

Attendance Policy

Last Review September 2024	Next Review	Review Frequency Every 2 years	Coordinator Head Teacher	Nominated Trustees EC&T Committee
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Introduction

This policy aims to promote good attendance for all children placed at the school. It has been written to reflect government's guidance set out in *Working together to improve school attendance (August 2024)* and to provide clarity for all stakeholders about how the Mulberry Bush School will meet the particular needs of our children.

The Mulberry Bush School is a thoroughly integrated, therapeutic provision, with education, care and treatment provided holistically throughout every day. All children at the school are boarders during term-time, and those placed on 52-week contracts live at the school all year round. Group Living (care), Therapies & Networks and Education staff work closely together to ensure that children receive thoughtful, individualised support at all times, in line with their EHCPs. It would therefore be a narrow view to categorise attendance as only occurring when the child is in a classroom or attending a lesson, although we strive to teach children to engage in learning within the classroom environment as much as possible.

We recognise the benefits of good attendance, in its broadest sense, in improving the long-term life chances of our children. Many children who attend the school have experienced limited access to education prior to joining us, due to school exclusion, poor mental health, reduced timetables, or lack of school placement. We therefore also recognise the important task of instilling habitual routines to allow children to access the classroom consistently. We recognise that 'attendance is the essential foundation to positive outcomes for all pupils including their safeguarding and welfare and should therefore be seen as everyone's responsibility in school'.

Promoting good school attendance

The Head Teacher is the Senior Attendance Champion and has overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance in school. Education is valued by the whole school community, and children are reminded that they have a right to learn and need to be in the classroom to do so. Group Living staff ensure that morning routines provide children with the best possible start to each day, so that they can arrive in class ready to learn. The Shifford Team, based in Education, provides play and behaviour support outside the classroom to enable children to regulate in order to access the classroom successfully. Class teams ensure that routines in class are predictable, learning is engaging, and that the classroom environment is calm, orderly, safe and supportive so that children want to be in class.

We value the relationships that we build with children's families and networks, and the role that these play in supporting children's school attendance. These relationships begin at the point of referral to the school and continue to be developed through regular contact between key workers and families, and the extensive specialist support of the Family & Network Practitioners.

The SENCO monitors attendance and shares this information with Virtual Schools through termly PEP meetings. The Head Teacher reports attendance data to the Education Standing Committee of the Trustees regularly, and highlights any concerns and actions taken.

The school day

Children are expected to transition from their houses to Education at 9.15am, to start the school day. If children are not present in class by 9.45am, and no reason has been provided, the Shifford Team will usually go to support the child in the house, where possible encouraging them to transition to Education.

The children remain in Education throughout the day, including over lunchtime, and are collected from class by staff from the houses (Monday, Tuesday, Friday – 3.15pm, Wednesday – 3.30pm, Thursday – 2.30pm).

Admissions register ('school roll')

The school holds a Register of Children which provides specific personal information about each child, including their name; address; date of arrival/departure at the school; placing local authority; care status. Additional information is held on the school's ITP Suite, including the child's previous school; and information regarding parents and carers. Children are archived on the Register of Children and the ITP Suite when they leave the school. Planning for the end of a child's time at the school is always done in close collaboration with the placing local authority.

Attendance register

As all children at the school are boarders, we are not required to maintain a daily attendance register. However, we hold a register that is completed by the SENCO and we submit weekly attendance information to the DfE.

The support for children's social, emotional and mental health throughout the full 24 hours each day is an essential feature of the school's provision, and the tracking of their attendance reflects this. We record children as absent only when they are not on the school site or when they are unable to access any educational provision due to illness. We consider that a child needing to come out of the classroom to be supported by Shifford or the houses is receiving what they need at that time and this is not considered to be an absence.

Definition of authorised and unauthorised absence

Absence is considered to be any time a child is not on the Mulberry Bush School site, or when their engagement with education is prevented due to illness.

Authorised absence is absence with permission from the Head Teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes instances of absences for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided (e.g. illness, religious

observance). Requests for authorised planned absence need to be in writing to the Head Teacher. Absences will only be agreed in exceptional circumstances, and only in consultation with the child's treatment team.

Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from the Head Teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences.

If a child does not return from a period at home, school staff will contact the parents or carers the same day wherever possible.

Responsibilities of parents and carers

Parents and carers have the prime responsibility for ensuring that children of compulsory school age attend school regularly. If a child does not attend regularly, the child's network should work closely with the school to resolve the problem. Ultimately, poor attendance may jeopardise the child's placement at the school.

The school is required to tell the LA if a pupil fails to attend regularly or has been absent for a continuous period of ten days and the absence is treated as unauthorised. The school would, of course, notify the LA earlier if there are areas of concern.

Requests for leave of absence

Only exceptional circumstances warrant a leave of absence, and these are considered individually, taking into account the specific circumstances and context of the request. Any requests for absence need to be made in writing to the Head Teacher, who will respond in writing providing an explanation for why the request has been agreed or denied, and the length of time the child can be away from the school. Decisions are always taken in collaboration with the child's Treatment Team, within the Mulberry Bush, and with relevant members of their external network, including their social worker if applicable.

Responding to poor punctuality and/or attendance

Attendance is rarely a concern, due to the fact that all pupils are boarders and that robust family support is in place for all children placed at the school. Attendance is therefore not analysed on a weekly basis but is discussed at termly PEP meetings and within treatment teams if concerns arise.

When children are persistently late for class or struggling to transition into Education, the Treatment Team will consider what further support or adjustments are needed. This includes the child's key worker, Treatment Team Leader, class teacher, SENCO and Head Teacher.

Where there are concerns about a child's attendance, the Head Teacher works collaboratively with the Family & Network Practitioners and the House Managers to ensure that children and families are supported so that children can return to school as soon as possible.

If poor attendance persists, we seek support from the wider external network. If there are associated safeguarding concerns, we would make appropriate referrals.

Some pupils have long-term medical conditions that make attendance difficult. Their right to an education is the same as any other pupil and therefore the child's treatment team would carefully consider what appropriate provision could look like, in consultation with the child's network.

As all children board, we do not use part-time timetables. On occasion, a child may be best supported away from the education environment, and we would then provide appropriate work. This would not be recorded as an absence.

As a non-maintained school, we do not issue Fixed Penalty Notices for absence.

In exceptional circumstances, where a child fails to attend school over a prolonged period of time, and despite extensive support, we would consider whether placement at The Mulberry Bush School continues to be in the child's best interests, and would consider bringing the child's placement to an early end. This would always be done in collaboration with the placing local authority.

Attendance codes

As all pupils at The Mulberry Bush School are boarders, the school does not have a statutory duty to hold an attendance register. However, the SENCO holds an attendance record and attendance data for Looked After Children is provided to Welfare Call and other agencies on a daily basis. We submit attendance data to the DfE weekly.

The following codes are most commonly used (for additional codes, see *Working together to improve school attendance, August 2024*):

Code	Code title	Reason for use at MBS
/ \	Present	/ am, \ pm
C	Leave of absence for exceptional circumstance	There will be a corresponding letter from the Head Teacher explaining why this has been granted.
I	Illness	Unable to engage in education due to illness, whether at home or on the school site.
M	Medical or dental appointment	Off-site at hospital appointment, CAMHS, dental appointment, etc
R	Religious observance	A day that is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body the child's parent(s) belongs to (one day only).
#	School closure	Travel <u>half</u> day / school holidays

V	Educational visit/trip	School trip, Camping Week, Outward Bound
B	Attending any other approved educational activity	For example, visiting their next school.
E	Suspended or permanently excluded	When sent home (ie not on site).
G	Family holiday <u>not</u> agreed by school	There will be a corresponding letter from the Head Teacher explaining why this has not been granted, plus a letter stating our position if it is taken without consent. Leave of absence cannot be granted retrospectively.
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances	The school site is unavoidably closed when pupils are due to attend: transport is not available (Y1), widespread disruption to travel (Y2), part or whole school premises closed (Y3/Y4), other (Y7)

Essential contact information

Senior Attendance Champion

Jessica Hooper, Head Teacher, Jhooper@mulberrybush.org.uk

Family & Network Practitioners

Stuart Harragan, Senior Family & Networks Practitioner,
sharragan@mulberrybush.org.uk

Di Nixon, Family & Networks Practitioner dnixon@mulberrybush.org.uk

Rebecca Lutman, Family & Networks Practitioner, rlutman@mulberrybush.org.uk