



Agreed By Governors -26th September 2024

ETHOS STATEMENT

Merridale School offers a positive, safe learning environment for its community, in which everyone has equal and individual recognition and respect. We celebrate success and are committed to the continuous improvement and fulfilment of potential in every child. We encourage increasing independence and self-discipline amongst the pupils. Everyone within the school has an important role to play in sharing responsibility for the development of positive behaviour and attitudes.

All members of the school community are treated with the respect and sensitivity implicit within our school aims, values and the practice of a code of equal opportunities and inclusion. Equality of treatment and opportunity operate regardless of background, ability, gender, religion, disability or ethnicity.

This is a hardworking school and you child plays their part in making it so. We aim for an environment which enables and encourages all members of the community to strive for excellence. For our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education, it is vital that they attend regularly and your child should be at school, on time every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is **unavoidable**.

It is **very important** therefore that you make sure that your child attends regularly and this policy sets out how, together, we will achieve this.

Why regular attendance is so important:

Learning:- Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning. Any pupil's absence disrupts teaching routines so may affect the learning of others in the same class. Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is your legal responsibility and permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution.

Safeguarding:- your child may be at risk of harm if they do not attend school regularly. Safeguarding the interest of each child is everyone's responsibility and, within the context of this school, promoting the welfare and life opportunities for your child encompasses:-

Attendance

Behaviour management

Health and Safety

Access to the curriculum

Anti-bullying

Failing to attend this school on a regular basis will be considered as a safeguarding matter.

The Law relating to attendance

Section 7 of the Education Act 1966 states that 'the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him / her to receive efficient full time education suitable:-

- a) To age, ability and aptitude and
- b) To any special education needs he / she may have

Either by regular attendance at school or otherwise'

The Law relating to safeguarding

Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities and governing bodies to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State with regard to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and students under the age of 18.

Promoting Regular Attendance:

Helping to create a pattern of regular attendance is everybody's responsibility – parents and carers, pupils and all members of school staff.

To help us all to focus on this, we will:

- Give you details on attendance in our regular newsletters, website and in assemblies;
- Report your child's attendance rate (percentage) each term
- Celebrate good attendance by sharing class achievements;
- Reward good attendance with weekly class attendance rewards ; and
- Reward good or improving attendance through certificates and prizes at the end of each term
- Reward 100% attendance with a certificate at the end of each term and a trophy at the end of each year for 100% attendance for the whole year.

Understanding types of absence:

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school (not by the parents/carers), as either **AUTHORISED** or **UNAUTHORISED**. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required by telephone call and preferably in writing preferably by e-mail to office@merridaleprimary.co.uk.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness, medical/dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no leave has been given. This type of absence can lead to the Local Authority using sanctions and/or legal proceedings. This includes:

- Parents/carer's keeping children of school unnecessarily;
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences which have never been properly explained;
- **Children who arrive at school too late to get an attendance mark** in the register;
- Shopping, looking after other children or birthdays; and
- Day trips and holidays in term time **which have not been agreed**

Whilst any child may be off school because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents and the child. If your child is reluctant to attend, it is **never** better to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and usually makes things worse. Merridale offers an open door policy to solving problems, however small.

Persistent Absence (PA):

A pupil becomes a '**persistent absentee**' when they miss 10% or more schooling **for whatever reason**. Absence at this level is doing **considerable damage** to any child's education and we need parents' fullest support and co-operation to tackle this.

Attendance at 95% or below

We monitor all absence thoroughly. When a child has reached the 95% or below mark **for whatever reason**. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to any child's education and we need parents' fullest support and co-operation to tackle this.

We monitor all absence thoroughly. When a child has reached the 95% or below mark for **any reasons, including only genuine absence**, the headteacher will write to parents to alert them and offer support. Attendance below 95% is regarded as heading towards persistent absence and the headteacher may ask to see parents in order to draw up an attendance action plan.

Attendance at 93% or below

When a child has reached the 93% or below mark for any reasons, **including only genuine absences**, the headteacher will write to parents to alert them and notify them that until their child's attendance improves to above 93% **no further absences will be authorised unless evidence is provided**. Evidence includes appointment cards, evidence of medicines being prescribed by a doctor or evidence of the circumstances necessitating the absence from school. **If evidence is not provided then any absence will be unauthorised. There are consequences of unauthorised absence detailed below.** Please note this only applies for the period until your child's absence reaches above 93%.

Attendance at 90% or below

When a child's absence falls to 90% or below we will have already been in contact several times and offered every support possible. The headteacher will write to parents to inform them that their child's

attendance has been referred to the Local Authority who have legal powers to prosecute, issue penalty notices and make home visits. The LA is independent of the school

Our school works with an Education Welfare Officer (EWO). If between the school, EWO and the parents / carers, we are unable to resolve persistent absence issues these will be referred to the Local Authority Attendance Service for consideration for legal proceedings, home visits, penalty notices etc.

Absence Procedures:

If your child is absent you must:

- Contact us as soon as possible on the first day of absence, ideally by 8.20am (either by telephone or e-mail);
- Or call into school and report to a member of the staff

If your child is absent we will:

- Telephone you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you;
- Invite you in to discuss the situation with the Head Teacher, Deputy Headteacher or Education Welfare Officer.
- Refer to matter to our Education Welfare Officer and / or the Local Authority if attendance falls below 95%

Telephone numbers:

There are times when we need to contact parents/carers about lots of things, including absence, so we need to have your correct, working contact numbers at all times. Help us to help you and your child by making sure we always have an up-to-date contact number – if we don't then something important may be missed. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

Lateness:

Poor punctuality is not acceptable. If your child misses the start of the day, they can miss work and do not spend time with their class teacher getting vital information and news for the day. Late arriving pupils also disrupt lessons. This can be embarrassing for the child and can encourage absence.

How we manage lateness:

The school day starts at 8.50am and we expect your child to be in class at that time. We open our doors at 8.35am.

Registers will be marked at 8.55am and your child will receive a late mark if they are not present in the class.

The register will be closed 15 minutes after school's start time. In accordance with the regulations, if your child arrives after that time they will receive a mark that shows them to be on site, but this will not count as a present mark and it will mean they have an unauthorised absence. This may mean that you could face the possibility of a Penalty Notice if the problem persists.

If your child has a persistent late record you will be asked to meet with a member of school staff and/or Education Welfare Officer to resolve the problem, but you can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school on time.

Should school be unable to resolve an ongoing lateness issue, we reserve the right to bring forward the close of register. This would mean that your child's lateness would be recorded as unauthorised which

could result in the Local Authority considering enforcement proceedings against you. **We will always inform you in writing should this action be necessary.**

Holidays in term time:

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's education and attainment as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children away during the school term. Remember that any savings you think you may make by taking a holiday in school time are offset by the cost to your child's education. **There is no automatic entitlement in law to time off in school time to go on holiday** and the government made an amendment to the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 in September 2013 to reflect this.

Leave of absence shall not be granted unless –

- A. An application has been made in advance to the proprietor by a parent with whom the pupil normally resides: and
- B. The proprietor, or a person authorised by the proprietor in accordance with paragraph (1), considers that leave of absence should be granted due to the exceptional circumstances relating to that application.

In light of the changes to the Pupil Registration Regulations, Merridale Primary School will only grant leave where parents can prove exceptional circumstances. All applications must be made in writing to the Headteacher at least 10 school days prior to the requested leave date.

Any period of leave taken without the agreement of the school, prior notice to school and in excess of that agreed with school, we will be classed as **unauthorised** and may attract sanctions such as a Penalty Notice or prosecution in the Magistrate's Court.

Attendance and Prosecution Service:

Parents/cars are expected to contact school at an early stage and to work with the staff and our Education Welfare Officer in resolving any problems together. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be sorted out in this way, the school may refer the child to the **Attendance and Prosecution Service** at the Local Authority. This service can use sanctions such as **Penalty Notices or prosecutions in the Magistrates Court**. Full details of the options open to enforce attendance at school are available from the **Local Authority**.

Alternatively, parents or children may wish to contact the Attendance and Prosecution Service themselves to ask for advice or information. **They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice in accordance with their statutory duties. Their telephone number is 01902 552203.**

Penalty Notice Fines issued by the Local Authority

From the start of the autumn term 2024-25 (September 2024), there are some changes to our school policy regarding holidays and unauthorised absences during term time.

Holidays or unauthorised absences of five days or more as per the above or where a child has taken a holiday and has already amassed over 5 days of unauthorised absence will mean that a penalty notice will be issued.

- There is a limit of two penalties and escalation in cases of repeat offences. A penalty notice is an out of court settlement which is intended to change behaviour without the need for criminal prosecution. Therefore, from Autumn term 2024, only 2 penalty notices can be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within a 3-year rolling period and any second notice within that period will be charged at a higher rate.

- The first penalty notice issued to a parent in respect of a particular pupil will be charged at £160. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. A second penalty notice issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.
- A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of issue of the first. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time (or subsequent times) within those 3 years, alternative action should be taken instead. This can include considering prosecution but may include other tools such as one of the other attendance legal interventions.

Summary Chart:

Who may be fined?

Penalty Notice fines are issued to each parent who allows their child to be absent from school.

For example: three siblings absent for term time leave would result in each parent who allowed the

National Threshold

There will be a single consistent national threshold for when a Penalty Notice must be considered by all schools in England of 10 sessions (usually equivalent to five school days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period.

For example: a 5 day holiday would meet the national threshold.

First Offence

The first time a Penalty Notice is issued for an unauthorised term time holiday or absence, the fine amount will be:

£80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days.

Second offence (within three years)

The second time a penalty notice is issued for unauthorised absence, the amount will be:

£160 per parent (who allowed the holiday) per child, payable within 28 days.

Third offence and any further offences (within three years)

The third time an offence is committed, a penalty notice will not be issued and Local Authorities will need to consider other available measures to address the absence concerns. This may mean that cases are presented before a Magistrates' Court. Prosecution can result in criminal records and fines of up to £2500.

Cases found guilty in the Magistrates' Court can show on the parent/carer's future DBS certificate due to "failure to safeguard a child's education".

- Where an excluded child is identified in a public place in the first 6 days of an exclusion,
- Where a Formal Warning Notice has previously been issued regarding unauthorised absence and further unauthorised absence is accrued,
- Where there is recorded unauthorised term time leave of absence/holiday leave. Further information regarding Penalty Notice Fine and other enforcement proceedings relating to school attendance can be obtained from the Attendance and Prosecution Service.

Children Absent and Missing from Education

A child absent or missing from education, particularly repeatedly, may be a vital sign of a range of safeguarding possibilities. In line with KCSIE, September 2023 and Merridale Primary School Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy 2023-24, we will work with parents and our local safeguarding partners as required in such cases. Early intervention is necessary to identify the existence of any underlying safeguarding risk and to help prevent the risks of a child going missing in education in the future.

Where reasonably possible, Merridale Primary School will hold more than one emergency contact number for each pupil or student. Merridale Primary School will endeavor to make contact with a responsible adult when a child is absent from or missing in education is also identified as a welfare and/or safeguarding concern.

The school has a duty by law to refer any absence of 2 days or more where it has been unable to make contact with the parent/child or have general concerns about the absence to the Attendance and Prosecution Service.

Taken from our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy:

Staff at Merridale Primary School are aware that children being absent from education for prolonged periods and/or on repeat occasions can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues.

Our response to persistently absent pupils and children missing education will support identifying such abuse, and in the case of absent pupils, helps prevent the risk of them becoming a child missing education in the future. This includes when problems are first emerging but also where children are already known to children's social care and need a social worker (such as a child who is a child in need or who has a child protection plan, or is a looked after child), where being absent from education may increase known safeguarding risks within the family or in the community.

Our school has an admission register and an attendance register. All pupils are placed on these registers at the beginning of the first day on which the school has agreed, or been notified, that the pupil will attend our school. If the child fails to attend on the agreed or notified date, our school will notify the local authority at the earliest possible opportunity to prevent the child from going missing.

Our attendance and admission registers are kept up to date. We actively encourage our parents and carers to inform us of any changes whenever they occur.

Our school monitors attendance regularly and we address any issues that may cause concern and where attendance fails to meet the expected level in line with our attendance policy.

Our school will notify the local authority of any child who fails to attend school regularly or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of 10 school days or, more at such intervals as are agreed by the school and the local authority. Our school will engage with the Education Welfare Officer when concerned about a pupil's attendance.

School targets, projects and special initiatives:

The school has targets to improve attendance and your child has an important part to play in meeting these targets.

The minimum target level of attendance for this school is **96%** and we will keep you updated regularly about progress to this level and how your child's attendance compares.

Our ambition is to achieve better than this because we know that good attendance is the key to successful schooling.

Through the school year we monitor absences and punctuality to show us where improvements need to be made.

Information on any projects or initiatives that will focus on these areas will be provided in our newsletters and we ask for your full support.

People responsible for ensuring good attendance:

Mrs L Towle, Headteacher

Mrs J Hitch, School Administrator/PA to the Headteacher

Mrs S Davis, Education Welfare Officer

Summary:

The school has a legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents/carers and to promote attendance. Equally, every parent/carer has a duty to make sure that their child/ren attends.

All school staff are committed to working with parents/carers and pupils as the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible.

It will be reviewed as part of the schools cycle for reviewing policies. Its success should be judged by answers to the following questions:

Have we reached our attendance target of 96%?

Or

Is attendance at Merridale in line with national attendance averages for primary schools?

Did all the classes reach their attendance target?

Is everyone aware of the procedures to be followed?

Do class teachers and children have high expectations of themselves and others?

Are forms and records regularly completed?

Do newsletters and the website include updates?

Appendix A

Attendance and Lateness Procedures – Staffing Responsibilities

The Headteacher (HT) is responsible for:

- The day-to-day implementation and management of this policy and all relevant procedures across the school.
- Appointing an appropriate member of staff to the attendance officer role.
- Ensuring all parents are aware of the school's attendance/punctuality expectations and procedures.
- Ensuring that every pupil has access to full-time education and will act as early as possible to address patterns of absence and repeated lateness.
- Sharing effective practice on attendance management and improvement across schools.
- Ensuring that all absences are followed up immediately as per safeguarding procedure.
- Ensuring that safeguarding procedures for children who are not collected within 10 minutes of the end of the school day (or end of the session for Nursery children). This includes trying to establish contact with the legal parent/guardian and then each emergency contact that is held by the school. In the event that this cannot be achieved within 45 minutes of the end of the school day, social care will be informed via MASH and their advice followed. Where there is no information provided, and children have not been collected within 1 hour of the end of the school day, the police will be called. Children will be kept safe and calm by a member of the SLT.

Staff are responsible for:

- Following this policy and ensuring pupils do so too.
- Ensuring this policy is implemented fairly and consistently.
- Modelling good attendance behaviour.
- Using their professional judgement and knowledge of individual pupils to inform decisions as to whether any welfare concerns should be escalated.
- Where designated, taking the attendance register at the relevant times during the school day.
- Taking attendance registers punctually by the agreed time so that unexplained absences can be immediately followed up.
- Reporting to the DSL/DDSL any child who is not collected within 10 minutes of the end of the school day.

The attendance officer is responsible for:

- The overall strategic approach to attendance and lateness in school.
- Working with senior leaders to develop a clear vision for improving attendance and punctuality.

- Monitoring attendance, punctuality and the impact of interventions.
- Analysing attendance data and identifying areas of intervention and improvement.
- Communicating with pupils and parents with regard to attendance and punctuality.
- Following up on incidents of persistent poor attendance and punctuality.
- Informing the LA of any pupil being deleted from the admission and attendance registers.

Pupils are responsible for:

- Attending their lessons and any agreed activities when at school.
- Arriving punctually to lessons when at school.

Parents are responsible for:

- Providing accurate and up-to-date contact details.
- Providing the school with more than one emergency contact number.
- Updating the school if their details change.
- The attendance and punctuality of their children at school.
- Promoting good attendance and punctuality with their children.

Definitions

The following definitions apply for the purposes of this policy:

Absence:

- Arrival at school after the register has closed
- Not attending school for any reason

Authorised absence:

- An absence for sickness or exceptional circumstance for which the school has granted leave
- Medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall during school time, for which the school has granted leave
- Religious or cultural observances for which the school has granted leave
- An absence due to a family emergency

Unauthorised absence:

- Parents keeping children off school unnecessarily or without reason
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Arrival at school after the register has closed

- Absence due to shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
- Absence due to day trips and holidays in term-time which have not been agreed
- Leaving school for no reason during the day

Persistent absence (PA):

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

Attendance expectations

The school has high expectations for pupils' attendance and punctuality, and ensures that these expectations are communicated regularly to parents and pupils.

Pupils will be expected to attend school punctually every day they are required to be at school, for the full day.

The school day starts at 8:30am/12.15pm in Nursery and 8.50am in Reception, KS1 and KS2, and pupils will be in their classroom, ready to begin lessons at this time.

Registers will be taken as follows throughout the school day:

- In Nursery, the register will be marked by 8.40am/12.25pm. In Reception, KS1 and KS2, morning register will be marked by 9.00am. Children arriving at school after this time, but before the register closes, will receive a late mark.
- The register will close at 9:00am/12.45pm in Nursery and 9.15am in Reception, KS1 and KS2. Pupils will receive an unauthorised absence mark if they are not in their classroom by this time. Pupils attending after this time will receive a mark to show that they were on site, but this will count as a late mark and count towards unauthorised absences.
- The afternoon register will close at 1:45pm for Reception, KS1 and KS2. Pupils will receive a mark of absence if they are not present

Pupils will be encouraged to communicate any concerns related to attendance and absence as soon as possible to the relevant member of staff.

Missing children

Pupils will not be permitted to leave the school premises during the school day unless they have permission from the school. The following procedures will be taken in the event of a pupil going missing whilst at school:

- The member of staff who has noticed the missing pupil will inform the HT immediately.
- The office staff will also be informed as they will act as a point of contact for receiving information regarding the search.
- A member of staff will stay with the rest of the class, and all other available members of staff will conduct a thorough search of the school premises as directed by the HT.
- The following areas will be systematically searched:
 - All classrooms
 - All toilets
 - Shared areas/intervention rooms and offices
 - The Den and The Hive
 - The school grounds, including wooded areas, the pond area and Forest School
- Available staff will begin a search of the area immediately outside of the school premises and will take a mobile phone with them so they can be contacted.
- If the pupil has not been found after 10 minutes, then the parents of the pupil will be notified.
- The school will attempt to contact parents using the emergency contact numbers provided.
- If the parents have had no contact from the pupil, and the emergency contacts list has been exhausted, the police will be contacted.
- The missing pupil's teacher will fill in an incident form, describing all circumstances leading up to the pupil going missing.
- If the missing pupil has an allocated social worker, is a looked-after child, or has any SEND, then the appropriate personnel will be informed.
- When the pupil has been located, members of staff will care for and talk to the pupil to ensure they are safe and well.
- Parents and any other agencies will be informed immediately when the pupil has been located.

The HT will take the appropriate action to ensure that pupils understand they must not leave the premises, and sanctions will be issued if deemed necessary. Appropriate disciplinary procedures will be followed in accordance with the Behaviour Policy. The HT will carry out a full investigation and will draw a conclusion as to how the incident occurred. A written report will be produced, and policies and procedures will be reviewed in accordance with the outcome where necessary.

[Attendance/Punctuality Monitoring Procedures](#)

Merridale Primary School 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. Attendance Officer monitors attendance and reports figures and any issues, including unauthorised absences daily and weekly to the Headteacher as appropriate. Any internal monitoring is logged using CPOMS.
2. Attendance is discussed by classroom teachers. Any attendance/punctuality trends noticed by classroom teachers are passed immediately to SLT.
3. 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 SLT and monitored by attendance officer daily.
4. Contact is made to the parents of any pupils marked using the N code. Any N codes not established after a week are recorded as an unauthorised absence.
5. If a pupil's attendance falls below 96 percent and no acceptable reason can be determined, an email is sent home raising concerns that their attendance has fallen below the school's expected standard. The letter also has an attached leaflet outlining how parents can work with the school and their child to improve attendance.
6. If a pupil's attendance falls below 90 percent, a letter is sent home explaining that the pupil's attendance is now being monitored, and the attendance officer contacts the parents to discuss this.
7. 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 attendance officer and set targets for their child. If parents are unwilling to cooperate, or are genuinely unable to attend, a referral may be required to the local education welfare officer (EWO), who will then conduct a home visit.
8. After the monitoring period, and if targets are met, a letter is sent home from the SLT to congratulate the pupil and their parents on improving attendance. Monitoring and communication with the parents continues until attendance stabilises to 96 percent.
9. If targets are not met, the attendance officer makes a referral to the EWO. Education welfare protocol is followed, and a parental contract is drawn up. A four-week monitoring period is established and, if there are no improvements, a final written warning is issued to the parents if there is no improvement after an additional four weeks, a fixed-penalty notice is issued.
10. Where patterns of lateness occur (e.g. repeated lateness or lateness occurring repeatedly on particular days of the week), parents will first be contacted informally by the attendance officer. Parents will be invited to raise any reasons for repeated lateness so that the school can support.
11. Where, following informal communication, punctuality does not improve, formal monitoring will commence. This may then lead to a parenting contract being issued, referral to external agencies for support, a fixed penalty notice, and ultimately, prosecution.