

ST. CHRISTOPHER'S THE HALL SCHOOL, BECKENHAM, KENT

ATTENDANCE POLICY

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Children of school age where registered at a school must, by law, attend that school regularly. The rules that govern attendance at school are contained primarily in two acts, the *Education Act 1996* (Sections 7 and 444) and the *Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995* (Sections 7 and 8). The effect of these laws is :

- Parents/carers must make reasonable efforts to ensure their children attend school
- The attendance of a child will be registered twice each day by the school
- There is no automatic right for a child to be absent from school
- All requests for absence will be considered on their own merits

SCHOOL / PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Regular attendance is vital and is the best way of ensuring that a child makes the most of the educational opportunities available to him or her. When a child is absent from school, he or she misses not only the teaching provided, but is also less prepared for the lessons after his or her return. A child's absence can seriously disrupt the continuity of their learning.

The school has a legal duty to promote good attendance. Promoting and sustaining good attendance at school is fundamental to supporting learning and achievement. The Governors expect regular and punctual attendance at each of the twice daily sessions of each school day within the given term dates.

The school has a legal responsibility to reduce the number of children whose attendance is below 85% over the school year. These are called 'persistent absentees' by the Government, whatever the reason for their absence. Special procedures may be applied to children at risk of falling into this category. Our current annual attendance is just over the national average of 95%, and it is our hope to increase this during the next academic year.

Parents should make attendance at school their priority, and have a duty to make sure that their children attend regularly. The School staff are committed to working closely with parents to find the best ways to ensure the highest possible level of attendance. Please work with us, and contact the school regarding any problems, so that we can work together to resolve them.

HOW THE EDUCATIONAL WELFARE OFFICER CAN HELP

If difficulties cannot be sorted out in this way, the school may offer parents a formal Parenting Contract, or refer the child to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) from the LA. He/she will also try to resolve the situation by agreement wherever possible but, if other ways of trying to

improve the child's attendance have failed, EWOs can use legal proceedings if required, including Penalty Notices (fines) or prosecution.

Alternatively, parents or pupils may wish to contact the EWO themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is available by contacting the LA.

LATENESS

If a child arrives after registration has closed then a late mark will be recorded.

- The morning registration period is from 08:30 – 08:55. The side gate will be open from 08:30 and closed at the official start of the school day at 08:50. Pupils will then have 5 minutes in which to reach their class for registration. If a pupil is arriving as the gate closes it is recommended that they go straight to the classroom for registration, and then to the cloakroom once the teacher has marked them as present. Any pupil arriving after 08:55 will be late, even if accompanied by a parent.
- After the gate has closed, all pupils should be brought through the front door. Please ring the doorbell and wait for a member of office staff to meet you. A latebook is in operation which logs the pupil name, time of arrival and reason for lateness. The parent will also be required to sign the latebook. A pattern of regular lateness will result in a discussion with parents/carers. If the lateness persists, the school will refer the child to the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO).

ABSENCE

If a child is absent without notification from the parents by telephone or in writing, an unauthorised absence mark will be recorded in the register. This situation remains so until the reason for absence is given by the parent/carer.

If the absence continues without satisfactory explanation (i.e. illness) for more than three days, the Head Teacher will send a letter of enquiry. If there is still no response from parents/carers, the Headteacher will ask the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) to contact the family.

School registers are scrutinised each half-term, and are available for inspection by Local Authority and OFSTED representatives.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason, such as:

- illness
- emergency medical/dental/optical treatment, or hospital appointments
- bereavement/funeral
- days of religious observance
- induction days and visits to new secondary schools

This list is only a selection of reasons, and all requests for leave of absence will be considered. It will not be our policy to routinely authorise absences for shopping, looking after other children, minding the house, birthdays, day trips etc. Leave may, however, be granted in an emergency or for genuine pastoral reasons (e.g. after the death of close relative).

Unauthorised absences are those that are avoidable during the school day, or are not considered to be reasonable, and for which no 'leave' has been given. These are an offence on the part of the parent and include:

- Keeping children off school without a good reason (see previous section)
- Truancy from a whole session
- Absences that have never been properly explained in writing
- Children arriving at school too late to get a mark for a whole session
- Taking holidays during term-time
There are approximately 190 school days in the academic year, leaving 175 days available for children to take holidays.
- Routine medical, optical or dental appointments. Parents are asked to make such appointments outside school time wherever possible. Where such appointments in school time are unavoidable due to surgery/clinic hours, a request for leave of absence should be made in advance. A 'present' mark can still be awarded if the child attends for as much of the session as they can. It is always better to attend for some of the time, rather than missing the whole day.
- Attendance at music or ballet tuition/examinations that are not directly connected with the school.

PROCEDURES

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

- Parents are expected to contact the school using the standard *REQUEST FOR LEAVE OF ABSENCE FORM* in advance of any absence which requires authorisation. The parent will then be given written notification as to whether their request has been authorised/unauthorised. A letter from the parent telling the school that a pupil will be absent for whatever reason does not constitute authorisation, as it is only the school who can legally authorise absence.
- If an absence is not authorised, the child will be expected to attend school. If they are not present the absence will be marked as unauthorised.
- If a pupil is ill and will not be attending school, it is the duty of the parent to telephone the school office to explain the absence by 08:50am. A message can be left on the answerphone. A written note sent with a sibling or other parent is sufficient as long as it is received by 08:50am. Verbal messages via siblings or others are no longer sufficient. A note will then be made in the register regarding the absence. If a pupil is absent for more than a day with a minor illness, work will be provided, and it is the responsibility of the parent to arrange for this to be collected from school.
- When a pupil returns to school after an absence, a letter of explanation is required, with a doctor's certificate for absences longer than 5 days.

HOLIDAYS

There is never a good time to take children away from their lessons, but there are some times when it is vital that they are in school. Authorisation for holidays will therefore not be given during the Summer Term due to the preparation for and the sitting of Examinations; **or** at the beginning or end of the school year as these are the times when important preparation for the new school year occurs.

Requests for long leave of absences such as holidays or overseas trips will be considered on their own merits, and may not be authorised. Applications should be made at least three weeks prior to the first day of the requested absence, using the ***Leave of Absence Request Form*** . A shorter period of notice may be allowed in exceptional circumstances. Holidays should not be booked until the school has granted permission for the absence. The headteacher may only grant approval for up to 10 consecutive school days, but this is discretionary. There is no right to have leave granted for term-time holidays, and authorisation will only be given when term-time is the **only option** for the family holiday (*Pupil Registration (Education) Regulations 2006*. As a result it will be necessary for parents to provide justification why the absence cannot be taken during the usual holiday period. Leave of absence of this type may only be made once during a child's education at St. Christopher's School.

If a period of longer than 10 days is requested, this will be referred to the Governing Body as this is considered to be exceptional circumstances, and the implications would need to be carefully considered.

Leave of absence will not be granted retrospectively, and any absence without advance permission will therefore be recorded as unauthorised.

WHO HAS RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN SCHOOL ?

The people responsible for attendance matters in this school are:

Mr. C. Hilditch	(Chairman of Governors)
Mr. A. Velasco	(Headmaster)
Mr. J. Mobbs	(Child Protection Officer)
Mrs. A. Purton	(Senior Mistress – Pastoral Matters)

Date of Policy: September 2013

Ratified by Governing Body: September 2013

To be reviewed: July 2014