

Meadfurlong School

Learning Together for a Successful Tomorrow

Attendance Policy

At Meadfurlong School, we recognise the importance of regular school attendance and believe that children can only learn effectively if they attend school regularly. It is also vitally important that children arrive and leave school on time.

Education provides a means of enhancement for all young people. Pupils need to attend regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. Irregular attendance seriously disrupts continuity of learning, undermines the educational process and leads to underachievement and low attainment.

The Law

By law, all children of compulsory school age must receive suitable education. Parents are responsible for making sure this happens, either by registering the child at a school or by arranging an effective alternative to school.

Local Authorities have various powers to ensure that parents meet their duties.

Responsibilities of Parents

There are legal obligations on parents to secure education for their children of compulsory school age, whether at school or otherwise, and to send them to school regularly once they are on the school roll.

If the school is to achieve its attendance targets, parents must see themselves as partners with the school in their children's education, and support the school in the following ways:

- ensure the fullest possible attendance of their child by keeping requests for their children to be absent from school to a minimum;
- when absence is unavoidable, provide a note of explanation, preferably on the first day of absence or when the child returns to school;
- when absence continues for more than a day, contact the school by 'phone or letter;
- ensure that their child arrives at school on time.

The Role of the School

It is the responsibility of the school to support attendance and to deal with problems which may lead to non-attendance. The school will employ strategies to improve and encourage good attendance.

The Importance of Registration

Registers are important legal documents and are kept securely. The law requires schools to call the register twice-a-day:

- at the start of the morning session, i.e. 8.40am;
- once during the afternoon session. At Meadfurlong the register is called at the start of the afternoon session, i.e. 1.10pm.

Calling the register is a key part of the school day and should be seen as such by staff, children and parents.

At Meadfurlong School, the registers are computerised. Children are marked either present or absent. Particular attention is given to accurate registration; staff use consistent rules and coding for registration.

When a child is absent, the register must also show whether the absence was authorised by the school or unauthorised. This information is entered onto the computer by the school secretary.

Notification of Absence

All parents are asked to contact school if their child is absent, giving a reason for the absence. This can be done by:

- **telephone:** the secretary will then pass the message to the class teacher and enter the reason for absence directly into the computer;
- **letter:** the class teacher will place the letter in the register and the school secretary will enter the reason for absence onto the computer;
- **in person:** an explanation may be given personally to either the class teacher or the school secretary when the child returns to school.

In the first instance, class teachers should follow up all absences which are unexplained. If no notification is received about a child's absence, the computer will generate a letter to be sent to parents.

School Responses to Absence

Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

Where a child is absent at the time of registration, the law requires schools to indicate on their attendance register whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Authorised absence means that the school has either given approval in advance for the child to be away or that an explanation offered afterwards has been accepted. The law requires that absences not agreed in advance are recorded as unauthorised, unless (and until) a satisfactory explanation is given.

The school will:

- investigate all unexplained absences;
- contact parents for an explanation if no message is received after three days of continuous absence. However, where there is a problem with attendance, the school will endeavour to make contact on the first day of absence;
- contact parents if it has any concerns over attendance;
- involve the Education Welfare Officer if parents fail to support the school in ensuring the fullest possible attendance of their children.

By law, only the school can approve absence, not parents. The school need not accept a parental explanation for a child's absence if it doubts the explanation. If the school is satisfied that the circumstances are both genuine and exceptional, the absence may be authorised. Where parentally condoned and/or unjustified absence appears to be a problem, the school will involve the EWO at the earliest opportunity.

Excessive amounts of authorised absence can disrupt continuity of learning. The school will, therefore, watch for emerging patterns of authorised absence by individual children.

Examples of Unauthorised Absence

The school cannot accept any of the following:

- shopping during school hours;
- special occasions, e.g. birthdays, day trip
- no uniform, shoes, etc.;
- overslept;
- at home due to family illness.
- looking after house

Examples of Authorised Absence

- *Headteachers Discretion:* an absence may be authorised if permission for the absence has been authorised by the Headteacher eg for Special Occasions. It is for the Headteacher to determine whether an absence in this category should be authorised or not. Regard will be given to the following:
 - the nature of the event;
 - frequency;
 - whether advance notification was given;
 - the overall attendance pattern of the child.
- *Sickness/Illness of the Child:* if the school is satisfied that a child is absent as a result of illness, the absence must be treated as authorised. Where there is doubt about the authenticity of absence attributed to illness, the school and EWO can refer the matter to the school doctor to arrange a special medical or make contact with the child's GP. If a child is absent for a prolonged period or the school notices

a pattern of absence emerging, early contact will be made with the EWO and/or the School Health Service.

- *Medical and Dental Appointments:* leave for medical or dental appointments may be authorised. It would be preferable if parents would make such appointments out of school hours.

Where a child is present for registration, but then has to leave school to attend an appointment, the school secretary must record, in the register, the fact that the child, although registered, is not physically present in a signing out book. Similarly, the school secretary will note in the late book, the presence of a child who was not there when the register was being taken but returns later from an appointment.

- *Close Family Bereavement:* the school will respond sensitively to requests for leave of absence for close family bereavements.

- *Days of Religious Observance:* children may be absent from school in order to participate in a day set aside exclusively for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong. It is helpful if parents can give the school advance notification of religious observance days.

- *Annual Holidays:* there is discretionary power for leave of absence to be granted for the purpose of an annual family holiday during term time. Only in exceptional circumstances may the amount of leave granted exceed (in total) more than two weeks in any year. Parents do not have an automatic right to withdraw children from school for a holiday, and in law, have to apply for permission in advance.

Both in the school prospectus and at the pre-school induction meeting, parents are asked to try to arrange their family holidays within the school holidays rather than in term time so that their child's education is not disrupted. The Headteacher will talk to those parents who persistently take their holidays in term time, reminding parents of the disruption to their child's education.

Parents are asked to complete a holiday form, requesting absence from school. The school will respond in writing to these requests. Holidays are counted as an absence on the register but the reason for the absence is recorded so that no further action is taken.

Exclusions

Where a child has been temporarily excluded [fixed term or permanent], he or she will remain on the school roll. The absence will be regarded as authorised. Once a permanent exclusion is confirmed, the child will be removed from the school roll.

Parental Concerns

Meadfurlong School is a happy school. Children learn best when they are happy and relaxed. All the staff at Meadfurlong School are concerned about children's regular

attendance and the importance of continuity in each child's learning. They are also concerned about each child's safety, welfare and happiness.

Parents are asked to share any worries their child might have in school. Sometimes, little things upset children, which means they become unhappy and may not want to attend school. Parents are encouraged to bring their child to school, so that reasons for the child not wanting to attend can be discussed and, hopefully, resolved.

The class teacher or Headteacher will talk to the child concerned to find out if there are any worries or problems in school that might make that child not want to attend. If there are, then these will be discussed with the parent/guardian and appropriate action taken.

Lateness

It is our policy at Meadfurlong School to actively discourage the late arrival of children at school. A child who arrives late may seriously disrupt not only his or her continuity of learning but also that of others. A firm line is taken on late arrivals. Where children miss registration altogether, they are marked in the late book along with their time of arrival with the reason for lateness. Particular attention is paid to emerging patterns of late arrival. If a child is regularly late for school or is often absent, then the class teacher will contact the parent concerned to have an informal discussion about this. If the lateness or absence persists then the teacher will register their concern with the Headteacher, who will contact the parent/guardian. Persistent problems will be referred to the EWO.

Communication with Parents

As attendance is crucial to effective learning and the continuity of learning experiences, the school places great emphasis on this in its communication with parents.

:

- **School Prospectus:** information on lateness, illness and absence is given to parents in the school prospectus. This highlights the importance of being at school on time and notifying school if their child is absent for any reason.
- **Mobile Children:** children are also admitted to school at various times of the year into various year groups. All parents requesting a place are asked to make an appointment with the Headteacher. At this meeting, the importance of regular attendance will be highlighted, along with other school routines.

The Education Welfare Service

Close liaison between the school and the Education Welfare Service is crucial in attempts to improve attendance. The principle function of the Education Welfare Service is to help parents and LEA's meet their statutory obligations on school attendance. At Meadfurlong

School, the Education Welfare Officer [EWO] meets with the Headteacher regularly to discuss attendance issues and offer advice and support.

The registers are looked at regularly, patterns of absence noted and the EWO for the school is contacted if necessary. Contact may be made by telephone if the situation needs discussing before a visit.

Where parentally- condoned, unjustified absence appears to be a problem in relation to a particular child, the EWO can investigate by making a home visit. Through home visiting, the EWO may be able to assess the problem in the wider family context.

The EWO may also act as a channel to other agencies, eg Children's Services.

The Role of the LEA

LEA's are charged in law with enforcing school attendance and must ensure that schools and parents are fulfilling their statutory obligations including, where necessary, the taking of action through the courts. LEA's discharge the enforcement obligations through their Education Welfare Service.

Jim Bailey
February 2009