



# **Attendance Policy and Procedures**

Date: September 2022

Date to be reviewed: September 2025

## **Introduction**

It is the aim of Overstone Combined School that pupils should enjoy learning, experience success and realise their full potential. Our Attendance Policy reflects this and recognises that regular attendance has a positive effect on the motivation and attainment of pupils.

Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence may seriously affect their learning. The Department for Education (DfE) defines a pupil as a 'persistent absentee' when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason.

## **Aims**

Our school aims to meet its obligations with regard to school attendance by promoting good attendance; ensuring every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled; and acting early to address patterns of absence.

This policy sets out our school's position on attendance and details the procedures that all parents<sup>1</sup> must follow to report their child absent from school.

It is vital that children develop regular attendance habits at an early age. Therefore, the school will encourage parents of Early Years children who are not yet of compulsory school age, to send their children to every session that is available to them. If the child is unable to attend the school for any reason, the parent should inform the school of the reason on the first day of absence. If the school is concerned about a pupil's attendance for any reason, we will contact the parent to discuss the matter, in the first instance.

We will also support parents to perform their legal duty to ensure their children of compulsory<sup>2</sup> school age attend regularly and will promote and support punctuality in attending lessons.

We want our pupils to attend school every day, unless they are really not well enough to. We believe that children who attend school regularly are more likely to feel settled in school, maintain friendships, keep up with their learning and gain the greatest benefit from their education. We want all our pupils to enjoy school, grow up to become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who are able to realise their full potential. Regular attendance and punctuality are essential in the workplace and children who are used to attending school on time, and on every occasion unless they are too unwell to attend, will be better prepared for the attendance expectations in the workplace.

In April 2017 the Supreme Court clarified the definition of regular attendance to be attendance "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school", therefore if an absence is not authorised by the school, the pupil's attendance is deemed to be irregular.

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<sup>1</sup> Education law defines parents as: all natural parents, whether they are married or not; any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person; and any person who has care of a child or young person i.e. lives with and looks after the child. In this policy the term 'parent' includes parents and carers.

<sup>2</sup> A child becomes of 'compulsory school age' on the 1st January, 1st April or 1st September following their 5th birthday and ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June of Year 11.

We will do all we can to encourage our pupils to attend. We will also make the best provision we can for any pupil who needs additional support in school or who is prevented from attending school, due to a medical condition.

We believe that one of the most important factors in promoting good attendance is the development of positive attitudes towards school. To this end, we strive to make our school a happy and rewarding experience for all children, and to foster positive and mutually respectful relationships with parents.

By promoting good attendance and punctuality we aim to:

- Make good attendance and punctuality a priority for all those involved in the school community
- Raise our pupils’ awareness of the importance of good attendance and punctuality
- Provide support, advice and guidelines to parents, pupils and staff
- Work in partnership with parents

### **Effects of non-attendance**

The table below indicates how what might seem like just a few days absence can result in children missing a significant number of lessons.

<b>Attendance during school year</b>	<b>Days lost in a year</b>	<b>Which is approximately</b>	<b>Approximate number of lessons missed</b>
95%	9.5 Days	2 Weeks	50 Lessons
90%	19 Days	4 Weeks	100 Lessons

### **Safeguarding and Attendance**

Our school will monitor trends and patterns of absence for all pupils as a part of our standard procedures. However, we are aware that sudden or gradual changes in a pupil’s attendance may indicate additional or more extreme safeguarding issues. In line with government guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education (2022 version, or as updated by the DfE) we will investigate and report any suspected safeguarding cases on to the relevant authorities. As part of our safeguarding duty and our standard procedures, we will inform the Local Authority and/or the Police of the details of any pupil who is absent from school when the school cannot establish their whereabouts and is concerned for the pupil’s welfare. (Please see our school’s Safeguarding Policy for more information.)

### **Legislation and Guidance**

This policy meets the requirements of the 2018 school attendance guidance, from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE’s 2015 statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance including:

- The Education Act 1996 (as amended)
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended in 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2016)
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended in 2012 and 2013)

The DfE's guidance on the school census explains the persistent absence threshold.

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

### **Contents of Attendance Register**

The law makes it clear that schools must take the attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. On each occasion the school must record whether each pupil is:

- Present
- Absent
- Attending an approved educational activity
- Unable to attend owing to exceptional circumstances

### **Present at School (and Lateness)**

Pupils are marked present if they are in school when the register is taken. If a pupil leaves the school premises after registration, they are still counted as present for statistical purposes.

It is the duty of parents to ensure that children attend school on time. This encourages habits of good timekeeping and lessens any possible classroom disruption.

The Headteacher will meet with parents of those children who are frequently late arriving at school to investigate reasons and suggest solutions to enable more punctual attendance.

Our pupils in Early Years to Year 6 must arrive by 8.45am on each school day.

Our morning register is taken at 8.45am. Children arriving between 8.45am and 9.00am will be marked as late. Children arriving after 9.00am will be marked as unauthorised unless they are late owing to a medical appointment.

Our afternoon register is taken at the start of the afternoon session and will be kept open for five minutes. A pupil who arrives late but before the register has closed will be marked as late (**L**) – which counts as present.

A pupil who arrives late **after** the registers close will be marked as absent. On arrival parents/carers must come into the school to the office and sign their child in giving a reason for lateness. If the pupil is late arriving due to a valid reason such as an unavoidable medical appointment, the absence will be authorised. If the pupil is late for no good reason, they will be marked with the **unauthorised** absence code 'Late after registers close' (**U**).

### **Effects of Late Arrival at School**

When a child arrives late to school, they miss important events such as teacher instructions and introductions. Children often also feel embarrassed at having to enter the classroom late.

The table below indicates how frequent lateness can add up to a considerable amount of learning being lost. This can seriously disadvantage children and disrupt the learning of others.

<b>Minutes late per Day</b>	<b>Equates to Days of Teaching Lost in one Year</b>	<b>Which means this number of lessons missed</b>
5 mins	3 Days	15 Lessons
10 mins	6 Days	30 Lessons
15 mins	9 Days	45 Lessons

### **Authorised Absence**

‘Authorised absence’ means that the school has either given approval in advance for a pupil of compulsory school age to be away from the school or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as justification for absence.

### **Illness**

In most cases, absences for illness which are reported by following the school’s absence reporting procedures will be authorised. That is unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

The school follows the 2018 DfE School Attendance Guidance which states that if the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask the parent to provide medical evidence, such as a prescription, appointment card, or other appropriate form of evidence. (See DfE 2018 School Attendance guidance document - link in the Legislation and Guidance section, or at the end of this policy, or ask the school for a printed copy.)

We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily. In some instances, the school may ask the parent/carer to obtain a letter from a GP, or the school may seek parental permission to contact the pupil’s GP directly.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

Where a pupil has a high level and/or frequency of absence, the school may require medical evidence of some description in order to authorise any future medical absences. If this is the case, the school will make the parent/carer aware of this expectation in advance.

The reporting of absence due to illness remains the responsibility of the parent/carer. Absences due to illness which have **not** been reported to the school by the parent on the first day of absence may not be authorised.

Parents/carers should notify the school of illness absence as early as possible but before 9:00am at the latest and include the specific reason for the absence ('unwell' is not sufficient). This should be by phone, using the automated answerphone service, by email or a personal visit (via an adult).

If a child is absent for more than one day, the parent/carer should contact the school each day to provide an update on the child's condition, unless otherwise agreed by the school.

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Parents/carers who have concerns about their child's mental wellbeing can contact our school's Designated Safeguarding Lead for further information on the support available.

Parents/carers should also contact their GP or the NHS Helpline by phoning telephone number 111 for advice if they are concerned. In case of emergency parents should dial 999.

### **Pupils taken ill during the school day**

If a pupil needs to be sent home due to illness, this should be by agreement with an appropriately authorised member of school staff. In such circumstances, the pupil must be collected from the school office by a parent or another authorised adult and signed out in the 'signing out' book. No pupil will be allowed to leave the school site without parental confirmation.

### **Medical/Dental Appointments**

Parents/carers should try to make appointments outside of school hours wherever possible. Where appointments during school time are unavoidable, the pupil should only be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary for the appointment. It is not acceptable for a child to miss a whole day's schooling for an appointment, unless absolutely necessary, in which case the school will need an explanation as to why this is.

If a pupil must attend a medical appointment during the school day, they must be collected from the school office by the parent/carer or another authorised adult and signed out in the 'signing out' book. No pupil will be allowed to leave the school site without parental confirmation.

Advance notice is required for medical or dental appointments, unless it's an emergency appointment, and must be supported by providing the school with sight of, or a copy of, the appointment card or letter – only then will the absence be authorised.

### **Religious Observance**

On some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside of school holidays or weekends. In accordance with the law, the school will authorise one day's absence for a day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parent/carer belongs. Should any additional days be

taken, these will be recorded in the register as unauthorised absence. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents'/carers' religious body, to confirm whether the day is set apart.

### **Traveller Absence**

The school will authorise the absence of a Traveller pupil of no fixed abode who is unable to attend school because they are travelling with their parent/carer who is engaged in a trade or business of such a nature as to require him to travel from place to place. This is subject to certain limits, depending on the child's age and number of sessions absent. The school will discuss cases individually with Traveller parents/carers as necessary. Parents/carers should let the school know of their plans as far in advance as possible. Authorised Traveller absence will be recorded appropriately in the register.

To help ensure continuity of education for Traveller children, wherever possible, the child should attend school elsewhere when their family is travelling for occupational purposes. In which case the child will be dual registered at that school and this school, which is their 'main' school.

Children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities whose families do not travel for occupational purposes are expected to register at school and attend as normal. They are subject to the same rules as other children in terms of the requirement to attend school regularly.

### **Exclusions**

If the school decides to send a pupil home owing to their behaviour, this will be recorded as an Exclusion. The school will follow the current DfE's statutory guidance on school exclusions.

Any exclusion must be agreed by the Headteacher or teacher in charge in the Headteacher's absence.

The school will notify the parent/carer of the exclusion. If the pupil is a Child in Care, the school will notify the pupil's carer, social worker and the Local Authority's Virtual School. In other instances, where a pupil is open to Children's Social Care for any reason, the school will also inform their allocated social worker.

The pupil must be collected from the school office by the parent/carer or another authorised adult and signed out in the 'signing out' book. No pupil will be allowed to leave the school site without parental confirmation.

### **Absence Reporting**

Parents/carers are not required to contact the school on the day of an absence which the parent/carer has already formally notified the school about. For example, a planned hospital appointment or an exceptional term time leave of absence which has already been agreed by the Headteacher in writing.

In the case of any other absence, such as illness or any other unavoidable emergency, parents/carers should notify the school of the absence as early as possible but before 9:00am at the latest, and include the specific reason for the absence. This should be by phone, using the automated answerphone service, by email or a personal visit (via an adult).

### **First Day of Absence Response**

If no contact has been made with the school on the first day of absence, the school office will make contact using the school emergency contact details for a child. Priority will be given where there is additional support in place, or where children are considered more vulnerable. e.g. Children in Care; children subject to Child Protection Plans; children open to Social Care as a Child in Need; children who have previously been reported missing; pupils who make their own way to school; and children where there are, or have been, concerns regarding attendance.

Parents/carers will be asked to supply details of at least two people and ideally three who can be contacted in an emergency. It is the responsibility of parents/carers to keep these contact details up to date by communicating with the school office. We will send out reminders about this at the start of each new year using data capture forms.

If the school is unable to contact any of the emergency numbers provided, and is concerned for the welfare of the pupil, we may make a home visit and/or request a Welfare Check from the police.

### **Leave of Absence Requests – ‘Exceptional Circumstances’**

**The law does not grant parents the automatic right to take their child out of school during term time.**

Only exceptional circumstances warrant an authorised leave of absence. The school will consider each application individually, considering the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind the request. The request must be made by the parent/carer and permission must be sought in advance. The school will consider the individual facts and circumstances of the case; following consultation with other staff as required. Where a leave of absence is granted, the school will determine the number of days the pupil can be away from school. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the school’s discretion.

Circumstances which could be authorised include significant family emergencies or funerals. However, parents/carers will also be aware that, wherever possible, it can be better for children to continue to attend school normally during difficult family times.

Parents/carers should complete a Leave of Absence Request form which is available on the school website. The request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated; and wherever possible, at least **four weeks** before the absence. **Although such absence may be unauthorised, it is better that we know your child is safe, rather than missing.** Please be aware that you may be required to provide us with additional evidence in order to support your request. If we have any concerns about possible safeguarding risks, such as risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Forced Marriage, we will follow the necessary protocols.

### **Unauthorised Absence**

Unauthorised absence is where a school is not satisfied with the reasons given for the absence.



Absence will be unauthorised if a pupil is absent from school without the permission of the school. Whilst parents can provide explanations for absences, it is the school's decision whether to authorise the absence or not.

Unauthorised absence can include the following:

- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Pupils who arrive at school after the register has closed
- Shopping
- Birthdays
- Waiting at home for something to be fixed, or a parcel to be delivered
- Day trips
- Long weekends and holidays in term time (unless very exceptional circumstances are agreed in writing, and in advance, by the school)
- In the case of term time leave - if a pupil is away from school longer than was agreed, the additional absence is unauthorised

Where the school has cause for concern about the actual reason for absence, we may seek additional information or evidence from parents/carers regarding the absence. The school may request medical evidence to support illness, such as prescriptions, appointment cards, etc, or may make a home visit in order to verify the reason for absence. If the reason cannot be verified and the school suspects the reason given for absence may not be genuine, the school may ask the parent/carer to provide satisfactory proof of the reason before the school authorises the absence. If satisfactory proof is not provided, the school may record the absence as unauthorised.

Unauthorised absences may result in Legal Sanctions, usually Penalty Notices or Prosecutions by the Local Authority.

### **Approved Educational Activity (AEA)**

When pupils are attending educational activities off the school site that have been approved by the school, the register will be marked to show this is the case. (See DfE 2018 School Attendance guidance for more information.)

### **Approved Sporting Activity**

If a pupil is participating in a supervised school sporting activity off the school site, this must be of an educational nature, approved by the school and supervised by someone authorised by the Headteacher.

### **Alternative Education Provider**

If a pupil is attending an alternative education provider such as another school, or Pupil Referral Unit, for part or all of their education, our school will make arrangements for the pupil to be dual registered at the other setting and mark our registers accordingly.

If a pupil is attending an alternative education provider, which is not a school or Pupil Referral Unit, for part or all their education, we will mark the sessions which the pupil attends the alternative setting as code **B** (off-site educational activity). The school expects the alternative provider (AP) to notify us by 9:00am **on the morning** of any absences by individual pupils, to ensure we become aware of any attendance concerns as soon as possible and take follow up action as necessary.

Attendance updates will be provided on a daily basis, or more frequently if agreed with the alternative setting.

Any attendance concerns will be followed up by us, in conjunction with the AP.

### **Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances (as set out in the law and DfE guidance)**

In accordance with DfE school attendance guidance, our school will record pupils as code **Y** 'Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances' in the following circumstances (such circumstances are not recorded as absences):

- Our school site, or part of it, is closed due to an unavoidable cause, such as inclement weather or a gas leak.
- The transport provided by our school or the Local Authority is not available, and the pupil's home is not within statutory walking distance.
- A local or national emergency has resulted in widespread disruption to travel which has prevented the pupil from attending school.

### **Support for Poor School Attendance (other than unauthorised term time leave)**

Sometimes pupils can be reluctant to attend school. We encourage parents and pupils to be open and honest with us about the reason for the pupil's absence. If a child is reluctant to attend, it is never better to cover up their absence or for a parent to give in to pressure to let the child stay at home. This can give the impression to the child that attendance does not matter and can make things worse. As a school, we need to understand the reasons why a pupil is reluctant to attend in order to be able to support pupils and parents in the best way.

When we have concerns about the attendance of a pupil, we will do our best to make the parent/carer aware of the concerns about their child's attendance and give them the opportunity to address this. However, if parents/carers do not make use of the support offered and improve their child's attendance to an acceptable level, this may result in legal sanctions from the Local Authority. Where there are no genuine reasons for the absences, parents/carers may be asked to meet with the Headteacher to discuss the matter. In some cases, this may result in a formal action plan being produced in the form of an Attendance Contract.

If our school refers a case of poor school attendance to the Local Authority for legal sanctions, we will show that we have warned the parent/carer that they are at risk of receiving a Penalty Notice or other legal sanction.

We will not usually request legal sanctions from the Local Authority in cases where poor attendance is symptomatic of complex family circumstances. In such circumstances our school will take a holistic

approach to the issue and involve other agencies as necessary. The exception to this will be where parents/carers fail to accept or engage with support offered by the school and/or other agencies or fail to implement the suggested changes. Again, when referring for legal sanctions in such cases, we will show that we have warned the parent/carer that they are at risk of receiving a Penalty Notice or other legal sanction.

If our school has safeguarding concerns about a pupil who is absent, we will share information with other agencies as we deem necessary. This can be done without the consent or knowledge of the parent/carer

### **Pupils on Part-time Timetables**

Pupils are entitled to a full-time education, suitable to their age, ability and aptitude, and any special educational needs or disabilities that they may have.

If, for any reason, our school is unable to provide a pupil with a full-time education due to the pupil's needs, we will work with the pupil, parent/carer and other agencies where appropriate, to come to a mutually convenient arrangement. Any part-time timetables will be for the shortest amount of time possible, whilst arrangements are made to support the pupil's return to a full-time timetable.

### **Penalty Notices and Prosecutions**

Parents/carers have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child attends school on a regular basis. This applies to both resident and non-resident parents who may both be subject to legal sanctions if their child fails to attend school regularly. It also applies to others who may not be the parent but may have day to day care of the child. As mentioned earlier, 'regularly' means "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school", therefore if an absence is not authorised by the school, the pupil's attendance is deemed to be irregular.

Under section 444 of the Education Act 1996, if a child of compulsory school age, who is a registered pupil at a school, fails to attend regularly at the school, his/her parent(s) are guilty of an offence. Parents/carers with more than one school aged child need to be aware that each child's irregular attendance is dealt with as a separate matter.

Unauthorised absence from school can result in several different outcomes for parents/carers and children. Each case is considered individually.

The school will refer cases of irregular attendance (unauthorised absence) that meet the threshold for a Penalty Notice to the Local Authority for legal action, unless there are reasonable grounds for not doing so. The outcome of a referral to the Local Authority may be a Penalty Notice or Prosecution.

Penalty Notices are intended as a sanction for low level offences and a tool to support improved school attendance. They are an alternative to prosecution and may not be issued if prosecution is considered a more appropriate response to a pupil's irregular attendance.

A pupil's irregular attendance at school could result in one of the following:

1. A Penalty Notice. The penalty is £60 payable within 21 days, rising to £120 if paid between 22 and 28 days. (Failure to pay will result in prosecution.)
2. Prosecution.

Prosecution could lead to fines up to £2500 and /or 3 months imprisonment. See DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures for more information and the Local Authority's Penalty Notice Code of Conduct, which is available from Buckinghamshire County Council.

Penalty Notices and prosecution proceedings are issued to each parent/carer with responsibility for the child and are issued for each child with irregular attendance. For example, in the case of Penalty Notices, if two siblings had irregular school attendance, and there were two parents with responsibility for the children, four Penalty Notices would be issued. Penalty Notices cannot be paid in instalments.

### **Children Missing Education (CME)**

Our school will add and delete pupils from roll in line with the law. The school will seek advice from the Local Authority as necessary and make CME referrals as appropriate, in accordance with the Local Authority's CME processes and the DfE's Children Missing Education guidance.

### **Following up Unexplained Absences**

Where no contact has been made with the school, the school will contact parents/carers by email, telephone or letter to try and establish the reason for a child's absence. When we establish the reason for the absence, we will mark it as authorised or unauthorised depending on the reason for the absence. If we are unable to establish the reason for absence within 3 school days, we will mark the absence as unauthorised using the O code. If we are concerned about a pupil's absence and are unable to contact the parent/carer, we may contact the pupil's emergency contacts and/or other professionals or contacts of the family who we reasonably expect may be able to advise us of the pupil's whereabouts. A home visit may also happen or a request for a welfare check from the police.

### **Reporting to Parents/carers**

Attendance is reported annually to parents/carers in their child's end of year school report. Parents/carers will be informed via a letter when their child's attendance is causing a concern.

### **Recording Information on Attendance and Reasons for Absence**

Reasons for absence are recorded on our IT system, SIMS, under a child's individual record and may include who reported the absence and the reason for the absence.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **Parents**

- The parent/carer is responsible for ensuring that his/her child attends school regularly and punctually in accordance with their legal obligations.

- Parents/carers must contact the school and report absence on the first day and continue to do so in line with this policy.

## **School**

Attendance trends and patterns are regularly monitored so that appropriate actions can be taken e.g.

- Follow-up actions/plans for pupils with low attendance/where there is a cause for concern
- Timely liaison with home
- Referral to outside agencies

## **The Governing Board**

The governing board is responsible for monitoring attendance figures for the whole school on at least a termly basis (3 times a year). Attendance figures are also shared during the relevant committee meetings. The governing body also holds the Headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy.

## **The Headteacher**

The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented consistently across the school, and for monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to governors. The Headteacher also supports other staff in monitoring the attendance of individual pupils, particularly where attendance is a concern and for vulnerable groups of pupils. The Headteacher requests legal action from the Local Authority, such as Penalty Notices, where necessary.

## **Any Senior Leaders (e.g. Deputy Head or Member of the Senior Leadership Team)**

Senior leaders also support the Headteacher in monitoring the attendance of individual pupils, particularly where attendance is a concern and for vulnerable groups of pupils.

## **Class Teachers**

Class teachers are responsible for recording attendance twice daily and submitting this information to the school office. Class teachers are responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented. This may include discussing any concerns about a pupil's punctuality and attendance with the parent/carers in the first instance, and if necessary, the Senior Leadership Team.

## **Office Staff**

School office staff are expected to take calls from parents about absence and record these on the school system and report to other school personnel as appropriate. Office staff are also responsible for recording attendance twice daily, using the correct codes, on the school's IT system, SIMS.

### **Policy Monitoring Arrangements**

This policy will be reviewed three yearly by the appropriate governor committee, or more frequently if there are changes to legislation and guidance. At every review, the policy will be shared with the full governing body.