



ST MARY'S SCHOOL HAMPSTEAD

Attendance and Punctuality Policy and Procedures

September 2024

Reviewed September 2024

Next Review Date: September 2025

MISSION STATEMENT

St Mary's School seeks to provide an outstanding education firmly founded on the Catholic Faith.

Spiritual and moral principles are nurtured in a way that is reflected in daily life.

Within a happy and caring environment and based on the recognition of the dignity and worth of each child, where each child is valued and high standards are expected. Intellectual development is emphasised and fostered along with the pursuit of academic excellence to achieve individual potential and spiritual development.

St Mary's values the unique contribution of every child within the school community.

St Mary's is inclusive and welcomes girls from all communities and faith backgrounds, or none, and believes that all benefit from the school's values.

St Mary's aims to encourage an active partnership between home, school, parish and the wider community.

BACKGROUND

Parents are legally responsible for making sure that their children of compulsory school age receive a suitable full-time education, which can be satisfied through regular attendance at school.

Furthermore, good attendance at school is essential for a pupil's education and establishes a positive working ethos early in life. At St Mary's, we see that good attendance is achieved through a successful partnership between parents, pupils and the school. School attendance is a whole school issue as well as a safeguarding issue.

ABSENCE

Student attainment and achievement depend on regular attendance at school. Any absence leads to missed learning and other experiences and may cause difficulties with social relationships.

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.
- **Unauthorised Absence:** is when the school has not received a reason for absence or has not approved a child's absence from school after a parent's request.

When a parent telephones the school with information that their child is unable to attend due to illness, or other circumstances, decisions regarding authorisation will always be made with reference to this policy.

EXPECTATIONS

We expect that all pupils will:

- attend school every day;
- attend school punctually;
- attend appropriately prepared for the day.

We expect that all parents/carers will:

- be aware of this policy and plan their family holidays accordingly;
- ensure regular school attendance and be aware of their legal responsibilities;
- ensure that their child arrives at school punctually and prepared for the school day;
- ensure that they contact the school daily of absence or if known in advance, whenever their child is unable to attend school;
- contact school promptly whenever any problem occurs that may keep their child away from school;
- notify school immediately of any changes to their contact details or their nominated emergency contact details;
- arrange out of school appointments to minimise school absence.

We expect that the school will:

- manage all pupil attendance matters in accordance with this policy;
- provide a welcoming atmosphere and a safe learning environment;
- provide a sympathetic response to any child's or parent's concerns;
- keep regular and accurate records of attendance and punctuality, following up any concerns when necessary;
- contact parents when a child fails to attend, and no message has been received to explain the absence.
- the School will make a sickness return to the local authority if a pupil is recorded in the attendance register as absent using the national absence code I (unable to attend because of sickness) and there are reasonable grounds to believe that the pupil will have to miss 15 consecutive school days or more for illness or the pupil's total number of school days missed during the current school year because of illness (whether consecutive or cumulative) will reach or exceed 15 school days.

The School recognises some pupils may find it harder than others to attend School and will work with those pupils and parents to try to remove barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.

The School will make reasonable adjustments where a pupil has a disability that puts them at a substantial disadvantage, in comparison with pupils without a disability, in relation to school attendance.

It will also work with parents, and where appropriate with the local authority, to develop specific support approaches for attendance for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities e.g. ensuring the provision outlined in a pupil's education, health and care plan is accessed.

Suitable strategies will also be considered for pupils with any social, emotional or mental health issue that is affecting their attendance.

Where barriers are outside of the School's control, the School will work with parents and pupils to identify alternative sources of support or consider, where appropriate, making a referral for early help.

INFORMATION SHARING

Personal information on attendance will only be shared in line with legal obligations and having regard to government guidance on attendance, safeguarding and children missing education.

The School, local authorities and other local partners should work jointly and share data on individual cases where it is of benefit to a pupil (e.g. health services where there are medical conditions or the police where there are extra-familial harms).

Where appropriate the schools will attend regular targeting support meetings.

The School is legally required to share information from the registers with the local authority. As a minimum this includes:

- New pupil and deletion returns;
- Attendance returns;
- Sickness returns.

The law allows local authority officers access to the attendance and admission registers of all types of schools to carry out their functions under the Education Acts to support joint working between schools

and local authorities. These officers are also permitted to take digital or physical extracts of the School's registers.

In the rare occasion that there is a request, the School must provide specific pupil information on request to the Secretary of State. The School meets this requirement by having an electronic management information system containing the required information that can be accessed by the DfE. The School also uses this tool to monitor pupil level attendance and understand trends in attendance patterns.

Where appropriate, the School is expected to inform a pupil's social worker if there are unexplained absences.

PRINCIPLES OF MONITORING ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY

Mornings

1. School starts at 8:45am. The playground is open from 8:00am. Children are brought into the school building by school staff from 8:45am.
2. Staff are on duty at the front gate to welcome the children. They are then able to walk through the Reception area to the playground, where there are staff on duty to meet them and supervise. EYFS staff meet children outside and walk them to their classroom. When it is wet, the Mary Ward Hall entrance will be opened and pupils will wait (without their parent) in the Mary Ward Hall (or the Chapel Hall if the Mary Ward Hall is unavailable) until they are collected by their class teacher.
3. When they first enter the school in the mornings, children in Years 1-6 use their wristband and the EntrySign readers located in the Reception area; main corridor to the playground; and by the Mary Ward Hall entrance to log their presence on site. This will mark the child as present for the purposes of the morning register and ensure a fire list is available. EYFS staff use age appropriate procedures for the child to log themselves as present in school (such as moving their name to an "in school" list) as the child arrives in their classroom.
4. After 8:45am any child arriving must come into school via the Reception and be reported late by the adult bringing them. The school doors are closed at 9:00am.
5. The School Office is responsible for ensuring that children are signed in as late in the EntrySign system (including their arrival time and reason for lateness), which will also record them as late in the register. Parents are required to explain why they have arrived late and this explanation is recorded.
6. Registers are taken every morning by class teachers at 8:45am using the official registers on the school's Information Management System (iSAMS) and the legal attendance and absence codes. In the mornings, this will include checking that all the pupils whose presence has already been recorded by the EntrySign system are present within the class. Action to locate a child is taken immediately by the class teacher if a child is recorded as present but has not arrived in the classroom.
7. On the first day of a child's absence, parents contact the School Office (telephone or email) by 9:00am to explain why their child is absent. A voicemail box dedicated to absences is available for this purpose (Option 1 on dialling the school number). We ask that absences advised to us directly in telephone calls (i.e., not via the absence voicemail system) be confirmed in writing with a follow-up email. A record of this communication, including date, time and reason for absence, is made in the register. Parents may also email their class teacher but must ensure that the School Office (Office@stmh.co.uk) is copied in.

8. The class teacher is responsible for recording the child's presence at school in the register and for identifying any pupils noted by the EntrySign system as present on site but not in their classroom. The School Administrator is responsible for the checking the correct entry of data into the school's registers regarding all pupil absences and following up on any unexplained absences.
9. The registers close at just after 8:45am (when the teachers have done the registers in the classroom) after which a late arrival is recorded as an unauthorised absence unless there is an exceptional circumstance (e.g., traffic hold-up due to a traffic accident; severe weather conditions; exceptional family circumstances on that day etc.).

Afternoons

12. In the afternoons, the register will be taken by the class teacher/specialist taking the class at the start of the first session after the lunch break using the official registers on the school's Information Management System (iSAMS) and the legal attendance and absence codes. Afternoon registers close 30 minutes after the start of the afternoon session for that class. Afternoon sessions start at 12:45pm (Pre-Nursery – Year 3); and 1:45pm (Year 4 – Year 6; earlier when off-site PE occurs in the afternoon).
13. Pupils arriving late but less than 30 minutes after the start of the child's afternoon session are recorded as late but counted as present for that session. Pupils arriving late when their class is on off-site PE will not be able to join their class but will be given an appropriate activity to undertake within school.
14. After the afternoon register has closed for that class, late arrival is recorded as an unauthorised absence unless there is an exceptional circumstance (e.g., traffic hold-up due to a traffic accident returning from an appointment; severe weather conditions; exceptional family circumstances on that day etc.).

Recording Absences

15. The class teacher is responsible for recording the child's presence at school in the register. The School Administrator is responsible for the checking the correct entry of data into the school's registers regarding all pupil absences and following up on any unexplained absences.
16. Pupils out of school but attending therapy / specialist education appointments are recorded in the register as present (this is classified as, attending education off-site).

Other

17. Pupil attendance will be prioritised and reported at all meetings with parents, pupil progress meetings, IEP review meetings and Parents' Evening meetings etc.
18. The admissions register and the attendance register must be available for inspection during school hours when requested.
19. School register records are legal documents, which may be required to be submitted as evidence in legal proceedings and are kept in school for six years from the date of the entries.
20. The registers must be kept electronically, and back ups must be made at least once a month. The back-ups must be kept for six years after the end of the year to which they relate.
21. The school will use the statutory codes when registering a child's attendance.
22. The school records and monitors the attendance of all pupils (both of compulsory and non-compulsory school age) in accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) (Regulations) 2024.

23. The School will also use these records to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) and work with pupils and parents to resolve any issues before they become entrenched.

HOW WE FOLLOW UP ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY: DAILY MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP

1. We ask all parents to contact the School Office by 9:00am to explain a child's absence including the specific details of any sickness.
2. For reasons of safeguarding (Child Protection), this also applies to Pre-Nursery, Nursery and Reception children below statutory school age so that we can account for the whereabouts of any children not present in school.
3. For reasons of safeguarding (Child Protection), we operate a daily policy - parents are telephoned every day of a pupil's absence if they have not contacted the school by 9:00am to explain their child's absence. Where absence is expected to last more than one day (for example chickenpox), the parent may advise the school of this at the time of recording a pupil's absence and a note will be made in the register of the expected return date.
4. When the Office cannot get hold of either parent of an absent child, the Office will call all emergency contacts available to ascertain the child's whereabouts.
5. If it is not possible to ascertain the whereabouts of a missing pupil, an email will be sent on the same day to the child's parent(s) requesting contact be made with the School Office as soon as possible to explain the child's absence.
6. The School Office always brings to the Deputy Head Teacher's immediate attention (or the Headmistress in his/her absence) any unexplained pupil absence or any absence explanation that is felt to require further investigation.
7. Where necessary, the Deputy Head Teacher (or Headmistress in his/her absence) makes investigatory telephone calls to follow up an unexplained or suspicious absence.
8. If neither parent has contacted the school for five days, but it is understood from other sources (e.g., extended family; friends etc.) that the children are safe but absent from school without authorisation, the school will make an immediate referral to the Education Welfare Service for investigation.
9. Where there are concerns as to the safety or welfare of the child, the school will endeavour to contact parents via an immediate home visit. This may be done in conjunction with Camden Education Welfare Service, Children's Social Care, Health Services or the Police where appropriate.
10. Even where parents have advised that a pupil will be away for a number of days due to sickness, after a few days authorised sickness absence (normally two to three days), the School Office calls families of children absent due to sickness to enquire after the child's welfare. This may be followed up with a telephone call from the Headmistress or Deputy Head to discuss when the child can return to school.

Weekly Monitoring and Follow-Up

1. The School Administrator meets weekly with the Deputy Head Teacher regarding all matters of pupil attendance.
2. The School Administrator monitors and reports weekly to the Deputy Head Teacher, whole school and individual class attendance and any concerns regarding punctuality.
3. The School Office reports each week any pupils with less than 90% attendance.

Half-Termly Monitoring and Follow-Up

1. The Deputy Head Teacher reviews the register entries every half-term. The Deputy Head Teacher/Headmistress will send a letter to the parents of those who have missed school and remind them of the expectations.

Monitoring and Follow-Up from Time to Time

1. Parents of pupils with attendance and / or punctuality concerns that are not improving will be asked to meet with the Deputy Headmistress (at Parents' Evenings or on other occasions) to discuss ways of improving their child's attendance. These meetings are recorded in the attendance file and may be followed up with a letter to parents.
2. Regarding Reception children not yet of statutory school age (reached the beginning of the term after the child's fifth birthday), we have the same expectations regarding attendance and punctuality as we do of statutory school aged children. Where there are persistent attendance and / or punctuality concerns, the Deputy Head Teacher will meet with the child's parents to explain the negative impact on their child's learning and the importance of establishing good attendance and punctuality habits.

ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS

The school makes every effort to stay open during adverse weather conditions, taking into account all necessary Health and Safety aspects (for example condition of the site, staff: pupil ratios etc.).

Regarding instances of school staying open in severe weather conditions e.g., snow, parents are expected to make every effort to bring their children to school especially when other parents living in the same locations are successfully bringing their children to school.

During periods of heavy snow, the registers remain open until later to allow for longer journey times.

It is understood that some families living further away from school may have more challenging journeys.

Parents are expected to telephone the School Office to discuss this situation in these circumstances. School may close earlier on heavy snow days to facilitate an easier journey home for the children.

MEDICAL AND DENTAL APPOINTMENTS

Parents are asked to arrange routine dental and optician check-ups for their children in the school holidays/out of school hours as well as non-emergency GP appointments out of school hours where possible.

Where a pupil is required to be absent from school for a medical appointment, parents are required to request authorisation by emailing the School Office to explain the appointment and reason for the absence.

Parents are asked to minimise time their children miss school for medical appointments by requesting only the time required for the appointment (and travel) with no extra time for convenience.

Where required in school time, we ask parents to endeavour to arrange medical / dental etc. appointments such that children are in school for register times: 8.45am and 1pm (Pre-Nursery – Year 1); 1:15pm (Year 2) and 1:45pm (Year 3 – Year 6; earlier when off-site PE occurs in the afternoon) and, where well enough to attend school before and / or after the appointment.

Children are expected to be absent from school only for the time necessary to attend an appointment and not any extra time for convenience. This may, for example, involve bringing a child in for registration and returning later in the morning to collect them for an appointment.

PARENT PROCEDURES

All communication to the School Office regarding pupil attendance and absence has to be made via email (Office@stmh.co.uk) or by hard copy letters.

All requests for school absence (unless medical) must be made at least two school weeks in advance of the proposed absence.

Emails sent at the weekend, at night or in the school holidays are noted as received the first following school morning.

Parents must ensure that children arriving late are signed in at the Office and children leaving early are signed out at the Office. This is for reasons of Health & Safety so that in the event of an emergency, we know who is in the building.

AUTHORISED AND UNAUTHORISED ABSENCES

The school is obliged by law to differentiate between authorised and unauthorised absence.

A letter or telephone message from a parent does not in itself authorise an absence.

Only if the school is satisfied, in accordance with this policy, as to the validity of the explanation offered, can the absence be authorised.

The Headmistress (or Deputy Head in her absence) makes the decision as to whether an absence should be authorised or unauthorised.

Where necessary, it is the parents' responsibility to provide all evidence of absence and bear any costs that this may incur.

School Procedure for Requests for School Absence

1. All requests for school absence are dealt with in accordance with this policy.
2. All requests for school absence are received via email by the School Administrator.

3. Where a request is straight-forward and in accordance with this policy, the Headmistress has delegated the responsibility to the School Administrator of deciding and communication authorisation (via email) of the request to the parents. For example, in the cases of absence to attend a medical appointment; single day / part of day requests to attend an external examination etc.

Examples of When Absence may be Unauthorised

1. No explanation of a child's absence is forthcoming within five working days.
2. The school is dissatisfied with the explanation (for example, all the children from one family are off sick for one day or reported sick the day after a holiday etc.).
3. The parent has been advised that absences will not be authorised without appropriate medical confirmation, and no medical confirmation is given.
4. The pupil is absent from school for the purpose of an unauthorised holiday.
5. The pupil is absent from school due to not returning to school from an authorised holiday at the given date.
6. The pupil, on returning to school, explains an alternative reason for the absence (this will be discussed further with the child's parents).