



**THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE PRIMARY PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT**

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**

**January 2019**

**This policy was agreed by the Management Committee: January 2019**

**This policy will be reviewed by: 31/01/20**

## **1. Introduction**

The Bucks Primary PRU believe that regular school attendance is the key to enabling children to maximise the learning opportunities available to them to ensure that they achieve their full potential. Regular and full attendance is essential if pupils are to benefit fully from school life. High levels of absence or erratic attendance inhibit the child's learning and progress.

The Bucks Primary PRU will work with pupils and parents/carers to ensure that pupils attend the PRU regularly and on time. As set out in this policy, we will work with families to identify the reasons for poor attendance and try to resolve any difficulties.

The Bucks Primary PRU recognises that attendance is a matter for the whole PRU community. Our Attendance Policy should not be viewed in isolation; it is a strand that runs through all aspects of school improvement. This policy also takes into account the Human Rights Act 1998, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Race Relations Act 2000.

## **2. Legal Framework**

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

A child is of Compulsory School Age at the beginning of the term following their 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

Under the Education Act 1996, the Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that parents secure education for children of compulsory school age and where necessary, use legal enforcement.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, require schools to take an attendance register twice a day, once at the start of the morning session and then again during the afternoon session.

The register must record whether the pupil was:

- present;
- absent;
- present at approved educational activity; or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

### 3. **Categorising absence**

Where pupils of compulsory school age are recorded as absent, the register must show whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Absence can only be authorised by the PRU and cannot be authorised by parents. All absences will be treated as unauthorised unless a satisfactory explanation for the pupil's absence has been received.

Parents should advise the PRU by telephone on the first day of absence and provide the school with an expected date of return. This should be followed up in the form of a written note from the parent/carer, though verbal explanations may be acceptable where this is considered appropriate. Alternative arrangements will be agreed with non-English speaking parents/carers.

Absence will be categorised as follows:

Illness: In most cases a telephone call or a note from the parent informing the PRU that their child is ill will be acceptable. Parents may be asked to provide medical evidence where there are repeated absences due to reported illness. This will usually be in the form of an appointment card, prescription etc.

Medical/Dental Appointments: Parents are advised where possible to make medical and dental appointments outside the school day. Where this is not possible, pupils should attend school for part of the day. Parents should show the appointment card to the PRU.

Other Authorised Circumstances: visits to prospective new schools, family bereavement, major religious observances, off site tuition, participation in an approved performance or an exceptional leave of absence which has been authorised by the Executive Head or Teacher in Charge.

Excluded (no alternative provision made): Exclusion from attending the PRU is counted as an authorised absence. The child's class teacher will make arrangements for work to be sent home.

Late Arrival: The register will be updated twice each day, as near to 9.15 am as possible and as near to 1.30 pm as possible. We expect pupils to arrive at the PRU by 9.00am to start the school day. However, allowance is made for pupils who arrive by school transport or where parents/carers need to deliver siblings to mainstream schools prior to bringing their child to the PRU. If a pupil arrives before the register closes (i.e. after 9.15 am but before 9.30 am) or there is an acceptable reason they will be marked as L (unless another code is more appropriate in the light of information received from parents). The register will close shortly after 9:30 a.m. Pupils arriving after the close of register will be recorded as absent. This will not be authorised and will count as an absence for that session.

The absence will only be authorised if a satisfactory explanation for the late arrival can be provided, for example, attendance at a medical appointment. (Code M)

The absence will be recorded as **unauthorised** if the pupil has arrived late after the registers close without justifiable cause, for example, if they woke up late (Code U)

Unauthorised absence: Absence will not be authorised unless parents have provided a satisfactory explanation that has been accepted as such by the school.

Examples of unsatisfactory explanations include:

- A pupil's/family member's birthday
- Shopping for uniforms
- Having their hair cut
- Closure of a sibling's school for INSET (or other) purposes (– although the PRU accepts that a pupil maybe absent from the PRU if their mainstream school has an INSET, and will talk to parents to agree the absence on an individual basis)
- "Couldn't get up"
- Illness where the child is considered well enough to attend school
- Holidays taken without the authorisation of school

Leave of Absence and Extended Leave: Parents do not have an automatic right to remove their child from school during term time for the purpose of a holiday and are strongly advised not to do so. Parents should be aware that if their child is absent for 10 school days they will miss 5% of their education during that academic year.

Parents wishing to take their child out of school during term time must send a written request to the Executive Head or Teacher in Charge before arrangements are made. Retrospective requests will not be considered and therefore will result in the absence being categorised as unauthorised. Each request will be considered individually and will take the following factors into account:

- Length of the proposed leave
- Age of the pupil
- The pupil's general absence/attendance record
- Proximity of SATs
- Pupil's ability to catch up the work missed
- Pupil's educational needs
- General welfare of the pupil
- Circumstances of the request
- Purpose of the leave
- Previous term time holidays taken
- When the request was made

A form is available for parents/carers to request a leave of absence. A written response will be sent to parents/carers after the request has been considered. Where a request has been granted, the letter should state:

- The expected date of return
- That parents must contact school should any delays occur

If the permission to take leave is not granted and the pupil is absent, the absence will be **unauthorised**. In such cases the school may refer the matter to the Education Welfare Service who may issue a Penalty Notice.

Religious Observance The Bucks Primary PRU acknowledges the multi-faith nature of British society and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside school holiday periods or weekends and that this necessitates a consideration of authorised absence or special leave for religious observance. (Code R)

It is reasonable for a parent to allow their children not to attend school on any day of religious observance if recognised by the parent's religious body.

Parents are requested to give advance notice to the PRU if they intend their child to be absent.

However, in the interests of fulfilling the academic requirements of the PRU and limiting the authorised absence rate of the school, it is identified as reasonable that no more than one day be designated for any individual occasion of religious observance/festival and no more than three days in total in any academic year. Absence in excess of this will be categorised as unauthorised.

Traveller Absence: The aim for the attendance of Traveller children, in common with all other children, 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 is safe from prosecution if their child accrues 200 attendances (i.e. 200 half days) in a year. Traveller absence (Code T) is acceptable only when the family is engaged in a trade or business that requires them to travel and when the child is attending school as regularly as that trade permits.

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

When in or around Buckinghamshire, if a Traveller family can reasonably travel back to their base school (see below) then the expectation is that their child will attend full-time.

The Bucks Primary PRU will be regarded as the base school if it is the school where the child normally attends when they are not travelling. However, the pupil must have attended in the last 18 months. Traveller children can register at other schools temporarily whilst away from their base school. In such cases, the pupil's school place at The Bucks Primary PRU will be kept open for them whilst travelling. This is to protect them from unfairly losing their place at their school of usual attendance.

The Bucks Primary PRU can operate effectively as the child's base school only if we are engaged in on-going dialogue with Traveller families. This means that parents must:

- advise of their forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen; and
- inform the school regarding proposed return dates

The Bucks Primary PRU will authorise absence of Traveller children if we are satisfied that a family is travelling and has given indication that they intend to return.

Traveller children will be recorded as attending an approved educational activity when:

- The child is on roll and attending another visited school
- Undertaking supervised educational activity under the jurisdiction of another Local Authority's Traveller Education Service
- The child is undertaking computer based distance learning that is time evidenced

Where Traveller children are registered pupils at a school and are known to be present either at a site (official or otherwise) or in a house and are not attending school, the absence will be investigated in the same way as for any other pupil.

#### **4. Deletions from the Register**

In accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, pupils will be deleted from the register only when one of the following circumstances applies:

- The school is replaced by another school on a School Attendance Order
- The School Attendance Order is revoked by the Local Authority
- The pupil has ceased to be of compulsory school age
- Permanent exclusion has occurred and procedures have been completed
- Death of a pupil
- Transfer between schools
- When a parent informs the school in writing that the pupil is to be withdrawn to be educated outside the school system
- Failure to return from an extended holiday after both the school and the local authority have tried to locate the pupil
- A medical condition prevents their attendance and return to the school before ending compulsory school-age
- In custody for more than four months (in discussion with The Youth Offending Team)
- 20 days' continuous unauthorised absence have elapsed and both the Local Authority and school have tried to locate the pupil
- A pupil has left the school but it is not known where he/she has gone after both the school and the Local Authority have tried to locate the pupil

The Bucks Primary PRU will follow Buckinghamshire County Council's Children Missing Education Protocol when a pupil's whereabouts is unknown.

#### **5. Roles and Responsibilities**

The Bucks Primary PRU believe that improved school attendance can only be achieved if it is viewed as a shared responsibility of the school staff, governors, parents, pupils and the wider school community.

Teachers and class room support staff will:

- Actively promote the importance and value of good attendance to pupils and their parents
- Form positive relationships with pupils and parents
- Contribute to a whole PRU approach which reinforces regular attendance; with good teaching and learning experiences that encourage all pupils to attend and to achieve their potential
- Comply with the Registration Regulations, England, 2006 and other attendance related legislation
- Implement systems to report, record and monitor the attendance of all pupils, including those who are educated off-site
- Analyse attendance data to identify causes and patterns of absence
- Contribute to the evaluation of PRU strategies and interventions
- Work with other agencies to improve attendance and support pupils and their families
- Document interventions used to a standard required by the Local Authority should legal proceedings be instigated

Request that Parents/Carers will:

- Talk to their child about the PRU and what goes on there. Take a positive interest in their child's work and educational progress
- Instil the value of education and regular PRU attendance within the home environment
- Encourage their child to look to the future and have aspirations
- Contact the PRU if their child is absent to let them know the reason why and the expected date of return. Follow this up with a note where possible.
- Try to avoid unnecessary absences. Wherever possible make appointments for the doctors, dentists etc. outside of school hours
- Ask the PRU for help if their child is experiencing difficulties
- Inform the PRU of any change in circumstances that may impact on their child's attendance
- Support the PRU; take every opportunity to get involved in their child's education, form a positive relationship with the PRU and acknowledge the importance of children receiving the same messages from both the PRU and home
- Encourage routine at home, for example, bed times, home work, preparing school bag and uniform the evening before
- Not keep their child away from school to go shopping, to help at home or to look after other members of the family
- Avoid taking their child on holiday during term-time. Where this is unavoidable, send a written leave request to the Executive Head or Teacher in Charge in advance of booking the holiday.

## **6. Using Attendance Data**

### **• Lateness**

Information will be provided to Teachers in Charge so that discussions and actions can be taken as appropriate to minimise lateness and to improve regular attendance at the PRU, including discussions with pupils/parents, letters to parents and agreed follow up actions to improve attendance and recognise improvements.

### **• Attendance**

All pupils' attendance will be monitored and will be shared with the Local Authority and other agencies if a pupil's attendance is a cause for concern.

Absence will be monitored on a half termly basis. Teachers in Charge will receive a complete set of data for their pupils and will agree with teaching staff about the most appropriate action to take for individual pupils. PRU staff will discuss any concerns about a pupil's attendance with parents and carers to find solutions and support them and the pupil in improving attendance. A letter confirming what has been discussed and any actions to be taken will be sent to the parents/carers. If it is not possible to meet with parents/carers then a letter will be sent to explain the concerns and ask that they work with the PRU to improve their child's attendance.

Should an improvement be noted within 3 weeks then a follow up letter confirming the position will be sent to parents/carers (or a discussion held, if more appropriate, and noted on the pupil file).

Where there is no improvement, the parents/carers will be asked to attend a meeting with the Executive Head or Teacher in Charge and a referral may be made to the County Attendance Team as shown in escalation of intervention (Appendix 1).

For dual registered pupils, the PRU staff will also liaise closely with the pupil's mainstream school to ensure that the overall response to the pupil's attendance is consistent and appropriate for the circumstances of that child.

Attendance data will also be used to identify emerging patterns and trends to inform whole PRU strategies to improve attendance and attainment and shared with the Management Committee as necessary.

The Bucks Primary PRU will share attendance data with the Local Authority as required. All information shared will be done so in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

## **7. Support Systems**

The Bucks Primary PRU recognises that poor attendance is often an indication of difficulties in a child's life. This may be related to problems at home, their mainstream school or at the PRU. Parents should make the aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and/or behaviour in school, for example, bereavement, divorce / separation. This will help the PRU identify any additional support that may be required.

The Bucks Primary PRU also recognise that some pupils are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, those pupils with special educational needs, those with physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee pupils and looked after children.

The PRU will implement a range of strategies to support improved attendance. Strategies used will include:

- Discussion with parents/carers, other professionals involved with the child
- Liaison with the pupil's mainstream school
- Referrals to support agencies
- Friendship groups
- Reward systems
- Time limited part time time-tables
- Additional learning support and/ or baviour support
- Reintegration support packages (for example following a term illness or after an exclusion).

The PRU will also work with the pupil's mainstream school so that there is a consistent approach in the support offered to families.

## **8 Legal Sanctions**

Where intervention fails to bring about an improvement in attendance, The Bucks Primary PRU will notify the County Attendance Team of the irregular attendance as appropriate.

The County Attendance Team, mainstream school or the PRU may invite parents to attend a Parenting Contract Meeting and issue a formal warning of a Penalty Notice.

Parenting Contracts (Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003) A Parenting contract is a voluntary agreement between the Local Authority, school and the parent, it can also be extended to include the child and any other agencies offering support to resolve any difficulties leading to improved attendance.

The contract will outline attendance targets and will detail agreed actions that will help to achieve the target. The contract will be reviewed regularly.

The contract can be used as evidence in a prosecution should irregular attendance continue.

Penalty Notices (Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003) Penalty Notices will be considered when:

- Intervention has failed to bring about improvement and further unauthorised absence has occurred following written warning to improve.
- A pupil has taken leave of absence i.e. for the purpose of a holiday in term time and the absence has not been authorised by the school

A Penalty Notice gives the parent the opportunity to avoid a prosecution. A £60 fine, per parent/carer, per child must be paid within 21 days. The fine increases to £120 per parent/carer, per child if paid after 21 days but within 28 days of the date the Notice was issued.

Failure to pay the Penalty Notice may result in a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

Prosecution: The school will provide the Local Authority with evidence required for a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996. This is to ensure that parents realise their own responsibilities in ensuring attendance at school and most importantly about returning children to education.

Signed: .....  
(Chair of Management Committee)

Dated: .....

Signed: .....  
(Headteacher)

Dated: .....

## Intervention Flow Chart – Appendix 1

The PRU I will notify parent/carer of the child's irregular school attendance and offer them the opportunity and support to improve.

If you receive a letter informing you of concerns regarding your child's attendance you should

- Speak with your child to see if there are any reasons why they are reluctant to attend
- Contact the PRU to discuss any difficulties you or your child may be experiencing.
  - Ensure your child attends school regularly

If there is no improvement and the parent has not provided a good reason for the absence, the PRU may refer to the County Attendance Team

The parents maybe invited to attend a Parenting Contract Meeting and may issue a Warning of a Penalty Notice.

A Parenting Contract is a voluntary agreement between parents and the Local Authority aimed at supporting you in improving your child's school attendance.

Whilst your involvement in a Parenting Contract is voluntary, if you fail to engage with the support offered and your child's attendance remains irregular, a Penalty Notice may be issued or legal proceedings may begin in the Magistrates' Court.

If you are issued with a Penalty Notice of £60 per parent/carer, per child this must be paid in full within 21 days otherwise the Penalty will increase to £120 per parent/carer, per child. If you fail to pay the Penalty by the 28<sup>th</sup> day, the Education Welfare Service may instigate legal proceedings against you.

If you are found guilty of this offence you can be fined up to £2500 and/or be imprisoned for a period of three months.