



## **Attendance Policy**

**Updated October 2019**

In Castle Gardens we believe it is our duty to educate the pupils academically, socially and emotionally. It is important that we do this in an environment, which is both responsive, and sympathetic to their needs. Children and parents should recognise this and feel confident about voicing any fears or concerns, knowing that they will be listened to by the principal and relevant staff members.

## **Introduction**

Regular school attendance is crucial in raising standards in education and ensuring that every child can have full access to the school curriculum and reach their potential.

At Castle Gardens Primary School we will strive to promote an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance and where each pupil will feel valued and secure.

## **Aims**

It is our aim at Castle gardens to provide a caring and supporting ethos which promotes a positive culture and encourages good attendance.

We aim:

1. To improve/maintain the overall attendance of pupils at Castle Gardens Primary School.
2. To encourage those children with good school attendance
3. To support those parents who feel their child is reluctant to attend school
4. To achieve a minimum of 95% attendance for all children in mainstream classes (except for those who have chronic health issues)
5. To develop a framework that defines roles and responsibilities in relation to attendance.
6. To provide advice, support and guidance to parents/guardians and pupils.
7. To promote good relationships with the Education Welfare Service.
8. To raise awareness of parents, carers and pupils of the importance of uninterrupted attendance and punctuality at every stage of a child's education.
9. To establish a pattern of monitoring attendance and ensure consistency in recognising achievement and dealing with difficulties.
10. To recognise the key role of all staff, but especially class teachers, in promoting good attendance.

## **The Importance of Attendance**

- It is required by law.
- Children need to attend school regularly to keep up with their work and promote social development.
- A good education will give the child the best possible start in life and enable him or her to make the best of the opportunities available.
- Children need to develop good habits in readiness for later life.

- Employers of school leavers will take into account the young person's school attendance and punctuality record before making a job offer.
- Young people who are away from school without good reason are at risk of becoming victims of crime or abuse.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

All members of the school community have a responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and punctuality.

Individual class teachers are responsible for:

- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/ carers
- Informing the Senior Leadership Team where there are concerns and acting upon them
- Providing background information to support referrals
- Monitoring follow-up once actions have been taken to correct attendance concerns
- Emphasising with their class the importance of good attendance and promptness
- Following up absences with immediate requests for explanation which should be noted inside the register
- Discussing attendance issues at consultation evenings where necessary

The Principal and the Designated Teacher (Mrs P. Harbinson) are responsible for:

- Overall monitoring of school attendance
- Trends in authorised and unauthorised absence
- Contacting families where concerns are raised about absence including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised
- Making referrals to the EWO service
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the school's EWO
- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence.

Administration staff in the School Office are responsible for:

- Collating and recording registration and attendance information.
- Taking and recording messages from parents regarding absence
- Ensuring the Absence/Late Book is completed
- Contacting parents of absent children where no contact has been made.
- Recording details of children who arrive late or go home
- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/ carers and reporting concerns to the principal
- Sending out appointment invitation and reminder letters regarding attendance

Parents/Carers are responsible for:

- Parents/guardians have a legal duty to ensure their child of compulsory school age shall receive efficient full time education suitable to age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular school attendance or otherwise.
- If a child is registered in school, their parent/guardian has a legal duty to ensure that they regularly attend that school.
- It is a parent's/guardian's responsibility to inform the school of the reason for a pupil's absence on the first day of absence. This should be confirmed with a written note when the pupil returns to school. If the absence is likely to be prolonged, this information should be provided to enable the school to assist with homework or any other necessary arrangements which may be required.
- Informing the school in advance of any medical appointments in school time. For the absence to be recorded as a medical absence we do require evidence from the doctor or dentist. (Appointment card/letter)
- Making requests for authorised absence in term time, only if absolutely necessary as these are not automatically authorised.
- Talking to the school as soon as possible about any child's reluctance to come to school so that problems can be quickly identified and dealt with.

The Board of Governors are responsible for:

- Ensure that the Principal keeps a General Register of the pupils at the school and a Pupil Attendance Register and that appropriate action is taken to encourage good attendance at school.
- Provide support by reviewing school attendance figures and targets □ Ensuring attendance is placed as an agenda item at each meeting.

The role of the Education Authority, South Eastern Region:

The Education Authority through the Education Welfare Service have a legal responsibility to make sure that parents and carers meet their own responsibility towards their children's education. If they do not, the Education Authority is duty bound to use the legal processes of Court action to uphold a parent's duty to make sure that the young people in their care receive an education.

Role of Pupils

Each pupil at Castle Gardens Primary School must attend school punctually and regularly. If a pupil has been absent from school, a written note from a parent/guardian must be provided to your teacher on the day of return.

## **Reasonable Reasons for Absence - When can children be absent from school?**

A child registered at a school can legally miss school only in very limited circumstances.

These include when he or she:

- is ill.
- has an unavoidable medical or dental appointment.
- is taking part in a religious event.
- has an exceptional family circumstance, e.g. wedding or a funeral

Some unacceptable reasons for absence:

- birthdays.
- visiting relatives.
- shopping.
- hair appointment.
- looking after other members of the family.

## **Term-time Holidays**

Absence from school should be avoided wherever possible as it causes disruption to the child's education and may affect their relationships within school. If a holiday is planned during term-time the child will miss part of their education and may miss important tests or exams.

Parents should discuss this with the Principal in exceptional circumstances but at Castle Gardens we consider that all term-time holidays count as absences.

## **Regular Non-Attendance**

The school expects attendance of at least 95%. It is important for children to establish good attendance habits early on in their primary school career. It is the responsibility of the Principal and the Governors to support good attendance and to identify and address attendance concerns promptly.

In Primary School we rely upon parents to ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually. Non-attendance is an important issue that is treated seriously and therefore where there are concerns regarding attendance parents are always informed.

Initially concerns about attendance are raised with parents via letters which are sent home. Letter 1 and Letter 2 can be found at the end of this document. Should attendance not improve, the parent is then invited to come to meet with the Principal and Designated Teacher where there will be opportunities for them to discuss reasons for absence. Support will then be given by the school with the aim to improve attendance by identifying strategies that could be put in place via an action plan. Consideration is given to all factors affecting attendance before deciding what intervention strategies to apply. Each case is different and the school acknowledges that no one standard response will be appropriate in every case.

In every case, early intervention is essential to prevent the problem from worsening. It is essential that parents keep the school fully informed of any matters that may affect their child's attendance.

It is hoped that a quick response and change in levels of absence will prevent the need for a referral to the Education Welfare Service (EWS).

Where a child's attendance record does not improve over a period of time then the school has a responsibility to make a referral to the EWS. If a child is missing school without good reason, schools and the Education Authority have a number of legal powers that they can use.

The Education Welfare Service receives referrals from schools when pupils' attendance is a cause for concern or when attendance drops below 85%.

The initial response to a referral of a pupil by a school to the EWS is a home visit. This provides the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) with an opportunity to assess whether the absence is condoned by parents and if they are in a position to ensure regular attendance.

The EWO will issue penalty notices to parents where there has been a referral to EWS from the school as part of the school's processes to address poor attendance patterns. (See Appendix 1.)

Article 45 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 states that it is the duty of parents who have a child of compulsory school age to ensure their child receives efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, ability and to any special educational needs they may have.

The order also states that it is the duty of a parent of a registered pupil of a school to secure their regular attendance at school. Parents are legally responsible for making this happen. If a child or young person who is registered at school does not attend regularly, a parent can receive a fine not exceeding £1000 in court (for each child). An Education Supervision Order (ESO) could also be made by a court under Article 55 of the Children (NI) Order 1995.<sup>1</sup>

*1: School Attendance Matters – A Parent's Guide (DENI)*

## **Promoting Good Attendance**

As a school operating a positive reward ethos we are keen to promote any success that an individual may have including good or improving attendance and punctuality. We use the following strategies to support and promote good attendance:

- Clear procedures for monitoring and identifying attendance and lateness patterns
- Attendance rules communicated to parents and pupils in a clear concise manner (e.g. via website)
- Parents are kept informed of attendance below 90%
- Recognising that pupils may face disadvantages and putting pastoral care arrangements in place to support them
- Ensure that information recorded is accurate
- Meet with parents to discuss learning expectations and discuss attendance as part of the learning
- Identify pupils who are vulnerable to becoming persistent absentees and have action plans in place for those pupils
- Incentives for before and after school include a Breakfast Club and a selection of afterschool activities covering a wide-range of interests

## **Rewarding Good Attendance and Punctuality**

At Castle Gardens we operate Daily Golden Time in P4 to P7 classes to reward children for good behaviour, effort, punctuality and attendance. There are a wide range of other incentives on offer in P1 to P3 classes as well as in P4 to P7 classes. These include stickers, reward charts, house points, treat boxes and certificates. Each individual child's circumstances will be taken into account in this process.

## **Procedures for Recording Attendance**

Attendance/absence of pupils should be recorded at the beginning of the morning within SIMS registration software by class teachers. The codes contained in Appendix 2 will be used to record pupils' attendance and absence as detailed in Circular 2019/14.

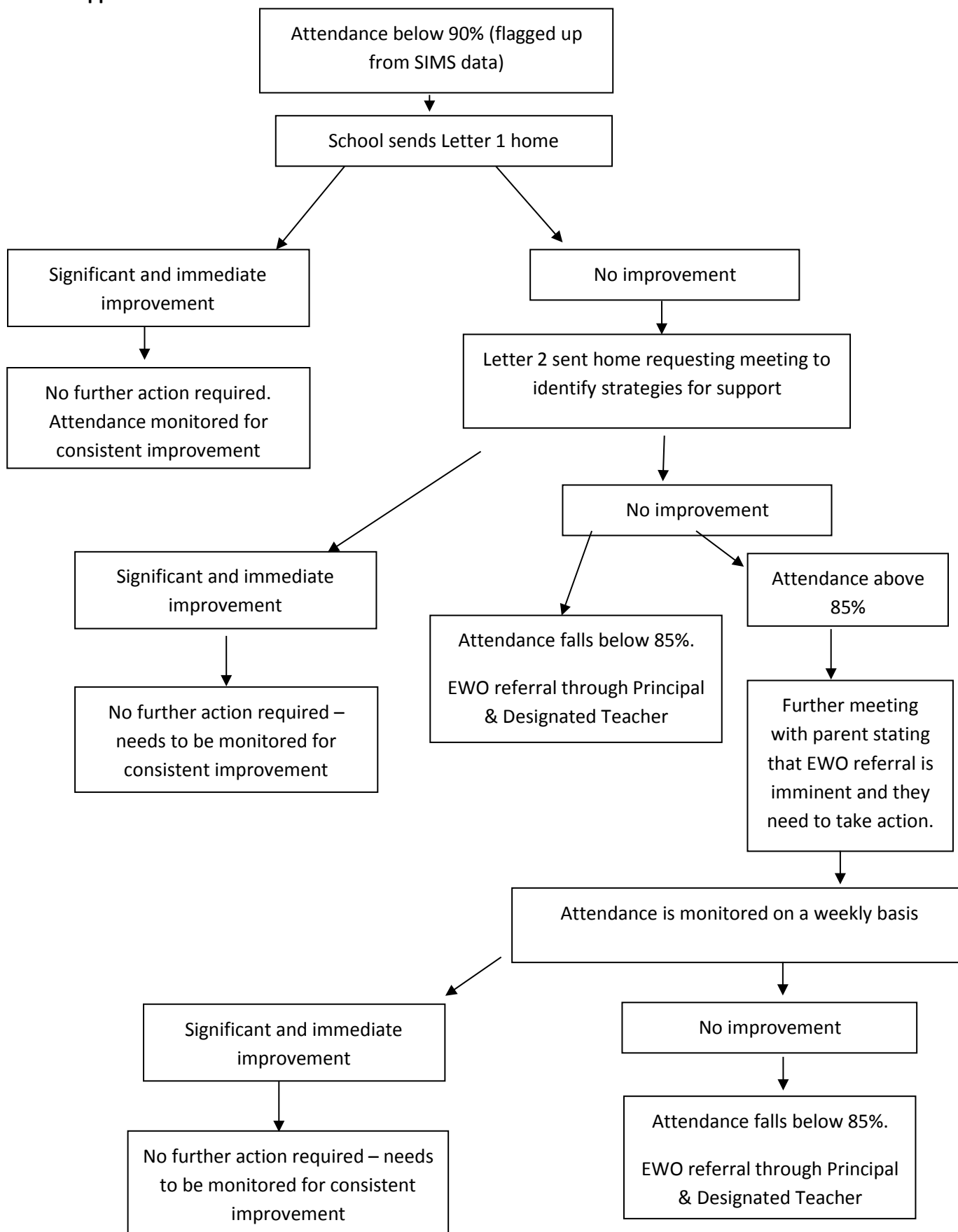
Accurate records of all pupils' attendance or absence at school will be recorded diligently by teaching staff as this information may be required as evidence in cases of non-attendance being brought to court.

Schools are required by law to continue to hold copies of pupil attendance records and pupil registration records for not less than 10 years from the date on which the register ceased to be used.

To enable our school to accurately record and monitor attendance in a consistent way we will adhere to the guidance provided in Department of Education Circulars, the most recent being 2019/14, Attendance Guidance and Absence Recording'.

Castle Gardens Primary School is committed to working with parents to encourage regular and punctual attendance.

## Actions to Address Low Attendance



Attendance will be monitored through SIMS and those who are achieving below 90% will be identified for support. Notes need to be written at all stages of this process and passed on to Principal and Designated Teacher who will keep them on file for future reference.



## Appendix 2

**ABSENCE CODES: DESCRIPTION STATISTICAL MEANING** / \ Present: / = (AM): \ = (PM) Present

|          |   |                                   |
|----------|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>A</b> | Artistic Endeavour  | Authorised Absence                |
| <b>B</b> | Bereavement   | Authorised Absence                |
| <b>C</b> | Suspended   | Authorised Absence                |
| <b>D</b> | No reason provided for absence  | Unauthorised Absence              |
| <b>F</b> | Family Holiday (agreed)   | Authorised Absence                |
| <b>G</b> | Family Holiday (not agreed)   | Unauthorised Absence              |
| <b>H</b> | Other Absence   | Unauthorised Absence              |
| <b>I</b> | Illness (not medical or dental appointments)                          | Authorised Absence                |
| <b>J</b> | Extended Leave  | Attendance not required           |
| <b>L</b> | Late (before registration closed)                                     | Present                           |
| <b>M</b> | Medical/Dental Appointments   | Authorised Absence                |
| <b>N</b> | No reason yet provided for absence<br>(temporary code only)           | Unauthorised Absence              |
| <b>O</b> | Other Exceptional Circumstances                                       | Authorised Absence                |
| <b>P</b> | Approved Sporting Activity  | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>R</b> | Religious Observance  | Authorised Absence                |
| <b>S</b> | Study Leave   | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>U</b> | Late (after registration closed)                                      | Unauthorised Absence              |
| <b>V</b> | Educational Visit   | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>W</b> | Work Experience   | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>X</b> | Only staff should attend  | Attendance not required           |
| <b>Y</b> | Exceptional Closure   | Attendance not required           |
| <b>*</b> | Not on roll   | Attendance not required           |
| <b>#</b> | Holiday for all   | Attendance not required           |
| <b>!</b> | No attendance required  | Attendance not required           |
| <b>1</b> | Alternative Education Provision (organised by<br>Education Authority) | Approved Educational Activity the |
| <b>2</b> | Home/hospital tuition (organised by the<br>Education Authority)       | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>3</b> | Elective Home Education   | Attendance not Required           |
| <b>4</b> | Pupil Referral Unit   | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>5</b> | Another mainstream school (under Entitlement<br>Framework – EF)       | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>6</b> | Training Organisation (under EF)                                      | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>7</b> | FE College (under EF)   | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>8</b> | Intensive Support Learning Unit                                       | Approved Educational Activity     |
| <b>9</b> | CAMHS/ Mental Health Support  | Approved Educational Activity     |



Date:

Re: Insert Pupil Name

### Attendance Letter 1

Dear Parent

You are receiving this letter because we are concerned that your child's attendance is below 90% and that he or she is missing school.

Our school records show that your child's attendance at school this year is **xx%**  
A day to day summary of attendance detailed in the table below.

|           |     |
|-----------|-----|
| Monday    | xx% |
| Tuesday   | xx% |
| Wednesday | xx% |
| Thursday  | xx% |
| Friday    | xx% |

Please be aware that any pupil with attendance below 85% will be discussed with the Educational Welfare Officer. School procedures for monitoring attendance can be found in our Attendance Policy located on our website.

You are invited to make an appointment to see our Designated Teacher Mrs Harbinson or myself to discuss ways in which we can help you to improve your child's attendance.

Yours sincerely,

Mr J Gray

Principal

**Principal:** Mr J Gray BA Hons, PGCE, PQH(NI)  
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Date:

Re: Insert Pupil Name

## Attendance Letter 2

Dear Parent

Further to Letter 1 that was sent home on **insert date**, you are receiving this letter because we are concerned that your child's attendance has remained below 90%.

Our school records show that your child's attendance at school this year is **xx%**  
A day to day summary of attendance detailed in the table below.

|           |     |
|-----------|-----|
| Monday    | xx% |
| Tuesday   | xx% |
| Wednesday | xx% |
| Thursday  | xx% |
| Friday    | xx% |

Please be aware that any pupil with attendance below 85% will be discussed with the Educational Welfare Officer. School procedures for monitoring attendance can be found in our Attendance Policy located on our website.

Can I please ask that you contact the office to make an appointment to see our Designated Teacher, Mrs Harbinson, or myself to discuss ways in which we can help you to improve your child's attendance.

Yours sincerely,

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