

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 8:45 am. 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 8.35 am and 8.45 am. Registration opens at 8:45 am and closes at 8:55 am. Pupils arriving after 8.45 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.

Requests for leave of absence

Parents and carers must apply to the Headteacher in advance if they wish to request leave of absence during term time. Leave of absence will only be granted where the Headteacher considers that the circumstances are exceptional.

Each application will be considered individually, taking into account the specific facts and circumstances of the request and the relevant background. The school will consider the nature of the event or circumstance, whether the absence could reasonably have been arranged outside term time, the length and timing of the proposed absence, the impact on the pupil's education and attendance, and any other relevant factors.

There is no automatic entitlement to leave of absence during term time, regardless of the reason given or the pupil's previous attendance.

Exceptional circumstances

The Department for Education does not provide an exhaustive list of circumstances that must be regarded as exceptional. The school will therefore exercise reasonable discretion and consider each request on its individual merits.

Circumstances that may be considered exceptional could include, depending on the individual facts and evidence:

- a significant and unavoidable family or personal circumstance which could not reasonably have been anticipated or arranged outside term time;
- a significant event of particular importance to the child or immediate family, where attendance at the event is genuinely important and the timing cannot reasonably be changed;
- exceptional circumstances arising from serious or unforeseen family difficulties;
- other circumstances where there is a compelling reason for the pupil's absence and it is reasonable, in the particular case, for the school to grant leave.

These examples are illustrative and do not create an entitlement to authorised leave. The fact that a circumstance falls within one of these categories will not, by itself, mean that leave will be authorised.

Where appropriate, the school may request supporting information or evidence to enable the Headteacher to make an informed decision.

Family holidays during term time

The DfE's position is that a holiday during term time is generally not an exceptional circumstance. Parents and carers are therefore expected to arrange family holidays during school holiday periods. A holiday taken for leisure or recreation will not normally be authorised simply because it is more convenient or affordable during term time.

The following factors would not normally, either individually or collectively, constitute exceptional circumstances:

- the cost of a holiday being lower during term time;
- the availability or cost of flights or other travel arrangements;
- parents' or carers' work or employment commitments;
- difficulties obtaining annual leave during school holiday periods;
- the convenience of travelling during term time;
- the availability of particular accommodation or travel arrangements;
- a family holiday having already been booked or paid for;
- financial loss resulting from cancelling or changing a booking;
- the holiday being a family tradition or an opportunity for family time; or
- the pupil having a good or previously good attendance record.

The fact that a holiday has been booked before an application is made, or before the school has confirmed that leave is authorised, does not constitute an exceptional circumstance.

The school will not normally authorise a holiday during term time solely because a parent or carer considers that the circumstances are exceptional. The decision will be based on the particular circumstances of the case and the Headteacher's professional judgement.

Children in Early Years

In England, there is an important distinction between a child being below compulsory school age and a child being registered as a pupil at a school. While a child below compulsory school age is not subject to the legal requirement to attend school and a penalty notice cannot be issued on this basis, once a child is registered as a full-time pupil, the School is required to maintain an attendance register and apply its Attendance Policy consistently. Requests for leave during term time will therefore be considered in accordance with this policy and the applicable Department for Education guidance. Where the circumstances do not meet the criteria for authorised leave, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. The School is therefore unable to amend the attendance code for term-time holiday leave where the absence does not meet the criteria for authorisation.

Length of authorised leave

Where leave of absence is authorised because exceptional circumstances have been established, the Headteacher will determine the length of leave that is reasonable in the circumstances.

Authorisation may be limited to a shorter period than that requested. The existence of exceptional circumstances does not mean that the full period requested will automatically be authorised.

Parents and carers should not make non-refundable travel or accommodation arrangements before receiving written confirmation that the requested leave has been authorised.

Unauthorised term-time leave

Where leave of absence is requested but the Headteacher does not consider that exceptional circumstances have been established, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised if the pupil is subsequently absent.

Where a parent or carer takes a child out of school without requesting permission in advance, or where a request for leave has been refused but the child is nevertheless absent, the absence will normally be recorded as unauthorised.

Unauthorised absence may result in consideration of a penalty notice or other legal intervention in accordance with the national framework and the relevant Local Authority's arrangements.

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