

Attendance Policy

Prepared using the DFE publications and website:

- School attendance departmental advice for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities, November 2016
- DFE School Attendance, November 2016
- Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs, January 2013
- <https://www.gov.uk/illness-child-education>
- Keeping children safe in education, September 2018

Introduction

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. The Iona 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. This policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Children Acts, Education Acts, Regulations and Guidance from the Department for Education. Although parents/carers have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's good attendance, the College of Teachers and SMT at our school work to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to develop good attendance habits. Procedures in this policy are followed to ensure this happens. The Government has set a challenging target of 96% attendance for primary schools for a school year. We also set this target.

Why is Attendance and Punctuality Important in a Steiner Waldorf School?

Good attendance is important in any school, but particularly so in a Steiner school. Steiner teachers practice a rhythmic approach to learning, building new material in layers over several days. In this way, you could think of our 'lessons' as really being 'blocks of learning' which extend over a number of days. During this period, recall and reflection are used to deepen and consolidate new ideas. Such an approach relies heavily on a regular and consistent daily presence in class. A lesson missed is a 'layer' lost and our best efforts are thwarted if your child is not present every day to benefit from the education we offer.

It is worth noting that even 90% attendance over a child's time in primary school equates to missing more than an entire year of statutory education. In Maths for example, missed lessons typically result in children accumulating 'gaps' in their understanding of key underpinning concepts. This has an on-going cumulative impact which increasingly hinders confidence and future progress in the subject.

Establishing habits of good attendance and punctuality are key to helping our children and young people thrive and succeed, both at school and beyond, in that these habits that will serve them well throughout life.

Aims and Objectives

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

Through this policy and our procedures we aim to:

- Improve pupils' achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality.
- Achieve a minimum of 96% 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 statutory school aged children in order to promote good habits at an early age.
- Work in partnership with pupils, parents and staff 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, but especially class teachers, in promoting good attendance.

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.

Definitions

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 telephones the school to explain the absence.
- Only the school can make an absence authorised. Parents do not have this authority. Consequently not all absences supported by parents will be classified as authorised.

Unauthorised Absence & Lateness

- 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 good reason, even with the support of a parent.
- If a child arrives between 8.50am and 9.10am this is recorded as (L) late.

- If a child arrives late after 9.10am after the register has closed we are obliged to mark this down as (U) “unauthorised absence” for that session (morning) unless you have notified the class teacher /school before this point.

Attendance

- This is the time your child is in the school, if a child is absent, authorised or unauthorised this goes towards the attendance figures.

Procedures

Addressing Attendance Concerns

It is important for children to establish good attendance habits early on in their primary school career. It is the responsibility of the College of Teachers to support good attendance and to identify and address attendance concerns promptly.

We rely upon parents to ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually and therefore where there are concerns regarding attendance parents are always informed of our concerns.

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

- Registers will be taken in a timely fashion and all pupils will have their attendance analysed and the results will be shared with the class teachers and Trustees each week.
- The class teachers will monitor attendance weekly. If they note that attendance is consistently dropping below **95% over the course of a term** they will call in the parents to discuss reasons for this and offer help and strategies to raise attendance.
- Pupils that are not showing improvement or having attendance of less than **90% over the course of a term this is called persistent absence**, parents will be asked to have a meeting with the class teacher to discuss this. We will see if we can offer any help to ensure the child reaches their full attendance and set an attendance goal plan, with two monthly targets.
- If pupils' attendance does not improve, decreases and fails to meet the two targets, a member of the SMT and safeguarding team will meet with parents, they may also discuss the case with external agencies, such as MASH, CAFD and the educational welfare officer so we can help and support the child further.
- Our attendance will be displayed termly.

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 teacher

Class teachers are responsible for:

- 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.
- Informing the College where there are concerns and acting upon them as per policy.
- Providing background information to support referrals.
- Monitoring follow-up once actions have been taken to correct attendance concerns.

- Emphasising with their class the importance of good attendance and promptness.
- Following up absences with immediate requests for explanation which should be noted inside the register.
- Discussing attendance issues at consultation evenings where necessary.
- Contacting families where concerns are raised about absence including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues.

The Iona College

The Iona College is responsible for:

- Overall monitoring of school attendance.
- Trends in authorised and unauthorised absence.
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised.
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion.
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence.
- Ensuring the trustees have attendance figures when they have their fortnightly meetings with the Education Lead.

Administration Staff

Administrative staff 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.
- 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 class teacher.
- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance.

Parents

Parents/carers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness or a hospital appointment.
- Contacting the school reception by telephone on every morning of absence, providing the detail for the absence. All absence for illness must be reported either in person or via telephone. Emails are not acceptable. This must be done between 8.30 and 9.00am.
- Only booking medical or dental appointments after school.
- Making requests for authorised absence in term time, only if absolutely necessary as these are not automatically authorised.
- Talking to the school as soon as possible about any child's reluctance to come to school so that problems can be quickly identified and dealt with.
- During an extended absence, parents are asked to keep the school informed every day.
- Parents will be contacted daily either by text, phone, visit or letter until a reason is given or the child returns to school.
- At the end of each week a letter will be sent home asking for a reason for any unauthorised absences.
- A reason given by the child concerned or another child will not be accepted.

Registration

- All the school doors open at 8.30am and school starts at 8.50am. This time is sufficient for all pupils to come into their classroom on time.
- 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 the morning and afternoon session (attendance code / and \ for pupils who are present) these registers are then returned to Reception.
- Attendance registers are legal documents and these must be kept secure and preserved for a period of three years after the date they were last used.

Lateness

- After 8.45am please bring your child to Reception. You will need to complete and sign the late folder and your child will be marked as late in the attendance record, this will be seen as unauthorised absence.
- Children who are persistently late miss a significant amount of learning and settling in time. If your child is of statutory school age and late for more than 5 mornings in any term you will receive a lateness letter.
- Where there have been persistent incidents of lateness, parents/carers will receive a letter advising of the concerns and the school will provide opportunities for parents/carers to seek support and advice to address these issues. If this persists we may have to involve the LEA.

Absences

- Parents/carers should contact the school on every day of their child's absence. When parents/carers notify us of their child's absence it is important that they provide us with details of the reason for their absence.
- All absences are recorded as either authorised or unauthorised absences on the register. It is important that we receive accurate information from parents with reasons for the child's absence. This information is used to determine whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised. The College of Teachers has the responsibility to determine whether absences are authorised or unauthorised.
- Where we have not received reasons for a child's absence then we send a letter requesting these details to parents/carers to complete. If this letter is not completed and returned by the specified date then the absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence (attendance code O).
- If a child has a health concern that means they legitimately miss periods of school, we will need to see proof of this from your GP/hospital. We will contact the LA to inform them if we deem this necessary.

First Day Contact

- Where a child is absent from school and we have not received any verbal communication from the parent by 9.00am on the day of the absence, then we initiate a first day contact process.
- Reception staff check all of the registers from 9.00am to 9.30am on a daily basis, to identify those pupils who are absent. There are occasions when we are unaware why the child is absent and we will contact the parent to check the reasons for the child's absence. If the staff cannot contact the parent, we may assume the child is missing and initiate a 'missing child protocol' or at the very least contact children and families direct or MASH to report a safeguarding concern.

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.
- 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 or copy of a prescription. We may seek written permission from you for the school to make their own enquiries.

- The school will, after a period of illness lasting 10 days (either in a block or amalgamated) contact the community public health nursing service (school nursing services) to discuss this with them.

Parental Request for Absence from School for Holiday

As an independent school, we cannot allow holiday absence in term time. Leave of absence may only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

If you want to request a leave of absence, parents must apply to the Head of College in writing at least 4 weeks before the event. You will be asked to complete a form that must be signed by both parents with parental responsibility. The form must have the reasons that you wish to take your child out of school and what benefit it will have on the child. We will then assess this within the College of Teachers and inform you of our decision, in writing if declined or verbally if accepted within 2 weeks of your application.

Taking Your Child Out of School in an Emergency

If you need to take your child from school in an emergency, this must be done by providing the class teacher a letter explaining why you need to remove your child and how long you expect this time out to be, you will be asked to complete a form that must be signed by both parents with parental responsibility.

This must be presented to the Receptionist, who will contact the SMT who will, in turn, take this to the class teacher. Under no circumstances are parents allowed to disrupt the class to take their child there and then. The class teacher, if feeling that this is not suitable, has the right to contact the school safeguarding team in order to assess this further.

Authorised Absences / Leave of Absence

The following are considered acceptable reasons for authorised absence:

- Illness of a child
- Close family bereavement
- Days of religious observance
- Urgent medical emergencies

N.B. Parents should give prior notice of any emergency medical appointments that cannot be made outside of school hours. If the child is in school he/she must be collected from Reception. The child must be collected by a parent or other authorised adult. Teachers should refer any exceptional circumstances to the Chair of College.

Unauthorised Absence

If you choose to take your child away on absence, without, in the school's opinion, good reason or thought for the child's education, for more than ten occasions in a ten week period, the school will in the first instance contact you in writing.

It will be explained that any further absences will be classed as unauthorised absence, which, after ten in any ten week period will be passed onto the Education Welfare Specialist team of the LEA. If they are not satisfied that absence is justified, they may take legal proceedings against you.

The following are not considered acceptable reasons for absence and will be recorded as unauthorised absence:

- Family holidays
- Minding the house
- Looking after brothers and sisters
- Music appointments

- Hairdressing appointments
- Treatment of lice
- Birthday celebrations
- Attending parental appointments
- Sleeping in (in such cases the child should attend school, however late)

This is not an exhaustive list.

Children Missing from Education

A child missing from education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect. These 'missing' children can be vulnerable; it is essential that all services work together to identify, locate and re-engage these children back as quickly as possible. It is important to establish the reasons for the child being missing at the earliest possible stage.

If staff have a concern about a child missing from education they will;

- contact the parents/carers to ascertain facts and see if they were aware of the situation
- collate all the dates from the register
- speak to the DSL, with these dates and concerns, in writing

The DSL must then;

- contact the Education Welfare Service and the appropriate children safeguarding board
- inform them of the full details and work with them until the child is found

If a child fails to attend school regularly or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of 10 school days or more, the local authority should be informed.

Issue Date

This policy takes effect from June 2019.

Review Date

This policy will be reviewed and revised on an annual basis.

Endorsement

Full endorsement to this policy is given by:

Name:	Mr Martin Taylor
Position:	Trustee
Signed:	
Date:	10 th October 2019

Related Policies

- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Assessment Policy
- Parents' Handbook
- Safeguarding Policy