

General principles

Good attendance means that children usually make good, consistent progress in their school work. Bowhill Primary School expects good attendance from its pupils, in order for them to make the most of the opportunities that the school has to offer. We rely on our partnership with parents to ensure that this is achieved as it is the responsibility of the parents to see that children attend school regularly and are punctual on all occasions.

Bowhill Primary School aims to maintain above 96% throughout the year for the whole school. Government targets now also stipulate and require monitoring of the number of persistent absences that a school has. A persistent absentee is categorised as a child who has a 90% and less attendance record at school over an academic school year.

We would ask parents to help the school by notifying us of all absences on the first day if possible, and always to ensure that any absence is covered by a note on your child's return to school. Any absence which is known in advance, such as medical appointments, should be notified to the school in writing beforehand or through a phone call. Our children are praised for good attendance which through working with your partnership, we wish to continue. We notify parents at the end of each term for children whose attendance has been excellent and award the children with badges at the end of the year if this is at 100%.

The school day

Children are met on the playground each morning by their teachers then walked into school. Our school day starts at 8:45am in Achieve, 8:50am in Aspire and 8:55am in Explore. Registers are marked shortly after this. Pupils who are not present for registration will be marked as absent initially. A child arriving between 9.00am and 9.10am will be marked as late in the register. A child who arrives after 9.10am will be marked with a 'U' code (late after registration closes). If school has received no notification for child's absence, from a safeguarding viewpoint, after 9:30am a phone call will be made to the contact details provided by parents/carers to establish the child's whereabouts.

It is the responsibility of the parents/carers to ensure their child attends full time education and arrives on time. Punctuality is monitored by the school. If a child persistently arrives after the registers close, cases will be referred to the EWO who may issue a penalty notice.

Authorised and unauthorised absence

The law requires that all schools must now show the difference between authorised and unauthorised absence.

Authorised absence can be:

- Sickness
- Medical or dental appointments which cannot be arranged outside school hours
- Days of religious observance
- An exceptional circumstance which was unavoidable and a one-off incidence.

Please note however regular time off for illness will be challenged, requiring not only medical evidence but also medical guidance on how schools can best support and 'manage' those children in school. Saying a child is "unwell" will no longer be enough, parents will need to be specific as the school administrative staff will enquire further.

Unauthorised absence is:

- Truancy
- Staying at home to look after younger children or sick relatives
- Going shopping or having hair cut
- Any absence which the school has not been informed about, either by letter or telephone
- Any family holiday in term time.

Absences during Term Time

As of September 2013, an amendment to the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 came into force and greater clarity was introduced to the issue of schools authoring absence requests. These changes reinforced the Government's view that every minute of every school day is vital and that pupils should only be granted authorised absences by the school in 'exceptional circumstances).

As a school, we support this view and believe that even one day's avoidable absence has a negative impact on learning.

The academic year in Devon schools includes 13 weeks when the school is not open to children (175 days including INSET days, holidays, bank holidays and weekends) that are issued in advance and shared on our school website with parents.

When considering if there are exceptional circumstances to authorise absence in term time, in order to demonstrate a consistent approach, the following will be considered; -

- Is this a one-off, unavoidable event that is unlikely to happen again in the child's time at school?
- Are the date(s) requested within the control/choice of the parent/carer?
- Are alternative date(s) available for this absence within the 13 weeks that school is closed throughout the school year?
- Where a request is linked to an employer setting dates for leave, is there written evidence from the employer/line manager that this is the case for a full 12-month period?
- Have families given school sufficient time to consider any request?

- If this is not the case, do the circumstances warrant this request being made?
- Is there a medical/social/emotional reason that is evidenced or known by the school or wider agencies to support this request at this time for the child or sibling?

All requests for absence are considered on an individual basis by the Head teacher.

Absence request forms are available from the School Office (DCC S2 form) or on the school website. Requests need to be made at least two weeks before the absence so that sufficient time can be made to review the request alongside a child's attendance and progress in school.

A family holiday is not normally considered by the Government to be an 'exceptional circumstance' and therefore will not be authorised by this school. Should you choose to take your child out of school without the authorisation of the Head teacher, then Parental Responsibility Measures could be instigated. This could mean receiving any of the following; -

- A Penalty Notice (assuming one has not been issued in the past 2 years)
- A summons to court under s444(1) Education Act 1996 (maximum fine of £1,000) or
- A summons to court under s444(1a) Education Act 1996 (maximum fine of £2,500 and/or 3 months' imprisonment).

Schools are required to notify the Local Authority if a pupil has a number of unauthorised absences. Unauthorised absences can be acquired when; -

- Leave has been requested, but the circumstances are such that the school is unable to authorise the leave and it is taken anyway
- Leave is not requested and/or the school has grounds to believe that the child has been taken out of school for an avoidable reason (e.g. a family holiday). Only the Head teacher can authorise an absence. This year there have been occasions when schools have been notified that the pupil is sick, but the school later discovers and reasonably believes that the reason given for the absence is not genuine.
- A child continually arrives late after the registration period has closed
- A child is ill for 5 or more consecutive days without medical evidence.

The school is required to notify the Local Authority in all of the circumstances listed above.

Should a Penalty Notice be issued as a result of unauthorised absence then one notice will be issued **per child, per parent** of £60 if paid within 21 days, increasing to £120 if paid within a further 7 days (total of 28 days). If a Penalty Notice goes unpaid after 28 days, then court proceedings will be initiated and non-payment may result in prosecution. If a previous Penalty Notice has been issued within the past 2 years then the Local Authority can proceed straight to Court.

We understand the disappointment that the refusal of a leave request may cause and we apologise, but as you can appreciate our approach represents the school's responsibility and commitment towards ensuring your child's education and their future life opportunities. We hope you will support your child's education by ensuring that your son/daughter obtains the maximum benefit from their time at school by attending punctually for the 190 days each year that the law requires (unless prevented from doing so by an unavoidable circumstance).

For any further information, please refer to the attendance policy which can either be requested from the school office or be located on the school's website or please contact the school office directly.

Leaving school during school hours

If parents require children to leave school early for a valid reason a request must be made to the Class Teacher or Headteacher.

- Parents are expected to meet the child at the school.
- No child will be released unless a parent or guardian has made a request.
- Parents are expected to sign their child out of school in the book located in the reception area.

Monitoring attendance

When a child's attendance is a cause for concern, (this has currently now been set at 90% and below) or they have been absent from school for more than three days with no communication with school, it is brought to the attention of the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). Our safeguarding responsibility is such that we need to know where our children are and that they are safe if they are not in school. The aim is to work with parents to increase their child's attendance at school.

Please remember:

- Ring the school if at all possible on the first day of an absence or send a written message.
- Consider carefully taking absences in school time and the effect this has on your child's education. These will not be authorised and you may incur a fine.

We would like to emphasise that these are government changes over which schools have no choice and apply to all schools. The aim is to improve overall attendance figures and reduce the lost days of education which can affect a child's progress. Your continued support in maintaining our very good levels of attendance is much appreciated. Every day counts!