



**GREAT FINBOROUGH
CHURCH PRIMARY**

Attendance Policy

Prepared by:	Stowmarket Pyramid
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Great Finborough Church Primary

Attendance Policy

(Stowmarket Schools)

Policy Statement

This policy was jointly written by representatives from all the Stowmarket schools, during the Autumn term 2014. The policy is reviewed annually.

We wish for all parents to be committed to supporting their children's education and make every effort for their children to attend school as much as possible. Regular attendance at school is vital if a child is to make good progress and is to achieve academic success.

A Joint Approach

As a group of schools, known as *The Stowmarket Pyramid of Schools*, we have agreed the following interpretation of the Department for Education's guidance on school attendance. The intention is to ensure uniformity in the way absence and the request for absence is managed within the Stowmarket area, which in turn will be fair and easily understood by parents and children alike.

Parents are required by law to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Children who miss lessons unnecessarily can cause a great deal of disruption for staff and other children. Every day that a child misses school is a missed opportunity. For example, if a child only attends school for 90% of the school year, they are missing the equivalent of four weeks a year or half a year over five years. For this reason, our schools take the non-attendance of children very seriously.

The Department for Education guidance on school attendance has been revised. Schools are required to ensure that pupils attend school unless:

- they are ill or have a medical appointment
- the school is closed (e.g. due to bad weather)
- the school transport service is not running or
- the day is a religious festival for that family

Any other occasion for absence **must be** an exceptional circumstance. If parents wish to take a family holiday during term time, even if due to work commitments, this is **not** considered to be an exceptional circumstance. The Stowmarket Pyramid of Schools has agreed that it is highly unlikely that we will authorise a holiday in term time. Our general principle is that if an event could have been organised during a school holiday or outside of school hours, then it will not be authorised in term time. This includes family reunions and visits from relatives.

Amendments to the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 remove reference to 'Family Holidays' and extended leave as well as the statutory threshold of ten school days.

N.B. There is no automatic right to any holiday in term time.

Leave of Absences during term time

We are not permitted to and will not authorise leave of absence during term time except for exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances may include such occasions as family bereavement or participation at a high level in a representative activity. The exceptional circumstances must be made clear on the Leave of Absence form which must be approved **in advance** for the absence to be authorised. A Leave of Absence form is available from the school office or from our website and must be completed **before** any absence from school, for any reason other than illness. All local schools will use the same form.

Parents will be fined by means of Penalty Notices or Prosecutions in the Magistrates Courts by the Local Authority for taking their child on holiday during term time without consent from the school.

Attendance at less than 90% will lead to involvement from the local authority and may lead to the issuing of a fixed penalty notice by the County Council after referral from the school. Schools may decide not to refer if it is satisfied that the absence is unavoidable and that every effort is made by parents to ensure maximum attendance.

AUTHORISED AND UNAUTHORISED ABSENCES

Authorised Absence

Schools can authorise an absence. Authorised absence is where the school has either given approval in advance for a child to be out of school, or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as satisfactory justification for absence. All absences will be treated as unauthorised until the school has agreed on a satisfactory explanation.

Family Holidays During Term Time / Leave Of Absence Requests

Schools are now encouraged not to allow **any** absence of leave unless in exceptional circumstances. We will not authorise family holidays as a matter of course. If a parent works in a sector including the armed forces and the police service and a letter from the employer states that leave will not be granted during school holiday periods then schools will, usually, authorise these requests. Again, this process of requesting approval must be made well in advance.

Categories Of Authorised Absence

Illness, medical and dental appointments - Where the school believes that a child is genuinely unwell the absence will be authorised. When attending a medical or dental appointment it is important that such appointments be made outside school hours unless in extreme, unavoidable cases. Your child must return after or be present in school before such appointments – if a whole session is missed due to a local appointment, then this may not be authorised.

If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, the school may request that parents provide proof that the child is unfit for school. Please note that it is the parents' responsibility to provide such evidence and that a school is not in a position to speak to doctors about this and will not do so. It is not the role / responsibility of schools to prove authenticity but the parents.

Days of religious observance - The school will be sensitive to such requests; once again, parents are required to give notice in advance for these leave of absence requests. Where necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body about authenticity and whether it has set the day apart for religious observance.

Traveller child when the family is travelling - A number of different groups are covered by the generic term Traveller – Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Showmen (fairground people) and Circus people, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers.

When Traveller families are known to be travelling for occupational purposes and have agreed this with the school but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision, T coding should be used but it should not be used for any other types of absence by these groups.

To help ensure continuity of education for Traveller children it is expected that the child should attend school elsewhere when their family is travelling and be dual registered at that school and the main school. Children from these groups whose families do not travel are expected to register at a school and attend as normal. They are subject to the same rules as other children in terms of the requirement to attend school regularly once registered at school.

Weddings – Schools will authorise time for a child to attend the wedding of an immediate family member, such as a parent or sibling as follows: In Suffolk 1 day; outside Suffolk **up to** 3 days to include travel to, the wedding day and travel from.

Family bereavements – The schools will respond sensitively to requests to attend funerals or associated events and have the discretion to authorise such absences. We will authorise short term absence for close family members i.e. parent, sibling (other family members such as grandparents would typically be 1 day).

Public performances, including film or TV work - The Local Authority must licence a student to take part in a public performance. The school will only authorise absence where participation has been agreed and a licence obtained.

Examination – children entered for examinations during normal school hours will not have this time authorised. It is expected that examination boards will arrange such examinations outside school hours.

Unauthorised Absence

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no “leave” has been given. This includes:

- parents keeping children off school unnecessarily
- truancy
- absences which have never been properly explained or prior authorisation not requested
- children who arrive at school too late after registration (after registration has closed)
- shopping
- looking after other children,
- Birthdays

Where unauthorised absence is deemed to be a concern for a particular child the school will:

- write to parents to alert them to concerns regarding their child’s attendance
- request support from the Education Welfare Service

Persistent Absenteeism (PA)

The Department for Education states that a pupil becomes a ‘persistent absentee’ when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year **for whatever reason**. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to a child’s education and we need parent’s fullest support and co-operation to tackle this.

We monitor all absences and the reasons given for them are recorded thoroughly. Any case that is seen to have reached PA level, or is at risk of moving towards that mark, is given priority and we will seek to take action immediately.

Penalty Notices

There are 2 reasons a Penalty Notice might be used:

- Where a pupil has 6 or more unauthorised absences.
- Where a pupil is stopped with parents/carers during a truancy sweep and the absence is not authorised by the school.

How this Works in practice:

A school will refer a family to Suffolk County Council if a child has six or more unauthorised absences. Each half day is one absence. These do not have to be consecutive, each unauthorised absence is counted and once they total 6, the penalty referral is made, i.e. the 6th absence will trigger the penalty referral.

Parents and carers will be issued with a penalty notice as a result of the referral being made. The penalty issued is charged at £60 per parent, per child. A parent is classed as any person who normally cares for the child. For example, if a family has 3 children and 2 parents, this will result in a fine of £360.

The money from a fine is paid to the Department for Education, once Suffolk has taken out the cost of issuing it. The money does not go to the school.

Unauthorised absences stay on a child's school record.

Please note:

- If fines are not paid within the stipulated time, they are doubled
- If fines are still not paid, then it is most likely that Suffolk County Council will take the parents to court to seek action to be taken. Ultimately, a custodial sentence can be given.
- If unauthorised absence continues after a fine has been paid, again, Suffolk County Council will most likely take the parents to court to seek action to be taken. Ultimately, a custodial sentence can be given.

School's roles and responsibilities

All staff at Great Finborough Church Primary School have a key role to play in supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and will work to provide an environment in which our pupils are eager to learn, feel valued members of the school community and look forward to coming to school every day. Staff also have a responsibility to set a good example by their own attendance and punctuality.

Attendance Leader

The Headteacher, in his role as Attendance Leader, oversees, directs and co-ordinates the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and ensures the Attendance Policy is consistently applied throughout the school. He ensures that up-to-date attendance data and any matters directly related to attendance are shared with the Senior Leadership Team, and to staff, pupils and parents as appropriate. It is his responsibility to see that a termly report is prepared for the governing body. He ensures that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.

Registration

- i) The school is required to mark the attendance register twice each day; once at the start of the day and once during the afternoon session. Classroom teachers are responsible for completing the attendance registers using the prescribed codes. (see Appendix A)
- ii) The register will be called promptly at **9.05 am** and at the beginning of afternoon school.
- iii) Morning register and playground doors will close at 9:25 am. Pupils who arrive between 9:05 and 9:25 will be counted as **present** and marked as **L** (see Appendix A). Any pupil who arrives **after** the closing of the register will be marked as **U** (see Appendix A) and will need to enter the school through the main reception.
- iv) For health and safety reasons it is important that the school knows who is in the building. Pupils arriving late should report to the school office. Parents/carers of pupils who arrive after the registers have closed will be asked to sign them in.
- v) For the same reason it is important that pupils leaving the premises legitimately (eg for a medical appointment), or returning to school later in the day are also signed in or out by a responsible adult.

Categorising absence

A mark will be made in respect of each child during registration. Any child who is not present at this time will be marked as an unauthorised absence **unless** leave has been granted by the school **in advance** or the reason for absence is already known and accepted by the school as legitimate. Where a reason for absence is given and accepted by the school at a later stage, the register will be amended in such a way that the original entry and the amendment are distinguishable.

If absence is frequent or continuous, parents will be asked to provide proof (such as a doctor's note or prescription) that the absence is unavoidable. A note or explanation from a pupil's home does not necessarily mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence rests with the Headteacher, who will follow Local Authority (LA) and, Department of Education guidance and agreed local procedure.

If no explanation about an absence is received by the school **within 2 weeks**, the absence will remain unauthorised.

Staff Training

The School Attendance Leader will ensure that all staff responsible for taking registers, including any temporary or supply staff, receive sufficient training to enable them to perform the task accurately.

Collection and analysis of data

The Attendance Leader will ensure that attendance data is complete, accurate, analysed and reported to the senior leadership team, parents and the governing body. The report should include commentary on the school attendance target, as set by the LA. The data will inform the school's future practice to improve attendance.

Attendance is monitored regularly and half-termly reports sent to the Educational Welfare Officer when requested.

Accurate attendance returns are made to the DfES within the stipulated time frame.

Systems and strategies for managing and improving attendance

Parents are reminded in newsletters and school meetings about the importance of good attendance and its links to attainment. Current attendance data is published periodically to parents/carers.

First-day calling

Great Finborough Church Primary School has in place a system of first-day calling. This means that parents will be telephoned on the first day a pupil is absent, without explanation, to establish a reason for the absence. This helps to identify at an early stage pupils who do not have a good reason for absence or who may be absent without their parents' knowledge. Where it is not possible to make contact with parents on the first or second (if applicable) day of absence, the school will send them a letter by first class post.

Meetings with parents

Where there is an emerging pattern to a pupil's absence, with or without explanation, the school will invite parents to a meeting to discuss the reasons for the absences. Plans will be put in place with the parents and pupil to resolve any difficulties and improve the attendance within a specified time limit – usually no more than 6 weeks. It will be explained to parents that any future absences will be unauthorised unless there is clear evidence of a good reason for them.

Referral to the Education Welfare Officer

If there continues to be unauthorised absences by the end of the specific time the matter will be referred to the Education Welfare Officer.

Post-registration truancy

Post-registration truancy occurs when a pupil goes missing from school having previously registered for the session. This behaviour not only means the pupil will not be receiving a full-time education, it also potentially renders him/her vulnerable to harm. If a pupil appears to have left the premises without authorisation, the school will try to make contact with his/her parents immediately.

Parents' / carers' responsibilities

The prime responsibility for ensuring children receive an appropriate and full-time education rests with parents / carers (defined by the Education Act 1996 as those with parental responsibility and those who have the care of a child), who will be supported and encouraged by Great Finborough Church Primary School.

Great Finborough Church Primary School expects parents / carers:

- ensure their children attend the school regularly;
- support their children's attendance by keeping requests for absence to a minimum;
- **not** expect the school to automatically agree any requests for absence, and **not** condone unjustified absence from school;
- notify Great Finborough Church Primary School on the first day of a child's absence;

- ensure their child(ren) arrive at school on time, properly dressed and with the right equipment for the day;
- contact the school without delay if they are concerned about any aspects of their children's school lives. Great Finborough Church Primary School will endeavour to support parents to address their concerns.

Pupils' responsibilities

All pupils should be aware of the importance of regular school attendance. If they are having difficulties that may prevent them from attending school regularly, they should speak to their class teacher.

Governors' responsibilities

The governing body of a maintained school shall make arrangements for ensuring that their functions relating to the conduct of the school are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school.

Equality and Diversity, and Special Educational Needs (SEN)

All pupils and parents regardless of ethnic origin, gender, class, aptitude or ability will be treated equally.

Reviewing the policy

This attendance policy will be reviewed annually.

Appendix A

REGISTER CODES

CODE	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
/	Present (AM)	Present
\	Present (PM)	Present
B	Educated off site (NOT Dual registration)	Approved Education Activity
C	Other Authorised Circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/description)	Authorised absence
D	Dual registration (i.e. pupil attending other establishment)	Approved Education Activity
E	Excluded (no alternative provision made)	Authorised absence
F	Extended family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
G	Family holiday (NOT agreed or days in excess of agreement)	Unauthorised absence
H	Family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
I	Illness (NOT medical or dental etc. appointments)	Authorised absence
J	Interview	Approved Education Activity
L	Late (before registers closed)	Present
M	Medical/Dental appointments	Authorised absence
N	No reason yet provided for absence	Unauthorised absence
O	Unauthorised absence (not covered by any other code/description)	Unauthorised absence
P	Approved sporting activity	Approved Education Activity
R	Religious observance	Authorised absence
S	Study leave	Authorised absence
T	Traveller absence	Authorised absence
U	Late (after registers closed)	Unauthorised absence
V	Educational visit or trip	Approved Education Activity
W	Work experience	Approved Education Activity
X	Non-compulsory school age absence	Not counted in possible attendances
Y	Enforced closure	Not counted in possible attendances
Z	Pupil not yet on roll	Not counted in possible attendances
#	School closed to pupils	Not counted in possible attendances