



# St Mary's C of E (VA) Primary School

To be a caring, inclusive, Christian environment, nurturing a life-long love of learning where we can work together to learn, to grow, to serve. We are proud to support the whole community and by collaborating will enable all children and adults within it to live fully whilst 'shining brighter and brighter' Proverbs 4:18.

“St Mary's is an inclusive school where we believe that all people are of equal value, irrespective of their ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, ability or sexual identity. We recognise and respect their differences.”

## Attendance Policy

This policy is GDPR compliant.

Date of issue: May 2016

Last reviewed/adopted: July 2020 (Academic Standards Committee)

Next review date: Summer 2022

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Principles**

At St Mary's we aim for our pupils to attain the highest levels of achievement and to foster their development so that they benefit fully from the opportunities and responsibilities presented to them. As part of this we consider excellent attendance at school to be vital.

It follows that children should be at school, on time, every day that the school is open, unless the reason for absence is unavoidable.

## **The Role of Parents/ Carers**

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 full-time basis. Permitting unauthorised absence from school is an offence and parents may be reported to the Education Authority if problems cannot be resolved by agreement. It is parents/carers responsibility to ensure that children arrive at school in time, before 8.55am, when registers are taken.

## **The Role of the School**

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school, not by the parents, as either Authorised or Unauthorised. This is why written information about the reason for each absence is always required.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason such as illness or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no "leave" has been granted. This includes:

- Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily;
- Absences which have never been properly explained;
- Pupils who arrive at school after the register has been closed (9:15am or 1:45 pm for the afternoon);
- Holidays during term time.

## **Procedures**

The school applies the following procedures in deciding how to deal with individual absences or lateness:

- School opens for children at 8.45am and all children should be at school by 8.55am when registers are taken. Lessons start at 9.00am. Registers are then electronically transferred to the school office. Children arriving after 9.00am must report to the office where they are marked as present but late. Children arriving after 9.15 are marked present but the session is recorded as an unauthorised absence, until a satisfactory explanation has been received;

- Parents/carers are asked to inform the school using the absence line. Absences for illness and medical/dental appointments will be authorised.
- If a teacher has concerns about an absence or no communication has been received then the school will attempt to contact the parents/carers;
- When a pupil returns to school after an absence, they should bring a written explanation if this has not already been sent. The absence will not be authorised until this note of explanation is received and even then, authorisation is at the discretion of the Headteacher;
- Pupils requiring Leave of Absence to take part in examinations (eg: music; ballet; etc.) or other legitimate educational activities will generally have their absence authorised;
- Pupils' attendance figures, including unauthorised absences, will be recorded on their Annual Report.

### **Family Holidays & Other Absences**

Absences in order to take family holidays will **not** generally be authorised except in very exceptional circumstances. The Governors, in conjunction with those from the other Berkhamsted schools, have agreed the following *may* in some cases be viewed as "exceptional circumstances":

- Family/carer funeral or trauma;
- Weddings (immediate family only: 1 day maximum) or other particularly special family celebrations;
- Religious Festivals;
- Visiting new schools prior to re-location;
- Visits to the child or parents' country of origin.

In these exceptional circumstances the school may agree to authorise up to 10 days per school year. A request must be made at least 3 weeks before departure (except in the case of funerals when this time constraint does not apply) by completion of a "Leave of Absence" form obtainable from the school office or the school website. The parents/carers will be asked to make an appointment to meet with the Headteacher to discuss the request. All other absences will be recorded as unauthorised unless special permission has been granted by the Headteacher. Should the child remain absent beyond the time granted, any further absence will be recorded as "Unauthorised".

In very rare cases, the Headteacher has the discretionary power to grant *extended* Leave of Absence for more than 10 days for visits to close family overseas. The parents will be invited to discuss the reasons for the trip, ways of minimising its impact (e.g.: overlapping with school holiday times) and arrangements for ensuring the child continues to receive an education whilst abroad, as a condition of any such authorisation being granted. Parents *must* agree with the school a return date and should they fail to return within 10 days of that date, the pupil will be deleted from the school's register, thus losing their place. It follows that the parents/carers should contact the school immediately if their return is delayed or if the child is unable to attend school by reason of illness or other unavoidable circumstances.

## **Rewards and Incentives**

The School issues special certificates to pupils who achieve a 100%, or very near, attendance record over the school year.

## **When Problems Arise**

Parents/carers are expected to contact the school at an early stage and work with staff 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 Improvement Officer (AIO) from the Local Education Authority. He/she will also try to resolve the situation by agreement but, if other ways of trying to improve the child's attendance have failed, these Officers can use court proceedings to prosecute parents or seek an Education Supervision Order on the child. The maximum penalty on conviction is a fine of £2500 and/or 3 months imprisonment. Alternatively, parents, carers or children may wish to contact the AIO themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is available from the school office or by contacting the Local Education Authority.

The school puts a lot of effort into re-integrating pupils who have had extended absence, for whatever reason, and will work closely with the parents/carers to provide support.

Parents who fail to respond to requests by the school to send their children to school, or who take unauthorised holidays during term time may be issued with a Fixed Penalty Fine by the Local Education Authority using the current Hertfordshire Country Council guidance and Code of Conduct issued April 2019 and adopted by the Governing Board in July 2020.

If a child goes missing from education, particularly on repeat occasions, the school will consider the risk of abuse and neglect including sexual abuse or exploitation and prevent the risks of their going missing in future.

## **Monitoring**

Attendance is monitored by the Senior Leadership Team every term and parents informed if attendance falls below 95%. This is a statutory requirement. Governors are informed termly of attendance figures in the Headteacher's report.