



# St Benedict's Catholic School

*The Catholic Secondary School for West Suffolk*

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

*Policy agreed and implemented by the Governing Body on ...7<sup>th</sup> December 2015*

*Reviewed by Governing Body on ...December 2016*

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# ATTENDANCE POLICY

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 St Benedict's Catholic School is committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all its pupils / students and recognises this can only be achieved by supporting and promoting excellent school attendance for all. This is based on the belief that only by attending school regularly and punctually will students be able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. High attainment depends on good attendance.
- 1.2 The whole school community – students, parents and carers, teaching and support staff and school governors – have a responsibility for ensuring good school attendance and have important roles to play. The purpose of the policy is to clarify everyone's part in this.
- 1.3 The policy has been drawn up after consultation with the whole community and is based on current government and Local Authority guidance and statutory Regulations. The school will ensure that all members of the community know of the policy and have access to it.

## 2. School's roles and responsibilities

- 2.1 All staff (teaching and support) at St Benedict's Catholic School have a key role to play in supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and will work to provide an environment in which all our students are eager to learn, feel valued members of the school community and look forward to coming to school every day. Staff also have a responsibility to set a good example in matters relating to their own attendance and punctuality.
- 2.2 Attendance Leader  
Mr A Watts. Deputy Head Teacher 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. Mr Watts, in the role of the Attendance Leader, will also ensure that up-to-date attendance data and issues are shared weekly with the Senior Leadership Team, are made regularly available to all staff, students and parents (who will regularly be reminded about the importance of good school attendance) and that a report is prepared for the governing body half termly. He will ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.
- 2.3 Registration

i) The school is required to mark the attendance register twice each day: once at the start of the day and once during the afternoon session. Classroom teachers / form tutors are responsible for the completing the attendance registers using the prescribed codes (shown below).

## REGISTER CODES

CODE	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
/	Present (AM)	Present
\	Present (PM)	Present
<b>B</b>	Educated off site (NOT Dual registration)	Approved Education Activity
<b>C</b>	Other Authorised Circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/description)	Authorised absence
<b>D</b>	Dual registration (i.e. pupil attending other establishment)	Approved Education Activity
<b>E</b>	Excluded (no alternative provision made)	Authorised absence
<b>F</b>	Extended family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
<b>G</b>	Family holiday (NOT agreed <u>or</u> days in excess of agreement)	Unauthorised absence
<b>H</b>	Family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
<b>I</b>	Illness (NOT medical or dental etc. appointments)	Authorised absence
<b>J</b>	Interview	Approved Education Activity
<b>L</b>	Late (before registers closed)	Present
<b>M</b>	Medical/Dental appointments	Authorised absence
<b>N</b>	No reason yet provided for absence	Unauthorised absence
<b>O</b>	Unauthorised absence (not covered by any other code/description)	Unauthorised absence
<b>P</b>	Approved sporting activity	Approved Education Activity
<b>R</b>	Religious observance	Authorised absence
<b>S</b>	Study leave	Authorised absence
<b>T</b>	Traveller absence	Authorised absence
<b>U</b>	Late (after registers closed)	Unauthorised absence
<b>V</b>	Educational visit or trip	Approved Education Activity
<b>W</b>	Work experience	Approved Education Activity
<b>X</b>	Non-compulsory school age absence	Not counted in possible attendances
<b>Y</b>	Enforced closure	Not counted in possible attendances

<b>Z</b>	Pupil not yet on roll	Not counted in possible attendances
<b>#</b>	School closed to pupils	Not counted in possible attendances

- ii) The register will be called promptly at **9.00 am** and **2.00 pm** by each form tutor and a mark will be made during the registration period in respect of each child.
- iii) The registers will close at **9.15 am** and **2.05 pm**. Any student who arrives **after** the closing of the register will count as **absent**. Students who arrive before the register closes will be counted **present** but will be dealt with under the school's policy on punctuality and lateness (see para. 4.5 on page 7).

#### 2.4 Categorising absence

- i) A mark will be made in respect of each student during registration. Any student who is not present at this time will be marked unauthorised absent unless leave has been granted by the school in advance or the reason for absence is already known and accepted by the school as legitimate. Where a reason for absence is given and accepted by the school at a later stage, the register will be amended in such a way that the original entry and the amendment / correction are distinguishable. The decision about whether the absence should be authorised or unauthorised rests with the Head of Year or Attendance Lead. In cases where permission is requested to authorise an absence in unusual circumstances, e.g. requests for holiday leave during term time, these will be referred to the Attendance Leader, Mr Watts.
- ii) St Benedict's Catholic School recognises the clear links between attendance and attainment, and attendance and safeguarding children. It recognises that inappropriate authorisation of absence can be as damaging to a child's education as authorised absence, will potentially send a message to parents that any reason for non-school attendance is acceptable and can render children extremely vulnerable to harm. If absence is frequent or continuous, and except where a child is clearly unwell, staff at St Benedict's Catholic School will therefore challenge parents about the need and reasons for their children'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**.
- iii) If no explanation about an absence is received by the school **within 2 weeks**, the absence will remain unauthorised.
- iv) Absences will be authorised in the following circumstances:
  - (a) where leave has been granted by the school in advance, for example –

- a student is to participate in an approved performance for which a licence has been granted by the Local Authority,
  - a pupil is involved in an **exceptional** special occasion – in authorising such an absence the individual circumstances of the particular case and the student’s overall pattern of attendance will be considered,
  - in **exceptional** circumstances, permission has been granted for a family holiday for which the parents have sought permission in advance
- (b) where the school is satisfied that the child is too ill to attend;
- (c) where the student has a medical appointment (although parents should be encouraged to make these out of school hours wherever possible, and to return their child to school immediately afterwards – or send him/her to school beforehand);
- (d) where there is an unavoidable cause for the absence which is beyond the family’s control, e.g. extreme weather conditions;
- (e) the absence occurs on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body, other than the Catholic Church, to which the student’s parent belongs;
- (f) the student lives more than three miles, is entitled to free or subsidised transport to St Benedict’s Catholic School, and no suitable transport arrangements have been made by the Local Authority;
- (g) in other exceptional circumstances (e.g. a family bereavement) and for a very limited period.
- v) Except in the circumstances described above, absences will be unauthorised. Some examples of reasons for **not** authorising absence would be:
- no explanation has been given by the parent;
  - the school is not satisfied with the explanation;
  - the student is staying at home to mind the house;
  - the student is shopping during school hours;
  - the student is absent for **unexceptional** reasons, e.g. a birthday;
  - the student is absent from school on a family holiday without prior permission;
  - the student has been stopped during a truancy sweep and is unable (or the parent is unable) to give a satisfactory reason for the absence.

Once a student has 8 unauthorised sessions (4 days) a penalty notice referral will be made to the Local Authority as per their Attendance guidelines which may result in a fine.

2.5 Approved educational activity

Where a student is engaged in off-site approved educational activities, the school will check his/her attendance on a daily basis before entering the appropriate code in the register.

2.6 Class registers

In order to track students' whereabouts throughout the day, deal with any truancy that occurs after morning or afternoon registration and to ensure the safety of students, subject teachers will take a register at the beginning of every lesson to record absence and lateness. Any sudden absences that occur during the day will be picked up immediately by the school office and measures taken to locate the student.

2.7 Staff training

The School Attendance Leader will ensure that all staff responsible for taking registers, including any temporary or supply staff, receive sufficient training to enable them to perform the task accurately.

**3. Collection and analysis of data**

3.1 The Attendance Leader will ensure that attendance data is complete, accurate, analysed and reported to the senior leadership team, parents and the governing body. (See para. above). The report should include commentary on the trajectory and the school target. The data will inform the school's future practice to improve attendance and prevent disaffection.

3.2 Attendance is monitored by year group, tutor group, Pupil Premium and SEN and by reasons for absence. It is also analysed by gender, ethnicity, pupils / students with special educational needs and those who are vulnerable to poor attendance.

3.3 Accurate attendance returns are made to the DfE within the stipulated time frame.

**4. Systems and strategies for managing and improving attendance**

4.1 Attendance has a very high profile at St Benedict's Catholic School and is regularly discussed at assemblies and in tutor groups. Parents are regularly reminded in newsletters and school meetings about the importance of good attendance and its links to attainment.

4.2 St Benedict's Catholic School has procedures for dealing with unexplained absences within a week. A letter will be sent home asking for the reason for the absence. If no reply is received, the absence will be marked as unauthorised.

4.3 First-day calling

St Benedict's Catholic School has in place a system of first-day calling. This means that parents will be telephoned or texted on the first day a student is absent without explanation to establish a reason for the absence. This helps to identify at an early stage students who do not have a good reason for absence or who may be absent without their parents' knowledge. Where it is not possible make contact with parents on the first day of absence, the school will send a letter to them by first class post.

4.4 School Strategies to Tackle Absence

The Attendance Leader is responsible for the school management of attendance, policy and systems to ensure that St Benedict's Catholic School intervenes in non attendance at an early stage.

If a student's attendance drops below 93% a letter will be sent to the parents informing them of this. At 91% a letter will be sent requesting medical evidence (if appropriate) for future absences.

Where there is an emerging pattern of a student's absence the school will invite parents to a meeting to discuss the reasons for the absences. Plans should be put in place with the parents and student to resolve any difficulties and improve the attendance within a specified time limit. It will be explained to parents that any future absences will be unauthorised unless there is clear evidence of a good reason for them.

St Benedict's Catholic School will organize Attendance / Governor Panels to intervene in levels of non attendance when parents will be invited to discuss the issues of the attendance.

4.5 Referral to the Educational Welfare Officers

If there continue to be unauthorised absences by the end of the specified time (or sooner if the student is failing to attend school at all), the matter will be referred to the Education Welfare Officer. Regulations (Education Pupil Regulations 2006) require schools to inform the LA of every pupil who has been continuously absent without a good reason (i.e. the absence is unauthorized) for 10 school day or more. Schools and Academies must also inform the LA of every pupil who fails to attend regularly which is interpreted to mean those pupils who have patterns of unauthorized absence without amassing 10 continuous absence.

4.6 Lateness and punctuality

Students are expected to arrive at school, and be in the correct room for registration, on time every day. It is very disruptive to their own education, and that of others in their class, if they are late. Students who arrive after the register closes

(see para. 2.3.(iii) on page 4) will be marked absent for the whole session (a session being a morning or an afternoon). This absence will be unauthorised unless the school is satisfied that there is a legitimate reason for the pupil / student to be late. Such a reason will not include things such as missing the bus, clothes in the washing machine or lost shoes. A student who is persistently absent by reason of lateness will be dealt with in the same way as other student with an emerging pattern of absence. (See para. 4.4). If the matter is not resolved quickly, it will be referred to the Education Welfare Officer.

4.7 Students who arrive late for school but before the register closes must report to the School Office and sign the late book. Students who have signed the late book within the period before the register has closed will have their attendance mark transferred to the register by the Attendance officer.

4.8 For health and safety reasons it is important that the school knows who is in the building. Students arriving late should therefore report to the School Office. **It is important that all students arriving late follow this procedure.**

4.9 For the same reason it is important that students leaving the premises legitimately (e.g. for a medical appointment), or returning to school later in the day they should sign in and out at the School Office.

#### 4.10 Post-registration truancy

Post-registration truancy occurs when a student goes missing from school having previously registered for the session. This behaviour not only means the student will not be receiving a full-time education, it also potentially renders him/her vulnerable to harm. St Benedict's Catholic School takes this very seriously and will endeavour to ensure it does not happen, by the class teacher immediately informing the School Office if a student who is marked present for the A.M. or P.M. session is not present in their timetabled class. If, however, a student appears to have left the premises without authorisation, the school will try to make contact with his/her parents immediately.

#### 4.11 Study leave

St Benedict's Catholic School believes that students' needs are best met if they attend school every day in the period leading up to examinations. No study leave will be granted during the period before Whitsun half term, therefore, and students will be expected to attend school in the usual way. Where GCSE examinations are scheduled in the period before Whitsun half term, Students will be expected to attend lessons as normal whenever they are not sitting examinations. Study leave will **only** be granted to Year 11 students during the time of the GCSE examination period. Should any students wish to attend school (or should their parents wish them to) in the period after Whitsun half term, on the days and at times when they are not sitting examinations, arrangements will be made for them to do so. The school will work within the legal requirements of: -

- study leave should only be granted to Year 11 pupils and never to those in other year groups;
- Study leave should never exceed 15 school days in a year and is most appropriately granted during the examination period itself, i.e. not before the beginning of that period;
- it should always be granted sparingly taking account of an individual pupil's ability to manage and benefit from unsupervised study;
- any student has the right to attend school during study leave and a parent has the right to insist he/she does so;
- any session given to pupils as study leave has a statistical meaning of authorised absence (it is not an 'approved educational activity' as it is unsupervised) and should be recorded and reported on by the school as such.

## 5. Term-time holidays

Term-time holidays are intended for children whose parents are unable to take holiday at any other time.

St Benedict's Catholic School will consider every application individually; Its policy is NOT to grant leave of absence for a holiday other than in the most exceptional circumstances Time off school for family holidays is not a right. An application must be made in writing, with appropriate evidence, in advance of the intended holiday.

St Benedict's Catholic School will consider authorising holidays for:

- service personnel and other employees who are prevented from taking holidays during term-time;
- when a family needs to spend time together to support each other during or after a crisis;
- parents who are subject to a strict and un-negotiable holiday rota and evidence is provided to this effect.

Requests for holidays for the following reasons will not be authorised:

- cheaper cost of holiday;
- availability of the desired accommodation;
- poor weather experienced in school holiday periods; and
- overlap with beginning or end of term.

St Benedict's Catholic School will respond to all requests for a leave of absence in writing giving the reasons for the decision.

St Benedict's Catholic School will NOT authorise a holiday during periods of national tests ie: SATS & GCSE examinations.

## **6. Extended leave of absence**

In considering absence for extended trips overseas St Benedict's Catholic School will take account of the following:

- a visit to family overseas has a very different significance from a normal 'holiday';
- such visits may be important in terms of children's identity and self-esteem as they grow up;
- parents may feel that the reasons for their visit outweigh the importance of their child's uninterrupted attendance at school (although parents could be encouraged to use the school holiday periods for at least part of their trip);
- the reasons for wishing to make a visit is more difficult, particularly for minority ethnic families, where huge distances and high costs are involved.
- Where extended leave of absence is granted there will be an expectation that the pupil undertakes some school-set work during this period.

## **7. Parents' / carers' responsibilities**

The prime responsibility for ensuring children receive an appropriate and full-time education rests with parents / carers (defined by the Education Act 1996 as those with parental responsibility and those who have the care of a child), who will be supported and encouraged by St Benedict's Catholic School.

St Benedict's Catholic School expects parents / carers will:

- ensure their children attend the school regularly;
- support their children's attendance by keeping requests for absence to a minimum;
- not expect the school to automatically agree any requests for absence, and not condone unjustified absence from school.

Parents will also be expected to:

- notify St Benedict's Catholic school on the first day of absence by telephoning the school office and speaking directly to a member of office staff or leaving a message at the designated "to report your child's absence" extension.
- Ensure students have the right equipment for the day;

- work in partnership with the school, for example by attending parents' meetings and consultations, signing homework diaries when asked to do so, taking an interest in their children's work and activities;
- contact the school without delay if they are concerned about any aspects of their children's school lives. St Benedict's Catholic School will endeavour to support parents to address their concerns.

## **8. Students' responsibilities**

All students should be aware of the importance of regular school attendance. If they are having difficulties that may prevent them from attending school regularly, they should speak to their class teacher or form tutor.

Students should attend all their lessons on time, ready to learn. If they have been absent from school and we have not been notified by phone or email, they should give their class teacher or form tutor a note from their parents to explain the absence. Students also have a responsibility for following school procedures if they arrive late.

## **9. Governors' responsibilities**

Section 175 (2)

The governing body of a maintained school shall make arrangements for ensuring that their functions relating to the conduct of the school are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school

## **10. Conclusion**

Regular school attendance is a necessary contributor to ensuring positive outcomes for all children. These include:

- good school attendance supports children in reaching their maximum potential and enjoying the fulfilment this brings
- the best way to safeguard children is to ensure they attend school regularly
- Regular attendance at school supports children's emotional and social health and development
- the school curriculum teaches children to be healthy
- schools and the LA have a statutory duty to promote the safety and welfare of children

- membership of a school community builds confidence, gives children a sense of belonging and teaches them to contribute to and be responsible for the well-being of others
- good school attendance supports engagement in further education, employment or training in the future, which in turn helps to support a prosperous and fulfilling life-style.

### **Reviewing the policy**

The school will review this policy each year, using the support available from the local authority to undertake this if required.

## A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

### 1. When does my child need to be in School?

Your child should be at school in good time for registration. The morning register will be called promptly at **9.00 am** and the afternoon register at **2.00 pm**.

### 2. What happens if my child is late?

Registration finishes at **9.15 am** in the morning and **2.05 pm** in the afternoon.

If your child arrives between **9.00 am** and **9.15 am** he/she will be marked **late**

If your child arrives after **9.15 am** he/she will be marked as **absent**

If your child arrives after **2.05 pm** he/she will be marked **late**

If your child arrives after **2.15 pm** he/she will be marked **absent**

Pupils who arrive after registration should report to the school office, and sign the Late Book. If a pupil is late on two or more occasions a meeting will be arranged with a member of staff to discuss reasons/ difficulties for lateness.

### 3. Does the School need letters explaining my child's absence or will a phone call do?

We would expect a parent to telephone the school on the first day of absence. If you do not phone us, we will phone you. However, we need a written explanation on your child's return to school. If we do not receive an explanation, or if the explanation is unsatisfactory, we will not authorise the absence, and this will be shown on your child's end of year report

### 4. What reasons will the school accept for absences?

- Illness
- Emergency dental/medical appointment  
(Please make routine appointments after school or during the Holidays)
- Day of religious observance
- Family bereavement
- Attending an interview for a job, college, university etc

Except in the case of illness, you should ask for permission for your child to miss school well in advance, giving full details. In cases of recurring absences through illness you may be asked to produce a medical certificate.

**5. What is unacceptable?**

The school will not authorise absence for day trips, visiting relatives, shopping, birthdays or looking after brothers or sisters etc.

**6. Will the school contact me if my child is absent?**

The school operates a first day response to absences: we will phone/text you if we have not heard from you. This is because we believe it is our responsibility to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance.

If we are concerned about aspects of your child's attendance or punctuality we will contact you to discuss the best way forward.

**7. I am thinking about sending my child on an extended absence for an overseas to visit relatives. What should I do?**

The school recognises that such absence can be important for children to keep in touch with their extended family. Contact your child's form tutor as soon as possible to discuss the best time for such a visit.

The school would strongly recommend that such absences do not take place during your child's SAT's & GCSE course (Years 10 and 11) examinations. You need to complete an application form for extended leave of absence and if the Headteacher then approves the visit, the school will set work for your child to complete while away.

As far as possible we will ensure the work set reinforces the educational value of such a visit.

**8. 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.

**9. My child is trying to avoid coming to school. What should I do?**

Contact your child's form Tutor, or Head of Year, immediately and openly discuss your worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with school work, bullying, 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.

## **ATTENDING SCHOOL REGULARLY**

### **A GUIDE FOR PUPILS/STUDENTS**

#### **ATTENDING REGULARLY AND ON TIME**

Regular attendance will help you make the most of the opportunities here at St Benedict's Catholic School. It will help you:

- keep up with your school work and get the best results you can;
- get a job – employers like people who are reliable.

Remember, your attendance at school is shown in your Record of Achievement.

#### **ABSENCES**

Acceptable reasons for absences include:

- Illness
- Emergency dental/medical appointments (please make routine appointments after school or during the holidays)
- Day of religious observance (if your family's faith is outside the Catholic or Christian tradition.)
- Family bereavement
- Attending an interview for a job, college, university etc

Looking after brothers and sisters, birthdays, general trips such as shopping and helping at home, are NOT reasons to be absent from school.

You will need a note from your parents to explain ALL absences from school. You will also need a note if you arrive at school after 9.05 in the morning. If you do not bring a note, or the explanation on the note is unsatisfactory, the absence will count as unauthorised and will be shown on your end of year report.

## **NEED HELP?**

Problems with your school work? Are you being bullied? Are your friends giving you a hard time? Are things difficult at school? Are things difficult at home?

You may feel that missing school is the answer. It is not – it may even make things worse. **TALK TO SOMEONE** – your form tutor, another member of staff, your parents. We will do everything we can to help you get over the problem.