

**Holme on Spalding Moor Primary School**

# **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY**

In association with the

## **Market Weighton Cluster schools**

(Holme on Spalding Moor Primary School, Mount Pleasant Junior School, North Newbald Primary School, St.Marys Primary School, The Market Weighton School)

**September 2011**

Approved by the Governing Body at their meeting 10th October 2011

## **INTRODUCTION**

This document is intended to offer support and guidance to all schools in the Market Weighton Cluster of East Riding of Yorkshire by promoting the very best levels of attendance and thereby contributing to raising attainment.

The Children, Family & Adults Directorate in the East Riding of Yorkshire Council is committed to helping schools achieve this goal by enabling them to develop an ethos which demonstrates to pupils, parents and the wider school community how each pupil's good attendance and punctuality is valued. Essential to this commitment is the partnership that must exist between the Local Education Authority and its schools' communities.

Improving and maintaining school attendance requires a committed partnership involving parents/carers and families, teachers and support staff, governors, the LA support services and other agencies. The Education Welfare Service in the East Riding of Yorkshire remains central to this process and continues to offer advice and support to children, young people and their families, as well as assisting schools in their efforts to improve attendance.

## **THE LAW**

The responsibility of promoting and ensuring regular school attendance is a multi-partnership. However, according to the 1996 Education Act, ultimately it is the parents / carers responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly. In cases of poor school attendance or continued lateness, the Local Authority can take legal proceedings under section 444 of the 1996 Education Act, or under section 23 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 issuing a £50 penalty notice to each parent for each child. This rises to £100 if unpaid after 28 days. Failure to pay after 42 days will normally lead to prosecution through the court.

The court can impose a fine on parents / carers not exceeding £2,500 per parent, per child, with an ultimate sanction of up to three months imprisonment. Magistrates can also impose a Community Sentence and/or a Parenting Order, which means that the parent is required to attend parenting classes.

## **POLICY STATEMENT OF THE EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

The East Riding of Yorkshire Council's School Attendance Policy is intended to guide, assist and empower schools and the Local Authority to meet their respective responsibilities towards improving pupil attendance and punctuality. It provides an agreed framework within which consistent practices and procedures can be applied.

## **THE LOCAL AUTHORITY**

The Local Authority (LA) has a statutory duty to ensure that children, who are of compulsory school age and registered at school, attend regularly.

### **Responsibilities:**

- To provide education suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs.
- To identify, develop and establish good practice in respect to children's welfare and access to education throughout the authority.
- To enable all LA services with responsibility for children to work together effectively in the best interests of the child through its Behaviour Support Plan.
- To fulfil its statutory duty through the Education Welfare Service whose primary responsibility is to ensure the regular and punctual attendance of all pupils.

## **EDUCATION WELFARE SERVICE**

The service works in partnership with schools, parents, children and carers in order to achieve the best levels of school attendance and punctuality for all pupils. The Service and all schools work closely with all other support services within Children, Family & Adults, The Multi Agency teams, other directorates of the Council and relevant external agencies, in order to achieve these levels of school attendance.

### **Responsibilities:**

- To allocate staffing resources.
- To allocate a named Education Welfare Officer to each East Riding of Yorkshire school who will work in close partnership with them.
- To uphold and enforce the law in respect of attendance, employment and the issue of entertainment licences. Fast tracking prosecutions where appropriate.
- To provide support to children, parents/carers, schools and other agencies in relation to improving attendance.
- To establish good working practices with all schools based on clear expectations.
- To monitor attendance across the East Riding of Yorkshire based on information from schools.
- To respond to written referrals from schools within an agreed time framework.

- To work with individual pupils in schools, parents and families at home, consulting and referring to other agencies as appropriate.
- To work within a multi agency framework.
- To support schools and agree targets to reduce absence.
- To maintain an effective working relationship with neighbouring authorities for all pupils for whom we have educational responsibilities and taking any legal action where necessary.
- To offer training in attendance related matters to all schools.
- To co-ordinate Truancy Sweeps in partnership with the schools, police and others.
- To monitor the employment of young people to ensure regular school attendance is maintained.

## **PARENTS**

All parents/carers who have children of compulsory school age, are responsible in law for ensuring that their children receive an efficient education, 'suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and any special educational needs which they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise' (Section 7 Education Act 1996.)

Parents should acknowledge their responsibilities by:

- Registering their children in school if they do not intend to educate them at home.
- Ensuring their children attend punctually, regularly and remain at school, during the required hours.
- Meeting any social and emotional needs which affect access to education: either through family support or by seeking the assistance of other people or agencies.
- Ensuring a good attitude to learning and support for the home-school agreement.
- Working in partnership with the school and other agencies in the best interest of their child. This may include informing the school about significant changes or influences in the child's life which may impact on learning.
- Notify the school of any changes in circumstances, e.g. change of address.

## THE SCHOOL

The School aims to provide a welcoming and safe environment which encourages attendance and promotes the best performance from children. It is often the school who can achieve the biggest direct influence in raising levels of attendance. Absence from school undoubtedly has a detrimental effect on a pupil's progress and attainment. Therefore, schools need to monitor and support pupils to maintain regular school attendance.

### **Responsibilities:**

- To promote the highest possible levels of attendance by pupils.
- To produce a whole-school attendance policy which should be communicated clearly to all pupils and parents and be applied consistently.
- To ensure all registers are completed promptly and accurately in accordance with Government and LA guidelines.
- To be alert to changes in attendance patterns and respond promptly to any issues which may lead to irregular school attendance.
- To pay particular attention to those pupils whose attendance is irregular and involve the Education Welfare Officer at the appropriate stage using the agreed referral system.
- To support parents/carers in promoting the regular and punctual attendance of their children and assist those parents/carers who have difficulty understanding written communication.
- To establish a good working partnership with the Education Welfare Service in supporting attendance based on clear expectations.
- To not exclude pupils for poor or non-attendance.
- To ensure all registers are available for inspection on request of the Education Welfare Officers.
- To only remove a child's name from the register in accordance with the legal criteria.
- To host LA Attendance Panels in accordance with the Fast Track prosecution process.

## **GOVERNORS**

Attendance has always been a matter of concern to school governors. The governing body is required by legislation to see that registers are kept accurately. The Headteacher should submit reports to the Governing Body on various aspects of pupil attendance.

Governors have an increasingly valuable role to play in establishing the importance of school attendance issues. They may wish to review the statistics and trends and support positive measures taken to improve attendance.

Governing bodies may wish to consider appointing a governor with specific responsibilities for school attendance matters and undertake appropriate training provided by the Education Welfare Service.

## **IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

The following strategies are drawn from good practice by schools:

All schools should have effective systems and procedures for encouraging regular school attendance and investigating the underlying causes of poor attendance. This should be set out in a School Attendance Policy. These systems should be reviewed regularly and modified where necessary to reflect the circumstances of the school.

- Parents should be aware of the School Attendance Policy and encouraged to co-operate with the systems and procedures that the policy describes.
- A good attendance policy should clearly set out staff roles and responsibilities for dealing with attendance and should link to the school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies. It should reflect the LA's attendance strategy and should be endorsed by the School Governors.
- Raising the profile of attendance by adopting a positive approach for pupils and parents, regular attendance at school is the key to every child achieving his or her maximum potential.
- A consistent reward system for good attendance.
- Advice for staff on adopting a consistent approach in dealing with absence and lateness and for reintegrating pupils who have been absent.
- Wherever possible, contact parents on the first day of absence followed by a letter in a timely manner. Contact by school should also be made when a pupil is absent without explanation, including cases when a pupil skips lessons after registration. This makes it clear to pupils and parents that unauthorised absence is taken seriously. This will also ensure that parents are aware their child is not in school and enable them to take appropriate action.

- Methods of ensuring that the whole policy is monitored, updated and evaluated at regular intervals.
- Encouragement to staff - including support staff - to see attendance as part of their responsibilities. It is, however, advisable to have a key, named senior member of staff with overall responsibility.
- Action should be taken by the school to improve a pupil's attendance before a referral is made to the LA. Schools should work closely with the Education Welfare Service to establish a clear protocol for referral.
- Attendance problems are often a symptom of some underlying cause. The school should investigate whether there are any school or home factors which are affecting the pupil's school attendance. Liaison with the Education Welfare Service to determine the course of action that should be taken in cases of non-attendance, other agencies such as Social Services, Connexions, the Police, Multi-Agency Teams, or the Youth Offending Teams should be engaged where appropriate.
- Schools must keep registers up-to-date and ensure that they are accurately completed.
- Schools can undertake a range of actions to overcome attendance problems. These will depend on the child and their circumstances and will involve working closely with parents. Action may include: - meetings with parents, production of action plans, possible alteration of timetable or subject choice, use of learning mentors/peer mentors, placing the child on report, extra help with work that has been missed or in-school counselling.
- Clear guidance to staff to discourage parents from taking holidays in term time.
- Methods of addressing all issues, such as bullying, which in turn may lead to non-attendance. Schools to regularly update their anti-bullying policies.
- Each pupil's school report to parents should include information relating to attendance and the number of unauthorised and authorised absences accrued during the school year with comment on levels of authorised absence where this is considered to be a cause for concern.

## PUNCTUALITY

Schools need to take active steps to ensure the punctuality of pupils. Lateness should be monitored and followed up swiftly.

To enable this to happen, school policies and brochures should state clearly the time at which each school session begins and finishes, including the time at which registers open and close. Registers should be kept open for a maximum of 30 minutes after registration period starts. Schools are free to set a lower time limit if they so wish.

The following procedures should be followed in line with agreed service standards:

- If a pupil arrives late and the register is still open they should be marked as 'late' but counted as present for that session.
- If a pupil arrives after the register has closed and provides a satisfactory explanation, they should be marked as 'authorised absence' for that session.
- If a pupil arrives after the register has closed and fails to provide a satisfactory explanation, they should be marked **@** with the meaning of unauthorised absence.
- If a pupil arrives late having missed registration, their presence on site should be noted in a book in the school office for purpose of emergency evacuation.

If a pupil arrives late for school on a regular basis after the register has closed; this should be followed up, as there may be grounds for a prosecution of the parents. Such circumstances should be referred to the school's Education Welfare Officer.

## FAMILY HOLIDAYS AND EXTENDED TRIPS OVERSEAS DURING TERM TIME

The Cluster schools guidelines on family holidays should be followed. Advice can be sought from the Education Welfare Service.

Schools should:-

- Regularly communicate to parents their policies regarding term-time holidays.
- Actively discourage parents from planning term-time holidays
- Remind parents that they are not entitled to withdraw pupils for holidays while schools are in session. However, the school may consider authorising requests for up to 10 days leave in any school year, but in doing so will consider the following.
  - Age of the child
  - The time of year proposed for the trip
  - Parental wishes
  - The overall attendance pattern of the pupil

- More than 10 days should be marked “unauthorised” unless the parents can demonstrate that there is an educational benefit to the holiday and this will be in exceptional circumstances only
- Holidays should not be taken during the first four weeks of any academic year (applies to all pupils).
- Holidays should not be taken on the year six transition day (year six pupils).
- Holidays should not be taken during year six SATS week (year six pupils).
- Holidays should not be taken during year eight options selection (year eight pupils).
- Holidays should not be taken during January, May and June in years nine, ten and eleven (year eight, nine and ten pupils)
- Holidays should not be taken at any time specified by the school (this will be communicated to parents by each school individually).

### **AUTHORISED ABSENCE**

Only the school can authorise an absence. The fact that a parent has provided a note or other explanation (telephone call or personal contact) in relation to a particular absence does not oblige the school to accept the explanation offered as a valid reason for absence.

Schools should communicate to parents their policies with regard to the notification and categorisation of absence. Some parents, such as those whose first language is not English, may experience difficulty in providing notes. In such cases schools should seek to make alternative arrangements, for example, through a neighbour, brothers or sisters or a community worker.

Absence should be authorised if:

- The pupil is absent with leave (defined as ‘leave granted by any person authorised to do so by the governing body or proprietor of the school’);
- The pupil is ill or prevented from attending by an unavoidable cause;
- The absence occurs on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil’s parent belongs;
- The school at which the pupil is registered is not within walking distance of their home; and no suitable arrangements have been made by the Local Education Authority for any of the following:-
  - The pupil’s transport to and from school;
  - Boarding accommodation for the pupil at or near the school;
  - Enabling the pupil to become a registered pupil at a school nearer to their home.
- The pupil is the child of Traveller parents who temporarily leave the area giving reasonable indication of their intention to return;
- There is a family bereavement;
- The pupil has a local authority licence to take part in a public performance including approved sporting activity or modelling assignment and the school has given leave of absence.

- The pupil is attending an interview with either a prospective employer or in connection with an application for a place at an institute of further or higher education or for a place at another school;
- The pupil is involved in an *exceptional* special occasion e.g. a family wedding. In authorising such absences the individual circumstances of the particular case and the pupil's overall pattern of attendance should be considered;
- Leave of absence is granted by the school for a family holiday of no more than 10 school days (or in 'exceptional circumstances' for more than 10 school days). parents should be reminded that they cannot expect, as of right, that the school will agree to a family holiday during term time.

### **UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE**

- No explanation is forthcoming from the parent;
- The school is dissatisfied with the explanation;
- The pupil is staying at home to mind the house or to look after siblings (the D of E guidance suggests that absence in such cases should only be granted in exceptional circumstances);
- The pupil is absent for unexceptional special occasions e.g. the pupil's birthday;
- The pupil is away from school on a family holiday for a period of time longer than that negotiated with the school;
- The pupil is on a family holiday without permission or if the parents have failed to apply for permission in advance of the holiday and instead seek retrospective approval on their return.

Further advice on the authorisation of absence can be obtained from the Education Welfare Service.

### **ATTENDANCE REGISTERS**

Attendance registers should be completed using recognised symbols as agreed with the LA, taking into account the variations introduced by various automated computer systems in use across the cluster.

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICIES

As a matter of good practice, all schools should have in place their own attendance policy. All the staff of a school should be fully aware of the policy and its contents. They should apply it fairly and consistently to all pupils.

An effective policy should:

- Support the aims of the school to reduce absences;
- Ensure legal requirements are met;
- Offer clear guidance to parents with regard to their legal responsibilities in relation to school attendance. This should also include information on punctuality;
- Identify systems for encouraging attendance and punctuality by promoting a positive school environment;
- Identify clear channels of communication with school staff, parents, children and external agencies, particularly the Education Welfare Service;
- Specify the school's policy and arrangements for authorising absence from school in special circumstances e.g. bereavement, graduation of sibling;

[Schools will need to have agreed criteria for the kinds of special circumstances which will be authorised, even if in practice there is some flexibility. These need to be based on the needs of the community.]

- Identify what is authorised/unauthorised absence;
- Include procedures to identify and follow-up all absences;
- Establish a range of strategies to promote good attendance and deal with absenteeism;
- Initiate guidelines on sensitive approaches to deal with the needs of individual pupils;
- Identify ways of setting attendance targets for individuals pupils, forms, year groups etc.;
- Specify procedures by which parents shall contact school in the case of absence;
- Specify the procedures that school will adopt in relation to the follow-up of absence in the short and the long term;
- Agree procedures with the Education Welfare Service for the referral of cases;
- Agree the procedures for a child's return to school including procedures for re-integrating long term absentees;
- Take into account the needs of particular groups such as travelling families.

## **CONCLUSION**

This policy document is designed to be a useful, living tool for schools, the Education Welfare Service and the LA. The policy has been designed to be amended in the light of practice, and will be the subject of a regular review.