Priory Junior School

Attendance Policy

The DfE guidelines recognise that attendance and positive behaviour should be equally valued and considered as part of the same approach. Regular attendance and good punctuality are not only fundamental to maximising achievement and obtaining the greatest benefit from education, but are also key skills for adult life.

We aim to:

- Promote the importance of good attendance with all children and parents
- communicate to all relevant parties the legal position with respect to attendance and the categories of absence which are deemed "authorised"
- Take action swiftly should there be concerns about a child's attendance
- Ensure children do not fall behind in their learning because of absence
- Work closely with families and agencies to support good attendance

Regular attendance at school is vital. Put simply, *absence* means *missed learning*; without it the learning process becomes fragmented and unsatisfactory. It is a legal requirement that students of compulsory school age receive full-time education and this, with the exception of those educated at home or elsewhere, means regular attendance at school. Irregular attendance leads to students missing important lessons and therefore not fulfilling their true potential.

Priory Junior School expects attendance at school to be 100%, unless there are exceptional or unavoidable reasons for absence. Therefore, we take the issue of attendance very seriously and do all we can to obtain very high attendance from all our students.

Recording Attendance

The school uses the DfE agreed attendance codes for recording absences in the register. All teachers receive an updated list of the codes annually.
Attendance is recorded twice a day, at registration – at 8.50am and 1.20pm. This is recorded directly into our Management Information System by the class teachers. A copy can be found in the appendix.

Authorised Absences

The school cannot legally authorise **any** leave of absence unless there are **exceptional circumstances**. The Department for Education (DFE) has issued guidelines to all schools detailing valid reasons for **authorised** or **justified** absences:

(i) a child is ill or receiving medical attention;
(ii) days of religious observance, notified in advance;
(iii) absence due to family circumstances (e.g. bereavement, serious illness).

There are other absences, such as **approved sporting activities** that can be authorised and there will be events affecting families, some unforeseen, which will necessitate absence from school; professional discretion will need to be used in these cases as to whether the absence can be authorised.

We expect absences to be kept to a minimum; **routine medical and dental appointments should be arranged out of school hours wherever possible.**

Unauthorised Absences

These are absences where:

- no letter or acceptable explanation is provided by parent(s)/carers;
- the reason for the absence does not fall into one of the categories of **authorised** absence above.

DFE guidelines state that the following activities would be classified as **unauthorised:**

- minding the house;
- caring for relatives;

- awaiting repair people;
- shopping;
- a birthday or family celebration.

In the case of **special occasions,** only **truly exceptional** occasions will be classified as authorised; for example, absence resulting from a pupil attending the graduation of an older brother or sister may be counted as authorised; a birthday treat to a theme park will **not**.

Absence in Exceptional Circumstances

In 2006, amendments to the regulations removed references to family holidays and extended leave. These amendments made it clear that **Headteachers** could only authorise leave in **exceptional circumstances. A note from home therefore does NOT automatically make an absence valid, justified or authorised.**

An exceptional circumstance is usually something that is **rare, significant, unavoidable and short.** All requests for this type of leave should be made in writing to the school, using the 'Request for Leave in Exceptional Circumstances' form available from the school office. A decision will be made based on the information provided and conveyed to parents promptly.

In line with DfE and Cambridgeshire Local Authority guidance, requests for holidays will be declined.

Home/School Partnership

Securing a high level of attendance requires the school and home to work closely together. To this end, we ask parents to:

- do all they can to ensure their child arrives **on time** for morning and afternoon school sessions; morning registration begins at 8:50am and afternoon registration is at 1.20pm. We will monitor persistent latecomers and action will be taken; **parents can be prosecuted if their child persistently arrives late;**
- if their child is ill, notify the school **on the first day** with an estimation of the likely length of absence;
- send in a written note with their child on the first day s/he is back at school. This should be handed to the class teacher or school office.
- get in touch at an early stage about any concerns they have about their child's attitude towards school.

In return we will:

- contact home on day 1 of absence if no message has been received from home;
- contact home over any unexplained absences;
- follow up promptly any concerns parents pass on to us that may be affecting their child's attitude to, or feeling of wellbeing in, school;
- regularly and consistently remind students of the importance of good attendance and punctuality;
- reward excellent or improving attendance and action any concerns promptly.

Our expectations are outlined in our **prospectus** within the attendance section. This is provided to parents in July of each academic year at the Parent Information evening for new Year 3 children – this is usually held on the same day as our Transition Day.

Strategies to Promote Good Attendance

As a school, we celebrate and promote good attendance at school through the following strategies:

- Weekly attendance award for the class with the highest attendance
- Termly tea parties for children with 100% attendance for the term
- Celebration of 100% attendance on our school newsletter
- End of year certificates for 100% attendance, with prizes for children with 4 years of 100% attendance
- Reminders on newsletters as to the importance of good attendance
- Termly updates for all parents about levels of attendance
- Involving children in evaluation of attendance through 'Individual Learning Reviews'

Monitoring Attendance

As a school, we take every child's attendance very seriously. Whenever they are absent, for whatever reason, they are missing out on their learning. Because of this, we monitor children's attendance weekly, and follow set procedures to keep parents informed of any concerns. This is outlined in Appendix 3.

The Education Welfare Service

Our Education Welfare Officer (EWO) visits the school every half-term. The school works closely with the EWO regarding students who are giving cause for concern; this work may involve the EWO visiting homes, or meeting with parents and children in school too. Working with the EWO is a vital component in our efforts to secure high attendance.

In extreme cases the Education Welfare Service also initiates legal proceedings against parents who have not fulfilled their responsibility for getting their child to school. Before a case goes to court, Parenting Contracts will be drawn up, setting targets for attendance levels; there may also be interviews which could lead to a fixed penalty notice. The prime aim of all action is to get the child attending school on a regular basis.

Should a child be absent for two continuous weeks without a satisfactory explanation having been received, or should there be child protection or other immediate welfare concerns then the school will, during this time, initiate enquiries as to the child's whereabouts.

If we still have concerns, and the absence continues into a third week, we will contact the Education Welfare Officer.

Should the child be subject of a Child Protection Plan, the child's social worker will be notified immediately.

Appendix 1

Absence Codes – Recorded on registers

/	Present at registration
B	Educated Off Site (Not dual registered)
C	Other authorised circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/description
D	Dual registered (ie present at another school or at a PRU)
E	Excluded but no alternative provision made
F	Agreed extended holiday
G	Family holiday (not agreed or sessions in excess of agreement)
H	Agreed holiday
I	Illness
J	Interview
K	Exam
L	Late but arrived before the register closed
M	Medical or dental appointment
N	No reason for the absence provided yet
O	Other unauthorised (not covered by other codes or descriptions)
P	Approved sporting activity
R	Day set aside exclusively for religious observance
S	Study Leave
T	Traveller absence
U	Late and arrived after the register closed
V	Educational visit or trip
W	Work experience (not based working)
X	Un-timetabled sessions for non-compulsory school age pupils
Y	Partial and forced closure
Z	Pupil not on roll yet
#	School closed to pupils
AEA	Authorised Educational Activity - counted as present.

The Absence Codes are identical for all schools nationally
Further explanations of the absence codes are kept in the School office.

Appendix 2

Staff Guide to Registers and Associated Procedures

This section complements the Attendance Policy and should be read in conjunction with it. It deals with the practicalities of completing the registers and associated procedures to do with attendance. Registers are important legal documents and we rely on accurate input in order to follow up any concerns as well as for data analysis.

Marking the register

Class teachers will be responsible for following up absences and communicating reasons to the School Administrator.

Reading the registers

The registers information is read every morning after registration (period 1). It is imperative that the data entered is accurate and that there is a mark for **EVERY** pupil (everyone **must** fall into one of the three categories of present, absent or late!). Staff must enter either 'present', 'absent' or 'late' (+ how many minutes late). **Schools have a responsibility for safeguarding the children in their care and it is vital that the information we have is as accurate as possible.**

We operate a policy of 1st day response regarding absence across the school. The School Administrator phones parents of any child not registered at the start of the day.

Communication with/from parents

The DFE guidance strongly recommends a policy of same-day contact as this has been shown to be the single most effective strategy in improving rates of attendance; it is also important from a Child Protection perspective.

We remind parents, in newsletters, of the importance of their contacting the school as early as possible on the **first** day of absence to notify us of their child's absence; there is a dedicated line on which parents can leave messages about absence.

We require **ALL** absences to be covered by a letter, e-mail, phone call or note in logbook from parents/guardians. Every Friday the School Administrator will follow up any absences that remain unexplained. Should the class teacher receive an explanation, it is their responsibility to report back to the School Administrator. All absence notes must be sent to the school office.

A Few Words on Lates

- Statutory Registration starts at 8:50am and 1.20pm and closes after 30 minutes. Thereafter students' absence will be recorded as unauthorised (U) unless a valid reason is provided such as a medical or dental appointment.

- A student should only be marked as **late** when the teacher has completed the whole register and a pupil arrives after the register has been "sent" (electronically).

- It is important that we are consistent in our procedures across the school: parents with siblings in the school do sometimes cross-check to see that the same standards are being applied and we are consistent in our approach to latecomers. So please record Lates and the number of minutes late then re-send registers.

- Lates are counted as present when the data is collected; however, parents have been successfully prosecuted for failing to get their child to school consistently on time. Therefore we will take a robust response to those who are regularly arriving late.

N.B. If for any reason you are unable to take an electronic register, a paper register must be taken and sent to the School office.

Attendance Data provided to Class Teachers

Class Teachers have access to any student's attendance data via SIMS. In addition, summary data is provided on progress update reports which go home termly. Class Teachers are also provided with attendance data for discussion with children during their termly 'Individual Learning Reviews'.

Housekeeping procedures:

- Take accurate registers during am and pm registration, making use of appropriate codes (present, absent, late).
- Monitor attendance of individuals.
- Raise issues of attendance and punctuality with the Headteacher.

Appendix 3

Monitoring Attendance: procedure and practice

1. **Data collection, input and analysis:**

The School Administrator ensures attendance collection is being kept up-to-date and accurate.
The Headteacher carries out a weekly analysis of attendance across the school.

2. **Early Intervention:**

The Headteacher identifies students whose attendance is 95% or below. Reasons are sought for why attendance is at this level. This takes place weekly on a Friday.

Where analysis shows a concern, Letter 1 will be sent at this point.

3. **If attendance does not improve? Letter 2**

If attendance continues to fall, and has become less than 93%, Letter 2 will be sent, along with a copy of the School Attendance leaflet.
A school meeting will also be arranged to explore reasons for absences and to determine any support that might be needed to ensure it improves. Medical evidence for future absences will also be required.

4. **If attendance falls further? Letter 3**

   If attendance continues to fall, and has become less than 91%, Letter 3 will be sent.
   If attendance continues to fall after letter 3 has been sent, and if mostly unauthorised at 86-89%, the school will refer to penalty notices.

   Attendance at 85% and below, mostly unauthorised over previous 6 weeks requires a referral for an Education Welfare Officer to follow formal processes

- Letter informing parents/carer inviting them to a formal 'Parenting Contract Meeting' where a clear 90% target is given over a 6 week period.
- Meeting with EWO, parents and school in attendance.

5. **Still no further improvement**

PACE interview where a formal caution is given, followed by court proceedings if necessary.