

Policy and Procedure: Attendance policy

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Aims

- To achieve an attendance target of 96% or above.
- To work closely with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to monitor the attendance of children and respond to concerns about levels of absence promptly.
- To encourage parents not to take their children out of school during the term time.

Purpose

Margaret McMillan Primary School wants each and every child to have the best possible attendance at school to enable them to reach their full potential. There is a strong link between good school attendance and achieving good results for children. Children who frequently miss school may fall behind in their work which may affect their future prospects. Absence may also have an effect on friendships. Young people who are frequently absent from school are more likely to become involved in, or be a victim of crime and anti-social behaviour. At Margaret McMillan Primary School we work closely with families to support them to achieve the best possible outcomes for our children.

Promoting Good Attendance

Good attendance will be celebrated on a weekly basis. Every Monday in assembly Attendance Cup is awarded to highest class/es attendance percentage for the previous week they will receive a £10 voucher to spend on books or games for games club. Every week pupils are awarded with individual attendance certificates. Classes will compete for the highest attendance. Every term pupils that have achieved **96%** or above will receive a certificate celebrating their good attendance.

For pupils **below 96%**, the letter will report their attendance figure and asks parents to be mindful of their child's attendance rate. In addition, parents will be offered the opportunity to talk to the Liaison Officer or Phase Leader about their child's attendance as a means of support (Appendix 2). At the end of the year, any child achieving **100% attendance** will be entered into a prize draw.

Monitoring Attendance

The Three Letter System:

Introduction:

The three-letter system is intended to enable school to continuously and consistently to monitor and address poor school attendance. The system will target non-attendance methodically and progressively up to and including the point at which a referral to the Education Welfare Service may be necessary.

It is intended to apply essentially to absence which is unauthorised, but with some modification (and appropriate rewording of the letters) it might in certain circumstances be used to target patterns of absence which are authorised but which are beginning to cause concern. School will however, decline to continue to authorise such absences once doubts arise as to their legitimacy.)

Key Features and Potential Benefits:

- Liaison Officer / Learning Mentors can focus on the attendance of all pupils at least once a fortnight.

Liaison Officer / Learning Mentor can quickly and easily identify those pupils whose attendance is becoming a cause of concern.

- In most cases Letter 1 brings about a rapid improvement in attendance and no further action is required.
- The system provides a clear record of the school's own efforts to improve attendance should it subsequently be necessary to involve the Education Welfare Service.
- As the Education Welfare Service 'School Attendance' leaflet is sent with Letter 2, parents are made aware of the existence and role of the Education Welfare Service prior to any subsequent involvement should this prove necessary.
- The school can readily identify emerging attendance problems and therefore target support accordingly.
- The school builds up a consistent record of their own attendance interventions and is able to ensure that when they do need to involve the Education Welfare Service they do this only when their own efforts have proved unsuccessful.
 - The school produces a record of attendance every fortnight for all pupils whose attendance has fallen beneath 96%.
 - These pupils are discussed fortnightly with the SLT, looking for emerging trends and patterns. Families are targeted by the Liaison Officer for support. A specific plan is produced for each child.

Letter 1

- For those pupils who have been identified for the first time, a copy of Letter 1 (Appendix 3) is sent to the parents
- Should the pupil's attendance improve but the improvement fail to be sustained, a further copy of Letter 1 may be sent at a later date.
- This is recorded by saving a copy of the letter in the absence letters folder on the network. The file name indicating Name, Letter Type and Date. A record of each letter sent is kept in the attendance folder for each class.
- Child's name recorded on spreadsheet with date so that further monitoring can be effective

Letter 2

- Following the sending of Letter1, should the pupil's attendance fail to improve or should it fall to a lower level, a copy of Letter 2 (Appendix 4), together with a copy of the Education Welfare Service 'School Attendance' leaflet is sent to the parent (and copied to the Education Welfare Officer).
- This is recorded by saving a copy of the letter in the absence letters folder on the network. The file name indicating Name, Letter Type and Date. A record of each letter sent is kept in the attendance folder for each class.
- Child will already be on the spreadsheet with the date the letter was sent

Letter 3

- Should the pupil's attendance still fail to improve or should it fall to a lower level, then a copy of Letter 3 (Appendix 5) is sent to the parents (and copied to the Education Welfare Officer). A record of each letter sent is kept in the attendance folder for each class.
- The case is formally referred to the Education Welfare Officer.

Should the pupil have been absent for two continuous weeks without a satisfactory explanation having been received, or should there be child protection or other immediate welfare concerns then the school may of course make an earlier referral to the Education Welfare Officer, Parent Support or Social Care. Should the child be currently involved with Social Care, the child's social worker should be notified immediately.

Leave of Absence during Term Time

Introduction

A minority of parents continue to cause disruption to their children's education by withdrawing them from school during term-time for the purpose of a family holiday. Many of these parents mistakenly believe that they have a 10-day holiday 'entitlement'. This is compounded by holiday companies offering out-of-season (i.e. outside of school holidays) bargains.

Absence during term-time as a result of term-time holidays interrupts continuity of teaching and learning, disrupts the educational progress of individual children and creates disruption in schools. Margaret McMillan Primary School therefore aims to discourage parents from arranging family holidays during term time.

Whilst it is acknowledged that for some parents the issue of choosing when to arrange annual family holidays may be problematic due to particular working patterns and particular restrictions on when leave can be taken in some occupations, Margaret McMillan Primary School nevertheless believes that the vast and overwhelming majority of parents should be able to arrange for their annual family holiday to take place within the published dates for school holidays.

It is recognised that some parents may persist in taking their children out of school for the purposes of a family holiday regardless of the view and response of their child's school. Margaret McMillan Primary School intends to make a clear statement regarding the issue of term-time holidays, to positively and proactively ensure that the amount of teaching and learning time lost to term-time holidays is, as a result, minimised.

Guidance for Parents

A child does not have a 'right' or 'entitlement' to term-time leave for the purposes of an annual family holiday and that term-time leave, like all leave, can only be authorised at the discretion of the Headteacher.

Parents should understand that any request for leave of absence in term-time leave will be treated on an individual basis. Decisions to authorise absence will be based on individual family circumstances. The school will not, as a rule, agree to leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. In all cases, absence will not be authorised unless the authorisation form has been completed (appendix 4) and the Headteacher deems the circumstance to be exceptional. Exceptional circumstances will not include financial restraints and making use of holiday discounts.

Any parent who takes a child out of school for term time leave of more than **6 consecutive sessions over a 4 week period, not authorised by the school** (under exceptional circumstances rule), may receive a Penalty Notice. Such cases will have to be supported by evidence of previous unauthorised term time leave (**more than 6 consecutive sessions over a 4 week period**) taken in the last 3 years and evidence of parents being warned about a potential Penalty Notice.

Margaret McMillan Primary School will communicate the details of leave of absence taken in term time through:

- the school's overall attendance policy;
- the school brochure;
- school newsletters;

- translations into community languages as necessary;
- parent induction evenings/parents' evenings.

Margaret McMillan Primary School will use an Application for Leave of Absence' form . Occasionally parents take their children on holiday without requesting a leave of absence. If the school suspect that this has happened a suspected holiday letter will be sent.

School Response

Margaret McMillan Primary School will make clear to parents the likely educational impact upon their children if extended leave is taken during term-time. The importance of being at school near and during SATs will also be stressed.

Should absence be agreed we will consider:-

- seeking to establish, and make explicit, if appropriate, the potential educational value of the visit;
- explaining what work the child will miss in school, how it can be made up on return if necessary, and how the parents can help the child;
- asking the pupil to make notes/observations in relation to a class topic or to keep a diary;
- sharing the experience, on return, in a positive way with other children;

Should the school feel unable to comply with the request for leave the reasons for this will be explained to the parents. This explanation should show an understanding of the parents' perspective.

Persistent Lateness

It is the duty of parents to ensure that children attend school regularly and punctually. This encourages habits of good timekeeping and lessens any possible classroom disruption. The school gates open at 8.40am and the registers close at 9.20am. If a child arrives at school after 9.20am this will affect their attendance rate as they were absent at registration. This applies in all cases for being late, including travel delays.

The Headteacher will meet with parents of those children who are regularly late arriving at school to investigate reasons and suggest solutions to enable more punctual attendance.

If there is no improvement in punctuality then a late letter will be sent.

Penalty Notices

Penalty Notices will only be issued in accordance with the terms within the Code of Conduct set out for Cambridgeshire. They will only be issued in relation to absence from school, which is unauthorised. At Margaret McMillan Primary School, Penalty Notices will be issued to parents when their child's attendance falls below 90% over the previous 4-week period. Before issuing a Penalty Notice, the school will deploy other strategies to help the family improve attendance rates. Such strategies might include:

- writing to the child's parents to remind them of their legal responsibilities
- meeting with the child's parents;
- first day absence phone calls;
- setting targets for improvement;
- referral to the Education Welfare Officer;

In the first instance, school would send a warning letter via the EWO (Appendix 9). If a family continue to take leave of absence without authorisation by the Headteacher, then a Penalty Notice Letter will be issued.