



Mill Water School

Preparation for *their* best future

Attendance Policy

March 2024

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Mill Water School Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, the Mill Water School Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy, and the Department for Education guidance *Working together to improve school attendance*.

Rationale:

We recognise that pupils attending school regularly is central to raising standards in education and ensuring all pupils can fulfil their potential.

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.

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 AIO

Legal Framework:

All children aged 5-16 years must receive a suitable education (Section 7, Education Act 1996). A pupil of compulsory school age who is registered at a school must, by law, attend regularly.

By law, parents have the prime responsibility for ensuring that pupils of school age attend regularly (Section 576, Education Act 1996).

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 for a pupil to be absent for a specific purpose, or that a satisfactory explanation was given afterwards

Authorised absences may include:

- An absence for illness
- Medical or dental appointments (where the appointment is an emergency, or where an appointment outside of school hours has not been possible)
- Religious or cultural observances
- An absence due to exceptional circumstances

An unauthorised absence is one where we are not satisfied with the reasons given for the absence. Reasons may include:

- Parents keeping children from attending without reason
- Missing sessions during the school day
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Day trips and holidays in term time that have not been agreed

Persistent absence is defined as 10% or more of sessions missed (based on each pupil's possible sessions). Absences may be authorised or unauthorised.

Severe absence is defined as 50% or more of sessions missed (based on each pupil's possible sessions). Absences may be authorised or unauthorised.

Persistent lateness is defined as pupils who have five or more late marks recorded in a single half term.

Roles and responsibilities:

The senior leader at the school with responsibility for the strategic approach to attendance is the Headteacher, who can be contacted via Reception. The Safeguarding Team and Receptionist are responsible for monitoring attendance throughout the school, working with the Headteacher, SLT and other school staff, parents, pupils and outside agencies to ensure

the positive attendance of our pupils. The data entry and administration of attendance is completed by the school Receptionist.

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 (Headteacher, 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 9.40am and 1.40pm.

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. Please see Appendix 1 for current codes.

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.

Reporting absence:

It is the responsibility of the parent to inform us of a pupil absence. Parents are expected to inform us of their child's absence before 9.30am on each day of absence, providing the reason for the absence and when the pupil is expected to return to school. We will contact parents and/or other listed emergency contacts where no contact has been made. Where required, we may conduct reasonable enquiries with friends or neighbours and will carry out welfare home visits as necessary. If no contact is made, we may request a welfare check from the police.

Reasons for absence:

Appointments: As far as possible, medical and dental appointments should be made outside of the school day. Where this is not possible, the school should be informed prior to the appointment.

Religious observance: Parent must inform us, in advance, if absences are required for days of religious observance. The day must be exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong. Where necessary we will seek advice from the parents' religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance.

Illness: Any authorisation of absence through illness is at the discretion of the Headteacher or delegated member of staff. Where illness lasts for five or more days (including INSET days and Bank Holidays) parents may be asked to provide additional medical evidence before the absence is authorised. This will only be requested if there are genuine and reasonable doubts about the authenticity of the illness.

Where attendance is a serious concern (repeated unexplained/unauthorised absences or three separate illnesses within a half term where there is no underlying health issue or medical condition) we may require medical evidence to authorise any further periods of absence through illness. Parents will be notified of this by letter.

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 parent(s).

Traveller pupils travelling for occupational purposes: Traveller pupils travelling for occupational purposes covers Roma, English and Welsh Travellers, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Circus workers, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers), Showman 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 us, but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision.

The aim for the Traveller students, in common with all other students, 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/carer is safe from prosecution if their child accrues 200 attendances (i.e. 200 half days) in a year. It is important to note that this is only relevant when the family are engaged in a trade or business that requires them to travel and when the child is regularly attending school when that trade/business permits following a request from parents (and the minimum 200 session criteria is met).

It does not mean that part-time education for Traveller pupils is legally acceptable, nor does it relieve parents/carers of their duties to ensure that their child is receiving a suitable education when not at school.

It is parent's responsibility to:

- Ensure that their child's ethnicity has been registered with the school. Parents can ask the school to correct this or update it.
- Ensure they inform their child's school ahead of time. 2 weeks' notice is useful.
- Ensure their children attend as much school as possible. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure their child is accessing at least 100 days (200 sessions) of school in any 12-month period.
- Have regular contact with their child's school whilst travelling. Once a week is suggested.
- Support their child to complete the work set by schools whilst travelling.
- If staying in a new area for a week or more, the parent/guardian can register their child for a temporary place at any school – called 'dual registration'.

It is the school's responsibility to:

- Allow Traveller pupils to travel with their parents for work purposes.
- Create work packs for their pupils to complete when away.
- Arrange times for at least a weekly 'check in' with the family. This can be through a call or email.
- Contact the Local Authority if they have concerns.
- Mark pupil's work and provide valuable feedback.
- Ensure missed opportunities such as parents evening, vaccinations and careers advice are supported on the pupil's return.

Holidays in term time: 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 below) 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: The decision to authorise a pupil's absence is wholly at the Headteacher's discretion based on their assessment of each individual request. If an event can be reasonably scheduled outside of term time, then absence for that event would not normally be authorised. However, 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 (e.g. 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.

Other authorised absences: 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 needs (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.

Flexi-schooling and out of school provision: If flexi-schooling or out of school provision have been agreed, we will follow the protocols determined by the Local Authority.

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 Headteacher's report to Governors
- Make regular checks (at least half termly) with the provider on the agreed aims/outcomes

Requesting leave in term time:

Absence for purposes of leave during term time can only be authorised by the Headteacher, as noted above. Requests should be made in writing to the Headteacher no less than two weeks before the date for which leave is being requested. The Headteacher's decision will be recorded using the relevant form (please see Appendix 3).

Monitoring absences:

Each day, once class registers are closed, the Receptionist/admin team will compile a 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 Headteacher 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 Headteacher 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 Headteacher 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 a pupil has reached the Persistent Absence threshold (10% or more of sessions missed (based on each pupil's possible sessions); absences may be authorised or unauthorised) a bespoke action plan will be created. This will be monitored by the Headteacher.

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

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. 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.

Role of the Attendance Improvement Officer:

In order to address any continued/persistent pupil absences we will refer the pupil to the Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO) 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 AIO:

- 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 AIO to implement any recommendations made; reviews of such work and the impact of this will be agreed with the AIO.

Taking statutory action:

It is a parent's legal responsibility to ensure their children receive appropriate education. Failing to send children to school regularly without good reason is a criminal offence. Schools can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their pupil, where the pupil is of compulsory school age. The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the Headteacher, in line with the local authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices. This may consider:

- A number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year
- Singular incidences of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission
- Where an excluded pupil is seen in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

Issuing Penalty Notices: each parent receives a penalty notice for each pupil who has unauthorised absence. 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. If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute the parent or withdraw the notice.

Taking Parents to Court for unauthorised absence: The Education Act (1996) Section 444 (1) states that courts can fine each parent up to £1000 per pupil, order payment of prosecution costs and/or impose a Parenting Order.

Taking Parents to Court for Persistent Unauthorised Absence: The Education Act (1996) – Section 444 (1A) states that courts can fine each parent up to £2500 per pupil, order payment of the prosecution costs, impose a Parenting Order and/or sentence parents to a period of imprisonment of up to three months.

Children Missing from Education (CME):

We have due regard to our statutory duty to safeguard pupils who are CME. We follow the Local Authority's processes for reporting pupils missing from education.

If a pupil fails to return following a period of absence, investigations will be made by staff to their whereabouts. If our investigations fail to contact the parents/pupil the case will be referred to the Local Authority Children Missing Education (CME) Team within 20 days.

Attendance and progress data:

Government data shows that for the academic year 2022/23 the absence rate in state funded special schools was 13.1% (10.0% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised) (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools/2023-week-29>). The attendance rate was therefore 86.9%. The Mill Water School attendance target is 90% or above.

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 parents/carers.

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.

Supporting the attendance of every pupil:

We use a variety of strategies to support attendance:

- Building strong and enduring relationships with our pupils and their families, so they feel a sense of belonging in our school community

- Verbal encouragement and praise
- Create personalised and achievable targets for pupils, based on their medical needs and/or additional needs, that are realistic and appropriate for each individual
- Create safe spaces for pupils to thrive
- Make decisions on targets in consultation with families, while understanding that a medical condition can worsen suddenly and taking this into account
- Create opportunities for dialogue with families about attendance, ensuring that we work in partnership with parents
- Raise the profile of attendance with families, particularly when pupils start at the setting
- Teach and model a love of learning, helping families to see the value of the education that is offered to them
- Look at the effect on attendance of decisions made at school level, for instance ending terms on a Monday or Tuesday
- Be aware of the complexity of different contexts and the pressures that families might experience, which may in turn contribute to poor attendance

Policy monitoring and review:

This policy and associated attendance data will be monitored by the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team, and the Headteacher will submit a report on pupil attendance to the Governing Body as part of the Headteacher 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 Headteacher 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.

Appendix 1: Attendance Coding

Appendix 2: Attendance Flow Chart

Appendix 3: Request for leave during term time response form

Appendix 1 – Attendance Codes

The following codes are taken from the DfE’s guidance on school attendance

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Pupil is present at morning registration
\	Present (pm)	Pupil is present at afternoon registration
L	Late Arrival	Pupil arrives late before register has closed
B	Off-site educational activity	Pupil is at a supervised off-site educational activity approved by the school
D	Dual registered	Pupil is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
J	Interview	Pupil has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
P	Sporting activity	Pupil is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
V	Educational trip or visit	Pupil is on an educational visit/trip organised, or approved, by the school
W	Work experience	Pupil is on a work experience placement

Code	Definition	Scenario
Authorised absence		
C	Authorised leave of absence	Pupil has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances
E	Excluded	Pupil has been excluded but no alternative provision has been made
H	Authorised holiday	Pupil has been allowed to go on holiday due to exceptional circumstance
I	Illness	School has been notified that a pupil will be absent due to illness
M	Medical/dental appointment	Pupil is at a medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance	Pupil is taking part in a day of religious observance
S	Study Leave	Year 11 pupil is on study leave during their public examinations
T	Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller absence	Pupil from a Traveller community is travelling, as agreed with the school
Unauthorised Absence		

G	Unauthorised Holiday	Pupil is on a holiday that was not approved by the school
N	Reason not provided	Pupil is absent for an unknown reason (this code should be amended when the reason emerges, or replaced with code O if no reason for absence has been provided after a reasonable amount of time)
O	Unauthorised absence	School is not satisfied with reason for pupil's absence
U	Arrival after registration	Pupil arrived at school after the register closed
Other		
X	Not required to be in school	Pupil of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances	School site is closed, there is disruption to travel because of a local/national emergency, or pupil is in custody
Z	Pupil not on admission register	Register set up but pupil has not yet joined the school
#	Planned school closure	Whole or partial school closure due to half term/bank holiday

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: