Working together to Improve Attendance Policy

(September 2024)

Create Learning Trust



(written in line with the DFE's ***Working Together to Improve Attendance*** 19 August 2024)

Create Learning Trust recognises that the majority of children have 'good' attendance (96% or higher). School staff, leaders, governors and trustees along with our families work together to ensure that their children are happy to come into school.

School non-attendance or lower than expected attendance can impact negatively on children's social and emotional development. There is a direct link between school non-attendance and lower than expected attainment. If a child isn't in school, then they cannot learn with their peers.

Create Learning Trust's schools aim to work closely with families where their child or children have low attendance or are a persistent absentee (90% or lower attendance)

Senior Leader for the strategic approach to improving attendance;

Mrs Debbie Bertram (Head Teacher)

- Member of staff with delegated responsibility for supporting families to improve attendance; **Mrs Margi Ireland (Family Support Worker)**
- Governor who oversees attendance strategy and policy; **Mrs Emma Zouhbi**
- Members of staff who receive absence calls and chases up any unknown absence; **Mrs Sawicki and Mrs Louise Foy**

The law on school attendance and right to a full-time education (***Working Together to Improve Attendance*** August 2024 Department for Education)

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have**. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school** or by education otherwise than at a school.

Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

For the purposes of Education Law, the definition of a 'parent' and who is responsible for ensuring regular attendance to school is:

- all biological parents, whether they are married or not
- any person who, although not a biological parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person - this could be an adoptive parent, a step-parent, guardian or other relative
- any person who, although not a biological parent and does not have parental responsibility, has care of a child or young person. This could be one parent, both parents and/or carer/s.

How will we support good attendance at Sandiway?

At Sandiway we will aim to treat any root causes of absence and remove barriers to attendance, at home or in school. Our core values of Respect, Ownership, Care and Kindness will ensure we work closely with families to support them when necessary.

At Sandiway school staff will:

MONITOR Rigorously use our school's attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched. *Mrs Ireland will access the school's attendance data on a monthly basis to identify any patterns of low attendance and contact families if necessary.*

EXPECT Aspire to high standards of attendance from all children and parents and work within our positive culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn.

LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND When a pattern is spotted, discuss with children and parents to listen to understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.

FACILITATE SUPPORT Remove barriers in school and help children and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school *(this may include a support and attendance plan)*

FORMALISE SUPPORT Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through a parenting contract or education supervision order.

ENFORCE Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education (see Appendix 1)

Example of the number of days absence and its impact over time

Attendance % over a school year	Equal to number of days absent	Converted to approximate weeks of absence	Weeks of learning lost over 7 years of primary school
95%	9.5	2 weeks	14 weeks
90%	19	4 weeks	28 weeks
80%	38	8 weeks	1 year and 1 month
70%	57	12 weeks	1 year and 8 months

Informing School about an unexpected absence

- At Sandiway, the start of the school day begins with the **doors opening to children at 8.45am**; the **register is taken at 8.55am;** the **register closes at 9.25am**
- Please **ring school as early as possible** (01606 883298) and leave a message on the absence line; **Name of the child, class they are in and reason for absence**
- If the child remains absent on day 3, then a member of the admin team will call a parent or carer to receive an update as to when it is hoped the child can return to school
- If the child remains absent on day 5 following an unexpected absence, then a member of the admin team will make a further welfare call and raise this absence with our family support worker (Margi Ireland)
- Our family support worker will contact the child's family to offer any support (if needed) – a letter may be sent to families to outline support offered to parents

Medical Absence

Only where the school has a **genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity** of the illness should medical evidence be requested to support the absence. In instances of **long-term or repeated absences for the same reason**, seeking medical evidence may be appropriate to assist in assessing whether the child requires additional support to help them to attend more regularly, and whether the illness is likely to prevent the child from attending for extended periods. If a parent proactively seeks out a note from a GP, it does not imply a need for absence unless this is explicit in their letter.

If a medical absence is likely to be ongoing or long term, then we will offer support in accordance with the school's policies and statutory guidance relating to Children with health needs.

Schools must provide information to the Council about children who are not attending school for reasons of illness, health or otherwise, which is expected to last for 15 school days or more. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3.

For children who have a medical condition and cannot attend school, the school will refer to the Cheshire West and Chester Council's Medical Needs Team.
https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/documents/education-and-learning/medical-needs-service/medical-needs-policy-latest.pdf
Their policy states that referrals must come directly from the child's school and must be supported by medical evidence from one of the following health professionals:

- consultant paediatrician or adolescent psychiatrist
- consultant child psychiatrist

- hospital consultant

Supporting evidence from a General Practitioner alone cannot be accepted.

What happens if a child is late?

Arriving at school late can be quite distressing for a child especially as they have to walk into a full classroom having missed the start of teaching. We would like to stress the importance of **arriving in school ON TIME**. At Sandiway, the start of the school day begins with the **doors opening to children at 8.45am**; the **register is taken at 8.55am;** the **register closes at 9.25am**. By which time the child has a 'U' code (**unauthorised absence**).

- Arriving at school after 8.55am is considered 'Late'
- This will be recorded as 'L' on the child's register
- The child with their parent will need to come to the main entrance to gain access to the school
- The parent will need to record the reason for lateness in the electronic 'signing in' system
- The school's admin staff will inform our Family Support Worker of regular 'lateness'

What happens if school is not informed of a child's absence

- A member of the admin team will contact each of the child's emergency contact numbers to determine why the child isn't in school. This will take place by 9.30am
- If we cannot make any contact with a parent/carer, then a member of the admin team will email the parent/carer asking them to contact school immediately
- if there is no reason for absence it would be marked as an unauthorised absence. A home visit will be undertaken by staff after 2 days of no contact

Unauthorised Absence and Fixed Penalty Notice

An absence may be coded as 'unauthorised' if:

i. no reason for absence has been given
ii. medical evidence is not received when requested
iii. a request for a leave of absence has been unauthorised
iv. a pupil arrives at school after registration has closed

Parents/carers should be aware that Sandiway Primary School may contact the Local Authority if a pupil has **10 or more unauthorised absences in any 10 week period** with a view to issuing a Fixed Penalty Notice or other legal action. The Fixed Penalty Notice is issued individually to each parent/carer who fails to ensure their child's regular attendance at school. The Penalty is £80 per parent/carer per child if paid within 21 days rising to £160 if paid within 28 days. Non-payment of the Fixed Penalty Notice may result in prosecution in the Magistrates court *(see appendix 1).*

Family Holidays in Term Time

- Create Learning Trust asks all parents to speak with the Head Teacher BEFORE booking a holiday in term time. A senior leader can then inform parents about the risks linked to taking a

holiday in term time and how this will affect their child's attendance and subsequent learning time lost

- A family holiday is not considered an exceptional circumstance for absence. It will be marked as an 'unauthorised' absence and a holiday fine may be issued

***For any planned absence (including a family holiday), please call the admin team to arrange a meeting with Mrs Ireland or Mrs Bertram**

Religious Observance

We recognise that some pupils may need to participate in days of religious observance.
Where a day of religious observance.

- falls during school time and
- has been exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil belongs

We ask that parents/carers notify Sandiway Primary School in writing in advance where absence is required due to a religious observance.

Appendix 1

Cheshire West & Chester

Code of Conduct for Education Fixed Penalty Notice (Unauthorised Leave of Absence & Irregular Attendance)

1. A Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) can only be issued in cases of unauthorised absence.

2. The first penalty notice issued to the parent for that pupil will be charged at £160 if paid within 28 days reducing to £80 if paid within 21 days.

3. Where it is deemed appropriate to issue a second penalty notice to the same parent for the same pupil within 3 years of the first notice, the second notice is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.

4. A third penalty notice must not be issued within a 3 year period. Therefore, in cases where the threshold is met for a third (or subsequent) times within those 3 years, a penalty notice cannot be issued and alternative action should be taken instead. This will often include considering prosecution, but may include other tools such as one of the other attendance legal interventions.

5. A FPN may be issued per parent per child.

6. Penalty Notices may be considered appropriate if:

- Unauthorised absences of at least 10 consecutive school sessions (five school days).
- Sessions either side of a weekend or school holiday will be counted as consecutive school days.
- For poorly attending learners, at least 10 sessions (five school days) lost due to unauthorised absence in line with the new national rolling threshold of 10 sessions in 10 weeks. These do not need to be consecutive.
- For poorly attending learners, persistent late arrival at school where there are at least 10 sessions in 10 weeks.
- The presence of an excluded child in a public place in the child's first five days of exclusion *(N.B. points 2 to 4 do not apply where a FPN is issued for an excluded pupil in a public place.)*

7. The school must notify parents of the Attendance Policy and clearly state that parents may receive an FPN for an unauthorised leave of absence relating to holiday in term time.

8. Schools and the Education Welfare Services will take into account any exceptional circumstances when determining whether to issue a FPN.