

ATTENDANCE POLICY
Nayland Primary School
Autumn 2023

Introduction Nayland Primary 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 punctuality and attendance for all. The policy has been drawn up after consultation with the school community and is based on current government and Local Authority guidance and statutory regulations.

School's roles and responsibilities All staff have a key role to play in supporting and promoting excellent school punctuality and attendance and will work to provide an environment in which all our pupils are eager to learn, feel valued members of the school community and look forward to coming to school every day. Staff also have a responsibility to set a good example in matters relating to their own attendance and punctuality.

Attendance Leader A member of the Senior Leadership Team will oversee, direct and co-ordinate the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and will ensure the Attendance Policy is consistently applied throughout the school. Attendance will be reported to the governing body termly, issues identified promptly with individual families and support put in place to deal with any difficulties.

Registration The school is required to complete the attendance register twice each day; at the start of the morning and the afternoon sessions. Staff members are responsible for completing the attendance registers using prescribed codes. Registers are completed promptly from 9am each morning and at 1pm (EYFS/KS1) and 1.30pm (KS2) and a mark made during the registration period in respect of each child. Registers will close at 9.10 am and 1.05/1.35pm. Any pupil who arrives after the closing of the register will count as absent. Pupils who arrive before the register closes will be counted as present but will be considered late. (N.B. Bus travelers are given dispensation if the bus arrives late.)

Categorising Absence A mark is made for each child during registration. Any child who is not present at this time will be marked 'unauthorised absence' unless leave has been granted by the school in advance or the reason for absence is already known and accepted by the school as legitimate. Where a reason for absence is given and accepted by the school at a later stage, the register will be amended in such a way that the original entry and the amendment/correction are distinguishable. The decision about whether the absence should be authorised or unauthorised rests with the school.

Nayland Primary School recognises the clear links between attendance and attainment, and attendance and safeguarding children. It recognises that inappropriate authorisation of absence can be as damaging to a child's education as authorised absence, will potentially send a message to parents that any reason for non-school attendance is acceptable and can render children extremely vulnerable to harm. If absence is frequent or continuous, and except where a child is clearly unwell, staff at Nayland will challenge parents about the need and reasons for their child's absence and they will be encouraged to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a pupil's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised as authorisation always rests with the school.

If no explanation about an absence is received by the school within 2 weeks, the absence will remain unauthorised;

Absence will be authorised in the following circumstances:

- leave has been granted by the school in advance, for example – to participate in an approved performance for which a license has been granted by the Local Authority
- a pupil is involved in an exceptional special occasion – in authorising such an absence the individual circumstances of the particular case and the pupil's overall pattern of attendance will be considered,
- in exceptional circumstances, permission has been granted for a family holiday for which the parents have sought permission in advance (see below)
- the school is satisfied that the child is too ill to attend;
- the pupil has a medical appointment (out of school hours wherever possible, return to school immediately afterwards, send him/her to school beforehand)
- there is an unavoidable cause for the absence which is beyond the family's control, e.g. extreme weather conditions;
- the absence occurs on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong;
- the pupil lives more than two miles (if he/she is under eight) or three miles (if he/she has reached eight) and no suitable transport arrangements have been made by the LA
- the pupil is of no fixed abode, his/her parent is engaged in a trade which required him/her to travel, the pupil has attended school as often as the nature of the trade permits and, having reached the age of six, he/she has attended 200 sessions in the preceding 12 months;
- in other exceptional circumstances (e.g. a family bereavement) and for a very limited period.

Except in the circumstances described above, absences will be unauthorised.

Some examples of reasons for not authorising absence would be:

- no explanation has been given by the parent;
- the school is not satisfied with the explanation;
- the pupil is staying at home to mind the house;
- the pupil is shopping during school hours;
- the pupil is absent for unexceptional reasons, e.g. a birthday;
- the pupil is absent from school on a family holiday without prior permission;
- the pupil has been stopped during a truancy sweep and is unable (or the parent is unable) to give a satisfactory reason for the absence.

Approved Educational Activity Where a pupil is engaged in off-site approved educational activities, the school will check his/her attendance on a daily basis before entering the appropriate code in the register.

Staff Training The School Attendance Leader will ensure that all staff responsible for taking registers, including any temporary or supply staff, receive sufficient training to enable them to perform the task accurately.

Collection and analysis of data The Attendance Leader will ensure that attendance data is complete, accurate, analysed and reported to the senior leadership team, parents and the governing body. The report should include commentary on the trajectory and the school target. The data will inform the school's future practice to improve attendance. Accurate attendance returns are made to the DfE within the stipulated time frame.

Systems and strategies for managing and improving attendance Attendance has a very high profile at Nayland Primary School; parents are regularly reminded in newsletters and school meetings about the importance of good attendance and its links to attainment. The school will follow up on all absences in order to secure the best attendance rate for all pupils.

First-day calling Nayland Primary School has in place a system of first-day calling. This means that parents will be telephoned on the first day a pupil is absent without explanation to establish a reason for the absence. This helps to identify issues at an early stage.

Meetings with parents: Where there is an emerging pattern to a pupil's absence the school will invite parents to a meeting to put plans in place to resolve any difficulties and improve the attendance. If there continue to be unauthorised absences by the end of the specific time (or sooner if the pupil is failing to attend school at all), the matter will be referred to the Education Attendance Service.

Lateness and punctuality: To avoid disruption of their own and other children's learning, pupils are expected to arrive at school on time every day. Pupils who arrive after the register closes will be marked absent for the whole session (a session being a morning or an afternoon). This absence will be unauthorised unless the school is satisfied that there is a legitimate reason for the pupil to be late. A pupil who is persistently absent by reason of lateness will be dealt with in the same way as other students with an emerging pattern of absence.

Pupils who arrive late, but before the register closes, will be marked L on the register.

For health and safety reasons it is important that the school knows who is in the building. Pupils arriving late should therefore report to the school office and parents/carers are asked to complete the late arrivals register. Pupils leaving the premises legitimately (e.g. for a medical appointment), or returning to school later in the day are signed out and in at the school office to record their whereabouts at all times.

Post-registration truancy: Post-registration truancy occurs when a pupil goes missing from school having previously registered for the session. This behaviour will immediately be made known to his/her parents/carers and the police to ensure safety.

Term-time Holidays (See LA letter below): Term-time holidays are intended for children whose parents are unable to take holiday at any other time. Nayland Primary School will consider every application individually, its policy is NOT to grant leave of absence for a holiday other than in the most exceptional circumstances. Time off school for family holidays is not a right. An application must be made in writing, with appropriate evidence, in advance of the intended holiday.

Nayland Primary School will consider authorising holidays for:

- service personnel and other employees who are prevented from taking holidays during school holiday time;
- when a family needs to spend time together to support each other during or after a crisis;
- parents who are subject to a strict and non-negotiable holiday rota and evidence is provided to this effect.

Requests for holidays for the following reason will not be authorised:

- cheaper cost of holiday;
- availability of the desired accommodation;
- poor weather experienced in school holiday periods; and
- overlap with beginning or end of term.

The school cannot authorise a holiday during periods of national tests, i.e. SATS.

Where parents/carers choose to take unauthorised leave for the purpose of holidays they should be aware that school attendance registers will show evidence of these unauthorised absences. The governors of Nayland School take attendance very seriously and will send a penalty notice letter to Suffolk County Council Education Attendance Service (part of The Education Welfare Service) when the amount of unauthorised holiday absence cumulatively reaches 11 sessions (5+ days) in any one academic year. The Attendance Service will act on this notification appropriately and this may include a fine levied against the parents/carers.

Extended leave of absence In considering absence for extended trips overseas, the school will take account of the following:

- a visit to family overseas has a very different significance from a normal 'holiday'; such visits may be important in terms of children's identity and self-esteem as they grow up;
- parents may feel that the reasons for their visit outweigh the importance of their child's uninterrupted attendance at school (although parents could be encouraged to use the school holiday periods for at least part of their trip);
- the reasons for wishing to make a visit is more difficult, particularly for minority ethnic families, where huge distances and high costs are involved;
- where extended leave of absence is granted there will be an expectation that the pupil undertakes learning tasks during this period.

Parents'/carers' responsibilities: Responsibility for ensuring children receive an appropriate and full-time education rests primarily with parents/carers (defined by the Education Act 1996 as those with parental responsibility and those who have the care of a child), who will be supported and encouraged by Nayland Primary School.

The school expects parents/carers to:

- ensure their children attend the school regularly;
- support attendance by keeping requests for absence to a minimum;
- not expect the school to automatically agree any requests for absence, and not condone unjustified absence from school.
- notify Nayland on the first day of absence by leaving a message on the school app, by telephone, visiting the school office or sending a letter.
- ensure their children arrive at school on time, properly dressed and with the necessary equipment for the day;
- work in partnership with the school, for example by attending parents' meetings and consultations, signing home learning diaries when asked to do so, taking an interest in their children's learning and activities;
- contact the school without delay with concerns about any aspects of their children's school lives. School will endeavour to support parents to address their concerns.

Pupils' responsibilities: All pupils should be aware of the importance of regular school attendance. If they are having difficulties that may prevent them from attending school regularly, they should speak to their class teacher in the first instance.

Governors' responsibilities: Refer to Section 175 (2) Education Reform Act 1998. The governing body of a maintained school shall make arrangements for ensuring that their functions relating to the conduct of the school are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school.

Conclusion: Regular school attendance is a necessary contributor to ensuring the outcomes of Every Child Matters: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being.

Reviewing the policy: The school will review this policy each year with its allocated Education Welfare Officer.

Signature of Chair of Governors _____

Date _____ 13.10.23 _____

To be Reviewed Autumn 2024

Transcript of the Letter from the Suffolk Director of Children & Young People's Services

You will be aware of the government's concern, which we all share, to raise levels of pupil attendance at school. Research has demonstrated a high correlation between attendance and attainment, and that schools where absence is high tend to have a lower level of attainment than might otherwise be expected. Crucially, good school attendance is regarded as essential in meeting the outcomes of Every Child Matters.

I know schools have been working very hard to reduce absence, but nevertheless it remains too high across all phases and does not compare well with that of our statistical neighbours. Despite everyone's hard work, absence has actually increased this year, and while sickness is likely to have been a major contributory factor in some schools, it may not have been the only one. We need to focus on other issues, especially those within our control, which contribute to significant levels of absence. Many of you report that one of these is holidays taken in term-time.

Schools, as you know, have the discretion to grant up to ten days absence in a school year for a family holiday. Parents do not have the right to take their children out of school for this purpose. Guidance already issued by Suffolk Local Authority, and by the DfES, stresses that headteachers should use their discretion to grant leave for a holiday very sparingly.

Term-time holidays were originally intended for children whose parents were unable to take a holiday at any other time, for example some agricultural workers and those whose place of work had an annual 'shut down' outside the school holiday period. Certain members of the uniformed or armed services, if they are subject to a strict and un-negotiable holiday rota, might also be affected. It was never intended that parents should be allowed to take their children out of school in term-time simply because holidays are cheaper, because the time is more convenient for them or for second holidays. Suffolk Local Authority's view is that leave should not be granted in these circumstances.

Every application for a holiday in term-time therefore needs to be considered on its merits. Whilst it is not advisable to impose a 'blanket' ban on term-time holidays (schools could find themselves open to legal challenge on the grounds that they have fettered their discretion), I would expect schools to be very clear with parents that, while they will consider every application individually, their general policy is not to grant leave of absence for a holiday other than in the most exceptional circumstances such as those described above. Even then, when considering whether or not to grant leave, the Local Authority would expect schools to take into consideration the time of year and the overall attendance pattern of the child. The Authority would not support leave of absence which coincided with SATs or GCSE examinations, or for a child whose attendance was not otherwise good.

Whilst it might generally be considered that a holiday is good family time, a child's right to a full-time education must take priority. It is now well recognised that children with high attendance perform better in SATs and achieve higher grades at GCSE. Some schools are setting a level of attendance below which they will not authorise absence for a holiday. Whilst this might be considered a helpful step, it should be noted that a pupil who takes 10 days holiday a year during term time will achieve only 94.7% attendance if there are no other absences. Furthermore, a pupil who otherwise has an attendance level of 95% will have this reduced to only 89.7% by taking 10 days holiday in term time, and a pupil who generally attends 92% of the time will have this reduced to 86.8%. Neither of these attendance levels is acceptable and will reduce the likelihood of those children reaching their potential in SATs and GCSE examinations. This will also, of course, be reflected in schools' performance on attainment.

I am aware that some school clusters are developing a whole-cluster policy on term time holidays so that parents are clear what is expected from the time their children first attend school, right through to school leaving age. This approach is likely to be helpful in changing attitudes to term time holidays by raising parents' awareness and understanding about the potential detrimental effect to their children of missing school, and therefore in contributing to raising levels of school attendance.

This is a matter which the Local Authority takes very seriously in serving the best interests of children. It is worth bearing in mind that a child who misses two weeks of school a year during his or her compulsory schooling, loses roughly two terms of education. I do hope you will do all you can to reduce unnecessary absence of this kind.

