

Heathfield Schools' Partnership Attendance Policy



This policy is to be read in line with the latest government guidance on school attendance ('Working together to improve school attendance', 6.5.22, updated 19.8.24). All processes in relation to attendance at HSP are carried out in line with government guidance.

Rationale

Good school attendance is related to positive outcomes, improved well-being and success in later life. This policy outlines the systems, attitudes and responsibilities which promote regular attendance amongst all groups of children at Heathfield.

Parents and carers have responsibility for ensuring their child attends school regularly and on time, unless there are significant reasons for them not to attend. Some parents and carers require additional support from school and other agencies in order to achieve good attendance for their child. We are committed to building partnerships with families and removing barriers. This is a key priority in securing good or better attendance for all children.

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames sets a target of 96% for all schools. Our aim is to meet or better this target for all groups within school.

Daily procedures:

- Electronic registers are marked by 9:10 (staff member to send the register electronically by 9:10, or as soon as all children are accounted for)
- An evacuation list is printed out by 9:30 in both schools for use in the event of fire or other emergency
- Office staff check answer phone and email messages
- Office staff check all absences and start calling and texting parents/carers after 9:10
- Office staff insert appropriate code once contact has been made with parent/carers
- A list of all absences is sent to Senior Strategy Team (SST), DSL and Club Manager by 10:00
- Electronic registers are submitted again after lunch (Early Years 12:30; KS1 1:00; KS2 1:35)
- At 3:00 a message is sent to SST and DSL with the names of children not accounted for (still 'N').

Lateness:

The school operates a 'soft start' in all year groups from Reception to Year 6. Children are encouraged to arrive in school on time in order to start the day with their peers. Important learning and interactions take place from the very start of the school day. Children arriving in school after 9:00 are signed into the office and marked as L in the register. In the Junior School, these children are given a card to show their teacher that they have been signed in; in the Infant School these children are escorted to class. Persistent lateness is monitored by members of SST, alongside absences.

Reporting absences:

Parents are asked to contact the School Office before 9:00am on every day of their child's absence via phone or email. In every case a reason must be given for the absence.

Where no reason is given, or no contact can be made the absence will be recorded as unauthorised (N) and the attendance officers will continue to attempt to make contact by phone, text message, WhatsApp or email. Each attempt will be recorded on a joint spreadsheet and the absence code will be changed from 'N' when a reason has been given. If no contact has been made by the end of the day, SST and/or DSL will undertake a risk assessment to determine next steps. This may include a phone call to SPA or to a Social Worker where there is particular concern.

Each day, attendance checks will start with Year 6 children (who may walk to school alone), followed by children not accounted for on the previous day (still 'N's). Each day that a child is absent, a risk assessment will be carried out to determine the next course of action. If no contact is made within 4 days, on the 5th day a CME referral will be made by the DSL.

Medical appointments:

Parents are urged to make all medical appointments, including GP or dental appointments outside of school hours. Where this is not possible, we ask that they inform the school via phone or email as soon as they can. On the day of their appointment, children are expected to attend school, leaving only for the time of the appointment, and returning afterwards.

In cases where a child has persistent absence due to illness or medical needs, evidence for all appointments must be provided. If an absence lasts for 5 days or longer, the school may seek medical evidence, such as a copy of a prescription or an appointment card, in order for the absence to remain authorised.

Holidays during term time

In accordance with local and national policies, we do not authorise absences for holidays taken in term time. Requests for leave during term time (for holidays or exceptional circumstances) should be made to the Headteacher in advance of the holiday taking place but will not be authorised. A holiday, or leave of absence for the purpose of recreation, is not considered to be an exceptional circumstance (see below). If children do not return from a planned holiday on the stated date, the absence will continue to be unauthorised and a Child Missing Education (CME) safeguarding referral will be made to the Single Point of Access. .

The school reserves the right to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice to the parents of children who take unauthorised holidays during term time.

Exceptional leave

Very occasionally, parents may need to request a leave of absence for their child for exceptional circumstances. In this instance, parents must complete an 'Absence Request Form' at least a week before the date required. These are available from the school office where they should also be returned. In the case of leave requested for an unexpected medical emergency (e.g. illness of a family member), the school may request proof of booking. Any leave during term time is only authorised at the Headteacher's discretion, taking into account the circumstances and context of the request.

Persistent absence (PA)

Persistent absenteeism refers to a child who is absent for more than 10% of the available school days within a year. Where a child is identified as being persistently absent from school our first step is to make contact with the family. We work hard to build positive relationships with families, to identify the barriers to school attendance and support the family eliminate these.

An attendance officer or member of SST will call the parents in the event of any persistent absence and the following procedure is followed:

1. Attendance monitoring letter sent home and phone call made.
2. Medical letter sent home: all absence unauthorised without medical evidence.
3. Formal attendance meeting and contract completed followed by a 3 week monitoring period.
4. Referral to EWS, after 3 attendance monitoring periods.

Responsibilities:

Class teachers:

- mark electronic registers twice daily within 15 minutes of the morning or afternoon session starting, in accordance with the above procedures
- direct parents/carers to bring any absence messages directly the school offices
- alert SST to any concerns regarding attendance
- engage enthusiastically with any incentives aimed at improving class/group attendance
- discuss absences directly with parents/carers especially when there is a concern

Admin/office staff ('Attendance Officers'):

- check all electronic registers at the start of the day and insert absence codes as necessary
- make phone calls to parents and carers on the first and any subsequent days of absence
- liaise with SST/DSL regarding any concerning absences
- submit attendance data to the Local Authority, in accordance with statutory guidelines
- keep an up to date list of children for whom attendance is a concern (including all Persistent Absentees)
- prioritise calls to vulnerable children or those where there are safeguarding concerns; continue calling until contact has been made, updating shared spreadsheet with each attempt made
- provide data to Senior Strategy Team and governors as required regarding Persistent Absentees and attendance of groups
- attend a monthly meeting with the Heads of School to discuss procedures, PAs and trends; following this meeting, send letters (1, 2 or 3) to parents/carers as agreed, and record that these have been sent
- work closely with the Safeguarding Team

Our Attendance Officers are: *Tracey King Martin and Louise Dawson*

Senior Strategy Team:

- support the school offices with first day calling, when needed
- arrange home visits where necessary, in conjunction with the DSL
- liaise regularly with the Attendance Officers to monitor the attendance of individuals
- report to governors on attendance data and strategies used to improve attendance

- prioritise attendance within the School Action Plan if it falls below national expectations
- meet with parents/carers where attendance continues to be a concern
- introduce attendance incentives and support class teachers with promoting these
- attend a monthly meeting with the Attendance Officers to discuss procedures, PAs and trends
- meet half termly with the Educational Welfare Officer (more frequently if necessary)
- attend legal attendance meetings where appropriate

Educational Welfare Officer:

- meet half termly with the Heads of School to monitor PAs
- take action (including following legal processes) as necessary
- meet with parents where attendance continues to be a concern, following school involvement

Specific groups of children:

We recognise the possible links between attendance and safeguarding issues and make all staff aware that absence from school can indicate an underlying safeguarding concern. The attendance of Children Looked After and children on Child Protection or Child in Need plans is of high importance. We also recognise that PPG children and children with Special Educational Needs can have poorer attendance than their peers and that this doubly disadvantages them within school. In response to this, our Safeguarding Team, Inclusion Managers and PPG Champion monitor the attendance of these specific groups and act swiftly to address any emerging concerns.

Staff attendance:

As members of staff, we are role models for the children at Heathfield and make staff attendance a priority. We are committed to good staff attendance, avoiding unnecessary absences as this can have an unsettling impact on the children and cause disruption to the smooth running of the school. Please see Staff Handbook for procedures around staff absence reporting.

Please also see Safeguarding Policy for further information including Children Missing in Education) and Working together to Improve School Attendance (August 2024)