

OAKDENE PRIMARY SCHOOL

ATTENDANCE POLICY



ATTENDANCE POLICY

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Vision Statement

At Oakdene Primary School we believe that regular school attendance cannot be overestimated. Regular attendance is vital to a good education. Securing it must therefore be a high priority of the school, governors, Local Authority, parents and the pupils themselves. By failing to attend school regularly, pupils lessen the impact of the education provided for them. Pupil absence may seriously disrupt the continuity of teaching for themselves and others.

The aim of Oakdene Primary School is to facilitate our pupils' regular and sustained attendance at school by providing a full and efficient educational experience for all.

Parents and carers have a vital role to play and there is a strong emphasis on maintaining home-school links and good communication systems that can be utilised whenever there is concern about attendance.

Within this policy we will refer to parent(s). By this we mean:

- any person who is a natural parent of the child, whether they are married or not, any person who has parental responsibility for the child,
- any person who has care of the child i.e. they live with and look after the child on a day to day basis.

School Attendance and the Law

School attendance is compulsory for all children aged 5 to 16 years. A child is considered to compulsory school age the term after they turn 5. The Education Act 1944 established the duty on parents to ensure their child attended school regularly. The Education Act of 1996 states that "The parent of a child of compulsory school age registered at school and failing to attend regularly is guilty of an offence punishable by law". It is the responsibility of local authorities to enforce school attendance where necessary.

Schools also have legal responsibilities in terms of school attendance registers and statutory guidance regarding the correct use of register codes and the reporting of absence. At Oakdene we hope that by working together with our families we can resolve any difficulties and support good attendance of all our pupils. Where however, pupil attendance remains a concern despite steps taken by the school we will make appropriate referrals to the local authority and other support agencies to enforce attendance where necessary.

Reporting Absence

School attendance will be mandatory again. Parents and carers have a duty to secure regular attendance.

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We expect that all children will attend school on time each day that the school is open. When children are unable to attend due to illness or other reason it is the parent's responsibility to inform school of the reason for absence.

Parents and carers should telephone the school office before **9.15am** each morning their child is absent to discuss the reason for the absence. We have a 24-hour answerphone and we encourage parents to use this facility to report their child's absence at any time before 9:15am. Medical evidence should be provided to the school for all hospital, dental, doctor, optician or other appointments that cannot be arranged outside of school time. Medical evidence may also be requested to cover a period of illness. If this is requested it can be, for example, in the form of an appointment card or copy of prescription provided to the school upon return of the child to school or during the absence.

Oakdene Primary School operates a first day calling system. If we have not received a reason for absence by 9.30am on the first day of absence a member of school staff will contact the home contact number to try to ascertain the reason for absence. If the absence continues to the second day, then all known contacts will be used to attempt to discuss the absence with the parent and ascertain the reason for absence. If, however the absence continues into the third day and no reason has been received from the parent for the child's absence the school's Parental Support Adviser will make a visit to the family home. Where concerns continue, and no contact is made a referral will be made to the Local Authority Attendance Team under Children Missing Education or attendance procedures. The school may choose to visit the family at a much earlier stage if there are other concerns around the child's absence from school.

School will record and retain via computerised record verbal explanations received regarding a pupil's absence.

Only the school, within the context of the law, can approve absence, not parents. The fact that a parent has provided a telephone or personal contact in relation to an 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 where no explanation is forthcoming at all the absence must be treated as unauthorised. Where parentally condoned unjustified absence appears to be a problem in relation to a pupil, school will seek to resolve any issues quickly by the involvement of our Family Support Adviser.

The role of our Family Support Adviser is to help and advise parents wherever possible and as part of this to encourage and support good attendance. Our Family Support Adviser works closely with our Education Welfare Officer to monitor attendance, work with parents and children to improve attendance and punctuality.

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This can involve home visits, telephone contacts, arranging meetings and involving other agencies as deemed necessary, for example, Early Help.

An excessive amount of authorised absence can also seriously disrupt the continuity of learning for children and can lead to a reluctance to attend school. At Oakdene Primary we are alert to emerging patterns of authorised absence and will seek to support and resolve any issues at an early stage by the involvement of our Parent Support Adviser and Education Welfare Officer. Support agencies the involvement of School Health and early help assessment may identify and provide support as required.

Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 provides that no offence is committed where a pupil of compulsory school age is prevented from attending school by reason of illness. If school is satisfied that a pupil is absent as a result of illness the absence will be treated as authorised. Parents will be asked to provide evidence of medical consultation after the third time of absence in any school year said to be due to reasons of illness. Should parents not provide this evidence when requested the absence will be categorised as unauthorised.

We may also ask for parents' permission to contact the child GP where we feel it is necessary to have further information on the illness preventing attendance at school. We may authorise absence retrospectively where we are satisfied as to the explanation offered.

We encourage where possible parents to only take children out of school for dental and medical appointments where this is an emergency or essential (i.e. planned hospital appointment). Leave for medical or dental appointments will be given (i.e. the absence will be authorised) on production of an appointment card.

Absences of pupils of compulsory school age without valid reason or for which no explanation has been provided will be treated as unauthorised and school attendance procedures followed.

Pupils who leave or return to school outside normal registration periods will be signed in and out by their parent/carer so that there is information on the child's whereabouts in the event of emergency evacuation.

Holidays in term time

Parents do not have an automatic right to take their children out of school for holidays in term time. The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2013 state that Head teachers can only authorise leave of absence in term time where there are exceptional circumstances.

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At Oakdene Primary School we define exceptional circumstances as;

An unexpected or unplanned circumstance which is highly unlikely to be repeated. Therefore, family holidays in term time due to parents work commitments or lower cost do not constitute exceptional circumstances.

Parents are strongly urged to avoid taking family holidays during term time due to the disruption and impact of the missed education on the child.

If parents feel that exceptional circumstances apply to their family then they should complete a leave of absence form, which they may obtain from the main office. It should be completed and returned to the school office at least four weeks prior to the commencement of the planned leave. A panel made up of representatives from the schools governing body and the Executive Head Teacher will consider each application individually on the information provided by the parent. It is extremely important that parents provide as much information as possible on the exceptional circumstances surrounding the application for consideration to the panel. Parents will usually be notified of the panel's decision in writing within 10 working days of the panel meeting.

Should the leave be unauthorised parents will be informed whether the school will request a penalty notice to be issued by the local authority. Prior to a penalty notice being issued the school will send a formal warning notice to all parents of the child (please refer to the definition of a parent in section 1) warning that should the leave in term time be taken a penalty notice will be requested. Currently, penalty notices are issued at £60 per parent per child if paid within 21 days and increasing to £120 per parent per child if paid between 21st -28th day. Failure to pay the penalty notice may result in the local authority taking prosecution proceedings.

Persistent Absence

Persistent absence is a term used by the government to define serious attendance concerns and where a child is missing 10% or more of their education. The absence can be for any reason and persistent absence is measured on a half termly basis. Parents may be sent letters about their child's attendance if their attendance is in this category with an expectation that attendance will improve. Children with 90% attendance or lower will be prioritised for involvement from our Education Welfare Officer who will make telephone and home contacts to help support an improvement in attendance. School attendance procedures will be followed and where improvements have not been made or sustained a referral to the local authority Attendance Team can be made.

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Punctuality

Staggered Start and Finish Times

In order to ensure the safety of our whole community we have staggered the start times for all year groups. **PLEASE ADHERE TO THEM DO NOT ARRIVE EARLY (especially if you have one child who attends Oakdene).**

We will actively discourage lateness and encourage punctual arrival to school. A pupil arriving late may seriously disrupt not only his or her continuity of learning but also that of others. In recognition of local circumstances (such as bad weather or occasional public transport difficulties), we may keep registers open for a reasonable period.

It is our policy at Oakdene School to record a late mark for children who arrive at school after the main entrance doors have been locked and who must then enter via the main office.

Registers close at our school at 9.35a.m, children arriving at school after this time will be recorded as absent in the register and an unauthorised registration code U entered in the child's register. The U code informs the school that the child is present for the purposes of emergency evacuation but arrived after the close of the registers. For health and safety purposes children are signed in at the main office and escorted to their classroom by a member of staff.

In responding to lateness, we will of course need to take account of the individual circumstances of each case. In some instances enquiries may reveal that the late arrival stems from difficulties at home or other genuinely unavoidable circumstances. We will offer the support and intervention of our Parent Support Adviser if this is found to be the case.

The school carries out regular 'Late Gates' where the names and reason for late arrival are noted by the school's Parent Support Adviser or Education Welfare Officer. Where a pattern of late arrival is noted parents may be invited to a meeting at school to discuss the reasons and how to resolve this issue.

Attendance Procedures

All staff at Oakdene School have a responsibility to encourage good levels of attendance and punctuality. Class teachers have the responsibility for taking the class register accurately, noting any absence and where there is an emerging pattern of absence informing the Parent Support Adviser and Executive Head

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Teacher of concerns. The register is a legal document and changes to absence and/or attendance codes are saved automatically.

Oakdene Primary School operates a first day response to absence system and where this has failed to make contact with the parent and emergency contacts of the absent child a home visit will be the next step.

A record is kept by the school of all contacts and conversations relating to reasons for absence from school.

Monthly register checks track the attendance of children who are achieving less than 95% and action to improve their attendance is agreed between the Education Welfare Officer, Parent Support Adviser and the Executive Headteacher.

If attendance has improved, then a letter of commendation is sent home.

If attendance has not improved then option include:

(i) Contact home to discuss attendance either by letter or phone. If contacted by phone or in person areas of concern should be discussed with the parent and appropriate advice and support offered. For example, if the parent reports absence to be due to a recurring medical condition such as asthma the school could offer assistance by putting the parent in touch with the School Health Service and suggesting a referral be made.

(ii) Parents will be invited to attend an Attendance Panel meeting.

An Attendance Panel will be called where parents have not responded to other forms of communication or where attendance concerns persist. The meeting is an opportunity to discuss the reasons for absence and for the school to offer support where appropriate. This may take the form of an Early Help assessment or involve getting other specialist agencies such as school health. At the meeting a plan will be agreed to improve attendance and the attendance of the child monitored very closely over a period of agreed time. Parents will be notified that should attendance fail to improve or be sustained the next step will be the involvement of the local authority for legal procedures to enforce the child's attendance.

Referral to the local authority Attendance Team

The Executive Head Teacher will prioritise the list of pupils to be referred to the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Attendance Officer. These circumstances include:

- (i) When school, despite several attempts by phone and by letter is unable to contact the parent. The child may be referred as a Child Missing Education. The child's name may be removed from roll if after investigation both the school and the local authority have failed to locate the child.

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- (ii) When unauthorised absence sessions are equal to or more than 10 in a six-week period and there is no valid reason for the absence. The school will request penalty notice procedures are initiated by the local authority.
- (iii) When a holiday in term time has been taken, the absence is unauthorised, and the parents have been notified and issued with a warning letter by the school.

Should the local authority Attendance Officer become involved in a case work capacity then they will;

- Convene an Attendance Case Conference to discuss any issues preventing the regular attendance of the child with parents, school and any appropriate agencies;
- Regularly visit the home address and work with the parent(s) to improve attendance over a time limited period;
- Enforce attendance through the local authority initiating court proceedings

The local authority Attendance Officer can also carry out register checks and offer advice and support to the school to improve attendance

Referrals can only be made through the Executive Head Teacher. A referral form will be completed for each pupil and sent to the local authority Attendance Team.

Rewarding Good Attendance and Punctuality

As well as taking appropriate action against parents who fail to secure the regular attendance of their children, we usually take steps to reward good attendance and punctuality at Oakdene Primary School on a weekly, termly and annual basis. In response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic we feel that this is an exceptional year and rewards will continue to be temporarily suspended.

Attendance and Absence Codes

Accurately marking the register is a legal duty placed on the school. All absence is considered unauthorised unless a satisfactory explanation is received. Once an acceptable reason is received for the absence the school may authorise the absence.

The tables below show the national codes that all schools in England use and their meaning.

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Attendance Codes	
Register Code	Meaning
/	Present at school for the morning session
\	Present at school for the afternoon session
L	Late before the registers have closed
B	Attendance at an approved educational activity
D	Dual registered with another school or educational provision
J	Attendance at an interview
P	Attendance at an approved sporting activity
V	Educational visit or trip
W	Work experience

Authorised Absence Codes	
Register Code	Meaning
C	Exceptional circumstances authorised absence
E	Exclusion
H	Authorised holiday in term time
I	Illness
M	Medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance absence
S	Study Leave
T	Gypsy, Roma, Traveller absence agreed by the school

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Unauthorised Absence Codes	
G	Unauthorised holiday in term time
N	No reason provided for absence
O	Unauthorised absence
U	Late arrival after the registers have closed
Administrative Codes – not counted in possible sessions	
X	Non-compulsory school age absence/ absence in relation to Covid-19
Y	Unable to attend due to exception circumstances/ school closure
Z	Pupil not on roll
#	Planned school holiday

Covid Related Absence

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the school have acted in accordance with all guidance and legislation from the government. Attendance at school is compulsory again for all statutory school age children. This means that parental responsibility to ensure regular attendance and schools' duty to follow up on absence including the use of referring for sanctions to be issued by the local authority also recommenced.

We recognise the concern some parents and children may have in relation to attending school during this time. The support of our Family Support Adviser and Education Welfare Officer will be available to those parents that require support and advice.

Although attendance at school is compulsory there are some specific circumstances where children will not be able to attend school due to Covid-19.

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As such a parent will not be guilty of an offence if their child is absent from school due to them following Public Health Guidance or government legislation relating to Covid-19. A child's school attendance will not be adversely affected if they must self-isolate. Code X is used to identify absence relating to Covid-19. A child may be required to self-isolate if;

- They are experiencing symptoms of Covid-19
- They are awaiting a pcr result
- They have been contacted as part of the governments Track and Trace and told to self-isolate
- They return from a country that requires people to quarantine on return.
- They or a member of their household are clinically vulnerable.

Where a child is show symptoms of Covid-19 they must not attend school and their parent must arrange a pcr test at the earliest opportunity. The child should isolate for 10 days from the first day of symptoms or until a negative test result if this is sooner. The child should return to school as soon as they have a negative test if they are feeling well enough to attend. If they do not return following the negative test result the school may choose to authorise the absence as an I code or unauthorise the absence as O depending on the circumstances. If a child tests positive for Covid-19 they should continue to self-isolate with their household for 10 days from the onset of their symptoms.

If a member of the child's household or class tests positive and your child is identified as a close contact, PHE strongly recommends that you book a pcr immediately. This absence will be recorded as X code.

If a family return from a country subject to quarantine procedures on their return the parent must inform the school on the first day of quarantine. This absence will then be recorded as X code.

The guidance on shielding can change. Currently shielding is not advised for any groups. Should this change and a child need to shield because they or a member of their immediate household is clinically vulnerable the medical letter confirming this must be shown to the school.

Should a child be absent for any of these reasons the school will work to support the family and child by providing schoolwork that can be accessed from home or referring to any other support agencies as appropriate.