



St Mary's CE (VA) Primary School

ATTENDANCE POLICY

July 2024

July 2026

Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Luke 18:16)

This policy is based upon our Christian values of thankfulness, respect, honesty, love and resilience.

Statement of Intent

St Mary’s 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.

Research tells us that there is a clear link between poor school attendance and lower attainment:

“Regular school attendance and educational attainment are inextricably linked” (McClure Watters 2012)

“There is a clear link between poor attendance at school and lower academic achievement” (Taylor 2012)

One of our basic principles is to celebrate success. Good attendance is fundamental to a successful and fulfilling school experience. We actively promote 100% attendance for all our pupils and we use a variety of weekly, termly and annual awards to promote good attendance and punctuality.

The Governors, Head Teacher and Staff in partnership with parents have a duty to promote full attendance at St Mary’s School. In 2024 the Department for Education published guidance which was statutory, stating that:

“..schools, trusts, governing bodies and local authorities must have regard to it as part of their efforts to maintain high levels of school attendance”.

Parental Responsibility

Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child(ren) 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 educational opportunities available to them. Poor attendance undermines their education and sometimes, puts pupils at risk, encouraging anti-social behaviour.

It is the parents’ responsibility to contact the school on the first day their child is absent. This is a safeguarding issue so that all parties know that your child is safe. Parents should regularly update the school and inform the school when their child is returning.

All pupils that arrive late must report **with their parent** to the school office, where the reason for lateness is recorded and they will be collected and taken into school.

The Role of the School Staff

St Mary's School all staff have a responsibility for attendance and safeguarding.

The Headteacher, Mrs A McGarrigle, has responsibility for monitoring attendance, which she does with our attendance service.

Class teachers complete a register at the beginning of each morning and once at the start of the 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. The Headteacher notifies the attendance service of children whose attendance is causing concern.

It is the responsibility of St Mary's School Office Manager (Mrs McKey), and for Nursery the Admin Assistant for Early Years, 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 of absence
- Where there has been no communication, letters are sent to parents requesting reasons for absence with a seven day reply deadline before the absence is unauthorised
- The appropriate attendance code is entered into the register (National Attendance Codes)
- Parents informed termly of child's attendance figure

Timeline of School Action for Poor Attendance

- 95 - 100% attendance - class teacher/ Attendance Officer to investigate and notify the Headteacher of concerns
- 90 - 95% attendance - monitored through attendance meetings with EWO, school intervention letters/meeting with parents and the Headteacher
- Below 90% - consider Attendance Service or Penalty Notice referral where the absences have not been authorised and referral criteria are met.

Children Missing Education

No child will be removed from the school roll without consultation between the Head Teacher and the Attendance Service. Where a child is missing from education, Local Authority guidance will be followed, and a missing education referral will be made:

- If 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 St Mary's School the register is taken at 9 00am and 1 00pm. Pupils arriving after these times must enter school by the main entrance and report to reception where their

name and reason for lateness will be recorded. The pupil will be marked as late before registration has closed (Code 'L').

The register will close at 9 15am and 1 15pm. Pupils arriving after the register has closed will be marked as late after registration (Code 'U') and this will count as an unauthorised absence.

Frequent lateness will be discussed with parents at open evenings and may be referred to the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) and / or Education Welfare Officer. It can provide grounds for prosecution or Penalty Notice.

Penalty Notice Proceedings for Lateness

- Five days (ten sessions) of unauthorised absence including arrival after the registers have closed in a term may lead to a referral to the Attendance Service (AS) for a Penalty Notice Warning Letter
- The Penalty Notice Warning Letter sets out 15 school days during which no unauthorised absence is to be recorded
- If unauthorised absence is recorded during the 15 day period, Penalty Notice(s) will be issued (one per parent per child)
- Where a Penalty Notice is not paid within 28 days of issue, Attendance Service may instigate court proceedings

Authorising Absence

Only the Headteacher can authorise absence. Where there is doubt, the Head Teacher, on behalf of the governing body, will take a consistent approach. The absence must be unavoidable. The Head Teacher is not obliged to accept a parent's explanation, and 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.

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

- Persistent non-specific illness e.g. poorly / unwell
- Absence of siblings if one child is ill
- Oversleeping
- Inadequate clothing / uniform
- Confusion over school dates
- Medical/dental appointments of more than half a day without very good reasons
- Child's / family birthday
- Shopping trip
- Family holidays
- Family weddings where the family will attend for a week or two

Attendance and Lateness

If a new pupil has a history of poor attendance at their previous school, there will be a pre-start attendance meeting held. The school has a 'five-step' approach to monitoring absence and lateness. It will not always be appropriate to progress through all of these steps or even to carry them out in the order listed. Responsible staff will use discretion and discuss each case carefully.

'Five Steps'

1. Where there has been no contact from parents, first day calling will take place, and the FLO and Headteacher will visit..
2. Discussion with the Attendance Service (**SEASS**) to identify pupils with attendance below 90%, monitoring trends in pupil attendance and lateness, and the allocation of FLO support.
3. Invitation to meet with the Headteacher
4. Initiate an early Intervention request for support
5. Referral to Attendance Service

Local Authority Action

Where there is no improvement in a pupil's attendance and / or there is at least ten sessions' (five days) unauthorised absence in a term (Autumn/Spring/Summer) the school will consider the following:

Education Welfare Officer Actions

This may include:

- Attendance Improvement Meeting
- Home visits
- Sign posting to supportive agencies e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Social Services and Family Group Conference Service.
- Fast Track to Prosecution

Penalty Notices for Poor Attendance

Penalty Notices are issued in accordance with the Attendance Service Code of Conduct (Revised August 2024).

- The Attendance Service issue a warning letter setting out 15 school days during which no unauthorised absence is to be recorded
- If unauthorised absence is recorded during the 15 day period a Penalty Notice will be issued (one per parent per child)

Penalty Notices will be issued in the following circumstances:

- Truancy
- Parentally-condoned absences

- Persistent lateness after the register has closed
- Being present in a public place without reasonable justification during the first five days of any fixed term or permanent exclusion.

Where Penalty Notices are imposed, the regulations state that the penalty will be £160 to be paid within 28 days, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. Penalty Notices are issued to each parent of each child. Failure to pay the penalty in full by the end of the 28 day period may result in prosecution by the Local Authority. The amount of this fine is subject to change and may increase.

Leave of Absence/Holiday

From September 2013 the Department for Education have amended the Pupil Registration Regulations, removing the Headteacher's ability to authorise leave of absence for the purpose of a family holiday.

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

- with leave (the school has given permission)
- 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

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

The Headteacher may authorise absence in "exceptional circumstances" but this must be requested in advance and 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 - Family holidays, for whatever reason, cannot be approved, even if the parent is unable to take time off work at any other time. An "exceptional circumstance" would have to be defined as an unavoidable cause eg, a one-off emergency situation which prevents the child from attending school.

Requests for holidays in term time will not be authorised.

If the absence is not authorised and the holiday is taken anyway, the case will be referred to the Attendance Service who will issue a Penalty Notice to each parent for each child taken out of school.

Penalty Notice Proceedings for Unauthorised Leave

- Penalty Notices are issued in accordance with the Attendance Service Code of Conduct.
- Attendance Service receives a request to issue a Penalty Notice for unauthorised leave of ten or more school sessions (five days)
- Attendance Service issue Penalty Notice(s) (one per parent per child)
- If Penalty Notice(s) is/are not paid within 28 days of issue, Attendance Service may instigate court proceedings

Appendix 1	Late letter (Code L)
Appendix 2	Late letter (Code U)
Appendix 3	Absence Letter
Appendix 4	School Attendance Meeting Letter
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Appendix 6	School Letter Warning re: Penalty Notice Referral
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Appendix 10	Traveller Absence (Off Roll)
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Appendix 1

Dear

I am writing to express my concern over the number of occasions that **name** has been arriving late at school. I attach for your information a summary of attendance indicating the days **name** was late. (Code L)

At St Mary's School the register is taken at 9 00am and at 1 00pm.

A pupil's lateness will seriously disrupt their learning and can be embarrassing for your child.

I am sure you share my concern and would wish to work with the school to improve punctuality. If we can help in any way, perhaps via our School Nurse or Family Liaison Officer, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

Appendix 2

Dear

Re: Child's Name

I am writing to express my concern over the number of occasions that **name** has arrived after the register has been closed. I attach for your information a summary of attendance indicating the days **name** was late. (Code U)

At St Mary's School the register is taken at 9 00am and is closed at 9 15am for the morning session and taken again at 1 00pm and closed at 1 15pm for the afternoon session. Pupils arriving after the register has closed will be marked 'U' which records the absence as unauthorised for that session.

Arriving after the register has closed is seriously disrupting your child's learning and is impacting on their overall attendance.

Persistent late arrival may lead to a referral for a Penalty Notice or a referral to the Education Welfare Officer for further action and possible prosecution.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

Appendix 3

Dear

Re: Child's Name

I am writing to express my concern over the number of occasions that **name** has been absent from school. I attach for your information a summary of attendance indicating the days **name** was absent.

A pupil's absence can seriously disrupt their learning, not only do they miss out on teaching while they are away but they are less prepared for future lessons when they return.

I am sure you share my concern and would wish to work with the school to improve **name's** attendance. If we can help in any way, perhaps via our School Nurse or Family Liaison Officer, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

Appendix 4

Dear

Re: Child's Name

Despite previous warnings, I note with concern that your child's attendance at school has made no significant improvement. **Name's** attendance at school is currently **xx%** which means **he/she** has missed **xx** sessions. or **xx** days. This will have an impact on your child's education which we cannot ignore.

As there has been no improvement in **name's** attendance, I must advise you that further absences from school as a result of illness will require medical evidence (eg copy of a prescription, Doctor / Dentist appointment card). If medical evidence is not provided, further absences will be marked as unauthorised.

I am inviting you to attend a School Attendance Meeting. The time and date have been set for **date** at **time**. It is important that you and **name** attend this meeting for us to explore the issues around poor attendance. The meeting will be attended by:

If this appointment is inconvenient, I would be grateful if you could contact me on 01322 665212 so that an alternative time can be arranged.

If you do not attend this meeting and **name's** absence continues to deteriorate, a referral may be made to the Attendance Service.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

Appendix 5

Dear Parent / Carer

Penalty Notices for Unauthorised Absence

In 2005, **Kent Local Authority (LA)** introduced Penalty Notices for unauthorised absence from school of at least ten sessions (five days) in a current term.

As you can see from the above we take this opportunity to remind parents (in a non-threatening way) the expectations placed upon schools from now on. Please therefore continue to read the letter and we appreciate your support in this initiative.

The following circumstances will be considered as appropriate reasons for the issuing of Penalty Notices:

- Truancy (including pupils caught on truancy sweeps)
- Parentally-condoned absences
- Unauthorised leave for the purpose of a family holiday in term time
- Delayed return from leave of absence without prior school agreement
- Persistent late arrival at school (after the register has closed)

Penalty Notices are issued **per parent per child**.

On receipt of the Notice, the penalty will be £120 reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days. Failure to pay the penalty in full by the end of the 28 day period may result in prosecution by the LA.

At St Mary's School we consider attendance and these legal powers very important, which is why we are bringing it to your attention.

Please ensure that your child attends school regularly and on time.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ACT 2003 SECTION 23 PENALTY NOTICE FOR UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE £60 PENALTY IF PAID WITHIN 21 DAYS £120 PENALTY IF PAID AFTER 21 DAYS BUT WITHIN 28 DAYS
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Appendix 6

Dear

Re: Name

At St Mary's School we consider attendance to be of the utmost importance and I am therefore bringing this information to your attention.

Our monitoring process has shown that **name** has been absent from school for a total of **xx** unauthorised sessions (**xx** days). I refer you to legislation regarding Penalty Notices.

'As from 2005, Kent Local Authority (LA) introduced Penalty Notices for unauthorised absence from school of at least ten sessions (five days) in a current term.' A separate Penalty Notice can be issued to each parent and for each child.

On receipt of the Notice, the penalty will be £160, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. Failure to pay the penalty in full at the end of the 28 day period may result in prosecution by the LA.

Please note this is a warning letter that a Penalty Notice could be requested if a total of ten unauthorised sessions (five days) are reached this term.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

Appendix 7

Dear

Request for Leave during Term Time – Child's Name

I have received your request to take **name** out of school for a family holiday between **date** and **date**, a total of **xx** school sessions.

From September 2013 the Department for Education has amended the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 removing the Headteacher's ability to authorise leave of absence for a family holiday. Requests for holidays in term time will **not** be authorised as the Regulations only allow me to authorise absence (leave) in "exceptional circumstances".

The School's Attendance Policy confirms that:

- agreement to each request is at my discretion, acting on behalf of the Governing Body
- each case will be judged on its merits
- my decision is final
- leave cannot be authorised retrospectively

I have considered your request but I am writing to confirm that on this occasion the leave will not be authorised. If you decide to take **name** out of school I will make a request for a Penalty Notice to be issued.

Or

You failed to apply in advance for permission for **name** to be absent from school. As stated above, I am unable to authorise leave retrospectively and I will be making a request for a Penalty Notice to be issued.

Penalty Notices are issued to **each parent** of **each child** and the amount of the penalty will be £120 to be paid within 28 days, reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days. Failure to pay the penalty in full at the end of the 28 day period may result in prosecution by the Attendance Service.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

Appendix 8

Dear

Traveller Absence – Child's Name

I am writing to say how concerned I am over the number of times **name** has been absent from school. Since **date**, **Name** has missed **xx** half day sessions, achieving an overall attendance rate of **xx**%.

Traveller children have to attend school for 380 sessions (190 days) each year, which is the same for all children and you are at risk of being referred to the Attendance Service if **name's** attendance falls below 90%. I am unable to authorise any absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances

If **name's** attendance does not improve and a referral is made to the Attendance Service, you could be prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court unless you can prove that:

- the child has no fixed abode
- because of the nature of your trade or business (work) you have to travel from place to place and your child has attended school as often as possible
- your child has attended for at least 200 sessions in the past 12 months (for children aged 6 years and over)

If you would like to speak to me about **name's** attendance, please telephone the school to make an appointment.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

Appendix 9

Dear

Traveller Absence – Child's Name

Thank you for contacting me to say that **name** will be absent from school from **date** as you will be travelling due to your work.

The law allows me to authorise **name's** absence if your trade or business means that you have to travel from place to place. However, you have not let me know when **name** is likely to return to school. Unless you contact me during the next ten school days to confirm a date, I will refer **name** to the Local Authority as a Child Missing Education.

After 20 days' absence, the Local Authority will give me permission to take **name** off the school roll and you will have to reapply for a school place when you return.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

Dear

Traveller Absence – Child's Name

Thank you for contacting me to say that **name** will be absent from school from **date** to **date** as you will be travelling due to your work.

The law allows me to authorise **name's** absence if your trade or business means that you have to travel from place to place. However, if **name** does not return to school by **date**, which is ten school days after your planned return date, I will refer **name** to the Local Authority as a Child Missing Education.

After 20 days absence, the Local Authority will give me permission to take **name** off the school roll and you will have to reapply for a school place when you return.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA McGARRIGLE
Headteacher

Appendix 12

Kent School Referral Pathway – Pupil Attendance

