



# St. Leonard's Primary School

## Attendance Policy

This document

- describes the key features of student attendance across Staffordshire schools
- describes actions taken by schools, Staffordshire Education Welfare Service, Behaviour and Attendance Consultants and other LA support services to encourage and maintain high levels of attendance in Staffordshire.
- set out L.A. priorities for action related to school attendance

### Legislation and guidance is taken from

- The Education Act 1996
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 and amendments
- The Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999
- The Education Act 2002
- The Changing of School Session Times (England) (Revocation) Regulations 2011
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003
- The Education Act 2005
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Parenting Contracts and Parenting Orders) (England) Regulations 2007
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 and amendments
- The Education and Skills Act 2008
- School attendance: Statutory guidance 2013
- Staffordshire County Council guidance 2017

### Introduction

Promoting positive behaviour and excellent attendance is the responsibility of the whole school community. Regular school attendance is the key to enabling children and young people to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who are able to realise their full potential and make a positive contribution to their community. All children should be at school, on time, every day the school is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

Good attendance is important because:

- Statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and poor attendance.
- Regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically.
- Regular attenders find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with.
- Regular attenders find learning more satisfying.
- Regular attenders settle into Secondary school more easily.

## **Supporting and encouraging your child's school attendance**

All children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems that arise with attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend, it is never better to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and may make things worse. Permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent. Parents whose children are experiencing difficulties should contact the school at an early stage and work together with the staff in resolving any problems. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be sorted out in this way, the school or the parent may refer the child to the Education Welfare Worker from the County Council. Alternatively, parents or children may wish to contact the Education Welfare Worker themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is available from the school office or by contacting the Local Education Authority.

### **School Registers**

School registers are a legal document and we are required to take an attendance register twice a day, and this shows whether the pupil is present, engaged in an approved educational activity off-site, or absent. The register is taken at 9:00 and closed by 9:15. Any child arriving after this time without a valid explanation such as a Doctor's appointment will be marked as Unauthorised and this will count towards their attendance. Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school, as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. Only school can authorise the absence, not parents. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required, preferably in writing.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness or other unavoidable cause.

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

- holidays in term time / cheap flights
- parents keeping children off school unnecessarily
- truancy before or during the school day
- absences which have never been properly explained
- children who arrive at school too late to get a mark
- waiting for a delivery
- going for a family day out
- going shopping or for a hair cut
- because it is your child's birthday
- parent's illness

### **Procedures**

The school applies the following procedures in deciding how to deal with individual absences:

If a child is ill or has an appointment then it is the responsibility of the child's parent to inform the school. This can be done through the main telephone number (01785 334960) or by emailing [absence@st-leonards-stafford.staffs.sch.uk](mailto:absence@st-leonards-stafford.staffs.sch.uk)

If the school has received no notification of why a child is absent by the time the register is closed at 9:30 am then the school will contact the parent / guardian by text to ensure that the child is safe and at home for a legitimate reason. If there is no response within 15 minutes then a phone call will be made directly to the parent / guardian and if there is still no response then the school safeguarding lead will be informed who may contact First Response or make a home Safe and Well visit. It is important that parents inform school on a daily basis if their child is going to be absent unless during the first call they are able to specify a longer period. An example of this would be if a child had chicken pox or had been admitted to hospital. If there is no contact from a child's parent then they will be marked as an Unauthorised absence.

It is the parent's duty to inform school of any change of contact details.

On returning to school there is no need for the child to provide a note as the school has already been informed of the absence.

### **Safeguarding**

Our attendance policy includes procedural referral agreements that are designed to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils.

Schools have a duty in law to refer any absence of 10 days or more where they have been unable to make contact with the parent/child or have general concerns about the absence to the Local Authority Safeguarding team / Education Welfare Worker. However school will contact the Local Support Team (A Local Support Team is a team of experienced children's service professionals from a variety of services who work with children, young people and families living within a particular geographical area. Members of the team include professionals such as Education Welfare Officers and Parent Support Workers) and follow safeguarding procedures where an absence creates a particular cause for concern. Our first day contact procedures ensure that by contacting parents to establish the reason for your child's absence, parents are made aware that the child is absent from school. Therefore this enables the parent where necessary to establish their child is safe. This is why our system of requesting parents contact our school on each day of absence, prior to 9.00am is of the paramount importance.

### **Persistent Absence and Termly monitoring**

A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' when they miss 10% or more of their schooling across the school year for whatever reason. This is defined by the Department for Education. Where there is persistent absence which is defined as children who have an attendance record of less than 90% a referral to the Local Support Team may be made. Where a child's attendance due to medical reasons does fall below 90%, then medical evidence may be requested by the school. Each term all parents of children whose attendance falls below 90% receive a letter detailing their child's attendance record for the proceeding period and warning them of further action which may well be taken by the Local Authority (LA). Children who are persistently late after the registers have

closed may also be referred to the EWW / Local Support Team when they have ten sessions of late arrivals within a 12 week period.

### **Exceptional Leave - Leave of absence during term time**

#### **Requesting a holiday or leave of absence during term time**

The school follows the Government and LA policy with regards to holiday requests and leave of absence. All parents must complete a leave of absence request form at least two weeks before the first date of leave. We will then send out a letter authorising, or not, the absence request.

Amendments to the 2006 regulations remove references to family holiday and extended leave as well as the statutory threshold of ten school days. The amendments make clear that Headteacher's may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Headteacher's should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted. At St. Leonard's this would be decided on a case by case basis.

In brief this means that:

- parents **CANNOT** demand a leave of absence as an automatic right.
- holidays in term time will not be authorised
- parental requests **MUST** be in writing using the holiday request form and should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the event
- schools **CANNOT** apply blanket policies to approve/reject all applications.
- all requests **MUST** be considered on their own merits
- extended periods of absence will be granted **ONLY** in exceptional circumstances
- the power to authorise/unauthorise a leave of absence belongs to the Headteacher.

If term time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised and you may be liable for a penalty notice fine (issued by the Local Authority). If you choose not to pay the fine you may face prosecution if the absence meets the criteria set out in the Local Authorities Code of Conduct.

You have the right to make representations to the Chair of Governors if you feel the Headteacher's decision is unjust, however the final decision lies with the Headteacher and the Local Authority

### **Medical and dental appointments**

We ask that all non-emergency medical and dental appointments are arranged out of school hours or during school holidays. Where this is not possible, we may ask for proof of the appointment card/ letter. Leave may be granted in an emergency (e.g. bereavement) or for medical appointments which must be in school time.

### **Information about individual school targets, projects and special initiatives**

The school has adopted the following attendance targets:

The school has set a target of 96% attendance. School administrative staff contact parents by text after registers close at 9:30am on any day a registered pupil of compulsory school age is absent without explanation. If we do not receive a reply we

phone the parents to explain the absence. By contacting the parent the school also ensure that the parent is aware their child is not in school enabling the parent where necessary to establish their child is safe. If there is still no explanation then the office staff refer this to the school safeguarding lead who may contact First Response or make a Safe and Well home visit.

We issue half termly attendance certificates for each child who has 100% attendance. This resets each half term. We also issue a whole class attendance award each half term for the class with the highest attendance.

### **Penalty Notices**

Penalty Notices are fines, only issued by the Locality Support Team, on behalf of the Local Authority, for a child's unauthorised absence from school. They are not issued by the school.

Penalty Notices can be issued to each parent liable for the attendance offence. (£60 per parent, per child).

The penalty is £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt, rising to £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days. The payment must be paid direct to the local authority.

There is no right of appeal by parents against a penalty notice. If the penalty notice is not paid in full by the end of the 28 day period, the local authority will prosecute for the original offence, unless there are grounds to withdraw the notice.

### **Changes to penalty notices for absences from school January 2018**

Following the Supreme Court ruling on attendance in June all schools have now been issued with new attendance guidance which will come into place from January 2018. As a result of this ruling the school Governors have amended the school attendance policy to ensure that it meets the new guidelines that have been issued.

### **Penalty Notices for Persistent Absence**

St. Leonard's follows the Staffordshire Local Authority code of conduct for the procedures of Penalty Notices. Details of this can be obtained from:

<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/welfareservice/Attendance/home.aspx>

The Local Authority will continue to monitor all school attendance and take appropriate action for absences during term time, both to support Headteacher's in their role and in challenging the small minority of parents that choose to disregard the law.

### **Penalty Notice for leave of absence (holiday) in term time**

From 1 January 2018 any period of unauthorised leave may result in you as a parent receiving a penalty notice fine. The Headteacher will continue to be the only person able to authorise leave in term time, but this will apply only in exceptional circumstances. Any unauthorised absence will be referred by your Headteacher to the local authority.

### **Penalty Notice for persistent lateness**

Previously a pupil had to achieve 20 unauthorised late marks before a penalty notice warning could be issued. This has now changed to 10 marks, and late marks do not have

to be one after the other in order for the penalty notice to be issued. You are therefore encouraged where possible to ensure your child attends school on time. However, if your child is late you must inform the school of the reason(s) why, as they may be able to offer you some form of advice or support.

Period of time used to measure persistent absence and lateness

If your child has had 10 days unauthorised absence or is late 10 times over a twelve week period, you may receive a penalty warning notice and also potentially a fine.

### **Leavers**

If your child is leaving our school (other than at the end of Year 6 to go to High School) parents are asked to:

- Give the school comprehensive information about their plans including any date of a move and your new address and telephone numbers, your child's new school and the start date when known. This should be submitted to our school in writing.

When pupils leave and we do not have information, about where they have gone, then your child is considered to be a 'Child Missing Education'. This means that the Local Authority has a legal duty to carry out investigations, which will include liaising with Children's Services (formerly Social Services), the Police and other agencies, to try and locate your child.

By giving us the above information, these investigations can be avoided

**Those people responsible for attendance matters in this school are:**

Ms Marston is responsible for First Day Contact information.

Mrs Spearing is responsible for promoting positive behaviour and excellent attendance

### **Monitoring of attendance data**

We conduct a full attendance review of our school at least every half term of all pupils.

We analyse class attendance, whole school attendance, annual / termly attendance, vulnerable groups and we conduct a code analysis for comparative purposes of specific coded absences.

Persistent Absence pupils are tracked and procedures are in place to ensure we are aware of the circumstances of the pupil's poor attendance and that support processes are in place to tackle the issues.

Our attendance figures are published publicly and our Ofsted report is also available for parents to view.

### **Summary**

The school has a legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents and to promote attendance. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend. School staff are committed to working with parents supportively to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible.



## Guidance Notes for Parents requesting Leave in Term Time

1. Parents who want the school to consider granting leave of absence in school term time should read these notes carefully, **complete the attached form and send it to the head teacher**. This form should be sent to the school in time for the request to be considered **well before** the desired period of absence. Parents are strongly advised not to finalise any booking arrangements before receiving the school's decision regarding their request. Head teachers cannot authorise any leave of absence unless the request is received before the period of absence begins.
2. The Department for Education makes it clear that head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are **exceptional circumstances**. Head teachers now also determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted.
3. There is no automatic right to any leave in term time.
4. Staffordshire County Council understands the challenges that some parents face when booking holidays particularly during school holidays. However, we believe that, in order to ensure children receive the best education and prospects, that they should be in school during term time.
5. Each case will be considered individually and on its own merits. Parents need, therefore, to consider very carefully before making any request for leave of absence. In considering a request, the school will take account of: -
  - the **exceptional** circumstances stated that have given rise to the request
  - the stage of the child's education and progress and the effects of the requested absence on both elements
  - frequency of similar requests
  - whether the parent made the request in advance
  - students/pupils on examination courses or due to take SATS will **not** normally be granted leave of absence.
6. Where parents have children in more than one school a separate request must be made to each school. The head teacher of each school will make their own decision based on the factors relating to the child at their school. However head teachers may choose to liaise with each other as part of their decision-making process.
7. Should the school decide to grant leave of absence, but the child **does not return to school at the time s/he was expected to** (i.e. following the expiry of the granted leave of absence period) and no information is available to the school to explain/justify the continuing absence this absence will be recorded as unauthorised.
8. Should the school decide **not to grant leave of absence** and parents still take their child out of school, the absence will be recorded as **unauthorised**, which may be subject to a Penalty Notice fine of £60 **per parent\* per child**. This fine will increase to £120 if not paid within 21 days. Failure to pay the £120 fine within the period 22 to 28 days may lead to Court proceedings.
9. The Local Authority will continue to monitor all school absences during term time and support head teachers in challenging parents who ignore the law.

\* Generally the DfE states that parents include all those with day to day responsibility for a child.



**Request for leave during term time**

To: The Headteacher of:..... (School) Date.....

I request a leave of absence from school during term time for:

my child (full name) .....Class .....

for the period from (date) ..... to (date).....

The **exceptional** circumstances and reason for this request are: -

.....  
.....

I have (an)other child(ren) in (an)other school(s) as follows

Child(ren) (full name(s) ) .....

School(s) attended .....

(Signature of 1<sup>st</sup> parent/carer(s) ..... Print Name.....

(Signature of 2<sup>nd</sup> parent/carer(s) ..... Print Name.....

**Please return completed form to the school office. The school will write to you and inform you of the decision on whether the request is authorised or not.**

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**For Office Use Only**

Current Attendance.....%

Number of school sessions taken as leave during term time ..... (this academic year)

**Agreed/Not Agreed**

Request for leave is agreed/is not agreed for the above student to take leave during term time between the above dates.

Rationale to decline request : .....

Signed .....Headteacher Date .....

Notification of decision:

Date letter sent to parent/carer.....