

# ST. VINCENT'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL



## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY

Date reviewed: August 2024

Date of next review: August 2025



Named personnel with designated responsibility for Attendance:

Academic year	Head teacher	Deputy Head	Assistant HT	Chair of Governors
2024 - 2025	Angela Ness	Naomi Watson	Ruth Burdon	Michael Willcock

**Our school attendance target is 98%**

# Attendance Policy

## Introduction

St. Vincent's Catholic Primary School's Attendance Policy takes into account the guidance set out in the DFE Document 'Working together to improve school attendance' August 2024.

Regular and punctual school attendance is important. Pupils need to attend school regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them by law. St. Vincent's Catholic Primary School fully recognises its responsibilities to ensure pupils are in school and on time, therefore having access to learning for the maximum number of days and hours.

Our policy applies to all children registered at this school and this policy is made available to all parents/carers of pupils who are registered at our school on our school website or available from reception for those without access to the internet.

This policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Children Acts, Education Acts, Regulations and Guidance from the Department for Education in addition to guidance from the Local Authority.

Although parents/carers have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's good attendance, the Head teacher and Governors at our school work together with other professionals and agencies to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to develop good attendance habits. Procedures in this policy are followed to ensure this happens.

Children who are persistently late or absent soon fall behind with their learning. Children who are absent from school frequently develop large gaps in their learning which will impact on their progress and their ability to meet age related learning expectations. A child whose attendance drops to 90% each year will, over their time at primary school, have missed two whole terms of learning.

## Aims and Objectives

This attendance policy ensures that all staff and governors in our school are fully aware of and clear about the actions necessary to promote good attendance.

### **Through this Policy we aim to:**

- Improve pupils' achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality.
- Achieve a minimum of 98% attendance for all children, apart from those with chronic health issues.
- Create an ethos in which good attendance and punctuality are recognised as the norm and seen to be valued by the school.
- Raise awareness of parents, carers and pupils of the importance of uninterrupted attendance and punctuality at every stage of a child's education.
- Ensure that our policy applies to Reception aged children in order to promote good habits at an early age.
- Work in partnership with pupils, parents, staff and the Attendance Service so that all pupils realise their potential, unhindered by unnecessary absence.
- Promote a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure, and valued, and encourage in pupils a sense of their own responsibility.
- Establish a pattern of monitoring attendance and ensure consistency in recognising achievement and dealing with difficulties.
- Recognise the key role of all staff in promoting good attendance.
- Recognise the role of class teachers as they will be able to identify where attendance is having an impact on attainment.

### **We maintain and promote good attendance and punctuality through:**

- Raising awareness of attendance and punctuality issues among all staff, parents and pupils.
- Ensuring that parents have an understanding of the responsibility placed on them for making sure their child attends regularly and punctually.
- Equipping children with the life skills needed to take responsibility for good school attendance and punctuality appropriate to the child's age and development.
- Maintaining effective means of communication with parents, pupils, staff and governors on school attendance matters.
- Developing and implementing procedures for identifying, reporting and reviewing cases of poor attendance and persistent lateness.
- Supporting pupils who have been experiencing any difficulties at home or at school which are preventing good attendance.
- Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at school.

## **Procedures**

### **Our school will undertake to follow the following procedures to support good attendance:**

- To maintain appropriate registration processes.
- To maintain appropriate attendance data.
- To communicate clearly the attendance procedures and expectations to all staff, governors, parents and pupils.
- To have consistent and systematic daily records which give detail of any absence and lateness.
- To follow up absences and persistent lateness if parents/carers have not communicated with the school.
- To inform parents/carers what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absence.
- To strongly discourage unnecessary absence through holidays taken during term time.
- To work with parents to improve individual pupils attendance and punctuality
- To refer to the Attendance Service or appropriate agencies of any child whose attendance causes concern and where parents/carers have not responded to school initiatives to improve.
- To report attendance statistics to the Local Authority and the DfE where requested.
- All staff should be aware that they must raise any attendance or punctuality concerns to the nominated person with responsibility for monitoring attendance.

## **Responsibilities**

All members of school staff have a responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and punctuality. The following includes a more specific list of the kinds of responsibilities which individuals might have.

### **Class teachers are responsible for:**

- Maintaining class registers and completing them accurately in accordance with school policy, and forwarding completed registers to school office staff after registration closes.
- Informing the nominated person where there are concerns and acting upon them
- Where poor attendance re occurs ensuring appropriate school staff are informed.
- Emphasising with their class the importance of good attendance and promptness.
- Ensuring appropriate school staff are informed of additional information provided by the child so it can be recorded in line with school policy
- Discussing attendance issues at consultation evenings where necessary

**The Head teacher is responsible for:**

- Overall monitoring of school attendance
- Trends in authorised and unauthorised absence
- Contacting families where concerns are raised about absence including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised
- Making referrals to the Attendance Service
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the school's LA Attendance Officer
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence.

**Staff in the School Office are responsible for:**

- Collating and recording registration and attendance information.
- Taking and recording messages from parents regarding absence
- Ensuring the Absence/Late Book is completed
- Contacting parents of absent children where no contact has been made.
- Recording details of children who arrive late or go home early
- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/ carers and reporting concerns to the Head teacher
- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance
- First Day Response: Contacting home if no reason for absence is received (phone call or text message)

**Our Home-School Coordinator is responsible for:**

At St. Vincent's Catholic Primary School we have employed a Home-School Coordinator to offer additional support to Parents/carers and pupils. This includes support in relation to:

- Improving school attendance by carrying out home visits, attending meeting with the parent / carer
- Identifying, with parents, the reason for poor attendance and work with parents to achieve improved attendance
- Offering parent contracts and attendance plans
- Talking to pupils on a 1:1 basis regarding attendance related matters
- Offering group work sessions to remove the barriers to attendance including friendship groups
- Referring to outside agencies for additional support for families including School Health, CYPS, Attendance Service, Police, Youth Offending Team & Social Care

### **Parents/Carers are responsible for:**

- Ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness or attendance at a medical appointment.
- Contacting the school office on the first morning of absence.
- Informing the school in advance of any medical appointments in school time. For the absence to be recorded as a medical absence we require evidence from the doctor or dentist (Appointment card/letter).
- Making requests for authorised absence in term time, only if absolutely necessary, as time out of school during term-time is not automatically authorised.
- Talking to the school, as soon as possible, about any child's reluctance to come to school so that issues can be identified and dealt with.

### **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 carer. For example, if a child has been unwell and the parent telephoned the school to explain the absence.

Only the school can make an absence 'authorised'. Consequently, not all absences will be classified as authorised.

### **Unauthorised absence**

An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the school.

Therefore, the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without the school's agreement that the reason is valid, even if the parent disagrees.

### **Registers**

1. Registers are legal documents and will be marked twice a day
2. Parents must always give reasons for absence to the school.
3. In exceptional circumstances, schools will determine whether absence is authorised or unauthorised. Staff must be observant of situations where absence is consistently condoned by parents.

The guidelines below clarify possible actions St. Vincent's RC Primary School may make:

<b>Authorised Absence</b>	<b>Unauthorised Absence</b>
Illness	Absence without a valid reason
Medical/Dental Appointment (for the time of appointment plus travelling)	Latecomers beyond 20 minutes after the session has started
Family Bereavement	Persistent lateness within the first 20 minutes of the day
Religious Observance	Shopping during school time
Excluded Children	Special occasions, e.g. birthday.
Other educational activity at the discretion of the Head teacher	Holidays in term-time

### **Reintegrating Long Term Absentees**

Following a long period of absence a child may feel vulnerable, so staff may wish to arrange a phased or gradual return and possibly:

- allocate a 'Key Worker' to support the child in school
- consider whether Special Needs support is appropriate
- ensure that all staff are aware of the situation

All children must feel welcomed and know how to seek help.

### **Registration**

The school gates are opened between 07:30 – 08:30am for Breakfast Club and at 8.45am for the main school. The school bell rings, to announce the start of the school day, at 08:55am.

Each class teacher has the responsibility for keeping an accurate record of attendance. Any pupil who is absent must be recorded at the beginning of each morning and each afternoon session. Attendance registers must be completed by 9.00 and by 1.05pm.

All attendance records are documented using SIMs software, a program supported by the Local Authority. Attendance registers are legal documents and, by law, must be kept secure and preserved for a period of three years after the date they were last used.

## **Lateness**

Children do not like walking into a classroom when the lesson has already started. They feel embarrassed for being late, uncomfortable for disrupting the lesson and self-conscious when everyone looks at them entering.

Furthermore, children who are persistently late miss a significant amount of learning. Indeed, the start of a lesson is where the teacher explains what each child is expected to do and achieve.

Repeated absence for the beginning of a school session is considered 'failure to attend regularly' according to the **1996 Education Act**. The school actively promotes punctuality and strives to improve the attitudes of parents/carers with persistently late children by:

- a. Informing parents of our expectations and offer ways of helping combat lateness
- b. Praising and acknowledging latecomers who improve
- c. Providing support, advice and guidance from the school's home-school coordinator

Once the doors are closed at 08.55am the only way to get into school is via the school office. Any pupil who comes into school this way will be marked as late in the Late Book and on the school's electronic records. Any child who arrives for school later than 09.20am is marked as having an unauthorised absence for the morning session.

Children who have attended a dentist or doctor's appointment and subsequently come to school later than 9.05am will have the absence recorded as a medical absence if a medical card is provided.

Where there have been persistent incidents of lateness, parents/carers will receive a letter advising them of the concerns and the school will provide opportunities for parents/carers to seek support and advice to address these issues.

## **Absences**

Parents/carers should contact the school on the first day of their child's absence. When parents/carers notify us of their child's absence it is important that they provide full and accurate details of the reason for the absence and expected date of return. This information is used to determine whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised. The Head teacher has the responsibility to determine whether absences are authorised or unauthorised

Where we have not received reasons for a child's absence, we send text message requesting these details. If no explanation is received, the absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.



## **First Day Contact**

Where a child is absent from school, and we have not received any verbal or written communication from the parent/carer, we initiate a first day contact process. Office staff check all of the registers between 9.00am to 9.15am every day to identify those pupils who are absent. There are occasions when we are unaware why the child is absent and we will attempt to contact the parent to check the reasons for this.

## **Illness**

When children have an illness that means they will be away from school long term, the school will do all it can to send material home so that they can keep up with their school work.

If the absence is likely to continue for an extended period, or be a repetitive absence, the school will contact the support services (Bridges Hospital Teaching) to see if arrangements can be made for the child to be given some home tuition.

Where, over the course of an academic year, a child has repeated periods of illness the school will write to parents to ask them to provide medical evidence for each future period of illness related absence. This evidence could be a Doctor's note, appointment card/letter or copy of a prescription. We may seek written permission from you for school to make our own enquiries. Alternatively we may make a referral to the School Health Advisor to offer support.

## **Parental Request for Absence from School for Family Holidays**

The government only allows Headteachers to authorise leave of absence during term time in '*exceptional circumstances*'. Parents/Carers must complete a Holiday Request form (available from the school office).

### Please note:

From August 2024, the fine for term-time absences due to a family holiday will be **£80 if paid within 21 days**, or **£160 if paid within 28 days**.

In the case of repeated fines, if a parent receives a second fine for the same child within any three-year period, this will be charged at the higher rate of £160. Fines per parent will be capped to two fines within any three-year period. Once this limit has been reached, other action like a parenting order or prosecution will be considered.

If you're prosecuted and attend court because your child hasn't been attending school, you could get a fine of up to £2,500.

For further information on fines, please see <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/>

## Monitoring Attendance

At St. Vincent's Catholic Primary School, we monitor attendance very carefully. To ensure compliance to the August 2024 DfE new School Attendance Rules, St. Vincent's has introduced a 4-stage monitoring process which aims to keep parents/carers fully informed about their child's attendance and the actions that school is obliged to take.

<b>Stage 1</b> Attendance below 96%	An initial ' <i>concern letter</i> ' will be sent to remind the parent/carer of the importance of good attendance.
<b>Stage 2</b> Continued absences	An ' <i>ongoing concerns letter</i> ' plus a parent/carer survey requesting information about the continued periods of absence.
<b>Stage 3</b> No improvement	A ' <i>serious concerns letter</i> ' will be sent initiating a 4-week monitoring period.
<b>Stage 4</b> Still no improvement	Consideration given to submitting a referral to the Newcastle City Council Attendance Team.

## Addressing Attendance Concerns

The school becomes concerned when attendance falls below 97%.

When school becomes concerned about a child's attendance, initially, parents/carers will receive a **Stage1 Initial Concern letter**. If improvement are not swiftly recorded, parents/carers will be sent a **Stage2 Ongoing Concerns letter** with a **parent/carer survey** to help school understand the barriers preventing good attendance. Failure to improve attendance following support and guidance from school will trigger **Stage 3: a Serious Concern letter** will be sent home along with an invitation to meet with the Headteacher and the Home-School Coordinator. At this meeting, a **Parenting Contract** (see Appendix A) will be completed and agreed. Should sustained good school attendance not result from Stage 3, St. Vincent's Catholic Primary School governors and the Headteacher will instigate **Stage 4** and consider referring the case to the Attendance Team at Newcastle City Council.

Additionally, at the end of every school term, school sends home a traffic light letter for every child which allows the Headteacher to share with parents/carers any concerns, improvements or great achievements in attendance. A Traffic Light letter places a child in either the red, amber or green zone:

- **Red Zone: Under 90% attendance**

Pupils in the red zone are more likely to underachieve, find making friendships difficult and misbehave. Legal action may be taken against Parents/Carers of Red Zone pupils.

- **Amber Zone: 91% - 96% attendance**

Students in this zone are still at risk of underachieving due to the absence level. Students who miss school regularly are more likely to suffer from school related stress. If your child is in the Amber Zone we will contact you to complete a Parent Contract to help avoid attendance falling into the Red Zone.

- **Green Zone: 97% - 100%**

We expect students to have Green Zone attendance throughout their education. Those in the green zone are more likely to do well in examinations, have better job opportunities and develop strong and lasting friendships within school.

### **Rewards & Recognition**

Although good attendance is an expectation, the school seeks to improve whole school attendance by offering incentives. This may include:

- 100% Certificates
- 100% badges and rosettes
- 100% end-of-year treat
- Class Attendance Trophy
- Reward points to be spent on trinkets and activities

### **What happens if my child misses school without a good reason?**

*Information from the DfE (August 2024)*

If your child is absent and you haven't received advance permission from the headteacher to take your child out of school, the school and local council may take action.

Before that, your child's school and your local council are expected to support you to improve the child's attendance before any measures are put in place.

These measures can include:

- **Issue a fixed penalty notice, otherwise known as a 'fine'** – your local council can give each parent a fine. If you do not pay the fine after 28 days you may be prosecuted for your child's absence from school.
- **Seek an Education Supervision Order from the family court** – if the council thinks you need support getting your child to go to school but you're not co-operating, they can apply to a court for an Education Supervision Order. A supervisor will be appointed to help you get your child into education. The local council can do this instead of, or as well as, prosecuting you.
- **Prosecute you** – this means you have to go to court. You could get a fine, a community order or a jail sentence up to three months. The court could also give you a Parenting Order.

# Appendix A

## Parenting Contracts for attendance – guide for parents

### What is a parenting contract?

A parenting contract is a formal written agreement between a parent or carer and either the school and / or the local authority. A parenting contract may be offered if your child has failed to attend school regularly.

A parenting contract is meant to support you, the school and the LA to identify and address the issues surrounding your child's irregular attendance at school and encourage a positive working relationship to improve attendance. It is not intended to be a punishment.

### What does it involve?

Everyone signed up to the contract will agree to take certain actions which are realistic and which address the issues of non-attendance for a specified period of time. You might agree to do things like getting your child up on time, signing a daily report card and reporting any difficulties to school as soon as possible. School might agree to inform you if your child does not arrive at school, deal quickly with any problems and involve other agencies that might be able to offer you additional support. The contract will be reviewed regularly.

### Do I have to enter into a parenting contract?

Entry into a parenting contract is voluntary but it does provide you with an opportunity to get support to improve your child's attendance at school. If you do take up the offer of a parenting contract and try to comply with it, this may assist your case if the local authority decides to take legal action against you for your child's irregular attendance. If you refuse the offer or don't comply without good reason this may also be presented as evidence. If you decide not to enter into a contract, you will need to try to find other ways of improving your child's attendance and it may be worth discussing how you intend to do this with the school or local authority.

### How is a parenting contract arranged?

You will be invited to a meeting in school with a school representative. The local authority Area Attendance Officer may also attend. Depending on their age and understanding, your child can attend part or all of the meeting.

At the meeting you will be asked your views on your child's attendance and whether there are any underlying issues. Try to think about the reasons behind your child's absences, any particular difficulties you are experiencing at the moment and what would help you to improve your child's attendance. Also think about what you can do to improve attendance.

School will explain what support they can offer and whether any other agency including the local authority might also be able to help you and your child. You will be able to discuss what is expected of both you and the school and then agree the actions that will support improved attendance. If you choose to accept the offer, the final contract will be signed by you, the school representative and in some cases the area attendance officer.

**National contacts**

[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) School attendance, absence and your child

[www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport) Behaviour and attendance - Parental responsibility

[familylives.org.uk](http://familylives.org.uk) Truancy Helpline: 0808 800 2222

**Local contacts**

[www.newcastle.gov.uk](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk) Schools – Attendance

You can phone the Attendance Service on 0191 277 4500 or

Email [attendanceservice@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:attendanceservice@newcastle.gov.uk)

**If you require this information in audio, Braille or large print, please contact the Attendance Service to arrange.**