Woodcroft Primary School
Attendance Policy

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Co-ordinator responsible for the policy in consultation with the staff and governors:

Headteacher
Home School Link Worker

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Introduction

For a child to reach their full educational achievement a high level of school attendance is essential. Woodcroft Primary School is committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all our pupils and to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome. Every child has a right to access the education to which they are entitled. Parents and teachers share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality for all.

As a school, it is our duty to consistently strive to achieve a goal of 100% attendance for all children.

Good attendance is important because:

- statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and absence below 95%
- regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically
- regular attenders find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with
- regular attenders find learning more satisfying
- regular attenders are more successful in transferring between primary school, secondary school, and higher education, employment or training.

Promoting good attendance

The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child. The Home School Agreement will contain details of how we will work with parents and our expectations of what parents will need to do to ensure their child achieves good attendance.

To help us all to focus on this we will:

- provide information on all matters related to attendance on our website
- report to parents on how their child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainments
- celebrate good attendance by displaying class achievements

Responsibilities of the Home School Link Worker

The designated responsibility from the Head Teacher to the Home School Link Worker is to oversee, direct and co-ordinate the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and they will ensure the attendance policy is consistently applied throughout the school. They will also ensure that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed. They will ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.

If absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, the Home School Link Worker will discuss with parents/carers the need and reasons for their child's absence and will encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a pupil's home does

not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence will always rest with the Head Teacher.

Responsibilities of students

- Attend every day unless they are ill or have an authorised absence
- Arrive in school before registers open at 8:40am.

Responsibilities of parents/carers

Ensuring a child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act) and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

Parents will:

- inform the school on the first day of absence
- discuss with the Home School Link Worker any planned absences well in advance
- support the school with their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year
- make sure that any absence is clearly accounted for by telephone no later than 9:00am on the first and subsequent days of absence, or by email if a phone is unavailable
- avoid taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments
- only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance
- Take responsibility for registering at the office if they are late.

Recording Attendance

Legally the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day at 8.40am, and again for the afternoon session at 1pm.

Department for Education guidance suggests all official registers should be closed a maximum of 30 minutes after the start of school, but schools can choose to use a shorter period. For further advice and guidance refer to: Hampshire County Council's guidance, *Promoting pupil attendance recording absence,* available at: http://documents.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/HIAS/Promotingpupilattendanceandrecordingabsence-maindocument.pdf.

It is important to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions. The period at the beginning of school is used to give out instructions or organise work. If your child is late they can miss time with their class teacher getting vital information, cause disruption to the lesson for others, and it can be embarrassing leading to possible further absence.

- The school day begins at 8:35am and **all pupils are expected to be in school at this time**. Morning registration is at 8:40am and it closes at 8:50am. Any child that arrives after 8:50am will be marked as late.
- All lateness is recorded daily. This information will be required by the courts, should a prosecution for non-attendance or lateness be necessary.
- Arrival after the close of registration will be marked as unauthorised absence and coded *U* in line with Hampshire County Council and Department of Education guidance. This mark shows them to be on site, but is legally recorded as an absence.

If a pupil is late due to a medical appointment, they will receive an authorised absence, coded *M*. Please be advised that, where possible, doctors and dentists appointments are to be made outside of school hours or during school holidays. It is at the school's discretion to ask for proof of these appointments.

Pupils who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of other pupils. Ongoing and repeated lateness is considered as **unauthorised absence and will be subject to legal action**.

Parents, guardians or carers of pupils who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good time keeping and how this might be achieved. If lateness persists parents, guardians or carers will be invited to attend the school and discuss the problem and support offered. If support is not appropriate or is declined and a child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence due to lateness recorded in any 10-week period, the school or Hampshire County Council will be required to issue parents with a Penalty Notice in accordance with Hampshire County Council's *Code of conduct: issuing Penalty Notices for unauthorised absence from schools*.

Please collect your child promptly at the end of the school day. Where late collection is persistent and/or significantly late, the school is obliged to take any uncollected pupil to the school office where a member of staff will contact the parent. If no contact can be made the office staff will inform a member of SLT or a DSL, the SLT or DSL is to remain with the child and contact Children's Services for further advice.
If a child is persistently not collected on time parents will receive a letter informing them that a referral has been made to Children's Services.

What to do if my child is absent?

A child not attending school is considered a **safeguarding** matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required. If your child is absent you must contact us as soon as possible on the first day of absence. On the first day of your child's absence we will telephone and text you if we have not heard from you – this is because we have a duty to ensure your child's safety, as well as their regular school attendance. We will invite you in to discuss the situation with the school's Home School Link Worker and Head Teacher if absences persist. If your child's absence is unauthorised and falls below 90% we can refer the matter to the Hampshire County Council's Attendance Legal Panels.

On the third day of absence, if your child is not seen and contact has not been established with any of the named parents/carers, we will make all reasonable enquiries to establish contact with known friends and wider family and home visits by the Home School Link Worker may take place. It is at the school's discretion to undertake a police welfare check if the need is felt.

We have a legal duty to report the absence of any pupil who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer then the local authority is notified that the child is *at risk of missing in education*. Children's Services staff will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child.

Continued or ongoing absence

If your child misses 10% (three weeks/sessions) or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason, they are defined as *persistent absentees*. Absence for whatever reason disadvantages a child by creating gaps in his or her learning. Research shows these gaps affect attainment when attendance falls below 95%. As such, we monitor all absence thoroughly and all attendance data is shared with the local authority and the Department for Education. If your child has had absence and their attendance level is falling towards 90% we will contact you and, depending on the reasons for the absence, will ask you to meet with the Home School Link Worker.

All our persistent absentee pupils and their parents are subject to an Attendance Plan.

Request for leave of absence

Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013; The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations state that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is important to note that headteachers can determine the length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all. The fundamental principles of defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, or unavoidable, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. There are no rules on this as circumstances vary from school to school and family to family. There is, however, no legal entitlement for time off in school term time to go on holiday and in the majority of cases holiday will not be authorised. Parents/carers wishing to apply for leave of absence need to fill in an application form (available from the school office) in advance and before making any travel arrangements.

If term-time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised and if the number of sessions absent hits the thresholds set down in Hampshire County Council's *Code of conduct,* parents/carers will be issued with a fixed penalty fine or other legal action in accordance with the code (see Section 6 for detail).

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children out during school time.

Understanding types of absence

Pupils are expected to attend school every day for the entire duration of the academic year, unless there is an exceptional reason for the absence. There are two main categories of absences:

- authorised absence: is when the school has accepted the explanation offered as satisfactory justification for the absence or given approval in advance for such an absence. If no explanation is received, absences cannot be authorised
- unauthorised absence: is when the school has not received a reason for absence or has not approved a child's leave absence from school after a parent's request. This includes:
    - parents giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily, such as for shopping, birthdays, to look after siblings etc.
    - truancy before or during the school day
    - absences which have not been explained.

A school can, if needed, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence and vice versa if new information is presented. Any changes will be communicated to parents/carers. An example of this would be where a parent states a child is unwell but on return to school there is evidence they have been on holiday.

Penalty Notices for non-attendance and other legal measures

In education law, parents/carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular attendance of their child of compulsory school age at the school at which the child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school.

Legal Measures for tackling persistent absence or lateness

Hampshire schools and Hampshire County Council will use the full range of legal measures to secure good attendance. Legal measures will only be considered when there is unauthorised absence and:

1. the child or family do not require the support from any agency to improve the attendance
2. the child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence and parents are complicit in the child's absence.

The following legal measures will be used for pupils of compulsory school age who are registered at a school:

- parenting contracts set at Education Planning Meetings
- parenting orders
- Penalty Notices
- Education Supervision Orders

- prosecution.

Where a child has unauthorised absence the school must enforce Hampshire County Council's *Code of conduct: issuing Penalty Notices for unauthorised absence from schools* or follow its guidance on other legal measures for non-attendance. The *Code of conduct* is a statutory document that ensures that powers for legal sanctions are applied consistently and fairly across all schools and their families within the authority. A copy is available from: www.hants.gov.uk/education/hias/learning-behaviour-attendance/attendanceguidance-for-parents/possible-penalties.

The *Code of conduct* states that schools or Hampshire County Council will issue a Penalty Notice for any unauthorised absence where the pupil has been:

- absent for 10 or more half-day sessions (five school days) of unauthorised absence during any 100 possible school sessions – these do not need to be consecutive
- persistently late (coded *U*) for up to 10 sessions (five days) after the register has closed
- persistently late before the close of the register (coded *L*), but the school has met with parents and has clearly communicated that they will categorise as unauthorised any further lateness (code *O*), and where the threshold of 10 sessions (five days) has been met
- absent for any public examinations of which dates are published in advance
- absent for any formal school assessments, tests or examinations where the dates have been published in advance

unless the issuing of a Penalty Notice would conflict with other intervention strategies in place or other sanctions already being processed.

If a child's unauthorised absence meets any of the above criteria and the family or child do not require any agency support to improve the attendance then a Penalty Notice is issued for either:

(1) 10 sessions of unauthorised absence or lateness in any 10-week school period

(2) one or more sessions of unauthorised absence during a public exam, formal school assessment or testing where dates are published in advance.

This includes where a pupil has unauthorised absence due to either: non-

approval of a parent/carer's request for leave of absence, or

a holiday that has been taken without permission.

Parents and carers will be warned of the likelihood of a Penalty Notice being issued for unauthorised absence via a letter, through the leave of absence request form, or through the school's attendance policy and website. The Penalty Notice is a fine that is issued to each parent/carer who condoned (or was responsible for the child) during the period of unauthorised absence for which the fine has been issued. For each case of unauthorised absence, the school or Hampshire County Council will decide whether a Penalty Notice is issued to **one or more parents/carers** for each child. **NB:** This could mean four Penalty Notices for a family with two

siblings, both with unauthorised absence for holiday, i.e. one Penalty Notice for each child to each parent.

Each Penalty Notice carries a fine of £60 if paid within 21 days of the Penalty Notice being posted. If the fine is not paid within 21 days, the penalty is automatically increased to £120 if paid within 28 days. If the fine remains unpaid, Hampshire County Council will consider prosecution for the non-attendance. Payment methods are detailed on the Penalty Notices themselves. Penalties are to be paid to Hampshire County Council and revenue resulting from payment of penalties is used by the County Council to help cover the costs of issuing Penalty Notices and/or the cost of prosecuting recipients who do not pay.

Please note: If you pay the Penalty Notice is paid and the child has further unauthorised absences, additional legal action will be taken. For example, in the event that a Penalty Notice has previously been served due to unauthorised holiday, should the child have any future unauthorised leave this will result in further legal action, such as prosecution or an Education Supervision Order. For further information, parents/carers can request a leaflet from their school and should visit Hampshire County Council's website at: www.hants.gov.uk/education/hias/learning-behaviour-attendance/attendanceguidance-for- parents/possible-penalties.

My child is trying to avoid coming to school. What should I do?

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents/carers and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend, it is never better to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and may make things worse.

Parents should contact the school's Home School Link Worker immediately and openly discuss their worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with school work, bullying, friendship problems, family difficulties. It is important that the school identifies the reason for the child's reluctance to attend school and work together to tackle the problem. In some cases, it may be helpful to discuss the circumstances of the child's difficulties with another professional.

Leavers

If your child is leaving the school (other than when transferring to the secondary school) parents are required to give the Home School Link Worker detailed information about their plans, including any date of a move, new address and telephone numbers, the child's new school and the start date when known. This should be submitted to the school in writing.

If pupils leave and we do not have the above information, then the child is considered to be a *child missing in education*. This requires schools and local authorities to then carry out investigations to try and locate the child, which includes liaising with Children's Services, the Police and other agencies. By giving us the above information, these investigations can be avoided.

Absence through child's participation in public performances, regional, county or national level for sport.

Parents of a child performer can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in a performance or to take part in regional, county, national and international events and competitions. They must contact the Head Teacher to discuss the nature and frequency of the work, whether the child has a valid performance licence and whether education will be provided by the employer during any future leave of absence.
It is, however, down to the Head Teacher's discretion as to whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss with parents the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs. Permission for the child to leave early or arrive late to attend coaching and training sessions is also at the discretion of the Head Teacher and is not likely to be approved if it is a regular event, unless the sports club or association is providing an education tutor as part of their coaching.
Any absence recorded as part of a child's participation in a public performance is recorded as *C*, an authorised absence.

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Showman families

Absence of a child from a Traveller family that has left the area may be authorised if the absence is for work purposes only and it is believed that the family intends to return. To ensure the continuity of learning for Traveller children, dual registration is allowed. That means that a school cannot remove a Traveller child from the school roll while they are travelling. When the Traveller is away, the home school holds the place open and records the absence as authorised through the *T* code. Distance learning packs for Traveller children are not an alternative to attendance at school.

Record preservation

School registers are legal documents. We will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least three years. Computer registers will be preserved as electronic back-ups.