

Attendance Policy

At St Mary's we expect good attendance from our pupils, in order for them to make the very best of the opportunities that the school has to offer. We want our children in school each and every day as we believe the better the attendance, the better their attainment. We rely on our partnership with parents to ensure that this is achieved.

Schools are judged on many things; attendance is one of the important factors that can be questioned and graded by OFSTED. Therefore we take our duty seriously to ensure that St Mary's attendance remains very good and will challenge parents if we feel that any ongoing absence is unjustified.

Expectations regarding attendance are published annually in our 'Guidelines for Parents' flier.

Absence

We ask parents to contact us on the first day of absence for safety reasons via telephone, so that we know the whereabouts of any child not in school. For the same reason, we ask parents to contact us on any subsequent days of absence until the child returns to school, unless a definite return date can be given at any point. A note to confirm the absence should be sent in on the child's return. We do not accept emails as a tool to explain absence for safeguarding reasons.

In the interests of your child's safety, the school will contact you if no contact has been received by 10.15am.

Any absence which is known about in advance should be notified to the school in writing beforehand.

Due to changes in the law (Sept 13), the Headteacher is unable to authorise any term time leave (holiday) unless it is under exceptional circumstances, i.e. a service parent returning from active tour of duty. In this case, an application in writing should be passed to the Headteacher in advance.

Dorset County Council state:

Dorset County Council Children's Services Directorate, full supports schools in expecting parents and carers to make sure that children and young people attend school on a regular basis. Any time away from school can have a significant impact on educational attainment, success in later life and longer term health and well being.

Dorset County Council will be supporting schools in ensuring the law is upheld. In law, parents and carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular and punctual attendance at school. Therefore, any unauthorized absence, such as taking holidays in term time not agreed with the school, can result in a Penalty Notice being issued, to each parent for each child. Any Penalty Notice unpaid must be referred to the Magistrates Court as failure to secure the regular attendance of your child. If found guilty of such an offence you will receive a criminal conviction and a potential fine of up to £1000".

Attendance is reported to parents annually with the school report.

Registration

The school day starts at 8.55am. Registers are marked shortly after this. Pupils who are not present at registration will be marked as absent initially. This will be changed to 'present' if a child arrives shortly after but as 'late' if the child arrives after 9.25am. Any child arriving after this will require an explanation from the parent/carer.

We would encourage parents to drop children off as soon after 8.45am as possible, when they can come straight into class. Arriving a few minutes early allows a child to settle calmly without feeling flustered.

Authorised and Unauthorised absence

The law requires that all schools must now show the difference between authorised and unauthorised absence.

Authorised absence can be:

- Sickness
- Medical or dental appointments which cannot be arranged outside school hours
- Days of religious observance
- School agreed term time leave (exceptional circumstances only).

Unauthorised absence is:

- Truancy
- Staying home to look after younger children or sick relatives
- Going shopping, having hair cut
- Any term time leave that has not been agreed by the school
- Any absence for which no explanation is received and or agreed by the school.

Monitoring attendance

Attendance records are kept electronically. The Headteacher is responsible for providing the Governing Body with sufficient information to monitor attendance and for ensuring all returns to the DfE are met.

There are 190 days in the school calendar and 175 days available for holidays. A 90% (171 days) attendance rate per year equates to a whole year lost to education by Year 11.

Attendance is tracked for individuals and year groups - where an individual pupil's attendance is causing concern or falls below 90%, the Headteacher will contact parents in writing to inform them. It is hoped that by working together, the child's attendance can be improved. However, if there is no further improvement, advice from Dorset County Council's Attendance Officer will be sought. Parents/carers may be invited in for a meeting with the Headteacher/Attendance Officer and actions agreed to support school attendance.

We recognize that some medical appointments cannot be arranged outside of school time but we would ask parents/carers to carefully consider whether the child needs to be out of school for the whole day or just part of the day. We also ask parents/carers to provide the school with copies of appointment letters.

The average percentage attendance for the whole school is noted; authorised and unauthorised absence figures are recorded. Teachers will note both authorised and unauthorised absences in the registers and keep a file of absence letters for the academic year.

The Headteacher/Administrative Officer will provide the Dorset Education Officer with the required information to monitor attendance and will raise any concerns with them.

Children with very good attendance will be issued certificates at the end of every term and year as recognition.

CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION (CME)

The Government has placed a duty on Local Authorities to make arrangements to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children in their area who are of compulsory school age and not receiving a suitable education. In relation to children, by suitable we mean efficient full time education suitable for her/his age, ability, aptitude and any special education needs the child may have. The duty does not apply in relation to children who are registered at school who are not attending regularly.

These children are referred to as Children Missing Education. Children are identified as missing from education when they are of compulsory school age and are:

- Not on a school roll
- Not being educated other than at school
- Identified as having been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time

The roots to grow, the wings to fly

Children go missing from education for a number of reasons including:

- They do not start school at the appropriate time and so they do not enter the education system
- They are removed from school by their parents
- They fail to find a suitable school place after moving to a new area
- The family move home regularly
- Family breakdown
- Children who do not make the transition between key stages, e.g. Nursery to Primary, Primary to Secondary
- Children and young people in the following groups are more likely to be missing from education
- Young people who have previously committed offences
- Children living in women's refuges
- Children of homeless families perhaps in temporary accommodation or housing
- Young people who run away from home
- Children with long-term medical and emotional needs
- Unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees and child who are from asylum seekers/refugees families
- Children of immigrant families not yet established in the UK
- Looked after children
- Children with Gypsy/Traveller background
- Young carers
- Children from transient families
- Teenage mothers
- Excluded pupils

Children missing from education are at a much greater risk of:

- Physical harm
- Becoming involved in crime
- Demonstrating anti-social behaviour
- Abusing drugs and alcohol
- Sexual exploitation
- Being illegally employed
- Forced marriages

An effective partnership between schools and a Local Authority is essential if we are to minimise the risk to children, maximising engagement and desired outcomes for learning and to protect professionals working to support children. It is vital that the Local Authority and partner agencies also work closely together to help safeguard children.

If we consider a child to be missing in Education, in the first instance the school will make every effort to ascertain the whereabouts of the pupil. This might include telephoning home, contacting the GP, friends, other relatives that are known.

If we have reason to believe that a child has transferred to another school we will make every effort to contact that school to ascertain whether or not your information is correct. Safeguarding procedures will be followed if we believe the children to be at risk.

After 4 weeks, should the school and the Local Authority be unable to locate where the child has moved to, the school should be advised by the Local Authority to remove the child's name from its roll.

Reviewed December 2019