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Introduction

At Oldbrook First School, we recognise the importance of regular school attendance and believe that children can only learn effectively if they attend school regularly. It is also vitally important that children arrive and leave school on time.

Education provides a means of enhancement for all young people. Pupils need to attend regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. Irregular attendance seriously disrupts continuity of learning, undermines the educational process and leads to underachievement and low attainment.

The Law

By law, all children of compulsory school age must receive suitable education. Parents are responsible for making sure this happens, either by registering the child at a school or by arranging an effective alternative to school.

Local Authorities have various powers to ensure that parents meet their duties.

Responsibilities of Parents/Carers

There are legal obligations on parents to secure education for their children of compulsory school age, whether at school or otherwise, and to send them to school regularly once they are on the school roll.

If the school is to achieve its attendance targets, parents must see themselves as partners with the school in their children's education, and support the school in the following ways:

- ensure the fullest possible attendance of their child by keeping requests for their children to be absent from school to a minimum;
- when absence is unavoidable, provide a note of explanation, preferably on the first day of absence or when the child returns to school or contact the school by telephone
- when absence continues for more than a day, contact the school by 'phone or letter;
- ensure that their child arrives at school on time.

The Role of Ofsted

The school's Ofsted grade is dependent on pupil's attendance and punctuality and it is important that parents support the school to achieve high attendance and punctuality.

Ofsted Guidance September 2021 – Behaviour and Attitudes

Inspectors will consider:

- a strong focus on attendance and punctuality so that disruption is minimised
- Pupils have high attendance, within the context of the pandemic. They come to school on time and are punctual to lessons. When this is not the case, the school takes appropriate, swift and effective action.

- There is demonstrable improvement in the behaviour and attendance of pupils who have particular needs.
- Fixed-term and internal exclusions are used appropriately. The school reintegrates excluded pupils on their return and manages their behaviour effectively. Permanent exclusions are used appropriately as a last resort (see [statutory guidance on school exclusion](#)).

The Role of the School

It is the responsibility of the school to support attendance and to deal with problems which may lead to non-attendance. The school will employ strategies to improve and encourage good attendance. The Headteacher will inform governors termly of the school's attendance analysis.

The Importance of Registration

Registers are important legal documents and are kept securely. The law requires schools to call the register twice-a-day:

- at the start of the morning session, i.e. 8.50 am;
- once during the afternoon session. At Oldbrook the register is called at the start of the afternoon session, i.e. 1.00pm.

Calling the register is a key part of the school day and should be seen as such by staff, children and parents.

At Oldbrook First School, the registers are computerised. Children are marked either present or absent. Particular attention is given to accurate registration; staff use consistent rules and coding for registration.

When a child is absent, the register must also show whether the absence was authorised by the school or unauthorised. This information is entered onto the computer by the School Business Manager / Business Support.

Notification of Absence

All parents are asked to contact school if their child is absent, giving a reason for the absence. This can be done by:

- **telephone:** the School Business Manager / Business Support will then pass the message to the class teacher and enter the reason for absence directly onto the computer;
- **Parentmail:** the School Business Manager / Business Support will then pass the message to the class teacher and enter the reason for absence directly onto the computer;
- **letter:** the class teacher will place the letter in the register and the School Business Manager / Business Support will enter the reason for absence onto the computer;
- **in person:** an explanation may be given personally to either the class teacher or the School Business Manager / Business Support when the child returns to school.

If no notification is received about a child's absence, a member of staff will make contact to seek reason for the absence.

School Responses to Absence

Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

Where a child is absent at the time of registration, the law requires schools to indicate on their attendance register whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Authorised absence means that the school has either given approval in advance for the child to be away or that an explanation offered afterwards has been accepted. The law requires that absences not agreed in advance are recorded as unauthorised, unless (and until) a satisfactory explanation is given.

The school will:

- investigate all unexplained absences;
- contact parents on the first day of absence for an explanation if no message is received.
- contact parents if it has any concerns over attendance;
- involve the Senior Attendance Officer if parents fail to support the school in ensuring the fullest possible attendance of their children (Attendance below 90%).
- withdraw a Nursery place if attendance falls below the minimum requirement.

By law, only the school can approve absence, not parents. The school need not accept a parental explanation for a child's absence if it doubts the explanation. If the school is satisfied that the circumstances are both genuine and exceptional, the absence may be authorised. Where parentally condoned and/or unjustified absence appears to be a problem, the school will involve the S.A.O. at the earliest opportunity.

Excessive amounts of authorised absence can disrupt continuity of learning. The school will, therefore, watch for emerging patterns of authorised absence by individual children.

Examples of Unauthorised Absence

The school cannot accept any of the following:

- shopping during school hours;
- special occasions, e.g. birthdays;
- no uniform, shoes, etc.;
- overslept;
- haircut;
- sham illnesses;
- at home due to family illness.
- Children arriving at school after the register has closed (Arriving after 9:30)
- Family Holidays
- Routine dental appointments

Holiday/Leave During Term Time

Headteachers are no longer allowed to authorise requests for children to be taken out of school in term time. If you take a holiday which is not authorised by the school then they may refer the matter to the Local Authority who will consider the issue of a Fixed Penalty Notice. Oldbrook First School follows the Local Authorities guidance.

If Parents/Carers take children out of school for a holiday, which results in the child missing 10 or more sessions, (5 school days) a referral will be sent to the Local Authority. Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) are issued to each parent and are for each child. A FPN is £60 if paid within 21 days, and £120 if paid between 22 and 28 days. If the fine is not paid, parents will be prosecuted in the magistrates' court.

The school will follow the guidance as set out in the 'School Attendance Enforcement Policy in relation to non-school attendance and Code of Conduct for the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices'. Further information can be found [here](#).

Examples of Authorised Absence

- *Sickness/Illness of the Child:* if the school is satisfied that a child is absent as a result of illness, the absence must be treated as authorised. Where there is doubt about the authenticity of absence attributed to illness, the school and S.A.O. can refer the matter to the school doctor to arrange a special medical or make contact with the child's GP. If a child is absent for a prolonged period or the school notices a pattern of absence emerging, early contact will be made with the S.A.O and/or the School Health Service.
- *Medical and Dental Appointments:* leave for medical or dental appointments requested by the organisation for treatment or procedures may be authorised (however this will still be recorded as an absence from school). It would be preferable if parents would make such appointments out of school hours. Routine dental checks should be taken out of school hours.

Where a child is present for registration, but then has to leave school to attend an appointment, the School Business Manager / Business Support must record, in the register, the fact that the child, although registered, is not physically present in a signing out book. Similarly, the School Business Manager / Business Support will note in the late book, the presence of a child who was not there when the register was being taken but returns later from an appointment.

- *Close Family Bereavement:* the school will respond sensitively to requests for leave of absence for close family bereavements. However extended periods of time will not be authorised.
- *Days of Religious Observance:* children may be absent from school in order to participate in a day set aside exclusively for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong. It is helpful if parents can give the school advance notification of religious observance days. Only the day of the actual religious festival/observance will be authorised.

Both in the school prospectus and at the pre-school induction meeting, parents are informed that family holidays within term time will not be authorised so that their child's education is not disrupted.

In exceptional circumstances parents are asked to write a letter to the Headteacher outlining the circumstances. A meeting will be organised with the Headteacher to discuss the request focusing on the child's progress, current attendance, any previous term time absences, whether the absence coincides with a key assessment period and also the nature of exceptional circumstance. The school will respond in writing to these requests. Absences are counted as an authorised absence on the register but the reason for the absence is recorded so that no further action is taken.

If a family takes extended leave (above 5 days) a return to school date will be set for the child. If the child fails to return to school after the agreed date their place at Oldbrook First School may be rescinded.

Exclusions

Where a child has been temporarily excluded [fixed term or permanent], he or she will remain on the school roll. The absence will be regarded as authorised. Once a permanent exclusion is confirmed, the child will be removed from the school roll.

Parental Concerns

Children learn best when they are happy and relaxed. All the staff at Oldbrook First School are concerned about children's regular attendance and the importance of continuity in each child's learning. They are also concerned about each child's safety, welfare and happiness.

Parents are asked to share any worries their child might have in school. Sometimes, little things upset children, which mean they become unhappy and may not want to attend school. Parents are encouraged to bring their child to school, so that reasons for the child not wanting to attend can be discussed and, hopefully, resolved.

The class teacher or Headteacher will talk to the child concerned to find out if there are any worries or problems in school that might make that child not want to attend. If there are, then these will be discussed with the parent/guardian and appropriate action taken.

Lateness

It is our policy at Oldbrook First School to actively discourage the late arrival of children at school. A child who arrives late may seriously disrupt not only his or her continuity of learning but also that of others. A firm line is taken on late arrivals. Where children miss registration altogether, they are marked in the late book along with their time of arrival with the reason for lateness. Particular attention is paid to emerging patterns of late arrival. If a child is regularly late for school or is often absent, then the Headteacher will contact the parent concerned to have a discussion about this. Persistent problems will be referred to the Senior Attendance Officer (SAO).

Communication with Pupils

At Oldbrook we believe that children need to develop an awareness of the importance of good attendance and punctuality. Attendance is celebrated regularly in the following ways to support this:

- Weekly Attendance Teddy awarded to the class with the highest attendance.
- Attendance display in the school hall to celebrate achievements.
- Termly certificates are awarded to children who achieve an excellent level of attendance. (98+% attendance) – Restart from Summer 2022.

Communication with Parents

As attendance is crucial to effective learning and the continuity of learning experiences, the school places great emphasis on this in its communication with parents.

- **School Prospectus:** information on lateness, illness and absence is given to parents in the school prospectus. This highlights the importance of being at school on time and notifying school if their child is absent for any reason.
- **Preschool Induction Meeting:** at the pre-school induction meeting, held for children about to enter our Foundation Stage, the importance of regular attendance is discussed and explained. This talk also includes parents and children arriving at school on time so that each child can be given the best possible start to each school day. Being picked up on time is also stressed, especially for young children who can be very upset if they are the only child left in the building.
- **Mobile Children:** children are also admitted to school at various times of the year into various year groups. All parents requesting a place are asked to make an appointment with the Headteacher. At this meeting, the importance of regular attendance will be highlighted, along with other school routines.

- **Parent Consultation Meetings:** individual attendance data is shared at parent consultation meetings and discussions take place where attendance or lateness may be an issue.
- **Parentmail:** identifies class and individual children's achievements each term.

Monitoring Attendance

Close liaison between the school and the Local Authority Senior Attendance Officer is crucial in attempts to improve attendance. The principle function is to help parents and LA's meet their statutory obligations on school attendance. At Oldbrook First School, we refer cases to the Senior Attendance Officer [SAO] for advice and support.

The headteacher looks at individual pupil attendance regularly and once a term analyses individual data to identify patterns of absence/lateness. Where concerns are highlighted parents are informed in writing of their child's attendance, the impact this may have on their education and steps which may be taken if the attendance does not improve. Parents may be invited into school to discuss their child's attendance further with the Headteacher to explore ways of improving attendance. If attendance improves then a letter is sent to parents to inform them of the improvements and to congratulate the child. The SAO for the school is contacted if necessary to discuss individual cases. Contact may be made by telephone if the situation needs discussing before a visit.

After the school has sent a warning letter, if there is no improvement, the Senior Attendance Officer will write to parents and invite them to an Attendance Interview (replacing the old Pre-court Interview). A review will not be booked at this meeting but, following this meeting, if there is no improvement then the parent will be invited back to the school for a Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) interview. The parent will be formally cautioned at the beginning of the interview and then asked a series of prepared questions. Their answers will be written down and read back to them at the end and they will be asked to sign the form. Then, if there is a decision to prosecute the parent or parents, this interview will form the basis of the evidence against them. As it is a legal interview, the parent will be entitled to have a legal representative, however they will not be able to have the support of a friend, family member or other professionals who may interfere with the legal process.

Full information on this process will be given to the parent prior to the PACE interview by way of an information leaflet and verbal feedback given at the Attendance Interview.

The SAO may also act as a channel to other agencies, eg Children's Services.

The Role of the Local Authority

LA's are charged in law with enforcing school attendance and must ensure that schools and parents are fulfilling their statutory obligations including, where necessary, the taking of action through the courts.

Appendix 1

SCHOOL CHECKLIST FOR ISSUE OF FPNs FOR UNAUTHORISED LEAVE IN TERM TIME

Does the school have the FPN process in their attendance policy for term time holiday?	YES/NO
Name of Student:	
Date of Birth:	
Year:	
Attendance:	
Attendance last year (if beginning of year i.e. prior to half term):	
Parent 1: Full Name (including first name) of parent or carer: #	
Parent 2: Full Name (including first name) of parent or carer: #	
Address of Parent(s) or carers:	
What reason did the parent give for requesting a term-time holiday? (Copy of request form to be enclosed) #	
Was a letter sent informing the parent that the holiday was unauthorised and that a FPN might follow? (If so, the letter sent to the parent <u>MUST</u> be attached).	
Were there any verbal communications with the parent?	
Dates of Absence (<u>Attendance Certificate to be attached</u>) #	
Has the parent requested a holiday previously?	
If so, was the holiday authorised?	
Are there other attendance concerns?	

Name of school referrer

Date

If this information is not provided by schools to support the FPN application then the FPN will NOT be processed.

Together we make the difference