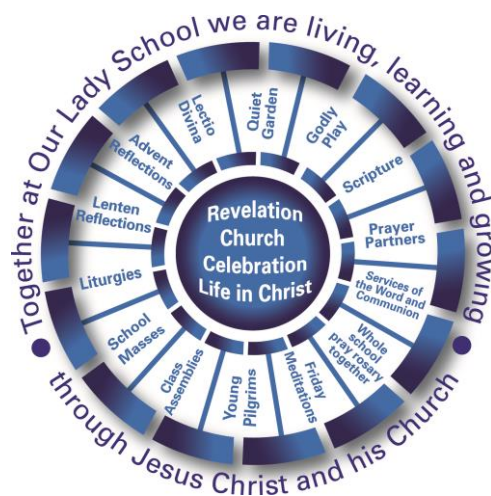




Our Lady Catholic Primary School

Attendance Policy



The Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust
A Catholic Academy

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Policy Aims

At Our Lady School, we want the whole school community – governors, staff, parents and pupils to be committed to high standards of attendance and punctuality.

The School aims to encourage excellent levels of attendance and punctuality to enable all pupils to take full advantage of the learning opportunities available to them.

Target Setting

This school sets target in accordance with Statutory Instrument 2005 No. 58 – The Education (School Attendance Targets) (England) Regulations 2005. For the school year 2020/21 the annual target for attendance is 96%+.

The annual target is the total attendance expected in the school year, expressed as a percentage of the total possible attendance by pupils at the school.

Statutory Framework

Under Section 199 of the 1993 Education Act, a pupil is required to attend regularly at the school where he/she is a registered pupil.

The school is obliged by law to differentiate between authorised and unauthorised absence. A letter or telephone message from a parent does not in itself authorise an absence. Only if the school is satisfied as to the validity of the explanation offered by the letter/message will the absence be authorised (see below).

Parents/Carers

Parents are expected to ensure that their child attends school regularly, punctually, properly dressed and equipped and in a fit condition to learn. If a child is prevented for any reason from attending, or is late, parents should notify the school office by 9.30am by telephone or e mail. A pupil's absence from school must be considered as unauthorised until a satisfactory explanation is forthcoming from the parent. If the school deems the explanation to be unacceptable, this absence must be recorded as unauthorised. If the school is not notified by 9.30am the absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

Staff will endeavour to encourage good attendance and punctuality through personal example. Attendance is the responsibility of all school staff. The school will employ a range of strategies (see below) to encourage good attendance and punctuality and will promptly investigate all absenteeism, liaising closely with parents. Staff will respond to all absenteeism firmly and consistently.

Parents will contact the school on the first day of absence, and every subsequent day, of the reason for their child's absence from school.

Registration

Children should arrive at school between 8.45am and 9am and enter their classrooms directly. If a child arrives after 9am they must be signed in at the office by an adult for safeguarding purposes but will not be recorded as late.

Registers are taken promptly at the start of the school day (9 am) and again at the beginning of the afternoon session (1.10pm). Registers close at 9.15am and 1.25pm and are marked consistently by staff. If a pupil arrives late for school, he/she must be accompanied by a parent/carer who will sign the child in at the office on the electronic signing in system. Parents/carers are expected to provide a reason for the child's late arrival at school. The School Office staff is responsible for transferring all late arrivals into the register. If a pupil is persistently late, the Headteacher will contact the parents/carers. The school will employ a range of strategies (see below) to encourage good attendance and punctuality.

In the event of an Emergency, the offsite list is taken with the school registers to the Assembly point.

Parents/carers are reminded that if a child arrives in school after the registers have closed and an acceptable explanation is not forthcoming, the pupil has to be recorded as 'unauthorised absent' for that session. Registers will be marked in accordance with DCSF guidance.

Parents will ensure that school are informed of any changes of contact details.

The Headteacher, in consultation with the Attendance Welfare Officer, will inspect the live digital registers regularly in order to ensure that correct procedures are being followed. Attendance software enables the school to maintain very up-to-date records and is instantly accessible to teachers and the Headteacher.

Following up Lateness

Parents/carers whose children are regularly late for school, will be contacted by a member of school staff who will work with the parent/carer(s) to bring about an improvement in punctuality.

Absences:

Notification must be provided for all absences from school. Notifications will be accepted from parents /carers only.

Notifications will be accepted by telephone, e-mail or letter.

All notifications should be given to the class teacher and to School Office staff. Notifications are filed in pupil records.

Absences are recorded by designated staff within the School. This will be by the school office staff, the class teacher, or the Headteacher.

The school will record absence when a satisfactory reason is provided for the absence. School may decide not to authorise absence, if an unsatisfactory reason is provided.

The Headteacher and designated Governor will make the decision to authorise a particular absence, and inform parents/carers where necessary.

Authorised/Unauthorised Absence

It is vital that all staff adhere to the same criteria when deciding whether or not to authorise an absence.

Our Lady School will decide on how an absence is to be recorded according to 'School Attendance: Policy and Practice on Categorisation of Absence' (DFE 1994). This states that:

Absences can be **authorised** if:

- The pupil was absent with leave (defined as 'leave granted by any person authorised to do so by the governing body or proprietor of the school').
- The pupil was ill or prevented from attending by any unavoidable cause.
- The absence occurred on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parent belongs.
- The school is not within walking distance of the child's home, and no suitable arrangements have been made by the LA for any of the following:
 1. the child's transport to and from school,
 2. boarding accommodation for the child at or near the school, and
 3. enabling the child to become a registered pupil at a school nearer to his/her home.
- The pupil is the child of Traveller parents and the conditions as stated in paragraph 47 of the 1994 guidance are met.
- There is a family bereavement.
- The pupil is visiting another school for a legitimate reason.
- The pupil is attending an approved off-site activity or is receiving special off-site tuition.
- The pupil is attending a Pupil Referral Unit.
- The pupil is participating in an approved public performance.
- The pupil is involved in an **exceptional** special occasion (e.g. if a pupil is attending the graduation of an older sibling).

Absence should be **unauthorised** if:

- The pupil is away from school on a family holiday.
- No explanation is forthcoming.
- The school is dissatisfied with the explanation.
- The pupil stays at home to mind the house or to look after siblings (the guidance suggests that absence in such cases should only be granted in exceptional circumstances).
- The pupil is shopping during school hours.
- The pupil is absent for unexceptional special occasions (e.g. a birthday).

Leave of Absence during Term Time

Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child's attendance at school. Changes in legislation in 2013 make it clear that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Therefore holidays during term time, including leave to visit family living overseas, may not be granted unless there are exceptional circumstances which can be evidenced.

Exceptional circumstances might include:

- for service personnel and other employees who are prevented from taking holidays outside term-time if the holiday will have minimal disruption of the pupil's education;
- when a family needs limited time to spend together to support each other during or after a crisis;
- attendance at a funeral or wedding of a close relative; and
- attendance at the graduation award of a parent or sibling;

Exceptional circumstance, according to the Department for Education do not include:

- financial considerations such as the availability of cheap holidays;
- poor weather experienced in school holiday periods;
- overlap with beginning or end of term; and
- visiting family living overseas.

All parents will be asked to write to the Headteacher prior to a decision being made asking for documentary evidence of the exceptional circumstances. The Headteacher may consult with a nominated Governor where decisions are complex. Advice from the Local Authority may also be sought. Applications, which should be in writing, will be turned down if less than 4 weeks' notice is given.

Procedures for Following up Absence

- If a pupil has an unexplained absence, the school will make contact with the parent/carer. If the absentee is a pupil about whom there are already concerns, the school will make every effort to contact the parents immediately.
- If a pupil is persistently (or intermittently) absent, the Headteacher will write to the parents and invite them to attend a meeting at school.
- If a pupil returns to school after a period of absence without a satisfactory explanation from the parent, the Headteacher will write to the parents.
- If a pupil is persistently absent (or late) and the school's efforts to effect an improvement have been unsuccessful, the situation will be referred to the Attendance and Pupil Support Service during his/her consultation visit. This could result in a fixed penalty notice (Subsection (1) of Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act) or legal action (Education Act 1996).

All notes from parents/carers regarding absence/lateness will be sent to the office for filing in the child's pupil record. All messages regarding absence/lateness are to be recorded directly onto the electronic registration database system.

The Head teacher in conjunction with the Attendance Improvement Officer would be responsible for making the referral to Hospital and Home Education for any pupil likely to be absent for a prolonged period due to medical issues.

The school follows the Hertfordshire County Council and Diocese of Westminster guidance on Exclusions.

Strategies for Promoting Attendance

- Our Lady School will offer an environment in which pupils feel valued and welcomed. The school's ethos must demonstrate that pupils feel that their presence in school is important, that they will be missed when they are absent/late and that follow up action will be taken.
- A broad and balanced curriculum will be offered to all pupils. Every effort will be made to ensure that learning objectives are matched to pupils' needs.
- Attendance data will be regularly collected and analysed in order to help identify patterns, set targets, correlate attendance with achievement, and support and inform policy/practice.
- The school issues certificates for rewarding good attendance on a termly basis and at the end of each school year.
- Pupils whose attendance is a cause of concern will be set targets for improvement. The class teacher will monitor and review these targets.
- Parents will be regularly reminded (via newsletters, the school prospectus, parents' evenings, etc.) of the importance of good attendance.
- Pupils who are absent through sickness for any extended period of time will (when appropriate) have work sent home to them.

The Headteacher will:

- The Headteacher will have meetings with the school's Attendance Welfare Officer in order to identify and support those pupils who are experiencing attendance difficulties.
- Make an annual report to the school's governing body on attendance matters and will include attendance data on the termly reports to governors.
- Review progress towards attendance target annually.
- Report data termly.
- When appropriate, liaise with other agencies - Educational Psychology Service, Social Services, Child and Family Guidance, etc. - when this may serve to support and assist pupils who are experiencing attendance difficulties.
- Include attendance data on the termly reports to governors
- Review progress towards attendance target at H.I.P. visit.

The Use of Legal Action

If a parent fails to register a child of compulsory school age at a school (and he/she does not intend to educate the child otherwise than at school), the LA will serve a School Attendance Order under Sections 437 - 439 of the Education Act 1996.

If a pupil, who is registered at a school, fails to attend that school regularly without a legitimate reason and attempts by the Attendance Welfare Officer and the school fail to secure that pupil's return to regular attendance, the County Council will take legal action. A complaint may be laid against the parents in the Magistrates' Court under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, or an Education Supervision Order relating to the pupil under Section 36 of the Children Act 1989 will be applied for. Any exceptional mitigating circumstances relating to the pupil's absence will be taken into account, when considering legal action. 'Exceptional mitigating circumstances' will be determined by the Central Attendance and Employment Support Team Manager on behalf of the County Lead for Behaviour and Attendance. If 'exceptional mitigating circumstances' are not deemed to exist then cases which remain open for more than 24 weeks will be referred for legal action. Legal action will, however, be taken earlier when appropriate.

If, after legal action has been taken, the child still fails to attend school regularly the AWO will keep the case open and will, if appropriate, take further legal action at a subsequent date. In cases where parents wilfully withhold a pupil from school, or persistently refuse to co-operate with efforts aimed at effecting a return to satisfactory school attendance, the ISL Attendance Team will promptly begin legal proceedings on the grounds that no other course of action is available.

The Central Attendance & Employment Support Team Manager on behalf of the County Lead for Behaviour and Attendance, will give approval before legal proceedings are commenced. The Attendance Team will consider applying for an Education Supervision Order when a parent finds it difficult to exercise an effective influence over a child who has developed a pattern of poor attendance.

Before an application is made for an Education Supervision Order:

- other possible means of dealing with the pupil's poor attendance will be explored;
- the attitudes of the parent and pupil towards the poor attendance, and their wishes as to how it should be dealt with, will be noted the AIO will be of the view that the Order will have a significant effect on the pupil's attendance at school .

Children missing education

A child is missing from education if they are of compulsory school age (age 5-16), do not have a school place and no alternative education arrangements have been made for them. Should a child believed to be missing from education comes to the school's attention, a CME referral will be made to The Children Missing Education Officer (CMEO). The CME Officer keeps a record of all children reported missing from education. The referral procedure for children believed to be missing from education should be followed by all Hertfordshire County Council staff and all schools and partner agencies. Children are tracked until they return to suitable education.

Penalty Notices for Parents of Truants

Subsection (1) of section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 added two new sections (444A and 444B) to section 444 of the Education Act 1996. These new sections introduced penalty notices as an alternative to prosecution and enable parents to discharge potential liability for conviction for that offence by paying a penalty.

Under new legislation penalty notices may be issued where the absence is unauthorised. A penalty notice is a suitable intervention in circumstances of parentally condoned truancy, where the parent is judged capable of securing their child's regular attendance but is not willing to take responsibility for doing so. For example it could be used where a parent has failed to engage in any supportive measures. It is particularly useful as a sanction at an early stage before attendance problems become entrenched and where the Local Authority considers that a prosecution would not be appropriate as a first action.

Further information on penalty notices is available at www.thegrid.org.uk administration/pupil welfare/attendance or from the local Attendance Team Manager.