

# The Bellbird Primary School



## Attendance Policy

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Date adopted: | July 2023   |
| Based on:     | LAO example on website, but heavily adapted to reflect our protocol |
| Review date:  | July 2024   |

## **Principles**

The Bellbird Primary School aims to work together with Parent/Carers and the Local Authority Attendance Officers (LAAOs) to ensure that all children registered at school attend every day and on time, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. We aim to improve the achievement of pupils by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality by creating an ethos in which attendance and punctuality are recognised and seen to be valued by the whole school. At the same time, ensuring that our policy applies to Reception aged children in order to promote good habits from an early age. The recognised expected level of attendance at school is 100% unless a pupil has chronic health issues or there are exceptional or unavoidable reasons for absence.

Good attendance by pupils is recognised and celebrated throughout the academic year with awards being presented for 98%+ attendance at the end of each term.

## **Registration**

Reception to Year 6:

- The EYFS/Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 gates are opened by a member of SMT at 8.45 am and locked at 8.55 am.
- Once the gates have been locked, entry to the school is via the main entrance.
- Registers are open at 8.45am and close at 8.55 am. Pupils who arrive at school after this time will be recorded as 'L', late on the register, along with the reason for lateness and number of minutes late.
- Pupils who arrive at school after 9.15am, without an unavoidable reason, will have their lateness recorded as 'U', unauthorised late, along with the reason for lateness and number of minutes late. A 'U' code will then impact on their overall attendance level.

## **Lateness**

Registration takes place from 8.45am to 8.55am after the start of the first activity of the day. This is also when the teacher informs the class of their daily timetable of learning and prepares the pupils for the day ahead. Pupils who arrive after the registration period and up to 9.15am will be marked as late (using the 'L' code). Any pupil who arrives after 9.15am will be marked as an unauthorised late (using the 'U' code). The reason for lateness and number of minutes late will be recorded on the child's attendance record. Children who are persistently late to school will miss a significant amount of their education and this is particularly damaging to a child's academic and social progress. For this reason, persistent lateness will be treated very seriously by the school and LAAO.

Where pupils show a persistent pattern of lateness, Parent/Carers will initially receive a letter informing them of the school's concerns. This will advise Parent/Carers to speak to a member of staff to help address the issue. Should the lateness continue, Parent/Carers will be invited to a meeting at school to discuss their child's lateness.

If there is no improvement, despite the school's attempts to address unauthorised absences, a referral could be made to the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO) for pupils who are of statutory school age.

## **Reporting a Pupil Absence**

Parent/Carers must contact school on the first and every subsequent day of absence by 9.15am.

For any pupil not present at the close of registration, and the reason is still unknown, a member of the office team will attempt to make contact with the Parent/Carers once the registers have closed at 9.15am.

The member of staff will ring every contact, starting with the priority contact, until a reason for absence is known. Failure to make contact with the Parent/Carers to establish a reason for an absence will result in an Unexplained Absence Form being sent home for the Parent/Carers to complete and return to school at the earliest opportunity. Any unexplained absence will be recorded as unauthorised absence if there is no response from a Parent/Carers to an enquiry regarding their child's absence from school.

For absences relating to a medical appointment, supporting evidence may be requested to authorise this absence. This can be a text message which clearly identifies who the appointment is for, a letter that is headed from the medical professional or an appointment card. A period of absences will only be authorised in relation to the length of the appointment. Children who fail to return to school within a reasonable time following their medical appointment could result in an am/pm session being unauthorised.

## **Illness**

Children who are unable to attend school due to sickness and/or diarrhoea can return after they have been clear of symptoms for 48 hours.

Children with mild coughs, colds, sore throats, sneezing and runny noses who are otherwise well can continue to attend school. However, if they develop a high temperature they should stay at home until their temperature has reduced and are well enough to return to school.

## **COVID-19**

If a pupil tests positive for COVID- 19 and this has been reported to school, the pupil should stay at home and can return to school after 3 days if they feel well enough and do not have a high temperature.

As a school, we are continuing to maintain the good practice of regular handwashing and pupils are encouraged to cough and sneeze into a tissue to help reduce the risk of passing on any infections.

## **Parent/Carers Responsibilities**

Parent/Carers have a legal responsibility to ensure that children of statutory school age (the term after the child turns five) attend school on a regular and full time basis. Permitting an absence from school without good reason is an offence. A pupil whose attendance drops to 90% each year will, over their time at primary school, have missed the equivalent of two whole terms of learning.

Parent/Carers must:

- Ensure all children registered at The Bellbird Primary School attend regularly and punctually everyday unless prevented from doing so by illness or medical appointment.

- Inform school in advance of any medical appointments during school time, parents may on occasions be asked to provide supporting evidence from the hospital, doctor or dentist, such as appointment details card/letter/text message in relation to the time requested.
- Ensure their child arrives at school in time for registration. Lateness is monitored and may be recorded as unauthorised (see 'Lateness' section above).
- Inform the school as soon as possible about any child's reluctance to come to school so that any problem can be quickly identified and dealt with.
- Follow application procedures regarding a request for leave of absence during term time, which should only be taken if absolutely necessary. Leave is not automatically authorised unless considered an exceptional circumstance and unavoidable. Any leave taken during term time, that has been unauthorised, could be subject to a penalty notice/fine (see 'Term Time Leave' section below).
- Report any changes to the contact details to the Office to ensure the school has the most up to date contact information.
- Attend attendance planning meetings when requested to do so with staff from the school.

### **School Responsibilities**

All members of the school staff have a safeguarding responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and lateness; with the Headteacher having overall responsibility in the monitoring of attendance and lateness of every pupil. Where there are concerns, parents will always be informed by letter and/or telephone conversation and given an opportunity to come into school to meet with designated staff.

If applicable, support strategies with a monitoring period will be put in place to help improve the attendance or lateness of a pupil. Should a pupil's attendance or lateness continue to be a concern despite the support strategies in place, with no improvement to the expected level set by school, a referral will be made to the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAEO) for statutory aged pupils. This could result in a penalty notice/fine, or prosecution being issued by Cambridgeshire County Council, as per section 444 Education Act 1996. This may result in a fine of up to £2500 and/or 3 months in prison.

### **The First Response Attendance Team [FRAT]**

The First Response Attendance Team is made up of all office staff who are responsible for following up on child absences. The FRAT will aim to contact the Parent/Carers of any pupil who is absent from school once the registers have closed at 9.15 am, where a reason has not already been provided and known to school [e.g. early phone call/email, term time leave request].

If the reason for absence is unknown at the close of registration, a member of the FRAT will:

- Phone the contact numbers provided by the parent/carers to enquire about a pupil's absence, starting with the first priority contact. If they are unable to make contact, they will call the next contact until they have been provided with a reason for absence.
- Where necessary leave a message on voicemail requesting parents to contact school regarding their child's absence
- Complete the registers in accordance to the guidelines relating to correct usage of codes
- Log the outcome of the phone call on SIMs [our pupil data system]
- Inform the School Attendance Officer should there be a particular concern regarding an individual pupil's attendance or lateness

- Inform the headteacher as soon as they know any child with a social worker is absent from school as they may be at risk of significant harm and immediate action may need to be taken.

If a child is late, a member of the FRAT will:

- Record the reason for lateness and number of minutes late on the child's attendance register on SIMs.

### **The School Attendance Officer**

Lateness and attendance are monitored daily by the School Attendance Officer who will:

- Monitor the work of the FRAT members to ensure they consistently carry out their responsibilities in line with the attendance procedures.
- Scrutinise the registers daily, monitoring authorised/unauthorised absence and other reasons provided for pupil absence and lateness.
- Contact parents by telephone, email, or letter to establish a reason for a pupil's absence if reason unknown and the FRAT have been unsuccessful in making contact.
- Inform the Senior Attendance Team if a child has 3 consecutive days of unexplained absence so the HT/DHT can carry out a home visit.
- Present weekly attendance analysis to the Headteachers/Deputy Headteacher and action all agreed Early Intervention steps, delegated to them.
- After consultation with the Headteachers/Deputy Headteacher, raise concerns with Parent/Carers of identified patterns of lateness with an initial 'Late Letter', as per the school's early intervention process below.
- After consultation with the Attendance Team, raise concerns with Parent/Carers once attendance has fallen below the threshold set of 95%, as per the school's early intervention process below.
- Record Early Interventions within the school's attendance tracker to review their impact
- Offer support or sign post to other areas of support within the community
- Liaise with other external organisations in relation to a pupil's attendance and/or lateness.
- Meet with LAAO on the allocated visits to school, who will also monitor the registers and follow up any identified concerns.
- Monitor absences for illness and requests for leave to attend medical appointments.
- Monitor trends in absences, e.g. regular Monday or Friday absences
- Monitor pupils attendance within specific and identified groups
- Monitor pupil absences for those with additional medical needs
- Monitor pupils and follow procedures for pupils 'Child Missing in Education'.
- Follow reporting procedures for parents who have requested to Home Educate their child(ren)
- Follow procedures when deleting a pupil from roll
- Work with the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher to Complete a Medical Needs Assessment on pupils with absences of 15 days during the school year
- Monitor and act upon requests for term time leave of absence and ensure Parent/Carers are informed of procedures in relation to authorised/unauthorised leave

### **The Senior Attendance Team [SAT]**

The Senior Attendance Team is made up of the School Attendance Officer, Headteacher and/or Deputy Headteacher. The Senior Attendance Team will:

- Meet weekly/fortnightly to review the attendance data prepared by the SAO.

- Agree appropriate Early Intervention procedures for each child highlighted with the prepared data
- Review the impact of Early Intervention procedures already actioned.
- Regularly compare school attendance with that of other primary schools in the county and nationally
- Report all children whose attendance falls below 90% to the LAAO (as per statutory requirements)
- Attend Targeted Support Meetings with the LAAO to review in school procedures and discuss complex cases
- Carry out a home visit when there are 3 consecutive days of unexplained absence.
- Gain ongoing support with attendance from the NSA helpline (01223 715 682) or email ([nsa.helpline@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:nsa.helpline@cambridgeshire.gov.uk))
- Keep up to date with attendance news through the Cambridgeshire Attendance Support Team page on the Learn Together website ([Cambridgeshire Attendance Support Team - Learn Together \(camblearntogether.co.uk\)](http://Cambridgeshire Attendance Support Team - Learn Together (camblearntogether.co.uk)))
- Regularly attend LA training and webinars booked through ([Webinars and Training - Learn Together \(camblearntogether.co.uk\)](http://Webinars and Training - Learn Together (camblearntogether.co.uk)))

### **The Bellbird Primary School's Early Intervention Process**

Our expectation of 100% attendance and the impact of non-attendance on educational outcomes is shared with all parents/carers through fortnightly newsletters. However, where attendance begins to drop or causes concern, we have a clear Early Intervention process to ensure we can work with families to ensure attendance levels improve, in line with our expectations.

Our Early Intervention process is set out below:

- **Step 1:** a letter for parents/carers information only, notifying them of the effect recent authorised absences due to illness have had on their child's attendance levels [decision made by SAT and actioned by the SAO].
- **Step 2a:** a letter advising parents/carers that we have noticed a deterioration in their child's attendance to 95% or below, unlikely to be all illness. A clear message is given that their child's attendance will continue to be monitored and we look forward to seeing an improvement [decision made by SAT and actioned by the SAO].
- **Step 2b:** often just after Letter 2, informal contact via telephone or a brief catch up at the start/end of the school day by any member of staff, to ascertain barriers to accessing education and offering support and signposting. [decision made by SAT and actioned by appropriate member of staff]
- **Step 3:** a letter advising parents/carers that their child's attendance is now causing a concern [below 90%], unlikely to be all illness. A clear message is given that their child's attendance will continue to be monitored and we look forward to seeing an improvement. Penalty Notice warning and offer of an Early Help Assessment [decision made by SAT and actioned by the SAO].
- **Step 4a:** a letter stating that attendance is still causing a serious concern and that a formal Parent Contract Meeting is to be held in school, with Parent/Carers to discuss concerns and, working together, identifying support which can be offered and signposting. Targets will be set to improve the attendance and/or lateness. These targets will be reviewed at the end of an agreed monitoring period. [decision made by SAT and actioned by the Headteacher]

- Step 4b: a letter explaining that as the parent/carer failed to attend the PCM targets have been set and these need to be met within six school week. If the targets are not met during the monitoring period the case is likely to be referred to Local Authority for enforcement actions to be considered. [decision made by SAT and actioned by the SAO].
- Step 5: Should the targets set at step 4a not be met following a review, despite every attempt by the school to support the family, a request for the issue of a penalty notice/fine or prosecution could be made to the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO) for children of statutory school age [decision made by SAT and actioned by the SAO]

*Other steps in our Early Intervention Process:*

Lateness Letter: a letter for parents/carers communicating a pattern of persistent absence has been noticed. An invitation to meet with the headteacher and a warning that if their child arrives after registers closes it will be unauthorised and this could lead to a Penalty Notice.

Suspected Term Time Leave: a letter for parents/carers where illness has been stated as the reason for absence but information from other sources suggests otherwise. Medical information requested to support absence being marked as illness.

Term Time Leave Request Follow Up Letter: a letter for parents/carers who query the headteacher's decision to not authorise term time leave.

### **Definitions of Leave:**

The Bellbird Primary School expects attendance at school to be 100%, unless there are exceptional or unavoidable reasons for absence. Only the Head teacher or a designated member of staff may authorise any absence for a legitimate reason, not all absence supported by Parent/Carers will be classified as authorised.

#### **i) Authorised leave:**

- An absence is classified as authorised where a pupil has been absent and a satisfactory and legal reason has been communicated to the school via the class teacher or directly to the office team, such as genuine illness, unavoidable medical appointments, religious observance, representing the school at an event or being on an educational visit.
- The school expects authorised absences to be kept to a minimum and therefore routine medical and dental appointments should be arranged out of school hours or during school holidays wherever possible.
- Parents/carers should provide evidence of unavoidable medical appointments through appointment letters, emails or text messages, which cover the period of absence. There is an expectation that the pupil will be in school for registration or return to school after the appointment, depending where the appointment falls within the school day.
- Only a day(s) exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong to will be authorised.
- Term time leave of absence will only be authorised if short and in exceptional, unavoidable circumstance (see term time leave below)

## ii) Unauthorised leave:

- An absence is classified as unauthorised when no letter or acceptable explanation is provided by parents / carers or the reason provided is not deemed as acceptable by the school, such as lateness after the end of registration, lack of child care, shopping, visiting relatives, celebrating birthdays or a leave of absence that has not been authorised due to not being considered an exceptional circumstance.
- Medical appointments where supporting evidence of appointment details have not been provided when asked for will also be unauthorised as will absences where there has been no reason provided by the Parent/Carers to support an absence.

### Guidance for Parents – Term Time Leave

Parents/carers do not have the right or entitlement to take their child out of school for term time leave. The school strongly discourages leave being taken in term time as learning is disrupted and the lost time is detrimental to the educational progress of the child. The Bellbird Primary School follows the DfE guidelines (September 2022) which state that requests for long-term leave can only be granted in 'exceptional circumstances' (*definition of exceptional being rare, unavoidable, short*) and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind the request.

No term time leave will be granted, or deemed granted, without a formal request on the appropriate forms (available from the office and on the website). This also applies to parents requesting to take their child out of school during the school day. A written response to your request will be forwarded to you by the Headteacher or Attendance Officer. Interviews following a request may be conducted prior to any decision being made if more information is needed. The school will not authorise any term time leave retrospectively. As headteachers should only grant leaves of absence in exceptional circumstances it is unlikely a leave of absence will be granted for the purposes of a family holiday

If the school suspect Term Time Leave has been taken but the parent/carers have not completed a Term Time Leave Request Form, we will write to all parent/carers giving them an opportunity to clarify the reason for absence and provide supporting evidence. Failure to respond to or provide supporting evidence will result in a referral to the Local Authority for unauthorised leave from school.

**Exceptional circumstance** (*definition of exceptional: rare, unavoidable, short*) will be considered on an individual basis, such as up to two days absence from school to visit a dying relative, death of a family member, attendance at a funeral or any unavoidable one off event, but the following examples of requests for leave of absence that do not meet the criteria of an exceptional circumstance and will not be authorised and could be subject to a penalty notice/fine for pupils of statutory school age are:

- Cheaper holidays/flights in the UK or abroad
- Holidays that overlap the beginning or the end of term
- Trip of a life time
- Visiting family or friends who have different half term holiday dates
- Family weddings for more than 1 day or visits to see family abroad
- Relatives coming to visit



- Extension of leave if a pupil has not returned to school after an agreed absence if does not meet grounds for an exceptional circumstance

### **Penalty Notice for Unauthorised Term Time Leave (including holiday)**

Failure to ensure a child's regular attendance at school is a criminal offence. Any parent/carer who takes a child out of school for term time leave for 6 consecutive sessions (3 days) or more, not authorised by the school (under the exceptional circumstances rule), will receive a Penalty Notice. Therefore, Penalty Notices will be issued for single event absences of at least 3 consecutive school days or more where these absences are unauthorised because they are neither exceptional nor unavoidable. The absences will be recorded with a 'G' code in the attendance register. Such cases will have to be supported by evidence of parents/carers being warned about a potential Penalty Notice, through the Term Time Leave Request forms and the school's Attendance Policy. A box will be ticked on the Term-Time Leave Request Form, to indicate a Penalty Notice will be issued on the child's/children's return to school, if the leave is still taken. The Term-Time Leave Request Form will be returned to parents/carers in paper form via Royal Mail and electronically via email, to ensure it is received. There will be no phone call from the school to further let Parents/Carers know a Penalty Notice has been requested. (The Supreme Court Judgement in the case between Isle of Wight Council v Platt (6th April 2017) clarified the meaning of regular school attendance in relation to Section 444 Education Act 1996. To attend school "regularly" means "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school".)

Contrary to the above criteria of 3 days of absence to warrant a Penalty Notice fine being issued, in exceptional circumstances where a parent takes a child out of school during term time for an extended period (20 days or more), not authorised by the school, prosecution in relation to Section 444 Education Act 1996, may be considered as an alternative to a Penalty Notice fine being issued.

If 3 or more term time leave Penalty Notices have been issued over a 3 year period then prosecution in relation to Section 444 Education Act 1996, may be considered as an alternative to a Penalty Notice fine being issued.

If, with support from the school's attendance officer and/or the Local Authority, your child's attendance does not improve, the Local Authority will consider one of two actions:

**Penalty Notice:** The court can give each parent a fine of £60, which rises to £120 each if you do not pay within 21 days. If payment is not received within 28 days from the issue of the penalty notice, the court may prosecute you for the offence of 'irregular attendance'. You could then be subject to a fine of up to £1,000 on conviction.

**Prosecution in the Magistrates' court:** Both parents could get a fine of up to £2,500, a community order or a jail sentence up to three months each. The court may also give you a Parenting Order.

The offence will apply to each child individually. Both parents are liable for the offence. The Education Act considers each 'responsible adult' as a 'parent'. This includes a family friend or relative if the child lives with them and they provided day-to-day care.

## School Register Codes

Teachers are only required to use a limited number of the codes. The FRAT and SAO should be consulted before entering codes that are different to those on the default settings via the electronic registration system.

The DfE offers a comprehensive set of register codes which all schools are required to use. These codes are as follows:

| Register Code | Description                        |
|---------------|------------------------------------|
| /             | Present AM                         |
| \             | Present PM                         |
| L             | Late (before registers closed) (L) |
| C             | Other Authorised Circumstances (C) |
| E             | Excluded (E)                       |
| H             | Holiday agreed (H)                 |
| I             | Illness NOTappointments (I)        |
| M             | Appointments (M)                   |
| R             | Religious observance (R)           |
| S             | Study leave (S)                    |
| T             | Traveller Absence (T)              |
| X             | For Early Years (X)                |
| B             | Off site Ed. not dual (B)          |
| D             | Dual registration (D)              |
| J             | Interview (J)                      |
| P             | Sports (P)                         |
| V             | Visit or trip (V)                  |
| W             | Work experience (W)                |
| G             | Holiday NOT agreed (G)             |
| N             | No reason (N)                      |
| O             | Unauthorised absence (O)           |
| U             | Late (after registers) (U)         |
| Y             | Enforced Closure (Y)               |
| #             | School Closed to all Pupils (#)    |
| Z             | Pupil not on roll                  |

| Colour     | Description  |
|------------|--|
| Light Blue | Present  |
| Yellow     | Authorised Absence                                 |
| Orange     | Approved Educational Activity - Counted as Present |
| Pink       | Unauthorised Absence                               |
| White      | Not Counted In Attendance Calculations             |