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Attendance and Punctuality Policy

Scope and publication

The Covid-19 Attendance and Registration Addendum was withdrawn and from the 8th March 2021 pupil attendance became mandatory.

The usual rules on attendance apply, including:

- parents' duty to ensure that their child of compulsory school age attends regularly at the school where the child is a registered pupil
- schools' responsibilities to record attendance and follow up absence
- the ability to issue sanctions, including penalty notices, in line with local authorities' codes of conduct

This policy applies to all pupils, parents and staff at St Mark's Church of England Academy.

Copies of the policy are available on request, in large print or other accessible formats if required.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's Registration of Pupils Policy.

Statement of intent

For a child to reach their full educational achievement a high level of school attendance is essential.

We are committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all our pupils and endeavour to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome. Every child has a right to access the education to which he/she is entitled. Parents and teachers share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality for all.

Under normal circumstances, we recognise that it is our duty to **consistently strive to achieve a goal of 100% attendance for all children**. Due to the uncertainties surrounding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we will not be setting specific attendance targets for the 2020-2021 academic year, but will nonetheless continue to do everything possible to maximise attendance, especially for those pupils who have made the least progress with their learning.

Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents or carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

For our children to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered, it is vital every child is at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. The routines children develop around attendance and punctuality at school are the same as the expectations of any future employer in the world of work. High attainment, confidence with peers and staff, and future aspirations depend on good attendance.

Department for Education (DfE) guidance -*School Attendance (2020)*

The DfE states that schools should:

- promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence
- ensure every child has access to full-time education
- act early to address patterns of absence

And that parents must:

- perform their legal duty by ensuring children of compulsory school age who are registered to a school must attend regularly

And that pupils must:

- be punctual to their lessons.

We believe good attendance is important because:

- statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and attendance below 95%
- regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically
- regular attenders find school routines, schoolwork and friendships easier to cope with
- regular attenders find learning more satisfying
- regular attenders are more successful in transferring between primary school, secondary school and higher education, employment or training.

Promoting good attendance

The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child.

To help us all to focus on this we will:

- Provide information on all matters related to attendance in our termly Newsletter which can be found on the website.
- Report to you on how your child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainment and progress.
- Celebrate good attendance by displaying individual and class achievements.
- Set targets for the school and for classes for attendance and display these in the school.
- Liaise closely with the families of children with low or declining attendance in order to bring about improvements.

Roles and responsibilities

Headteacher and Education Director

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for attendance in this school. The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented consistently across the school, and for monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to the Education Director via the Headteacher's termly summary. The Headteacher also supports other staff in monitoring the attendance of individual pupils and may issue penalty notices, where necessary.

The Education Director will monitor and oversee the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance by reviewing the weekly Integris/SIMS reports and the Headteacher's termly summary. (S)he will ensure that any negative patterns of attendance are challenged and provide support to remedy this.

School attendance lead

A member of the senior leadership team will oversee, direct and coordinate the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and will ensure the attendance policy is consistently applied throughout the school. This person will also ensure that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed. (S)he will ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.

If absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, staff will discuss with parents/carers the need and reasons for their child's absence and will encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a pupil's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence will always rest with the school.

Classroom staff

- Ensure that all students are registered accurately.
- Promote and reward good attendance with students at all appropriate opportunities.
- Liaise with the attendance lead on matters of attendance and punctuality.
- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a child's absence.
- Support pupils with absence to engage with their learning once they are back in school.

Pupils

- Attend every day unless ill or have an authorised absence.
- Arrive in school on time.
- Go to all registrations and lessons on time.
- Take responsibility for registering at the reception desk if late or leaving the school site during school hours.

Parents/carers

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

Parents must:

- inform the school on the first day of absence
- discuss with the tutor/class teacher any planned absences well in advance
- support the school with their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year
- make sure that any absence is clearly accounted for by telephone or text on the first and subsequent days of absence, or by letter if a phone is unavailable
- avoid taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments
- only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance.

Request for leave of absence

Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all is at the Headteacher's discretion. The fundamental principles for defining *exceptional* are rare, significant, or unavoidable, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. There is no legal entitlement for time off in school term time to go on holiday and in the majority of cases holiday will not be authorised.

Parents/Carers wishing to apply for leave of absence need to fill in the Request for leave of absence application form on our website. On receipt of the application form, together with any supporting documentation, consideration will be given to the circumstance. A letter outlining the decision of the school will be sent to the Parents / Carers within 7 days.

If term-time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised - see the section below on legal sanctions.

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children out during school time.

Absence through child participation in public performances, including theatre, film or television work and modelling

Legislation sets out that a local authority licence must be obtained before a child can take part in a performance. Where the license specifies the dates that a child is to be away from school to perform, then the Head teacher will authorise those days. However, where the terms of the license do not specify dates it is at the discretion of the Head teacher to authorise leave of absence. Parents of a child performer must contact the Headteacher to discuss the nature and frequency of the work, whether the child has a valid performance licence and whether education will be provided by the employer during any future leave of absence. The Head teacher will be sympathetic to requests that are supported by a licence, as long as the school remains satisfied that this will not have a negative effect on a child's education.

Any absence recorded as part of a child's participation in a public performance is recorded as C, an authorised absence.

Absence through competing at regional, county or national level for sport

Parents can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in regional, county, national and international events and competitions. It is, however, down to the Headteacher's discretion as to whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss with you the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs. Permission for your child to leave early or arrive late to attend coaching and training sessions is also at the discretion of the headteacher and is not likely to be approved if it is a regular event, unless the sports club or association is providing an education tutor as part of their coaching.

Recording attendance

Legally the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day, and again at the start of the afternoon session.

Authorised and unauthorised absence

Pupils are expected to attend school every day for the entire duration of the academic year unless there is an exceptional reason for the absence. There are two main categories of absences:

- **Authorised absence:** is when the school has accepted the explanation offered as satisfactory justification for the absence or given approval in advance for such an absence. If no explanation is received, absences cannot be authorised.
- **Unauthorised absence:** is when the school has not received a reason for absence or has not approved a child's leave absence from school after a parent's request. This includes:
 - parents giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily, such as for shopping, birthdays, to look after siblings
 - truancy during the school day
 - absences which have not been explained.

Absence due to illness will be authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness. If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask parents to provide medical evidence, such as a prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily. If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents will be notified of this in advance.

A school can, if needed, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence and vice versa if new information is presented. Any changes will be communicated to parents/carers. An example of this would be where a parent states a child is unwell but on return to school there is evidence, they have been on holiday.

Please see Registration of Pupils Policy for further guidance on the recording of absence.

Absence linked to Covid-19

There will be circumstances where pupils cannot attend due to coronavirus. To account for this, the DfE has added a new category to the school attendance regulations to cover the 2020-21 academic year.

The new category is only for where a pupil does not attend because their travel to, or attendance at, school would be:

- against guidance from Public Health England (PHE) and/or the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) relating to the incidence of coronavirus or its transmission
- prohibited by any legislation or statutory directions relating to coronavirus.

In this case, parents will not be penalised, and this category will not count as absence (either authorised or unauthorised) for data collection purposes.

Lateness/punctuality

It is important for pupils to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions and to lessons. The start of school/lessons is used to give out instructions or organise work. If a child is late, they can miss work time with their class teacher getting vital information, cause disruption to the lesson for others, and it can be embarrassing leading to possible further absence.

- The school day begins and ends at the following times for each year group [*staggered start and end times due to Covid-19*]

Yr 7	– 8:20am – 2:30pm
Yr8	– 8:30am – 2:40pm
Yr9	– 8:50am – 3pm
Yr10	– 9:10am – 3:20pm
Y11	– 9:20am – 3:30pm

- Morning registration is at / closes at

Yr 7	– 8:20am and it closes at 8:50am
Yr8	– 8:30am and it closes at 9am
Yr9	– 8:50am and it closes at 9:20am
Yr10	– 9:10am and it closes at 9:40am
Y11	– 9:20am and it closes at 9:50am

- Afternoon registration is at / closes at

Yr 7	– 12:50 and it closes at 12:55pm
Yr8	– 1:10pm and it closes at 1:15pm
Yr9	– 1:20pm and it closes at 1:25pm
Yr10	– 1:30pm and it closes at 1:35pm
Y11	– 1:50pm and it closes at 1:55pm

All lateness is recorded daily. This information will be required by the courts, should a prosecution for non-attendance or lateness be necessary.

Arrival after the close of registration will be marked as unauthorised absence and coded U as per DfE guidance. This mark shows them to be on site but is legally recorded as an absence.

If a pupil is late due to a medical appointment, they will receive an authorised absence, coded M.

Please be advised that, where possible, doctors and dentist's appointments are to be made outside of school hours or during school holidays.

Pupils who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of the other pupils. **Ongoing and repeated lateness after the close of registration, is considered as unauthorised absence and may be subject to legal action.**

Primary school-aged pupils

Parents must collect their child/ren promptly at the end of the school day. Where late collection is persistent and/or significantly late, the school is obliged to take any uncollected pupil to a place of safety

and share concerns, as necessary, with other agencies. If one is available, the school may place a child into the after-school club for which the parent may be invoiced.

How to report a pupil absence – information for parents

A child not attending school is considered a **safeguarding** matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.

If your child is absent you must:

- Contact us by phone as soon as early as possible on the first day of absence call into school and report to reception.
- Send a note in on the first day they return with an explanation of the absence – you must do this even if you have already telephoned us.

Responding to pupil absence

If your child is absent:

- We will telephone or text you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you – this is because we have a duty to ensure your child’s safety as well as their regular school attendance.
- If absence continues on the second day, then a second attempt to call will be made.
- If absence continues for a third day, then the school will make a home visit. If no contact is made, then a letter will be left.
- Where appropriate a request for a safe and well check conducted by the Police/PCSO will be made. If a Social Worker is involved with the family, then they will be informed. If there are concerns relating to safeguarding, then a CSC referral will be made.
- We will invite you in to discuss the situation with our attendance officer and/or pastoral leaders or senior member of staff if absences persist.
- We will refer the matter to the Educational Welfare Officer if absence is unauthorised and falls below 90%

Child missing in education.

If your child is not seen and contact has not been established with any of the named parents/carers, after the first day we will make all reasonable enquiries to establish contact with parents/carers and the child, including making enquiries to known friends, wider family, and visiting the family home to try to establish contact.

If there has been no contact after three days of absence, the school will start the *child missing in education* procedures and notify relevant agencies such as the relevant LA Child Missing in Education team, the Education Welfare Officer or Police or Social Services. If the pupil is a Looked After Child, or has been identified as a vulnerable pupil, these agencies may be notified on the first day of absence.

If your child is leaving our school other than when leaving at the end of Year 11 parents are asked to give the attendance officer comprehensive information about their plans, including any date of a move and your new address and telephone numbers, your child’s new school and the start date when known. This should be submitted to our school in writing.

If pupils leave and we do not have the above information, then your child is considered to be a *child missing in education*. This requires schools and local authorities to then carry out investigations to try and locate your child, which includes liaising with Children’s Services, the Police and other agencies. By giving us the above information, these investigations can be avoided.

10 days’ absence

We have a legal duty to report the absence of any pupil who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer then the local authority is notified that the child is *at risk of missing*. Please be aware that the Trust expects its schools to report this unexplained absence sooner than the 10-day period, if it is deemed that there are significant concerns of harm. Children’s Services staff will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child. Parents are expected to help us by making sure we always have an up-to-date contact number. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

Persistent absence

We understand that some absence is unavoidable due to chronic illness for example. However, if a child misses 10% (three weeks/sessions) or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason, they are defined by government as *persistent absentees*.

As such, we monitor all absence thoroughly and all attendance data is shared with the Trust, local authority and the DfE.

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school for a variety of reasons. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents/carers and the child. **If a child is reluctant to attend, it is never better to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending.** This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and may make things worse.

Parents should contact their child’s class teacher immediately and openly discuss any worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with schoolwork, bullying, friendship problems, family difficulties. **It is important that we identify the reason for your child’s reluctance to attend school and work together to tackle the problem.**

If your child has had absence and their attendance level is falling towards 96%, we will contact you and, depending on the reasons for the absence, will invite parents/carers to attend a meeting to formulate a formal attendance plan. Any further unauthorised absence will escalate to a formal attendance panel meeting with our senior leadership team before a decision is made to refer to our Education Welfare Officer.

Please refer to the Trust “Administration of Medicines and Supporting children with medical conditions” Policy for long term absences due to ill health.

Absence linked to anxiety or SEND

We understand that for some children absence can be due to anxiety and other mental health difficulties. We understand this anxiety and these difficulties may be increased due to Covid-19 and extended school absence. These children may need adjustments to their daily routines, timetables, or other school

environment factors to support their needs. We aim to work with parents and other support agencies to understand and support these children rather than taking a punitive approach. Parents who are concerned their child may be suffering from school-related anxiety should speak to the school SENCO in the first instance.

Legal sanctions

Schools and Local Authorities can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age.

If issued with a penalty notice, parents must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the local authority.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the Headteacher, following the local authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices. This may take into account:

- a number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year
- one-off instances of irregular attendance, such as leave taken in term time without permission
- where an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason.

If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute the parent or withdraw the notice.

Record preservation

School registers are legal documents. We will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least three years. Computer registers will be preserved as electronic back-ups or microfiche copies.

There are key policies that are relevant to pupil attendance, registration procedures, and following up on pupil absence which, for your convenience, are listed below:

- Anti-bullying
- School Behaviour
- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Exclusions
- Registration of Pupils
- Missing Children
- Administration of Medicines and Supporting Children with medical conditions

Key documents to refer to:

- School Attendance August 2020
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020

Study leave

*For academic year 2020/2021, the academy will follow government guideline relating to COVID-19

We believe that pupils/students' needs are best met if they attend school every day in the period leading up to examinations. No study leave will be granted during this period, therefore, and pupils/students will be expected to attend school in the usual way.

Study leave will only be granted to Year 11 pupils/ students during the time of the GCSE examination period. Should any pupils/students wish to attend school (or should their parents wish them to) on the days and at times when they are not sitting examinations, arrangements will be made for them to do so. The school will work within the legal requirements, i.e.

- Study leave should only be granted to Year 11 pupils and never to those in other year groups.
- It should never exceed 15 school days in a year and is most appropriately granted during the examination period itself, i.e. not before the beginning of that period.
- It should always be granted sparingly, taking account of an individual pupil/student's ability to manage and benefit from unsupervised study.
- Any pupil has the right to attend school during study leave and a parent has the right to insist he/she does so.
- Any session given to pupils as study leave has a statistical meaning of authorised absence (it is not an *approved educational activity* as it is unsupervised) and should be recorded and reported on by the school as such.

Teenage pregnancy

Support will be directed to keeping a pupil in school and, wherever possible, her return to full-time education as soon as possible after the birth. A pupil who becomes pregnant should be allowed no more than 18 weeks' authorised absence to cover the time immediately before and after the birth of the child. After that time, any absence should be treated as unauthorised.