Attendance Policy

January 2022

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Mill Water School Safeguarding Policy, the Mill Water School Relational Behaviour Regulation Policy and the School Attendance guidance produced by the Department for Education (August 2020). We will monitor any pupil who may be missing from education in accordance to the protocols determined by the Local Authority.

Rationale:

We want all of our pupils to receive a full-time education which maximises opportunities for each of them to realise their best future.

We will provide a welcoming, caring environment in which each member of the school community feels valued, safe and secure. All school staff will work with pupils and their families to ensure each pupil attends school regularly and punctually.

Legal Framework:

Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 states that children of compulsory school age (5 – 16) should attend school regularly. 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.

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

Legal Requirements for all Schools:

Schools must keep two registers: an admission register which serves as the school roll, and an attendance register:

- attendance registers must be called twice a day: at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session
- the register must show whether the pupil is present, engaged in an approved educational activity, off-site or absent
- when a pupil is absent, the register must also show whether the absence was authorised by the school or unauthorised
- authorised absence means either the school has given approval in advance, or that a satisfactory explanation was given afterwards.

Mill Water School recognises that pupils attending school regularly is central to raising standards in education and ensuring all pupils can fulfil their potential.

The government expects schools and Local Authorities to:

- promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence
- ensure every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled, and act early to address patterns of absence
- expect parents to perform their legal duty by ensuring their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly.

This policy and associated attendance data will be monitored by the Head Teacher and Senior Leadership Team, and the Head Teacher will submit a report on pupil attendance to the Governing Body as part of the Head Teacher report to Governors. This report will outline if there are any concerns in relation to pupil attendance and any impact of pupil attendance on progress over time. The report will outline the measures the school has made to address any such issues. Where there have been non-attendance issues within the school, the Head Teacher will collate examples of case studies/summaries which evidence the approach taken by the school in addressing pupil attendance.

Mill Water School may share attendance data with Children's Services and the local authority if required; all information is shared in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

This policy will be reviewed every two years.

Aims of this Attendance Policy:

- To secure an informed approach to attendance and how it is monitored/recorded/reported in accordance with statutory guidance
- To establish systems for following up all absences to ensure that safeguarding is and remains effective
- To ensure that all absences are correctly identified
- To ensure clear distinctions are made which take into account the pupils' disabilities and/or special educational needs
- To develop a systematic approach to gathering, analysing and reporting attendance related data to Governors
- To ensure that we provide an appropriate response to improve the overall percentage attendance which maximises opportunities for all pupils to learn and achieve
- To reduce unauthorised attendance if this becomes an issue
- To identify appropriate protocols to pursue the re-integration of pupils following periods of significant absence
- To enable us to work with parents/carers in a sensitive way, whilst seeking to maximise attendance
- To ensure the school's Safeguarding Policy is upheld and fully adheres to the protocols in place to keep all children safe, which includes appropriate liaison with social care and the school's allocated EWO.

Role and Responsibilities of the Attendance Officers:

The role of attendance officer is part of the role and responsibilities of the Safeguarding Team. The data entry and administration of attendance is completed by the school receptionist.

The receptionist will work with the Head Teacher, SLT and other school staff, parents, pupils and outside agencies to ensure the positive attendance of our pupils. The attendance officers will be responsible for monitoring attendance throughout the school to the agreed attendance benchmark, meeting all statutory and legal requirements in the process. The receptionist will be required to:

- use the school information management system (SIMS) to monitor attendance/pupil absence on a daily basis;
- track pupil attendance by collecting and analysing attendance data on a daily basis, formulating this in a report/email to the HT, DHT, DSL/DDSL by 10.30 am
- ensure school records are maintained to a high quality and in accordance with our attendance policy (two parent/carer contact numbers wherever possible)
- provide weekly attendance data for school-based reports (Head Teacher, Governing Body) and the annual report to parents
- produce individual attendance data when requested by the HT/DSL/DDSL
- advise agencies on pupil attendance information as appropriate
- act as the first line of contact with parents/carers in relation to attendance, advising them, when able, on ways they can ensure their child attends school
- contact any parents/carers of any absent pupil to identify reason for any pupil absence; log all calls made in accordance with school-based protocols
- provide any information requested by parents/carers in relation to attendance/exceptional circumstances.

Registers:

Teachers must complete their online class registers by 9.40 am and 1.40 pm.

Every pupil attendance/absence is recorded using the Department for Education/Local Authority agreed code in the class register which is transferred to SIMS by the admin team. This information is then made available to the Local Authority and the DfE.

Parent/carer contact details:

The school will keep a record of two contact parent/carer telephone numbers which will be held within SIMS; parents will be reminded to contact the school to provide any updates to the information held. This information will be checked regularly during Annual Review meetings.

Follow-up of every absence:

Once class registers are closed, the receptionist/admin team will compile the List of Absences for the day, showing reasons for absence. The receptionist will have followed up with all parents/carers if an explanation was not received at the start of the school day.   Reasons for absence will be recorded on each pupil's SIMS record.

Through the regular scrutiny of attendance records the Head Teacher and DSL will be able to identify any concerns in relation to attendance.

If a pupil is beginning to show a sporadic attendance record and this is not linked to any ongoing medical complaint or additional reason of which the school is aware, the school will attempt to rectify this with the parents. The Head Teacher will contact the parents initially via a telephone call to discuss and clarify reasons for lower attendance (all telephone conversations will be logged by the school). If any issues continue, the Head Teacher will write to the parents/carers inviting them to a meeting to discuss the reason(s) why attendance continues to decline and agree a support plan to rectify this.

If the child concerned continues to attend school sporadically following these measures, this will be discussed with the EWO.

The Safeguarding Team will discuss any pupil whose absence from school is recorded outside of the medical/illness code used in the register and where there is cause for concern.

Role the Designated/Deputy Safeguarding (DSL) lead:

The DSL/DDSL will scrutinise the attendance information emailed via the receptionist each morning; any unauthorised absence will be immediately addressed.

Attendance Data

It is recognised that there are no national attendance data sets to benchmark our pupils' attendance although through research we have identified the following averages:

National average attendance rate for special schools	90.9%
Mill Water School attendance target	90% or above
National average attendance for mainstream school	94.8%

We recognise that disabled children and those with special educational needs have greater levels of absence from school than do their mainstream peers. This is usually as a direct result of their impairments (attending therapy sessions or for surgical intervention for example), but it can often be the result of an indirect consequence of their condition. For example: a child may experience a seizure just as the transport arrives to take them to school, forcing them to miss it. The child's inability to attend school is not 'Illness', as once they have recovered from the seizure, he/she would have been fit to attend school, but could not now get into school due to transport/mobility issues. Similarly, this is not a 'Medical' absence as the child was not attending hospital.

Another example may be a pupil with extreme autism who is too distressed to leave their room following a stormy night: likewise, they are not 'ill' but are unable to attend the school because of their autism. Unfortunately, the agreed attendance codes do not cover situations like this. In attempting to overcome this, we have expanded the use of the C code (other authorised circumstances) to include condition related absences and hospice stays. By doing this, we are able to provide data which more accurately reflects the complex situation experienced by our pupils.

SLT will monitor progress data for any pupil who may experience a prolonged absence from school. Data associated with progress over time will be scrutinised and where this has slowed, opportunities will be identified to 'close the gap'. Such measures will be discussed with the class teacher and the parents/carers will be contacted to discuss.

The school will work closely with parents/carers to ensure the continuation of progress towards EHCP targets and PLGs (Personal Learning Goals).

The attendance of all pupils will be discussed with parents/carers at each pupil's Annual Review. Attendance data will be recorded within the review documents provided by the Local Authority. Attendance data will also be recorded in the PEPs for all Children in Care; this will be the responsibility of the designated teacher for Children in Care.

Persistent absences:

Every term, the receptionist will provide the HT/DSL/DDSL with a summary of the attendance data for any pupil who has been recognised as falling below the expected attendance level. If there are emerging patterns/themes, this will be investigated.

Role of the Education Welfare Officer (EWO):

In order to address any continued/persistent pupil absences we will refer the pupil to the Education Welfare Officer with a view to improving the situation; parents will be notified of such measures. The school will provide the following information to inform the future work of the EWO:

- reason for referral and any other relevant information
- prior action taken by referrer (including details of contact with parents)
- attendance data.

The school will work with the EWO to implement any recommendations made; reviews of such work and the impact of this will be agreed with the EWO.

Parental Request for Absence from School for Holiday:

Pupils are not entitled to be away from school during term time for a family holiday. Such absences will be recorded as unauthorised. Leave of absence will be granted in very exceptional circumstances (as detailed above) on application to the Headteacher. These requests should be made in writing in advance to the Headteacher and permission is subject to their discretion.

Exceptional circumstances

We recognise the pressures placed upon families with a child with disabilities and/or special educational needs and the need for respite. We also recognise that the additional costs involved in taking such children on holiday can make them prohibitive, often to the point where the family could not afford them. In many cases, the only option is to take the holiday when costs are lower or times are quieter for the child (eg – if the child is autistic) within school term times. We recognise that this is sometimes the only option available to families. To address this, we have developed a protocol on how to manage pupil leave of absence in exceptional circumstances; if the school has any doubt in regard to the safety of any pupil whose parent has requested an exceptional circumstance this will be discussed with

Children's Services. Leave of absence for any Child in Care will not be authorised without discussing this with their allocated social worker.

Religious Observance:

Pupils will be granted 2 days per year to attend any religious observance; parents will be expected to request such non-attendance via the school's Absence Request Form.

Operation Encompass:

The school will take particular notice of any child who has been subject to an Operation Encompass telephone call; if a child is absent this will immediately be followed up with contact via Children's Services. All details will be recorded on CPOMS.

Pupils with Long Term Health Issues:

If a pupil is unable to attend school because of long term health issues, then they may be referred to the Hospital School based at Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital so that trained teachers can deliver learning at home.

Any pupil who has a prolonged stay in hospital will be discussed with the school nurse who will become the channel for all health-related information between the school/health care providers. The class teacher will be able to provide work for the pupil concerned if this is deemed appropriate; this will be discussed between the school, nurse and parents(s).

Flexi-schooling:

Another option is to register a pupil for "flexi-schooling" where a pupil can be educated off site; if flexi-schooling is agreed we will follow the protocols determined by the Local Authority.

Out of school provision:

Any out of school provision will have been agreed with the Local Authority and will be documented as such within the pupil's Annual Review documentation. As such, the school remains responsible for the education, safety and welfare of the pupil.

We will:

- agree the aims/outcomes of the out of school provision/school offer with the Local Authority (record all aims/outcomes/frequency of visits within the agreed documentation provided by the LA)
- ensure any out of school provider has the appropriate DBS checks and are compliant with Keeping Children Safe in Education
- record the number of pupils within the Head Teacher's report to Governors
- make regular checks (at least half termly) with the provider on the agreed aims/outcomes

Appendix 1: Attendance Coding
Appendix 2: Attendance Flow Chart
Appendix 3: Request for leave during term time response form

Appendix 1 – Attendance Codes

CODE	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
/	Present (AM)	Present
\	Present (PM)	Present
B	Educated off site (NOT dual registration) approved by the school	Approved Education Activity
C	Other Authorised Circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/description) approved by the school	Authorised Absence
D	Dual Registration (i.e. pupil attending other establishment) approved by the school	Approved Education Activity
E	Excluded (no alternative provision made)	Authorised Absence
G	Family holiday (NOT agreed or days in excess of agreement)	Unauthorised Absence
H	Family Holiday (agreed)	Authorised Absence
I	Illness (not medical or dental etc. appointments)	Authorised Absence
J	Interview	Approved Education Activity
L	Late before registers closed	Present
M	Medical/Dental appointments	Authorised Absence
N	No reason yet provided for absence	Unauthorised Absence
O	Unauthorised absence (not covered by any other code/description)	Unauthorised Absence
P	Approved Sporting Activity	Approved Education Activity
R	Religious Observance	Authorised Absence
S	Study Leave	Authorised Absence
T	Traveller Absence	Authorised Absence
U	Late (after register closed)	Unauthorised Absence
V	Education Visit or Trip	Approved Education Activity
W	Work Experience	Approved Education Activity
X	Not attending in circumstances relating to coronavirus (COVID-19) Non-Compulsory School Age Absence or not required to be in school	Not Counted in Possible Attendances
Y	Enforced Closure due to unavoidable cause	Not Counted in Possible Attendances
Z	Pupil Not Yet On role	Not Counted in Possible Attendances
#	School Closed to Pupils – planned whole or partial school closure	Not Counted in Possible Attendances

Appendix 2:

Attendance Flow Chart

9.00 - 9.30 am **Registers open**	• Pupils arrive from 9.00 am. Pupils go to class. • Class team mark those pupils that are present with **'/'** on eSchools register. • If a pupil is not present yet and no reason given, mark as **'N'**. • All pupils must have a mark. • Class teams do not need to phone home.
Arrivals after **9.40 am**	• Pupils arriving after 9.40 am will come through Reception. The receptionist will record their arrival in SIMS, giving reason for their late arrival.
9.40 am onwards	• Registers close, eSchools updates SIMS. Receptionist runs a SIMS report to verify which pupils are not in school (unauthorised) • Receptionist phones parents/carers on all available numbers, leaving messages requesting parents/carers to phone back. • Receptionist amend the register accordingly. • Receptionist alerts class (email or Smartboard message) • Receptionist emails Safeguarding Team and SLT the names of any pupils who are still unauthorised and where there has been no contact from home. • Safeguarding Team try to make contact via external agency/other means etc. • Receptionist continues to try to make contact with parents/carers of those pupils not identified by Safeguarding Team.
1.00 - 1.40 pm **Registers open**	• Class team mark those pupils that are present with **'/'** on eSchools register.

Appendix 3:

Request for leave during term time (Holidays)

Response form

Pupil:

Class   **Year Group:**

Date Request Received:

Current and previous year attendance:

Current year		Previous year	
Overall %		Overall %	
Authorised Absence		Authorised Absence	
Unauthorised Absence		Unauthorised Absence	

Exceptional Circumstances outlined/evidenced:

☐   None – unauthorised (code G)

☐   Authorised - parents/carers in Armed Forces (Code H)

☐   Authorised - parents/carers leave dictated by Employer (Code H)

☐   Authorised - funded by charitable organisation (ie Make A Wish, The Children's Holiday Foundation, CHICKs etc) (Code H)

☐   Authorised - parent/carer/sibling has life limiting illness (Code H)

☐   Authorised - other (please detail) (Code H):

Rationale for decision making:

Headteacher signature:

Date: