

# Bernards Heath Infant and Nursery School



## Joint School Attendance Policy with Bernards Heath Junior School

Review Date: September 2023

Next Review Date: September 2024

Committee: LFL

Reviewed by: Hannah Rimmer and Darren Armoogum

## **Mission Statement**

We believe that children cannot learn if they are absent from school. Therefore, we aim to ensure that all our children and young people take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them and will strive to raise standards by promoting the regular attendance and punctuality of our pupils. We believe the foundation of securing good attendance is that our school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where our pupils will want to be and are keen and ready to learn.

## **Aims**

- To demonstrate that improving attendance is everyone's business and embed a 'support first' approach.
- To develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of good attendance and is an integral part of the school's ethos.
- To work with children and their parents/carers to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships.

## **Attendance Target**

- To keep whole school attendance above 96%.

## **Good Attendance**

The school encourages good attendance by:

- Using clear and consistently applied systems and processes to improve attendance and address absences. Making sure these systems are inclusive and appropriate for all pupils.
- Publicising good attendance in newsletters and reports to the Governing Body.
- Informing parents/carers about their child's attendance in an easy to understand format.

## **Responsibilities**

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

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

We all need to understand and commit to fulfilling the actions and responsibilities included in this policy if good attendance is to be achieved.

### **The Governing Body is responsible for:**

- Ensuring an effective whole school culture of high attendance is underpinned by clear expectations, procedures and responsibilities.
- Offering a clear vision for high attendance, underpinned by high expectations and core values, which are communicated to and understood by staff, children and families.
- Having a clear, written school attendance policy based on the expectations from the Hertfordshire model policy.
- Regularly reviewing and understanding attendance data, discussing and challenging trends and helping school leaders to focus improvement efforts on individual pupils or cohorts who need it the most within school.
- Ensuring school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties.
- Making sure staff and families understand that absence from school is a potential safeguarding risk and understand their role in keeping children safe.
- Expecting good attendance and punctuality from all members of the school community.
- Conveying clear messages about how absence affects attainment, wellbeing and wider outcomes. Empowering staff to take responsibility for attendance.
- Recognising attendance is an important area of school improvement. Making sure it is resourced appropriately (including through effective use of pupil premium funding.)
- Having a designated attendance champion in the senior leadership team with clearly assigned responsibilities which are identified within this attendance policy.
- Making sure staff receive relevant training/professional development and support to deploy attendance systems effectively.

### **The Head teacher is responsible for:**

- Having a clear, written school attendance policy based on the expectations set out in the Hertfordshire model policy and ensuring the implementation of the policy.
- Ensuring every member of staff knows and understands their responsibilities for safeguarding and how this links with poor school attendance.
- Developing good support for children with medical conditions (including the use of individual healthcare plans), mental health problems and special educational needs (SEND).
- Ensuring every member of staff knows and understands their responsibilities for attendance.
- Ensuring accurate completion of admission and attendance registers.
- Ensuring staff are actively working to maximise attendance rates, both in relation to individual children and their classes.
- Having clear processes in place to address persistent and severe absence. Often severely absent children have additional needs and therefore it is vital that schools ensure all appropriate services are informed

and aware of the child's absence so suitable support can be considered, and education provided/accessed.

- Ensuring that all staff adopt a consistent approach in dealing with absence and lateness.
- Monitoring and analysing data and trends.
- Reporting to the Governing Body the attendance figures and progress to achieving the set targets.
- Reminding parents of their commitment to this policy.
- Building and modelling respectful relationships with staff, children, families and other stakeholders in order to secure their trust and engagement. Making sure there is a welcoming and positive culture across the school.
- Open and honest communication with staff, children and families about the expectations of school life and performance so that they understand what to expect and what is expected of them.
- Liaising with other agencies working with children and their families to support attendance, for example, where a child has a social worker or is otherwise vulnerable.
- Sharing information on and working collaboratively with other schools in the area, LA's and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming severe or persistent.
- Ensuring the school attendance policy is applied fairly and consistently and recognises the individual needs of pupils and their families who have specific barriers to attendance.
- Ensuring all teachers meet the expectations listed on them in the section below.
- Monitoring implementation of policy and practice, for example monitor gates/who is arriving late/registers closing on time.
- Monitoring of whole school data regularly to identify reasons for absence, patterns, attendance of particular groups and the impact of interventions.
- Establishing and ensuring implementation and robust monitoring of arrangements to identify, report and support children missing education (CME) or at risk of becoming CME.

**The School Attendance Champion (Head teachers at both the Infants & Juniors) is responsible for:**

- Implementing the policy.
- Offering a clear vision for attendance improvement.
- Championing and improving attendance.
- Ensuring practice is in place to address persistent and severe absence is robust.
- Evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes
- Oversight of data analysis -
  - Monitoring and analysing attendance data regularly to allow early intervention to address issues. This includes raising concerns with other agencies like children's social care and early help services which are working with families.

- Robust school systems which provide useful data at cohort, group and individual pupil level to give an accurate view of attendance, reasons for absence and patterns amongst groups such as:
  - children who have a social worker including looked-after children
  - young carers
  - children who are eligible for free school meals
  - children who speak English as a second language
  - children who have special educational needs and disabilities
- Keeping all school staff informed of attendance figures and trends by providing regular reports to enable them to implement attendance procedures
- compiling attendance data for, the Governing Body and the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAO).
- Ensuring a positive working relationship with the LAO is fostered, including attending Attendance Targeted Support Meetings.
- Communicating messages to children and parents
- If required, holding regular meetings with the parents of children who the school (and/or Local Authority) consider to be vulnerable or are persistently or severely absent to discuss attendance and engagement at school.
- Undertaking home visits in line with school's safeguarding responsibilities to engage families and ensure children are safe.
- Identifying pupils who need support from wider partners as quickly as possible and make the necessary referrals.
- Making sure escalation procedures to address absence are initiated proactively, understood by families, implemented consistently and their impact reviewed regularly.
- The escalation of procedures to address absence needs to be:
  - understood by parents/carers
  - implemented consistently
  - reviewed regularly
- Ensuring that the Local Authority is notified of any pupil who fails to attend school regularly via a **10 Day Absence Form**.

### **Teachers are responsible for:**

- Ensuring the effective whole school culture of high attendance is underpinned by setting an example of punctuality and good attendance.
- Implementing the policy and ensuring it is applied fairly and consistently.
- Ensuring that the registers are taken at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session and are accurate and up to-date.
- Informing the Head teacher of any concerns/patters of lateness/absence.
- Praising children for being 'ready to learn' when they arrive in the morning.
- Reminding parents of their commitment to this policy.
- Building respectful relationships with children and parents/carers in order to secure their trust and engagement.

- Welcoming children into school in line with a positive culture across the school. (Smiling, saying a child's name and making eye contact.) This is equally important if a child is arriving late to the classroom – in most cases a child has little responsibility for the time they arrive at school.
- Communicating openly and honestly with parents/carers about our expectations of school life and performance so that they understand what to expect and what is expected of them.
- Liaising with other agencies working with pupils and their families to support attendance, for example, where a young person has a social worker or is otherwise vulnerable.
- Understand the importance of school as a place of safety where children can enjoy trusted relationships with staff, particularly for children with a social worker and those who have experienced adversity.
- Ensuring confidentiality is adhered to when discussing children's attendance.

### **Parents and Carers**

Parents are responsible in law for ensuring that their children of compulsory school age receive an efficient education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have. Most parents fulfil this responsibility by registering their children at a school. Parents whose children are registered at a school are responsible for ensuring that their children attend and stay at school every day school is open.

Parents are responsible for:

- Ensuring that their children are punctual and know the importance of good attendance.
- Instilling in their children an appreciation of the importance of attending school regularly.
- Impressing upon their children the need to observe the school's expectations 'Kind, Respectful, Safe.' (Infants)  
'Respect, Resilience, Responsibility.' (Juniors)
- Commit to working in partnership with the school to develop a positive sense of self and the skills for lifelong learning.
- Informing the school on the first day of absence, by 8.40am at the latest (Infants) /8:50am at the latest (Juniors).
- Providing the school with an explanation for any absence.
- Informing the school of any changes to their contact details and those of emergency contacts.
- Taking an active interest in their children's school career, praising and encouraging good learning behaviours and attending parent's evenings and other relevant meetings.
- Working in partnership with the school to resolve issues and help the school to understand their child's barriers to attendance.
- Proactively engage with the support offered by school to prevent the need for more formal support.
- If formal support is needed, proactively engage with this support to prevent the need for any legal intervention.

- Booking any medical appointments around the school day where possible.
- Only requesting leave of absence in exceptional circumstances and do so in advance.
- Treating staff with respect
- Calling staff for help when they need it (Home/School triangle)
- Communicating as early as possible circumstances which may affect absence or require support

### **Children**

The age of the children in our school means that they are brought to school by a parent/carer and have little responsibility for their own attendance. We talk positively about attendance at school and ensure that children understand our expectation is that they are at school every day they are well enough. We understand that childhood illnesses like chicken pox may mean younger children are absent from school. This is a common illness in an infant school and is unavoidable. For this reason we do not award 100% attendance, in this case we would be awarding being 'lucky' rather than an active commitment to attendance.

### **Working with the Local Authority**

Our work with the Local Authority might take one or more of the following routes:

- Working in partnership with the Statutory Attendance & Participation Team to devise a strategic approach to attendance.
- The Head teacher will meet with the link LAAO when required to discuss and improve attendance for all persistently absent or severely absent pupils.
- Action Plans will be developed for all persistently and severely absent pupils. The school may request support from the LAAO for advice and guidance with the implementation of these action plans.
- If parents/carers do not proactively engage with support offered through the action plan, then formal intervention may be requested from the LAAO.
- If parents/carers do not engage with formal support, the school may request statutory intervention from the Local Authority. Statutory intervention can include:
  - Parenting Contract
  - Fixed Penalty Notice application from school
  - Parenting Order
  - Education Supervision Order
  - Prosecution

### **Punctuality**

- The School doors open 8.40am (Infants) and 8.45am (Juniors)
- The school day starts at 8.45am (Infants) and 8.55am (Juniors)
- Pupils who arrive after registers close at 8.55am (Infants) and 9:05 (Juniors) and parent provides a satisfactory explanation will be marked as 'authorised absent' for that session.

- Pupils who arrive after the register has closed and parent fails to provide a satisfactory explanation will be marked as 'unauthorised absent' for that session (Code U).

School may arrange a meeting with parents to discuss concerns so that the problem can be addressed.

Being late for school can have an impact on a child's wellbeing. Having to enter a room, try to catch up with what has been said and join in part way through, when everybody else seems to know what they are doing can be challenging for some children.

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).

### **Persistent lateness**

Parents/carers 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 LAAO.

### **Leaving and returning to school during the school day**

Parents/carers must give notice if a child needs to leave the school premises during the course of the school day with a clear reason for why this is necessary. 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/carers will be asked by the office staff to sign their children out and back in during the school day.

### **Absence**

Only the school can authorise an absence. The fact that a parent/carer has provided a note or other explanation (telephone call or personal contact) in relation to a particular absence does not, of itself, oblige the school to accept it, if the school does not accept the explanation offered as a valid reason for absence.

If, after further investigation doubt remains about the explanation offered – or when no explanation is forthcoming at all – the absence will be treated as unauthorised and the parent informed.

### **Illness**

If children are ill, we would expect parents/carers 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.



If your child is going to be absent because they are ill, we ask you to telephone the school by 8:40am at the latest with an explanation. In line with safeguarding procedures, and to establish the whereabouts of a child, the school will telephone parents/carers of children from whom we have received no explanation of absence. If there is ultimately no explanation for your child's absence, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

### **Prolonged absence**

If a child is absent from school for more than a day we ask that parents/carers keep us updated on how the child is and inform us of expected return date.

### **Frequent illness absences**

The schools will contact parents/carers if a child is absent through sickness for more than four separate days during any term, even when parents/carers 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/carers may help prevent a serious attendance problem developing.

### **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 sharing learning, 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.

### **Children who are at risk of becoming persistently absent**

The School's will:

- proactively use data to identify children at risk of poor attendance.
- Work with each identified child and their parents/carers to understand and address the reasons for absence, including any in-school barriers to attendance.
- Signpost and support parents/carers to access any required services where out of school barriers are identified.
- If the issue persists, take an active part in a multi-agency effort with the Local Authority and other external partners.
- Act as the Lead Practitioner where all partners agree that the school is the best placed lead service.

Where the Lead Practitioner is outside of the school, continue to work with the Local Authority and partners.

## **Children who are persistently absent**

Persistent absence occurs when a child's attendance is at or falls below 90%. Absenteeism at this level will considerably damage a pupil's educational prospects and the school will work alongside parents/carers to tackle this issue.

The Schools will:

- Continue support for children who are at risk of becoming persistently absent.
- Ensure additional targeted support is in place to remove any barriers. Where necessary this includes working with external partners.
- If there is lack of engagement, hold more formal conversations with parents, being clear about the potential need for legal intervention in future.
- Where support is not working or being engaged with, work with the Local Authority on legal intervention.
- If there are safeguarding concerns, intensify support through statutory children's social care.

Work with other local schools, such as schools of siblings.

## **Children who are severely absent**

Severe absence occurs when a child's attendance is at or falls below 50%.

The Schools will:

- Continue support as for children who are persistently absent.
- Agree a joint approach for all children who are severely absent with the Local Authority.

## **Part time timetables**

- As part of the framework for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after, and care leavers (Ofsted June 2015) local authorities are required to provide detailed data on school age children in their area who are not in receipt of full-time education. If we have any children on a part time timetable (children of compulsory school age who are on their roll but attending on a part-time timetable) we send this data to the local authority using the pro-forma provided.
- We follow the Local authority's published guidance for all maintained schools on the use of part-time timetables for pupils of compulsory school age (the term after their fifth birthday.)
- We return the information required on children who are on part-time tables within five days of the pupil starting or ending a part-time timetable.

## **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 families to take holidays during these periods. Family holidays are not considered exceptional or unavoidable.

Should exceptional circumstances arise, parents/carers 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 school offices. In addition, parents/carers 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 home learning 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, expectations and routines.
- Leave of absence will also never be authorised during assessment weeks including 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.
- Leave of absence can be applied for in advance. It is the school's decision as to whether this is granted because of exceptional circumstances relating to the application (parents cannot expect, as of right, that the school will grant leave of absence).

Leave of absence to allow a pupil to take part in a performance within the meaning of s37 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1963 © for which a child performance licence has been issued. HCC will not issue a child performance licence where absence is required without the written permission of the Head teacher.

## **Fixed Penalty Notices**

Our school follows Hertfordshire County Council's Penalty Notice for Truancy Code of Conduct and procedures.

- We expect parents/carers to work with us to address attendance problems.
- If a pupil has at least 15 sessions (half day= 1 session) unauthorised absence in the current and/or previous term (including unauthorised holidays), the Head Teacher may ask the Local Authority to issue a Penalty Notice.
- The penalty is £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice, rising to £120 if paid after 28 days.
- There is no right of appeal by parents against a Fixed Penalty Notice.
- If the penalty is not paid the Local Authority may prosecute parents/carers for their child's irregular attendance.

### **Further guidance**

If parents/carers are unclear about any of the information in this policy, they are invited to contact the Head teacher, who has overall responsibility for attendance, for further clarification.

The DfE Working together to improve attendance 2023 can be found here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

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

Next Review – September 2024

**Application for LEAVE OF ABSENCE from school during term time.**

I understand that you have requested leave of absence from school for your child. Absence from school for any reason other than medical is not automatic. Schools have the discretion to allow up to 7.5 days (15 session) absence in a school year, only if the Head teacher and Chair of Governors believe the circumstances are exceptional. Pupil Registration regulation 7 (2006) states that 'leave of absence should only be granted due to exceptional circumstances relating to that application'.

*Please note, no leave of absence will be given during the first 2 weeks of the new school year. In the Junior School, no absence will be authorised during Year 6 SATs week.*

Name of Child: ..... Class: .....

Please tick if you have a sibling in the other Bernards Heath School

**PART 1 – TO BE COMPLETED BY THE PARENT/CARER**

1. I would like you to consider the following **exceptional circumstances** for authorising my child's absence from school during term time. This absence is unavoidable because:

2. The first day of the proposed absence will be: .....

3. My child would be returning on: .....

Signed: ..... (Parent/Carer)

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**PART 2 – TO BE COMPLETED BY THE SCHOOL**

<b>Number of absences</b>	% Authorised	% Unauthorised
<b>Number of Lates</b>	BEFORE registration close at 8.55am	AFTER registration close at 8.55am

**I authorise / I do not authorise** this absence from school.

Head teacher's comments:

This is a policy upheld by both Bernards Heath Infant and Nursery & Junior School. Please note the above data will be taken into consideration. Any absence is unlikely to be authorised when attendance is less than 96%. Absence in term time will be authorised only if circumstances are exceptional.

Signed:

Hannah Rimmer (BH Infant and Nursery) or Darren Armoogum (BH Junior School)

September 2023