



St Paul's Catholic Primary School

Attendance Policy 2023

Principles

This Policy represents our commitment to striving for 100% attendance, which is achievable, and achieved by many children. To achieve our Mission Statement at St Paul's Catholic Primary School, it is essential that children attend school. We aim for an environment which enables and encourages all members of the community to reach out for excellence. We need to be sure that our children are safe. For our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they should be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. It is very important therefore that parents make sure that their child attends regularly and this policy sets out how, as school and family together, we will achieve this.

This policy sets out the principles, procedures and practices the school will undertake. Strategies, sanctions and possible legal consequences of poor Attendance and Punctuality are also detailed, as well as rewards for, and benefits of good attendance. This policy will be reviewed, amended as necessary and published annually in accordance with current legislation and guidance. The DfE guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2022 states that attendance to school is "essential for pupils to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances".

This policy is based upon the following principles:

- Receiving a full-time, suitable education is a child's legal entitlement.
- It is a parents /carers' legal responsibility to ensure this happens.
- Attending school regularly aids intellectual, social and emotional development and is essential if children are to benefit fully from their school life.
- Attending school regularly safeguards the welfare of children whilst they are not in the care of their parents.
- All children whose attendance is poor will be treated as vulnerable. These principles are enshrined in British law, within the Education Act 1996, the Children Act 1989, and other associated pieces of legislation.

Aims

- To ensure that all children attend school regularly and punctually, in order to maximise their educational achievement and social development. Statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and absence below 95%.
- To discharge our duty to safeguard its pupils to the best of its ability.
- To ensure that all those responsible for children's education, including parents, carers, staff and governors understand and accept their responsibilities in relation to attendance.
- To minimise absence from school, thereby reducing levels of persistent absence.
- To improve the life chances of the children attending St Paul's Catholic Primary School and to prepare them to be fully contributing citizens when they reach adulthood.



Policy Objectives

- To safeguard the welfare, health, social and emotional development of children
- To reduce persistent absence for all pupils
- To reach our attendance target of 96%
- To reduce or eliminate term time holidays/leave of absence
- To promote commitment to education and high achievement
- To maximise the potential of every individual pupil
- Ensure robust systems are in place to monitor and manage attendance and punctuality throughout the school

Responsibilities

School Responsibilities

St Paul's Catholic Primary School will

- provide and promote a welcoming and positive atmosphere so that children feel safe, and know that their presence is valued.
- raise awareness of the importance of full attendance and punctuality, using newsletters and other communications to parents; making attendance a high priority.
- deploy a key member of staff with responsibility for monitoring, improving and evaluating school attendance. At St Paul's Catholic Primary School, this role is fulfilled by Nicola Clark (Admin Assistant). The Attendance Lead is Susan Buscombe. The Senior Leader responsible for the strategic approach to attendance to school is Finola Gill, Executive Headteacher.
- encourage parents to fully support the policy as a vital contribution towards their child's education. All new parents are introduced to the Policy and information on attendance in the School's Admission Pack. It is also accessible on the School website.
- encourage the children to have a positive attitude towards attendance and punctuality so that they can retain this into adult life.
- send home termly attendance certificates showing the record of attendance for each child
- ensure the school is a clean, safe environment where spreading of infectious illnesses is minimised. This will include asking parents to keep children away from school if they could be the cause of infections spreading.
- celebrate good attendance by recognising Top Class Attendance in the weekly newsletter and awarding the Attendance Cup to the winning class and through the 99 club where each child with a percentage attendance of 99% or more is rewarded with an ice-cream or similar treat at the end of the term.
- ensure that attendance is effectively monitored, using SIMs registration system, and absences are followed up promptly in accordance with this policy.
- communicate effectively with other agencies (EWO, Plymouth LA, School Health, Traveller Education, Early Help, Social Services etc).
- meet the legal requirements with the use of correct codes for absence, with particular reference to authorised and unauthorised absence. (DFE guidance)
- ensure that all staff comply with the school policy and deal consistently with absence and punctuality.
- ensure attendance information is available for Governors and parents.
- share good practice with other schools.



- have procedures in place to help children settle back to school after a long absence. It is important that on return from an unavoidable absence all pupils are made to feel welcome. This should include ensuring that the pupil is helped to catch up on missed work and brought up to date with any information that has been passed to the other pupils.
- liaise with the LA and other relevant agencies promptly for those children whose health needs do not allow them to attend school (See Supporting Children with Medical Conditions policy for further details.)
- make every effort to meet the individual needs of the pupils with SEND

Parent/Carer Responsibilities

Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning. Any pupil's absence disrupts teaching routines so may affect the learning of others in the same class. Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is your legal responsibility and permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution. Failing to attend this school on a regular basis will be considered as a safeguarding matter.

Parents and Carers will

- provide up to date contact numbers and any changes of address.
- provide details of **at least two** contacts for emergency use.
- notify the School when their child is unable to attend, with a reason, on the first day of the absence.
- telephone the School on each day following the first day of absence to advise the School if the absence is continuing.
- keep the School well informed, in cases of lengthy absence. Parents/carers will be encouraged to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a child's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence will always rest with the School.
- provide medical evidence indicating attendance at the dentist, doctor or optician before the arranged appointment unless an emergency situation has arisen. Whenever possible all appointments should be made outside of school hours
- ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day. Let the school know if their child is going to be late, e.g. if a car breaks down; if an urgent appointment has been made.
- understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality and promote this with their child, aiming for 100% attendance each year.
- provide written explanations of any absence and medical evidence for whole day appointments as well as medical evidence for persistent absence from school due to alleged illness (see 3.1).
- only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance. Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carers' legal responsibility (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act) and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the Head Teacher creates an offence in law.

Pupil Responsibilities

We expect pupils to

- attend every day unless they are ill or have an authorised absence.
- arrive in school on time ready to learn.



- go straight to their classrooms when they arrive, not delaying in cloakrooms.

Recording Attendance

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the School as AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required, preferably in writing.

Medical evidence may also be required in the form of a copy of a prescription, GP note, etc.

Types of absence that are **likely to be authorised** are illness, medical or dental appointments that **unavoidably** fall in school time or emergencies.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no "leave" has been given. This type of absence can lead to Plymouth City Council using sanctions and/or legal proceedings.

Examples of types of absence that are **not considered reasonable** and which **will not be authorised** under any circumstances are:

- Going shopping with parents
- Birthdays
- Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily
- Minding other younger children in the family
- Sibling unwell
- absences which have never been properly explained
- Staying at home because other members in the family are unwell
- Day trips and holidays in term time unless there are exceptional circumstances that have been approved by the Head Teacher
- Arriving at school too late to get a present mark (After 9.10am which is close of registration)
- Truancy
- Death of a pet

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.

Whilst any child may be off school because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the child. If your 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 usually makes things worse.

When a child's attendance dips below 95%, a 'Low Attendance Warning' letter is sent to alert the parent to the dip in attendance and to invite them to a meeting to explore how best the school can support. In some instances EHATs or TAFs may be appropriate.

The school may refer the matter to the Plymouth City Council Education Welfare Officer if attendance moves below 90%.



If a child is absent for 11+ sessions (unauthorised) a referral for a Penalty Notice may be considered.

Access to Breakfast Club may be subsidised by the school to support children in receipt of Free School Meals for an agreed time-limited period in order to improve attendance.

Persistent Absenteeism (PA)

The definition of persistently absent (PA) pupil as set out by the DfE for 2015-2016 is a pupil with 10% or more absence (90% or less attendance). The table below, derived from the census guidance, gives an indication of the minimum number of sessions a pupil would miss by each half term to be classed as PA.

Half Term	10%
Half term 1	7 or more sessions
Half term 1 – 2 (autumn term)	14 or more sessions
Half term 1 – 3	20 or more sessions
Half term 1 – 4 (autumn and spring term combined)	25 or more sessions
Half term 1 - 5	31 or more sessions
Half term 1 – 6 (full academic year)	38 or more sessions

As a school, we collect attendance data on our management information system, SIMS. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to any child's educational prospects and we need parent's fullest support and cooperation to tackle this. We monitor all absences thoroughly. Any case that is seen to have reached the PA mark or is at risk of moving towards that mark is given priority and you will be informed of this immediately.

As per legal requirements, this data is shared with the local authority and nationally. Internally, we check this data on a weekly basis to look for patterns of absence across the school and at an individual level with a particular focus on those pupils in danger of being classed as PA. The office and Senior Leaders will then monitor these pupils and try to work with families to improve attendance. This data is then anonymised and monitored by our Safeguarding Governor as part of their ongoing monitoring of safeguarding. This data is also shared with the Plymouth CAST to ensure the school is keeping PA to its lowest levels.

Attendance of pupils who have a history of poor attendance, who are in receipt of free school meals or are vulnerable are a focus of this monitoring. At St Paul's we keep a record of identified children on our system. The identified children are the focus of action and intervention and are discussed at safeguarding meetings and with our



EWO. These identified children become a daily or weekly focus to ensure improvement. The school is committed to working with parents to help solve attendance issues and ensure regular attendance and has appointed a Parent Support Advisor to support parents and families to improve attendance. As parents/carers have accepted a place at our school, it is an expectation that parents/carers will be committed to ensure attendance is as high as possible and pupils are always punctual.

Lateness

Poor punctuality is not acceptable. If your child misses the start of the day they miss important learning and do not have that vital time with their class teacher to prepare for the day ahead. Late arrival of pupils also disrupts lessons, can be embarrassing for the child and can also encourage absence.

How we manage lateness

Children are admitted from 8.35am onwards as we implement a **'soft start'** to the day. This enables children to arrive in good time, settle to their morning work, revisit learning from the previous day with which they may have struggled and enables teaching staff to do pre-teaching/intervention with children so that they are ready to move forward with the day's learning.

The school day officially starts at **8:45am** and we expect your child to be in school at that time. The gate is open from 8.35 to 8.45am. If your child arrives after 8.45am but before registers close at 9.10am, they will be marked 'Late' (L). In accordance with the regulations, if your child arrives after that time they will receive a mark that shows them to be on site (U), but this will not count as a present mark and it will mean they have an **unauthorised absence**. This may mean that you could face the possibility of a Penalty Notice if the problem persists.

When a child's attendance reaches the threshold for concern with 1 or 2 Lates (before registers close) per week within a 6 week period, a warning letter is sent to alert the parent to the dip in attendance and to invite them to a meeting to explore how best the school can support.

If your child has a persistent late record (more than 8 in a 6 week period) you will be sent a letter and may be asked to meet with the Headteacher to resolve the problem, but you can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school on time. This may also be referred to the Education Welfare Officer.

Term Time Absence

As from the 1st September 2013, all schools are unable to authorise any requests for absence relating to holidays being taken in term time. This has been brought about by an amendment to the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, which has removed reference to holidays and the ten day period. The amendments make it clear that Head Teachers may not grant leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Taking time out of school during the school term has a detrimental effect on children's learning beyond the time they are actually absent.



Penalty Notices

If you fail to make sure your child attends school regularly (even if they're missing school without your knowledge), you may be issued with a penalty notice (a fine for children who miss school without authorisation) or subject to a criminal prosecution.

A penalty notice of £60 may be issued as an alternative to prosecution. This rises to £120 if you don't pay within 21 days. Failure to pay within 28 days will normally lead to prosecution.

We can issue penalty notice if:

- your child has eight or more unauthorised absences from school over a six month period (eight absences are equal to four school days as there are two sessions in a school day)
- your child has been late to school after registration has closed eight or more times over a six month period
- your child is found during a truancy sweep and the absence hasn't been authorised by the school, and there are already eight previous unauthorised absences
- you repeatedly fail to provide the school or our Inclusion, Attendance and Welfare Service, reasons for your child's absences (this includes ignoring our attempts to contact you)
- your child is found in a public place during the first five days of a fixed term or permanent exclusion

You'll receive a warning about your child's unauthorised absences in writing and get a chance to talk to us about this. If your child has one more unauthorised absence within 15 days of you receiving this letter, a penalty notice may be issued.

School targets, projects and special initiatives

The school has targets to improve attendance and your child has an important part to play in meeting these targets. Attendance has been negatively impacted by COVID 19. **Our target for 2023-2024 is 97%.**

Through the school year we monitor absences and punctuality to show us where improvements need to be made.

When attendance dips, we will notify you in writing and you may be invited in to meet our attendance lead, Miss Buscombe.

Children Missing in Education

When children are registered at and attend regularly at a school their level of safety can be monitored. If a child leaves St Paul's Catholic School without beginning in attendance at another school, or fails to attend school regularly then safeguarding concerns are raised. We will liaise with the EWO and follow the advice for schools in the Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 'Children Missing Education' September 2016 whenever a child has an unexplained absence of five days or more.

Requesting Leave

Only exceptional circumstances warrant a leave of absence. Here at St Paul's, the Executive Headteacher considers each application individually, taking into account the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind the request. If a leave of absence is granted, it is for the headteacher alone to determine the length of



the time the pupil can be away from school. As head teachers should only grant leaves of absence in exceptional circumstances, a leave of absence will not be granted for the purposes of a family holiday.

Please request an Absence Request Form by calling the office on 01752 365459, by dropping into the office at drop off/pick up time or by emailing admin@stpaulsplymouth.com. Parents should complete the request form, providing as much detail as possible. This form should then be returned to the school office where it will be passed to the headteacher for consideration. Once a decision has been made, the form will be returned to you, informing you whether the leave of absence is authorised or unauthorised. If it is not authorised, a reason will be given. Should a parent/carer take the child out of school without the authorisation of the headteacher, a penalty fine may be issued.

Absence Procedures:

If your child is absent you must:

- Contact us as soon as possible on the first day of absence (preferably by 9.30am). This can be done by leaving a message on the school answer phone on 01752 365459 or by calling into school and reporting to reception.
- Contact us again on the second and following days if your child continues to be absent (preferably by 9.30am); This applies even if your child is ill with vomiting/diarrhoea and has to remain off school for 48 hours in line with our infection control measures.
- Admin check registers and chase unaccounted for absences by 10.30am. If the school is unable to reach contacts on day 2, the school will carry out a home visit to ensure the child is safe. If the school is unable to reach contacts on day 1, no message has been received and there is social care involvement, a home visit will take place that day.

Telephone numbers

There are times when we need to contact parents about lots of things, including absence, so we need to have your contact numbers at all times. So help us to help you and your child by making sure we always have an up to date number – if we don't then something important may be missed. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

The School Attendance Officer/Education Welfare Officer (EWO)

Parents are expected to contact school at an early stage and to work with the staff in resolving any problems together. This is nearly always successful. The Plymouth City Council Education Welfare Officer visits the school regularly and the attendance lead monitors absences of any child who has dropped below 95%. If a child is causing particular concern (eg below 90%) the EWO will offer advice to try to resolve the situation by agreement. However, if other ways of trying to improve the child's attendance have failed and unauthorised absences persist, these Officers can use sanctions such as Penalty Notices or prosecutions in the Magistrates Court.

Full details of the options open to enforce attendance at school are available from the school or PCC. Alternatively, parents or children may wish to contact the EWO themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is available from the school office or by contacting PCC.

Suspension from School

With effect from the 1st September 2022, any pupil who has been suspended from school, where alternative provision has been arranged, shall be recorded as an unauthorised absence if they do not attend the provision. This



may result in further action taken by the school . (Please see 'Penalty Notice' section).

Working Together to Improve Attendance

Improving attendance is everyone's business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families. Here at St Paul's, we aim to ensure that school is a calm, orderly and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn. Improving attendance needs to be a concerted effort across the school where we work with parents and families to ensure children attend daily.

As stated in 'Working Together to Improve Attendance, May 2022), 'successfully treating the root causes of absence and removing barriers to attendance, at home, in school or more broadly requires schools and local partners to work collaboratively with, not against families. All partners should work together to:



EXPECT

Aspire to high standards of attendance from all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school.



MONITOR

Rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.



LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND

When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen to understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.



FACILITATE SUPPORT

Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.



FORMALISE SUPPORT

Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through a parenting contract or education supervision order.



ENFORCE

Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.



Summary

The school has a legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents and to promote attendance. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend. All school staff are committed to working with parents and pupils as the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible and that every child's welfare and life opportunities are promoted.

Review Date: NOVEMBER 2023

