

Eleanor Palmer Primary School Attendance and Punctuality Policy

Introduction

At Eleanor Palmer, attendance and punctuality are a very high priority. We want motivated enthusiastic learners who get to school on time, ready to learn and who thus establish good habits for lifelong learning.

Parents and carers have a legal responsibility to make sure that children come to school regularly and on time. The school has a legal duty to mark the register and record the attendance of every child on its roll and to specifically code which children are absent or late and why. There is now a statutory requirement that schools publish statistics about their attendance rates. We fully support all initiatives from our Local Authority and comply with all Camden's guidance and expectations. We have challenging targets set each year against both local and national averages.

Absences fall into two groups, authorised and unauthorised.

What are authorised absences?

Authorised absences involve children having time out of school for approved reasons, for example: illness, urgent medical appointments, attendance at funerals, religious observance or visits to new schools.

The school will need an explanation from parents or guardians (an email, telephone call or message in person) if they are to authorise the child's absence. This is then coded in the register.

Every effort should be made to arrange routine dentists and GP appointments outside school hours. However, it is understood that specialist hospital or clinic appointments may have to be made during school hours.

Exceptional authorised leave

As per Department for Education guidance, the Headteacher must be satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances based on the individual facts and circumstances of the case, which warrant the leave.

Parents who wish to take their children out of school for any other reason during school time must make this request to the Headteacher, in writing, by email or in person. It is important to make the request in good time before the period of requested leave; it is not acceptable to tell the school afterwards. The Headteacher will respond quickly by phone, email or in person.

Each request for exceptional leave will be considered as a separate case and the Headteacher's decision will take into account the following: The reason for the leave and why it could not be taken in school holidays:

- The number of days requested;
- Previous requests for leave during term-time;
- The child's attendance and punctuality record (broadly speaking we would expect a pattern of attendance consistently at or above 95%);
- The age of the child;
- The time of year proposed for the trip;
- The child's stage of education, any additional needs they may have, their current attainment and level of progress and any impact the leave will have on their learning.

We are not unsympathetic to difficult or special circumstances and will always consider requests for absence that, if then authorised, are recorded as 'other circumstances'. Examples of this might be urgent trips to see ill relatives, or special opportunities in sport or music.

There is no entitlement to holiday in term-time. We strongly discourage missing school for this reason. Children miss out on crucial work and friendships and may lose their sense of engagement and involvement with school life. We do however accept that holidays do very occasionally have to be taken in term-time due to parents' work restrictions or exceptional opportunities. Any such request for holiday is considered as above. Requests to the Headteacher should be made before the holiday is booked (in case the request for absence is not authorised).

We are also aware that for many children, visits to family involve long haul flights to continents other than Europe. Such requests will be considered by the same criteria as above.

What are unauthorised absences?

Unauthorised absences involves children having time out of school without explanation, or where the reason for absence is one that the school cannot authorise, for example: shopping, birthdays, baby-sitting for younger siblings, too tired, late night due to birthday, not realising term had started or because other members of the family are ill.

If the Headteacher does not authorise a holiday or exceptional leave in term time, and either is still taken, or days are taken in excess of those agreed with the school this is always classified as unauthorised.

The Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 2006 state clearly that if a child has failed to return to school 10 days later than the agreed return date, that the child's name be deleted from the admission register i.e. the school place is taken away.

Routines for managing and improving attendance

- A member of the senior staff and our school-keeper are at the school entrance every morning. The bell is rung promptly at 9am; classroom doors are open from 8.55am to allow for a gentle start;
- At every Friday assembly 'Be Here Bear' is awarded to the class with best attendance as measured as a percentage of the week. This has proved highly motivating to children. The winning class dresses the bear in a topic related outfit;—A clear and consistent message is given at all times by all members of staff;
- Our approach is to be direct and relatively informal and to follow up as soon as possible: phone calls are made daily, soon after 9am, to families of children who are absent without an explanation;
- The Head is given a weekly update on attendance and punctuality by class and analysed in terms of groups. Any child causing concern is immediately flagged up;
- At the end of each term, letters are written to all parents whose child's attendance has fallen below 95%. This may be due to illness and/or other acceptable reasons, but it is good to highlight to parents, as they may not realise how odd days add up.

Punctuality

Punctuality is very important and sets important lifelong habits. At Eleanor Palmer, all children should be in school by 9.00am. The register is marked as soon as possible after the start of the school day and always by 9.05am, after which arrivals are marked as late.

Late arrivals will be marked as such by the teacher or by the School Office.

Children arriving after 9.35, i.e. 30 minutes after registration closes, and who do not have a good reason for doing so (for example a dental appointment) are marked as an unauthorised absence.

Routines for monitoring and improving Punctuality

- A member of our senior staff and our school-keeper are at the gate every morning;
- The bell is rung promptly at 9am;
- Late marks are issued after 9.05am. There is a great emphasis on consistency between classes;
- The school gates close promptly at 9.05am;

- As with the attendance prize in assembly, we have 'Peter Punctual' a bird, won by the class with the best punctuality for the week.

Involvement of the Education Welfare Service

The Education Welfare Service remotely monitors our attendance remotely. They scrutinise all records and registers and, with the Headteacher's agreement, contact all those with attendance figures below 90%. Below 90% triggers a letter, below 85% is a significant cause for concern and would involve a meeting and further action.

The school also makes referrals to the Education Welfare Officer where there are concerns about attendance or punctuality. This will not simply be due to relatively low attendance figures or unauthorised exceptional leave but also if there are patterns e.g.-regularly missing Fridays, taking long weekends or always returning to school late after a school break.

If attendance and punctuality concerns persist and parents make no effort to work with the school and local authority to make improvement, the school supports the Education Welfare Service's right to fine parents and if necessary to take court action.