



The Eliot Bank and Gordonbrock Schools Federation



Attendance Policy

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1. Introduction

The Eliot Bank and Gordonbrock Schools Federation is committed to providing a whole school culture which promotes the benefits of high attendance. We know that if pupils are to benefit from education, good attendance is crucial. Throughout our school we celebrate achievement and recognise that attendance is a critical factor for a productive and successful school career. We therefore do all that we can to actively promote, encourage and ensure maximum attendance for all our pupils.

We give a high priority to conveying to parents and pupils the importance of regular and punctual attendance. We recognise that parents have a vital role to play in their children's attendance and that there is a need to establish strong home-school links and communication systems that can be used effectively whenever there is a concern about attendance. If any problems do affect a pupil's attendance, we will work in partnership with parents and pupils to investigate and resolve these quickly and efficiently in order to enable the pupil to return to full attendance as soon as possible. Regular attendance at school is crucial in raising standards of education and in ensuring every child can meet their own potential. Missing lessons leaves children vulnerable to falling behind. Children with poor attendance tend to achieve less in both primary and secondary school.

The Government expects Schools and Local Authorities to¹:

- reduce absence including persistent absence;
- ensure every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled;
- act early to address any patterns of absence; and
- parents to perform their legal duty by ensuring their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend early and ensure that all pupils are punctual to their lessons and attend school regularly

The Senior Attendance Champion at Gordonbrock School is Marinda Barry

The Attendance Officer at Gordonbrock School is Jean Allen

¹ *Department for Education – Working together to improve School Attendance – August 2024*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

2. What the Law Says About School Attendance

By law, all children of compulsory school age (between 5 and 16) must receive a full-time education.

Section 444(1a) of the Education Act 1996 says, “If a child of compulsory school age, who is a registered pupil at a school, fails to attend regularly, without reasonable justification, then his (her) parent is guilty of an offence and can be prosecuted”.

Children are required to attend school for 190 days (380 sessions) in any single academic year (September – July). Any exceptions to this can only be taken with the full agreement of the Head of School.

This policy is informed by DFE Circular 11/91 “The education (pupil registration) (England). Regulations 2006 and Education Act 1996 section 444, the ‘School Attendance – Policy and Practice on Categorisation of Absence, “DFE 1994 – Paragraph 21, page 4 which reminds us that: “Only the school, within the context of the law, can approve absence, not parents. The fact that a parent has offered a note or other notification (telephone call, written letter) in relation to a particular absence does not, by itself, oblige the school to accept it.”

There is an expectation that over the course of an academic year a child’s attendance will be 95% or more. Absence that falls below 90% is categorised by the government as persistent absence. Parents must ensure that their child is able to attend school for the whole academic year by not booking any holidays during term time and avoid encouraging their child to stay at home for unjustifiable reasons. We would also expect medical appointments to be made wherever possible outside of school hours.

2.1 Definition of A Parent: (Section 576 Education Act 1996)

A parent means:

- All natural parents, whether they are married or not.
- Any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person.
- Any person who has care of a child or young person i.e. lives with and looks after the child.
- All those with day to day responsibility for a child or young person.

3. What We Do to Promote Good Attendance and Punctuality

The school will take the following action to promote good attendance and minimise lateness:

- The schools set high expectations for the attendance and punctuality of pupils and we communicate these regularly to pupils and parents.
- Good attendance in school is central to our work and all staff promote the benefits of good attendance, at all times.
- Provide a copy of our attendance expectations to parents/carers of reception children and children who join us throughout the year.
- The schools celebrate high levels of attendance and punctuality in a variety of ways.
- The schools employ Learning Mentors who monitor attendance and, where necessary, support families to get their children to school. They work closely with the Deputy Headteachers for Inclusion.
- The schools provide information to parents about their child's attendance in written form at parents' evening and in end of year reports.
- All staff receive appropriate training on the importance of good attendance as part of annual Safeguarding training, when we also review our approach to improving attendance – overall, for groups and for individuals.
- **The schools recognise the link between Attendance and Safeguarding. We know that children missing in education can act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding issues.**

4. Procedures for Parents

4.1 Absence Due to Illness

If your child has an illness, then you must:

- Consider first of all whether you feel that your child would still be able to take part in the majority, if not all, of the school's activities. In this case, you should still send your child to school. Should your child become unwell during the day and/or where the school feels that the child is no longer able to participate in school activities, the school will contact you to collect your child.
- If you feel that your child cannot take part in the school's activities and would be better remaining at home, **then you must contact the school by as soon as possible on the first/each day of absence before 9.15 a.m.** Failure to do so constitutes a breach of this policy. The person ringing will be asked to identify themselves and clearly give the reason for the absence.
- This information will be recorded.
- Where a reason has not been provided on the first day of absence, the school will contact parents, and continue to do so where needed, until the reason is established and/or the child returns to school.

4.2 Absence Due to Medical Appointment

- We would encourage you to make appointments out of school hours. Where this is not possible then you should get the school's agreement in advance; we would expect your child to be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary for the appointment.
- You are required to provide us with evidence of the appointment. This can be an appointment card/letter or mobile text. The school will not authorise the absence unless they have seen a copy of the requested evidence before or after the appointment.

4.3 Absence Due to Other Reasons

If you need to request 'leave' for a specific reason, then you must complete an 'Absence Request Form,' which is available from the School Office or via the school website. The request must be received by the Head of School no later than 10 working days before the proposed leave is due to take place. Each request must meet specific 'exceptional circumstances' which would not be expected to be repeated within an academic year or to occur regularly throughout a child's school life. Reasons such as, 'it's cheaper', 'fits in with work patterns' or 'split families,' birthday celebrations or a family holiday are not classed as exceptional circumstances.

If your request is refused and you decide to take your child/children out of school during term time, then you will be referred to the Local Authority who may decide to take legal action or issue a penalty fine.

Leave taken without a formal request being made to the Head of School will remain unauthorised even if the parent enters a request on returning from the holiday/leave.

5. Procedure for The School

5.1 Absence Due to Illness

Children who are genuinely poorly are not expected to attend school and an authorised code will be used. However, where the child's repeated absence due to illness is becoming a concern, the Head of School may decide to remove the right to the authorised code, and unauthorise further absences due to illness, particularly if the absences total between 5 and 10 days. In order to avoid this, it is essential that parents inform the school of any health concerns that may be affecting the child's ability to attend school regularly. Evidence for recording absences due to illness should only be needed in a minority of cases. If we feel evidence is deemed necessary, we will speak to you about what evidence is available to you.

The school will review any absences that are not explained, for each session, and contact parents to find out the reason why, and when the pupil will return.

The School will:

- Keep regular, efficient and accurate recording of attendance registers. These are completed at the beginning of each morning session and at the beginning of the afternoon session, using a coding system approved by the DfE and Local Authority. For each child, for each session, there will be a code relating to present or absent. The absent code will either be authorised or unauthorised. (See, 'Use of Attendance Codes' below)
- Ensure that parents/carers are aware of the times for the beginning of each session, school term dates and other INSET days when a pupil is not expected to attend school and notify the parents of any immediate school closure e.g. due to bad weather.
- Notify parents/carers as early as possible where their child's attendance is a cause for concern.
- Respond to requests for attendance data from the Local Authority, Department for Education or OFSTED.
- Work with the Local Authority in 'targeting support meetings' at least termly.
- Notify the Local Authority of individual children whose attendance is a cause for concern.

Monitor and Analyse Data to Identify Those That Need Support

- Carry out regular data analysis to identify groups or pupils who need targeted support and then plan, implement and evaluate the impact of this support.
- Use data analysis to identify any historic or emerging patterns across the school and devise specific strategies to address these, monitoring impact at regular intervals.
- Tailor its approach to meet the needs of the local context and/or the needs of a particular pupil cohort.
- Benchmark its data against local, regional and national levels to both celebrate success and identify areas for improvement.
- Regularly present attendance data to the Governing Body for review.

Engage with Families, Understand Barriers to Attendance and Work Together to Remove Them

- Support Parents/Carers by working with them to understand barriers and develop approaches to ensuring good attendance.
- Meet with those at risk of persistent or severe absence and agree actions or interventions to improve the situation.
- Make referrals to services and organisations that can provide support as part of our Early Help Offer.
- If absence intensifies, hold more formal conversations with parents and work the local authority and other relevant partners.
- See Section 8 for further action.

Provide Additional Support for Pupils with Medical Conditions or SEND

The school is aware that these pupils can face additional barriers to attendance than their peers. The school will put additional, tailored support in place where necessary:

- Make reasonable adjustments where a pupil has a medical condition and/or disability and put in place an individual plan where needed.
- Work closely with parents to develop specific support approaches for pupils with SEND.

5.2 Use of Attendance Codes

A series of codes are used for each child and for each session. The codes are used by all schools so that reasons for absence can be easily and universally monitored. Each code will mean that the absence has been authorised or unauthorised.

The Head of School may decide to use a code that authorises a child's absence due to:

- Leave agreed due to exceptional circumstances agreed by the Head of School
- Day of religious observance – officially set aside by the religious body to which the family belong.
- Medical/dental appointment – pupils should be absent only for a reasonable amount of time necessary for them to attend the appointment.
- Genuine illness or a stay in hospital and/or consequent recuperation at home following medical treatment.
- Prevention from attending by an unavoidable cause e.g. exceptionally bad weather coupled with the inability to arrive in school safely e.g. wheel chair users.
- Attending a family funeral (this must not however exceed an agreed period of absence).
- Exclusion – temporary or fixed term exclusion will be recorded with code 'E.' A permanent exclusion will be treated as authorised absence until the child is removed from the school register.

The following will be coded as 'present:'

- education off-site e.g. visit;
- education off-site at another setting e.g. exam or dual registered pupils;
- off-site education activity – supervised by someone authorised by school;
- approved, school led, sporting activity.

Unauthorised codes are used where it is felt that the reason given does not justify the absence. This may include:

- a shopping trip;
- a birthday;
- attending a pop concert/football match;
- bad weather – too wet, too cold;
- a whole session of absence for a single short medical appointment;
- lack of usual transport – the parent must demonstrate that every effort has been made to get the child to school safely;
- taking a period of leave that has not been approved by the Head of School;
- parent giving a reason which after investigation is found to be false; and
- where no reason for the absence is given, the absence will be unauthorised.

6. Persistent and Severe Absence

Persistent absence refers to pupils who miss 10% or more of school. **Severe** absence refers to pupils who miss 50% or more of school. This term was introduced in the Department for Education guidance – Working together to improve School Attendance September 2022.

To avoid cases of either persistent or severe absence, the school will:

- Use data to identify pupils at risk of poor attendance
- Work with families to understand and address the reasons for absence.
- Support pupils and parents to access the school's Early Help Offer.
- Where any out-of-school barriers are identified, signpost families to access any required, local services.

Where a pupil is persistently absent, the school will:

- Implement additional targeted support to remove any barriers.
- Where support is not working or being engaged with, work with the local authority on legal intervention.
- Where there are safeguarding concerns, intensify support through referral to Children's Social Care.

Where a pupil is severely absent, the school will also agree a joint approach with the Local Authority.

7. Lateness

The school bell is rung at 8.55 a.m. for children to line up to go into class; a second bell is rung at 9.00a.m. when the school day starts. Child/children who arrive between 9.00 am and 9.30 am will be marked late, using the 'L' late code and their time of arrival will be recorded. Child/Children who arrive after 9.30 a.m. will be recorded using the 'U' code, which is an unauthorised absence for that session, and their time of arrival will be recorded.

Lateness will be closely monitored and if it becomes a cause for concern then parents/carers will be invited into school to meet with the Attendance Officer, in the first instance.

8. School Closures

The academic year is 190 days. Schools also have to have an additional 5 days that they can use for staff training: often called INSET (In Service Training) Days. These days are not part of the 190 days which is every child's free entitlement.

The Head of School will make every effort to ensure that the school remains open for 190 days. However, in some circumstances, the school may have to close. The Head of School must always consider the health, safety and welfare of every person who uses the school site, pupils, staff, parents, volunteers and visitors. If at any point, to use the school building would be detrimental to a person or persons' health, safety and welfare, then the Head of School must close part or all of the school. Such events may be:

- Not enough staff to safely supervise the pupils and ensure the safe running of the school;
- Lack of fresh running water and/or toilet facilities;
- Lack of appropriate lighting and/or heating;
- Damage to the structure of the building e.g. fire, water or weather damage;
- Instruction to close due to a local emergency incident;
- Emergency incident at the school;
- Severe weather – in the event that severe weather is forecast, or is developing, the Head of School, will consider either closing the school in advance of the school day, closing the school early, or opening the school later than usual. The action taken will always be as a result of careful consideration of pupils, parents and staff facing 'significant risk of serious injury' in school or whilst travelling to or from school.

Once a decision is made, the Head of School will endeavour to inform parents of that decision and the details of any arrangements that have been put in place. This would usually be by text message and on the school website. Parents should always assume that the school will remain open during term time unless they hear otherwise. If the Head of School decides to close the school, then the register is closed for the day and coded as an enforced school closure. This does not affect a child's attendance record.

9. Attendance, Inclusion and Participation Service – Local Authority

The Attendance, Inclusion and Participation Service is responsible for ensuring that parents meet their legal obligations in respect of their child's education and to identify levels of support that a family may need in assisting them to ensure that their child receives a suitable education. The Head of School and Governing Body of each school have a responsibility to inform the AIPS when a child's attendance becomes a matter of concern and to support the AIPS in the actions that they may take.

When it is found that parents fail to meet their responsibilities, the AIPS has the legal power to take one or more of the following approaches:

- Warning letter – clarifies the legal responsibility of the parent and the school expectation in relation to what the parent must do next;
- Parenting Contract – Parent/s will be invited to meet with the school Attendance Officer and AIPS to sign a formal written agreement which will be reviewed within a specified timeframe. Appropriate support will be provided to parents by the school and/or the AIPS to meet the terms of the Parenting Contract;
- Parenting Order – this may be made by the court where a parent has been found guilty of an offence relating to school attendance, this requires each adult with parental responsibility to co-operate with conditions attached to the order to assist them in managing their child's overall behaviour and attendance;
- A Penalty Notice – may be issued for example, if your child has unauthorised absences, including taking unauthorised holiday in term time, if your child has unauthorised absences for 10 sessions or more in a twelve-week period or if the child is continually late for school. The first penalty notice issued to a parent in respect of a particular pupil will be charged at £160, paid by each adult with parental responsibility, for each child. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. There is no option to pay in instalments, the fine cannot be reduced if you are in receipt of benefits and there is no right of appeal. Fines are paid to the Local Authority;
- If a second penalty notice is issued, within a three-year rolling period, to the same parent in respect of the same child, the penalty is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.
- Prosecution – The AIPS can prosecute parents if they fail to ensure that their child attends school.