

## **St Chad's Patchway CE VC Primary School**

### **Attendance Policy**

'Learning to love, loving to learn'.

The aim of this document is to explain the responsibilities for you as parents / carers to ensure your child attends school regularly and sets out in return what St Chad's will do.

#### **Vision Statement**

#### **'Learning to love, loving to learn'**

In order to support its Vision Statement, St Chad's Patchway C. E. Primary School aims to maximise attendance rates of children who are well enough to come to school in order to ensure that all students are able to take full advantage of the learning and social experiences available to them.

#### **Rationale**

It is widely recognised that setting good attendance patterns from an early age will also help your child later on and into adult life; it is a worthy learning point on its own. Being punctual is also vital. Arriving late at school can be very disruptive for your child, the teacher, and the other children in the class.

Encouraging regular attendance, high levels of punctuality and reducing persistent absence is an integral part of our drive to:

- Promote all children's welfare
- Ensure that every child has access to the full-time education they are entitled to
- Ensure that children maximise their full potential
- Equip children with the skills and knowledge needed, enabling them to have access to the widest possible range of opportunities.

#### **Rights and Responsibilities**

Improving attendance at St Chad's C.E. Primary School is the responsibility of everyone in the school community – children, parents, staff and Governors.

#### **Children**

Children should attend school every day unless prevented from doing so due to circumstances which the school would normally authorise. This is classed as regular attendance. To be clear, regular attendance is that of statutory attendance, where children of school age are expected to attend school daily unless they are prevented from doing so in ways described in more detail in the Authorised / Unauthorised section. Children must arrive at school punctually; 9.00 a.m. This is the *latest* time we would expect a child to arrive for registration.

### Parents/Carers

Parents are responsible for ensuring that their child attends school regularly, punctually, properly dressed and equipped and in a fit condition to learn. Children who are overtired, feeling ill or have very recently experienced vomiting, diarrhoea etc are unlikely to concentrate fully in the classroom. If a child is prevented for any reason from attending, or is late, parents are requested to notify the school as soon as possible – by phone call or preferably in writing. A child's absence from school must be considered as unauthorised until a satisfactory explanation is provided by the parent. Parents will be informed the same day of any concerns which may arise over a child's attendance – often this is via text or phone call. The Headteacher will investigate if a child's attendance is a cause for concern. **Parents should avoid making medical/dental appointments for their child during school hours and no holidays should be taken during term times.**

- If a child is unwell, a telephone message should be left on **01454 866523** before 9:30 a.m. on the first day of absence stating the reason the child cannot attend school.
- Absence which remains **unauthorised** will be reported to the Education Welfare Officer from the Local Authority. • Parents and carers should make all medical appointments outside of school hours. Notification of absence for unavoidable medical appointments must be made in advance of the appointment by telephoning the school.
- Parents or carers must, when requested, provide proof, such as an appointment card, when absences require further justification.
- Parents or carers should be aware that a letter or phone call does not in itself authorise the absence. Only the schools acceptance of the explanation will authorise the absence.
- Parents or carers must take all reasonable steps to ensure that their child arrives punctually to school every day. If punctuality problems are of a persistent nature, parents or carers are encouraged to work in partnership with the school to improve the situation.

### School

Staff will endeavour to encourage good attendance and punctuality through personal example. Attendance is the responsibility of all school staff. The school will employ a range of strategies to encourage good attendance and punctuality and will promptly investigate all absenteeism, liaising closely with parents and the Education Welfare Service (EWS). Staff will respond to all absenteeism consistently.

The Governing Body receive regular statistics regarding authorised, unauthorised attendance and will report accordingly to parents. Governors fully support the school in its efforts to minimise absenteeism.

Regular attendance at school is essential for continuity in learning, enabling each child to reach his/her potential.

**Statutory Framework – the law.**

The school is obliged by law to differentiate between authorised and unauthorised absence. A letter or telephone message from a parent does not in itself authorise an absence. Only if the school is satisfied as to the validity of the explanation offered by the letter/message will the absence be authorised (see 'Authorised/Unauthorised Absence'). All absences are tracked by the school and the local authority, and once unauthorised absences go above a certain limit, the process of legal intervention begins, which is why it is important that the school is notified of an absence as soon as possible and with a valid reason.

### **Registration**

Attendance Registers will be called by 9.10 am and by 1.10 pm and will be marked on our computerised system known as SIMs. Registers will be officially closed by 9.30, anyone arriving after this time will be classified as late after the register has closed.

Children who arrive after the registers have closed should report to the School Office and have their names entered in the School Late Book. The School Secretary or Headteacher will then amend the register entry to read 'absent/late'. If a child is late on two or more occasions in a week, the parents will be contacted.

The school's Education Welfare Officer (EWO) will inspect registers on each visit. The Headteacher will inspect all registers each half term in order to ensure that correct procedures are being followed; totals are being calculated and entered, and so on, and the registers will be monitored weekly by the attendance team.

### **Authorised/Unauthorised Absence**

The final decision about authorisation of absence rests with the Headteacher with the backing of, and on behalf of the Governors. The Education Welfare Officer will be consulted when a doubt arises.

Absence can be **authorised** if:

- the child was ill 'or prevented from attending by an unavoidable cause'
- the absence occurred on a day exclusively set aside for major religious observance by the religious body to which the child's parent belongs
- the school at which the child is a registered child is not within walking distance of the child's home, and no suitable arrangements have been made by the LA
- the child is the child of Traveller parents and are subject to specific special circumstances linked to this, which have been discussed with the school
- there is a family bereavement
- the child is attending an interview for a place at another school
- the child is participating in an approved public performance
- circumstances when the school is declared closed by the governing body

Children away from school for the following reasons can be regarded as present for statistical purposes.

- The child is attending an approved off-site Educational activity or is receiving special off-site tuition,
- The child is attending a Pupil Referral Unit.

Absence will be **unauthorised** if:

- no explanation is forthcoming
- the school is dissatisfied with the explanation
- the child is shopping with a parent / relative during school hours
- the child is absent for **unexceptional** special occasions (e.g, a birthday)
- the child is visiting relatives
- the child is away from school due to a parent or sibling illness ☐ the child is away from school on a family holiday.

### **Holidays**

The Department of Education's guidance strongly encourages schools to take a much firmer stance on absence authorised in term times. OFSTED also judge a school in part on its level of absence, authorised and unauthorised alike. Parents **do not have the right** to take their child out of school for such a holiday.

St Chad's always shares terms dates in advance, publishing them on our website and reminding you of them in the school newsletters. Advance dates of school terms are always published on the South Gloucestershire website but these will not show any additional training days (INSET days), and this information is shared again in the above ways. <http://www.southglos.gov.uk/>

It is important that parents and carers book holidays during the stated holiday periods.

### **Procedures for Following up Absence**

- If a child is absent without explanation, school will attempt to contact the parents on the same day by telephone or letter, whenever possible,
- If a child is persistently (or intermittently) absent without adequate explanation, the Headteacher will write to the parents and invite them to attend a meeting at school,
- If a child returns to school after a period of absence and fails to bring a note or if the explanation offered by note is unsatisfactory, the Headteacher will write to the parents,
- If a child is persistently absent or late and the school's efforts to effect an improvement have been unsuccessful, a Single Assessment Framework for early help (SAFeh) will be completed, submitted to the First Point Team and monitored within a defined, usually 6 week period.
- If the situation still does not improve, the matter will be referred to the Education Welfare Officer,
- Notes from parents will be kept on the child's file. All telephone messages regarding absence/lateness are to be recorded in the telephone message book.

### **Penalty notices**

Penalty Notices were introduced under Section 23 (1) of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 to address unauthorised absence from school. It is a fine issued by South Gloucestershire Council to parents/carers of a child who has failed to attend school regularly and whose absence is unauthorised.

It does not require the parent to attend court but is an alternative to prosecution in the magistrate's court. Parents/carers who pay the fine in full within the time limits cannot

later be prosecuted for the offence to which the Penalty Notice relates (Section 444 of the Education Act 1996).

### **Why have Penalty Notices been introduced?**

Reducing absence from school is a key priority of the government and local authority because missing school may limit a child's attainment, disrupt school routines and the learning of others, and can leave a child vulnerable to anti-social behaviour and youth crime.

### **When might a Penalty Notice be issued?**

A Penalty Notice may be issued to a parent in one or more of the following circumstances where more than 10 sessions of absence are recorded in 7 school weeks (ie 70 sessions). There are 2 sessions per day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon:

1. where unauthorised absences are recorded
2. where more than 10 sessions of unauthorised holiday are recorded and;
  - a) the parent has not informed the school; or
  - b) the leave was not authorised; or
  - c) the child did not return on the agreed date
3. where the child is persistently late arriving at school after registers have closed
4. where a combination of more than 10 sessions of a) to c) above have been recorded.

### **How much is the fine?**

The fine is £60 (per parent, per child) if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice; rising to £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days.

For example a two - parent family taking 2 children out of school for an unauthorised holiday would be liable for a total of £240 if paid within 21 days or £480 between 21 and 28 days.

The payment must be made in full – part payments will not be accepted - details of how to pay are printed on the Penalty Notice. The school does not benefit from this fine, the funds go to the Local Authority.

### **School attendance meetings**

For children whose attendance and lateness consistently falls below a satisfactory level and that do not fall within the remit of the penalty notices, parents or carers and children will be invited to attend a school attendance meeting where, if appropriate, the Education Welfare Officer will also attend. These meetings provide a useful opportunity to review the reasons for absence and lateness and agree actions that will support the children in making the necessary improvements. These plans set specific targets for attendance and may include the school requesting evidence in support of a child's high level of absence, such as, appointment cards as well as parents or carers providing written permission for the school to contact professionals in the Health service by signing a medical consent form. The school may decide to not authorise any absences unless proof of illness or medical consent is provided. A formal referral to the school's Education Welfare Officer may be made at this stage.

### **School attendance panels**

For any child whose attendance continues to fall below a satisfactory level with no good reason, or for a serious infringement of the guidance outlined above, a meeting will be held in school. This is a more formal meeting which consists of School members of staff, Governors & possibly the EWO. The aim is to set out the parent's or carer's responsibilities in ensuring regular attendance to avoid the possibility of legal action. This is the first stage of formal legal proceedings for unsatisfactory attendance at school.

### **External agencies**

If the outlined steps have been taken and attendance has not improved, the school has the right to request parents and school enter into a SAFeh, which is a significant and formal document, detailed and far reaching, submitted to the Local Authority via First Point, and strictly monitored within a short time frame.

When support has failed to improve attendance, the parent/carer can be deemed to have committed an offence, and this is when external agencies become more heavily involved. The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 and Education Act 1996 gives the Local Authority and the Police powers to enforce the law (a child must be in school unless a valid and appropriate reason is given).

These powers range from supporting the child back into school following prolonged, intermittent or sustained absence, issuing Penalty Notices and the power to prosecute. The term prosecution covers a gradient of measures, ranging from a fine up to £1000 under Section 444 (1) and up to £2,500 under section 444 (1A) per child, and per parent, a deferred sentence, and a range of community sentences. In serious cases under Section 444(1A) a custodial sentence could be imposed on the parent/carer. The court may impose a Parenting Order.

Such action is considered to be very much a 'last resort' when all attempts to increase attendance have been unsuccessful.

St Chad's CE would like to stress that we aim to positively maintain a child's attendance and will work with parents and carers to achieve this. As with all aspects of school, this is a two way process and St Chad's actively seek out an open dialogue with parents and carers where attendance issues may arise and strive to resolve them quickly and satisfactorily for all parties.

Penalty notices may be requested by the Headteacher and issued to both parents and carers regarding each of their children if more than 10 sessions of unauthorised absence accumulates within a 7 week period, (excluding school holidays). A session is a morning or afternoon.

### **Strategies for Promoting Attendance**

- As a school, we value and promote attendance, with classes celebrating good attendance, as well as high attendance being celebrated in a whole school setting. This includes a 100% attendance award for each child who achieves this, on a termly basis. There will also be a week by week competition between classes to gain the highest attendance, where a reward will be given to the class who achieves the highest attendance across the term.
- St Chad's C.E. Primary School ethos must demonstrate that children feel that their presence in school is important, that they will be missed when they are absent/late and that follow up action will be taken.

- Attendance data will be regularly collected and analysed in order to help identify patterns, set targets, correlate attendance with achievement, and support and inform policy/practice.
- The attendance of ‘looked after’ children and children on the Child Protection Register are monitored in a specific way in alignment with statutory requirements.
- Children whose attendance is a cause for concern will be set targets for improvement in consultation with parents.
- The Headteacher will, when appropriate liaise with other agencies, Educational Psychology Service, Social Services, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry etc – when this may serve to support and assist children who are experiencing attendance difficulties.
- The Headteacher will have regular meetings with the school’s Education Welfare Officer in order to identify and support those children who are experiencing attendance difficulties.

We always encourage parents or carers to work in partnership with the school at all times and not to collude with their child’s absence from school. If a child is experiencing problems attending, it is much better for the school to know straightaway so that we can offer our support to you and them.

Whenever the school is unable to contact a parent/carer because of inaccurate/ out-dated contact details, the parent/carer will be informed and new contact details requested. It is the responsibility of the parent/carer to keep the school informed of all changes to contacts details.

Reviewed: November 2019

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