

Attendance Policy

Last Review	Next Review	Review Frequency	Coordinator	Nominated Trustees
July 2024	July 2026 (or as statutory guidance is updated)	Every 2 years	Head Teacher	EC&T Committee

Introduction

This policy aims to promote good attendance for all children placed at the school. It has been written to reflect government's statutory guidance set out in *Working together to improve school attendance (August 2024)* and to provide clarity for all stakeholders about how the Mulberry Bush School will meet the particular needs of our children.

The Mulberry Bush School is a thoroughly integrated, therapeutic provision, with education, care and treatment provided holistically throughout every day. All children at the school are boarders during term-time, and those placed on 52-week contracts live at the school all year round. Group Living (care), Therapies & Networks and Education staff work closely together to ensure that children receive thoughtful, individualised support at all times, in line with their EHCPs. Attendance is therefore understood in a broad sense, beyond classroom presence, although we strive to teach children to engage in learning within the classroom environment as much as possible.

We recognise the benefits of good attendance in improving the long-term life chances of our children. Many children who attend the school have experienced limited access to education prior to joining us. We therefore prioritise instilling habitual routines to allow children to support consistent classroom access. Attendance is the essential foundation to positive outcomes and is everyone's responsibility in school.

Promoting good school attendance

The Head Teacher has overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance. Education is valued by the whole school community, and children are reminded of their right to learn. Group Living staff support morning routines to ensure children arrive in class ready to learn. The Shifford Team provides play and behaviour support to help children regulate and access the classroom.

The SENCO monitors attendance and shares data with Virtual Schools through termly PEP meetings. The Head Teacher reports attendance data to the Education Standing Committee of the Trustees and highlights any concerns and actions taken.

The school day

Children are expected to transition from their houses to Education at 9.15am, to start the school day. If children are not present in class by 9.45am, and no reason has been provided, the Shifford Team will usually go to the child's house, where possible supporting them to transition to Education.

The return to their houses for lunch at 12 noon, and re-enter their classrooms at 1pm. They are collected from class by staff from the houses at 3.15pm each day (2.30pm on Thursdays).

Admissions register ('school roll')

The school holds a Register of Children which provides specific personal information about each child, including their name; address; date of arrival/departure at the school; placing local authority; care status. Additional information is held on the school's ITP Suite, including the child's previous school; and information regarding parents and carers. Children are archived on the Register of Children and the ITP Suite when they leave the school; planning for the end of a child's time at the school is always done in close collaboration with the placing local authority.

Attendance register

As all children are boarders, the school is exempt from maintaining a statutory daily attendance register under the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. However, a register is maintained by the Shifford team and attendance information is provided to Virtual School and the DfE following their protocols.

Attendance is recorded as absent only when a child is off-site or unable to access any educational provision due to illness. Support outside the classroom is not considered absence.

The support for children's social, emotional and mental health throughout the full 24 hours each day is an essential feature of the school's provision, and the tracking of their attendance reflects this. We record children as absent only when they are not on the school site or when they are unable to access any educational provision due to illness. We consider that a child needing to come out of the classroom to be supported by Shifford or the houses is receiving what they need at that time and this is not considered to be an absence.

Definition of authorised and unauthorised absence

Absence is considered to be any time a child is not on the Mulberry Bush School site, or when their engagement with education is prevented due to illness.

- **Authorised absence:** With permission from the Head Teacher or representative, including illness or religious observance. Requests must be in writing and agreed only in exceptional circumstances, in consultation with the treatment team.
- **Unauthorised absence:** Without permission or explanation.

If a child does not return from home as expected, staff will contact parents/carers the same day.

Responsibilities of parents and carers

Parents/carers are responsible for ensuring regular attendance. If attendance is irregular, the child's network and school will work together to resolve issues. Persistent poor attendance may jeopardise the placement.

The school must notify the local authority if a pupil fails to attend regularly or is absent for 10 continuous days without authorisation. Concerns may be reported earlier.

Requests for leave of absence

Only exceptional circumstances warrant a leave of absence, and these are considered individually, taking into account the specific circumstances and context of the request. Any requests for absence need to be made in writing to the Head Teacher, who will respond in writing providing an explanation for why the request has been agreed or denied, and the length of time the child can be away from the school. Decisions are always taken in collaboration with the child's Treatment Team, within the Mulberry Bush, and with relevant members of their external network, including their social worker if applicable.

Responding to poor punctuality and/or attendance

Attendance is generally strong due to boarding and family support. It is reviewed termly and more frequently if concerns arise.

When children are persistently late for class or struggling to transition into Education, the Treatment Team will consider what further support or adjustments are needed. This includes the child's key worker, Treatment Team Leader, class teacher, SENCO and Head Teacher.

Where there are concerns about a child's attendance, the Head Teacher works with the Family & Network Practitioners and the House Managers to ensure that children and families are supported so that children can return to school as soon as possible.

If poor attendance persists, we seek support from the wider external network. Safeguarding referrals are made if necessary.

Some pupils have long-term medical conditions that make attendance difficult. Their right to an education is the same as any other pupil and therefore the child's treatment team would carefully consider what appropriate provision could look like, in consultation with the child's network.

Children with long-term medical conditions are supported to access education appropriately. Part-time timetables are not used. If a child is best supported outside Education, appropriate work is provided and not recorded as absence.

As a non-maintained school, we do not issue Fixed Penalty Notices for absence. However, we acknowledge the legal framework and work closely with children's

networks (including their local authority) to share information and risk and to plan a supportive response where significant attendance concerns arise.

In exceptional circumstances, where a child fails to attend school over a prolonged period of time, and despite extensive support, we would consider whether placement at The Mulberry Bush School continues to be in the child's best interests, and would consider bringing the child's placement to an early end. This would always be done in collaboration with the placing local authority.

Attendance codes

Although not required to maintain a statutory register, the School records attendance and shares data with Welfare Call and other agencies.

The following codes are used:

Code	Code title	Reason for use at MBS
/ \	Present	/ am, \ pm
C	Leave of absence agreed by the school.	There will be a corresponding letter from the Head Teacher explaining why this has been granted.
H	Family holiday agreed by school	There will be a corresponding letter from the Head Teacher explaining why this has been granted.
I	Illness	Unable to engage in education due to illness, whether at home or on the school site.
M	Medical	Off-site at hospital appointment, CAMHS, dental appointment, etc
R	Religious observance	A day that is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the parents' religious body (one day only).
#	School closure	Travel <u>half</u> day / school holidays
V	Educational visit/trip	School trip, Camping Week, Outward Bound
B	Off-site educational activity	For example, visiting their next school.
E	Excluded	When sent home (ie not on site).

G	Family holiday not agreed by school	There will be a corresponding letter from the Head Teacher explaining why this has not been granted, plus a letter stating our position if it is taken without consent. Leave of absence cannot be granted retrospectively.
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances	The school site is unavoidably closed when pupils are due to attend; transport is not available; local/national emergency.

For the full statutory guidance please see:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf