

St Margaret's C of E Primary School

Attendance Policy

Ratified: Autumn 2024
To be reviewed Autumn 2025

Our Attendance and Punctuality Policy has been created to communicate to the school community our expectations and the manner in which we aim to move the school towards achieving our vision. All our policies are designed around this commitment; providing a set of priorities which enable us to live our lives according to this important Christian vision; giving purpose, a series of objectives and the boundaries in which we educate our pupils. At the heart of this lies our commitment to reconciliation and forgiveness. These are essential in our approach as they build bridges, create a peaceful common future and sustain peace. Attendance and punctuality are important for Genesis Education Trust schools as we believe this plays a key role in raising overall pupil attainment. Good attendance and punctuality are clearly linked to children making good progress in their learning and getting the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances.

Unplanned absence

Parents/carers must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence by calling the school office staff.

The parent/carer must clearly state the pupil's full name, class and provide a valid, detailed reason for absence – 'unwell' is not a sufficient reason and will not be authorised. If the school phone line is busy in the morning, a detailed voicemail message will be sufficient. Alternatively, parents/carers can report absence face-to-face at the school office or via email.

Absence from school may be authorised if it is for one of the following reasons:

Illness:

- Vomiting – a child should stay at home for 48 hours after the last bout of sickness/diarrhoea only if sickness and diarrhoea are associated with a virus/bug;
- Head lice – children should come to school after treatment is begun;
- Conjunctivitis – children should come to school after treatment is begun;
- Periods of absence of 5 days or more where medical evidence has been provided.

We will mark absence due to physical or mental illness as authorised, unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

Planned absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the pupil's parent notifies the school in advance of the appointment.

However, we encourage parents to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

The pupil's parent must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence

Attendance register

We will keep an electronic attendance register, and place all pupils onto this register.

We will take our attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark, using the appropriate national attendance and absence codes from the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.

The school day starts at 8:40am and ends at 3:30pm.

Pupils must arrive in school by 8:55am each school day.

The register for the first session will be taken at 8:55am. The register for the second session will be taken at the beginning of the afternoon session

Staff Responsibilities

The class teacher is expected to complete the register by 8:55am and again at the start of the afternoon session.

The Designated Senior Leader for attendance is responsible for leading, championing and improving attendance across the school. They do this by regularly monitoring attendance, evaluating data, liaising with parent, carers and external agencies where needed and building relationships with pupils and their parents/carers. The Designated leader for St Saviours is Sheldon Phillips.

Office staff are staff are responsible for recording absence and updating SLT as appropriate.

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for attendance and is held to account by the Governing body.

Parent/carers are expected to:

- Ensure their child attends school every day and on time.
- Call the school to report their child's absence by 8:55am on the first day of absence and each subsequent day
- Ensure that appointments are scheduled outside of the school day where possible

Reporting to parents

The school will regularly inform parents/carers about their child's attendance and absence levels at parent's evenings and via written reports

Following up unexplained absence

Where any pupil we expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:

- Call parents/carers on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If the school cannot reach any of the pupil's emergency contacts, the school may make a home visit and call relevant agencies
- Identify whether the absence is approved or not
- Identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained – this will be no later than 5 working days after the session(s) for which the pupil was absent
- Call the parent on each day that the absence continues without explanation, to make sure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will consider involving an education welfare officer
- Where appropriate, offer support to the pupil and/or their parents to improve attendance
- Identify whether the pupil needs support from wider partners, as quickly as possible, and make the necessary referrals
- Where support is not appropriate, not successful, or not engaged with, issue a notice to improve, penalty notice or other legal intervention as appropriate

As absence is so often a symptom of wider issues a family is facing, St Saviour's will work together with other local partners to understand the barriers to attendance and provide support. Where that is not successful, or is not engaged with, we will make use of the full range of potential sanctions to tackle poor attendance. Decisions will be made on an individual, case-by-case basis.

Approval for term-time absence

The headteacher will allow pupils to be absent from the school site for certain educational activities, or to attend other schools or settings. The headteacher will only grant a leave of absence to a pupil during term time if the request meets the specific circumstances set out in the 2024 school attendance regulations. These circumstances are:

- Attending an interview or entrance exams for new schools;
- A temporary, time-limited part-time timetable
- Exceptional circumstances

A leave of absence is granted at the headteacher's discretion, including the length of time the pupil is authorised to be absent for.

We define 'exceptional circumstances' as those that are unexpected, unavoidable, and outside of your control

St Margaret's will 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 school to determine the length of the time the pupil can be away from school.

The DfE does not consider a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance.

A leave of absence will not be granted for a pupil to take part in protest activity during school hours.

A leave of absence is granted entirely at the school's discretion.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated via a leave of absence request form, accessible via the school office.

The headteacher may require evidence to support any request for leave of absence.

Other valid reasons for authorised absence include (but are not limited to):

- Illness and medical/dental appointments
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parent(s) belong(s). If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parent's religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart
- Parent(s) travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision
- If the pupil is currently suspended or excluded from school (and no alternative provision has been made)

Other reasons the school may allow a pupil to be absent from the school site, which are not classified as absences, include (but are not limited to):

- Attending an offsite approved educational activity, sporting activity or visit or trip arranged by the school
- Attending another school at which the pupil is also registered (dual registration)

St Margaret's recognises the importance of school attendance and promotes and celebrates this by:

- Weekly attendance awards in assembly
- Celebrating attendance in newsletters
- Issuing 100% attendance certificates at the end of the year.
- Early intervention meetings where attendance is a concern
- Monitoring attendance

Notices to improve

If the national threshold has been met and support is appropriate, but parents do not engage with offers of support, the school may offer a notice to improve to give parents a final chance to engage with support. Notices to improve will be issued in line with processes set out in the local code of conduct for the local authority area in which the pupil attends school.

They will include:

- Details of the pupil's attendance record and of the offences
- The benefits of regular attendance and the duty of parents under section 7 of the Education Act 1996
- Details of the support provided so far
- Opportunities for further support, or to access previously provided support that was not engaged with
- A clear warning that a penalty notice may be issued if attendance doesn't improve within the improvement period, along with details of what sufficient improvement looks like, which will be decided on a case-by-case basis
- A clear timeframe of between 3 and 6 weeks for the improvement period
- The grounds on which a penalty notice may be issued before the end of the improvement period

Penalty notices

The headteacher (or someone authorised by them), local authority or the police can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age, by issuing a penalty notice.

If the school issues a penalty notice, it will check with the local authority before doing so, and send it a copy of any penalty notice issued.

Before issuing a penalty notice, the school will consider the individual case, including:

- Whether the national threshold for considering a penalty notice has been met (10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks)
- Whether a penalty notice is the best available tool to improve attendance for that pupil
- Whether further support, a notice to improve or another legal intervention would be a more appropriate solution
- Whether any obligations that the school has under the Equality Act 2010 make issuing a penalty notice inappropriate

Each parent who is liable for the pupil's offence(s) can be issued with a penalty notice, but this will usually only be the parent/parents who allowed the absence.

The payment must be made directly to the local authority, regardless of who issues the notice. If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice.

If issued with a first penalty notice, the parent must pay £80 within 21 days, or £160 within 28 days.

If a second penalty notice is issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil, the parent must pay £160 if paid within 28 days.

A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of the issue of the first penalty notice. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time within those 3 years, alternative action will be taken instead.

A penalty notice may also be issued where parents allow their child to be present in a public place during school hours without reasonable justification, during the first 5 days of a suspension or exclusion (where the school has notified the parents that the pupil must not be present in a public place on that day). These penalty notices are not included in the National Framework, not subject to the same considerations about support being provided, and do not count towards the limit as part of the escalation process.

In these cases, the parent must pay £60 within 21 days, or £120.

Lateness and punctuality

The school day starts at school name at 8.55am. If a child arrives late, they will receive a late mark.

- Persistent lateness and poor punctuality can also be interpreted as absence.
- The parent of a child who is persistently absent or persistently late after the registers have closed can be prosecuted under Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act and the register would act as the main source of evidence in court.
- Children who arrive at school after 8:55am will be recorded as late with an (L) code along with the time and valid reason provided by the parent/carer.
- Children arriving after 9:25am will be marked as an unauthorised late following DfE guidance, will reflect as an absence for that session.

Good punctuality is essential for a child to achieve high attainment and to maintain/improve behaviour. The school will:

- Keep accurate records of lateness;
- After 10 days late, we will send a letter home regarding lateness and including a report stressing those days with a late code;
- Stress how much we care about children being punctual for school each day and how much their class is disrupted due to another child being late.

Continued Poor Punctuality:

- Parents/carers will be invited into school to discuss the issue;
- The Educational Welfare Office will be informed of children whose lateness is causing concern;
- Where necessary the Education Welfare Officer will contact parents/carers and may make a home visit

Children collected late from school at the end of the day:

Late collection can cause distress to children who are keen to see their parents and carers and should be avoided at all costs.

Please inform the school immediately if you are running unavoidably late. In the event of lateness being a regular problem then the EWO/Social Care will be informed and parents will be charged £15.00 per event of late collection.

Reducing persistent and severe absence

Persistent absence is where a pupil misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a pupil misses 50% or more of school. Reducing persistent and severe absence is central to the school's strategy for improving attendance.

The school will:

- Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of absence
- Consider potential safeguarding issues and, where suspected or present, address them in line with our safeguarding policy
- Hold regular meetings with the parents of pupils who the school considers to be vulnerable or at risk of persistent or severe absence, or who are persistently or severely absent, to:
 - Discuss attendance and engagement at school
 - Listen, and understand barriers to attendance
 - Explain the help that is available
 - Explain the potential consequences of, and sanctions for, persistent and severe absence
 - Review any existing actions or interventions
- Provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance, in conjunction with the local authority, where relevant
- Consider alternative support that could be put in place to remove any barriers to attendance and re-engage these pupils. In doing so, the school will sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence
- Implement sanctions, where necessary

Pupils absent due to complex barriers to attendance

St Margaret's recognises that some pupils may have barriers to attending school. School name works together with families to ensure support is offered on a case by case basis to assist those who may have additional barriers.

Pupils absent due to mental or physical ill health or SEND

St Margaret's works with families on a case by case basis to ensure those who have additional health needs are offered targeted personalised support.

Where a pupil has an education health and care (EHC) plan and their attendance falls, or the school becomes aware of barriers to attendance that relate to the pupil's needs, the school will inform the local authority.

Pupils returning to school after a lengthy or unavoidable period of absence

St Margaret's works with families on a case by case basis to ensure those who have additional health needs are offered targeted personalised support.

Monitoring attendance

The school will monitor attendance and absence data (including punctuality) half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual pupil, year group and cohort level.

The school has granted the DfE access to its management information system so the data can be accessed regularly and securely. Specific pupil information will be shared with the DfE on request.

Analysing attendance

The school will:

- Analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify pupils, groups or cohorts that need additional support
- Identify pupils whose absences may be a cause for concern, especially those who demonstrate patterns of persistent or severe absence
- Conduct thorough analysis of half-termly, termly, and full-year data to identify patterns and trends
- Look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns

Using data to improve attendance

The school will:

- Develop targeted actions to address patterns of absence of individual pupils, groups or cohorts that it has identified via data analysis
- Provide targeted support to the pupils it has identified whose absences may be a cause for concern, especially those who demonstrate patterns of persistent or severe absence
- Provide regular attendance reports to facilitate discussions with pupils and families
- Use data to monitor and evaluate the impact of any interventions put in place in order to modify them and inform future strategies
- Share information and work collaboratively local authorities and other partners where a pupil's absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe, including keeping them informed regarding specific pupils, where appropriate