The Buckinghamshire Primary Pupil Referral Unit

Perseverance Respect Understanding

ATTENDANCE POLICY

This policy was agreed by the Management Committee: Summer 2026

This policy will be reviewed: Summer 2027

Changes highlighted in yellow

1. Introduction

The Buckinghamshire Primary PRU believe that regular school attendance is the key to enabling children to maximise the learning opportunities available to them to ensure that they achieve their full potential. Regular and full attendance is essential if pupils are to benefit fully from school life. High levels of absence or erratic attendance inhibit the child's learning and progress.

The Buckinghamshire Primary PRU will work with pupils and parents/carers to ensure that pupils attend the PRU regularly and on time. As set out in this policy, we will work with families to identify the reasons for poor attendance and try to resolve any difficulties.

The Buckinghamshire Primary PRU recognises that attendance is a matter for the whole PRU community. Our Attendance Policy should not be viewed in isolation; it is a strand that runs through all aspects of school improvement, such as safeguarding, anti-bullying and equalities. This policy also considers other relevant legislation including but not limited to:

- Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
- Equality Act 2010
- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (latest guidance)
- DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance (latest statutory guidance)

2. Legal Framework

Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act states that parents must ensure that children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

A child is of Compulsory School Age at the beginning of the term following their 5th birthday. A child can leave school on the last Friday in June if they reach age 16 by the end of the summer holidays and then continue in an approved route of education or apprenticeships until age 18.

Under the Education Act 1996, the Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that parents secure education for children of compulsory school age and where necessary, use legal enforcement.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, require schools to take an attendance register twice a day, once at the start of the morning session and then again during the afternoon session.

The register must record whether the pupil was:

- present;
- absent;
- present at approved educational activity; or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

3. Categorising absence

Where pupils of compulsory school age are recorded as absent, the register must show whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Absence can only be authorised by the PRU and cannot be authorised by parents. All absences will be treated as unauthorised unless a satisfactory explanation for the pupil's absence has been received.

Parents should advise the PRU by telephone on the first day of absence and provide us with an expected date of return. This should be followed up in the form of a written note from the parent/carer, though verbal explanations may be acceptable where this is considered appropriate. Alternative arrangements will be agreed with non-English speaking parents/carers.

Absence will be categorised as follows:

Illness: In most cases a telephone call or a note from the parent informing the PRU that their child is ill will be acceptable. Parents may be asked to provide medical evidence where there are repeated absences due to reported illness. This will usually be in the form of an appointment card, prescription etc.

Medical/Dental Appointments: Parents are advised where possible to make medical and dental appointments outside the school day. Where this is not possible, pupils should attend school for part of the day. Parents may be asked to provide written confirmation of appointments such as a screen shot, text message or letter.

Other Authorised Circumstances: visits to prospective new schools, family bereavement, major religious observances, off site tuition, participation in an approved performance or an exceptional leave of absence which has been authorised by the Executive Head or Teacher in Charge.

Suspension (no alternative provision made): Suspension from attending the PRU is coded to reflect that suspension, using code E. The child's class teacher will make arrangements for work to be sent home.

Late Arrival: The register will be updated twice each day, as close to 9.30 am as possible and as near to 1.30 pm as possible. We expect pupils to arrive at the PRU by 9.00am to start the school day. However, allowance is made for pupils who arrive by school transport or where parents/carers need to deliver siblings to mainstream schools prior to bringing their child to the PRU. If a pupil arrives before the register closes at 9.30 am and there is an acceptable reason for lateness they will be marked as L (unless another code is more appropriate in the light of information received from parents). The register will close shortly after 9:30 a.m. Pupils arriving after the close of register will be recorded as absent. This will not be authorised and will count as an absence for that session. Persistent lateness will be monitored and the PRU will work with parents/carers and other professionals (including school transport) to support improvements to punctuality so that pupils have access to the full school day.

The absence will only be authorised if a satisfactory explanation for the late arrival can be provided, for example, attendance at a medical appointment (Code M).

The absence will be recorded as **unauthorised** if the pupil has arrived late after the registers close without justifiable cause, for example, if they woke up late (Code U).

Unauthorised absence: Absence will not be authorised unless parents have provided a satisfactory explanation that has been accepted as such by the PRU.

Examples of unsatisfactory explanations include:

- A pupil's/family member's birthday
- Shopping for uniforms
- Having their hair cut
- Closure of a sibling's school for INSET (or other) purposes (although the PRU accepts that a pupil maybe absent from the PRU if their mainstream school has an INSET, and will talk to parents to agree the absence on an individual basis)
- "Couldn't get up"
- Illness where the child is considered well enough to attend school

- Holidays taken without the authorisation of school

  Leave of Absence and Extended Leave: Parents do not have an automatic right to remove their child from school during term time for the purpose of a holiday and are strongly advised not to do so. Parents should be aware that if their child is absent for 10 school days they will miss 5% of their education during that academic year.

  Parents wishing to take their child out of school during term time must send a written request to the Executive Headteacher, Deputy Executive Headteacher or Teacher in Charge before arrangements are made. Retrospective requests will not be considered and therefore will result in the absence being categorised as unauthorised. Each request will be considered individually and will take the following factors into account:

- Length of the proposed leave
- Age of the pupil
- The pupil's general absence/attendance record
- Proximity of SATs
- Pupil's ability to catch up the work missed
- Pupil's educational needs
- General welfare of the pupil
- Circumstances of the request
- Purpose of the leave
- Previous term time holidays taken
- When the request was made

  A form is available for parents/carers to request a leave of absence. A written response will be sent to parents/carers after the request has been considered. Where a request has been granted, the letter should state:

- The expected date of return
- That parents must contact school should any delays occur

  If the permission to take leave is not granted and the pupil is absent, the absence will be **unauthorised**. In such cases the PRU may refer the matter to the County Attendance Team who may issue a Penalty Notice.

  Religious Observance: The PRU acknowledges the multi-faith nature of British society and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside school holiday periods or weekends and that this necessitates a consideration of authorised absence or special leave for religious observance (code R).

  It is reasonable for a parent to allow their children not to attend school on any day of religious observance if recognised by the parent's religious body.

  Parents are requested to give advance notice to the PRU if they intend their child to be absent.

  However, in the interests of fulfilling the academic requirements of the PRU and limiting the authorised absence rate of the school, it is identified as reasonable that no more than one day be designated for any individual occasion of religious observance/festival and no more than three days in total in any academic year. Absence in excess of this will be categorised as unauthorised.

  Traveller Absence: The aim for the attendance of Traveller children, in common with all other children, is to attend school as regularly and as frequently as possible.

  To protect Traveller parents from unreasonable prosecution for non-attendance, the Education Act 1944, section 86, states that a Traveller parent is safe from prosecution if their child accrues 200 attendances (i.e. 200 half days) in a year. Traveller absence (code T) is acceptable only when the family is engaged in a trade or business that requires them to travel and when the child is attending school as regularly as that trade permits.

It does not mean that part-time education for Traveller children is legally acceptable, nor does it relieve parents of their duties to ensure that their children are receiving suitable education when not at school.

When in or around Buckinghamshire, if a Traveller family can reasonably travel back to their base school (see below) then the expectation is that their child will attend full-time.

The PRU will be regarded as the base school if it is the school where the child normally attends when they are not travelling. However, the pupil must have attended in the last 18 months. Traveller children can register at other schools temporarily whilst away from their base school. In such cases, the pupil's school place at the PRU will be kept open for them whilst travelling. This is to protect them from unfairly losing their place at their school of usual attendance.

The PRU can operate effectively as the child's base school only if we are engaged in on-going dialogue with Traveller families. This means that parents must:

- advise of their forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen; and
- inform the school regarding proposed return dates

The PRU will authorise absence of Traveller children if we are satisfied that a family is travelling and has given indication that they intend to return.

Traveller children will be recorded as attending an approved educational activity when:

- The child is on roll and attending another visited school
- Undertaking supervised educational activity under the jurisdiction of another Local Authority's Traveller Education Service
- The child is undertaking computer-based distance learning that is time evidenced

Where Traveller children are registered pupils at a school and are known to be present either at a site (official or otherwise) or in a house and are not attending school, the absence will be investigated in the same way as for any other pupil.

4. Deletions from the Register

In accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, pupils will be deleted from the register only when one of the following circumstances applies:

- The school is replaced by another school on a School Attendance Order
- The School Attendance Order is revoked by the Local Authority
- The pupil has ceased to be of compulsory school age
- Permanent exclusion has occurred and procedures have been completed
- Death of a pupil
- Transfer between schools
- When a parent informs the school in writing that the pupil is to be withdrawn to be educated outside the school system
- Failure to return from an extended holiday after both the school and the local authority have tried to locate the pupil
- A medical condition prevents their attendance and return to the school before ending compulsory school-age
- In custody for more than four months (in discussion with The Youth Offending Team)
- 20 days' continuous unauthorised absence have elapsed and both the Local Authority and school have tried to locate the pupil
- A pupil has left the school but it is not known where he/she has gone after both the school and the Local Authority have tried to locate the pupil

The PRU will follow Buckinghamshire County Council's Children Missing Education Protocol when a pupil's whereabouts is unknown.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The PRU believes that the foundation for good attendance is based on a strong partnership between the PRU, its Management Committee, parents, pupils and the wider school community. It our responsibility to support pupils to achieve 100% attendance. We aim for the highest possible attendance for every pupil, recognising individual circumstances and barriers.

Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents/carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

PRU staff will:

- Actively promote the importance and value of good attendance to pupils and their parents,
- Form positive relationships with pupils and parents
- Engaging with parents at the earliest stage to address concerns and seek their views about how to move forward to improve attendance
- Contribute to a whole PRU approach which reinforces regular attendance; with good teaching and learning experiences that encourage all pupils to attend and to achieve their potential
- Comply with the Registration Regulations, England, 2006 and other attendance related legislation
- Implement systems to report, record and monitor the attendance of all pupils, including those who are educated off-site
- Analyse attendance data to identify causes and patterns of absence
- Contribute to the evaluation of PRU strategies and interventions
- Work with other agencies to improve attendance and support pupils and their families
- Document interventions used to a standard required by the Local Authority should legal proceedings be instigated

Request that parents/carers will:

- Talk to their child about the PRU and what goes on there. Take a positive interest in their child's work and educational progress
- Instil the value of education and regular PRU attendance within the home environment
- Encourage their child to look to the future and have aspirations
- Contact the PRU if their child is absent to let them know the reason why and the expected date of return. Follow this up with a note where possible.
- Try to avoid unnecessary absences. Wherever possible make appointments for the doctors, dentists etc. outside of school hours
- Ask the PRU for help if their child is experiencing difficulties
- Inform the PRU of any change in circumstances that may impact on their child's attendance
- Support the PRU; take every opportunity to get involved in their child's education, form a positive relationship with the PRU and acknowledge the importance of children receiving the same messages from both the PRU and home
- Encourage routine at home, for example, bed times, home work, preparing school bag and uniform the evening before
- Not keep their child away from school to go shopping, to help at home or to look after other members of the family
- Avoid taking their child on holiday during term-time. Where this is unavoidable, send a written leave request to the Executive Head or Teacher in Charge in advance of booking the holiday.

This policy will be given to parents/carers before placement at the PRU starts as part of the paperwork which makes up the inreach placement pack for parents. PRU staff will discuss attendance, daily routines and what to do when a child is unwell at the meeting to complete the inreach paperwork.

6. Using Attendance Data

- **Lateness**

  Information will be provided to SLT so that discussions and actions can be taken as appropriate to minimise lateness and to improve regular attendance at the PRU, including discussions with pupils/parents, letters to parents and agreed follow up actions to improve attendance, punctuality and recognise improvements.

- **Attendance**

  All pupils' attendance will be monitored and will be shared with the Local Authority and other agencies if a pupil's attendance is a cause for concern. For dual registered pupils, the PRU will advise schools if a pupil does not attend on a placement day as part of the ongoing relationship between the school and the PRU. Any attendance concerns are shared so that the school and the PRU can work together to support the child, parents/carers to address concerns.

  Our attendance concern procedures are shown in Appendix 1. A flowchart summarising interventions to manage attendance is shown in Appendix 2.

  Attendance will be monitored as part of day to day routines and more formally on a half termly basis. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will review a complete set of data for their pupils and will agree with teaching staff about the most appropriate action to take for individual pupils. PRU staff will discuss any concerns about a pupil's attendance with parents and carers to find solutions and support them and the pupil in improving attendance. A letter confirming what has been discussed and any actions to be taken will be sent to the parents/carers. If it is not possible to talk directly with parents/carers then a letter will be sent to explain the concerns and ask that they work with the PRU to improve their child's attendance.

  Should an improvement be noted within the agreed monitoring period, then this will be recognised and parents/carers informed. The PRU will also celebrate the pupil's achievement in improving attendance.

  Where there is no improvement, then the later stages of our attendance concern procedure will be implemented. Where attendance remains unacceptable low after the PRU has exhausted all avenues to help improve attendance, the PRU may involve the Local Authority Attendance team who have the power to prosecute.

  The PRU will take into account the individual circumstances of pupils and the reasons for referral and placement, liaising with other professionals involved in supporting the pupil. For dual registered pupils, the PRU staff will also liaise closely with the pupil's mainstream school to ensure that the overall response to the pupil's attendance is consistent and appropriate for the circumstances of that child.

  Attendance data will also be used to identify emerging patterns and trends to inform whole PRU strategies to improve attendance and attainment and shared with the Management Committee as necessary.

  The PRU will share attendance data with the Local Authority as required. All information shared will be done so in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

7. Support Systems

The PRU recognises that poor attendance is often an indication of difficulties in a child's life. This may be related to problems at home, their mainstream school or at the PRU. Parents should make the PRU aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and/or behaviour in the PRU, for example, bereavement, divorce / separation. This will help the PRU identify any additional support that may be required.

The PRU also recognise that some pupils are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, those pupils with special educational needs, those with physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee pupils and looked after children.

The PRU will implement a range of strategies to support improved attendance. Strategies used will include:

- Discussion with parents/carers, other professionals involved with the child
- Liaison with the pupil's mainstream school
- Referrals to support agencies
- Friendship groups
- Reward systems
- Time limited part time time-tables
- Additional learning support and/ or behaviour support
- Reintegration support packages (for example following a term illness or after an exclusion).

The PRU will also work with the pupil's mainstream school so that there is a consistent approach in the support offered to families.

8 Legal Sanctions

Where intervention fails to bring about an improvement in attendance, The PRU will notify the County Attendance Team of the irregular attendance as appropriate. In many instances the PRU will already be working with the County Attendance Team because of the reasons for the placement at the PRU and this will inform decision about the steps to be taken for individual circumstances.

Parents may find it useful to read the Bucks Council web pages about school attendance and supporting pupils in education. The information also includes the Council's code of conduct in respect of issuing penalty notices. The Government also publishes useful information to parents about school attendance and when fines might be considered.

https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/school-attendance-and-supporting-children-in-education/pay-your-childs-penalty-fine-for-missing-school/code-of-conduct-for-issuing-penalty-notices-for-unauthorised-absence-from-school/

The County Attendance Team, mainstream school or the PRU may invite parents to attend a Parenting Contract Meeting and issue a formal warning of a Penalty Notice.

Parenting Contracts (Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003): A Parenting contract is a voluntary agreement between the Local Authority, school and the parent, it can also be extended to include the child and any other agencies offering support to resolve any difficulties leading to improved attendance.

The contract will outline attendance targets and will detail agreed actions that will help to achieve the target. The contract will be reviewed regularly.

The contract can be used as evidence in a prosecution should irregular attendance continue.

The school or Local Authority can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age. Fines are issued in line with Bucks Council's Penalty Notice Code of Conduct. Details are available from Bucks Council or the PRU. The payment must be made directly to the Local Authority. Penalty notices can be issued by a headteacher, Local Authority officer or the police. The decision on whether to issue a penalty notice may take into account where an intervention has failed to bring about an improvement in attendance and there are further unauthorised absences, along with:

- The number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year

- One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission
- Where a suspended child is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the Local Authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice. In the case of repeated fines, if a parent receives a second fine for the same child within any three-year period, this will be charged at the higher rate. Fines per parent will be capped to two fines within any three-year period. Bucks Council Penalty Notice code provides details. Once this limit has been reached, other action, like a parenting order or prosecution, will be considered.

Money raised via fines is only used by the Local Authority to cover the costs of administering the system and to fund attendance support. Any extra money is returned to the government.

A Penalty Notice gives the parent the opportunity to avoid a prosecution.

Failure to pay the Penalty Notice may result in a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996: 'If a parent/carer is prosecuted and attends court because your child hasn't been attending school, you could get a fine of up to £2,500.'

Prosecution: The PRU will provide the Local Authority with evidence required for a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996. This is to ensure that parents realise their own responsibilities in ensuring attendance at school and most importantly about returning children to education.

Appendix 1 - The PRU's attendance concerns procedures

At the PRU, all pupils' attendance is monitored. When a child's attendance is below 90%, our formal monitoring process will start. This threshold figure reflects the nature of dual registered placements and the challenges PRU pupils face. PRU staff will liaise with mainstream schools and other professionals involved in supporting the child, so that our response to managing attendance is consistent and appropriate for individual circumstances, including our safeguarding response.

Bespoke support will be put in place as appropriate and could include:

- Support for parents in arranging transport
- Staggered start times
- Individualised timetable for agreed time periods
- Soft starts, with activities of particular interest to the child
- Rewards and celebration of improvements in attendance (individual and class)
- Time with particular adults
- Other professional interventions or Alternative provision
- Consideration given to a change of sites

This list is not exhaustive and will also consider both physical barriers to attendance and barriers relating to the pupil's emotional and mental well-being, including Emotional Based School avoidance.

The PRU may also decide that a visit to the pupil's home is appropriate where attendance is a concern. This will be authorised by SLT, taking into account safeguarding arrangements. On occasions, PRU staff may transport pupils into the PRU if that is in the best interests of the child whilst other issues are being resolved.

If the PRU (or other professionals supporting the pupil) commissions Alternative Provision for the child, the PRU remains responsible for monitoring attendance and acting on concerns. Bespoke arrangements will be put in place by SLT, which are appropriate for the individual circumstances, but will include an attendance/wellbeing check for each day of the Alternative Provision.

At the PRU we consider that it is essential that we work with parents/carers, and other professionals to help the children we support attend and enjoy school. This is consistent with our vision to develop a community of lifelong learners. We will celebrate attendance and improvements in attendance so that pupils and parents know that their efforts are valued and recognised.

Step 1 – Day to day monitoring

Regardless of the threshold for formal monitoring, PRU staff monitor attendance as part of day to day routines, recognising the individual circumstances for each pupil and the reasons for their placement. Where concerns are identified, lead teachers will have informal discussions with parents/carers to identify barriers and raise the profile of the importance of regular and punctual attendance. That will be followed up in writing if appropriate, with actions agreed to support improved attendance. Lead teachers will consult with SLT as appropriate. Safeguarding concerns will be raised following PRU procedures.

Step 2 – Attendance drops to 90% or under

SLT will discuss individual pupils with lead teachers and agree what actions are necessary. Parents/carers will be sent an attendance concern letter and will be invited to meet /talk with the lead teacher to discuss concerns and barriers. This stage in the process will reflect the level of attendance, review of previous actions and any new actions to help remove barriers. The pupil's attendance will be monitored for a further half term (or earlier if appropriate).

Step 3 – Attendance has not improved

Parents/carers will be sent a second attendance concern letter from SLT about the level of attendance and the impact on the child's opportunities for learning. Parents/carers will be invited into a meeting with a member of SLT and lead teacher to discuss barriers to attendance and identify any additional ways the PRU can help. Realistic targets for improvement will be agreed. Attendance monitoring will continue.

Step 4 – Ongoing concern

If there is no improvement in attendance and it continues to be at a level which concerns the PRU, then we will consider a number of other actions to help parents improve their child's attendance. This may include a Parenting Contract meeting with a member of the Senior Leadership team /Safeguarding team and further support and actions as appropriate. The PRU will liaise with other professionals engaged in supporting the pupil as necessary and the Local Authority attendance team.

The final step in the process will be to contact the Local Authority who have the power to prosecute parents/carers for not ensuring that their children receive an appropriate education.

Note: Lateness is monitored following a similar approach. The PRU recognises the challenges faced by parents when bringing children to the PRU and siblings are educated in a different part of the county and also recognises the challenges faced with school transport. The PRU will work with parents and others so that the pupil has the best opportunities to participate in the full school day. Rewards and consequences will be put in place as appropriate.

Intervention Flow Chart – Appendix 2

School will notify parent of the child's irregular school attendance and offer them the opportunity and support to improve.

If you receive a letter informing you of concerns regarding your child's attendance you should

- Speak with your child to see if there are any reasons why they are reluctant to attend
- Contact the school to discuss any difficulties you or your child may be experiencing.
- Ensure your child attends school regularly

If there is no improvement and the parent has not provided a good reason for the absence, the school may refer to the County Attendance Team

Whilst your involvement in a Parenting Contract is voluntary, if you fail to engage with the support offered and your child's attendance remains irregular, the County Attendance team may issue a Penalty Notice or begin legal proceedings in the Magistrates' Court.

If you are issued with a Penalty Notice of £80 per parent/carer, per child this must be paid in full within 21 days otherwise the Penalty will increase to £160 per parent/carer, per child (see Bucks Council web pages for latest information). If you fail to pay the Penalty by the 28th day, the County Attendance Team may instigate legal proceedings against you.

If you are found guilty of this offence you can be fined up to £2500 and/or be imprisoned for a period of three months.

A Parenting Contract is a voluntary agreement between you and the Local Authority aimed at supporting you in improving your child's school attendance.