

# Attendance Policy

## West Rainton Primary School



**Academic Year**

**2022/23**

**Attendance Policy**  
**West Rainton Primary School**

**Document History Log:**

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| <b>Author of document:</b>    | Alison McDonough | <b>Job role:</b>                   | Headteacher    |
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### Attendance key contact List

| Name             | Role  | Contact details                                 |
|------------------|---|---|
| Alison McDonough | Head Teacher  | 0191 5843805                                    |
| Alison McDonough | Designated senior leader with responsibility for attendance | a.mcdonough101@westraintonprimary.durham.sch.uk |
| Rev Michael Beck | Lead governor for attendance                                | M.Beck600@durhamlearning.net                    |
| Susan Firth      | SENDCo and Inclusion Lead                                   | s.firth200@westraintonprimary.durham.sch.uk     |
| Kirstin McGowan  | School Business Manager                                     | westrainton@durhamlearning.net                  |
|                  |   |   |
|                  |   |   |

**Who in school can help if you are experiencing difficulty / require help and support:**

| Name  | Role / type of help   | Contact details                                 |
|---|---|---|
| Alison McDonough  | Head Teacher  | 0191 5843805                                    |
| Alison McDonough  | Designated senior leader with responsibility for attendance | a.mcdonough101@westraintonprimary.durham.sch.uk |
| Rev Michael Beck  | Lead governor for attendance                                | M.Beck600@durhamlearning.net                    |
| Susan Firth   | SENDCo and Inclusion Lead                                   | s.firth200@westraintonprimary.durham.sch.uk     |
| Kirstin McGowan   | School Business Manager                                     | westrainton@durhamlearning.net                  |
|   |   |   |
| In addition, all class teachers are available to support with attendance. |   |   |

## **Introduction to our school attendance vision and ethos**

West Rainton Primary School seeks to ensure that all of its pupils receive an education which maximises opportunities for each pupil to realise his/her true potential. The school will strive to provide a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn within a culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance.

Regular school attendance plays a vital role in children's wellbeing and their education, ensuring that their current learning needs are being met but also building their future ability to learn.

As attendance is the essential foundation to positive outcomes for all pupils', improving attendance is everyone's business, a concerted effort across all teaching and nonteaching staff in school, the trust or governing body, the local authority, and other local partners.

Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and therefore at all stages of improving attendance, the school and partners will work with pupils and parents to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.

### **Why is regular attendance so important?**

Being in school every day that it is open, is important to your child's achievement, wellbeing, and their wider development. There is a renewed national focus on maximising pupils' time in the classroom, as evidence shows that the students with the highest attendance throughout their time in school gain the best GCSE and A Level results.

### **Here's what the data shows:**

Pupils with higher attainment at KS2 and KS4 had lower levels of absence over the key stage compared to those with lower attainment.

Pupils who did not achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 4.7% over the key stage, compared with 3.5% among pupils who achieved the expected standard and 2.7% among those who achieved the higher standard.

Pupils who did not achieve grade 9 to 4 in English and maths GCSEs in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 8.8% over the key stage, compared with 5.2% among pupils who achieved a grade 4 and 3.7% among pupils who achieved grade 9 to 5 in both English and maths.

Generally, the higher the percentage of sessions missed across the key stage at KS2 and KS4, the lower the level of attainment at the end of the key stage.

Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS2, 83.9% achieved the expected standard compared to 40.2% of pupils who were persistently absent.

Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS4, 83.7% achieved grades 9 to 4 in English and maths compared to 35.6% of pupils who were persistently absent.

West Rainton Primary School is a vibrant and happy place to learn, play and grow. There is always something going on! Attending school, on every day possible, means our pupils gain the maximum benefit, not only from the classroom experiences, but from the wider personal development that we offer.

Our routine, clarity and structure ensures all of our pupils know that they are valued, and this in turn makes them feel secure. We work as one big, extended family so everyone cares if someone is missing.

Our extra-curricular clubs offer is exceptional. Driven by pupil voice, it is a key element of how we've improved attendance to where we are today. But, there's always more work to be done.

As a team, we progress and improve together. Good attendance is fundamental in all aspects of our continuing journey such as, assuring pupils are receiving a quality education, improving their understanding of safeguarding and e-safety, ensuring consistent behaviour and anti-bullying values are shared and supporting pupils who are disadvantaged to ensure everyone has the best chance possible of maximising their potential.

**This policy is supported by our policies on:**

safeguarding;  
anti-bullying;  
SEND;  
wellbeing;  
behaviour;  
inclusion

You can find all of these policies on our school website.

**The school and all partners will work together to:**

**EXPECT**

Aspire to high standards of attendance from all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school.



**MONITOR**

Rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.



**LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND**

When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen to understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.



**FACILITATE SUPPORT**

Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.



**FORMALISE SUPPORT**

Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through a parenting contract or education supervision order.



**ENFORCE**

Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.

## **1. Expectations**

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.
- Attendance is a priority across the school.
- Aspire to high standards on attendance.
- Students will not be deprived of their education opportunities by, either their own absence or lateness, or that of students.
- Action is taken where necessary to secure an improvement in attendance.
- We continually provide a vibrant offer, within the classroom curriculum, extra-curricular opportunities and 'hidden' curriculum so that pupils simply don't want to miss out.
- All staff and governors buy into our championing of attendance so that we lead by example.

## **2. Attendance data**

In school, our attendance is monitored daily. Our pupils love nothing more than a whole-school conga on every 100% day!

First-day phonecalls are made for every absence and follow-up calls are made in a timely and supportive manner.

Parents are kept in touch with attendance figures, at the end of each month and term, through clear letters explaining our observations on any concerns, patterns, achievements and improvements. It also offers holistic advice going forward to the whole school population.

More concerning absence data are more regularly and rigorously assessed so that all parties can come together swiftly to resolve issues before they become entrenched.

## **3. Listening to and understanding barriers to attendance**

When an absence pattern is spotted, the school will discuss this with pupils and parents to listen to and understand barriers to attendance and make a plan / otherwise agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.

We find, in most cases, this level of support is often enough to see significant changes.

#### 4. Facilitate support

Often, in those initial conversations, simple solutions can be sought and tried, in order to improve attendance. Understanding that a full education is a fundamental right that all children are entitled to becomes a shared understanding for all involved.

Support offered at West Rainton has included access to wraparound care; communication with all caregivers to ensure approaches are consistent; external specialist support for wellbeing; planning for travelling or holidays; collection from home by senior staff.

Where further support may be needed, the school may suggest an early help referral or whole family plan to strengthen knowledge through other agencies about wider issues affecting attendance.

#### What is 'good attendance' at West Rainton?

All pupils in West Rainton Primary are regularly made aware of an individual, cohort and whole-school target of 96%. More information about how we promote this is set out later in this policy. 96% is the national expected target for all pupils, and equates to 8 days or fewer absence per school year.

There are categories of attendance where more urgent support is needed. These are:

**Persistent absence**- a pupil is classed as a persistent absentee if, at any point, their attendance drops below 90% (absence of 10% or more). This equates to 20 days or more absence in a school year and significantly impacts on academic and personal progress. A staggering way to look at this is to think that if a child was allowed to maintain 90% attendance, consistently from reception to the end of year 4, they will, in fact, have missed **HALF A YEAR** of school.

**Severe absence**- a pupils is classed as having severe absence if, at any point, their attendance drops below 50%. This equates to approximately 100 days absence in a school year.

In **many cases** of persistent absence, and **all cases** of severe absence, the school will formalise the support being provided, in conjunction with local authority guidance and resources.

#### 5. Formalise support

Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working, or not being engaged with, partners will work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. We do recognise that each case of absence is individual so, depending on the circumstances, this may include formalising support through a parenting contract or education supervision order.

At this point, we work very closely with families, and with our designated attendance improvement officer, to carry out a timely and appropriate process to secure improvement.

## 6. Enforce

Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, attendance may be enforced where necessary, through statutory intervention, or prosecution, to protect the pupil's right to an education.

This is a last resort approach in our relentless drive to champion attendance for every pupil.

### General / frequently asked questions

#### **When can children be absent from school?**

When you register your child at school, you have a legal duty to ensure your child attends that school regularly.

This means that your child must attend every day that the school is open, unless:

- Your child is too ill to attend that day.
- You have asked in advance and been given permission by the school for your child to be absent on that day due to exceptional circumstances.
- Your child cannot attend school on that day because it is a day you are taking part in religious observance
- Your local authority is responsible for arranging your child's transport to school and it is not available on that day or has not been provided yet; or
- You are a gypsy/traveller family with no fixed abode, and you are required to travel **for work** that day meaning your child cannot attend their usual school. In most circumstances, however, **your child is required to attend another school temporarily** during such absences.

These are the **only circumstances** where schools can permit your child to be absent.

#### **What do I need to do if my child needs to be absent from school for one of those reasons?**

You should contact their school as early as possible to explain why. If not, your child's school will contact you on the first morning of their absence to find out why.

All parents can request a 'leave of absence' for their child which gives them permission to be absent from school. Leaves of absence must be applied for before your child will be absent and will **only be granted in exceptional circumstances**.

Your child's headteacher has the final say over whether to approve the request and how long your child can be absent.

Their decision will be made after considering the specific facts and circumstances behind your request.

## **Can I take my child on holiday during term time?**

Parents should plan their holidays around school breaks and avoid requesting leaves of absence for holidays unless it is unavoidable.

As leave of absence is only granted in exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely that your child's headteacher will agree a leave of absence for a family holiday.

If permission is refused and you keep your child off school on the days requested, you are likely to be committing an offence and be issued a fixed penalty notice or be prosecuted by your local authority.

## **Attendance Procedures and Absence Processes**

### **Attendance and absence management**

#### **Promoting good attendance and punctuality**

There is not a day goes by at West Rainton Primary where good attendance is not recognised by all staff and for all pupils. We have many varied ways of promoting good attendance and punctuality.

- Clarity and consistency of the school policy on attendance is the very first step. All pupils, and parents, joining the school hear, read about and experience how we achieve this.
- On each day where all pupils (from reception to Year 6) are in school, a whole-school conga takes place either in assembly or outside!
- In each Friday assembly, the headteacher gives the children an update on attendance and the top three classes are celebrated; the first placed one receiving the attendance trophy to keep in class for the week.
- A simple, visual display of our whole-school 96% attendance target is visible in the hall. It is referred to in Friday's celebration assembly and, at the end of each month, children wait with baited breath to hear if our collective figure is above the target.
- If this collective whole-school target of 96% is met by the end of the academic year, all children participate in a reward day. In recent years, this has included inflatable slides and ice cream!
- For every completed week of perfect attendance, each child adds their own raffle ticket to a box. In the final week of each term, (December, March and July) a huge prize draw, funded by our PTA, takes place.
- Monthly and termly updates on attendance for parents/carers include letters, postcards or certificates for pupils with good, improving or perfect attendance.

#### **Communication**

The school requests that all parents please remember to report and explain the reasons for absence and to make sure your contact and emergency contact details are up to date.

It is vital, that school can contact parents if their child becomes unwell during the school day, or in order to discuss the reasons for absence. Not providing adequate emergency contacts, or rejecting communication, can prompt safeguarding concerns.

The school will analyse absence across the school. As a result of this, 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, for example medical needs). If we have concerns regarding your child's attendance then we may contact you by phone, letter, invite you to a meeting or make a visit to your home.

As a parent, you may identify concerns about school attendance early on if you have seen a change in your child's attitude to school or in their willingness to attend. If this is the case, please share your concerns with us and we can work together to ensure that school attendance doesn't ever need to decline. The quicker that concerns are shared, the quicker they can be resolved.

The school will work with you to discuss ways that we can offer support in finding a way to improve attendance.

### **On the first day of absence**

If a child is absent for any reason, parents or carers are asked to phone the school office, stating a reason for the child's absence. 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.

Doctors', dentists' and opticians' appointments should be made outside of school time. If this is not possible, your child should miss the minimum amount of school time necessary. If they are well enough to come back to school following the appointment they need to.

The school will question repeated similar medical ailments and request that medical intervention is sought. The school will also question sibling absence occurring concurrently.

### **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, the school will contact parents/carers, by either telephone or home visit, to verify the absence and take any relevant action in relation to assuring itself of the child's welfare.

If the school receives no reason for any absence then an unauthorised absence will be recorded. Continued absenteeism and unauthorised absences could result in more formal action.

### **Absence authorisation**

The High Court has confirmed that the school's Head Teacher authorises absences. In some circumstances, the school may request that parent's provide medical evidence to support absences.

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.

***It is important for parents/ carers to note that authorised absence is still absence. It does not remove the fact that attendance figures will reduce, it simply validates the reason for the absence.***

### **Punctuality:**

Registration time is at **8:50 am** at which point the pupil entry gates 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. If a child arrives in school up to 15 minutes after this time then a late mark will be recorded in the register (L). Registers will be closed at this point and any children arriving more than 15 minutes 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 more formal action being considered).

### **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 data base (SIMs).

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

Reasons given for lateness will be recorded on SIMs and CPOMS systems. Conversations will be held with parents/carers to ascertain whether or not support needs to be put in place to achieve better punctuality.

### **If lateness becomes persistent with no identifiable reason**

The school will begin more formalised procedures, similar to those outlined in response to repeated poor attendance. This may include: formal meetings with parents/carers, a parent contract, a signed support plan agreement with a short-term target to be reviewed.

Where the school can find support to improve punctuality such as, access to wraparound care or liaising with external agencies in the case of health or wellbeing issues, they will do so as swiftly as possible.

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

The school will seek support from their designated attendance improvement officer at the Local Authority to begin more formal monitoring of the impact that it is having on the child's academic and personal development.

### **Help & Support**

If you need help with attendance, it is important that you contact school about the issues as soon as possible. The quicker we know what the problem is, the quicker that we can work together to solve it and put a plan together which will meet your

child's needs and ensure your child can benefit from all that school has to offer. Where needed we can also involve other services to make sure that your child and your family gets the right support, at the right time from the right people.

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

Head teachers are only able to grant leave of absence during term time **unless there are exceptional circumstances**. The school will consider each request of absence individually; considering 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.

An application for leave of absence must be made well in advance via a form which is available from the school website or in person 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. 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.

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

### **Pupils with specific needs**

Some pupils, with specific needs, may have valid reasons for absence. Through the rigorous and regular reviews held by our school SENDCo and parents/carers, these reasons will be explored and documented appropriately in school. For example, these may include: absence for appointments above and beyond universal medical needs, absence to attend therapeutic sessions and/or absence to recover from specific medical episodes such as epilepsy.

Similarly, some pupils may have additional responsibilities as young carers at home where the needs of the family can become a barrier to attendance. It is important that the school is made aware of circumstances like this as soon as possible, to ensure the right support for all is in place.

As evidenced in our Inclusion Quality Mark Centre of Excellence status, key staff have strong awareness of their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This ensures that policies, such as this, can be applied fairly for all pupils and families.

### **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**.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Please see key contact list and details at the start of this document.

- Mrs Alison McDonough- Headteacher and lead for championing attendance. Mrs McDonough is also the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead so is perfectly placed to recognise that attendance can be a factor in keeping children safe.
- Mrs Kirstin McGowan- School Business Manager is responsible for the daily checking of registers and recording of attendance on our systems. Mrs McGowan will most usually be the person who makes first-day and subsequent attendance phonecalls.
- Rev Michael Beck- Lead governor for attendance and safeguarding. Rev Beck is the Chair of our Governing Body and has regular monitoring meetings with the Headteacher about attendance and safeguarding. He, and the headteacher are accountable for reporting to the governing body on anonymised attendance figures and improvement planning.
- Mrs Susan Firth- Deputy Headteacher and school SENDCo and Inclusion lead. Special considerations around attendance for pupils with specific needs will be co-ordinated alongside parents/ carers in regular review meetings with Mrs Firth.
- All teachers and teaching assistants- have a shared role in championing attendance and will challenge absence or lateness in a consistent way in line with this policy. Attendance is everyone's business!