Houghton Primary School

Working hard to achieve our best

Attendance Policy

Date reviewed and adopted:	November 2025
Reviewed and adopted by:	FGB
Signed: Chair of governors	Briony Rice
Signed: Headteacher	Andrew Spencer
Date of next review:	November 2026

Principles

As a school, we realise that for a child to reach their full educational potential, a high level of school attendance is essential. An ethos of high levels of attendance and punctuality is recognised and valued across our whole school community. We aim to work with parents/carers to ensure that all children registered at school attend every day and on time, unless the absence is unavoidable. We expect that all children will achieve 100% attendance but recognise that there may be exceptional or unavoidable reasons for absence, or absences relating to persistent health issues. Our policy applies to all children, including Reception-aged children, to promote good attendance habits from an early age.

The following guidance has been taken into consideration when developing this policy: Working Together to Improve School Attendance. August 2024.

Our attendance policy aims to:

- Support children and their parents/carers to have the highest possible levels of attendance and punctuality.
- Ensure that all children have full and equal access to the best education that we can offer.
- Make parents/carers aware of their legal responsibilities.

School education lays the vital foundations of a child's life. Research clearly demonstrates the link between regular attendance and educational progress and attainment. As a school we will encourage parents/carers to ensure that their child achieves maximum possible attendance and that any problems that prevent this are identified and acted on promptly.

The school has a safeguarding duty of care to all its pupils. We take the role of ensuring a child's good attendance as part of our safeguarding duties.

Expectations:

We expect that all parents/carers will:

- Ensure regular school attendance and be aware of their legal responsibilities.
- Ensure that their child arrives at school prepared for the school day, punctually and in time for registration. Lateness is monitored and may be recorded as an unauthorised absence.
- Inform school in advance of any medical appointments during school time. Parents may on occasion be asked to provide supporting information from the hospital, doctor or dentist, such as appointment details card/letter/text message in relation to the time requested. Where possible, medical appointments should be arranged outside of school hours.
- Ensure that they contact the school before 08.40am if their child is unable to attend school, citing the reason.
- Inform the school as soon as possible about any child's reluctance to come to school so that any problem can be quickly identified and dealt with.
- Follow application procedures regarding a request for leave of absence during term time, which should only be taken if absolutely necessary. Leave is not automatically authorised unless considered an exceptional circumstance. Any leave taken during term time, that has been unauthorised, could be subject to a penalty notice/fine.
- Notify school immediately of any changes to contact details, and ensure school has more than one name, address and telephone number as an emergency contact.
- Engage with early interventions designed to support the family and their child's attendance at school.
- Discuss attendance where necessary face to face or on the telephone – conversations are preferable to messages or emails.

Parents/carers have a legal responsibility to ensure that children of statutory school age (the term after the child turns five) attend school on a regular and full-time basis. Permitting an absence from school without good reason is an offence. A pupil whose attendance drops to 90% each year will, over their time at primary school, have missed the equivalent of two whole terms of learning.

We expect that school will:

- Provide a safe learning environment.
- Keep regular and accurate records of attendance and punctuality.
- Monitor individual children's attendance and punctuality.
- Contact parents/carers when a child fails to attend and where no message has been received to explain the absence.
- Follow up all unexplained absences to obtain explanations from parents/carers. Although parents/carers may offer a reason, only the school can authorise the absence. In the case of long term or frequent absence due to medical conditions, information from a GP or other relevant body may be requested to assist school in offering appropriate support.
- Promote and celebrate good attendance and punctuality, for example through assemblies, social media, displays and parent/carer communications.
- Meet regularly with the Local Authority Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO) to monitor and support school attendance and punctuality.
- Refer irregular or unjustified patterns of attendance to the Local Authority Attendance Service.
- Provide intensive and bespoke support to children at risk of persistent absence.
- Work alongside other services and teams to support children's attendance. E.g. other schools in a multi academy trust, the Local Authority, Early Help, Social Care, Virtual School and the local community (including volunteers).
- Share attendance data with parents/carers and make it clear what good attendance and success looks like for their child.
- Communicate clearly and consistently with parents/carers and children regarding attendance.
- Follow the Local Authority Medical Needs Policy for children who are failing to access education in school due to medical and behavioural needs. This goes hand in hand with Section 19 of the Education Act 1996.
- Consider an Individual Healthcare Plan for children with medical needs.
- Work alongside the Access and Inclusion team to identify and support children with medical needs preventing them from attending school.

The Attendance Champion for our school is Andrew Spencer. He is also Headteacher and can be contacted on 01480 463398.

All members of the school staff have a safeguarding responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and lateness; with the Headteacher having overall responsibility for the monitoring of attendance and lateness of every pupil. Where there are concerns, parents will always be informed by letter and/or telephone conversation and given an opportunity to come into school to meet with designated staff.

We expect that all children will:

- Attend school every day.
- Attend school punctually.
- Attend appropriately prepared for the day.
- Discuss promptly with their class teacher any problems that may affect their school attendance.

We expect that governors will:

- Monitor attendance figures for the whole school on at least a termly basis.
- Hold the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy.

We expect that the Local Authority will:

- Provide support, information and guidance to school by having regular meetings to discuss attendance.
- Act as a partner with school to support in some cases of persistent absence.
- Work with schools in the enforcement of penalty notices, fines and prosecutions in cases that require legal involvement.

- Identify suitable provision and reasonable adjustments for pupils unable to access education due to prolonged ill health.

School Attendance Strategy

Whilst Andrew Spencer is our Senior Attendance Champion, for day-to-day aspects of attendance, please contact our Attendance Officer, on 01480 463398

We are responsible for all children's attendance at school, and we partner with other agencies to help us do this. For children who might need extra support to maintain their attendance e.g. Young Carers, we signpost families to appropriate places to reduce the impact that their needs and personal circumstances have on their attendance at school. Safeguarding and attendance are closely linked, and we work together with Social Care to identify where children need extra support. We will work with families in many different ways to overcome barriers to attendance. All staff have direct access to our trained Designated Safeguarding Lead, and this is important for this work.

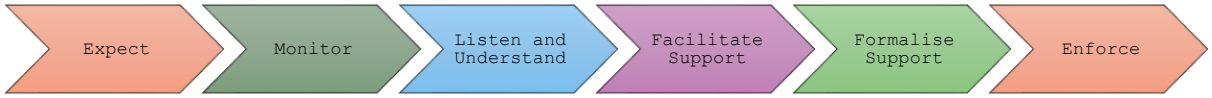
School is responsible for monitoring whole school attendance data and using this to inform how we support pupils. We share this data within the school staff to ensure continuity of support. We are required to report our attendance to the Department for Education (DfE) so that we can compare our performance with that of other schools, both locally and nationally. Attendance data is analysed regularly, and children whose attendance is falling or deemed to be a concern will be noted. This will be communicated with parents and carers. Support will then be put in place. Children whose attendance falls to 90% or under are deemed to be 'persistently absent' and can be referred to the Local Authority for enforcement action. Pupils whose attendance is 50% or under are 'severely persistently absent' and parents/carers will be expected to engage in substantial support.

We have a whole-school ethos of promoting and celebrating attendance. This means that we train every staff member in attendance procedures so that everyone understands the processes for attendance and the pastoral structures in school. We train, remind and support all staff to follow this policy, and constantly refer to it. Good attendance is celebrated with children and families and reported to parents/carers in written end-of-year reports.

Our whole-school strategy for attendance involves deciding how to allocate resources (both financial and staffing) to manage attendance. Our support and early interventions for attendance are regularly monitored to ensure they are having an impact and are worth the resources allocated to them.

Supporting Attendance

As a school, we aim to work collaboratively with parents/carers to improve school attendance. This means that we will **listen, empathise and support with attendance. However, if this is unsuccessful, legal sanctions will be considered where appropriate.**



When required, support strategies with a monitoring period will be put in place to help improve the attendance or lateness of a pupil. Should a pupil's attendance or lateness continue to be a concern despite the support strategies in place, with no improvement to the expected level set by school, a referral will be made to the Local Authority Attendance Team for statutory aged pupils. This could result in a Penalty Notice/fine, or prosecution being issued by Cambridgeshire County Council, as per section 444 Education Act 1996. This may result in a fine of up to £2500 and/or 3 months in prison.

Lateness and attendance are monitored daily by the **school attendance officer** who will:

- Scrutinise the registers daily, monitoring authorised/unauthorised absence and other reasons provided for pupil absence and lateness.
- Raise concerns with parents/carers of identified patterns of lateness with an initial 'Late Letter'.
- Contact parents by telephone, email, or letter to establish a reason for a pupil's absence if the reason is unknown.
- Raise concerns with parents/carers once attendance has fallen below an acceptable level.
- Offer support or signpost to other areas of support within the community.
- Our early intervention process (which occurs prior to choosing one of the two pathways [Notice to Improve or Attendance Contract]) is as follows:
    - Step One. Telephone call advising parent/carers of our concerns regarding the level of their child's attendance/lateness, and offering support.
    - Step Two. Send a letter to offer support and further explain the effect the absence/lateness is having on the child.
    - Step Three. Send an invitation to attend a meeting to enter into an Attendance Contract. This is a supportive meeting, entered into voluntarily to discuss the needs of a pupil and family and identify ways that barriers to attendance can be removed.
    - Step Four. Should the Attendance Contract fail to improve attendance, or should there be no engagement with interventions and support despite every attempt by the school to support the family, a request for the issue of a penalty notice/fine or prosecution could be made to the Local Authority Attendance Team for children of statutory school age.
    - At Step 3 or 4, school might consider using a Notice to Improve letter, a strategy used in partnership with the Local Authority to set targets for improved attendance. This is a final attempt to improve attendance when parents/carers are failing to engage with support being offered by school, before referring parents for legal sanctions.
- Following use of one of the two pathways above, if attendance does not improve, school will refer to the Local Authority for legal sanctions.
- Liaise with other external organisations in relation to a pupil's attendance/lateness.
- Monitor pupil attendance within specific and identified groups.
- Monitor and respond to pupil absences for those with additional medical needs.
- Monitor pupils and follow procedures for pupils who are 'Children Missing in Education'.
- Follow reporting procedures for parents who have requested to home educate their child.
- Follow statutory procedures when deleting a pupil from roll.
- Monitor absences for illness and requests for leave to attend medical appointments.
- Reporting pupils to the Local Authority when they have 10 consecutive 'O' coded (unauthorised absence) sessions in school.
- Report pupils with unauthorised term-term leave absences (10 consecutive sessions of 'G' codes) to the Local Authority for issuing of a legal sanction to parents/carers.
- Report pupils with 15 consecutive days of 'I' (illness) codes to the Local Authority.

Registration

EYFS - Year 6**:**

- The classroom door is opened at 8.40 am.
- All external classroom doors are locked at 8.50am am.
- Once the external classroom door has been closed, entry to the school is via the main entrance.
- Registers are open at 08.40am am and close at 8.50am. Pupils who arrive at school after the register has been taken, but before it is closed, will be recorded as 'L' - late on the register.
- Pupils who arrive at school after registers close at 8.50am, without an unavoidable reason, will have their lateness recorded as 'U' - unauthorised late which then impacts on their overall attendance level.

It is a legal requirement that a register of attendance is taken during the morning and afternoon at school. Any unexplained absence must be coded as unauthorised until a reason is given by parents/carers. This must be no later than 5 days after the session. Only the Headteacher may authorise or unauthorise an absence. The register can only routinely be amended where the reason for absence cannot be established at the time it is taken and it is subsequently necessary to correct the entry. Where amendments are made, the register will show the original entry, the amended entry, the reason for the amendment, the date on which the amendment was made, and the name of the person who made the amendment. Registers are kept for three years as a record.

Lateness

When children arrive late at school, they disrupt routines, affect other children's learning, miss the teacher's instructions to the lesson and may also feel embarrassed at having to enter the classroom late. They may also miss important intervention programmes and the opportunity to practice key learning skills. Where pupils show a persistent pattern of lateness, Parents/carers will receive contact from the school advising them of the concern and offering support to resolve the issue. Should the lateness continue, parents/carers will be invited to a meeting at school to discuss their child's lateness.

If there is no improvement, despite the school's attempts to address unauthorised absences, a referral could be made to the Local Authority Attendance Team for pupils who are of statutory school age.

Reporting a Pupil Absence

Parents/carers must contact school on the first and every subsequent day of absence by 8.40am.

For any pupil not present at the close of registration, and the reason is still unknown, a member of the admin staff will attempt to make contact with the parent/carers once the registers have closed at 8.50am.

The member of staff will ring every contact, starting with the priority contact, until a reason for absence is known. Messages will be left on voicemail requesting parents to contact school regarding their child's absence. Outcomes of any phone conversations will be logged on the pupil's electronic school record. Staff will complete the registers in accordance with the correct use of registration codes (see appendix 1).

Any unexplained absence will be recorded as unauthorised absence if there is no response from a parent/carers to an enquiry regarding their child's absence from school.

At times we may decide it is necessary to conduct a door knock to establish the safety and wellbeing of a child who is absent without explanation from a parent/carer.

For absences relating to a medical appointment, supporting information may be requested to authorise this absence. This can be a text message which clearly identifies who the appointment is for, or an appointment card. A period of absence will only be authorised in relation to the length of the appointment.

Illness

Children who are unable to attend school due to sickness or diarrhoea can return after they have been 48 hours clear.

Children with mild coughs, colds, sore throats, sneezes and runny noses who are otherwise well can continue to attend school. However, if they develop a high temperature they should stay at home until their temperature has reduced and they are well enough to return to school. We expect children to attempt to come to school unless they are too unwell to complete basic tasks. We will contact you if they need to return home.

Medical Needs and SEND

When children are prevented from accessing school due to physical or mental ill health, school will try to identify the barriers these pupils face, and use our tiered approach to supporting medical

needs. This starts with the universal offer of support for all children and leads to higher tiers of need where increasingly specialist support is required. We will consider reasonable adjustments for uniform, transport, routines, access to support in school and lunchtime arrangements. We will liaise with appropriate services to ascertain support, in the rare instances that a pupil is unable to access any education inside the school setting. We will work with the Local Authority Access and Inclusion Team to identify available options for education. Where a pupil's health needs mean they need reasonable adjustments or support because it is complex or long term, we may seek medical information to better understand the needs of the pupil and identify the most suitable provision. This may take a variety of forms, which we will discuss with parents/carers on an individual basis.

Where children have an EHCP, we will liaise closely with the child's SEN Caseworker to work towards the best attendance outcomes for the child.

We are able to make adjustments to practice and policies to help meet the needs of pupils who are struggling to attend school, as well as making formal reasonable adjustments under section 20 of the Equality Act 2010 where a pupil has a disability. Any adjustments must be agreed by, and regularly reviewed with, the pupil and their parents/carers.

Definitions of Leave

We expect attendance at school to be 100% unless there are exceptional or unavoidable reasons for absence.

Authorised leave

An absence is classified as authorised when a pupil has been away from school for a legitimate reason such as:

- Illness or a medical appointment. There is an expectation that the pupil will be in school for registration or return to school after the appointment, depending on where the appointment falls within the school day and the health of the pupil.
- Religious Observance - only day(s) exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong to.
- The leave of absence has been authorised due to a short and exceptional, unavoidable circumstance.

Unauthorised leave:

An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the school, even with the support of the parent/carers, such as:

- Shopping, hair appointments, visiting family, taking part in a protest or birthdays.
- There has been no reason provided by the parent/carers to support an absence.
- Failure to follow school procedures or inform the school when taking a pupil out of school during term time.
- A leave of absence that has not been authorised due to not being considered an exceptional circumstance.

Coding is always at the Headteacher's discretion.

Term-Time Leave

Parents do not have the right or entitlement to take their child out of school for a term-time holiday. Recent government guidelines have removed the discretion for headteachers agreeing to term-time leave. Any requests for leave of absence need to be submitted before the leave is taken. Parents must complete a Term-Time Leave Request Form (Appendix 2) and provide any supporting evidence, if applicable, with their request. This also applies to parents requesting to take their child out of school during the school day.

If the school suspect term-time leave has been taken but the parents/carers have not completed a Term-Time Leave Request Form, we will write to the parents/carers giving them an opportunity to clarify the reason for absence and provide supporting evidence. Failure to respond to or provide supporting evidence will result in a referral to the Local Authority for unauthorised leave from school.

Exceptional circumstances (*definition of exceptional*: *rare, unavoidable, short*) will be considered on an individual basis. Examples of requests for leave of absence that **do not** meet the criteria of an exceptional circumstance and **will not** be authorised and could be subject to a Penalty Notice fine/prosecution for pupils of statutory school age are:

- Cheaper holidays/flights in the UK or abroad.
- Holidays that overlap the beginning or the end of term.
- Trip of a lifetime.
- Visiting family or friends who have different half term holiday dates.
- Family weddings for more than 1 day or visits to see family abroad.
- Relatives coming to visit.
- Extension of leave if a pupil has not returned to school after an agreed absence if it does not meet grounds for an exceptional circumstance.
- Leave taken due to potential travel disruption.

Penalty Notices

If a pupil takes unauthorised term-time leave for 10 consecutive sessions or more (generally 5 days) they will be subject to a Penalty Notice. The fine for a penalty notice is £80 per child, per parent/carer, increasing to £160 if not paid after 21 days but within 28 days for pupils who are of statutory school age. If a penalty notice remains unpaid, parents may be the subject of court proceedings for failing to ensure the regular school attendance of their child and this could result in a fine of up to £2,500 and/or a term of imprisonment of up to 3 months per parent.

For second offences of unauthorised term-time leave (10 consecutive sessions or more) within a three-year rolling period, the fine is a flat £160 per parent, per child. For the third offence in a three-year rolling period, the referral will be automatically considered for prosecution in relation to Section 444 Education Act 1996.

Children Missing in Education

If a pupil fails to attend school for 10 consecutive days, without explanation, the school will refer the pupil to the Local Authority as a Child Missing in Education. After a further 10 days of absence with no explanation, your child is at risk of losing their school place with us.

Elective Home Education

It is a parent's right to be able to withdraw their child from school to educate them at home if they wish to. There are legal responsibilities parents/carers must fulfil if they wish to educate their child at home, which are monitored by the Local Authority. Please speak to the headteacher in the first instance if you are considering this option.