

**VALLIS FIRST SCHOOL**  
**ATTENDANCE POLICY**  
**NOVEMBER 2023**

## Policy Statement

Vallis First School is committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all its pupils and recognises this can only be achieved by supporting and promoting excellent school attendance for all.

This is based on the belief that by attending school regularly and punctually children and young people will be able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. High attainment depends on good and regular attendance.

It is the policy of our school to celebrate both.

All staff will work with pupils and their families to ensure each pupil attends school regularly and punctually.

We recognise that parents have a vital role and there is a need to establish strong home-school links and communication systems. We will provide effective and efficient communications with pupils, parents, and appropriate agencies to provide mutual information, advice and support to meet our objectives.

As a school, we will:

- develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance
- ensure all staff, pupils and parents understand our expectations for attendance
- accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence
- regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place
- build strong relationships with families, listen to, and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them
- share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.

This policy is based on current government guidance, [Working Together to Improve School Attendance](#) (May 2022) and other statutory regulations.

## Definitions

In this policy there are some key definitions which will be used. We have referenced the meaning of these terms below for ease of understanding:

### **Persistent Absence**

When a pupil's attendance figure reaches 90% or below, they are deemed as 'persistently absent' from school. Children whose attendance is below 90% are likely to achieve lower educational outcomes and are at increased risk of harm and exploitation. A pupil with 90% attendance will be absent for the equivalent of: one session per week, six sessions per six-week half term or 38 sessions per school year.

### **Severe Absence**

When a pupil is absent from school with an attendance figure of 50% or below, they are deemed as 'severely absent'. Children in this group are at increased risk of exploitation and education outcomes are poor. A pupil with 50% attendance will be absent for the equivalent of: five sessions per week, 30 sessions per six-week half term or 190 sessions per school year.

### **Parent**

Within this policy, a parent is defined as: all natural parents, whether they are married or not or any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person and any person who has care of a child or young person (i.e., lives with and looks after the child).

### **Vulnerable pupils**

Within this policy, vulnerable pupils are defined as those that: have a social worker or have previously had a social worker; are a Child Looked After (CLA); have an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan); are severely absent, as defined above.

### **Local Authority**

Within this policy the Local Authority refers to Somerset Council. From 1 April 2023, the Local Authority will refer to Somerset Council.

### **Session**

Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day for all pupils. Each of these attendance marks counts for one session. Each day is made up of two sessions; morning and afternoon. In a typical school year, a pupil will can attend for a maximum of 190 days, or 380 sessions.

## Statutory and Legal Guidance

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

When parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly.

This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances, such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

This policy aligns with the following statutory guidance and regulations:

- [The Education Act 1996](#)
- [The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)
- [The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations \(Amended\) 2013](#)
- [Working Together to Improve School Attendance](#)

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 was amended by Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations in 2013 only allowing head teachers to authorise leave of absence in exceptional circumstances.

In line with these regulations, requests for term-time leave will not be granted.

Additional legal requirements relating to school attendance can be found in The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.

## Key Staff and Contacts

| <b>Role</b>                        | <b>Name</b>         | <b>Contact details</b>                 |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Lead for Attendance                | <b>Nick Firkins</b> | <b>office@vallisfirstschool.org.uk</b> |
| Headteacher                        | <b>Nick Firkins</b> | <b>office@vallisfirstschool.org.uk</b> |
| Designated Safeguarding Lead       | <b>Nick Firkins</b> | <b>office@vallisfirstschool.org.uk</b> |
| Attendance Officer                 | <b>Sue Cobb</b>     | <b>office@vallisfirstschool.org.uk</b> |
| School Absence reporting line      |                     | <b>01373 462657</b>                    |
| Nominated Attendance link Governor | <b>Martha Oster</b> | <b>office@vallisfirstschool.org.uk</b> |

The above can also be contacted via the school office by calling 01373 462657.

## Safeguarding

Knowing where children are during school hours is an extremely important aspect of safeguarding. Absence can be an indicator of abuse and neglect and may also raise concerns about other safeguarding issues, including the criminal exploitation of children.

We monitor attendance carefully and address poor or irregular attendance without delay. We will always contact parents when pupils are not at school to ensure their whereabouts are known. It is essential that we have a least two up-to-date contact numbers for each pupil.

Parents should remember to inform the school as soon as possible if their contact details change. This includes home addresses, email addresses and phone numbers.

Vallis First School recognises that inappropriate authorisation of absence can be as damaging to a child's education as unauthorised absence as it will potentially send a message to parents that any reason for absence is acceptable and can render children extremely vulnerable to harm.

Where necessary, Vallis First School will challenge parents about the reasons for their child's absence and will always encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a parent does not guarantee that the absence will be authorised.

The decision to authorise absences rests with the Headteacher, Mr Nick Firkins, and will be made depending on the reasons given. In some cases, evidence may be requested to support this decision. If no reason is given for an absence, it cannot be authorised.

## Children Missing Education

In line with the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education (2022), school leaders have ensured that:

- all members of staff are aware of attendance guidance and expectations
- all members of school staff understand what to do when a child's attendance becomes a concern
- the school has in place required and appropriate policies, and robust procedures and responses for pupils who go missing from education (especially on repeat occasions)
- all staff are aware of the risks of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the legal requirement to take immediate action if there is reason to believe a child is at risk or that it has taken place.

## Removing Pupils from the School Roll

Schools are required to inform their local authority when a pupil is removed from roll.

Procedures are in place to ensure this information is shared in a timely manner when we plan to take pupils off-roll, or when they:

- leave the school to be home educated
- move beyond a reasonable distance from the school
- remain medically unfit beyond compulsory school age
- are in custody for four months or more (and will not return to school afterwards)
- are expelled (permanently excluded).

Pupils who are expected to start attending Vallis First School, but fail to take up the place, will be referred to the Local Authority.

When a pupil leaves Vallis First School, the pupil's new address, school, and expected started date will be recorded. This information will be passed to the Local Authority.

## The School's Responsibilities

All pupil attendance and absence levels are monitored on a regular basis. When a pupil's attendance becomes a concern, a graduated and supportive response will be put in place, to support improved attendance. In some cases, this may result in multi-agency support being requested, including the Education Engagement Service, who uphold the Local Authority's statutory duty to improve school attendance.

### Vulnerable Pupils

Vallis First School routinely monitors the attendance of vulnerable pupils. If we have concerns about a pupil, we work closely across our staff and with support services to ensure parents understand the importance of good attendance and attendance procedures.

Additional measures are in place to monitor the attendance of vulnerable pupils.

- Vulnerable pupils are included on the school's internal Attendance Monitoring List. The attendance of these pupils is monitored on a lesson-by-lesson basis and absences are reported to the appropriate staff member immediately to ensure contact is made with their parent as quickly as possible.
- SC to add the vulnerable children to the Attendance Monitoring List each term regardless of their attendance percentage

- Daily school contact with parents (and any external professionals such as social workers) in relation to absences of vulnerable pupils or those at risk of persistent or severe absence.
- Pupils with complex needs (including those with medical needs) will be supported to ensure their attendance is maximised and its improvement is planned for. The attendance of pupils in this group will be monitored daily.
- When a pupil is dual registered or accessing learning off-site, their attendance at that provision will be monitored daily. Vallis First School holds the legal responsibility for these pupils' attendance and safeguarding.
- Pupils with Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND) whose attendance is poor are monitored through the internal school processes and offered additional support in line with their needs.

The leadership and staff supporting attendance at school will hold regular meetings, where attendance is discussed and tracked, so that suitable support and interventions are put in place as quickly as possible.

Pupils whose attendance becomes a cause for concern will be supported by dedicated members of our staff who will make regular contact with them. This will support them to identify and remove any barriers, improve their attendance and to re-engage with learning. This work is robustly recorded and the impact of it is monitored regularly.

When a pupil's attendance continues to decline despite the support that is put in place, additional support may be requested from several support services. This may include the use of multi-agency work and support being discussed. These discussions can lead to additional support being identified and support from the Education Engagement Service being agreed.

The Education Engagement Service (EES) forms part of the Local Authority's Early Help Framework. It supports schools and families to improve attendance and fulfils the Local Authority's statutory duties to improve and promote school attendance. The EES may consider legal action against parents in line with Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

How we monitor attendance and the support that is offered is determined on a case-by-case basis. These decisions are regularly reviewed between the attendance, safeguarding and pastoral teams in school. Support from the Education Engagement Service may also be requested and implemented.

## Celebrating Good Attendance

Good attendance will be celebrated with a letter home to children and families.

## Informing Parents about Attendance

Annual attendance is reported to parents/carers in the school's written report. The attendance leads will include a termly bulletin regarding attendance on the school's Newsletter. The attendance leads will communicate with parents and carers in line with the school's graduated response.

## Daily Attendance Procedures

Schools are required to take a register twice a day for every pupil. This happens at the beginning of our morning and afternoon sessions. These sessions form the basis of each pupil's attendance record.

Our registration periods are as follows:

|                   | <b>Registers open</b> | <b>Registers close</b> |
|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Morning session   | 8.45am                | 9.00am                 |
| Afternoon session | 12.55pm               | 1.15pm                 |

Absence reports are run following each registration period so parents can be contacted if necessary. Following our morning registration, if a pupil is absent and a reason for that absence has not been provided, the following action will be taken:

- a text message will be sent to the parental contact number(s) listed on our system
- if no response is made, parents will receive a phone call made on the first day of the unexplained absence
- if it is not possible to get a response after three days a home visit may be completed
- Attendance leads/members of the SLT may carry out a home visit.

When children with a social worker are absent and no reason provided, the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead will inform their social worker.

## Absence and Punctuality

Parents are required to inform the school as soon as possible if their child is absent or due to be absent. This should be done on every day of absence.

Parents are asked to inform us of any absences as follows:

|                         |                                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| By phone                | 01373 462657                    |
| By email                | office@vallisfirstschool.org.uk |
| Designated absence line | 01373 462657                    |

Each school day is split into two sessions; morning and afternoon. Registers are opened at the beginning of each session and closed 20 minutes later, as shown in the table below:

| Morning session   | Afternoon session  |
|---|--|
| Pupils are expected to arrive at school by 8.45 am.   | Pupils are expected to attend registration by 1 pm.  |
| Registers open at 8.55 am   | Registers open at 12.55 pm   |
| Pupils that arrive after 9 am will be recorded as late (L code).  | Pupils that arrive after 1 pm will be recorded as late (L code).   |
| Registers close at 9.15 am.   | Registers close at 1.15 pm.  |
| Pupils that arrive after 9.15 am will be marked as late after registers have closed (U code). This counts as an unauthorised absence. | Pupils that arrive after 1.15pm will be marked as late after registers have closed (U code). This counts as an unauthorised absence. |

Pupils' punctuality will be regularly monitored. Parents will be contacted to discuss persistent lateness and lateness after the close of the registers could result in a request for support from the Education Engagement Service.

When parents make daily contact regarding their child's absence, that contact and the reasons for absence will be recorded. Absences will be coded on the child's register in line with the reason for that absence.

The decision about how absences are coded rests with Mr Nick Firkins, the Headteacher, and in some cases, absences may not be authorised even when a reason is provided.

Additional information or evidence may be requested before an absence is authorised. This may occur when there are concerns about a pupil's attendance, even if it is related to illness, or when the reason provided is believed to be false.

Unexplained absences may result in contact being made with parents and a home visit being made to speak with the parent or the pupil and put support in place, as needed.

## Authorisation of Absence

In line with legislation and Local Authority guidance, pupil absences can only be authorised when:

- a pupil is too unwell to attend school
- a pupil is attending a medical appointment that is unavoidable
- a pupil is taking part in a recognised religious observance
- a pupil is prevented from attending due to school transport not being available (this only applies to transport that is arranged by the Local Authority or the school)

Absences may also be authorised at the discretion of Mr Nick Firkins, the Headteacher, when:

- term-time leave is requested, and its circumstances are exceptional
- a pupil has one or more medical appointments
- the parent of a pupil is engaged in a trade that requires them to travel and they have previously attended school as often as the nature of that trade permits (this relates only to families with Traveller status)
- other exceptional circumstances (e.g. a close family bereavement)

## Medical Appointments

Where possible, medical appointments should be made outside school hours or in school holidays. However, we realise this is sometimes not possible. Pupils should come into school before and after appointments to ensure they miss as little lesson time as possible.

## Term-Time Leave

Arranging holidays or planned absence during term time causes issues for many reasons:

- the pupil's education suffers; lessons and extra-curricular activities are missed
- there is no opportunity for teachers to set additional work or to assist a child in catching up on their return from holiday
- parents may be in breach of their legal obligation to send their child to school.

The Government issued new regulations in September 2013 that placed greater restrictions on families and schools in relation to planned term-time leave.

The Education (Pupil Regulations) (England) Regulations 2006 as amended by Education (Pupil Regulations) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 state:

***Head teachers shall not grant any Leave of Absence during term time unless they consider there are exceptional circumstances relating to the application.***

Parents do not have any entitlement to take their children on holiday during term time. Any application for leave must establish that there are exceptional circumstances, and the Head Teacher must be satisfied that the circumstances warrant the granting of leave.

**Requests for term-time leave will be considered on a case-by-case.**

The Headteacher, Mr Nick Firkins, will determine how many sessions may be authorised in cases where term-time leave is agreed.

The school can only consider applications for Leave of Absence which are made by the resident parent (the parent with whom the child normally resides).

Applications for term-time leave must be made in advance by email to [office@vallisfirstschool.org.uk](mailto:office@vallisfirstschool.org.uk) . Failure to do so will result in the absence being unauthorised.

When an application for term-time leave is declined, any resulting absences will be unauthorised.

Unauthorised absence relating to term-time leave being taken will be sent to the Local Authority for consideration of a Penalty Notice when 10 or more sessions are unauthorised.

Unauthorised absences resulting from term-time leave being taken is likely to result in the Local Authority issuing each parent with a Penalty Notice for each child absent from school.

The Education Engagement Service issues penalty notices on behalf of the Local Authority in line with the Somerset Penalty Notice Code of Conduct, which is available at [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk).

If a Penalty Notice is issued and not paid, the Local Authority will consider prosecuting parents in line with Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996. This can result in a fine of up to £1,000 for each offence.

In exceptional cases, the Local Authority may seek to prosecute parents in line with Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996 without issuing a Penalty Notice.

## Attendance Support and Intervention

Vallis First School monitors the attendance of all pupils regularly and will put in place varying levels of support and intervention, as outlined below.

The strategies, support and interventions put in place and offered will vary depending on each pupil's attendance and the circumstances resulting in their absences.

Through regular attendance monitoring and scrutiny, Vallis First School is able to identify pupils that require support in relation to their attendance at the earliest possible stage.

| Attendance Stage                            | Strategies, Support and Interventions  |
|---|--|
| Stage 1<br>98% to 100%                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendance monitored by class or form teacher</li> <li>Absences may be discussed upon return to school</li> </ul>   |
| Stage 2<br>96% to 98%                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stage 1 letter sent</li> <li>In-school support considered and offered</li> <li>Support requests made to other services</li> <li>Parenting contract discussed and offered</li> </ul>   |
| Stage 3<br>90% to 95%                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stage 2 letter sent</li> <li>Support and interventions as laid out in Stage 2</li> <li>Medical evidence requested, where appropriate</li> <li>Request for support at Team Around the School</li> <li>Attendance support request submitted to the ESS</li> <li>Attendance Improvement Plan</li> <li>Penalty Notice for unauthorised absence</li> </ul> |
| Stage 4<br>50% to 90%<br>Persistent Absence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stage 3 letter sent</li> <li>Support and interventions as laid out in Stage 3</li> <li>Multi-agency support</li> <li>Attendance Casework from the EES</li> <li>Possible legal interventions for unauthorised absences</li> </ul>  |
| Stage 5<br>Below 50%<br>Severe Absence      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support and interventions and laid out in Stage 4</li> <li>Continued statutory intervention</li> <li>High risk of legal intervention for unauthorised absence</li> </ul>  |

Early intervention and support is the most effective approach to improving attendance. Parents are strongly encouraged to engage with any support offered, as this may improve attendance quickly and prevent the need for requests for support from statutory services.

While the use of statutory and legal interventions is always a last resort, they may be put in place by the Education Engagement Service on behalf of the Local Authority.