



'OPENING DOORS OF
OPPORTUNITY TOGETHER'

PUPIL ATTENDANCE POLICY

UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2023



PUPIL ATTENDANCE POLICY

Introduction

Regular school attendance is crucial in raising standards in education and ensuring that every child can have full access to the school curriculum and reach their potential.

Meadow Bridge Primary School will strive to promote an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance and where each pupil will feel valued and secure.

Mission Statement

Meadow Bridge Primary School aims to foster a safe, happy, and caring environment where each child's personal development is nurtured. Every child's educational journey is enhanced and their lives enriched through stimulating learning experiences. Equal emphasis will be placed on pastoral care and on ensuring each individual reaches his or her academic potential, equipping them for the future.

Aims

1. To improve/maintain the overall attendance of pupils at Meadow Bridge Primary School.
2. To develop a framework that defines roles and responsibilities in relation to attendance.
3. To provide advice, support and guidance to parents/guardians and pupils.
4. To promote good relationships with the Education Welfare Service.

Role of the School

The Principal has overall responsibility for school attendance; teachers/staff should bring any concerns regarding school attendance to his attention.

The Board of Governors provides support by reviewing school attendance figures and targets and ensuring it is placed as an agenda item at each meeting.

Teaching staff regularly monitor the attendance and punctuality of pupils by ensuring that attendance is recorded at the beginning of morning and afternoon registration sessions.

It is the responsibility of the school to ensure attendance and lateness records are up-to-date. On returning to school, if a reason for absence has not been provided, a letter is sent to parents requesting a reason for absence. If none is provided, then a phone call is made to obtain the required information.

School shares the attendance percentage with parents at the end of each school year in the annual Report and more frequently where there are concerns.

To record and monitor attendance accurately and in a consistent way we will adhere to the guidance provided in the Department of Education Circular 2017/15, which can be found at the following link:

www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/circular-201715-attendance-guidance-and-absence-recording-by-schools

Meadow Bridge Primary School is committed to working with parents/guardians to encourage regular and punctual attendance.

Role of Parent/Guardian

Parents/guardians have a legal duty¹ to ensure their child of compulsory school age shall receive efficient full-time education suitable to age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular school attendance or otherwise.

If a child is registered in school, their parent/guardian has a legal duty to ensure that they regularly attend that school.

It is a parent's/guardian's responsibility to inform the school of the reason for a pupil's absence on the first day of absence. This can be done by contacting the school office before 9.30 am. This should be confirmed with a written note when the pupil returns to school. If the absence is likely to be prolonged, this information should be provided to enable the school to assist with homework or any other necessary arrangements which may be required.

As part of our Safeguarding procedures, the school office may contact the parent or guardian and other emergency contacts if a message has not been received regarding the reason for the absence, to check on the safety of the child.

Pupils are expected to be in school at 9.00 am for registration and the beginning of classes at 9.10 am. It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to ensure that their children are punctual. Lateness is recorded at registration and on your child's attendance record.

If your child appears reluctant to attend school, please discuss the matter promptly with the class teacher or Principal to ensure that both you and your child receive maximum support.

Meadow Bridge Primary School discourages holidays during term-time due to the impact that has on pupils' learning. Family holidays taken during term-time will be categorised as an 'Unauthorised Absence'. Only in exceptional circumstances will a holiday be authorised.

Parents should ensure as far as is possible that all medical/dental appointments are outside school hours.

Role of Pupils

Each pupil at Meadow Bridge Primary School must attend school punctually and regularly. If you have been absent from school, a written note from a parent/guardian must be provided to your teacher when you return.

All pupils are responsible for lining up quietly with their class when the bell rings at 9.00 am. Each pupil is shown at the beginning of the year where they are to line up.

School does not accept legal responsibility for pupils until 8.40 am when supervision begins in the playground.

Absence Procedures

If a child will be absent from school, his/her parent/guardian should telephone the office and leave a message before 9.30 am on the first morning of absence. If further information is required, school will contact the parent/guardian.

Action for Low Attendance

Pupil attendance is monitored intermittently throughout the year. In cases where lateness or absence is causing concern, parents will be contacted formally by written letter and requested to take appropriate steps.

Procedures for Managing Non-attendance

Non-attendance is an important issue which is treated seriously. Each case, however, is different and school acknowledges that no one standard response will be appropriate in every case. Consideration is given to all factors affecting attendance before deciding what intervention strategies will be applied.

In every case, early intervention is essential to prevent the problem from worsening. It is essential that parents keep school fully informed of any matters which may affect their child's attendance.

Education Welfare Service

The Education Authority through the Education Welfare Service (EWS) has a legal duty to make sure that parents/guardians meet their responsibility towards their children's education.

If a pupil's absence causes concern, or if their attendance falls below 85% and there is also a concern, they will be referred to the EWS, if appropriate. EWS will support staff and parents in developing and implementing strategies to address or improve school attendance.

Lateness

The class register is taken between 9.00 am – 9.10 am. Pupils arriving after this will be marked as 'Late' with the number of minutes late and the reason for lateness being recorded.

Frequent lateness is disruptive to learning, both for the child concerned and the class. This will be discussed with parents at Open Evenings and may be referred to EWS.

Authorised Absence

An absence is classified as 'Authorised' when a child has been away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification from a parent or guardian.

Examples may include a family bereavement, hospital internment, or a relevant sporting/musical activity.

Unauthorised Absence

An absence is classified as 'Unauthorised' when a child is away from school without the permission of the Principal. Unauthorised Absences are those which school does not consider reasonable and for which authorisation has not been given.

This may include (but not exhaustively):

- Parents keeping children off school unnecessarily.
- Truancy during the school day.
- Absences which have never been properly explained.
- Term-time holidays.

Authorising Absence

Only the Principal can authorise absence for approved reasons. The absence must be unavoidable or clearly in the pastoral interest of the child/family. The Principal is not obliged to accept a parent's explanation. Authorised Absence codes will only be used after there has been some communication between the parent and school. The following reasons are examples (but not an exhaustive list) of the kinds of absence that ***will not be authorised***:

- Persistent non-specific illness, eg poorly/unwell.
- Absence of siblings if one child is ill.
- Parental illness (alternative arrangements should be made to get children to school – emergencies excepted).
- Over-sleeping.
- 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 holiday during term-time.

Leave of Absence/Holiday Absence

Time off school for family holidays cannot be authorised. Schools have the discretion, in exceptional circumstances, to authorise leave of absence:

- For service personnel and other employees who are prevented from taking holidays outside term-time if the holiday will have minimal disruption to the pupil's education.
- When a family needs to spend time together to support each other during or following a crisis.

Applications for Leave of Absence where dates can be known ahead MUST be made in advance of the requested date. Consideration is given to each request before a decision is reached on behalf of the Board of Governors.

Each case will be judged on its merits in line with the criteria outlined above. The decision is final and once the decision not to authorise the leave is taken it cannot be authorised retrospectively.

Review

This policy will be reviewed according to the review schedule for Safeguarding Policies.

Signature: Principal _____

Signature: Chair, Board of Governors _____

Date: _____

¹ Article 45(1) of The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986