



## **The Importance of School Attendance**

At Brook Infant School and Nursery, we recognise that improving attendance is everyone's business. The barriers to accessing education can be wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual children and families. The foundation of securing good attendance is that school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all children want to be and are keen and ready to learn. It is also in the positive relationships that we make with the children and their families.

### **The Law on School Attendance and the Right to a Full-Time Education**

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. **It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.**

**Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.**

Evidence shows that at the end of Key Stage Two (junior school), children not meeting the standard in reading, writing and maths had an absence rate of 4.7%, compared to 3.5% among those meeting the expected standard.

For the most vulnerable children and families, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided.

### **Working Together to Improve Attendance**

At Brook Infant School and Nursery, we want to work with our families to improve attendance and punctuality of our children. In order to do this, all partners need to work together.

We use the following steps as a structure for our support.

- **EXPECT ...** We aspire to high standards of attendance from all children and parents and work hard to build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn. We understand the importance of establishing strong relationships with our families and we them to talk to us as the earliest opportunity if there are any barriers surrounding attendance so that we can think creatively and try to find a way forward for everyone by either removing the barrier or finding a route around it.
- **MONITOR ...** We rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.
- **LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND ...** When a pattern is spotted, we discuss this with our families and listen to understand barriers to attendance before agreeing how all partners can work together to resolve them.

- **FACILITATE SUPPORT ...** We work with our families to remove barriers in school and help children and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an Early Help or whole Family Plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.
- **FORMALISE SUPPORT ...** Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, we work with our families and explain the consequences clearly. We ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond.
- **ENFORCE ...** Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, we will enforce attendance through statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the child's right to an education.

### **Developing and Maintaining a Whole School and Nursery Culture that Promotes the Benefits of High Attendance.**

We know that good attendance is a learnt behaviour, and so we work hard to develop a good pattern of behaviour from the outset and as an integral part of our school and nursery ethos and culture. This is true of our children in Nursery and Reception who are under statutory school age as if the child learns you can be absent for school for holidays, breaks, family parties and so on, they begin to think this is how it is going forward.

In building a culture of good school and nursery attendance, we strive to:

- Recognise the importance of good attendance and, alongside good behaviour, make it a central part of the school's vision, values, ethos and day to day life.
- Recognise the interplay between attendance and the side school and nursery improvement efforts, building it into strategies on attainment, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, supporting children with medical conditions or disabilities, safeguarding, well-being, and support for disadvantaged children (including use of pupil premium).
- Recognise improving attendance is a school leadership issue and have a designated senior leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance in school.
- Make sure all teaching and support staff know the importance of good attendance, are consistent in their communication with children and parents, and receive the training and professional development they need.
- Make sure attendance support and improvement is appropriately resourced, including where applicable through effective use of pupil premium funding. Where possible this should include pastoral support staff who can work with families and school leaders.
- Set high expectations for the attendance and punctuality of all children and communicate these regularly to children and parents through communication channels. In doing so, schools should help parents to understand what is expected of them and why attendance is important to their child's attainment, well-being, and wider development. It should also include clarity on the short- and long-term consequences of poor attendance.
- Visibly demonstrate the benefits of good attendance throughout school life.
- Recognise that attendance is never 'solved' and is a continuous process by regularly reviewing and updating messages, processes and strategies.
- Recognise children missing in education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, sexual abuse and child sexual and criminal exploitation.

### **Our Attendance Expectations**

An effective whole school culture of high attendance is underpinned by clear expectations, procedures and responsibilities.

#### At Brook Infant School and Nursery ...

- Our main gates open every morning at 08:25 to allow time for everyone to be on the playground so that the children can enter school once the doors open at 08:30. The gates then close at 08:35. If children in nursery are due to arrive for a 09:00 start, they are to be waiting at the nursery gate at 09:00 and the gate will then be opened at this time.
- Our children are registered upon entry to the building and any children who are after 08:35 need to enter the building via the main office and our families need to sign them into school using the signing in system in the entrance foyer. This system links to Bromcom and so updates the registers accordingly.
- Some of our nursery children leave at 11:30 and parents should collect from the nursery gate. Some arrive at 12:00 and again, these families need to be waiting at the nursery gate for 12:00 and the gate will then be opened at this time.
- Our main gates are opened every afternoon at 14:55 to allow time for everyone to be on the playground so that the children can be dismissed to the families at 15:00. The gates will then close again at 15:05.
- We ask all our families to report any absence before 09:00 so that register can be updated. All absence can be reported through the My Child at School (MCAS) app. The 'Report Child's Absence' form can be found under 'Important Forms' on the app.
- We ask all our families who need to apply for an 'Absence from Learning' to do this through the MCAS app, again this form can be found in the 'Important Forms' section.
- If we are not informed about an absence, we will contact the family to find out why the child is not in school. This forms part of our safeguarding responsibility, and we have to have this information by 12noon. If we cannot locate the child or the family, we then have to work with other agencies (such as Early Help) so we can locate the missing child.
- We hold more than one emergency contact number for every child as this gives a greater chance of making contact with a responsible adult.
- Mrs Sarah Cox (Headteacher) and Mrs Jack Sexton (Inclusion Manager) are the senior leaders responsible for the strategic approach to attendance within the school. They will analyse attendance data and look for patterns and trends in order to plan for any needed intervention and support.
- If any families have any questions or queries about attendance or punctuality, they should contact Mrs Ceri Tinning via emailing [office@brookinfant.school](mailto:office@brookinfant.school) or telephoning 01293 886521. Messages will then be passed to staff as appropriate.
- All of our families can see attendance data for their child on the MCAS app. This data shows their percentage attendance in real time.
- We review attendance and punctuality regularly and speak to families at the gate to try and see if we can make improvements together and arrange meetings as appropriate. Each half term we send letters to families in which there has been persistent and severe absence. These letters will detail how much has been missed, what this absence means for their child and also talk about the need for any Fixed Penalty Fines.
- We issue Fixed Penalty Notices when there has been an unauthorised absence for 10 consecutive sessions, such as for family holiday, but also when there have been 10 unauthorised absences. We also issue Fixed Penalty Notices for persistent lateness.
- We work closely with the Early Help Team and our Family Link Worker is Natalie Goshawk. Natalie works with us and together we can offer support to families who are struggling with attendance and punctuality. We work to help lessen or remove barriers to attendance and punctuality. If there is still no improvement, then we would work alongside the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to plan our next steps.
- If children have an extended period of absence for any reason, we would work as a team to support them back into school and help to build their confidence and bridge any gaps.
- We will apply our approach to attendance and punctuality fairly and consistently, but we will always consider the individual needs of our children and their families who have specific barrier to

attendance. We consider our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **Attendance Register**

The law requires all schools to have an attendance register and all children must be placed on the school roll and have their attendance recorded in the attendance register.

At Brook Infant School and Nursery, our registers will be taken on the doors in the morning and at the start of our afternoon sessions. We used the agreed codes in Bromcom to mark absences as appropriate.

Registers are legal records, and all schools must preserve every entry in the school roll and attendance for three years from the date of entry.

Our registers close each day at 08:40 and 13:10, but Reception close their afternoon register at 12:55. In nursery our registers are open for 10 minutes from 09:00 until 09:10 and 12:00 until 12:10.

Our attendance registers are managed and monitored by our Attendance Officer, Mrs Ceri Tinning.

### **Granting 'Absence from Learning'**

At Brook Infant School and Nursery, we can only in exceptional circumstances warrant an 'Absence from Learning' request. We consider each application individually and take into account the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind the request.

As we can only grant 'Absence from Learning' in exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely an 'Absence from Learning' will be granted for the purposes of a family holiday.

If an 'Absence from Learning' is granted, it is for the Headteacher to determine the length of the time the child can be away from school.

### **Children with Medical Conditions or Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

Some children and families face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include children who suffer from long term medical conditions or who have special educational needs and disabilities. Their right to an education is the same as any other child and therefore attendance ambition for these children should be the same as they are for any other child. That said, in working with their parents to improve attendance, we will always be mindful of the barriers these children face and put additional support in place where necessary to help them access their full-time education.

### **Part-time Timetables**

All children of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. In very exceptional circumstances, where it is in the child's best interests, there may need to be a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs. For example, where a medical condition prevents a child from attending full-time education and a part-time timetable is considered as part of a reintegration package. A part-time timetable should not be used to manage a child's behaviour.

A part-time timetable must only be in place for the shortest time necessary and not be treated as a long-term solution. Any pastoral support programme or other agreement should have a time limit by which point the child is expected to attend full-time, either at school or alternative provision. There should also be formal arrangements in place for regularly reviewing the plan with the child and their parents.

In agreeing to a part-time timetable, a school has agreed to a child being absent from school for part of the week or day and therefore must treat absence as authorised.

### **Collaboration with Other Schools, Local Authorities and Other Partners**

All schools should work with the local communities (including voluntary and community groups) to help remove the barriers to attendance that families experience. In some cases, families will experience the same or similar barriers to attendance for multiple children who attend different schools in the area. Therefore, it is of mutual benefit for schools to work together where possible. We work particularly closely with Maidenbower Junior School (MJS) and Oriel High School, but are also in close contact with all other local schools as necessary.

At Brook Infant School and Nursery we work jointly with West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and other local partners and share data on individual cases where it is of benefit to the child (e.g., health services where there are medical conditions or the police where there are extra-familial harms).

We are committed to sharing attendance data with WSCC and as a minimum will ensure that we share with them every time a child's name is to be added, or deleted from, the school roll outside of standard times. We share deletions with WSCC before the deletion and additions within five working days of the addition.

### **Further Information**

For further information, please refer to the Department for Education (DfE) Guidance entitled [Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/guidance/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance) which applies from September 2022.