



The Governors of  
*Herons Dale Primary*  
*School*

have adopted the following policy:

**Attendance Policy**

**Reviewed by:**

**Meg Palmer**

**Date:**

**March 2023**

**Ratified by Governors:**

**April 2023**

**Review Date:**

**March 2024**

## **Introduction**

Hérons Dale School is a Special Primary School in Shoreham which caters for pupils with a diverse range of needs, including PMLD, SLD, MLD and ASD. We are committed to providing a stimulating learning environment in which all our children can feel happy, valued, safe, secure, and confident.

At Herons Dale we are very proud of what we can offer; we have a good range of facilities that help us to fully engage all our pupils in their learning and our children enjoy coming to school.

We strive to be flexible in our approach to ensure that we meet the needs of each child as each child is unique regardless of their age, ability, or diagnosis.

All our pupil's achievements are celebrated, no matter how small they are. Each step of learning is important to each child and their family.

## **Our Vision Statement**

"Enabling, valuing and empowering all, in our positive, safe and happy school."

## **Rationale and Aims**

At Herons Dale School we strive to ensure that pupils experience bespoke opportunities which cater specifically to meet their needs and to facilitate holistic progress. The Department for Education stipulate that 'pupils need to attend school regularly to benefit from their education. Missing out on lessons leaves children vulnerable to falling behind. Children with poor attendance tend to achieve less'. DfE, School Attendance, Guidance, November 2016.

In accordance with government expectations, Herons Dale School wishes to:

- Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence.
- Ensure every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled; and,
- Act early to address patterns of absence. Herons Dale School also supports government expectations of parents:
- Perform their legal duty by ensuring their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly.
- Ensure all pupils are punctual to their lessons.
- Promote the best level of attendance achievable by our students.

Within our school we recognise that:

Some pupils have significant medical conditions that make it unlikely they will achieve attendance at this level. The school does not consider it appropriate or beneficial for pupils who are unwell to attend school.

Sometimes pupils are unhappy about attending school. Families may be going through unsettled times that can make regular school attendance difficult. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents or carers and their child at an early stage.

Due to the nature of some pupils' needs it may only be possible to arrange holidays during term time, to facilitate our pupils and their families having quality time away from the stresses that crowds can induce etc. Herons Dale School is committed to working with families to ensure that maximum attendance is achieved wherever possible and that in circumstances where attendance is less than is desirable; we will work together with you to move towards improved attendance.

### **Information**

The people responsible for attendance matters in this school are Isabel Robson, Headteacher and Meg Palmer Assistant Head.

Each half day absence (defined as a session) from school must be recorded by staff at the school as either **authorised** or **unauthorised**. It is therefore a requirement that we receive information regarding the reason for every absence.

### **Authorised absences**

You must get permission **in advance** from the headteacher if you are planning to take your child out of school during term time. Your child may be allowed to miss school for:

- A death in the family or funeral
- Doctor, hospital, or dental appointments.

If you do not get permission and you take your child out of school, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

### **Unauthorised absences**

Unauthorised absences are when a pupil has been marked in the school attendance register as being absent from school without authority. It is only a headteacher who can authorise absence for any reason from school. These are an offence by the parent or carer and include:

- Keeping students off school without a good reason
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Students who arrive too late at school to get a mark
- Taking holidays that have not been approved by the school in advance

### **Attendance Policy**

The Government has directed that Headteachers may now only grant leave for a holiday in term-time where there are exceptional circumstances. In West Sussex, we may issue a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) if a pupil has accrued unauthorised absence from school and the school has referred the matter to us.

- Any absence marked in the register as unauthorised ('O' or 'N' codes)
- Persistent late arrival at school after the register has been taken ('U' codes)
- A holiday in term-time, which has not been authorised by the headteacher ('G' codes).

## Procedures

The school will monitor the attendance and punctuality of all pupils, following the procedures outlined below:

- Pupils may arrive on site from 8:30am
- Pupils must be handed directly into the care of a member of staff
- Pupils are expected to be on site by 8:45am
- Registers are marked by 9.15am and pupils will receive a late mark ('L' code) if arriving after this time (with the exception of pupils for whom there is an alternative arrival/departure arrangement linked to their SEN)
- At 9:45 the registers will be closed. Pupils arriving after this time will be marked in the register as on site but will receive an unauthorised absence for the morning session ('U' code). In accordance with the regulations, if your child arrives after that time, they will receive a mark that shows them to be on site, but this will not count as a present mark, and it will mean they have an unauthorised absence.
- Parents and carers are expected to contact the school office by **8.45am** on the day that their child is not able to come to school and any subsequent days that their child is absent. If issues arise with children and families coming to school for any reason, the Family Liaison Officer will contact all parties to offer support and assistance to ensure a smooth transition in the first instance.
- Please communicate your child's absence by phone or parent mail, and not on seesaw to your child's class teacher. This is to ensure we have the message of absence as quickly as possible. We would also be very grateful of an earlier notification, where possible, including the day before as this would support with planning cover and potentially reducing class closures.
- Office staff listen to absence calls
- Staff will call and email the parents/carers of any pupils absent without explanation. They will continue to call until they get an answer.
- If they get an overseas ring tone – it will be recorded
- If no reply at all we consider whether any children have additional agency support, such as a social worker or Early Help. The Safeguarding Lead or Family Liaison Officer will contact them.
- If there continues to be no answer then DSLs will convene and formulate a plan to handle based on knowledge of the family. Responses may include referring to children's services/MASH/Police etc. or undertaking a home visit if staffing allows.
- Parents and carers are expected to inform office staff verbally or by note of prior appointments e.g., medical. Pupils are encouraged to attend school before and/or after medical appointments where practical to access as much of the school day as possible.
- Any requests for exceptional leave should be made using the appropriate form. Forms are available from the school office and on the school website.
- The Safeguarding Lead and Family Liaison Officer will discuss any absences for concern. Absence monitoring letters will be sent home for pupils whose attendance falls below 86%.
- Parents and carers will be invited to a meeting in cases where there has been no improvement in a pupil's attendance or punctuality. All cases will be treated on an individual basis, considering personal circumstances.

## **School Refusal**

If a child who is on roll at Herons Dale is school refusing then we school will liaise with parents/cares to arrange fortnightly visits to ensure that either the school, social care, external agencies or alternative provision have sight on the child every 2 weeks to ensure we are doing our due diligence to safeguard.

## **Absence Requests**

Headteachers have been directed by the Government not to authorise any absence from school unless there is an 'exceptional' circumstance. You must get permission from the Headteacher if you want to take your child out of school for a holiday in term time. It's up to the Headteacher on how many days your child can be away from school if it is granted.

## **Term Time leave**

Leave may be granted in exceptional circumstances on an individual basis but arrangements should not be made without the school's prior agreement. The Headteacher may authorise absence in exceptional circumstances only. These might include:

- Leave granted on compassionate grounds for sudden unexpected incidents e.g. when a family member dies or is very ill.
- Special 'one off' family events such as weddings, funerals and other occasional celebrations (but not just because it is a pupil's birthday).
- Family holidays to accommodate the individual needs of our pupils e.g. when going on holiday at busy periods could be extremely traumatic to a pupil's wellbeing. The Headteacher will take into account whether requested absence will fall before and during assessment periods or examinations, whether a pupil's attendance record already includes any level of unauthorised absence and whether a pupil's attendance rate is already below 90% or will fall below that level as a result of leave and may not grant leave if this is the case. Taking leave without permission is 'unauthorised' absence. If you think the Headteacher's decision not to authorise the absence is unreasonable you have the right to make representations to the Chair of Governors, but the final decision over any action to be taken lies with the Head teacher and the LA.

## **Targets**

The special school national attendance statistic is now 86%. Pupils' welfare is of paramount importance to us and we believe that regular attendance and the consistency of routine throughout the year is essential for their success and fulfilment. We have high expectations for the pupils of Herons Dale and therefore will be setting the aim for 88% attendance.

The school has adopted the following attendance targets:

- Overall whole school attendance to be 88% or better and each individual child's attendance must be 88%.
- There will be no gaps between vulnerable groups and their peers' attendance.

Fixed Penalty Notices Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) are issued per parent, per child and are an alternative to prosecution, giving you an opportunity to discharge your criminal liability by paying a fine of £120, which must be paid within 28 days. They are generally issued where there have been at least 10 sessions of unauthorised absence from school within a recorded 10 school week period. However, there are some occasions where they are issued outside of these criteria. Should the period of absence for a holiday in term time be 15 school days or more, a FPN may not be deemed suitable. Instead, the matter may be brought directly before the court. After 28 days we will consider prosecuting for the original non-attendance, not for the non-payment of the FPN, however if you pay within 21 days, we will reduce the fine to £60.