

# Merton Junior School



*'Be wise, together we  
succeed'*

## Attendance Policy

Date reviewed: January 2024		
Next review date: January 2025		
Headteacher	Signed:	Date: January 2024
Chair of Governors	Signed:	Date: January 2024
<b>Reviews</b>		
Date approved: March 2014		
Review date: March 2016		
Date reviewed: September 2015		
Review date: September 2016		
Review date: September 2017		
Review date: September 2018		
Review date: September 2019 – weblinks updated		
Review date: January 2021 – addendum written inline with Covid-19 (see separate document)		
Review date: January 2022 – DHT now leading attendance, this has been updated throughout the policy to reflect that the HT <u>or</u> DHT may be the point of contact (not just the HT). ARBOR is now used in school, not SIMs – this means that: RAG letters no longer produced (this has been removed from policy); parents can now log in to see their child's attendance and parents can send in messages to the school via the Arbor app (all added to policy). <i>Addendum due to Covid</i> written alongside this, and updated January 2022. Afternoon session timing changed, temporarily, to 1pm – to be reviewed at next review point.		
Review date: January 2023 – Afternoon registration changed to 1.15pm. The whole policy has been updated to meet the requirements of the 'Working together to improve school attendance' from the Department of Education.		
Review date: January 2024 – extra information added to bullet points on page 6. Removal of reference to cluster, and instead refers to Hampshire.		

### Objective:

We, at Merton Junior School, recognise the need for every pupil to attain regular attendance at school and will endeavour to ensure that all stakeholders: staff, parents, governors, LA

staff and the wider community are all accountable and work together in support of the school's Attendance Policy which is essential if effective schooling is to take place. All stakeholders play a part in making our school so successful. 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.

We are committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all our pupils/students and endeavour to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome.

It is our duty to consistently strive to achieve a goal of 100% attendance for all children. Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents or carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance, and to build a strong relationship with families to ensure pupils have the support in place to attend school.

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 absence below 96%
- Regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically
- Regular attenders find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with
- Regular attenders find learning more satisfying
- Regular attenders are more successful in transferring between primary school, secondary school, and higher education, employment or training

## **Section 2:**

### **Operating the Policy**

#### **1. Promoting Good Attendance**

Recognition of the positive features arising from excellent attendance can play a major role in the improvement of the overall school attendance rate. The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child. Our vision and beliefs about attendance run alongside other schools in Hampshire. **It is important that the school responds to pupils showing excellent attendance.**

To encourage good attendance, we will endeavour to:

- Praise individual pupils through certificates
- Pass on positive comments to the family; meeting, phone call or letter
- Recognise and celebrate good attendance in school assemblies
- Report attendance on annual pupil reports
- Commend pupils who have been making an effort to improve their attendance
- Issue certificates of good attendance

To help us all to focus on this we will:

- Provide information on all matters related to attendance in our regular newsletter and on our school website
- 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 by displaying individual and class achievements
- Reward good or improving attendance through class competitions, certificates and outings/events

## **2. Roles and Responsibilities:**

### **The Governing Body**

The governing board is responsible for:

- Promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos
- Making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
- Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data
- Monitoring attendance figures for the whole school
- Making sure staff receive adequate training on attendance
- Holding the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy

### **Responsibilities of the School's Attendance Leader**

The Headteacher will oversee, direct and co-ordinate the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and will ensure the Attendance Policy is consistently applied throughout the school. The Headteacher will also ensure that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed. The Headteacher will ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties. The headteacher will issue fixed-penalty notices where necessary.

The designated senior leader will lead on attendance across the school offering a clear vision for attendance improvement. They will evaluate and monitor expectations and processes, have an oversight of data analysis and devise specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance. Working with parents/guardians is an important part of improving attendance through telephone calls and meetings which will be arranged with the senior lead on attendance. If intervention is required, the senior lead will liaise with the relevant staff / agencies for implementation.

The attendance officer will monitor and analyse attendance on a regular basis by looking at reports detailing the percentage of attendance and by observing daily attendance. Each child is looked at on an individual basis and discussions will be had with the senior lead as to what steps, if any, are appropriate, in order to improve the attendance. For

example a discussion with the child may take place, letters sent home to parents, meetings and telephone calls with parents, referrals for support from other agencies, issuing fixed-penalty notices or referral to the Attendance Legal Panel.

The designated lead for attendance is Mrs O'Neill and the attendance officer is Mrs Hooley. Both can be contacted by telephone on 01256 326573 or email: [admin.office@merton-jun.hants.sch.uk](mailto:admin.office@merton-jun.hants.sch.uk)

If absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, staff will discuss with parent/carers the need and reasons for their child's absence and will encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a pupil's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence will always rest with the school.

#### **Responsibilities of Classroom Staff:**

- Ensure that all students are registered accurately;
- Promote & reward good attendance at all appropriate opportunities;
- Liaise with the Attendance Leader on matters of attendance and punctuality;
- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a child's absence.

#### **Responsibilities of Students:**

- Attend every day unless they are ill or have an authorised absence;
- Arrive in school on time and ready to learn;
- Go to all their registrations and lessons on time;
- Take responsibility for registering at the Reception Desk if they are late or are leaving the school site during school hours.

#### **Responsibilities of Parents and Carers:**

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carers legal responsibility (section of the 1996 Education Act) and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

#### **Parents will:**

- Inform the school on the first day of absence;
- Request any planned leave of absences in advance using the Leave of Absence Request form, which must go to the Headteacher (and only request for leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance)
- Support the school with their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year;
- Make sure that any absence is clearly accounted for by phone on the first and subsequent days of absence, or by email / letter if a phone is unavailable;
- Avoid taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments.
- Log onto the Arbor Parent App where they can view the attendance of their child.

## Section 3

### **3.1. Recording Attendance**

Legally the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day at 9:00am and again for the afternoon session at 1:15pm. This means that the child must be in their classroom by 9am and not just entering the building.

### **3.2. Lateness /Punctuality**

It is important to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions and to lessons. The start of school/lessons are used to give out instructions or organise work. If your child is late they can miss work, time with their class teacher getting vital information, cause disruption to the lesson for others, and can be embarrassing leading to possible further absence.

The school day begins at 9am and all pupils are expected to be in class at the time. Registers are open at 9am and close at 9.30am. A pupil will receive a late mark 'L' if they are not in the classroom at 9am when the registers are taken. If they arrive after 9.30am they will receive a 'U' mark which indicates an unauthorised absence.

- All lateness is recorded daily. This information will be required by the courts, should a prosecution for non-attendance or lateness be necessary
- The school day begins at 9:00am and all pupils are expected to be in class at this time. Morning registration is at 9:00am. The school doors open at 8:45am.
- Arrival after the close of registration at 9.30am will be marked as unauthorised absence code 'U' in line with county and Department for Education (DfE) guidance. This mark shows them to be on site, but is legally recorded as an absence.
- If a pupil is late due to a medical appointment, they will receive an authorised absence coded 'M' if proof of appointment has been received by the school. If proof of the appointment is not received then the absence will be unauthorised. Please be advised that where possible doctors and dentists appointments are to be made outside of school hours or during school holidays.

Pupils who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of the other pupils. On-going and repeated lateness is considered as **unauthorised absence and will be subject to legal action** (see section 6 for further detail).

Parents, guardians or carers of pupils who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good time keeping and how this might be achieved. If lateness persists, parents, guardians or carers will be invited to attend the school and discuss the problem and support offered. If support is not appropriate or is declined and a child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence due to lateness recorded in any 10 week period the school or Hampshire County Council will be required to issue parents with a penalty notice in accordance with Hampshire's Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices for non-attendance (See section 6 of this policy for further detail).

### 3.3. What to do if my 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. If a Social Worker or Family Support Worker has been allocated to the family, we often have a safeguarding obligation to inform them that the child is absent from school and whether, or not, we have been able to gain contact with the parent/carer at home.

If your child is absent you must:

Contact us **by 9am** on the first day of absence and each day of absence thereafter. By

- Telephoning the office and speaking to a member of staff or leaving a message on the student absence line
- Emailing the office
- Visit reception in person (if onsite dropping of another child, for example) and speak to a member of staff
- Sending a message via the Arbor Parent App.

We will require the reason for absence and / or details of the illness. If no notification is received the absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

If your child is absent we will:

- Telephone you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you, send a text and / or email requesting contact; *This is because we have a duty to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance*
- we will continue to attempt to contact you throughout the school day, if we have not been able to make contact in the first instance, and will try other contact numbers supplied for your child.
- Invite you in to discuss the situation with our Headteacher / Attendance Lead if absences persist;
- Refer the matter to Hampshire County Council's Attendance Legal Panel if absence is unauthorised or is below our school's expected percentage and no improvements have been made despite intervention and support from us.

If we cannot make contact to establish why your child is not in school and / or we are concerned for the safety of the family (parent/s or child/ren) we may request a Welfare Visit to your home by the local CSPO, Police or visit ourselves.

### Third Day Absence

Please Note: If your child is not seen and contact has not been established with you or any of the named parent/carers after three days of absence the school is required to start a child missing in education procedure as set down by Hampshire County Council Guidance. We will make all reasonable enquires to establish contact with parents and the child including making enquires to known friends and wider family. Upon return, children will attend a "Return to School" session with our ELSA.

## **Ten Day's Absence**

We have a legal duty to report the absence of any pupil who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive school days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer then the Local Authority is notified that the child is 'at risk of being missing'. Children's Services Staff will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child. So help us to help you and your child by making sure we always have an up to date contact number. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

## **Continued or Ongoing Absence**

If your child misses 10% (3 weeks / 30 sessions) or more schooling across the school year for whatever reason they are defined as **persistent absentees**. Where this absence is unauthorised the school are likely to administer a Fixed Penalty Notice.

Absence for any reason disadvantages a child by creating gaps in his or her learning. Research shows these gaps affect attainment when attendance falls below 96%. As such we monitor all absence thoroughly and all attendance data is shared with the Local Authority and the Department for Education.

Children at this school are dependent on their parents/carers, who are responsible for their level of attendance and punctuality. It is vital that children enjoy coming to school, and whilst being encouraged to attend well and on time, will not carry blame and be made to feel unhappy if their parents are not supportive or effective in these areas.

## **Timeline of School Action for Persistent Absence**

The Headteacher/Attendance Lead and Attendance Officer meet monthly to discuss any children whose attendance has dropped or is below 96%. A letter is sent to parents informing them that their child's poor/decreasing attendance has been noted and will be monitored by the school. If improvements have not been made by the following review then a letter scheduling a meeting with the Headteacher or Attendance Lead is sent. This meeting is written up using the school's Attendance Clinic Form and specific targets are set and actions made which may involve either/both school and parents. This is also a chance for the parents to be honest with the school and for the school to provide any necessary support to aid further issues, if appropriate.

## **A Welcome Back**

It is important that on return from an unavoidable absence all pupils are made to feel welcome. This should include ensuring that the pupil is helped to catch up on missed work and brought up to date on any information that has been passed to the other pupils. It may be necessary for work to be sent home during a long term absence to make sure that the child does not fall behind. We thank parents/carers for their support with this.

## **Section 4:**

### **Request for Leave of Absence:**

Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013: (Pupil registration) (England) regulations state that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is important to note that Headteachers 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. There is however, no legal entitlement for time off in school time to go on holiday **and in the majority of cases holiday will not be authorised.** Leave of absence for any child in Year 6 will not be authorised under any circumstance.

Parents/Carers wishing to apply for leave of absence need to fill in a leave of absence request form (available from our school office) in advance and before making any travel arrangements. The request will be considered and the decision indicated on the reverse of the form, school records will be marked accordingly and the form will then be returned to the parent.

If term time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be **unauthorised** and if the number of sessions absent hits the thresholds set down in Hampshire's Code of Conduct parent/carers may be issued with a fixed-penalty fine, or other legal action in accordance the code (see section 6 for detail).

**Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us to help their child by not taking children out during school time.**

**Religious observance:** We will record 1 day absence as authorised when it falls on a day that is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the parents' religious body (not the parents). If a religious body sets apart a single day for a religious observance and the parent applies for more than one day, the school may only record one day as authorised on this basis; the rest of the request would be a leave of absence, and this is granted at the school's discretion. A leave of absence form will need to be completed.

## **Section 5:**

### **Understanding types of absence:**

Pupils are expected to attend school every day for the entire duration of the academic year, unless there is an **exceptional reason** for the absence. There are two main categories of absences:

- **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 will not 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. This includes:
  - parents giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily such as for shopping, birthdays, to look after siblings
  - truancy before or during the school day
  - absences which have not been explained
  - holidays which have not been applied for, and/or not authorised, but taken

A school can, if needed, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence and vice versa if new information is presented. Any changes will be communicated to

parents/carers. An example of this would be where a parent states a child is unwell but on return to school there is evidence they have been on holiday. Or if attendance is poor and a decision has been made by the Headteacher or Attendance Lead & Attendance Officer to unauthorise all absence unless medical evidence is received supporting the reason for absence.

## **Section 6:**

### **Penalty Notices for Non Attendance and other Legal Measures:**

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.

### **Legal Measures for tackling persistent absence or lateness:**

Hampshire Schools and Hampshire County Council will use the full range of legal measures to secure good attendance. Legal measures will only be considered through a referral to Hampshire's Attendance Legal Panels where:

- The child or family do not require the support from any agency to improve the attendance or have support and this support has not been successful in improving the attendance.
- The child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence and parents are complicit in the child's absence.

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

- Parenting contracts set at Education Planning Meetings
- Parenting orders
- Penalty notices
- Education Supervision Orders
- Prosecution

### **Legal Measures for absence taken when the Headteacher has declined parent/carers request for leave of absence**

Where a pupil has unauthorised absence due to either:

- non approval of a parent/carer's request for leave of absence or
- a holiday that has been taken without permission

and the unauthorised absence is for 10 or more sessions (5 days) in any 100 possible school sessions then a penalty notice for non-attendance will be issued

Where a child has unauthorised absence the school must enforce Hampshire's Code of Conduct for issuing Penalty Notices or follow its guidance on other Legal Measures for Non-Attendance. The Code of Conduct is a statutory document that ensures that powers for legal sanctions are applied consistently and fairly across all schools and their families within the authority. A copy is available from

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/behaviour-attendance-parents>

The code of conduct states that:

Schools or Hampshire Local Authority will issue a Penalty Notice for any unauthorised absence where the pupil has been:

- absent for 10 or more half-day sessions (five school days) of unauthorised absence during any 100 possible school sessions – these do not need to be consecutive
- persistently late (coded *U*) for up to 10 sessions (five days) after the register has closed
- absent for any public examinations of which dates are published in advance
- absent for any formal school assessments, tests or examinations where the dates have been published in advance

unless the issuing of a Penalty Notice would conflict with intervention strategies in place or other sanctions already being processed.

If a child's unauthorised absence meets any of the above criteria and the family or child do not require any agency support to improve the attendance then a single Penalty Notice is issued for either:

1. 10 sessions of unauthorised absence or lateness in any 10 week school period
2. 1 or more sessions of unauthorised absence during a public exam, formal school assessment or testing where dates are published in advance.

Parents and Carers will be warned of the likelihood of a penalty notice being issued for unauthorised absence either via a letter, through the leave of absence request form, or through the schools attendance policy and website. The penalty notice is a fine that is issued to each parent/carer who condoned (or was responsible for the child) during the period of unauthorised absence for which the fine has been issued. For each case of unauthorised absence the school or Hampshire County Council will decide whether a Penalty Notice is issued to one or more parent/carers for each child. N.B This could mean four penalty notices for a family with two siblings both with unauthorised absence for holiday i.e. one Penalty Notice for each child to each parent.

Each penalty notice carries a fine of £60 if paid within 21 days of the penalty notice being posted. If the fine is not paid within 21 days the Penalty is automatically increased to £120 if paid within 28 days. If the fine remains unpaid the Hampshire County Council will consider prosecution for the non-attendance. Payment methods are detailed on the Penalty Notices themselves. Penalties are to be paid to Hampshire County Council and revenue resulting from payment of Penalties is used by the County Council to help cover the costs of issuing Penalty Notices and/or the cost of prosecuting recipients who do not pay.

#### **Further unauthorised absence from school**

If you pay the Penalty Notice and your child has further unauthorised absences additional legal action may be taken. For example, in the event that a Penalty Notice has previously been served to you due to unauthorised holiday, should your child have any future unauthorised leave this may result in further legal action for you, such as prosecution or an Education Supervision Order.

For further information parents/carers can request a leaflet from their school and should visit Hampshire County Councils website at

School will follow any variant issued by Hampshire County Council with regards to legal intervention and the issuing of Penalty Notices.

## **Section 7:**

### **7.1 My child is trying to avoid coming to School. What should I do?**

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the child. If a child is reluctant 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.

We ask that the parent/carer contacts the child's class teacher, our Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA), a member of the Leadership Team or the Headteacher immediately and openly discuss your worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with school work, anxieties, friendship problems, 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.

### **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.

Your child will bring home a school diary each evening. Please ensure you look at it with your child and sign it ready for the next day.

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!

### **7.2 Leavers**

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

1. Give the attendance officer 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 pupils leave 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.

### **7.3 Absence through child participation in Public Performances, including theatre, film or TV work & 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 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. When proof of any absence as part of a child's participation in a public performance is received then this will be recorded as an authorised absence.

### **7.4. 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 a regional, county, national and international events and competitions. It is, however, down to the Headteacher's discretion 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 are also at the discretion of the Headteacher and are not likely to be approved if it is a regular event, unless the sports club or association are providing an education tutor as part of their coaching.

### **7.5 Gypsy Roma, Traveller and Showman families**

Absence of a child from a traveller family that has left the area may be authorised if the absence is for **work purposes only** and it is believed that the family intends to return. To ensure the continuity of learning for Traveller children, dual registration is allowed. That means that a school cannot remove a Traveller child from the school roll while they are travelling. When the Traveller is away the home school holds the place open and records the absence as authorised through the T code. Distance Learning packs for traveller children are not an alternative to attendance at school.

## **Section 8**

### **Record preservation**

School registers are legal documents. We will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least 3 years. Computer registers will be preserved as electronic back-ups.

### **Legislation and Guidance**

This policy should be read inline with the Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Policy.

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