

Brandhall Primary School



Attendance Policy

Last Reviewed: October 2020

Next Review: September 2021

BRANDHALL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Attendance Policy

Policy Statement

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 school regularly and on time. School staff are committed to working with parents in order to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible. Our aim is to have all our children in school every day as we recognise that there is a strong link between good attendance and successful achievement. The careful monitoring of attendance is also necessary in the safe interests of children who are potentially at risk when not accounted for.

Principles

Children should be at school, on time, every day the school is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. Permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent.

Children can sometimes be reluctant to attend school, but any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents 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.

Registers are taken twice a day, during the morning and afternoon sessions. Every half-day absence from school must be classified by the school, (not by the parents), as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. Therefore, information about the cause of each absence is always required from parents, either in writing or by phone, to enable the Head Teacher to decide upon the coding of the absence. If a reason for absence is not received the school will make a telephone call or send a text message on the first day of absence. Home visits may be made if we have been unable to contact parents regarding the reason for absence.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for an appropriate reason such as illness and hospital appointments or other unavoidable causes.

Unauthorised absences are those, which the school does not consider reasonable.

This includes:-

- Parents keeping children off school unnecessarily, e.g. Shopping, birthdays, weather.
- Truancy before or during the school day

- Absences which have not been properly explained and are not agreed by the Head Teacher
- Absences for which medical evidence has not been provided but has been requested by the school
- Leave of absence that has not been agreed by the school
- Children who arrive at school too late to get a mark

This list is not exhaustive, and the authorisation of absence is judged on the circumstances at the time. We will always try to contact parents to inform you if your child's absence has not been authorised or if additional information is required regarding the absences.

Parents are expected to contact school at an early stage and to work with staff in resolving any problems together. This is nearly always successful. The school also employs an Education Welfare Officer (EWO), Sally Beasley and Kimberely Jones from Instill-Excellence. Their roles in school are varied; Sally is available to meet with parents and offer further support and advice and both Sally and Kim work with the school to reduce persistent absence and improve whole school attendance.

On occasions, if there are ongoing concerns regarding a pupil's attendance, the EWO will make a referral on behalf of the school to Sandwell's Attendance and Prosecution Service who will consider instituting legal proceedings. This Service can use court proceedings to prosecute parents or seek an Education Supervision Order regarding the child. The maximum penalty on conviction is a fine of £2,500 per parent and/or 3 months imprisonment.

Procedures

The school applies the following procedures in deciding how to deal with individual absences:-

Parents are asked to inform school either by letter or phone if a child is absent. Absences for illness and medical appointments will usually be authorised. Where attendance is below the expected level, we may request supporting medical information. This will then help the Head Teacher to determine if the absence should be recorded as authorised or unauthorised.

Persistent Absenteeism (PA):

A pupil is on track to becoming a 'persistent absentee' (PA) when they miss 10% or more schooling (i.e. has attendance below 90%) at any given time during the school year for whatever reason. Any pupil who has attendance of 90% or below for the whole school year, whatever the reason for absence, will be recorded as a persistent absentee by the Department for Education. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to any child's educational prospects and we need parents' fullest support and co-operation to tackle this. PA pupils are tracked and monitored carefully through our pastoral system and we also combine this with academic mentoring where necessary.

We monitor all absence thoroughly and closely track any student with attendance of 94% or below on a weekly basis. Any case that is seen to have reached the PA mark (90%) or is at risk of moving towards that mark, is given priority and parents will be contacted as required.

Leave of absence in term time.

Head Teachers are no longer permitted to grant **any** leave of absence during term time unless there are **exceptional circumstances**. Please note, exceptional circumstances do not include family holidays or weddings and visiting relatives and friends. If parents/carers consider that a 'request for leave of absence' during term time is for 'exceptional circumstances' then a written request should be made to the Head Teacher using a 'Request for Leave of Absence Form' which is available from the school office. This should be completed and submitted at least three weeks in advance of the period for which it is to be requested. Leave of absence needs to be requested and agreed before any tickets/flights/firm bookings are made. Parents will be invited to attend a meeting with the Head Teacher or Education Welfare Officer to discuss the request and will be asked to provide documentation to support the request for leave of absence if there are deemed to be exceptional circumstances. Please note, requests for leave of absence in term time for holidays, visiting relatives and weddings are not normally agreed by the Head Teacher.

If the reason for leave is due to an emergency, parents should contact the school office to arrange to discuss this with a member of the Senior Leadership Team or the Education Welfare Officer.

Please be aware, leave can only be authorised on the content of the request. A request for leave of absence form must be completed fully and must include details of all people who have care of the child. Incomplete requests will be declined and will not be considered, which will result in the absence being recorded as unauthorised. Parents will normally be informed of the decision in writing. All letters will be kept on file. If the child takes time off when leave has not been granted, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

Term time holidays

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's academic progress as much as any other absence, and we expect parents to help us by not taking pupils away in school time. We do not permit holidays in term time and do not normally authorise requests for leave of absence for this reason. Remember that any savings you think you may make by taking a holiday in school time, are offset by the cost to your child's education. There is no automatic entitlement in law to time off in school time to go on holiday.

Holidays should be taken in school holiday time of which we have plenty of weeks available. Holidays taken in term time may be referred to Sandwell's Attendance and Prosecution Service, who may then contact parents regarding the leave taken. Parents taking unauthorised leave in term time may be subject to a penalty notice fine being issued by the Local Authority. This is a

£60 fine (per child, per parent), rising to £120 (per child, per parent) if not paid within 21 days.

Other reasons for extended absence and requests for leave of absence.

FGM

All staff are trained and made aware about possible reasons for extended absence from school. Female genital mutilation is a form of child abuse common to some African, Asian and Middle Eastern communities in the UK. The age at which girls are subject to FGM varies greatly from shortly after birth to any time up to adulthood. Victims are usually aged between four and ten, primary school age. It is illegal in the UK to subject a child to female genital mutilation (FGM) or to take a child abroad to undergo the procedure – Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. School staff should be alert to the following indicators:

1. The family comes from a community that is known to practise FGM
2. The family may be preparing for the child to take a holiday, arranging vaccinations, planning or requesting absence from school and a child may talk about a long holiday to a country where the practice is prevalent
3. A child may confide that she is to have a 'special procedure' or to attend a special occasion

Forced Marriage and absence

A 'forced' marriage is distinct from a consensual 'arranged' marriage because it is without the valid consent of both parties and where duress is a factor. A child who is forced into marriage is at risk of significant harm through physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Forced marriage may also become apparent when other family issues are addressed, e.g. domestic violence, self-harm, child abuse or neglect, family/young person conflict, a child absent from school. Forced marriage may involve the child being taken out of the country for the ceremony and so staff should be alerted to any requests for holiday or extended absence during term time.

Any information or concern that a child is at immediate risk of or has undergone FGM or forced marriage should result in a child protection referral under school procedures to the Designated Safeguarding Lead in the first instance and then to Children's Social Care Services and/or the Child Protection Team, West Midlands Police Service. Staff should be alert to the need to act quickly. Consideration should be given to establish, if there are also risks to any younger sisters.

Punctuality

The classroom doors open at 8.45am for pupils to arrive and settle into class and join in early morning activities. The school day starts at 8.55am and we expect your child to be in the classroom at that time. Registers are marked as soon after 8.55am as possible (by 9.00am at the latest) and are immediately sent electronically to the school office. Your child will receive a late mark (L) if they are not in by that time.

Lateness will be recorded as unauthorised if arriving after the close of register (9.15am), unless the school has been informed of, and agreed to authorise the reasons given. All pupils arriving late to school must report to the main school office.

School targets, projects and special initiatives

The School has adopted the following attendance targets and special projects:-

Individual pupil and whole school targets of 96.5% has been set for the academic year 2020/2021. This will be reviewed each term due to changing circumstances due to COVID 19.

There are several individual and class incentives for pupils. These include: -

- weekly 100% attendance rewards (by class and for individual pupils);
- a reward for the best attending classes by key stage each half term;
- termly certificates and badges.
- 20-day challenges for 100% attendance.
- Most improved attendance rewards.

The persons responsible for attendance matters are the Head Teacher, Miss Elizabeth Hart and Instill-Excellence (Sally Beasley or Kimberley Jones)