

Priors Hall – a learning
community
Attendance Policy

2020-2021



Resilient – Ambitious – Curious -
Responsible – Respectful - Caring

Adopted: 1st September 2020

Review Date: 1st July 2021

Introduction

Regular attendance is important, any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning. Any pupil's absence disrupts teaching routines so may affect the learning of others in the same class. Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is your legal responsibility and permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution.

The Supreme Court has given its judgement on the meaning of what is meant by "attend regularly" at school for the purposes of section 444 of the Education Act 1996. The Supreme Court decided that "regularly" meant "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school".

Therefore, it is the expectation that all children attending Priors Hall – a learning community attend every day the school is open. In order to measure attendance, we take two registers a day. Once in the morning on arrival and once in the afternoon, after lunch. Children are counted back into the classroom following break time.

1. Aims

This policy outlines the aims and expectations of Priors Hall – A Learning Community to support pupil attendance at school.

2. Overview

No pupil should be deprived of their opportunity to receive an education that meets their needs and personal development.

In the first instance, it is the responsibility of parents/carers and pupils to ensure attendance at school as required by law.

Situations beyond the control of pupils and/or parents/carers may impact on attendance. We will, with the agreement and support of parents/carers, work in partnership with external agencies to resolve these.

The vast majority of pupils want to attend school to learn, to socialise with their peer group and to prepare themselves fully to take their place in society as well-rounded and responsible citizens with their skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to contribute to the life and culture of the communities.

3.COVID – 19 response

From September 2020, attendance to school is statutory and our 'pre lockdown' attendance policy will be followed, however, leaders at Priors Hall – a learning community recognise that many children have not been in school since March. Therefore it is our priority to support children and parents in

adapting to a 'new normal' post-national lockdown. We strive to allow a successful re-engagement with education to aim for regular attendance and punctuality for the whole school. We will do this by aiming to:

- Maintain a high level of confidence amongst parents that the school is a safe place for children to attend
- Provide reassurance to, and work with, parents of children from priority groups or who have been shielding during national lockdown.
- Articulate the effective measures put in place to secure the health and safety of all children
- Keep registers open 5 minutes later to take into account staggered arrival times
- Meticulously follow the guidance from Public Health England and the DfE

In order to prevent the spread of Covid-19, schools have a duty to minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend school. It is important that parents ensure that children do not come into the school if they have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or have tested positive in the last 7 days.

School staff will ensure that children are not exposed by ensuring that anyone developing those symptoms during the school day is sent home. These are essential actions to reduce the risk in schools and further drive down transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). All schools must follow this process and ensure all staff are aware of it. School will contact parents to collect their child if any of the Covid-19 symptoms, as outlined by Public Health England, are identified. Parents must collect their child as soon as they have received a phone call.

Government guidance states:

'If anyone in the school becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, or has a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia), they must be sent home and advised to follow 'stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection', which sets out that they must self-isolate for at least 7 days and should arrange to have a test to see if they have coronavirus (COVID-19). Other members of their household (including any siblings) should self-isolate for 14 days from when the symptomatic person first had symptoms.'

If children have to stay at home due to self-isolation, a note will be made on their absence record. Work will be provided by school to be completed if a child is self-isolating due to a family member presenting with symptoms. If the child themselves is unwell, they are not expected to complete the work set. If school are notified of a child self-isolating, we will remain in contact to ensure that the well-being of all is supported.

4. Expectations

We expect the following from parents/carers:

- To ensure their children attend school regularly and punctually
- To ensure that their children arrive in school well prepared for the school day and to check that they have done their homework
- To contact the school in confidence whenever any problem occurs that may affect their child's performance in school

- To ensure that they contact the School Office by either telephone before 8.45 am to advise the school if their child will not be attending school that day and the reason why.

5. Responding to Non-Attendance

When a pupil does not attend, the school needs to respond effectively, for safeguarding purposes.

In cases where a problem may appear to be emerging, the Headteacher may telephone the families concerned or invite parents/carers to meetings about attendance discreetly, to discuss the situation with them.

5.1 Recording Pupil Attendance and Absence

To ensure children's safety, and help us meet Government guidelines, we request that parents contact the school before 8.45 am on the first day of absence to inform us of their children's absence. Parent/carers are required to call in to inform us about any children absent for any reason. If the school is not contacted, a call home will be made to ensure all children are accounted for. If school cannot make contact with any of the people on the contact list, a home visit will be made.

If Your Child is Absent:

- Parent/carers are required to contact the School Reception Office on the day of the absence, informing them of the reason for absence and before the registration period at 8.45 am
- Each reason will be recorded on the child's registration document
- The parents/carers are required to contact the school EVERY day the child is absent
- If parents/carers do not contact the school and the school is unable to speak to anyone about the child's absence, the school will conduct a home visit to check the child is safe.

If we are concerned for the child's safety, a referral will be made to the MASH or the police may be called.

If your child needs to be taken out of school for any reason during the school day, please notify the school in advance and notify one of the office staff when taking the child out and on return. You will be asked to sign your child in and out. This will ensure the safety of your child at all times.

Any absences not explained will be marked as unauthorised. Should the school not require parents/carers to telephone about an absence, e.g. when a child is expected to be absent for some time for hospitalisation etc, the school will inform parents whether they are required to telephone in. An accumulation of unauthorised absences may result in a FPN (Fixed Penalty Notice) being issued.

When a pupil is late into school, i.e. after 9.00 am for the morning session, parents are required to sign in the pupil at Reception on arrival. They will receive a late mark in the register. This lateness will be marked as unauthorised absence.

It is essential that your contact details are kept up to date and ask that if parents/carers change either address or phone numbers then these details are communicated to the office so that our records can be amended.

5.2 Absence Management

It is the school that authorise absence. Parents/carers provide a reason for children being absent from school. It is at the discretion of the school as to whether this reason is acceptable or not.

The school may issue a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) to each Parent or Carer who fails to ensure the regular attendance of their child at school. This currently stands at £60 per child per parent if paid within 21 days but rises to £120 per child per parent for those paying within 28 days.

Priors Hall – A Learning Community follows the Northamptonshire LA School Attendance Fixed Penalty Notices Code of Conduct to ensure consistent approach across the school.

Authorising Absence

Authorised absence is where the school has given approval in advance for a pupil to be away or has accepted and explanation offered afterwards as a satisfactory reason for absence. An absence can only be authorised for the following reasons:

- Illness of the pupil concerned (not of the parent or another family member)
- A medical or dental appointment
- For the purpose of religious observation (one day only)
- It is an educational event/trip
- Family bereavements
- Fixed term exclusion or permanent exclusion until removed from roll or re-instated

It is important that you understand the circumstances when absence in term time will not be authorised by the school – such as:

- When a pupil is just starting the school. This is very important as your child needs to settle into their new environment as quickly as possible
 - Immediately before and during assessment periods
- When a pupil's attendance record already includes any level of unauthorised absence

In cases of medical absence, where the school has initially authorised the absence but the issue persists, the school may request the parent to provide evidence or request other GP/medical proof of absence from the parent; this change should be communicated to the parent in writing or included as part of a meeting with the school.

Holidays and requests for a leave of absence during term time

We advise parents that Priors Hall – A Learning Community follows the guidance which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/school-attendance-absence>.

Headteachers have the discretion to grant leave, but they should only do so in exceptional circumstances. If a Headteacher grants a leave request, it will be for them to determine the length of time that the child can be away from school. This, however, will not be granted for the purposes of a family holiday.

Parents who wish to request a leave of absence during term time are asked to complete a leave of absence form and submit any supporting evidence with it. Forms can be obtained from the school office.

Parents can be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) for taking their child on holiday during term time without consent from the school. The school works within the guidelines set out by the Northamptonshire Local Authority. Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) are issued to each parent and are for each child. A FPN is £60 per child per parent if paid within 21 days, and £120 per child per parent if paid between 22 and 28 days. If the fine is not paid, parents will be prosecuted in the magistrates' court.

Absence will not be authorised under the following circumstance:

- Shopping trips
- Holidays in term time
- Minding the house or looking after siblings
- Lateness after 9.00 when the registers have been taken
- Medical appointments that cannot be verified
- No reason given
- School staff have cause to believe that the note is not genuine or not valid

Attendance Monitoring

Attendance of all pupils is monitored by Priors Hall – A Learning Community administration staff and the Headteacher. On a weekly basis, every child's attendance is considered, and an overall percentage figure is created based on attendance during this academic year.

Priors Hall – a Learning Community applies the following procedures in deciding how to deal with individual absences:

Attendance Below 96%

Parents will be contacted with a letter (see Appendix 2 – attendance letter 1) to outline the decline in attendance and the offer of support to the family via a member of the school's SLT (Senior Leadership Team)

Attendance Below 90%

Parents will be contacted with a letter requesting a meeting with a member of the SLT (see Appendix 3 – attendance letter 2) to outline the decline in attendance and the offer of support to the family. This letter will also identify procedures that will be followed should the attendance figure continue to drop. A child attending school only 90% of the time or less is considered to be 'persistently absent'

according to the Government's expectations of attendance. Any case that is seen to have reached the PA mark or is at risk of moving towards that mark is given priority and parents/carers will be informed of this immediately

Attendance of 85% or Less

If a child's attendance reaches this level, parents/carers will be invited into a meeting outlining the School's concerns. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the attendance figure, an action plan will be set up and parents will be invited into school to discuss the situation in greater detail.

The school will request where necessary medical evidence to support the reasons for failing to attend school.

Fixed Penalty Warning Letters and Prosecutions

Any unauthorised leave of absence of ten consecutive sessions (5 consecutive days) will be subject to a Fixed Penalty Notice. Persistent absence/lateness will result in a warning letter being issued to each parent (Appendix 4).

The warning letter will be effective for twelve weeks and during this time it is an expectation that the child's attendance increases. If there is no improvement to the attendance for that child, a Fixed Penalty Notice will be issued which will result in a fine of £60 per parent per child (£120 if not paid within 28 days).

For the standard Section 444(1) prosecutions, there is a requirement for an overall attendance of below 85% with some unauthorised in the last 4 weeks. There are no limits to the number of times a warning letter can be sent. For the higher level, also known as the 'aggravated offence', a 444 (1A) letter needs to be issued. In these cases, there is a requirement for the parent/carer to have knowledge of this offence.

If the issuing of warning letters does not lead to the desired improvement, Northamptonshire County Council attendance officers will be contacted. At this stage, documentary evidence of the interventions already attempted should be provided by the school. If it meets the criteria, a FPN will be issued and a copy sent to the school. If the school would prefer a prosecution, and a warning letter had been sent, then Northamptonshire County Council will write to the parent/carer(s) and invite them to an Attendance Interview. At that meeting, a review will be planned. However, if there is no improvement then parents will be written to again and invited to a PACE Interview. Information will be given at the Attendance Interview about the PACE Interview and the parent(s) right to legal representation.

The PACE Interview will be carried out following the guidelines given to Local Authorities by the Department for Education. A police caution will be given to the parent(s) in accordance with Code C of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE).

Following the interview, the case will be booked into court. Northamptonshire County Council officer will inform the parents of the court date and write a Section 9 statement based upon the PACE interview and other supporting information, which has been provided by the school and/or other agencies. This 'court pack' will be sent to parents two weeks prior to any legal proceedings.

5.3 Punctuality

Start of the School Day

The classroom doors are open at 8.45* and the children come straight into class. The register for the morning session will be taken at 8.50 a.m. Pupils arriving after this time will be marked late on the register, the register closes at 9.00. After this time, the lateness will be marked as an unauthorised absence.

School will notify parents/carers of pupils who are persistently late.

The school may issue a Fixed Penalty Notice to each parent/carer where the child has persistent late arrival at school after the registers has closed. This currently stands at £60 per child per parent (for those that settle with 21 days) and £120 per child per parent (for those who pay within 28 days). The school works with the guidelines set out in the Northamptonshire School Attendance Fixed Penalty Notices Code of Conduct.

* Covid-19 amendments – these times have been adapted due to staggered start and finish times.

Punctuality

Priors Hall – A Learning Community actively discourages late arrival at school by challenging those who are persistently late or arrive late without reasonable explanation.

Priors Hall – A Learning Community applies the following procedure in deciding how to deal with individual concerns about punctuality.

Parents/Carers will be contacted with a letter to outline the decline in punctuality and the offer of support to the family via our SENDCo and SLT (see Appendix 5 – punctuality letter 1). Should the punctuality figure continue to drop a further letter will be sent (see Appendix 6 – punctuality letter 2)

Missed Sessions

If a child's punctuality reaches this level, parents/carers will receive a phone call outlining the School's concerns. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the punctuality figure, an action plan may result in a fine. This currently stands at £60 per child per parent if paid within 21 days but rises to £120 per child per parent for those paying within 28 days.

6. School Organisation

In order for the attendance policy to be successful, every member of the staff must make attendance a high priority and should convey to pupils the importance and value of education. In addition, there may be specific responsibilities allocated to individual staff.

Parents/Carers

Priors Hall – A Learning Community expects parents/carers to:

- Make contact with school on first day of absence and every subsequent day of absence thereafter, unless the School asks you not to do this.
- Support their child and the school achieving maximum attendance

Definitions

Every half-day absence from school has to be recorded by staff at the school as either authorised or unauthorised. Any information about the cause of each absence is always required if possible in writing, evidence will be required to support some absences.

Authorised absences are morning or afternoon sessions away from school where the school has either given approval in advance for a pupil to be away or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as a satisfactory reason for absence. All other absence must be regarded as unauthorised. Authorised absences can only be agreed by the Headteacher.

Unauthorised absences are those missed sessions that the Headteacher does not consider reasonable, or for which no 'leave' has been given. The Government makes it very clear that Headteachers are not to authorise any term time absences unless for very exceptional circumstances.

Other Circumstances - Unusual circumstances may arise that lead to a young person being absent from school. It is for the Headteacher to decide whether the explanation offered is reasonable. In such situations, the individual circumstance, previous attendance pattern and frequency of such incidents should be considered.

Ensuring Pupil Information is Up-to-Date

School will ensure, as far as possible, that the information they hold on pupils and parents is accurate and up to date. This will help to ensure that contact with families is productive and that referrals to other agencies are effective. Principle 4 of the Data Protection Act 1998 state 'Personal Data shall be accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date'. The School Office will send out Data Collection sheets three times a year.

Parents are asked to:

1. Amend the Data Collection Sheet with any information that has changes or is incorrect
2. Sign the Data Collection Sheet at the bottom to let us know that you have seen it
3. Return the Data Collection Sheet to the School Office within two weeks.

Safeguarding Statement

Safeguarding is everybody's business. Priors Hall – A Learning Community has an unwavering commitment to safeguarding to ensure that all our children and young people are safe and feel safe; that children, parents / carers and staff are able to talk about any safeguarding concerns and feel assured that they will be listened to; and that all staff and volunteers are aware of and implement safeguarding procedures and guidance, including what to do if they suspect a child or young person may be experiencing, or be at risk of harm. In essence, we instil a culture of vigilance. All concerns should be given to our school Designated Safeguarding Leads, Ben Lynch, Tess McQuade, Jenna Smith or Alex Crawford.

- In any case where an adult is concerned that a child is, or may be, at risk of significant harm they must report this immediately to the DSL or to a member of the

Safeguarding Team who will make a referral directly to Northamptonshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

- If a child or other person is at immediate risk of harm, the first response should always be to call the police on 999. This Policy applies to all adults, including volunteers, working in or on behalf of Priors Hall – A Learning Community.

Approval: Attendance Policy

This policy was ratified by Priors Hall – A Learning Community governors Date:

1st September 2020

Next Review on or before: July 2021

This policy will be reviewed annually and approved by governors

Appendix 1

Attendance letter 1 – Attendance Below 96%



Date

Dear Parents/Carers

We are writing to you as it has been recognised that XXXXXXXX has been absent from school for a period of time during this academic year resulting in an attendance rate of XXXXXXXXXXXX.

The Supreme Court Judgement on 6th April 2017 defined 'regular' attendance as being in school every day that the school is open. This is therefore the expectation for all children attending Priors Hall – A Learning Community.

Attending school every day is essential for your child and their learning and social development. Holidays during term time will be recorded as unauthorised and this will affect your child's attendance record.

Should you have any difficulty getting your child to school every day, we can work with you and your family, so please contact the School Office to arrange this further.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix 2 –

Attendance Letter 2 – Attendance below 90%



Dear Parents/Carers,

We are writing to you as it has been recognised that xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx has been absent from school for a period of time during this academic year resulting in an attendance rate of _____%.

The Supreme Court Judgement on 6th April 2017 defined 'regular' attendance as being in school every day that the school is open. This is therefore the expectation for all children attending Priors Hall – A Learning Community.

Attending school every day is essential for your child and their learning and social development.

Holidays during term time will be recorded as unauthorised unless otherwise granted and this will affect your child's attendance record.

We invite you in to school to attend a meeting to discuss the reason for your child's persistent absence on _____.

Should you have any difficulty getting your child to school every day we can work with you and your family, so please contact the School Office to arrange this further.

Should your child's attendance fail to improve, you may be issued with a formal warning.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix 3 –

Fixed Penalty Warning Letter



Dear Parents/Carers

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE WARNING LETTER Name:

DOB: Year Group:

I write to advise you that you could face a legal sanction if you fail to ensure that your child attends school regularly and punctually.

During the period to the school was open for sessions and xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx attended on _____ and or was late after the registration on _____ occasions. Your child's overall attendance is _____%.

Section 7 of the Education Act, 1996 states that you have a legal duty to ensure your child's regular attendance at school; therefore, if your child's attendance does not improve the matter will be referred to the Local Authority who will commence legal proceedings. This could mean, under the terms of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, a Fixed Penalty Notice will be issued to you and a fine of £60 per parent per child will become payable in 21 days or £120 per parent per child will be payable after 21 days but within 28 days. A Notice could be issued three weeks after the date of this letter, if there is no improvement in your child's attendance or punctuality. This warning is in place for 12 (twelve) school weeks as set out in the Northamptonshire Code of Conduct for their issue.

Alternatively, the Local Authority will write to invite you to an Attendance Interview at your child's school. If there is no improvement after the interview, legal sanctions will commence, and you will be invited to a formal caution interview as required by the PACE Act which will lead to a prosecution in the magistrates' court under section 444(1a) Education Act 1996: if convicted you will receive a fine of up to £2,500 and/or 3 months imprisonment for an "aggravated" offence or a fine of up to £1000 and a criminal record for a Level 3 offence.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix 4 –

Punctuality Letter 1



Dear Parents/Carers

I am writing to you as it has been recognised that xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx arrived late _____ last term.

Arriving late to school is not in the best interest of your child as they miss vital learning.

I would like to clarify that our classroom doors open at 8.45 for your child to arrive at school.

Registration and early morning work takes place from 8.45 am to 8.55 am. When a child arrives after 8.45 they are marked as late.

Any child arriving after 9.00 am will have an unauthorised marked session for the first half of the day.

Should you have any problems getting your child to school then we can work together to ensure your child gains the most from their school day.

Please contact the School Office should you wish to discuss this.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 5 –
Headteacher

Punctuality Letter 2



Dear Parents/Carers

We are writing to you as a follow up from our previous letter in which we were highlighting your child's lateness to school. Your child has now been late _____ times, totalling _____ minutes of lost learning.

Arriving late to class is not in the best interest of your child as they miss vital learning.

I would like to clarify in writing that our doors open at 8.45 am for your child to arrive in school.

Registration and early morning work takes place from 8.45 to 8.55 and any time after 8.45 children are marked as late. If they arrive after 8.45 am they need to come through the main reception to be signed in by the adult who brings them to school with an explanation given for the lateness.

We have wrap around care onsite from 8.00 am should this be easier for you. Please contact the School Office to get more information.

Should your child continue to keep arriving late to school then you will be invited in to discuss this matter. This will now be monitored over the coming weeks.

Appendix 6 –

If you have any issues regarding this, or have any problems getting your child to school then please contact us as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher