



Attendance Policy

Our Vision

We want Virginia Primary School to be a community of happy, confident, motivated lifelong learners. We want our children to be successful citizens who value themselves and each other. Therefore, we are continually striving to ensure that we nurture, challenge and enable each and every one to be the very best they can be in all areas of school life.

Rights Respecting School

We are a Right Respecting School and this policy supports the following articles from the United Nations on the Convention on the Rights of a Child:

- Article 15 – every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organisations.
- Article 28 – every child has the right to an education
- Article 29 – education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities.

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Rationale

We believe in giving every child in our care the widest educational opportunities in order for them to be happy and successful citizens. Attending school on time every day is very important for the following reasons:

- For pupils to build on prior learning and not have gaps in learning.
- For pupils to feel that they are fully included and have access to all areas of learning.
- For pupils to develop strong friendships and good relationships.
- For pupils to develop good habits which will stand them in good stead in the future.
- It is the legal responsibility for a child's parent or carer to ensure that they attend school on time, every day.

This policy defines the different types of absences and the procedures we follow when recording absence.

Authorised Absence

This is when the parent/carer tells the school that their child is absent for a specific reason.

- Illness – the school should be informed by phone call from the parent/carer **before school starts** on the first morning of absence. We should be told how many days the pupil is expected to be absent for. If the pupil is absent for more than five days, we require medical evidence e.g. medical certificates, GP letters, hospital letters etc.
- Medical/dental appointments – it is important to minimise having these appointments during school time as much as possible. Please try and ensure routine appointments take place during the school holidays. However, if your child needs to go for an appointment during the school day please come in and tells us the day before and bring the appointment card/letter. A child will be expected to miss as little of the day as possible for a routine appointment.
- Religious holidays – pupils are allowed to be absent in order to celebrate a religious holiday. Christian holidays fall within Britain's national holidays. In order to minimise the disruption of our Muslim pupil's education, the school follows the LBTH guidelines of using two days of our holiday allocation for pupils to celebrate Eid.
- Interview or exam – occasionally pupils may need to attend interviews or exams, perhaps for secondary school admissions. Please could you inform the school in advance if this is the case.

If you require your child to be absent from school because of exceptional circumstances, please talk to the head teacher.

Please note: **if your child is well enough to be in school they are well enough to take part in all learning.** This includes swimming and PE unless they have a specific medical condition or injury that means it would be painful/unsafe for them to take part.

Absence procedures

Parents will be required to contact the school office via telephone as soon as possible on the first day of their child's absence. Alternatively, parents may call into school and report absence to the school office where arrangements will be made to speak to a member of staff.

Parents should:

- Contact the school on the first day of absence before the beginning of the school day, or as soon as possible thereafter
- Contact the school on every further day of absence
- Ensure that your child returns to school as soon as possible and you provide any medical evidence, if requested, to support the absence

A telephone call will be made to the parent of any pupil who has not reported their child's absence

on the first day that they do not attend school.

The school will always follow up any absences in order to:

- Ascertain the reason for the absence.
- Ensure the proper safeguarding action is being taken.
- Identify whether the absence is authorised or not.
- Identify the correct code to use to enter the data onto the school census system.

Unauthorised Absence

If a child is absent from school and no reason has been given, this is an unauthorised absence and the following procedure will take place:

- If a pupil is not in school, the office staff will phone the parent in the morning. If this happens more than three times in a month, the head teacher will contact the family to arrange a meeting to see what support maybe needed. This will be followed up by letter to agree how to resolve the issue.
- If absence continues, we will:
 - Write to you if your child's attendance is below 95%, or where punctuality is a concern
 - Invite you into school to discuss the situation if absences persist
 - Create a personalised action/support plan to address any barriers to attendance
 - Offer signposting support to other agencies or services if appropriate
 - Refer the matter to the Local Authority if attendance does not improve.
- If the situation remains unresolved and the pupil continues to have regular days of unauthorised absence and the absence drops below 90%, the Tower Hamlets Attendance and Welfare Service will become involved.
- If a child has more than 20 consecutive days of unauthorised absence, they will be removed from the school roll. This means that they may lose their place at school.
- Virginia Primary School has adopted the Tower Hamlets policy regarding extended leave and we do not authorise it. However, all parents and carers are asked to complete an extended leave form should they choose to take leave during school time.

Persistent absenteeism:

- Missing 10 percent or more of schooling across the year for any reason

A pupil is defined by the Government as 'persistently absent' when their attendance is 90% or below and 'severely absent' when attendance is 50% or below, this can be authorised or unauthorised absence.

Absence at these levels will cause considerable damage to any pupil's education and we need the full support and co-operation of parents to resolve this. For children who are severely absent we are likely to involve outside agencies to support the school and family to overcome barriers to attendance and each child may have an individual support plan.

The attendance welfare officer meets regularly with the office staff to monitor attendance and will inform the head teacher if there are families causing concern.

Nursery Attendance

Nursery is non-statutory schooling. However, we expect high levels of attendance for nursery children as we believe that this not only gives them an excellent start to their education but also fosters good habits. It is very difficult for children to settle if they are not attending regularly. Therefore, if your child's attendance falls below 80% and you have not given us good reason for this (backed up by medical

evidence if appropriate) we will invite you in to discuss ways in we can support you to ensure attendance is improved.

Punctuality

Arriving at school on time is very important as pupils learning starts at 8.55. If a child is late they miss an important part of their learning – guided reading takes place for the whole school at this time, and if they are late it is very disruptive for the rest of their group. Remember, if your child is late by just over 10 minutes a day that adds up to an hour of learning time missed each week!

For those coming from further away, we understand London traffic can be difficult and unpredictable so it is necessary to leave lots of time. To make things easier, the playground is supervised from 8.45 each morning which means that your child can arrive earlier if you think the traffic is better then.

The office staff or class teachers will inform the head teacher if there are children who are persistently late and it is having an impact on their learning. The head teacher will invite the parent/carer in to discuss the matter and provide support.

Parents can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school on time. We expect parents and staff to encourage good punctuality by being good role models to our children and we celebrate good class and individual punctuality.

Unauthorised lateness could result in the school referring to the Local Authority for sanctions and/or legal proceedings. This may mean that you could be issued with a Penalty Notice if the problem persists.

Celebrating Good Attendance and Punctuality

We recognise and praise children who are consistently punctual and have 100% attendance each term.

- Assembly – presentation of individual and class certificates each term at our attendance and achievement assembly (parents and carers invited).
- Attendance and punctuality table in weekly newsletter.
- Termly prize (a class trip) for the class with the highest attendance and punctuality.

Penalty Notice Scheme Protocol

In September 2012, the governing body adopted the Tower Hamlets Penalty Notice Scheme Protocol. This means that should parents take unauthorised leave during term time they will be referred to the AWA who may issue a penalty notice requiring the parents to pay up to £120 per child for the period of absence. Penalty notices can also be issued for frequent lateness. Further details of the penalty notice scheme can be obtained from the school office.

Parental involvement

The school will build respectful relationships with parents and families to ensure their trust and engagement. Open and honest communication will be maintained with pupils and their families about the expectations of school life, attendance and performance so that they understand what to expect and what is expected of them. The school will liaise with other agencies working with pupils and their families to support attendance, e.g. social services.

Parents will be expected to:

- Treat staff with respect.
- Actively support the work of the school.
- Call staff for help when they need it.
- Communicate with the school about possible circumstances which may affect their child's attendance or require support.

Understanding barriers to attendance

Whilst any child may occasionally have time off school because they are too unwell to attend, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any barriers preventing regular attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents and the child.

If a parent thinks their child is reluctant to attend school, then we will work with that family to understand the root problem and provide any necessary support. We can use outside agencies to help with this, such as the School Nurse, Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing support services, a Child and Family Support Worker or the relevant Local Authority team/s.

Where outside agencies are supporting the family, you may be invited to attend a Team Around the Family meeting (TAF) to consider what is working well and what needs to improve. An individualised attendance plan will be agreed and subsequently reviewed.

Some pupils face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include pupils who suffer from long-term medical conditions or who have specific special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or other vulnerabilities which may impact attendance. High expectations of attendance remain however, and we will work with families and pupils to support improved attendance whilst being mindful of the additional barriers faced. We can discuss reasonable adjustments and additional support from external partners where appropriate.

Tower Hamlets Attendance Welfare service

Local Authority Attendance Welfare Advisors (AWAs) work strategically by offering support to schools, families, and other professionals to reduce persistent and severe absence and improve overall attendance for all pupils.

Parents are expected to work with the school and Local Authority to address any attendance concerns. Parents should proactively engage with the support offered, aiming to resolve any problems together. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be resolved in this way, the school may consider more formal support and/or refer the child to the Local Authority. If attendance does not improve, legal action may be taken in the form of a Penalty Notice prosecution in the Magistrates Court. Legal proceedings are designed to strengthen parental responsibilities and ensure improved attendance.

Attendance And Welfare Advisor (AWA)

If they are persistently absent, pupils will be referred to the AWA, who will attempt to resolve the situation through a parent agreement. If the situation cannot be resolved and attendance does not improve, the AWA has the power to issue sanctions such as prosecutions or penalty notices to parents.

The AWA will monitor and analyse attendance data regularly to ensure that intervention is delivered quickly to address absence, and will provide regular reports to staff

Holidays in term time

There is no entitlement in law for pupils to take time off during the term to go on holiday. In addition, the Supreme Court has ruled that the definition of regular school attendance is "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school". In LBTH the LA considers 96% attendance or above as regular school attendance.

Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are "exceptional circumstances". It is a rule of this school that a leave of absence shall not be granted in term time unless there are reasons considered to be exceptional by the headteacher, irrespective of the child's overall attendance.

Only the headteacher or his designate may authorise such a request. All applications for a leave of

absence must be made in writing on the prescribed form provided by the school. Where a parent removes a child when the application for leave was refused or where no application was made to the school, a penalty notice may be requested by the school to the Local Authority.

A Penalty Notice may be issued where there have been at least 6 consecutive sessions of unauthorised absence for the purpose of a holiday.

At Virginia Primary School 'exceptional circumstances' will be interpreted as being of unique and significant emotional, educational or spiritual value to the child which outweighs the loss of teaching time (as determined by the headteacher).

The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are events that are "rare, significant, unavoidable and short". By 'unavoidable' we mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time, outside of school term time. The headteacher will consider the child's overall attendance figure when making a decision regarding the application for leave of absence. If leave of absence is authorised, the school will not provide work for children to do during their absence.

Parents are however advised to read with their children and encourage them to write a diary while they are away.

Modelling, sport and acting performances/activities

The school will ensure that all pupils engaging in performances/activities (whether they, or another person, receives payment or not), which require them to be absent from school, understand that they will be required to obtain a licence from the LA which authorises the school's absence(s).

Additional arrangements will be made by the school for pupils engaging in performances or activities that require them to be absent from school to ensure they do not fall behind in their education – 10

this may involve private teaching. These arrangements will be approved by the LA who will ensure that the arrangements are suitable for the pupil.

The pupil will receive education that, when taken together over the term of the licence, amounts to a minimum of three hours per day that the pupil would be required to attend a school maintained by the LA issuing the licence. This requirement will be met by ensuring a pupil receives an education:

- For not less than six hours a week; and
- During each complete period of four weeks (or if there is a period of less than four weeks, then during that period), for periods of time not less than three hours a day; and On days where the pupil would be required to attend school if they were attending a school maintained by the LA; and
- For not more than five hours on any such day

Where a licence has been granted by the LA and it specifies dates of absence, no further authorisation will be needed from the school. Where an application does not specify dates, and it has been approved by the LA, it is at the discretion of the headteacher to authorise the leave of absence for each day. The headteacher will not authorise any absences which would mean that a pupil's attendance would fall below 96 percent. Where a licence has not been obtained, the headteacher will not authorise any absence for a performance or activity.

Young carers

The school understands the difficulties that face young carers, and will endeavour to identify young carers at the earliest opportunity, as well as through their time at the school. A caring and flexible approach will be taken to the needs of young carers and each pupil will be examined on a case-by case basis, involving other agencies if appropriate.

The school, in conjunction with relevant authorities, will implement support for pupils who are young carers, to encourage their sustained and regular attendance at school in line with the school's expectations.

APPENDIX: Attendance Monitoring Procedures

Virginia has adopted the following attendance monitoring procedures, to ensure that pupils' attendance meets the expected standard, and effective intervention is provided where pupils' attendance falls below the standard:

1. The Headteacher and Admin team review attendance on a daily basis.
2. Attendance data summary is sent to the SLT detailing weekly and annual attendance to date.
3. Attendance is discussed with children by classroom teachers. Any attendance/punctuality trends noticed by classroom teachers are passed immediately to the HT.
4. Contact is made with parents on the first day of absence for any pupil absence not reported. 'N' codes are used to indicate that the pupil is absent for a reason not yet provided - these N codes are reported to the HT daily.
5. Where the Admin team fail to make contact with a parent, they will make use the child's emergency contacts. Where they fail to make any contact, these pupils will be highlighted to the HT and Safeguarding Lead who will determine whether and when a welfare check home-visit should be made.
6. Any N codes not established after a week are recorded as an unauthorised absence.
7. If a pupil's attendance falls below 97%, the Admin Team will closely monitor for 2 weeks. If there is no improvement the class teacher will discuss this with parents, if necessary.
8. If a pupil's attendance falls below 95%, parents will be invited in to discuss concerns that their attendance has fallen below the school's expected standard and devise ways to improve attendance.
9. If a pupil's attendance falls below 90%, a letter is sent home explaining that the pupil's attendance is now being monitored, and the AWA will be informed and in contact.
10. The pupil's attendance is monitored for two weeks and, if attendance does not improve after this time, parents are required to attend a meeting in school with the HT/AWA and set targets for their child. If parents are unwilling to cooperate, or are genuinely unable to attend, a home visit will be organised.
11. After the two-week monitoring period, and if targets are met, the pupil and their parents are congratulated on improving attendance. Monitoring and communication with the parents continues until attendance stabilises to 95%.
12. If targets are not met, the HT and AWA will discuss the case and Fixed Penalty Notice warning will be initiated.