

Attendance Policy

This policy was ratified on 28th January 2025

Reviewed: **2nd February 2026**

Section I: Rationale/statement of intent

For a child to reach their full educational achievement a high level of school attendance is essential.

We are committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all of our pupils and endeavour to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome. Parents and pupils play a part in making our school successful and their views have been taken into consideration in writing this policy.

Every child has a right to access the education to which he/she is entitled. Parents and teachers share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality for all.

For our children to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered it is vital your child is at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

The routines children develop around attendance and punctuality at school are the same as the expectations of any future employer in the world of work. High attainment, confidence with peers and staff, and future aspirations depend on good attendance. Good attendance is important because:

- statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and attendance below 95%
- regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically
- regular attenders find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with
- regular attenders are more successful in transferring between primary school, secondary school, and higher education, employment or training

We will always consider the individual needs of pupils and families who have specific barriers to attendance in order to fulfil our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN convention Right of the Child.

Children are sometimes anxious to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the child. If a child is anxious about coming into school it is important to share this and not to cover up their absence or give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This can give the impression that attendance doesn't matter and may make things more difficult.

This policy meets the requirements of the school attendance guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) and refers to the Working together to improve school attendance DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance and parental responsibility measures.

Rachel West is the senior leader with responsibility for the strategic approach to attendance this is shared with Jeannette Fuller, Head of Schools.

The school office staff Lisa Geer and Debbie Ziolek at Laughton and Jessie Wilson at Firle will be the contacts for attendance on a day to day basis

Section 2: Promoting good attendance

The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child. To help us all to focus on this we will treat all pupils and parent/ carers with dignity and respect. Staff will model respectful relationships to build a positive rapport between home and school that can be the foundation of good attendance.

- provide information on all matters related to attendance in our regular newsletters
- report to you on how your child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainments
- celebrate good attendance in assemblies and publish in newsletters
- reward good or improving attendance
- set targets for the school and for classes for attendance and display these in the school

If your child's absence falls below 95% we will inform you by letter. We will review their attendance in three weeks and if it has improved we will write to thank you for your efforts. If their attendance does not improve in three weeks we will invite you to a meeting with a member of SLT to discuss ways to support you and your child and set targets for improved attendance. We do not send letters out after the first 3 weeks of the academic year due to the percentages potentially being skewed as they are not over a long enough period of time.

We will also be consulting external agencies if difficulties in attendance continue.

Section 3:

a) Legislation and guidance for parents and carers

Every half-day absence has to be classified by the school, (not by the parents), as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required, (preferably) in writing.

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act). The law does not grant parents an automatic right to take their child out of school during term and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013: The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations state that head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.

It is important to note that the head teacher can determine the length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all.

The fundamental principles for defining exceptional are: rare, significant, or unavoidable, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. There are no rules on this as circumstances vary from school to school and family to family.

Therefore, the DfE only allows a head teacher the discretion to authorise an absence if there are exceptional circumstances.

b) Support from School

The school will work collaboratively with families to support their child/rens attendance, forming positive relationships and sign posting external sources of help. The school will monitor and analyse attendance data to get timely support for those children and families.

Section 4: School procedures

4.1 If we don't know why your child is absent:

We will attempt to contact you on the first day of absence by 9:30 a.m if we haven't heard from you. Please note: If your child is not seen and contact has not been established with any of the named parents/carers the attendance procedure will be initiated. Following 10 days of consecutive days of absence, when no contact has been made the school is required to start child missing in education procedures as set down by East Sussex County Council guidance.

We will make all reasonable enquiries to establish contact with parents/carers and the child, including making enquiries to known friends, wider family and we will visit the family home to try to establish contact.

4.2 Registration by law

All schools are required to keep an attendance register, and all pupils must be placed on this register. Registers are taken twice each day, at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions.

At Laughton

Drop off - 8:30-8:40am; Pick up - 3:15pm

*The register for the first session will be taken by 8.45am and will be kept open until 9.15am.
The register for the second session will be taken at 1.00pm.*

At Firle

Drop off – 8:30-8:45; Pick up - 3:15pm

The register for the first session will be taken at 8:45am and will be kept open until 9.15am. The register for the second session will be taken at 1.00pm.

4.2 Lateness and punctuality

It is important to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions. The start of school/lessons is used to give out instructions or organise work.

If your child is late, they can miss this valuable time, cause disruption to the lesson for others and it can be very distressing or embarrassing for your child.

A child who arrives late after 8:45am but before the registers close at 9.15am will be marked as late, using the appropriate code. A child who arrives after the register has closed at 9.15am will be marked as absent for that whole session.

At Laughton, if a child arrives late to school they must enter the building via the main school office and the accompanying adult must record the lateness on a sheet in the attendance folder stating the reason why the child is late before leaving.

At Firle, if a child arrives late to school they must enter the building via the front entrance and the accompanying adult must record the lateness in the office book and state the reason why the child is late before leaving.

On-going and repeated lateness impacts on your child's start to the school day and missing out on key information and learning. It also is considered as unauthorised absence after the close of registration. Lateness will be monitored 3 weekly and if a pattern of lateness is identified then parents will be contacted by the school attendance team and support put in place to ensure that it is addressed.

If parents fail to engage or lateness does not improve, a meeting will be held with the parents/ carer and the Executive Headteacher/ Head of Schools to set targets to achieve within a given time. If targets are then not met this may result in a penalty fine being issued.

4.3 What to do if your child is absent:

A child not attending school is considered a safeguarding matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required. As a school we recognise that there are going to be a small number of occasions when children are unable to attend school, for example due to ill health.

If your child is absent you must:

It is under the Head teachers discretion for the absence to be authorised

1. Contact us as soon as possible on the first day of absence or you can call into school and speak to a member of the office staff. If your child is absent and we have not heard from you by 9.15am we will telephone you on the first day of absence (and each subsequent day); this is because we have a duty to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance.

2. Notify school by 9.15am each day that your child remains absent

3. For any absence there needs to be a valid reason and this needs to be put in writing either via an email or using the 'return to school' form or medical evidence such as a GP appointment card, a prescription or other form of appropriate evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily but it is likely that it will be requested from the fifth consecutive day of absence onwards or as a result of a pattern of absence.

4.4 Keep in touch:

It is very important that you notify us each day that your child remains absent (unless for example, it is known from the outset that they will be absent for a certain period. This might be for a hospital stay, for example).

4.5 Persistent absence:

If your child misses 10% (the equivalent of three weeks) or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason, they are defined as persistent absentees. Absence for whatever reason disadvantages a child by creating gaps in his or her learning. Research shows these gaps affect attainment when attendance falls below 95%. We therefore monitor all absences thoroughly and regularly and all attendance data is shared with the local authority and the Department for Education. If, at any point, your child has had an absence and their attendance level falls below 95% we will contact you and, depending on the reasons for the absence, will decide what course of action to take.

Section 5: Medical and dental appointments

We ask that where possible, medical and routine dental appointments are arranged outside of school hours. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary. Missing registration for a medical or dental appointment is counted as an authorised absence; advance written notice and a copy of the appointment card is required for authorising these absences.

Section 6: Authorised and unauthorised absence

Authorised absence is when the school has accepted the explanation offered as satisfactory justification for the absence or given approval in advance for such an absence. If no explanation is received, absences cannot be authorised.

Unauthorised absence is when the school has not received a reason for absence or has not

approved a child's leave absence from school after a parent's request.

6.1 Granting approval for term time absence

The Executive Headteacher will not grant any leave of absence for children during term time, including for holidays, unless they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. We define exceptional circumstances as unavoidable and a rare circumstance such as a family bereavement or a close family wedding. Such absences would not be expected to be more than one or two days. Holidays attached to such events will not be authorised. Some time away from school due to unavoidable illness already impacts on the child's learning and so to choose to withdraw your child for a reason that is not an exceptional circumstance on top of this means that your child has even less education.

The school year is only 39 weeks which leaves 13 weeks in which holidays can be taken without your child missing school. Children returning from a term time holiday are also unprepared for the lessons which build on the teaching they have missed. This poses a potential risk of the under achievement of other children in the class. This is something we all have a responsibility to avoid.

If we suspect a child has been absent from school due to a holiday that we have not been informed about, the absence will be unauthorised and it is the responsibility of the parent(s) to provide evidence to the contrary. This might be a doctor's certificate, for example.

We hope you will support our efforts to raise attendance and attainment at our school.

6.2 Valid reasons for authorised absence

Valid reasons include:

- Illness or medical appointment – as explained in sections 2.2 and 2.3
- Bereavement of an immediate family member
- To attend the funeral service of a close family member
- To visit a seriously ill relative, in particular if they are not local.
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the children and parents belong to. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart.
- Service personnel on active service who are prevented from taking holidays outside of term time if the holidays will have minimal disruption to the child's education. (We are unable to authorise holiday for any other job or business).

Traveller children travelling for occupational purposes- this covers Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish traveller, showmen (fairground people) and Circus people, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a Traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational

purposes and has agreed this with the school but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision. To help ensure continuity of education for Traveller children it is expected that the child should attend school elsewhere when their family is travelling and be dual registered at that school and the main school. Children from these groups whose families do not travel are expected to attend school as normal. They are subject to the same rules as other children in terms of the requirement to attend school regularly once registered at school.

The circumstances detailed above are not exhaustive. Such absences would not be expected to be more than one or two days. Holidays attached to such events will not be authorised. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. This might mean that only part of the absence may be authorised. By 'unavoidable' we mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time (for example, during school holiday time). If a child's level of absence is 10% or higher they are classed as a persistent absentee and action will be taken to improve their levels of attendance – see section 2.

Examples of what are not considered to be exceptional circumstances?

- Taking additional days at the beginning or end of a scheduled school holiday
- A birthday
- Availability of cheaper holidays
- Tickets to sports/culture events

Section 7: How do I request an absence?

The school will provide you with a 'Withdrawal from Learning Application' which you should complete and return at least 14 days before the proposed absence if possible. Parents are strongly advised not to make any bookings or incur holiday –related costs before approval for exceptional absence is granted.

The school considers each application for term time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the Executive Headteacher's discretion.

Section 8: What if my request is not authorised?

If you feel you have exceptional circumstances, have you ensured that the school are fully aware of these? Have you supplied all required information and any supporting documentation? If you have any queries in relation to why your absence was unauthorised you must refer these to the Executive Headteacher.

9 Legal Sanctions

9.1 Local Authority Attendance Specialists work strategically by offering support to schools, families, and other professionals to reduce persistent absence and improve overall attendance.

Parents are expected to work with the school and local authority to address any attendance concerns. Parents should proactively engage with the support offered by school and the local authority where involved, aiming to resolve any problems collaboratively. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be resolved in this way, the school and local authority may consider more formal support and/or refer the child to the Local Authority. If attendance does not improve and where all supportive strategies have been exhausted, legal action may be considered and could take the form of a Penalty Notice, a prosecution in the Magistrates Court or the application of an Education Supervision Order, designed to strengthen parental responsibilities and ensure improved attendance.

Sanctions for unauthorised absences If term-time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised. East Sussex County Council is responsible for issuing fines to parents. However, the decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the Executive Headteacher, following the local authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices.

This may take into account:

- number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year, where the child is of compulsory school age (5 years old)
- one-off instance or irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission
- where an excluded child is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

If issued with a penalty notice, parents must pay £80 within 21 days or £160 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the local authority. If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute the parent or withdraw the notice.

In education law, parents/carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular attendance of their child of compulsory school age at the school at which the child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school.

9.2 Legal measures for tackling persistent absence or lateness

East Sussex schools and East Sussex County Council will use the full range of legal measures to secure good attendance. Legal measures will only be considered when there is unauthorised absence and:

1. the child or family do not require or accept the support from the school outlined in

Section 3.4 above and/or from any other agency to improve the attendance

2. the child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence and parents are complicit in the child's absence.

The following legal measures will be used for pupils of compulsory school age who are registered at a school:

- parenting contracts set at Education Planning Meetings
- parenting orders
- Penalty Notices

Section 10: What to do if your child is leaving to attend another school

If your child is leaving our school (other than when moving on to secondary school), parents are asked to:

- Give the office staff comprehensive information about their plans, including any date of a move and your new address and telephone numbers, your child's new school and the start date when known. This should be submitted to our school in writing
- If your child leaves us and we do not have the above information, then your child is considered to be a child missing in education. This requires schools and local authorities to then carry out investigations to try and locate your child, which includes liaising with Children's Services, the Police and other agencies. By giving us the above information, these investigations can be avoided.

Section 11: Other types of absence

11.1 Absence through child participation in public performances, including theatre, film or television work and modelling

Parents of a child performer can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in a performance. They must contact the Executive Headteacher to discuss the nature and frequency of the work, whether the child has a valid performance licence and whether education will be provided by the employer during any future leave of absence. It is, however, down to the Executive Headteacher's discretion as to whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss with you the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs. The decision will be conveyed to the LA prior to the performance licence being issued. Any absence recorded as part of a child's participation in a public performance is recorded as C, an authorised absence.

11.2 Absence through competing at regional, county or national level for sport

Parents of able sportsmen and women can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in regional, county, national and international events and competitions. It is, however, down to the Executive Headteacher's discretion as to whether to authorise this

and they will wish to discuss with you the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs.

Permission for your child to leave early or arrive late to attend coaching and training sessions is also at the discretion of the Executive Headteacher and is not likely to be approved if it is a regular event, unless the sports club or association is providing an education tutor as part of their coaching.

Section 12: My child is trying to avoid coming to school. What should I do?

Children are sometimes resistant or apprehensive to attend school. As above, any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents/carers and the child together. If your child is resistant 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 may make things worse.

If your child is hesitant or refusing to attend school, contact your child's class teacher immediately and openly discuss your worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with school work, friendship problems or family difficulties. It is important that we identify the reason for your child's reluctance to attend school and work together to tackle the problem.

In some cases you may find it helpful to discuss the circumstances of your child's difficulties with another professional.

Section 13: What can I do to encourage my child to attend school?

Make sure your child gets enough sleep and gets up in plenty of time each morning. Ensure that he/she leaves home in the correct clothes and properly equipped. Show your child, by your interest, that you value his/her education. Be interested in what your child is doing in school, chat to them about the things they have learnt, what friends they have made and even what they had for lunch!

For many parents and carers, your child attending school may be your first experience of being separated from them. This can seem daunting at first for both of you, but consistency and a caring, supportive home and school life will make the transition a quick and easy experience for you both.

Attached

Appendix I - A Return to school form

To be reviewed in January 2027