

The Discovery School



Attendance Policy

Rationale

The Discovery School is committed to the continuous raising of achievement of all our pupils. Regular attendance is critical if our pupils are to be successful and benefit from the opportunities presented to them.

Good attendance is fundamental to a successful and fulfilling school experience. We actively promote 100% attendance and expect all pupils to achieve at least 96% attendance. To achieve this, we use a variety of strategies to promote good attendance and punctuality.

The Governors, Headteacher and Staff, in partnership with parents and carers, have a duty to promote full attendance at our school.

Roles and Responsibilities

Parental Responsibility

Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their children attend school regularly and arrive on time. Regular attendance is essential to the all-round development of the child and they should be allowed to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them, in order to make good progress in their learning. Poor attendance undermines their educational attainment and progress and can put pupils at risk by encouraging anti-social behaviour.

It is the parents' responsibility to contact the school on the first day, and each subsequent day, their child is absent. This is a safeguarding requirement, so that all parties know that the child is safe and their whereabouts is known.

Pupils are expected to arrive in school by 8:50am. All pupils that arrive late must report, with their parent, to the school office where the reason for lateness will be recorded.

The Role of the School Staff

At our school there is a whole school responsibility and approach for improving school attendance, with specific staff taking individual responsibility.

The Headteacher, **Miss Tina Gobell**, has overall responsibility for securing good attendance at school from all pupils.

The Attendance Officer, **Mrs Gaynor Priddis**, has overall responsibility for monitoring attendance issues on behalf of the Headteacher.

It is the responsibility of the Attendance Officer to ensure:

- Attendance and lateness records are up to date
- If no reason for absence has been provided, parents are contacted on the first day, and each subsequent day, of absence by telephone call.
- Where there has been no communication, letters are sent to parents requesting reasons for absence.
- The appropriate attendance code is entered into the register
- Parents/carers are informed in a timely manner of any concerns regarding the attendance of their child.

Class teachers have responsibility for completing a register at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session. Marking the attendance registers twice daily is a legal requirement. (The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006). Teachers mark pupils present, absent or late.

Children Missing Education

No child should be removed from the school roll without consultation with the Headteacher, and if appropriate, the Local Authority Inclusion and Attendance Service.

Local Authority guidance will be followed by completing a Child Missing Education referral under the following circumstances:

- The whereabouts of the child is unknown and the school has failed to locate him/her.
- The family has notified the School that they are leaving the area, but no Common Transfer Form (pupil file) has been requested by another school.

Lateness

At The Discovery School, the school gates are open between 8.40 am and 8.50 am. Registration opens at 8:45 am and closes at 8:55 am. Pupils arriving after 8.50 am must enter school by the main entrance and report to Reception, where their name and the reason for lateness will be recorded. The pupil will be marked as late before registration has closed (Code 'L').

The register will close at 8.55 am and fifteen minutes after the end of the lunch hour in the afternoon. Pupils arriving after the register has closed will be marked as late after registration (Code 'U'). This will count as an unauthorised absence. Frequent lateness will be discussed with parents and can result in a referral to the Local Authority, where action can be taken.

Authorising Absence

Only the Headteacher can authorise absence, using a consistent approach. The Headteacher is not obliged to accept a parent's explanation for absence. A letter or telephone message from a parent does not in itself authorise an absence. If absences are not authorised, parents will be notified.

If no explanation is received, absences will not be authorised.

Unauthorised Absence

Absence during term time can only be approved in "exceptional circumstances". The following reasons are examples of absence that will not usually be authorised:

- Family Holidays
- Persistent, non-specific illness e.g. poorly/unwell
- Absence of siblings if one child is ill
- Absence of child if parent is ill
- Oversleeping
- Clothing/uniform issues
- Confusion over school dates
- Medical/dental appointments of more than half a day without very good reasons
- Child's/family birthday
- Shopping trip

Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 says that parents/carers are **guilty** of an offence of failing to secure regular attendance at school, unless they can prove that the child was absent for the following reasons:

- Due to sickness or any unavoidable cause (the sickness or unavoidable cause must relate to the child, not the parent)
- Religious observance
- Failure by the Local Authority to provide transport
- Due to authorised leave (the School has given permission)

In law, these are the only acceptable reasons for a child being absent from school.

Where concerns regarding a pupil's absence are identified, parents and carers will be notified in writing and support will be offered. The Headteacher may request a meeting with the parent/carer. Where concerns regarding repeated, parentally condoned absence arise, then parents/carers may be asked to provide medical evidence in order to authorise future absences.

Persistent and Severely Absent Pupils

A child is deemed to be persistently absent from school when attendance is below 90%.

Severely Absent pupils are those that are absent from school for more than 50% of the time.

Persistent and severe, unauthorised absence may result in a referral to the Local Authority for consideration of prosecution.

The School will follow this policy prior to referral and parents will be notified in writing. When a referral is made, the child's Registration Certificate, copies of all letters sent to parents and minutes of any meetings will be attached to the completed referral form, with any other relevant information.

Local Authority action may include:

- Attendance Improvement Meeting
- Home visits
- Liaison with other agencies
- Fast Track to Prosecution
- A penalty notice

Penalty Notices Proceedings for Poor Attendance

For children who are experiencing barriers to good attendance at school, we will seek to support families. However, there are occasions when support is not appropriate e.g. unauthorised absence due to a holiday or persistent, parentally condoned absence. Where support is not appropriate, is not successful or not engaged with, then the School may seek a fixed-penalty notice.

A fixed penalty notice can be issued for the following reasons:

- Parentally condoned absences
- Unauthorised leave for the purpose of a holiday in term-time
- Delayed return from a leave of absence, without prior school agreement
- Persistent late arrival at school after registration has closed
- Where an excluded child is found in a public place during school hours, during the first five days of an exclusion

Penalty notices may be issued to a parent as an alternative to prosecution for irregular school attendance under s444 of the Education Act 1996 and in accordance with the Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007, as amended, and Kent County Council's Penalty Notice Code of Conduct, August 2024:

https://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/62126/KCC-Penalty-Notice-Code-of-Conduct.pdf

- A Penalty Notice can only be issued in cases of absence for 10 or more half day sessions (5 school days) without authorisation during any 100 possible school sessions or period of 50 days of schooling – these do not need to be consecutive.
- A Penalty Notice can also be issued where an excluded child is found in a public place during school hours.

National threshold for issuing a penalty notice

The threshold is:

- 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks
- A school week means any week in which there is at least one school session
- This can be met with any combination of unauthorised absence (e.g. 4 sessions of holiday taken in term time plus 6 sessions of arriving late after the register closes all within 10 school weeks)
- These sessions can be consecutive (e.g. 10 sessions of holiday in one week) or not (e.g. 6 sessions of unauthorised absence taken in 1 week and 1 per week for the next 4 weeks)
- The period of 10 school weeks can also span different terms or school years (e.g. 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in the Summer Term and a further 8 within the Autumn Term)

Penalty Notice Fines

A penalty notice can be issued to each parent believed to be liable for the offence or offences.

Arrangements for payment will be detailed within the Penalty Notice issued.

- The first penalty notice issued to the parent for a child will be charged at £80 if paid within 21 days, rising to £160 if paid between days 22 and 28.
- Where it is deemed appropriate to issue a second penalty notice to the same parent for the same pupil within 3 years of the first offence, the second notice is charged at a flat rate of £160 and is payable within 28 days. There is no reduced sum available in this instance.
- Part payments or payment plans are not acceptable and fines must be paid in full within 21 or 28 days, at the rate specified within the penalty notice.
- Payment after the deadline will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.
- Any revenues collected by Kent County Council is retained by them and not by the School.

A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within three years of the date of issue of the first. In a case where the national threshold (above) is met for a third time (or subsequent times) within those 3 years, alternative action will be considered instead. This will include considering prosecution or some other legal intervention.

Authorised Absence

The Headteacher may authorise absence in “exceptional circumstances”. In law, the only acceptable reasons for a child being absent from school are:

- Due to sickness or any unavoidable cause (the sickness or unavoidable cause must relate to the child, not the parent)
- Religious observance
- Failure by the Local Authority to provide transport

- The School has given prior permission for a period of leave

If a child is absent due to illness, it is the parents' responsibility to contact the School on the first day, and each subsequent day, their child is absent.

Any other periods of leave must be requested in advance. Agreement to each request is at the discretion of the Headteacher, acting on behalf of the Governing Body (Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006). Each case will be judged on its merits and the Headteacher's decision is final. Once the decision not to authorise leave is taken, it cannot be authorised retrospectively.

Exceptional circumstances for authorising leave could include:

- Service personnel returning from a tour of duty abroad where it is evidenced the parent will not be in receipt of any leave in the near future that coincides with school holidays.
- Where an absence from school is recommended by a health professional as part of a parent's or child's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue.
- The death or terminal illness of a person close to the family.
- To attend a wedding or funeral of a person close to the family for a reasonable period of absence.
- Any strong personal reasons why a family might need to take a child away from school for a short break.

The examples provided above are illustrative, rather than exhaustive. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short (and by 'unavoidable', it implies that an event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time).

In considering a request for authorised leave, it is acceptable for the School to take a pupil's previous record of attendance into account when making decisions.

It is important to note that, whilst Headteachers can agree the absence of a child in exceptional circumstances, this discretion can also be used to determine the length of the authorised absence.

If the absence is not authorised and the leave is taken anyway, the case may be referred to the Inclusion and Attendance Service, who may issue a Penalty Notice to each parent, for each child, taken out of school (see above).

Policy Agreed: 14th July 2025

Next review date: July 2026