

ST JAMES THE LESS RC PRIMARY SCHOOL WHOLE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY



Links in this policy verified November 2024

DFE – Working Together to Improve School Attendance

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf

Lancashire County Council – School Absences

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/schools/absence-from-school/>

Children Missing Education

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf57a4dcb0757928e5bd39/Children_missing_education_guidance_-_August_2024.pdf

Rationale:

At St James the Less RC Primary School we recognise that attending school regularly has a positive impact on learning, progress and therefore the best life chances for children. We will encourage good attendance for all pupils, by offering an environment in which pupils feel valued and part of the school community.

Department for Education (DfE) guidance states that all schools should have effective systems and procedures for encouraging regular school attendance and investigating the underlying causes of poor attendance which should be set out in an attendance policy. These systems should be reviewed regularly and modified where necessary to reflect the circumstances of the school. A comprehensive document, produced by the DfE, sets out the statutory guidance that schools must follow. It is important to view this St James the Less policy alongside any statutory implications, as these must be followed.

Link updated November 2024

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf

It should also be noted that this policy and guidance should be read alongside the statutory guidance documents on children missing education, supporting pupils with medical conditions at school, education for children with health needs who cannot attend school, suspensions and exclusions, alternative provision, and Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Aims

We will

- Promote a culture across the school which identifies the importance of regular and punctual attendance.
- Make attendance and punctuality a priority for all those associated with the school; including pupils, parents, teachers and governors.
- Further develop positive and consistent communication between home and school.
- Set targets to improve individual and whole school attendance levels.

Rights, Roles and Responsibilities

We will develop a procedural framework which defines agreed roles and responsibilities for

- Parents and carers
- Pupils
- School staff
- Governors

to complement this policy, and identify how we will deliver our aims in respect of regular and punctual attendance.

This procedural framework will include guidance on

- Registration
- Punctuality
- What constitutes unauthorised absence
- Leave of absence
- Systems for monitoring attendance and punctuality for individual pupils
- Systems for dealing with absence
- Criteria and systems for referral to and working with the Pupil Attendance Support Team and School Attendance Consultant
- Systems for monitoring whole school attendance and action planning
- Appropriate alternative curricular arrangements

Leave of Absence

Schools cannot authorise any leave other than in exceptional circumstances. In St James the Less RC Primary School the head teacher is the person authorised by the 'proprietor' i.e. the governing body, to make this decision. If the leave is being requested for a holiday, approval should be obtained prior to making any bookings and well in advance of the intended holiday.

Leave of absence **SHALL NOT** be granted unless:

- a request for leave has been made in advance, by a parent with whom the pupil normally resides, and
- the head teacher considers that leave of absence should be granted due to the **EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES** relating to the request.

Additional information regarding leave of absence is included with the procedural framework.

Religious Absence

The school will authorise one day of absence per religious festival, e.g. Eid, (i.e. the day set aside by the religious body of which the parent is a member) and this will be marked in the register.

Parents must request any additional leave in advance and this can only be authorised if it is felt that exceptional circumstances apply.

Use of Penalty Notices

In accordance with the current code of conduct, St James the Less RC Primary School may request that the local authority issue penalty notices in respect of unauthorised absence. This includes leave of absence which is taken without a prior request being made; and leave taken after a prior request has been made and parents have been informed that the period of absence would be classed as unauthorised but the leave is taken regardless of this advice. St James the Less RC Primary School may also request that the local authority issue a penalty notice for days taken in excess of the agreed period of leave; without good reason. Parents also risk losing their child's school place if they do not return from leave, as agreed, and readmission cannot be guaranteed.

Partnership Working

St James the Less RC Primary School will work with the Pupil Attendance Support Team, the School Attendance Consultant and other support agencies as appropriate to ensure regular attendance at school. The criteria for referral and areas of responsibility for staff will be set out in the procedural framework.

Monitoring, Analysis, Action Planning

St James the Less RC Primary School will use electronic systems for monitoring attendance at both individual pupil and whole school level. We will analyse patterns and trends of non-attendance to inform future action planning and target setting in respect of whole school attendance matters.

Persistent Absence

The minimum attendance level which is expected at our school is 95%. It is when attendance falls below this level that school will consider whether it is appropriate to offer support in order to improve the situation. Both local and central government pay particular attention to reducing the number of pupils who fall into the persistent absence category (PA). A pupil becomes a **persistent absentee** when their attendance falls below 90% at any point during the school year; whether the absences are authorised or unauthorised. When attendance nears this level children miss significant amounts of schooling; meaning that their educational progress is put at risk. We need parents' full support in ensuring that attendance does not reach this level. However, if for any reason a child's attendance does fall into this category parents will be asked to do all they can improve the situation.

Families will be supported in this via school's robust systems for managing PA. This support may involve the need for parents, and children of an appropriate age, to agree to a parenting contract. Due to the seriousness of PA status it is highly likely that such cases will be referred to a local authority attendance team (Pupil Attendance Support Team). Furthermore, absence data for individual pupils who are classed as persistent absentees are reported to the Department for Education; along with whole school absence figures.

Monitoring the attendance of pupils who are educated off site

The attendance of all pupils who are educated off site, or those who are dual registered, will be monitored in accordance with the procedures outlined within the procedural framework.

Review of Whole School Attendance Policy

St James the Less RC Primary School will review this policy and the associated procedural framework annually.

Reviewed: Autumn 2024

WHOLE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY PROCEDURAL FRAMEWORK

This document forms part of St James the Less RC Primary School's whole school attendance policy. It sets out the rights, roles and responsibilities for parents/carers, pupils, school staff and governors; and the systems and procedures in place to identify how the school will deliver its aims in respect of regular and punctual attendance. It will be reviewed annually.

Rights, Roles and Responsibilities

St James the Less RC Primary School believes that it is important that parents and carers, pupils, school staff and governors all work in partnership to encourage good attendance for all pupils. The following is a summary of the rights, roles and responsibilities for individual groups of stakeholders.

Parents and Carers

- Ensure the child(ren) in their care attend school regularly and punctually
- If the child(ren) is/are absent to inform the school office or class teacher on the first day of absence and provide a reason for the absence
- If the child(ren) is/are absent for more than 1 day, to inform the school office of the continued absence and update as to the reason for the absence regularly
- To avoid leave in term time wherever possible. Where this is not thought possible, contact the school as soon as possible prior to the first proposed day of absence to request authorisation
- To advise the school, by contacting the school office, immediately if they become aware of problems with attendance
- To co-operate with the school in promoting and improving attendance e.g. attending meetings, participation in parenting contracts and supporting the school in agreed intervention/action plans
- Adhere to systems for late registration, signing out and signing in

Pupils

- Attend school regularly and punctually
- Adhere to systems for late registration, signing out and signing in
- Acknowledge behaviour needed out of school to ensure good attendance e.g. early bedtimes and getting uniforms ready the night before

School Staff

The head teacher has overall responsibility for ensuring that there are appropriate and efficient systems in place to promote and support the school attendance policy, that these are adhered to and training is given where appropriate. The head teacher is also responsible for liaison with individual families, the School Attendance Consultant and the Pupil Attendance Support Team (PAST) to ensure appropriate support is given where attendance concerns are identified and for liaison with the local authority and DfE to ensure that the school conforms to all statutory requirements in respect of attendance.

However, St James the Less RC Primary School believes that all staff have responsibilities and a role to play in promoting good attendance by:

- Providing a welcoming atmosphere for children
- Providing a safe learning environment

- Ensuring an appropriate and responsive curriculum
- Providing a sympathetic response to any pupil's concerns
- Being aware of factors that can contribute to non-attendance
- Being aware of the role all staff can play in ensuring attendance is seen as important for all pupils and parents
- Adherence to the systems and procedures in place within school to promote good attendance and highlighting any concerns to the head teacher
- Participation in training regarding school systems and procedures
- Willingness to communicate with children and parents about attendance
- Completion of the attendance registers in accordance with the legislation and under the direction of the head teacher

Some staff will have specific individual responsibilities to support the attendance policy and these are outlined in the procedures section of this framework.

Governors

- Ensure compliance with The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations
- Adopt an attendance policy and review it annually
- Agree targets for attendance at St James the Less RC Primary School
- Ensure that they receive reports from the head teacher regarding school attendance as part of the school monitoring or school profiling exercise
- Where the school is not meeting its attendance target, or when the governors believe there is cause for concern, to require a review of the systems and procedures in place to promote good attendance
- To promote the strong link between attendance and educational attainment to parents and pupils where appropriate and ensure that the school attendance policy and procedures are communicated effectively
- Authorise the head teacher (or other designated person) to consider and make decisions regarding leave of absence requests
- Work with the head teacher in establishing criteria against which leave requests will be considered. This is important to ensure the process is equitable and consistent

Procedures

Registration

Morning Registration is between 08.35am and 8.45am

Afternoon Registration is 12:45 (KS1) 13:15 (KS2)

Each class teacher or their nominated representative is responsible for marking children present or absent in the register at morning and afternoon registration. The registers must be completed promptly to avoid discrepancies between classes and no later than 8:50am.

The school office is responsible for checking the electronic register and for inputting absence codes on a daily basis.

Late Registration

Pupils requiring admittance to school following registration periods must go to the main entrance and request entry via the school office.

The school office is responsible for maintaining the signing in/out book. This must contain details of name, class, time admitted/time released, reason for lateness/early departure and name of supervising adult.

In accordance with current guidance, the attendance registers are closed 30 minutes after opening i.e. 9:05 in the morning. This means that any pupil who arrives after the registration period (8.35 to 8.45am) but before the registers are closed (9.05am) will be given a late mark (L) in the register. This code is classed as a present mark, but displays that the pupil arrived late for school. Any pupil who arrives after the registers have closed (9.05) but before the end of the session will be given a "late after registers closed" mark (U) in the register. This code is classed as an unauthorised absence but displays that the pupil was physically present in school for part of the session.

The fact that the U code is classed as an unauthorised absence means that when it is used pupils are likely to be missing significant amounts of schooling; putting their educational progress at risk. For this reason the use of this code will be considered as serious as any other unauthorised absence and will attract the interest of external agencies, including referral to the local authority attendance team and consideration of the use of legal measures, in just the same way.

Our school also follows the guidance set out by Lancashire County Council
<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/children-education-families/schools/absence-from-school/>

Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

In every instance it is the head teacher who determines whether an absence is recorded as authorised or unauthorised. This decision is made based on information provided by parents/carers. However, because the register is a legal document, the head teacher has responsibility to ensure that it is completed accurately and in accordance with the legislation. For this reason it is not sufficient for an absence to be recorded as authorised based entirely on information provided by parents/carers. Therefore, there may be occasions when it will be necessary for parents to provide evidence of reasons for absence before authorisation is granted. For example, in the case of absence due to illness or medical appointment, evidence may be requested in the form of: sight of a prescription, prescribed medication, a medical appointment card or similar.

The school office is responsible for maintaining records of reason and length of absence.

- Parents/Carers are required to contact the school office or class teacher on the first day of absence, advising of the reason for the absence and expected return date; if known
- Where information is provided to the class teacher they are responsible for passing this information to the school office
- Where a verbal message is taken by school office staff this should be noted in the register and the class teacher informed
- Where a written note is received by the class teacher this should be returned to the school office with the register
- Where the absence is for several days, the parent/carer is responsible for informing the school of the continued absence and updating them as to the reason for the absence on a regular basis
- Where no explanation for absence is provided, or the reason provided is unsatisfactory, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and will be addressed with parents promptly

- Schools have a responsibility to report such absence to the local authority after a period of 10 school days, or sooner if appropriate
- The reason for absence should be linked directly to the pupil (e.g. illness or medical appointment of/for the child). Reasons for absence relating to parents or siblings may not be authorised

If a child is absent and no contact has been made by the family, the school office will contact the family on the first day of absence, as the registers close at 9.05am. If contact cannot be made the head teacher should be informed and, in the case of prolonged or repeated absence without justification being given, the head teacher will determine whether a referral to the Pupil Attendance Support Team should be made.

The head teacher is responsible for determining what is classed as authorised and what is classed as unauthorised absence.

Examples of authorised absence:

- Medical or dental appointments, which relate directly to the pupil and unavoidably fall during the school day (evidence may be required prior to authorisation)
- Illness of the pupil (evidence may be required prior to authorisation)
- Leave which has been authorised by the head teacher due to exceptional circumstances

Examples of unauthorised absence:

- Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily
- truancy before or during the school day
- absences which have never been properly explained
- children who arrive at school after the register has closed
- shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
- day trips and leave in term time which have not been agreed
- days that exceed the amount of leave agreed by the head teacher

The school office is responsible for inputting the appropriate absence code on the electronic register. Where they are not certain whether an absence is authorised or not they should seek advice from the head teacher.

Office staff may also use the comments facility within SIMS in order to log specific reasons for absence. This facility will allow school staff to monitor and manage developing patterns of absence more effectively and share such information with parents.

Signing Out

The school office is responsible for overseeing the procedure for releasing children where parents/carers have requested and been granted leave during the school day.

The child(ren) can only be released to a parent or authorised carer/family member. When an authorised adult is picking up a child within school time the school office staff will complete and sign the school signing out book (see above for details of requirements). The school office is responsible for inputting the appropriate absence code on the electronic register.

When a child leaves the school site after the morning or afternoon register has been taken, the original mark must remain in the register and the signing in/out book should be referred to during an evacuation situation to ensure all pupils can be accounted for.

Leave of Absence

Schools cannot authorise any leave other than in exceptional circumstances. In St James the Less RC Primary School the head teacher is the person authorised by the 'proprietor' i.e. the governing body, to make this decision. If the leave is being requested for a holiday, approval should be obtained prior to making any bookings.

Leave of absence **SHALL NOT** be granted unless:

- a request for leave has been made in advance, by a parent with whom the pupil normally resides, and
- the head teacher considers that leave of absence should be granted due to the **EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES** relating to the request.

Additional Factors for Consideration

Pupils attend school for a maximum of 190 days each academic year. Regular attendance is vital for your child's educational progress. The local authority expects that all parents/carers ensure their children attend school whenever possible. Absence during school time is largely prohibited by regulation and hinders academic progress. Even in exceptional circumstances, the following factors may be taken into account when considering an application for leave:

- Will leave at this point in time be detrimental to the pupil's education?
- Will he/she miss any national tests or examinations?
- Is his/her attendance a cause for concern?
- Is the proposed absence during the month of September or any other transition period?
- Has he/she already had leave during term time this year?
- Did he/she have leave of absence during term time in the previous school year(s)?
- Does he/she have any absences which have been recorded as unauthorised this year?

If work commitments are stated as supporting evidence towards an exceptional reason for requesting leave, parents may be asked to provide employer details and any additional evidence which shows why leave cannot be taken during the school holidays

Parents/Carers who need to request leave during term time should complete an application form, available from the school office as soon as possible prior to the first proposed date of absence. The head teacher will consider the request and advise in writing within 5 days whether the absence will be authorised or not. The head teacher may request a meeting with parents before any period of leave is authorised.

Use of Penalty Notices

The school takes unauthorised absence seriously and, particularly in the case of repeated unauthorised absences, will undertake further liaison with the family, pupil, the School Attendance Consultant and the Pupil Attendance Support Team as appropriate. Furthermore, St James the Less RC Primary School may request that the local authority issue penalty notices in respect of unauthorised absence. This includes leave which is taken

without a prior request being made; and leave taken after a prior request has been made and parents have been informed that the period of absence would be classed as unauthorised but the leave is taken regardless of this advice. St James the Less RC Primary School may also request that the local authority issue a penalty notice for days taken in excess of the agreed period of leave; without good reason. Parents also risk losing their child's school place if they do not return from leave, as agreed, and readmission cannot be guaranteed.

The school office is responsible for recording leave requests in the electronic register and will retain copies of correspondence regarding requested leave of absence for 3 years. They will also be responsible for highlighting to the Headteacher if absence continues after the notified period. In this instance the Headteacher will undertake further liaison with the family, pupil, the School Attendance Consultant and the Pupil Attendance Support Team as appropriate and a Penalty Notice may be considered.

Monitoring, Analysis and Action Planning

The governors have determined that the head teacher has overall responsibility for the monitoring, analysis and action planning of school attendance. The head teacher is also responsible for ensuring that data is returned promptly to the local authority and DfE within deadlines. However, it is expected that the day to day implementation of this will largely rest with the class teachers who take the register and highlight causes of concern and the school office who are responsible for maintaining the school records on attendance and for highlighting causes for concern.

The Headteacher will review the attendance records at least once every half term to check that there are no outstanding causes for concern and that codes are being used consistently. In addition, the head teacher will address specific concerns as they arise.

The head teacher is required to review this whole school attendance policy and procedural framework annually and to report on attendance matters to the governors termly. The governors will also review the attendance policy at least annually to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the school.

If there is a trend of worsening attendance in a particular group of pupils, including pupils who belong to any vulnerable group, discussions should be held between the head teacher and appropriate staff to agree action plans to reverse the trend. It should also be reported to the governors at the next full governor's meeting.

St James the Less RC Primary School also uses whole school incentive and reward schemes in order to raise the profile of; and promote good levels of attendance. These schemes will be reviewed and changed regularly in order to ensure that children remain interested and motivated.

Monitoring the attendance of pupils who are educated off site

When pupils are **dual registered**, their registration status will acknowledge this. For sessions when a dual registered pupil is expected to attend St James the Less RC Primary School the usual attendance procedures will be followed. When this pupil is expected to attend the other establishment our registers will display the D code (Dual Registration). As the **Main School** we retain responsibility for dual registered pupils. Therefore, the other establishment will be contacted regularly in order to ensure that this placement continues to be successful. When this is not the case, appropriate action will be taken. In cases where we are the **Subsidiary School** our normal first day absence procedures will be used and

any concerns regarding attendance will be reported to the **Main School**. In addition, we will provide other information regarding attendance to the **Main School** on request.

When pupils are **Present at an Approved Off-Site Educational Activity** school will decide which code is most suitable:

The head teacher is responsible for the pupil's education and wellbeing during these sessions. Therefore, before any of these codes are used school must ensure that the following criteria are met:

- ✓ The activity is broadly educational in nature
- ✓ it is suitable for the pupil's age and ability
- ✓ it will complement the pupil's curriculum
- ✓ it is taking place during the session for which the approved off-site educational activity code is being used and
- ✓ suitable supervision arrangements are in place

Criteria and Systems for referral to and working with the School Attendance Consultant and the Pupil Attendance Support Team

The head teacher is responsible for ensuring consistent referral of regular or unjustified absence. The criteria for referral are outlined in the systems below:

A request for support will be made to the local authority attendance team (Pupil Attendance Support Team) when:

- School have informed parents of their concerns regarding attendance
- School have attempted to employ appropriate strategies in order to improve attendance
- School strategies have failed to prompt the required amount of improvement in attendance OR parents refuse to engage with school support

In addition to the above, the head teacher can discuss general attendance matters with the School Attendance Consultant. The purpose of such discussions would be to:

- Monitor progress towards targets, highlighting any concerns and identifying any action required
- To receive guidance on latest best practice
- To receive information about local and national trends and benchmarking
- To discuss whether current attendance policy and procedures are effective

School System for dealing with concerns about Lateness and Absence

The school office is responsible for advising the head teacher of pupils who are persistently late or absent as issues arise.

The class teacher is also responsible for raising concerns about lateness or absence of class members to the head teacher as issues arise.

In addition, the head teacher will use electronic systems to monitor the attendance of individual pupils at least once per half term.

Once concerns have been raised:

- The head teacher will discuss the matter informally with the family (including the pupil)
- Parents and children, if appropriate, will be asked to agree to a parenting contract, or take part in attendance panels, which will include the setting of targets and will be reviewed regularly
- When persistent lateness is an issue and/or parents fail to follow procedures by not accompanying late arriving pupils into school to sign them in, this will be communicated to parents via letter or a meeting in school as appropriate
- If lateness/absence persists, and school procedures fail to promote the required level of improvement, the head teacher will contact the Pupil Attendance Support Team who will attend meetings with the family and head teacher as appropriate and help school determine whether any further interventions are required. These interventions will include consideration of the use of legal measures (penalty notices and prosecution)
- Incentive and reward schemes will be used for individual pupils, as appropriate.

Alternative provision and use of directions

There are a range of reasons why pupils might be required to access educational provision at a venue other than their main school. The main reasons are listed below:

Pupils who have been excluded, either for a fixed period (for more than 5 days) or permanently,

When a pupil is unable to access provision at their main school for medical reasons

When a pupil is required to attend another venue for the purpose of improving behaviour; either on a temporary basis or with a view to making a permanent move to the alternative provision (managed move)

When a pupil is required to attend alternative provision, the governors of the main school must issue a written 'direction' informing all parents of the alternative provision which their child is required to attend.

Pupils who are unable to attend school for medical reasons

Statutory guidance places much more emphasis on the role of governing bodies in ensuring that pupils with medical conditions are able to fully access education in the same way as other pupils. A key element of this responsibility is reducing the amount of time missed by these pupils; whether their condition is short or long term. The school will work with parents and other relevant professionals to minimise absence for reasons of ill health. This may be as a result of specific practices or resources used within school or by sourcing more appropriate provision at another establishment. When education is to be provided at an alternative location, this will always be done via the use of a direction (please see the relevant section of this policy).

School System for reintegrating pupils who have had long term absence

When a pupil has been absent from school for an extended period, the head teacher, the class teacher and other support services will liaise with the family to ensure that a smooth reintegration is achieved.

Communication of Attendance Policy and Procedure

It is important that the school's policy on attendance is communicated to all the stakeholders and that parents, pupils and staff know the procedures and systems that are in place to implement it.

The governors have determined that:

- The attendance policy will be placed on the school website
- Details of the policy and the procedure for requesting absence in term time, and signing in and out of school will be disseminated as part of the new parent induction process e.g. induction package, talks to new parents
- Reference to the school attendance policy regarding leave during term time is to be made clear when the school calendar of dates is sent out each year
- Summary of responsibilities under the attendance policy will be contained in the home/school agreement
- Staff responsibilities will be contained in the staff handbook
- The head teacher will ensure that staff receive training regarding their responsibilities in relation to the attendance policy and procedures
- The head teacher will provide a summary of attendance and causes for concern to the governors during termly meetings
- Details of the absence record of the school will be communicated as part of the school profile/prospectus
- Attendance and punctuality will be included in newsletters on a regular basis
- Attendance will be reported to parents termly via letters and annually via the end of year report which will include a certificate of attendance, where applicable