THE MEADOWS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Attendance Policy

Mission Statement

We strive to ensure that all students receive an outstanding education, maximizing the opportunities for all to realise their true potential. All school staff will work in partnership with parents, children and the Education Inclusion Service to make sure that students achieve the best possible attendance. We will address attendance problems quickly, sensitively and effectively to help parents to meet their legal duties.

The school recognises that regular attendance is a key safeguarding measure. Children who are absent from education, particularly repeatedly or for prolonged periods, may be at increased risk of abuse, neglect, child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, mental health difficulties or other safeguarding concerns. Attendance information will therefore be regularly monitored and shared with safeguarding staff where concerns arise.

Key Points

- Parents of registered pupils have a legal duty under the Education Act 1996 to make sure that children of compulsory school age attend school on a regular and fulltime basis.
- Every half day absence from school has to be classified by the school (not parents) as either authorised or unauthorised. This is why information about the cause of all absences is requested from parents.
- Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason (i.e. illness or other legitimate reason).
- Where a pupil is absent without prior authorisation, an explanation is required. If one is not provided, the absence will be treated as unauthorised and the register annotated accordingly. Reasons given such as: minding the house, looking after other children, or shopping trips within school hours are not acceptable reasons for absence from school.
- In promoting regular attendance, the school will work closely with Education Welfare Officers, who regularly monitor the school's attendance registers, examining levels of absence and patterns of lateness or non-attendance among specific pupils.

The school will maintain a whole-school approach to attendance and safeguarding. Patterns of absence, persistent absence, severe absence, frequent lateness, unauthorised absence and unexplained absence will be monitored by senior leaders and the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) to identify any potential safeguarding concerns at the earliest opportunity.

Regular school attendance is important if children are to achieve their best in school. Children need to attend regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them in law. To this end we will actively pursue the goal of regular attendance and individual absences will be carefully investigated and monitored.

❖ Registration

An attendance register will be kept at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session and children are marked present or absent. Absences will be recorded as authorised or unauthorised. Different categories of absence are marked in accordance with Local Authority arrangements.

Registers should be marked in such a way that original entries and corrections are both clearly distinguishable.

Registers form part of the school's safeguarding systems. Accurate attendance recording enables the school to identify children who may be at risk through poor attendance, patterns of absence or children missing education.

Procedures

The school applies the following procedures in deciding how to deal with individual absences.

- **Illness and other legitimate reasons for absence from school**

If a child is unfit for school, parents are asked to contact the school on the first day of absence before morning registration. Other reasons for absence must be discussed prior to the absence with the Headteacher. Any authorization for absence will be decided upon on a case-by-case basis. However, the school cannot authorise absence for shopping, looking after sick parents or siblings, day trips, birthday outings etc. However, leave may be granted in an emergency (e.g. family bereavement) or for medical/dental appointments that have to take place during school time.

- **Absence without explanation**

If a child is absent at morning registration, and the school has not received an explanation, the School Secretary will contact the parent by telephone to establish a reason for absence from school. Where attendance concerns are identified, the school will consider whether a family assessment, safeguarding referral or support from external agencies may be appropriate.

Where contact cannot be established, staff will follow the school's safeguarding procedures. Consideration will be given to carrying out additional welfare checks and consulting the Designated Safeguarding Lead where there are concerns about a child's welfare or whereabouts.

- **Safeguarding and Attendance**

The school recognises that children who are absent from education may be at increased risk of safeguarding harm.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed of attendance patterns that may indicate a safeguarding concern, including:

- repeated unexplained absences;
- persistent absence;
- severe absence;
- regular lateness;
- part-day absence;
- frequent illness without medical evidence where appropriate;
- patterns of absence linked to specific lessons or days;
- sudden changes in attendance.

Attendance data will be reviewed regularly by senior leaders and the Designated Safeguarding Lead. Attendance concerns will be discussed alongside other safeguarding information to ensure children receive support at the earliest opportunity.
The school will adopt a support-first approach and work with families to identify and overcome barriers to attendance.

❖ Children Missing Education

The school acknowledges that children missing education can be a warning sign of abuse, neglect, exploitation, mental health concerns or other safeguarding risks.
The school will follow local authority procedures where a child:

- fails to attend school regularly;
- is absent for prolonged periods;
- cannot be located;
- is removed from roll.

The school will notify the Local Authority whenever required by legislation and local procedures.
The Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed of all children who may meet the definition of a child missing education.
The school will make reasonable enquiries to establish the whereabouts of any child who has stopped attending school and will work with the Local Authority in line with Children Missing Education procedures.

❖ Leave of Absence during Term Time

Head teachers are only permitted to authorise any leave of absence when an application has been made in advance and it is felt to be for an '**exceptional circumstance'.**

'Exceptional circumstance' is likely to be:

- where the event is highly unlikely to occur again in a child's school life;
- it is necessary for the child to be in attendance at the event;
- the event cannot be organised outside of the school term;
- the event is necessary to the health and well-being of the child;

Anyone wishing to request a leave of absence for an 'exceptional circumstance' is asked to complete a request form (see appendix A).

Requests for a leave of absence for the purposes of a family holiday will not be authorised. Unauthorised absence may then be reported to the Local Authority. The triggers for reporting to the Local Authority include: child's current attendance %, absence that will impact upon national assessment periods and duration of absence.
Repeated requests for leave, extended periods overseas or concerns regarding a child's welfare while abroad will be considered in conjunction with the school's safeguarding procedures and referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead where appropriate.

❖ Lateness

Pupils must attend on time to be given a mark for that session, unless lateness is unavoidable (e.g. transport difficulties or a medical appointment). Parents are expected to ensure that children arrive on time for morning registration at 08.45 a.m. Children who arrive **before** registration has closed at 09.15 a.m. will be marked as L (late before registers close). Children who arrive **after** registration has closed at 09.15 a.m. will be marked as U (late after registers close).

❖ Attendance Monitoring

The school secretary is responsible for entering all attendance data into the school's electronic attendance record.

The Education Welfare Officer (EWO) monitors all children's attendance half termly with the School Secretary and Headteacher, to identify any particular cause for concern. Where a child's attendance drops below 90%, or if a child is persistently late, the EWO will contact the parents to discuss the issue. If poor attendance continues over an extended period of time, the Local Authority may prosecute or issue a fixed penalty fine. Attendance data will also be reviewed regularly by the Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead to identify trends, patterns and emerging safeguarding concerns.

❖ **Parental Notes**

In law, the school sanctions reasons for absence, not the parent. A telephone call or note does not oblige the school to accept the explanation offered as a valid reason. If there is doubt, the absence must be treated as 'unauthorised'.

❖ **Illness, Medical and Dental Appointments**

Where there is doubt about the authenticity of absence attributed to illness, the school and Education Welfare Officer can refer to a doctor in the School Health Service or the child's G.P.

Leave for appointments may be authorised where confirmation has been received by the parent (either in person, in writing, by a telephone call or on production of an appointment card). When a pupil is present for registration and then attends the appointment, the fact that the child is not physically present MUST be recorded for purposes of emergency evacuation. Similarly, the presence of a pupil who was not there for registration but returns later from an appointment should be recorded. There is an Attendance Book kept for this purpose by the registers in the School Office.

❖ **Special Occasions**

Only truly, exceptional cases should be authorised, e.g. a birthday would be unauthorised but a graduation, authorised. Consideration should be given to the nature of the event; its frequency; whether advance notification was given; the child's overall attendance pattern.

❖ **Family Bereavement**

Sensitivity is required and absences may be authorised for funerals and associated events.

❖ **Days of Religious Observance**

Notice of these should be given to the school and absences classified as authorised.

❖ **Traveller Children**

Where the child has attained the age of six years, a minimum of 200 attendances (half day sessions) must be made in a twelve-month period, schools may authorise absence. Liaison with the Traveller Education Service will be necessary.

Where Traveller Children are registered at school and are not attending, their absence should be investigated in the same way as for any other child.

❖ **Off-Site Activities**

These may be

(i) school-directed (e.g. educational visits)
(ii) personal or activities (e.g. music examinations)

In (i) children are marked present or absent as usual.

In (ii) authorisation of absence is discretionary but will normally be granted if the time needed is deemed reasonable.

❖ **Excluded Pupils**

- Temporary suspension is an authorised absence.
- Permanent exclusion should be treated as authorised while a review or an appeal is in progress but if permanent exclusion is confirmed s/he should be removed from the school roll. During the period of authorised absence, the school should set up work for the child.

❖ **Pupil Referral Units (PRU)**

Pupils with dual registration, at both school and a PRU, will have their absence authorised whilst receiving education at the Pupil Referral Unit.

❖ **Roles and Responsibilities**

Headteacher
Overall responsibility for attendance strategy and legal compliance.

Attendance Officer / School Secretary
Day-to-day attendance monitoring and first-day contact.

Designated Safeguarding Lead
Responsible for considering attendance concerns through a safeguarding lens and coordinating safeguarding responses where attendance indicates potential risk.

Governors
The governing body will receive attendance information and seek assurance that attendance procedures support safeguarding responsibilities.