

# Ravensfield Primary School

## Attendance and Punctuality Policy



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by: Full Governing Body

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## ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY POLICY STATEMENT

### Overview

At Ravensfield, we believe that a high level of attendance is essential if children are to progress at the maximum rate which they are capable and fully realise their potential in school. Even short spells of absence can interrupt a child's progress, especially if they miss work which is essential for subsequent learning and lessons.

Absence can also result in children feeling a sense of distance from the work of the class, especially if occurring at beginning or end of terms or at times when special events are taking place at school. Absence can also impact on children's friendship circles.

### Objectives

1. To ensure that all children attend school every day.
2. Offer a safe and supportive environment, which welcomes children regardless of race, gender or ability.
3. To ensure that all children are punctual.
4. To work effectively with the Local Authority and other agencies to follow up attendance issues promptly and efficiently.
5. To support pupils with attendance and punctuality issues and to work with parents and where appropriate other agencies to bring about improvement.

### Strategies

1. To keep good records of attendance through the school registers and to take prompt action to follow up absences.
2. All staff will complete registers accurately for each session and will draw to the School Attendance Officer's attention any absences that cause concern via School Pod.
3. Staff will follow attendance and punctuality procedures when dealing with related issues.
4. Parents must telephone school to inform school of the reason for absence, as soon as possible or before 9.00am on the first day of absence. The information will be stored on School Pod (school data system) as evidence.
5. The school office will contact the parents when a child is absent and school have not been notified of the reason of absence (see pupil absence procedures).
6. Where a pattern of 'occasional' absences is noted, the parent will be contacted to discuss the pattern of absences with the School Attendance Officer.
7. The school will use Local Authority services and the school attendance and family support officer to support families where absence and punctuality issues are related to social circumstances and parenting issues.

## Attendance and Punctuality Policy

8. The School's Attendance Officer will be used to follow up absences that are suspicious or causing concern or where the family is not engaging with the support the school is providing.
9. Where necessary the school will work closely with the Local Authority to take action against those unlawfully keeping children from school.

### Legal Framework

Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 provides a wide definition of 'parent'. For the purpose of school education provision a parent is defined as:

- All natural parents, whether they are married or not.
- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person.
- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person (a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child, is considered to be a parent in education law).

Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act states that parents must ensure that children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

A child is of compulsory school age at the beginning of the term following their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. However, as some children enter school at an earlier age, Ravensfield aims to follow the same expectations for all children to ensure consistency on a whole school approach to promote good attendance and punctuality. A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June of the school year in which they reach the age of 16.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 require schools to take an attendance register twice a day, once at the start of the morning session and then again during the afternoon session. The register must record whether the pupil was:

- Present
- Absent
- Present at approved educational activity
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances or unavoidable cause.

Regular and punctual attendance at school is a legal requirement under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996. It is essential that parents maximise the educational opportunities available for their children and provide the best possible start in life.

Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013: The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations state that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.

## Attendance and Punctuality Policy

It is important to note that headteachers can determine the length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all. The fundamental principles for defining exceptional are *rare, significant, or unavoidable*, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. There are no rules on this as circumstances vary from school to school and family to family.

There is, however, no legal entitlement for time off in school term time to go on holiday and in the majority of cases holidays will not be authorised. Parents/carers wishing to apply for leave of absence need to write a letter to the Head Teacher in advance and before making any travel arrangements.

If term-time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised and if the number of sessions absent hits the 10 sessions (5 Days) set down in Tameside MBC's Code of Conduct, parents/carers will be issued with a fixed-penalty fine or other legal action in accordance with the Code.

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children out during school time.

If parents fail to engage with support and their child continues to have unsatisfactory attendance/punctuality, legal action may be initiated with a Penalty Notice, Notice to Improve or School Prosecution in the Magistrates' Court. Parents found guilty in a Magistrates' Court of failing to secure their child's regular attendance at school under the provisions of the Education Act 1996, will receive a criminal record and a maximum penalty of a £1000 fine under a Section (1) offence or a £2500 fine or up to a 3-month prison sentence, under a Section (1a) offence.

### Penalty Notices

In law, an offence is committed if a parent fails to secure a child's regular attendance at school. Tameside Education Welfare Service, in conjunction with schools and Greater Manchester Police, will use these powers as a deterrent to prevent patterns of unauthorised absence developing.

Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996 empowers the local authority to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school. This means that when a pupil has unauthorised absence of 10 sessions (5 days) or more, in a 10-week period (where no acceptable reason has been given for the absence) or if their child persistently arrives late for school after the close of registration, their parents may receive a Penalty Notice. Following the implementation of DfE legislation on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2024, there is a new national framework for Penalty Notices for school absence:

For the first offence committed under the new legislation, the rate of a penalty notice is now £160 if paid within 28 days, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.

## Attendance and Punctuality Policy

For the second offence committed under the new legislation, the rate of a penalty notice is now £160 with no option for the second offence to be discharged at the lower rate of £80.

There is now a limit of two penalty notices that can be issued to a parent for the same child within a rolling 3-year period. If there is a third offence committed within this timeframe, another tool will be considered such as prosecution to answer an offence under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996: failure to ensure regular attendance. Conviction of an offence under section 444(1) may result in a fine of £1000. Under section 444(1A), convictions may result in a fine of £2,500, a community order, electronic tagging or a custodial sentence and a criminal conviction recorded.

The Penalty Notice will need to be paid in full before 28 days of the Notice being served. Failure to pay a Penalty Notice may result in prosecution as detailed above. Please note the issuing of a Penalty Notice is an alternative to issuing proceedings at court.

Parents/carers may also receive a Penalty Notice for the offence of failing to secure regular school attendance under the following circumstances:

- Their child is stopped on a truancy sweep
- Where the absence is recorded as an unauthorised leave of absence for a minimum of 10 sessions (5 school days) in a 10-week period

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 also makes it an offence if a parent fails to ensure that their child is not in a public place during the first five days of a fixed term or permanent exclusion. Penalty Notices may be issued for such an offence.

Parents/carers of pupils registered at this school are reminded that they hold legal responsibility for ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually. Please note that a separate Penalty Notice may be issued to each parent/carer for each child as each parent/carer holds responsibility to ensure regular school attendance.

Ravensfield Primary School shares the Government's determination to raise levels of pupil attendance and achievement in order to ensure the best possible start in life for our children.

### Absence Procedures

The Head Teacher, not parents, determines whether an absence is authorised. Ravensfield Primary School adheres to the Department for Education (DfE) guidelines in authorising absence.

All absences will be treated as unauthorised unless a satisfactory explanation for the pupil's absence has been received.

Whenever children are ill, parents/carers should:

## Attendance and Punctuality Policy

- Inform school of the reason for absence, usually by phoning the school office, as soon as possible and certainly before 9.00am on the first day of absence.

If no contact is received this will trigger a text message from school. Upon receiving the text message, we do expect parents/carers to telephone school as soon as possible. If no contact is received the office staff will call the parents/carers listed on the child's contact form. If parents/carers cannot be contacted by phone, then a home visit may be necessary.

All actions taken by staff, including administrative staff, will be recorded on School Pod ensuring the School Attendance Officer is informed.

### Categorising Absence

#### Illness

Parent/carers may be asked to provide medical evidence where there are repeated absences due to reported illness. When medical evidence has been requested, the absence will be marked as unauthorised until evidence has been provided. In case of uncertainty, please visit: [Is my child too ill for school? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk).

#### Medical/Dental Appointments

Parent/carers must make medical and dental appointments outside of the school day unless it is an emergency. Where this is not possible, pupils should attend school for part of the day. Parent/carers are required to show the appointment card to school to confirm the appointment for the absence to be marked as authorised within the register.

#### Other Authorised Circumstances

Parents/carers of a child who requires leave of absence for their child to take part in performance/licencing work will be required to submit written evidence/confirmation of full details. Each request will be dealt with by the Head Teacher.

#### Requests for Leave of Absence

In September 2013, changes to Government regulations and guidance means that Head Teachers can no longer authorise leave of absence for the sole purpose of a holiday (unless in exceptional circumstances). Leave of absence (holidays in term time) The Education (Penalty notices) (England) Regulations 2004 came into force on 27 February 2004. These were updated with The Education (Policy notices) (England) Regulations 2007.

All absences associated with a holiday (without exceptional circumstance) during term time will be marked as unauthorised within the register. Any parents/carers known to have removed their child from school for the sole purpose of a holiday may be referred to the Education Welfare Officer, issued with a penalty notice fine or referred to the Local Authority to consider prosecution. Registers will be marked with a 'G' code.

## Attendance and Punctuality Policy

A penalty notice request or a referral for full prosecution may be submitted to the Local Authority should:

- The parent fail to submit a leave of absence request in writing at least one month in advance of taking the leave
- An application for a leave of absence is not agreed by the Head Teacher but is still taken.
- A longer period of time is taken in excess of the agreed number of days.

### Religious Observance

Ravensfield Primary School acknowledges the multi-faith nature of British society and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside holiday periods or weekends. Parents/carers must give advance notice to school if they intend their child to be absent. It is reasonable that no more than one day be designated for any individual occasion of religious observance or festival. Any further absence will be categorised as unauthorised. In such cases the school may request that a penalty notice is issued or refer the Local Authority to consider prosecution.

### Recording Absence

Legally the register must be taken twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day and again for the afternoon session.

Parents and carers who have patterns of lateness and poor attendance will be contacted to discuss the importance of good attendance/punctuality, and how this may be achieved. If this persists or the parent declines the offer of support and the pupils has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence recorded the parent may be issued with a Notice to Improve, as a way of improving the pupil's attendance, this is in line with Tameside MBC Code of Conduct: issuing penalty notices for unauthorised absence from schools.

Please collect your child promptly at the end of the day 3.25pm, where late collection is persistent and/or significantly late, the school is obliged to take any uncollected pupil to a place of safety and share concerns with other agencies.

### Strategies For Promoting Good Whole School Attendance

- Celebrating good attendance of class achievements through weekly assemblies.
- Rewarding achievements through certificates and extra-curricular activities for 100% attendees.
- Providing regular support and feedback to parents/carers.

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. In this instance contact school immediately and openly discuss your worries. It is important that we identify the reason for your child's reluctance to attend school and work together to tackle the problem.

### Persistent Absence

## Attendance and Punctuality Policy

A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' (PA) when their attendance drops below 90% for any reason. Over a full academic year this would be 38 sessions. Absence at this level is causing considerable damage to a child's educational prospects. All pupils who are actually PA, or are considered to be on track to becoming PA, will be discussed at the weekly Attendance Review which will result in contact from the Head Teacher or School Attendance Officer to discuss and plan how to improve or be the subject of a referral to Local Authority to consider legal implications.

### Monitoring and Review

It is the responsibility of the governors to monitor overall attendance. The School Attendance Officer will produce a termly report for governors, outlining the attendance data and the key issues arising from this, alongside actions to be taken. The governing body also has the responsibility for this policy, and for seeing that it is carried out. The governors will therefore examine closely the information provided them, and seek to ensure that our attendance figures are as high as they can be.

### Outcomes

The Senior Management Team and all teaching staff work to ensure a high level of enjoyment and commitment to learning as a means of ensuring regular attendance. The Head Teacher holds responsibility for attendance matters, supported by the School Attendance Officer.