



St Matthew's Primary School
Attendance Policy and Procedures

November 2023

St Matthew's Primary School Attendance Policy

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Our policy aims to:

- emphasise the importance to all pupils and families that maximum attendance at school is vital for achieving their full potential
- reinforce the notion that every child has a right to access the education to which they are entitled and that parents are responsible in law for the regular and punctual attendance of their child
- make explicit to all (pupils, parents/carers, teachers) the school's expectations on attendance levels and support strategies to help pupils maximise their attendance;
- stress the need for home and school to work in partnership to achieve high attendance
- promote a consistent approach across the school towards attendance matters
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of all parties linked to attendance at school and in the Local Authority

Regular attendance at school is vital. Put simply, '*absence*' means '*missed learning*'. It is a legal requirement that pupils of compulsory school age receive full-time education and this means regular attendance at school. Irregular attendance leads to pupils missing lessons and not achieving their potential.

Purpose

National data shows a clear correlation between high attendance rates and good performance at school.

The aim of this policy is to promote regular attendance for all pupils at school and to ensure that effective systems are in place for dealing with absence. Promoting regular attendance is part of creating an effective school, which is committed to raising the levels of achievement for all of its pupils. This policy was drawn up following consultation with the attendance team and the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO) and is based on the most recent guidance from the Department of Education and Cambridgeshire County Council.

The school strives for all pupils to have 100% attendance and sees **95% attendance as the minimum expectation** for all pupils. Amendments to the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 2006 and November 2016 make clear that Head teachers may not authorise holidays (or other leave of absence) in term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. The school upholds these regulations and supports the use of financial penalties and court action where necessary.

For further information, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance> and <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/schools-&-learning/education-your-rights-and-responsibilities/school-attendance/>

Roles and Responsibilities

Parents have a legal duty to make sure that children attend school regularly, punctually, properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn. Permitting unauthorised absence from school is an offence under Section 444/441(a) of the Education Act 1996.

St Matthew's aims to establish a partnership with parents to promote good attendance. Any concerns around attendance are shared with parents and may also be discussed at parent consultation appointments or an attendance meeting if necessary. Parents should not keep their children away from school whilst a problem is being resolved. Families in particularly challenging circumstances may receive support from the Local Authority Attendance Officer or from an Early Intervention Family Worker.

St Matthew's Primary School expects all children to attend school regularly and punctually. The school encourages good attendance and will investigate every unexplained or unjustified absence. This involves following up all pupil absences where parents/carers have failed to inform the school of the reason why the pupil is absent. This may take the form of a telephone call home or email contact if a parent/carer has not made contact about the absence.

Encouraging Attendance

At St Matthew's, we take a number of measures to promote good attendance and punctuality:

- we ensure that the children follow an exciting, engaging curriculum that is relevant to the needs of individuals
- attendance data is collected for all children and used to inform our practices
- communications sent to parents about good attendance and the link with good academic achievement
- structured meetings with our Local Authority Attendance Officer in order to identify, receive advice for and support those children whose attendance/punctuality causes concern
- attendance/punctuality included in the Headteacher's report to the Governing Body at least termly
- ongoing concerns about a child's poor attendance/punctuality to be investigated by the class teacher and the Attendance Lead

Monitoring and Evaluating

Attendance figures are reported to the Governing Body each term as part of the Headteacher's report. An annual return is also made to the Department for Education

Registers are monitored by the Attendance Officer in the school office and overseen by the Attendance Lead. Concerns are raised swiftly to the Local Authority Attendance Officer for advice and support as needed. The attendance patterns of different groups are monitored.

Term-time leave (including holidays)

Parents do not have any right or entitlement to expect leave to be granted during term time. At St Matthew's Primary School, we strongly discourage such leave as learning and progress is disrupted and the lost time is detrimental to the educational progress of the child.

In accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013, Headteacher's may not grant any leave of absence during term-time *unless there are exceptional circumstances*. Exceptional circumstances are one-off events which are unavoidable and examples may include the death of a close relative, attendance at a funeral or a housing crisis which prevents attendance. **Term-time leave will not usually be authorised.** Parents must apply as far in advance as possible (preferably at least 2 weeks) for requests for leave of absence from school using the school's **Application for Leave of Absence form** (see below) and the Headteacher will consider each case on an individual basis.

Any parent who takes a child out of school for term-time leave of 6 consecutive sessions (3 whole days) or more over a 4 week period (not authorised by school), will/can be referred to the Local Authority for a Penalty Notice fine. **A Penalty Notice may be issued for single event absences of at least 3 consecutive school days where these absences are unauthorised because they are neither exceptional or unavoidable.** For further information can be found here:

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/schools-&-learning/education-your-rights-and-responsibilities/term-time-holidays/

Please note that the Local Authority cannot override the decision made by the Headteacher to unauthorise the absence. If you have any reasons to believe the Penalty Notice should not have been issued, please contact the school within 10 working days. There is no statutory right of appeal against the issuing of a Penalty Notice.

PROCEDURES

Registration practice

- The school day starts at 8:45am for all children and children should be in school at this time
- The register is taken at the beginning of the morning and afternoon sessions
- Morning registration closes at 8:55am and afternoon registration at 1:40pm
- School uses the SIMS Attendance system and registration is usually completed online. Teachers mark the child as present or absent with the appropriate code as follows:

/	Present
I	Illness
M	Medical appointment
C	Other authorised circumstance
L	Late (registers have been closed)
N	No reason yet been given for absence
O	Unauthorised absence
G	Family holiday (not agreed)
- Codes for absence are inserted by the Attendance Officer during the daily check of registers. Staff should make a note of any relevant information provided by a parent on the attendance sheet in SIMS.
- Children who arrive after the close of registers should report to the school office to be signed in
- Any child leaving the school for a medical appointment, illness or other reason will be signed out at the school office so we have an accurate record of pupils on site for fire and evacuation purposes. This will be marked on the paper register for fire evacuation purposes. Pupils will have an M,I or other appropriate code entered on the electronic register.

Absences

Absences from school may be authorised or unauthorised, depending on the circumstance.

Authorised absences are where a pupil has been absent from school and a satisfactory and legal reason has been communicated to the school (via the class teacher or the school office). A child may also be representing the school or be on an educational visit. Other reasons include: genuine illness, days of religious observance, unavoidable medical appointments, exceptional circumstances (bereavement/marriage of immediate family member or traveller children going 'on the road'). The school expects authorised absences to be kept to a minimum and therefore, routine medical and dental appointments should be arranged out of school hours or during the school

holidays wherever possible. **Where absence through illness has led to an attendance of below 90%, parents and carers will be expected to provide evidence of illness and/or appointments.**

Unauthorised absences are when no acceptable explanation for an absence is provided by parents or carers or the reason provided is not deemed as acceptable by the school. Examples of these may be lateness after the end of registration, attending a birthday celebration, minding a house, caring for a sibling, a lack of childcare, going shopping, having a day out, visiting relatives or going on holiday during term-time when flights are cheaper.

The Headteacher, or Attendance Lead, using DfE guidelines, makes the final decision about whether or not any absence is authorised or unauthorised. Parents who wish to request absence may do so by completing a 'Leave of Absence' form, which is available from the school office or in the 'Useful Forms' section of the school website:

http://www.stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk/website/useful_forms/570007

This should then be returned to the school office **before the absence occurs.**

Term-Time Holidays

The school cannot authorise holidays being taken during term-time as learning is disrupted and the lost time is detrimental to the educational progress of the child. St Matthew's Primary School follows DfE guidelines from September 2013 that states that requests for long-term leave can only be granted in 'exceptional circumstances' and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. No term-time leave will be granted, or deemed granted, without a formal request on the appropriate form (as indicated above) being received and a written response given. Interviews following a request may be conducted prior to any decision being made and further evidence may be requested. The school will not authorise any holidays retrospectively and may follow-up any reported illness that we feel may have been a term-time holiday.

Illness

- Parents are asked to notify the school on the first day of their child's absence from school. A record of the reasons for absence is made on the school attendance system (SIMS) and teachers are able to access this information in the classroom. Such absence should be reported on a daily basis unless there are circumstances where the duration of absence is known in advance
- If a child is absent for more than 3 days, school may request supporting evidence from a doctor or ask to see an appointment card or prescription. The absence can then be authorised. If there is a query about whether to authorise an absence, the office staff will check with the Headteacher or Attendance Lead
- Once all registers have been completed, a printout is produced showing which children are absent from school that day. A phone call is made to a parent or carer where a child is absent where a reason for absence has not been received. If contact cannot be made by phone, the office will follow this up with an email, asking the parent or carer to contact the school
- If a child with a safeguarding concern is absent, the office staff will inform a Designated Person who will contact the relevant social worker or carry out a home visit if appropriate.

Longer term absence due to physical and mental health conditions

Where a child is absent for 15 school days (consecutive or non-consecutive) due to physical or mental health conditions and the reasons for absence have been explored by the school St Matthew's Primary School will follow the Cambridgeshire Medical Needs Policy 2023. This includes the following actions

- A meeting is held to discuss and write the IHEP (Individual Health and Education Plan). This includes contributions from key school staff, the child (where appropriate), parents, relevant health professionals and the Access and Inclusion Coordinator where applicable
- Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycles are followed using the IHEP to include school professionals, parents, health and medical professionals if possible.
- Where medical advice states a child is too ill to attend school the IHEP and supporting documents are sent to the Access and Inclusion Team and a child may receive medical tuition or alternative provision from the Local Authority.

Lateness

If a child is not present when the register is taken in the classroom, they will be marked as absent with an 'N'. This will then be followed up by the office staff (in line with the Safeguarding Policy) by phone call or email to the parent to obtain a reason for absence.

If a child arrives after the close of registration (8:55am), they must report to the school office and be signed in to the late book. A note will be made of the reason for lateness. The office staff will then decide whether to code the lateness as authorised (medical appointment before school) or unauthorised (no reason given or reason unsuitable).

If a child is persistently late, the class teacher may speak directly to parents and carers. The Attendance Lead will also write a late letter to those parents and carers whose children are persistently late to school.

Punctuality

It is vital that children arrive on time for the start of school, which starts at 8:45am. Learning begins as soon as the children arrive in the classroom and important information is often given out at the start of the day. All children in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 line up in the playground when the whistle blows at 8:45am. Reception children should be taken to their classroom at 8:45am instead of lining up. If a child is in the playground at 8:45am each morning, there will be no problem with lateness.

If a child arrives after 8:55am, they should report to the school office where a member of the office staff will sign the child in to the late book. This will also indicate their choices of dinner for the day. The child will then walk to their classroom by themselves. Children in reception will be escorted by a member of the office staff.

All registers will be coded in line with Cambridgeshire County Council guidelines, according to the time of arrival.

If a child is regularly late, the class teacher will contact the parents/carers to discuss this further and suggest ideas for improving the punctuality. If the punctuality does not improve, a late letter will be sent and the parents/carers will be asked to discuss the concern with the Attendance Lead.

Following up on absence

- Any member of staff who has an ongoing concern about attendance or patterns of absence of a pupil should raise their concerns with the Attendance Lead or Attendance Officer so appropriate enquiries can be made

- The Attendance Lead and Attendance Officer will complete regular check of the registers in order to note any patterns of absence / lateness. Standard letters are sent to families where absence is causing a concern. An attendance meeting may follow if a further conversation about the situation is necessary. (see attendance letters in the appendix)
- If no explanation for an absence has been received, an email is sent to remind parents and carers of the need to inform the school and to request an explanation.
- The school works closely with the Local Authority Attendance Officer who supports St Matthew's with school attendance. The LAEO advises the school on the most appropriate action to take to improve attendance
- Attendance under 90% is deemed to be Persistent Absence (PA) and parents / carers will need to provide medical evidence for their child's illness (medical appointment cards and prescriptions are acceptable)

Monitoring Attendance

From September 2015, the DfE defined 10% of absence as Persistent Absence (PA). If a child is absent for 3 days or more within 4 weeks without a valid reason, this would reach the persistent absence threshold. Each day has 2 sessions (the morning and the afternoon) so if a child has a medical appointment they are encouraged to come in to school for the other session on that day.

Attendance of all children is monitored by the Attendance Officer and the Attendance Lead with responsibility for attendance.

If a child's attendance starts to fall, individual circumstances will be taken into account and the class teacher will contact the parents in the first instance to discuss their concerns and offer support.

If the attendance continues to fall, letters one and two may be sent and parents / carers will be invited to a meeting to discuss the concerns. Support and/or advice may be offered and targets set for a period of time in order to see if an improvement has been made to the child's attendance rate. A lack of any relevant medical evidence will mean the absence will be unauthorised.

If a child had 6 or more unauthorised sessions over a half- term period or their attendance is 90% or below, then a referral for a Penalty Notice can be made.

- If a parent/carer fails to pay a Penalty Notice requested by school, the Local Authority Attendance Officer will be instructed by the Local Authority Legal Panel to prepare a court statement for prosecution at Cambridge Magistrates Court. If a parent is issued a Penalty Notice and pays it within the 28 day period, the school can request a further one penalty notice. On the request for a third penalty notice, the Legal Panel will request a court statement is prepared for Cambridge Magistrates Court. If the Legal Panel agree to prosecute, and after investigating the case, the Local Authority Attendance Officer may request a formal meeting to be held or a PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) meeting to take place in preparation for the prosecution.

School would prefer to work with parents and carers to improve poor attendance and to avoid the need for a Penalty Notice to be issued.

Please Note:

- If a child has a genuine reason for absence, the above procedures will not be implemented. However, if there are concerns about the *pattern* of a child's attendance, then the parents may be contacted to discuss this and support and advice may be offered.

- If a child has ongoing health issues, the parents may be contacted to decide whether any additional support can be given

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Letter One

Appendix 2 – Letter Two

Appendix 3 – Letter Three

Appendix 4 – Late Letter

Appendix 5 – Leave of Absence form

Appendix 1.

St Matthew's Primary School

19 Norfolk Street, Cambridge CB1 2LD

Telephone: 01223 568838

Fax: 01223 568839

Email: office@stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

Web site: www.stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

LETTER ONE

«salutation»
«address_block»

«date_of_printing»

Dear «salutation»,

Re: «chosen_forename» «chosen_surname» Date of Birth: «date_of_birth»

We are writing to advise you that «chosen_forename»'s school attendance is causing concern as it has fallen to «percentage_attendance»%. We are asked by the Local Authority to make you aware that your child's attendance has fallen to below 90% and will be recorded as Persistent Absence (PA). We have enclosed a copy of «chosen_forename»'s attendance record which shows an analysis of attendance, punctuality and whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Regular attendance is extremely important as missing school can have an impact on learning, and as we are sure you are aware it is a legal requirement. Good attendance enables pupils to keep up with the work required. Unauthorised absence during term-time can result in you receiving a Penalty Notice fine of £60 per parent per child so please make every effort to ensure that «chosen_forename» attends well during term-time this academic year.

We will continue to monitor «chosen_forename»'s attendance over the next 6 week period of school, and we hope to see an improvement. If possible, and again if it is medical, please ensure we have relevant doctor's notes and appointment details.

If there are any particular circumstances that the school may not be aware of which is having an influence on «chosen_forename» attending school regularly, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Enc Record of attendance
 School Attendance Leaflet

Appendix 2

St Matthew's Primary School

19 Norfolk Street, Cambridge CB1 2LD

Telephone: 01223 568838

Fax: 01223 568839

Email: office@stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

Web site: www.stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

LETTER TWO

«salutation» «date_of_printing»
«address_block»

Re: «chosen_forename» «chosen_surname»

Date of Birth: «date_of_birth»

Dear «salutation»,

We are writing to inform you that «chosen_forename»'s attendance has slipped to «percentage_attendance»% and this low rate of attendance is continuing to cause school some concern. The Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO) has asked school to send this letter to you and to arrange a meeting with you to discuss this matter further.

Please contact the school office on (01223) 568838 or office@stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk to make an appointment to meet with the Attendance Lead.

Should «chosen_forename»'s attendance remain irregular, the LAAO could be requested to take more formal action. This could result in a Penalty Notice and/or prosecution through the Magistrates court for failing to ensure regular school attendance of your child under Section 444 Education Act 1996 and a fine of up to £2500 and/or 3 months in prison.

Medical evidence will now be required for any future absences to be authorised with immediate effect.

We look forward to discussing any concerns you may have so we can continue to support «chosen_forename» to make good progress and to improve their attendance and therefore avoid the need for legal proceedings to be implemented. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact school on the number above.

Yours sincerely,

Enc Record of attendance
 School Attendance leaflet

Appendix 3

St Matthew's Primary School

19 Norfolk Street, Cambridge CB1 2LD

Telephone: 01223 568838

Fax: 01223 568839

Email: office@stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

Web site: www.stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

LETTER THREE

«salutation»

«date_of_printing»

«address_block»

Dear «salutation»,

Re: «chosen_forename» «chosen_surname» Date of Birth: «date_of_birth»

We are aware that «chosen_forename» has been absent from school for «periods_of_absence» sessions this school year. We have enclosed a record of «chosen forename»'s attendance.

As parent(s) it is your legal responsibility, as stated under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, to ensure that your child attends the school at which «he_she» is registered, regularly and punctually.

From September 2015, schools were advised by the government's Department for Education (DfE) that the Persistent Absence (PA) threshold is 10% or more. This means that if a pupil has an overall attendance of 90% or less over a given period, they will be classified as a persistently absent pupil.

We are therefore writing to inform you that if attendance fails to improve during the next 4 weeks, the case may be referred to Cambridgeshire County Council for possible legal intervention.

Yours sincerely

Enc Record of attendance
 School Attendance Leaflet

Appendix 4

St Matthew's Primary School

19 Norfolk Street, Cambridge CB1 2LD

Telephone: 01223 568838

Fax: 01223 568839

Email: office@stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

Web site: www.stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

LATE LETTER

«salutation» «date_of_printing»
«address_block»

Dear «salutation»,

Re: «chosen_forename» «chosen_surname»
School: St Matthew's Primary School

Date of Birth: «date_of_birth»

On checking the register at school, we are concerned to see that «chosen_forename» has been late to school «total_lates_both» times during the xxxx term. The lateness is broken down as follows:

Late (**arrivals before 9.20am**) – «total_lates_before»
«dates_of_lates_before»

Late (**arrivals after 9.20am**) – «total_lates_after»
«dates_of_lates_after»

As we are sure you are aware, it is important that «chosen_forename» arrives at school on time. Being on time to school is vitally important. It gives your child the best possible start to their day and helps them to arrive in the right frame of mind for learning. It also causes less disruption to the other members of the class, who may already have begun their lessons for the day. It may be that there is an acceptable explanation for this, of which we may or may not be aware of.

Please note that if your child arrives after registers close, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. We must remind you that as parent(s) it is your legal responsibility, as stated under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, to ensure that your child attends the school at which he/she is registered, regularly and punctually. Failure to do so could result in a Penalty Notice being issued against you and/or legal proceedings being considered.

Yours sincerely,

cc Local Authority Attendance Officer (LA AO)

Appendix 5

St Matthew's Primary School

19 Norfolk Street, Cambridge CB1 2LD

Telephone: 01223 568838

Fax: 01223 568839

Email: office@stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

Web site: www.stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk

Application for Leave of Absence for a School Pupil in Term-Time in Exceptional Circumstances

Dear Parent/Carer,

The attached form is used to apply for special leave of absence for a child during term time. When making an application it is important to have regard to the following.

It is important to remember that children attend school regularly to benefit from their education. Absence from school leaves children vulnerable to falling behind with their learning.

The Education Regulations 2006, as amended by Education Regulations 2013, no longer permit Headteachers to authorise leave for holidays.

- Headteachers shall not grant any leave of absence during term-time unless they consider there to be exceptional circumstances relating to the application.
- The Headteacher must be satisfied that exceptional circumstances warrant the granting of a leave of absence.
- The Headteacher will determine how long the absence should be and any additional absence will not be authorised.
- Parents whose children have unauthorised absence may be subject to a Fixed Penalty Notice and /or prosecution.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 says that parents have a legal duty to ensure that their children of compulsory school age receive a suitable full-time education through regular attendance at a school or otherwise (e.g. home education). For a child who is of compulsory school age, who is registered at school and fails to attend regularly, it is the parent that will be guilty of an offence (Section 444 (1)).

We have a shared responsibility to ensure that the law is upheld and that your child achieves to his/her full potential.

If you are applying for leave of absence for your child, please have regard to the above and follow the procedure below:

1. The application must be made **in advance** by the parent(s) that the child normally resides with.
2. Please be clear on the form why the application is exceptional. Applications for leave of absence should be:
 - rare,
 - unavoidable (the leave has to happen when it does, it cannot be arranged for the school holidays)
 - short (as little time as possible given the exceptional circumstance).
3. In considering the application, the school will consider the above alongside the child's overall attendance, the frequency of such requests and the impact on the child's attainment, progress and well-being.
4. Please complete a separate Leave of Absence form for each child

Please note that parents can be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice or prosecuted for unauthorised absence including holidays.

We look forward to your co-operation. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Barratt

Inclusion Lead



Application for Leave of Absence for a School Pupil in Term-Time in Exceptional Circumstances

Please complete this form and return to the school office for the attention of Sarah Barratt, Inclusion Lead Teacher with responsibility for attendance.

I wish to apply for Leave of Absence from school to be granted to:

Name of Pupil: _____ Class Teacher: _____

Dates of Proposed Absence: From _____ To: _____

Reason for Proposed Absence – please provide reasons to support the application including evidence.

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Total Days Requested On This Occasion

Signature of Parent / Carer: _____ Date: _____

FOR SCHOOL USE ONLY

Dates checked: Y / N Class Teacher informed: Y / N Current Attendance Rate % : _____

Previous Leave taken: Y / N (dates: _____)

Reason for decision:

.....

1st Date of Absence: _____ Expected date of return to school: _____

Authorised: Y / N Code used: _____

Authorised by: _____ Date: _____