
ATTENDANCE POLICY

“We rejoice in trials and problems as these produce endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope.

Our school community will be a compassionate place of enjoyment, respect and hope where courage is valued and skills developed for all to thrive in a diverse world; growing in strength, wisdom and faith.”

1. Introduction

Regular school attendance is essential for children to make good progress, develop socially and grow in social and academic confidence.

St Paul's believes that regular school attendance is the key to enabling children to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who are able to make a positive contribution to their community. Based upon its Christian foundation, St Paul's values all pupils. As set out in this policy, we work with families to identify the reasons for poor attendance and try to resolve any difficulties by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.

St Paul's recognises that attendance is a matter for the whole school community. Securing good attendance cannot be seen in isolation, and effective practices for improvement will involve close interaction with schools' efforts on curriculum, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, pastoral and mental health and wellbeing, and effective use of resources. This policy also takes into account the Human Rights Act 1998, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Race Relations Act 2000.

“7. Improving attendance is everyone's business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families. The foundation of securing good attendance is that school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn.”¹

2. Legal Framework

Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act states that parents must ensure that children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or by education otherwise than at school.

A child is of Compulsory School Age at the beginning of the term following their 5th birthday. A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June of the school year in which they reach the age of 16.

“Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.”¹

Under the Education Act 1996, the Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that parents secure education for children of compulsory school age and where necessary, use legal enforcement.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, require schools to take an attendance register twice a day, once at the start of the morning session and then again during the afternoon session.

The register must record whether the pupil was:

- present;
- absent;
- present at approved educational activity; or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

St Paul's Church of England Combined School believe that improved school attendance can only be achieved if it is viewed as a shared responsibility of the school staff, governors, parents, pupils and the wider school community. The Headteacher is responsible for the strategic approach to attendance at St Paul's and reports to the Learning and Standards Committee on attendance.

St Paul's:

- Develops and maintains a culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance through, for example, presentations to parents
- Has a clear school attendance policy which all staff, pupils and parents understand
- Accurately completes admission and attendance registers and has effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence
- Regularly monitors and analyses attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and puts effective strategies in place.
- Builds strong relationships with families, listens to and understands barriers to attendance and works with families to remove them.
- Shares information and works collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.

Governors:

- Take an active role in attendance improvement, including working with school leaders to create a whole school culture of valuing attendance
- Ensure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties including staff training
- Analyse attendance data to identify causes and patterns of absence

Parents should:

- Try to avoid unnecessary absences. Wherever possible make appointments for the doctors, dentists etc. outside of school hours
- Instil the value of education and regular school attendance within the home environment
- Encourage routine at home, for example, bed times, home learning, preparing their school bag and uniform the evening before
- Encourage their child to look to the future and have aspirations, linking this to the importance of school attendance
- Contact the school if their child is absent to let them know the reason why and the expected date of return. Follow this up with a note where possible.
- Talk to their child about school and what goes on there. Take a positive interest in their child's work and educational progress
- Ask the school for help if their child is experiencing difficulties
- Inform the school of any change in circumstances that may impact on their child's attendance

- Support the school, taking every opportunity to get involved in their child's education, form a positive relationship with school and acknowledge the importance of children receiving the same messages from both school and home
- Not keep their child away from school to go shopping, to help at home or to look after other members of the family
- Avoid taking their child on holiday during term-time.

4. Support Systems

St Paul's recognises that poor attendance is often an indication of difficulties in a child's life. This may be related to problems at home and or in school. Parents should make school aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and/or behaviour in school, for example, bereavement, divorce/separation. This will help the school identify any additional support that may be required.

St Paul's also recognises that some pupils are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, those pupils with special educational needs, those with physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee pupils and looked after children.

The school will implement a range of strategies to support improved attendance, including:

- Discussion with parents and pupils
- Referrals to support agencies such as Family Support Service
- Friendship groups
- Reward systems
- Time limited part-time timetables
- Additional learning support
- Behaviour and emotional support
- Reintegration support packages

Support offered to families will be child-centred and planned in discussion and agreement with both parents and pupils.

5. Categorising absence

Where pupils of compulsory school age are recorded as absent, the register must show whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Absence can only be authorised by the school and cannot be authorised by parents. All absences will be treated as unauthorised unless a satisfactory explanation for the pupil's absence has been received.

Parents should advise the school by telephone on the first day of absence and provide the school with an expected date of return. This should be followed up in the form of a written note, though verbal explanations may be acceptable where this is considered appropriate. Alternative arrangements will be agreed with non-English speaking parents.

Absence will be categorised as follows:

Illness: In most cases a telephone call or a note from the parent informing the school that their child is ill will be acceptable. Parents may be asked to provide medical evidence where there are repeated absences due to reported illness. This will usually be in the form of an appointment card, prescription etc.

Medical/Dental Appointments: Parents are advised where possible to make medical and dental appointments outside the school day. Where this is not possible, pupils should attend school for part of the day. Parents should show the appointment card to school.

Other Authorised Circumstances: Attendance at a family wedding, funeral or other official occasion (such as a graduation) is considered exceptional. This will include travel to and from the event if abroad. Service families taking holidays in term time are also considered exceptional.

*"Only exceptional circumstances warrant a leave of absence. Schools should consider each application individually taking into account the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind the request. If a leave of absence is granted, it is for the headteacher to determine the length of the time the pupil can be away from school."*¹

Excluded (no alternative provision made): Exclusion from attending school is counted as an authorised absence.

Late Arrival: Registration begins at 8:45am. Pupils arriving after 9am will be marked as present but having arrived late (L). The register will close at 9:20am. Pupils arriving after the close of register will be recorded as absent. This will not be authorised and will count as an absence for that school session.

On arrival after the close of register, pupils must immediately report to the school office to ensure that we can be responsible for their health and safety whilst they are in school. Parents complete the late book as a record of the child's presence in school.

The absence will only be authorised if a satisfactory explanation for the late arrival can be provided, for example, attendance at a medical appointment. (Code M)

The absence will be recorded as unauthorised if the pupil has arrived late after the registers close without justifiable cause, for example, if they woke up late. (Code U)

Unauthorised absence: Absence will not be authorised unless parents have provided a satisfactory explanation that has been accepted as such by the school.

Examples of unsatisfactory explanations include:

- A pupil's/family member's birthday
- Shopping for uniform
- Having their hair cut
- Closure of a sibling's school for INSET (or other) purposes
- Tiredness
- Holidays taken without the authorisation of school

Leave of Absence and Extended Leave: Parents do not have an automatic right to remove their child from school during term time for the purpose of a holiday and are strongly advised not to do so. Parents should be aware that if their child is absent for 10 school days they will miss 5% of their education during that academic year.

Parents wishing to take their child out of school during term time must complete a request for leave of absence form at least a month before the planned absence. This form is available from the school office or downloadable from the school website. The completed form should then be handed in to the school office for the headteacher to consider on behalf of the governors. Documentary evidence of leave and return dates may be required in order to process requests. Retrospective requests will not

be considered and therefore will result in the absence being categorised as unauthorised. Each request will be considered on an individual basis and will take the following factors into account:

- Reason for absence and circumstances of the request
- Length of the proposed leave
- The pupil's general absence/attendance record
- Timing of SATs and other assessments
- General welfare of the pupil
- When the request was made

All requests for leave of absence will receive a written response. Where a request has been granted, the letter will state:

- The expected date of return
- That parents must contact school should any delays occur

If the permission to take leave is not granted and the pupil is still absent on those dates, the absence will be unauthorised. In such cases the school may refer the matter to the Council Attendance Officers who may issue a Penalty Notice.

Religious Observance St Paul's acknowledges the multi-faith nature of British society and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside school holiday periods or weekends and that this necessitates a consideration of authorised absence or special leave for religious observance. (Code R)

It is reasonable for a parent to allow their children not to attend school on any day of religious observance if recognised by the parent's religious body. Parents are required complete a request for leave of absence form as is normal procedure.

In the interests of fulfilling the academic requirements of the school and limiting the authorised absence rate of the school, it is identified as reasonable that no more than one day be designated for any individual occasion of religious observance/festival and no more than three days in total in any academic year. Absence in excess of this will be categorised as unauthorised.

"In very exceptional circumstances, where it is in a pupil's best interests, there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs." ¹

Traveller Absence: The aim for the attendance of children from travelling communities, in common with all other children, is to attend school as regularly and as frequently as possible.

To protect Traveller parents from unreasonable prosecution for non-attendance, the Education Act 1944, section 86, states that a Traveller parent is safe from prosecution if their child accrues 200 attendances (i.e. 200 half days) in a year. Traveller absence (Code T) is acceptable only when the family is engaged in a trade or business that requires them to travel and when the child is attending school as regularly as that trade permits.

It does not mean that part-time education for Traveller children is legally acceptable, nor does it relieve parents of their duties to ensure that their children are receiving suitable education when not at school. When in or around Buckinghamshire, if a Traveller family can reasonably travel back to their base school (see below) then the expectation is that their child will attend full-time.

St Paul's will be regarded as the base school if it is the school where the child normally attends when they are not travelling. However, the pupil must have attended in the last 18 months. Traveller children can register at other schools temporarily whilst away from their base school. In such cases, the pupil's school place at St Paul's will be kept open for them whilst travelling. This is to protect them from unfairly losing their place at their school of usual attendance.

St Paul's can operate effectively as the child's base school only if we are engaged in on-going dialogue with Traveller families. This means that parents must:

- advise of their forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen; and
- inform the school regarding proposed return dates.

St Paul's will authorise absence of Traveller children if satisfied that a family is travelling and has given indication that they intend to return.

Traveller children will be recorded as attending an approved educational activity when:

- The child is on roll and attending another visited school
- Undertaking supervised educational activity under the jurisdiction of another Local Authority's Traveller Education Service
- The child is undertaking computer-based distance learning that is time evidenced

Where Traveller children are registered pupils at a school and are known to be present either at a site (official or otherwise) or in a house and are not attending school, the absence will be investigated in the same way as for any other pupil.

6. Deletions from the Register

In accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, pupils will be deleted from the register only when one of the following circumstances applies:

- The school is replaced by another school on a School Attendance Order
- The School Attendance Order is revoked by the Local Authority
- Permanent exclusion has occurred and procedures have been completed
- Death of a pupil
- Transfer between schools
- When a parent informs the school in writing that the pupil is to be withdrawn to be educated outside the school system
- Failure to return from an extended holiday after both the school and the local authority have tried to locate the pupil
- A medical condition prevents their attendance and return to the school before ending compulsory school-age
- In custody for more than four months (in discussion with The Youth Offending Team)
- 20 days' continuous unauthorised absence have elapsed and both the Local Authority and school have tried to locate the pupil
- A pupil has left the school but it is not known where he/she has gone after both the school and the Local Authority have tried to locate the pupil

St Paul's will follow Buckinghamshire Council's Children Missing Education Protocol when a pupil's whereabouts is unknown.

7. Using Attendance Data

Every half term the Administrative Officer will provide the Headteacher with attendance data.

This pupil level data will be used to trigger school action if necessary, as set out in the escalation of intervention (Appendix 1).

Attendance data will be used to identify emerging patterns and trends to inform whole school strategies to improve attendance and attainment.

St Paul's Church of England Combined School will share attendance data with the Local Authority as required. All information shared will be done so in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

8. Strategies for reducing persistent and severe absence

Persistent absence is noted in the DfE guidance as absence of 10% or more. Severe absence is absence of 50% or more.

St Paul's will hold meetings with parents whose children are at risk of persistent or severe absence to try to establish the cause and remove any barriers to attendance.

*"Where the needs are wider and a whole family response is more appropriate, this is likely to include a voluntary early help assessment."*¹

Pupils with medical conditions or SEND face greater barriers than their peers. Their right to education is the same as any other pupil therefore the attendance ambition for these pupils is also the same. However, St Paul's is mindful of the barriers these pupils face and puts in additional support where needed to help them access their education. This includes having sensitive conversations with pupils and parents, working with them to develop specific support strategies; making reasonable adjustments; providing pastoral care and monitoring attendance data regularly.

Where engagement in support is proving challenging, St Paul's will notify Buckinghamshire Attendance Support Team and work with them to hold more formal conversations with parents. *"These meetings should clearly explain the consequences of persistent and severe absence to the pupil and family and the potential need for legal intervention in future, but should also be an opportunity to continue to listen to and understand the barriers to attendance and explain the help that is available to avoid those consequences."*¹

*"Where voluntary support has not been effective and/or has not been engaged with all schools should work with the local authority to put formal support in place in the form of a parenting contract or an education supervision order; issue a fixed penalty notice where support would not be appropriate or has not been successful or engaged with and it is likely to change the parents' behaviour; intensify support through statutory children's social care involvement where there are safeguarding concerns, especially where absence becomes severe (below 50% attendance); prosecute parents where all other routes have failed or are not deemed appropriate. This could include making the case for a community or parenting order where the parent is convicted to secure engagement with support."*¹

*J Butler – January 2023
Review January 2025*

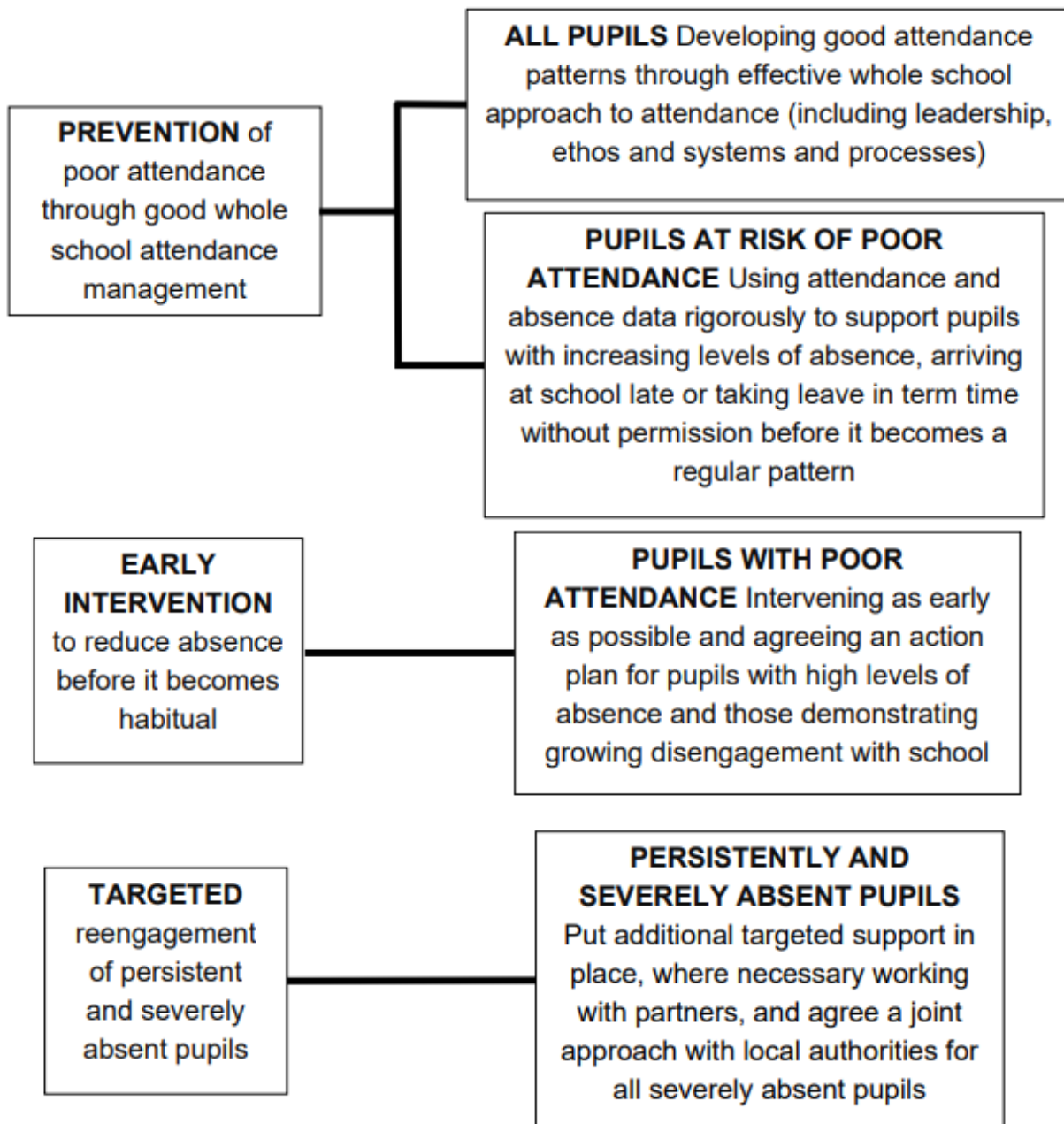
¹ Working Together to Improve School Attendance - DfE May 2022
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1099677/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance.pdf

²Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance – DfE May 2022

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1073619/Summary_table_of_responsibilities_for_school_attendance.pdf

Appendix 1

Effective School Attendance and Management



Appendix 2
Attendance Legal Intervention

