



## **A Parent(s)/Carer(s) Guide – Working Together to Improve School Attendance**

JTMAT considers excellent school attendance as paramount to pupils achieving their full potential and therefore, enhancing lifelong outcomes. It is central not only, to academic attainment but in developing children socially, morally, ethically and in enhancing well-being. It is with this in mind, that we set expectations of excellent attendance for all our pupils.

Being in school and having the best attendance possible underpins all the many benefits of school for your child, such as their learning, wellbeing, and wider development.

For some children, attending school every day will be harder than for others. This is why Shobnall Primary & Nursery School is committed to working together with families to solve problems and support your child's school attendance.

Therefore, each child enrolled at our school is expected to attend every day, on time so that they can achieve their full potential. We monitor and manage attendance and punctuality across all year groups according to the JTMAT Attendance and Punctuality Policy and statutory guidance.

### **Working together to improve school attendance**

Being in school and having the best attendance possible underpins all the many benefits of school for your child, such as their learning, wellbeing, and wider development. For some children, attending school every day will be harder than for others. This is why John Taylor Multi- Academy Trust, Shobnall Primary & Nursery School and Staffordshire County Council, are committed to working together with families to solve problems and support your child's school attendance.

### **What are my responsibilities for my child's attendance?**

As a parent you are legally responsible for making sure your child gets a suitable full-time education from the age of 5. For most parents this will mean making sure your child is in school every day except when:

- Your child is too ill to go to school
- You have permission for a leave of absence from the school for them not to attend and you can only ask for this in exceptional circumstances
- Your religious body has a day especially for religious observance

### **If my child needs to be absent from school, what do I need to do?**

You should contact the school as early as possible, on the first day of absence to explain why. If you do not, the school will contact you on the first morning of their absence to find out why they are not in school.

All parents can request a 'leave of absence' for their child and the Headteacher will either approve or decline this request.

### **Does my child need to attend school when they are unwell?**

If your child is ill, read the NHS advice to help you decide whether they can go to school.

If they are too ill to attend, you are not breaking the law and will not be penalised. You should let the school know on the first day of absence and the school will record such absence as authorised. If the absence due to illness is ongoing or frequent the school may ask you to provide medical evidence and will offer support to help improve attendance.

In the majority of cases medical evidence is not needed by school may ask you for evidence where:

- Your child is regularly absent because of illness, to assess how they can help your child by putting the right reasonable adjustments in place
- In a small number of cases where the school has reason to believe your child was not too ill to attend and a conversation cannot resolve the issue

If you are asked to provide medical evidence this does not need to be a letter from your doctor or consultant, and doctors will not usually provide such letters. It can instead be an appointment card, prescription, notes of previous consultations (including from the NHS App).

### **What should I do if my child needs a dental or medical appointment in school time?**

To avoid disruption to your child's attendance, medical and dental appointments should not be booked during the school day whenever reasonably possible. When they are, you should ask the school in advance for a leave of absence and collect them as close as possible to the time of the appointment and return them to school for the rest of the school day afterwards.

### **My child is struggling to attend because of an issue in school. Who can help us?**

The first step is to talk to your child's school about why your child is missing school and what help the school can give. You should still do everything you can to help your child attend as much as possible whilst waiting for help and support to be put into place. The person to contact in school you can contact for help is (school to complete). You can also look at the school attendance policy (website link to school website) on our website for more details.

If your child is struggling to attend because of something that is happening at school we will work with you and your child to overcome the issues. We will agree a set of joint actions that we develop together. This will include a commitment to support you and your child by working together or help you to access the support services in exchange for an agreement from you and your child to take part in the support offered. We will arrange times for you to come into school to review the actions and your child's progress.

Depending on the reasons for your child's absence, this may take form of an action plan, an early help plan or a parenting contract.

**My child is struggling to attend because of an issue at home or getting to school. Who can help us?**

Talking to school is the first step as we can help you to access the support you need. If there are lots of reasons for your child's absence, local services that support the school will work with us to support you and your child. They will devise an action plan and a lead worker to support you. This may be a member of school staff, but it might be a member of the services within the local council or healthcare teams. In exchange you are expected to agree and take part in accessing the support once it has been put in place.

**My child has a long-term illness, special educational needs or a disability that is impacting their attendance. What help is available?**

If your child is regularly absent from school because of illness, regardless of whether it is mental or physical or special educational needs or a disability, they have the same right to have a suitable full-time education as any other child. We encourage you to work with us to discuss the reasons and make sure the right support is in place.

We will work with you to:

- Make reasonable adjustments to help your child attend
- Ensure your child receives pastoral care and, in some cases, consider a time-limited phased return to school where appropriate
- Work jointly with services including the local council and health services
- For pupils with a long-term medical condition, we can make attendance support a key feature of any individual healthcare plan
- Access to any provision outlined an education health and care plan

To make this work it is important that you are open and work with us by sharing written information. This will help agree the right support and take an active part in agreeing and putting in place the solution.

**Where can I get help if my child is too anxious to go to school**

Attending school usually helps to protect your child's mental health for a range of reasons including giving them a chance to be with friends and to benefit from learning. However some children can be anxious or worried about going to school, particularly around the start of the new year or joining a new school or class. This is a normal emotion and not necessarily indicative of an underlying mental health condition.

If their anxiety continues and becomes an attendance issue, you can speak to us in school to find out more about why they are anxious and what can be done.

You can find some useful advice at Young Minds to help work through likely reasons together with your child, what to do and how to make sure that you get the right support if there are more serious issues.

## **Will my local council take legal action against me**

If your child is absent from school without permission or a valid reason you are likely to be breaking the law. Where this happens, we will speak with you to help you understand the reasons for our concerns. If your child isn't attending because they are struggling we may ask the local council for support to help you.

If you do not take part in this support or it does not work because more structured formal support is needed, then we may:

- Invite you to attend a parenting contract meeting – where we will put in place a formal action plan setting out what we will all do to improve your child's attendance;
- Apply to the family court for an education supervision order to ensure you and your child receive advice, assistance, and direction to make sure your child receives a full-time suitable education

If you do not make any efforts to improve your child's attendance or it is clear you have knowingly allowed your child to be absent without good reason, for example taking your child on holiday during school time without permission, the local council may prosecute you to protect your child's right to a full-time education. Even during this process, you have the opportunity to engage in voluntary support, such as an early help assessment, or formal support such as a parenting contract or education supervision order to prevent the case from going to court. If found guilty you may be given a parenting order, community order, or a fine up to £2,500 or in very exceptional circumstances a sentence of up to 3 months in prison.

## Glossary

**Attendance action plan** – an informal agreement between you, your child if they are old enough to understand, their school and sometimes your local council about what actions supporting your child will take to improve their attendance.

**Community order** – an order that can be made by a Court after you have been found guilty of knowingly failing to secure your child's regular attendance rather than sending you to prison. This may include requirements for you to take part in certain activities or observe certain rules.

**Early help assessment** – a voluntary assessment of what you and your family need help with to allow your child's school and/or your local council to put the right support in place or help you access the right services.

**Education supervision order** – an order that can be made by the Family Court to require a local council to advise, assist, and direct you and your child so that they receive suitable full-time education. This is not a criminal conviction, but persistently breaching the council's directions can lead to prosecution.

**Leave of absence** – permission given by your child's school for them to be absent from school for a specified period of time. You should write to the head teacher and ask for a leave of absence before the time your child needs to be absent from school. They will only be agreed to in exceptional circumstances.

**Parenting contract** – a formal signed agreement between you, and your child's school and/or your local council agreeing what actions you will take to improve your child's attendance and what the school/council will do to support you in this.

**Parenting order** – an order that can be made by a Court after you have been found guilty of failing to secure your child's regular attendance. You will be required to take part in certain activities or observe certain rules.

**Reasonable adjustment** – a change made by your child's school to remove or change something that is preventing your child from attending school.

**Regular attendance** – attending school every day that the school is open in line with the school rules apart from in a small number of allowable circumstances.

Working together to improve school attendance Being in school and having the best attendance possible underpins all the many benefits of school for your child, such as their learning, wellbeing and wider development. For some children, attending school every day will be harder than for others. This is why schools, and local councils in some cases, are committed to working together with families to solve problems and support your child's school attendance. This guide covers two areas:

- parents' responsibilities for school attendance and what you need to do when your child needs to be absent.
- How schools and local authorities will work with you to support your child's attendance.

Parents' responsibilities What are my responsibilities for my child's attendance? As a parent, you are legally responsible for making sure your child gets a suitable fulltime education, usually from the age of 5 to 16. For most parents, this will mean making sure your child is in school every day except when:

- Your child is too ill to go to school.
- You have permission for a leave of absence from your child's school for them not to attend. You should only ask for this in exceptional circumstances.
- Your religious body has a day especially for religious observance.

There are also some other circumstances for example where:

- Your local council is responsible for arranging your child's transport to school and it is not available on that day or has not been provided yet.
- Your child attends an independent school that is beyond walking distance from home and your local council has not arranged for your child to board at or near the school or attend another school closer to home.
- Your child does not have a permanent address and you are required to travel for work. (This exception only applies if your child attends their usual school or another school where you are staying as often as possible. This must be 200 half days or more a year if they are aged 6 or older.