



# A Parent Guide to Attendance and Punctuality

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# Welcome to our Guide

This guide tells you all about our attendance policy at Oughtibridge Primary. Our attendance policy is very long (over 12,000 words) because it has to cover some very specific details.

The government changed the rules on attendance in 1996, in 2007 and in 2024 so rules are different to when our children's parents went to school. Because many parents don't have time to read our full policy, this guide highlights the key points you'll need to know.

Let's start with four goals...

We want every child's school days to be the best days:



- ✓ A time for eyes to light up.
- ✓ A time for wonder and discovery.
- ✓ A time for dreams to run wild.
- ✓ A time for friends who feel like family.

And we don't want them to miss a single day!

## 1. The Heart of Attendance



Children only get their school days once.

In England, school attendance is still less than it was before Covid.

Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child gets the full time education that they are entitled to.

Schools need to work with parents and children to support them to have the most awesome attendance and time in school possible.

Because children only get their school days once.



There's lots that we do to promote great attendance and punctuality that you probably haven't thought about.

It's not just certificates, it's this too:



Exciting lessons that mean children love coming to school.  
Marvellously motivated children don't delay getting to school.



And all this!



A warm welcome to parents & families.  
Great teamwork with our families helps us address issues fast.



Fabulous chances to get involved in sport and develop active lifestyles.  
Happy, healthy children attend even better.



Reward systems that celebrate children doing their best.  
Children who know the feeling of success want to come to school even more.



Clubs and activities where children enjoy their passions and make good friends.  
Children who have lots of interests and friendships are happier in school.

## 2. Key Terms

### **Authorised absence means an absence for:**

- Sickness which the school have granted leave for.
- Health appointments (which unavoidably fall during school time) and which the school have granted leave for.
- Religious or cultural observances which the school have granted leave for.
- A family emergency.

### **Unauthorised absence means an absence due to:**

- Parents keeping children off school unnecessarily or without reason, including:
  - Term time holidays which have not been agreed.
  - Birthdays.
- Truancy
- Absences which have not been properly explained
- Arrival after 9.20am where there is no satisfactory reason given for lateness.

## 3. Celebrating Good Attendance

The best prize from attendance is more for the child to spend learning with great teaching. However, we also celebrate outstanding attendance via:

- ✓ School reports.
- ✓ Certificates and prizes for excellent attendance (97% and above).
- ✓ Certificates for improved attendance.

## 4. What if a child is going to be off today?

If a child is going to be off school, parents need to let school know by 8:50 am on the first day. They should explain why their child is absent and how long they will be away. Parents can:

- Email [enquiries@oughtibridge.sheffield.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@oughtibridge.sheffield.sch.uk).
- Talk to office staff, their child's teacher, or the teaching assistant.
- Call 0114 2863167 and leave a message.

### **What happens if parents do not let us know?**

If we don't hear about an absence, staff call the parent (usually before 10 a.m.) to check on the child. If no one answers, then we call the other contacts listed.

If our office staff can't reach anyone, they involve senior staff and possibly contact social services or the police to make sure the child is safe. In some cases, our staff may visit the home.

### **Longer Absences**

If a child is absent today and it's going to be for more than the next five days (or for more than 10 days in a term), parents must give a written explanation. The school may ask for medical or other proof if a child has low attendance or if there's a concern about the reasons given.

## 5. Attendance Targets

**When a child smashes these goals, they have an even better chance of success for the rest of their life!**

Oughtibridge school expects very high attendance and punctuality from all children, and makes sure everyone understands this.

We aim for every child to have at least **96.5%** attendance, but also have broader bands so you can tell what your child's attendance means.

We share the rates of absence with parents, including via end-of-year reports.

Attendance rate	Attendance
Excellent	Over 97%
Satisfactory	95% - 97%
Becoming a Concern	90% - 95%
Concerning	Less than 90%

School absence quickly adds up and then takes away from a child's chance to be the best they can. Don't just think about today – think about the ten years that children are in school from the day they move up to Y1 until they leave Y11.

When we do this, it's easy to imagine the massive amount of lost learning through poor attendance. It's not hard to imagine how this can affect a youngster for the rest of their life.

Attendance per year	Time lost from Y1 – Y11
95%	½ a school year
90%	1 school year
85%	1.5 school years
80%	2 school years

No one would think it ok for their child to take a full year off.

But, if a child has 90% attendance, that's kind of what happens.

So you'll understand why we're ambitious for our children's attendance.

## 6. Mild Illness

Children can come to school with mild illness if it is safe and appropriate. Sometimes, the child just needs a few tweaks to help their day go smoothly. For example:

- Staying indoors at playtime.
- A quiet place to eat lunch.
- Letting the child know which member of staff to go to if they need help or feel worse.
- Phoning parents for an update at lunchtime.
- Parents providing medication to school where this complies with our *Administration of Medication* policy (this is on the policies page of our website).

If you are unsure, you can always give us a call or check out the helpful NHS guide:

[www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school)



## 7. Requests for time off

### Family Holidays

There are 175 days every year when children aren't at school. Attendance matters and so parents are expected to book holidays during the time that they are not legally obliged to have their children at school.

Parents can ask for leave of absence for family holidays but it is very unlikely that it will be agreed.

If leave is not granted, taking a child out of school is recorded as unauthorised absence and may result in sanctions (e.g. £320 in fines). We usually send a request to Sheffield Council for a fine to be issued to parents for unauthorised absence of **5 days or more**. You can read more about fines and consequences of absence in Sections 9, 10 and 11).

Sheffield Council publish term dates for at least the next year and a half. This makes it easy to plan your holiday within school breaks. To check ahead, Google 'Sheffield school term dates.'

### Health appointments

Parents must make medical or dental appointments outside of school hours if possible. Where this is not possible, parents will be expected to obtain approval for their child's absence to attend such appointments as far in advance as they can.

Where children are present when we do the register, appointments are not counted as an absence.

If appointments are during the day, it is expected that the child attends school prior to the appointment and returns afterwards.

### Religious observance

You need to request absence for religious observance at least **two weeks** in advance.

We only accept requests religious absence for days that are exclusively set apart for religious observance by the relevant religious body. That is defined as a day where parents would be expected by an established religious body to stay away from their own jobs to mark the occasion. We may ask for advice from the religious body.

### Other exceptional leave requests

In order to have any other requests considered, parents should contact the headteacher by completing an exceptional leave request form at least two weeks prior to the start of the leave of absence (unless the reason was not foreseeable). Parents will need to provide the reason and dates for the proposed absence.

All such requests go to the headteacher. The decision to grant or refuse the request is at their sole discretion, taking the following into account:

- The child's best interests,
- The educational impact,
- Their previous attendance.

The headteacher's decision is not subject to appeal; however, the school will consider to the parent's reasons and will be sensitive to the needs of the child and the family.

Where the absence is granted, the headteacher confirms the duration of it being authorised.

### **When we are very unlikely to say yes to a leave request:**

- Leave of absence for **family holidays**.
- When a child's attendance record shows **any** unauthorised absence. The head teacher may opt to use their discretion for a minimal number of unauthorised late codes).

### **When we will not say yes to a leave request:**

- During first two weeks of a new school year.
- During and just before national assessments (Y6 SATs, Y4 Tables Test, Y1 Phonics Test).
- Where a child's authorised absence record is already above 10% for any reason. For requests received in the first half term of the new school year, attendance data from the previous school year is used.
- Where the reason for exceptional leave request is clearly not exceptional and could normally be expected to happen for most families (e.g. a milestone birthday celebration).

When a term time leave request is denied, parents will be notified in writing with the reasons.

To recap: If leave is not granted, taking a child out of school is recorded as unauthorised absence and may result in sanctions (e.g. £320 in fines). We usually send a request to Sheffield Council for a fine to be issued to parents for unauthorised absence of **5 days or more** (see sections 10 and 11).

It's also important to note that not only is there one fine per parent – there's also fines issued for each child. So if a parent takes two children out of school, then the fine will be double (i.e. £640 for the family).

We cannot grant leave of absence retrospectively. Therefore, any absences that are not pre-approved are marked as unauthorised.

## **8. SEND or health conditions**

We recognise that some children with SEND or health conditions face extra barriers to good attendance. These barriers can be due to mental health as well as physical health.

If a child is unable to attend school for long periods of time due to their health, we will work with their parent, Sheffield Council specialists and the child to agree the best possible action plans. In rare cases, it might include an adjusted timetable to help reintegrate the child.

We try to ensure that children with health needs or home circumstances that cause extra absences can still be included in attendance rewards (e.g. by setting individual targets for them).

**Remember:** Attendance rates tell us about the child's attendance, and don't always tell us how much effort parents make to get their child to school!

Our full attendance policy has more detail – It is on the policies page of our website.

## 9. Truancy!

Truancy is **any** absence of part of a school day, for which no reason for absence has been given. It does not simply refer to children being absent without a parent's knowledge.

- If it happens, a letter of warning is sent to the child's parents, informing them of the truancy and stating that any repetition could result in escalating action.
- If any further truancy occurs, then the school will consider issuing a penalty notice.

Reasons for issuing a penalty notice include:

- Overt truancy.
- Inappropriate parentally-condoned absence.
- Unauthorised absence due to holidays in term-time.
- Persistent late arrival.

Our Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is involved if truancy links to a safeguarding concern.

## 10. When things start escalating...

### When are the council involved

School will try to work with parents to sort issues early. But there's also Sheffield Council support (as a next step). In general, the council's Attendance Officer looks at all our attendance that drops below 95%.

In a small number of cases, attendance below 90% following support may be a form of neglect. This means we might need to escalate concerns to social care.

### When are the legal processes started?

In theory, parents could be prosecuted (i.e. taken to court) over a single day of absence (e.g. a child being kept off for their birthday). In reality, neither schools nor parents want to end up in court over a single day.

A key trigger is 5 or more days of unauthorised absence. This same trigger is met after 10 half days of unauthorised absence (which is quickly reached if children arrive at school later than 9.20am).

Often, school warns parents that they might be fined. We'll tell them at this point what they need to do to avoid the fine (if we haven't done already). However, it depends on the circumstances (Why absence is unauthorised, how much absence in previous school year etc). As soon as the 5 day trigger

Sheffield Council have four main options:

- **Write to parents to warn them about their child's attendance.**
- **Issue parents with a fine.**
- **Seek an *education supervision order* (ESO):** If the council thinks a parent needs support getting a child to go to school but the parent is not co-operating, the council can apply to a court for an ESO. A supervisor is then appointed to help you get your child into school. The council can do this instead of, or as well as, prosecuting you.
- **Prosecute you:** This means you'll have to appear in court. The court case could lead to a fine (max value £2,500), a community order or the parent being sentenced to up to 3 months in prison.



## 11. Fines (More detail)

**Note:** If you came straight to this page, please read the previous page before this one.

### What are fines usually given out for?

Government stats show that about 90% of all attendance fines in England are issued for term-time holidays.

Schools had stopped turning a blind eye some time ago. However, the government further focused on this issue by tightening rules in 2024. The government wanted to end the post code lottery of some schools not sticking up for attendance as much as others.

Taking children out of school in term time is becoming less and less acceptable as the years have gone on.

### How expensive are fines

These are now £160 and there's one for each parent (so £320 for most families). Whilst it may be reduced for quick payment, that's only for parents who are fined for the first time.

It's also one per child, so if you've more than one child then it gets expensive very quickly.

### Subsequent absences (or term time holidays)

If second fine is issued, within 3 years, it is £160 per parent per child (again). However, there's no reduction for quick payment.

If there is a third offence, within 3 years, a fine is not issued. The issue is passed to the magistrates' court who can fine each parent up to £2,500 per child. Sheffield Council advise parents that, if found guilty, these cases can appear on a parent's criminal record check (also known as a DBS check).

If a child changes school (e.g. moves to Bradfield for Y7), the 3 year period still counts. Secondary schools are given the primary school records of their new children. They can then check the child's attendance during Y4 - Y6.

### Does school make money from fines?

No. Fines get paid to Sheffield Council.

The council are allowed to use the money to offset the cost of supporting attendance in the city.

### Our governor's view on fines

We don't want to our parents to be fined because, if fines are being issued, it means children have missed out on learning.

By the time fines are being issued, the situation is using an unacceptable amount of staff time that should be devoted to making school even better for all our children.

Therefore, we support the headteacher triggering fines without delay so that they can then better focus their time on the child's success and the success of every other child.

## 12. Be on Time

School starts at 8.50am and being late for school makes it harder for a child to flourish at school.

From 8.40am, staff open the doors for children to come and participate in morning tasks.

If a child is late by 10 minutes a day, they miss the equivalent of one week's learning in a year.

If a child is late arriving at school, the parent must take them to the main office to be signed in. If they are a few minutes late, they will receive a late mark. If they are very late (after 9.20am), this counts as an unauthorised absence for the whole morning.

### Children do better when they're on time because:

- ✓ It gets the day off to the best start.
- ✓ It means they don't miss a minute of learning with their teacher and friends.
- ✓ It reduces stress for the child (e.g. because they're having to rush).
- ✓ It grows good habits for adult life.

### Lateness hinders children because:

- Children often feel embarrassed.
- It may damage a child's confidence.
- It hinders a child's achievement because they miss school time.
- It can disrupt learning for classmates.

Where lateness is repeated, school continue to monitor the child's punctuality and hope to see an improvement.

We ask parents and children to make every effort to leave for school that little bit earlier each morning.

If there are reasons that we are unaware of that are causing your lateness, parents can make an appointment to speak to:

- Mrs Shelton, Deputy Head
- Mrs Doxford, Assistant Head.

If they are struggling, parents aren't alone. They shouldn't wait for us to get in touch to ask for help!

### Lateness: It adds up

If a child is 5 minutes late every day, does that matter?

Yes!

Because it all adds up.

Very quickly, the child has missed days of school.

Minutes late per day	Learning lost per year
5	3 days
10	5 ¾ days
15	8 ½ days
20	11 ½ days
30	17 days!

## The Power of Sleep

If every morning is tricky, it's worth reflecting on the bedtime routine and bedroom hygiene.

- ! Melatonin is a natural hormone in all of us that helps us sleep. However, phones, TVs and tablets give off a type of light that hinders melatonin production. Children's melatonin levels are thought to be especially vulnerable to the effects from screentime in the evening.
- ! Screen time also stimulates the brain, making it harder for a child to wind down for sleep.

That means:

- ⊘ Always keep electronic devices out of the bedroom.
- ⊘ Devices should be off and away for the whole hour before bedtime.

Books are great to have in the hour before bedtime.

## Did you know?



Larks and Foxes is the name of the child care we provide before and after school.

Children can be booked into our fabulous breakfast club which opens from 7:30am daily.

For more info, Google 'Oughtibridge Larks and Foxes' or ask at the school office.

## Transparency and Review

We publish this guide on our website. Updates can be approved by any member of SLT.

# 13. The last word on attendance

Do you remember that, at the start of this guide, we said school days are:



- ✓ A time for eyes to light up.
- ✓ A time for wonder and discovery.
- ✓ A time for dreams to run wild.
- ✓ A time for friends who feel like family.

Well... Who knows where great attendance will lead?

Here's one former pupil, Robin, collecting his first class master's degree.

That opened the door to one of Europe's best universities where he conducts research that will underpin the medical imaging equipment of the future.

If he and the team he works with can find the breakthroughs, it could lead to better radiation therapy in hospitals and so save millions of lives across the world.

And it all starts with good attendance...

See you at school tomorrow!

