



Bernards Heath Infant and Nursery School and
Bernards Heath Junior School
Joint Policy on School Attendance
September 2019

1. AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

The purpose of this policy is to set out the requirements and expectations for school attendance and to create a culture at both the Bernards Heath Schools in which the reasons for good attendance and punctuality are fully understood and valued by all in the school community.

2. DEFINITION OF GOOD ATTENDANCE

The schools set our own attendance targets annually and for 19/20 academic year this is 96%. Attendance falling below this level will be addressed by school staff through support measures initially. However should low attendance continue the Head Teacher may apply to the LA for a Fixed Penalty Notice to be issued or a referral to the Local Authority for the intervention by an Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO) Should a parent provide medical confirmation absence will be authorised and support considered if the absence is to be long term.

190 attendance days in the school year = 380 morning and afternoon sessions
Absence of 7.5 days (15 sessions) or less for any reason would still mean 96% attendance for a child. However, parents are required to inform the school for the reason for every absence.
Absence of more than 7.5 days (15 sessions) parents are required to inform the school of the reason and to update the school regularly on the expected date of return. This will usually be for an ongoing medical condition, not any form of holiday.

Individual attendance statistics for the school year are included on the end of year school report for each child.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibility for good attendance and punctuality is shared between all members of the school community:

- school staff and governors
- parents and carers
- pupils
- and appropriate external agencies.

We all need to understand and commit to fulfilling our responsibilities if good attendance is to be achieved.

3.1 The school (staff and governors) will:

- provide a safe and effective learning environment;
- maintain accurate records of attendance and punctuality (e.g. morning and afternoon registers) in accordance with Government legislation and guidance;

- produce, and update as required, school attendance policies and guidance which are consistently applied and clearly communicated to all parents, pupils and staff;
- ensure that parents are clear about the procedures to follow if their children are absent from school;
- work actively to maximise attendance rates, both in relation to individual pupils and for the pupil body as a whole, with a view to all children attending for 96% or more;
- ensure that all staff adopt a consistent and pro-active attitude towards encouraging and reinforcing the importance and benefits of regular and punctual attendance;
- follow up all instances of poor attendance and punctuality promptly and sensitively in accordance with clearly communicated procedures.

3.2 **Parents and carers**

Parents and carers are responsible in law for ensuring that their children of compulsory school age receive an education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have. Parents fulfil this responsibility by registering their children at the school and ensuring that they attend and stay at school.

To work towards good attendance, parents should:

- ensure that their children arrive at school on time, properly dressed and ready to learn;
- instil in their children an appreciation of the importance of attending school regularly;
- impress upon their children the need to observe the school's rules and guidance;
- take an active interest in their children's school career, praising and encouraging good learning and behaviour and attending parents' evenings and other relevant meetings;
- work in partnership with the school to resolve issues which may lead to non-attendance;
- ensure they are aware of the school policy on attendance;
- notify the school if their child is absent in accordance with the required school procedures;
- avoid arranging medical/dental appointments wherever possible during school hours;
- not book holidays during term time.

3.3 **Pupils**

All pupils are expected to understand the requirement to attend school. They should:

- attend all of their lessons regularly and punctually;
- appreciate the importance of being ready to learn;
- remember to hand in any note giving reasons for absence to the relevant person at school;
- parents must inform the school office of the reason for any absence at the earliest opportunity, this may be done by phone or e-mail.

3.4 **External Agencies**

3.4.1 **The Attendance Service**

The Attendance Service fulfils the statutory duty of the County Council to enforce regular school attendance. The school is able to work with its allocated Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO) should a particular attendance problem become apparent either for an individual child or the pupil body and when usual school strategies have had no positive impact.

3.4.2 **Penalty Notices**

If a pupil has at least 15 sessions (half day = 1 session) unauthorised absence in the current and/or previous term, including leave of absence where permission has not been requested or requested and denied, (this includes irregular attendance) the Head Teacher can apply for a Penalty Notice to be issued by the Local Authority. A fine of £60 is issued if paid within 21 days or £120 if paid within 28 days. Fines can be issued to each parent/carer for each child. Parents can discharge potential liability for conviction by paying the penalty.

Should the fine not be paid in full within 28 days, the Local Authority must consider prosecution.

4. **ABSENCE: Reasons, procedures and consequences**

4.1 **Punctuality** is an important life skill which we encourage in our children at Bernards Heath. Arriving late puts a child at a big disadvantage. Adults can imagine their own embarrassment when they arrive late to an event, having to enter a room without causing a disturbance and trying to catch up with what has been said and join in part way through, when everybody else seems to know what they are doing. This is exactly what it is like for children who regularly start their day by being late.

4.1.1 **Lateness**

At the Junior School children may arrive on the Playground from 8.40am where a member of the school staff will unlock the gate and will be on duty from 8.40am. Children should not be left unattended before this time as the school does not assume responsibility for supervision.

At the Junior School the afternoon register will be taken at 1:20pm.

At the Infant School parents must see their child across the threshold and into the care of the teacher at 8.50am. The alarm is sounded at 8.50am when classroom doors open. The school day starts at 8.55am.

The registers at both Schools close at 9.05am. Any **children arriving after 9.05am will be considered late after closure of register which is logged as unauthorised absence**. All children arriving late should report to the school office. This is monitored by the Head Teacher, Governors and both schools' Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO).

4.1.2 **Persistent lateness**

Parents whose children are regularly late for school after closure of the register (unauthorised absence), will be contacted by a member of school staff to discuss the situation. In the first instance, the school will work with the family to try to

bring about an improvement in punctuality. If this does not have the desired effect, the school will seek intervention and help from the AIO.

4.1.3

Leaving and returning to school during the school day

The school must be notified in advance by parents if a child needs to leave the school premises during the course of the school day and clear reasons must always be given for any such absence. Medical and dental appointments should be requested whenever possible outside of school hours, but it is accepted that this may not always be possible. Parents will be asked by the office staff to sign their children out and back in during the school day.

4.2

Illness

If children are ill, we would expect parents to keep them at home, both for their own well-being and to prevent the spread of infection at school. This is particularly important in the case of sickness and/or diarrhoea when children must stay at home for a minimum of 48 hours. School will alert parents to any new National/County guidelines published in the event of a flu epidemic or similar.

If your child is going to be absent because he/she is ill, we ask you to telephone the school by 8:50am at the latest with an explanation. In the interests of child safety, and to establish the whereabouts of a child, the school will telephone parents of children from whom we have received no explanation. If there is no explanation for your child's absence, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. The school will follow County recommended procedures and guidance to establish the whereabouts of a child should the need arise. Authorising an absence is the decision of the Head Teacher.

4.2.1 **Prolonged absence**

If a child is absent from school for more than 5 consecutive days, we ask parents to again phone the school to explain the circumstances and to keep the school regularly updated with regard to the expected return date.

4.2.2 **Frequent illness absences**

The schools will contact parents if a child is absent through sickness for more than four separate days during any term, even when parents have followed the correct procedures for explaining a child's absence from school. Frequent short absences are very disruptive to a child's education and may be the sign of other underlying problems that the school is not aware of. The schools believe that early intervention and dialogue with parents may help prevent a serious attendance problem developing.

4.2.3 **Prolonged serious illness**

In the case of a serious illness or medical condition which requires a prolonged period of absence, the schools will liaise with the family and make arrangements for setting work, and/or call upon the support and advice of external agencies to provide support and advice to the family. The school will discuss the most appropriate courses of action for re-establishing full attendance at school as the child recovers.

4.3 **Requests for Leave of absence**

Head Teachers will not grant any leave during term time unless there are exceptional and unavoidable circumstances. There are 13 weeks of school holidays during the year. The schools expect parents to take holidays during these periods. Term time is not the appropriate time to take a family holiday. This reflects both national and county policy.

Absence from school for family holidays will not be authorised. The Pupil Registration Regulations 2006 outline the conditions under which leave of absence may be granted. Regulation 7 states that 'leave of absence should only be granted due to the special circumstances relating to that application'.

Taking children out of school during term time can be damaging to a child's educational progress for the following reasons:

- Children find it difficult to catch up on the learning that they have missed
- All members of the class suffer if children take term-time holidays as teachers have to spend time helping those children catch up
- In the long term, this can have a negative impact on their confidence and progress
- Based on the school's existing data, children who have a poor attendance record usually have a low attainment at the end of Year 2 and similarly at Year 6. This is backed up nationally with evidence showing that children with a poor attendance record usually do not achieve 5 A*-C GCSEs. Local secondary school data also strongly supports this
- Children can be given very unhelpful messages about the value of learning, being on time and being responsible - all vital elements of coping successfully in the adult world.

Should exceptional circumstances arise, parents must make a written request to the Head Teacher for their children to have time out of school during term time using a 'Request for Absence Form' which is available from the Head Teacher in the Infant School and from the school office in the Junior School. In addition, parents should bear in the mind the following conditions before making any such request:

- Each application for leave of absence will be considered by the Head Teacher and will only be authorised due to the special circumstances and taking into consideration the child's attendance record and previous requests for leave.
- It is not acceptable to ask the school to provide homework or catch-up activities for children who take leave of absence during term time.
- Leave of absence will never be authorised in the first two weeks of a new school year (save for Religious Holidays) this is a vital time for establishing relationships, groupings, expectations, routines and introducing new projects and units of work. Children are placed at an immediate disadvantage if they miss the first weeks of being in a new class.
- Leave of absence will also never be authorized during assessment weeks parents are notified of these dates well in advance – Year 6 SATs week in May.
- Long weekends, holidays arranged by Grandparents or odd special treats and days out are **not** considered to be exceptional or unavoidable circumstances.

4.4 **Exceptional or unavoidable circumstances**

Bearing in mind all the points mentioned in 4.3 above, parents may still wish to take children out of school for reasons other than holiday during term time. Parents should make any such request to the school in writing. This will be considered by the Head Teacher, and Chair of Governors on a case by case basis, and will only be authorised should exceptional or unavoidable circumstances prevail.

The school will, of course, treat any emergency situation that should arise in an appropriate and supportive way.

4.5

When absence for exceptional circumstances has been authorised, if a child does not return to school on the agreed date, a Penalty Notice may be issued without warning if cumulative unauthorised absence exceeds 15 sessions across the current and/or previous term. Should parents require an extension to the leave, they are asked to provide evidence to support the reason for this request or a Penalty Notice may be issued. In addition, should a child not return to school within 2 weeks of the agreed date, following investigation by the school and Local Authority, the child may be removed from the school roll.

When absence for exceptional circumstances has been unauthorised, a Penalty Notice may be issued if cumulative absence exceeds 15 sessions across the current and/or previous term. In addition, should a child not return to school within 4 weeks of the 1st day of absence, following investigation by the school and LA, the child may be removed from the school roll.

5. Further guidance

If parents are unclear about any of the information in this policy, they are invited to contact the Head teacher for further clarification.

To be reviewed annually by the appropriate Head Teachers and governing body committee.

Next Review – September 2020