

# The Bliss Charity School



## Attendance Policy

(2021-2022)

### Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction .....                            | 2  |
| 2. Guidance and legislation .....                | 2  |
| 3. Aims of this policy .....                     | 2  |
| 4. The role of parents/carers .....              | 3  |
| 5. The role of pupils .....                      | 3  |
| 6. The role of school staff .....                | 4  |
| 6.1 The role of teachers .....                   | 4  |
| 6.2 The role of the school secretary .....       | 4  |
| 6.3 The role of the headteacher .....            | 5  |
| 7. The role of the governing body.....           | 5  |
| 8. Lateness .....                                | 5  |
| 9. Absence.....                                  | 6  |
| 10. Leaving during the school day.....           | 7  |
| 11. Managing attendance .....                    | 7  |
| 11.1 Encouraging high attendance .....           | 7  |
| 11.2 Dealing with poor attendance.....           | 7  |
| 11.3 Penalty Notices and court proceedings.....  | 8  |
| 12. Emergency closure procedure .....            | 8  |
| 13. Non-collection of children .....             | 8  |
| 14. Children missing <i>in</i> education.....    | 9  |
| 15. Children missing <i>from</i> education ..... | 9  |
| 16. Inclusion .....                              | 10 |
| 17. Links with other policies .....              | 10 |
| 18. Complaints procedure.....                    | 10 |
| 19. Review.....                                  | 10 |

## 1. Introduction

The Bliss Charity School is committed to helping every child make excellent progress and attain as highly as possible, as well as providing a rich and broad range of curricular and extra-curricular experiences for them to enjoy. High attendance is key to children being successful and benefitting fully from these opportunities, as well as helping them to make and sustain friendships.

Research by the Department for Education (DfE)<sup>1</sup> found that:

- The higher the overall absence rate across Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4, the lower the likely level of attainment at the end of Year 6 and Year 11.
- Pupils with no absence are 1.3 times more likely to achieve the expected standard or above at the end of Year 6 than pupils who missed 10-15% of all sessions.
- Pupils with no absence are 3.1 times more likely to achieve the higher standard at the end of Year 6 than pupils who missed 10-15% of all sessions.

Furthermore, regular, punctual, attendance establishes good habits that will support pupils throughout their lives, whereas poor attendance can put pupils at risk by encouraging anti-social behaviour. Moreover, absence and lateness also affect the achievement of others as adult support has to be re-directed into helping pupils 'catch up' when they return to school – or arrive late to school – instead of being used where it is most needed.

## 2. Guidance and legislation

This policy has been written in line with the latest guidance from the DfE:

- [DfE – 'School attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities \(August 2020\)'](#)

This policy is based on the following legislation:

- The Education Act 1996 - sections 434(1)(3)(4)&(6) and 458(4)&(5)
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016

## 3. Aims of this policy

This policy aims to clarify the role of all stakeholders in promoting and achieving high attendance this academic year. By working together, parents/carers, pupils, staff and governors, at The Bliss Charity School can continue to achieve a high attendance rate which exceeds the national average<sup>2</sup>:

| 2016-2017 |          |            | 2017-2018 |        |        | 2018-2019 |          |            | 2019-2020 <sup>3</sup> |          |            | 2020-2021 <sup>4</sup> |          |            |
|-----------|----------|------------|-----------|--------|--------|-----------|----------|------------|------------------------|----------|------------|------------------------|----------|------------|
| School    | National | Difference | School    | School | School | School    | National | Difference | School                 | National | Difference | School                 | National | Difference |
| 97.1%     | 96%      | +1.1%      | 96.8%     | N/A    | N/A    | N/A       | 96%      | +1.1%      | N/A                    | N/A      | N/A        | N/A                    | N/A      | N/A        |

Our whole school attendance target for 2021-2022 is 97%.

<sup>1</sup> [DfE – The link between absence and attainment at KS2 and KS4 \(2016\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Overall absence in the last three years (excluding 2019-2020) was in the lowest 20% of all schools.

<sup>3</sup> No attendance figures due the partial school closure during 2019-2020 caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

<sup>4</sup> No attendance figures due the partial school closure during 2020-2021 caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

#### **4. The role of parents/carers**

Parents/carers have a [legal duty](#) to ensure that their child attends school regularly and arrives on time. Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 says that parents are guilty of the offence of failing to secure regular attendance at school unless they can prove that their child was absent:

- With leave (for which the headteacher has given permission due to 'exceptional circumstances').
- Due to sickness or any unavoidable cause (the sickness or unavoidable cause must relate to the child, not a parent/carer).
- Religious observance.
- Failure by the Local Authority to provide transport.

In law, these are the only acceptable reasons for a child being absent from school.

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to:

- Encourage their child to value the importance of education and view going to school positively.
- Ensure that their child attends school regularly – aiming for 97% attendance means less than 7 days off school all year.
- Ensure their child arrives at school on time each day, properly dressed and with the right equipment for the day – the school day starts promptly at 8:55 am.
- Use the latest [NHS guidance](#) when deciding whether their child is too ill to attend school – the school office can provide assistance.
- Comply with the latest clinical and/or public health advice regarding when pupils can/cannot attend school – where children are not able to attend school due to clinical and/or public health advice, absence will not be penalised.
- Notify the school on the first day of absence (and every day of absence thereafter) before 8:30 am by phone or email – this is a safeguarding requirement so that all parties know that the child is safe and their whereabouts is known.
- Provide regular updates regarding their child's absence and inform the school when their child is returning.
- Complete a 'Request for Absence Form' (these are available from the school office and on the [school website](#)) – authorisation will only be given in 'exceptional circumstances' (see section 9).
- If requested to do so, provide medical evidence for absences where the school has attendance concerns – in these circumstances, failure to provide suitable evidence (i.e. a letter, an email or a telephone call from a GP) will lead to the absence being unauthorised.
- Meet with the headteacher to discuss their child's absence and/or punctuality, if requested to do so.

#### **5. The role of pupils**

It is the responsibility of pupils to:

- Get up and ready for school when requested by parents/carers.
- Work together with parents/carers and siblings to get out of the house on time for school.
- Value the importance of school and recognise that high attendance leads to good achievement.
- Report illness concerns honestly so that parents/carers can make the right decision about school attendance.
- Wash their hands for 20 seconds with soap and water – or use hand sanitiser – when asked to.
- Use a tissue for coughs and sneezes and make sure their tissue is put in a lidded bin.

#### **6. The role of the school staff**

At The Bliss Charity School, there is a whole school approach to achieving high attendance. So that children are eager to attend and to learn, staff work hard to plan and deliver an engaging, cross-curricular, topic-based curriculum.

Moreover, staff ensure that the ethos and the atmosphere at Bliss is welcoming and inclusive so that children feel valued, safe and secure when in attendance.

High attendance for all pupils is actively promoted and a variety of weekly, termly and annual awards are used to encourage being in school every day and being on time. The importance of good attendance is also shared with parents/carers through a regular feature in the school newsletter and on the school website.

Staff have a responsibility to set a good example in matters relating to their own attendance and punctuality. Staff also have a duty to follow The Bliss Charity School's 'Preventing and Managing Sickness Policy' and to comply with the latest clinical and/or public health advice regarding when they can/cannot attend the workplace.

### **6.1 The role of teachers**

It is the responsibility of teachers to:

- Complete a register using SIMs at the beginning of each morning and at the start of the afternoon session, marking pupils as *present*, *absent* or *late* – marking the attendance registers twice daily is a legal requirement<sup>5</sup>.
- Provide access to remote education for children who are well enough to be in school but are required to be at home because they are complying with clinical and/or public health advice.
- Monitor daily patterns of attendance and notify the headteacher of children whose absence and/or punctuality is causing concern.

### **6.2 The role of the school secretary**

It is the responsibility of the school secretary (**Mrs. Emma Howard**) to:

- Provide training to teachers and teaching assistants on how to complete a register using SIMs.
- Ensure absence and lateness records are up to date and the appropriate attendance code is entered into the register every day (see [National Attendance Codes](#)).
- Make accurate attendance returns to the Local Authority and the DfE, as requested.
- Make first day absence calls and record the reasons for absence and lateness.
- Follow the procedure for 'children missing from education' (section 15), if no reason for a child's absence has been provided.
- Use the latest [NHS guidance](#) to provide parents/carers with support and assistance when making decisions about whether their child should be in school.
- Where possible, notify parents/carers that their child's absence and/or punctuality is a potential cause for concern and might be identified for improvement by the headteacher unless action is taken – this will be an informal 'alert' so parents/carers can take early action.
- Offer support to parents/carers where it is needed so that absence and/or punctuality improvements can take place and children do not become 'persistently absent'.
- Inform parents/carers of their child's attendance figure twice every academic year.
- Provide the headteacher with an attendance report at least once a term (i.e. at least once every six weeks) so that trends can be identified and high absence and/or poor punctuality can be addressed.

### **6.3 The role of the headteacher**

It is the responsibility of the headteacher (**Mr. Shaun Carter**) to:

- Monitor attendance informally on a daily/weekly basis.
- Analyse attendance formally at least once a term (i.e. at least once every six weeks).
- Identify and address absence trends and notify parents/carers in writing if their child's absence and/or punctuality is a concern

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<sup>5</sup> The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

- Monitor the absence and/or punctuality of specific children who have been identified as a cause for concern to ensure improvements take place.
- Offer support to parents/carers where it is needed so that absence and/or punctuality improvements can take place and children do not become 'persistently absent'<sup>6</sup>.
- Provide an attendance report to governors three times per year which includes analysis at a whole school and class level, as well by gender, for disadvantaged pupils and for children with SEND.

## **7. The role of the Governing Body**

Governors at The Bliss Charity School analyse attendance figures regularly (at least three times every academic year) and ensure that school leaders have suitable plans in place to improve attendance for groups/individuals where necessary.

## **8. Lateness**

It is very important that pupils arrive on time for the start of school. The school day starts promptly at 8:55 am.

It is very disruptive to their own education, and that of others in their class, if pupils are late. The very beginning of the day is just as important as the rest, as all classes practise key skills and consolidate previous learning as soon as the register is taken. Children who are regularly late may miss out on spelling, phonics, handwriting or times-tables work which takes places daily as soon as the children arrive. Being late by just 5-10 minutes every day will affect the progress children make in these areas over the course of the year and their school life. Moreover, lateness also affects the achievement of others as adult support has to be re-directed into helping pupils 'catch up' when they arrive late to school instead of being used where it is most needed.

The register will be called at the beginning of the morning session and the beginning of the afternoon session. The registers will close at 9:30 am and 1:30 pm. Pupils who arrive after the start of the morning/afternoon session but before the register closes will be marked as present. However, staff will address punctuality and the importance of being in school on time with parents/carers so that improvements can take place. Pupils who arrive after the register closes will be marked absent for the whole session (a session being a morning or an afternoon) and this will count as an unauthorised absence, unless there is a legitimate reason for the child being late. Legitimate reasons do not include, for example, oversleeping, tiredness, missing the bus or finding/preparing uniform.

Persistent absence by reason of lateness will be dealt with in the same way as other pupils with an emerging pattern of absence and could provide grounds for prosecution. If the matter cannot be resolved quickly by the headteacher using the process outlined in section 11, it may be referred to NCC's Educational Inclusion Partnership Team (EIPT) which could result in the issue of a Penalty Notice under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

## **9. Absence**

Term times are for education and the headteacher of The Bliss Charity School will rightly prioritise attendance. Children and families have 175 days off school each year to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. However, there are times when children cannot or should not attend school. In the following circumstances, absence will be authorised:

- Where the child is too ill to attend and a satisfactory reason has been given – decisions on whether to send a child to school should be informed by the latest [NHS guidance](#). If requested to do so, parents/carers must provide medical evidence for absences where the school has attendance concerns. The illness must relate to the child, not the parent(s)/carer(s) or sibling(s).
- Where a child is well enough to be in school but they are required to be at home because they are complying with clinical and/or public health advice. In this instance, teachers will provide access to remote education<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> A pupil is identified as a persistent absentee if they miss 10% or more of their possible sessions.

<sup>7</sup> The Bliss Charity School's 'Remote Education Policy (2021-2022)' outlines *how* and *when* remote education will be provided during the coronavirus outbreak.

- Where leave has been granted by the headteacher in ‘exceptional circumstances’ but this must be requested in advance by completing a ‘Request for Absence Form’ (these are available from the school office and on the [school website](#)). Agreement to absence under ‘exceptional circumstances’ is at the discretion of the headteacher and written evidence may be requested to support the application. In authorising such an absence, the individual circumstances of the particular case and the pupil’s previous record of attendance will be taken into account when making decisions. Each request for leave due to ‘exceptional circumstances’ will be judged on its merits and the headteacher’s decision is final. The fundamental principles for defining ‘exceptional circumstances’ are that they are *rare, significant, unavoidable* and *short*. By ‘unavoidable’ this means that the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. Family holidays are not, therefore, considered ‘exceptional circumstances’ because they can reasonably be scheduled outside of term time. Once the decision not to authorise leave is taken, it cannot be authorised retrospectively. The headteacher can determine the length of the authorised absence under ‘exceptional circumstances’ as well as whether a particular absence is authorised. Examples of authorised absence for ‘exceptional circumstances’ include<sup>8</sup>:
  - Service personnel returning from a tour of duty abroad where it is evidenced the parent(s)/carer(s) will not be in receipt of any leave in the near future that coincides with school holidays.
  - Where absence from school is recommended/supported by a health professional due to the medical/emotional needs of the child, parent(s)/carer(s) or sibling(s).
  - The death or terminal illness of a person close to the family.
  - To attend a wedding or funeral of a person close to the family, but for the service and travelling time only, not for extended leave.
  - Religious observances but only for the ceremony and travelling time, not for extended leave. This is intended for one-off situations rather than regular or recurring events.
- Where the pupil has a medical appointment, although parents/carers are strongly encouraged to arrange these out of school hours wherever possible, and to return their child to school immediately afterwards or to send him/her to school beforehand.
- Where there is an unavoidable cause for the absence which is beyond the family’s control, e.g. extreme weather conditions.
- Where the child travels to school by arrangement of the Local Authority but the transport failed to arrive.
- The absence occurs on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil’s parents belong.
- Where the child is attending an off-site educational activity that has been approved by the headteacher.

The following reasons are *examples* of absences that will not be authorised<sup>9</sup>:

- Persistent, non-specific illness.
- Illness of a sibling or a parent/carers.
- Oversleeping.
- Inadequate clothing/uniform.
- Confusion over school dates.
- Medical/dental appointments of more than half a day without very good reasons.
- Child’s/family birthday.
- Sporting/leisure occasion.
- Shopping trip.
- Family holidays.

Only the headteacher can authorise absence. The headteacher is not obliged to accept a parent’s/carers’ explanation. A telephone message or an email does not in itself authorise an absence. If absences are not authorised, parents/carers will be notified. If no explanation is received, absences will not be authorised.

## **10. Leaving during the school day**

<sup>8</sup> Please note, the examples provided are illustrative rather than exhaustive.

<sup>9</sup> Please note, the examples provided are illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Children who have to leave for any reason throughout the day should be signed out at the main office by a parent/carer. However, appointments during the school day are strongly discouraged – parents/carers are requested to make dental or medical appointments outside of school hours. Leaving school early to travel to a family holiday/occasion is also not an acceptable reason to collect a child early from school.

## **11. Managing attendance**

### ***11.1 Encouraging high attendance***

At The Bliss Charity School, there is a whole school approach to achieving high attendance. So that children are eager to attend and to learn, staff work hard to plan and deliver an engaging, cross-curricular, topic-based curriculum. Moreover, staff ensure that the ethos and the atmosphere at Bliss is welcoming and inclusive so that children feel valued, safe and secure when in attendance.

High attendance for all pupils is actively promoted and a variety of weekly, termly and annual awards are used to encourage being in school every day and being on time. The importance of good attendance is also shared with parents/carers through a regular feature in the school newsletter and on the school website.

### ***11.2 Dealing with poor attendance***

The Bliss Charity School will provide support to families experiencing attendance difficulties. Support will be offered once absence and/or punctuality concerns are identified. Alternatively, parents/carers can request support by contacting the school on [01327 340758](tel:01327340758) or emailing [office@bliss.northants.sch.uk](mailto:office@bliss.northants.sch.uk).

Where possible, in the first instance, parents/carers will be notified that their child's absence and/or punctuality is a potential cause for concern and might be identified for improvement by the headteacher unless action is taken – this will be an informal 'alert' so parents/carers can take early action.

Following attendance analysis by the headteacher, parents/carers may receive formal notification in writing that their child's absence and/or punctuality is a concern. This letter will inform the parents/carers that improvements need to take place and that their child's attendance is being monitored closely.

An attendance improvement letter *will* be triggered by:

- Five days (ten sessions) or more unauthorised absence – consecutive or non-consecutive – in a six week period.
- Late for ten sessions or more – consecutive or non-consecutive – in a six week period.

In addition, the headteacher *may* also issue an attendance improvement letter when a child's absence rate – whether authorised or unauthorised – places them at risk of not achieving 95% attendance by the end of the academic year. In this instance, the reason(s) for absence – as well as the child's previous attendance record – will be considered.

Depending on the reason for issuing the attendance improvement letter, parents/carers might be notified that their child's attendance *has* been referred to the county council's EIPT or that their child's attendance *may* be referred to the EIPT unless sufficient and sustained improvements occur.

### ***11.3 Penalty Notices and court proceedings***

A referral to the EIPT could result in the issue of a Penalty Notice.

The criterion for issuing a Penalty Notice is usually five days (ten sessions) of consecutive, unauthorised absence (or more) within a six week period. However, a Penalty Notice can also be used as a sanction for irregular attendance

where a pupil accumulates five days (ten sessions) of non-consecutive, unauthorised absence (or more) within a six week period.

An initial fixed Penalty Notice of £60 is issued to each parent for each child (so a two parent family with two children would be fined £240). However, if payment is not made within 21 days, the Penalty Notice doubles to £120 per parent, per child (so a two parent family with two children would be fined £480). If payment is not made within 28 days from the issue of the Penalty Notice, parents/carers may be prosecuted for the offence of irregular attendance and could be subject to a fine of up to £1,000 on conviction per child and/or a Parenting Order or a Community Service Order, and also costs.

If the school refers a period of absence that is longer than 15 consecutive school days, the EIPT may consider that a Penalty Notice is not appropriate. In these instances, the matter may proceed directly to a prosecution.

## **12. Emergency closure procedure**

There can be occasions when children are not able to attend temporarily either because the school or their class cannot open or remain open. Emergency closures of this nature can occur because of adverse weather conditions or a health and safety issue within the premises. The school or a class may also be forced to close following a local or national public health direction.

A decision to close the school or a class is never taken lightly. The headteacher will prioritise the welfare of pupils, staff and parents/carers when making a decision of this nature. If an emergency closure is required, the decision will be made and shared promptly. Moreover, closure details will be provided through a variety of communication channels (email, letter, text message, social media platforms and the school website) to ensure all concerned receive the information as quickly as possible.

Emergency closures that are made *during* the school day may require parents/carers to collect their child promptly. Emergency closure decisions that have to be made *outside* of school hours will be made by 7:30 am (on the day of the closure) at the latest.

## **13. Non-collection of children**

A child who is not collected on time will be taken to the main office. Staff will then try to make contact with the list of parents/carers held on file for the child to arrange collection.

After an hour has elapsed, if the school has not been able to make contact with any parents/carers, a referral will be made to Local Authority. This will alert Children's Social Care that a child may need to be accommodated to await collection by the parents/carers. If the child is already known to Children's Social Care, the school will contact the allocated social worker.

If a child is taken into care, the school and Children's Social Care will continue to make efforts to inform the parents/carers of the action that has been taken. A letter will be sent to their home address and an anonymous letter will be affixed to the main gate should the school close for the evening prior to contact being made with the parents/carers. The letter will inform the parent/carers of the action taken and will provide a contact number with which the parents/carers can contact Children's Social Care. All actions will be recorded in line with the school's '[Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy](#)'.

## **14. Children missing *in* education**

These procedures are designed to ensure that a child who goes missing during the school day (or during an activity where the child is under the supervision of school staff) is found and returned to effective supervision as soon as possible.

- Once a pupil is identified as missing by any member of school staff, a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

will be informed.

- Staff will risk assess the urgency of the situation to help inform the timeframe required in establishing the pupil's whereabouts – timeliness should be on a case by case basis.
- The DSL should, together with the class teacher, assess the child's vulnerability.
- School staff will try to locate the pupil whilst maintaining the safety of other children who may be in their care.
- School staff will contact the pupil's parents/carers to inform them of the situation.
- If/when the police are informed, school staff will act in accordance with Police instructions.

## **15. Children missing from education**

If a pupil is absent, the parents/carers will be contacted **on the first day of absence** and school staff will continue to make every effort to locate the pupil.

- ***Day 1 – Phone call***

A staff member trained to do so (usually the school secretary, Mrs. Emma Howard), will telephone the child's home to seek reasons for the absence and reassurance from a parent/carer that the child is safe at home.

| <b>Response from parent/carers</b>  | <b>Next step from school</b>   |
|---|--|
| The parent/carer answered the call and the child is safe with them.   | Ask the reason for the absence and record on the school's attendance management system.  |
| There is no answer at the home or on mobile numbers.  | Call back. <a href="#">Risk assessment</a> after 2 hours.  |
| The person answering is not a parent/carer and the school is not reassured that the child is at home or safe. | A DSL should be consulted on a <a href="#">risk assessment</a> and the degree of vulnerability of the child.   |
| A parent/carer answered the call but the child is not with them or safe and the parent/carers is concerned.   | Advise the parent to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact the local police station to inform them that the child is missing.</li> <li>• Contact all the people the child is known to talk to – as well as the places where they are known to visit – and inform contacts that the child is missing. Ask if they can help to find the child or provide information which may shed light on the child's whereabouts.</li> <li>• Contact the family GP and Accident and Emergency Centres near where the child lives and goes to school, in case he/she has sustained an injury and been taken in for medical treatment.</li> <li>• Report back to school if the child is found or remains missing.</li> </ul> |

- ***Day 2 onwards – Follow up phone calls***

A subsequent telephone call will be made either from the school landline or preferably a mobile phone.

- ***Day 3 – Write to/email the parents/carers***

The parents/carers will be written to (letter and/or email) asking for contact to be made with the school immediately. If English is not the first language, the letter and/or email will be translated into a language that may be more accessible.

- ***Day 5/6 – Home visit***

With appropriate risk assessments in place, a visit will be arranged to the home address by school staff, including a DSL.

- ***Once the above checks have been completed (or within 10 days, whichever is earlier)***

If the child has not been seen and the parents/carers have not been made contact with either, the school will report the child as missing from education by completing the Local Authority's [online form](#).

## **16. Inclusion**

This policy – and the management of attendance – will be implemented in accordance with The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

## **17. Links with other policies**

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Remote Education Policy
- Preventing and Managing Sickness Policy
- Complaints Policy

## **18. Complaints procedure**

If a pupil, parent/carer or member of staff is concerned about any aspect of the way The Bliss Charity School manages attendance as outlined in this policy, the headteacher should be informed of their concern. The headteacher will respond to the complaint in accordance with the school's Complaints Policy. If a concern relates to the headteacher, contact should be with the Chair of Governors (**Mrs. Sherry Hornagold-Prosser**).

## **19. Review**

Governors will formally review this Attendance Policy every year to ensure that it remains up to date with the latest guidance from the DfE and it is relevant to the needs of pupils, staff, parents/carers and governors.

**Signature:** ..... (Chair of Governors)

**Print Name:** Mrs. S. Hornagold-Prosser

**Date:** XXXX

**Signature:** *Mr S. Carter* ..... (Headteacher)

**Print Name:** Mr. S. Carter

**Date:** XXXX