



# **Attendance Policy**

## **Durham Gilesgate School**

**Academic Year**

**2021/22**

## **Durham Gilesgate Primary School - Attendance Policy**

Durham Gilesgate Primary School seeks to ensure that all its pupils receive an education which maximises opportunities for each pupil to realise his/her true potential. The school will strive to provide a welcoming, caring environment, whereby each member of the school community feels valued and secure.

We believe that all students benefit from the education we provide, and therefore from regular attendance. The aim of our attendance policy is to provide a consistent practice that encourages and facilitates the regular attendance of all pupils.

All school staff work continually with pupils and their families to support parents in helping them to meet their legal duty; to ensure that their children attend school regularly and on time. A whole school attendance target of 96% has been set for the **academic year 2021/2022** and various measures will be put in place to help work towards this.

The school has established an effective system of incentives and rewards which acknowledges the efforts of pupils to improve their attendance and timekeeping and will challenge the behaviour of those pupils and parents who give low priority to attendance and punctuality.

This policy has been reviewed and rewritten in line with the DFE 'School attendance Departmental advice for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities' (October 2014) and 'School attendance parental responsibility measures' (January 2015).

This policy is supported by our policies on safeguarding, bullying, behaviour and inclusive learning.

### **1. Attendance and Attainment**

We recognise that the relationship between attendance and achievement of our students is inextricably linked.

Regular school attendance is crucial to maximise pupil progress and enjoyment of learning, and for this reason the school is dedicated to ensuring its attendance policy is adhered to.

#### **We will ensure that:**

- All students have an equal right, and access to, an education in accordance with the national curriculum, or agreed alternative.
- Students will not be deprived of their education opportunities by, either their own absence or lateness, or that of other students.
- Action is taken where necessary to secure an improvement in attendance.

### **2. The Law**

You need to make sure your child attends school regularly and on time. Because parents are responsible for this duty in law, you will be **breaking the law** if you do not do this and there are no good reasons for missing school.

The School and Local Authority **want to help you if you are having a problem**. If attendance does not get better or you do not accept help and support offered, the Council may issue you with a warning notice, Penalty Notice or ask you to attend an interview to ask you questions about whether you have broken the law.

If you go to court and are found guilty of an offence, you could be fined up to £1,000 for a less serious offence or up to £2,500 if the law breaking is more serious. **In very serious cases, the court may involve the probation service or consider up to 3 months in prison.**

### **3. Attendance Procedures**

#### **a) On the first day off and any further absence**

If a child is ill or is absent for any reason, parents or carers must phone the School Office (0191 3847284) giving a reason for the child's absence. The telephones are automated so that parents can leave absence messages out of hours or if the lines are busy. Parents should use this service if they cannot speak to someone in the office.

If a child is absent from school and there is no phone call from home then school will phone home to inform parents that the child is not in school and enquire about a reason why.

#### **b) Avoidable Absences**

Doctors and dentists appointments should be made outside of school time wherever this is possible. If this is not possible, your child should miss the minimum amount of school time necessary. For example, if they are well enough to come back to school following the appointment they need to. Similarly, it is not necessary to have a full day's absence if the appointment is at 2:30pm. Instead make sure your child comes to school and then collect them in the afternoon to attend their appointment.

#### **c) Periods of extended absence**

If a child's absence continues beyond 3 days then parents are requested to notify the school to update them. If a phone call is not received then the school will contact home to verify the absence.

If the school receives no reason for any absence then an unauthorised absence will be recorded. Continued absenteeism and unauthorised absences could result in further action such as referral to the Attendance Improvement Team.

#### **What will happen if your child is absent from school more than they should be:**

As a minimum; at the end of each month and at the end of half term the School Office will use its computer system to analyse absence across the school. We will also monitor children with low attendance on a more frequent basis. As a result of these monitoring systems, some families will receive letters to inform them if their child's absence is lower than it should be, if no prior discussion has taken place (unless this is due to frequent hospital appointments and/or long term medical needs).

#### **Persistent Absenteeism**

A child is classed as a persistent absentee where they have missed 10% of possible school attendance. Punctuality can affect overall attendance, particularly when the child arrives after 9:15 and receives an unauthorised late mark, which counts as an absence. (See Punctuality section)

If attendance or punctuality are a cause for concern parents will be invited to an attendance planning meeting. In this meeting the reasons for absence or lateness will be discussed and targets set for improvements. Help and support will be given as needed.

#### **d) Help & Support:**

If you need help with attendance, it is important that you talk to the school about the issues as soon as possible. You may need to attend a meeting in school to talk about the problems

and to put a plan in place to help. Sometimes, school may need to involve other services to help.

**e) Communication:**

Communication is the key improving attendance. School staff will always try to communicate with you regarding your child's attendance if it declines. This communication may involve explaining that attendance is a cause for concerns by letter or by making telephone calls to you, and inviting you to attend a meeting in school depending on the circumstances. The school will work with you to discuss ways that we can offer support in finding a way to improve the situation. Please remember that communication works both ways and that parents are always welcome to tell us about problems they are having or if they know about an upcoming circumstance that might affect punctuality or attendance.

**f) Repeated absence due to illness**

The High Court has confirmed that the school's Head Teacher authorises absences. If your child misses school a lot because of illness, or if school do not know of any serious health issue that would mean your child could miss school a lot, the school may ask to you to provide medical evidence to support authorised absences. Without this supporting evidence repeated absences for illness will be recorded as unauthorised.

**g) Enforcement Action:**

If, following the schools attempts to intervene there is no significant improvement and no good reasons for absences (i.e. absences are not supported by relevant evidence), or you have not co-operated with the school's attempts to improve the situation the school are required to consider referring the matter to the Local Authority for enforcement action.

Enforcement may be in the form of a formal warning letter or a fixed penalty (this includes unauthorised absences accrued through leave of absence taken during term time).

We are committed to supporting your child effectively, to ensure that they get the very best education possible and therefore have the best life chances. All challenges made concerning persistent absences, will be handled sensitively and in confidence.

**h) Punctuality:**

The school doors open at 8:50, giving children time to enter school, hang coats up and enter their classroom. Registration time is at **9.00am** and **1.00pm** for children in Reception and through to Key Stage 2, it is **8:55am** for children in nursery and the 2 year old room.

At 9:00 am the pupil entry gates to the yard will be locked and all pupils must enter by the main entrance. It is so important for all children to be on time, as missing the first few minutes of any lesson can be disruptive and unsettling, both for children and for the rest of the class.

The beginning of the day is often when children take part in some intervention work such as the movement group, fine motor skills group, practising handwriting or responding to marking and making corrections to previous work. Missing out on any of this work impacts negatively on the attainment of children. Pupils that are late beyond 9:05 often miss out on the start of the lesson and find it hard to catch up and know what to do when they enter their class.

If a child arrives in school 15 minutes after 8:50 then a late mark will be recorded in the register (L). Registers will be closed in the classroom at this point (9:05). A further 10 minutes will be given for late arrival and any children arriving beyond 9:15 late will be recorded as (U) which is a late after registers close mark and this is classed as an unauthorised absence (a number of these marks can also contribute to a fixed penalty notice being issued).

### **In summary**

In the morning, arrival up to 9:05 will be marked as present (/), arrival from 9:05 to 9:15 will be marked as late (L) and arrival after 9:15 will be marked as unauthorised late (U)

### **If your child is late for school:**

All children arriving late at school will be asked the reason for their lateness and this will be recorded on the school's attendance database (SIMs), along with the time of their entry to school.

#### **1. If a child is late (after registers close) for school on a number of occasions;**

A letter will be sent home from school to parents to say their child's punctuality is causing some concern. An appointment with the Head may be offered to discuss ways that the school can offer support in finding a way improve this.

#### **2. If lateness becomes persistent with no identifiable reason –**

A letter will be sent home and a specific appointment will be given to meet with Head Teacher or deputy head for a 'planning meeting'. This will aim to address any issues which may be behind this pattern of poor punctuality.

#### **3. If the school continues to have concerns about a child's punctuality;**

Then a referral may be made to the Attendance Improvement Team to consider if enforcement action is required.

In any of the three steps above an alternative to an appointment is the discussion attendance and punctuality at a Team Around the Family meeting (TAF) or any other multi-agency forum where the school and family are working together.

### **4. Leave of Absence in Term Time**

Head teachers are no longer able to grant leave of absence during term time **unless there are exceptional circumstances.**

An exceptional circumstance is something that is not likely to happen at regular intervals such as

- A major family event such as the wedding of a close relative, if the Headteacher is satisfied that the circumstances are truly exceptional;
- Serious or terminal illness of a close relative
- Significant family trauma has occurred and it is believed that a break is in the child's best interests.
- Where parents are requesting a holiday because their employer will not let them take leave during a school holiday. (Evidence from the employer must be provided by the parent and repeat request, each year may be declined)
- Where an absence from school is recommended by a health professional as part of a parent or child's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue.
- Out of school programmes such as music, arts or sport where the child is operating at a high standard of achievement. Documentary evidence of this event will be required.
- Religious observance – The Education Act 1996 S444(3) (c), states "on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his/her parent belongs"

The school will consider each request of absence individually; taking into account the circumstances, such as; the nature of the event for which leave is sought, the pupil's prior attendance and any important events taking place in school at that time e.g. termly tests.

An application for leave of absence must be made well in advance via a form which is available from the school office. Where a leave of absence is granted, the head teacher will determine the number of days a pupil can be away from school. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the head teacher's discretion. As stated in the most recent DFE guidance on attendance, if an application for leave of absence is not made prior to the time of the required absence then the absence will be recorded as unauthorised regardless of circumstances.

The number of days authorised for leave of absence will be communicated to parents.

**Please note that absence will not be authorised under any circumstances during any period of public examinations or internal assessments.**

#### **5. Promoting good attendance and punctuality**

In order to promote attendance and punctuality the school will give out a weekly trophy for the class with the best attendance. Each week children with 100% attendance will receive a golden 100% attendance sticker. Attendance percentages for each class will be displayed in the school hall. Children who have good attendance or who have attendance that has improved will receive a letter from the Headteacher praising their attendance.

#### **6. Children Missing from Education:**

If you move from the area and your whereabouts are unknown, the school can legally remove your child from the roll after 20 school days of unauthorised absence. It is **vital that if you keep school informed of any change of details** and regularly update them if details change. Your child may be at risk of losing their school place if your whereabouts are not known.

It is also important that emergency contact information is kept up to date and that if you are leaving the area, you provide details of where and how you can be contacted. If you do not do this and the school is unable to trace your child, this would be treated as a **safeguarding matter**.

#### **7. Roles and Responsibilities**

##### **Governing Body:**

As part of our school approach to maintaining high attendance, the governing body will:

- Ensure that the importance of attendance is made clear by promoting the relevant school policies and guidance directed to parents and staff.
- Annually review the school's attendance policy and ensure that all provisions are in place to allow school staff, parents, and students to implement the policy effectively.
- Ensure regular meetings of the Pupil Welfare Committee take place and they will take the lead role in monitoring attendance and coordinating provision and policies for attendance. The governor's meetings will review and discuss attendance issues that have arisen in order to be fully aware and supportive of expected attendance targets for the year.
- Ensure that the school is implementing effective means of recording attendance and organising that data, including for children who are educated off site.

##### **School Leadership Team:**

As part of our school approach to maintaining high attendance, the leadership team will:

- Be active in their approach to promoting good attendance with students and their parents.
- Ensure the school's teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance and that students are taught the value of high attendance for their own progression and achievement.
- Coordinate with the governing body to monitor the implementation of the policy and its effectiveness, with annual review of full policy.

- Ensure that all staff are up to date with the school's attendance policy and that staff are fully trained to recognise and deal with attendance issues.
- Ensure government legislation on attendance is complied with and that the leadership team are up to date with any legislation changes and how to implement them.
- Nominate or appoint a senior manager to take responsibility for overseeing and monitoring attendance provision and that this person has sufficient time and resources to give to the job.
- Report to Full Governing Body and / or Pupil Welfare Committee meeting each term on attendance records, data and provision.
- Ensure that systems to record and report attendance data are in place and working effectively.

#### **Teachers and support staff:**

As part of our school approach to maintaining high attendance, the teachers and support staff will:

- Be active in their approach to promoting good attendance with students and their parents.
- Ensure the school's teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance and that students are taught the value of high attendance for their own progression and achievement.
- Ensure the senior manager responsible for overseeing attendance and any other relevant personnel are kept fully aware of and up to date with any concerns relating to students that may impact on their attendance.
- Ensure compliance with regulation and guidance on attendance.
- Work professionally with parents, carers, students and relevant agencies to secure improvements in attendance via appropriate support or enforcement measures.
- Ensure understanding and that they are following the correct systems for recording attendance and that attendance is taken each session.

#### **Parents / Carers:**

As part of our school approach to maintaining high attendance, we expect that parents / carers will:

- Engage with their children's education – support their learning and take an interest in what they have been doing at school.
- Promote the value of good education and the importance of regular school attendance at home.
- Follow the procedures outlined in this policy regarding absences, ill health, medical or dental appointments, leave of absence in term time and punctuality.
- Do everything they can to prevent unnecessary or avoidable school absences.
- Keep the school informed of any circumstances which may affect their child's attendance and work with staff in resolving any issues that may be having an impact on their child.
- Enforce a regular routine at home in terms of homework, bedtime etc so that the child is used to consistency and the school becomes part of that routine. It is vital that the child receives the same messages at home as they do at school about the importance of attendance.

This version of the policy was amended in January 2022 to take into account the DfE proposals around avoidable absences.