

OUR ATTENDANCE STRATEGY AT BIRCH:

OUR RATIONALE:

You will have heard in the media and possibly in local news about a Nation-Wide and Essex-wide focus on attendance in schools, due to a national trend of falling attendance figures since the COVID epidemic. Attendance and well-being continue to be a focus of staff and governor planning and monitoring in this academic year.

Coming to school every day means children do not miss out on anything!

- They see their friends
- Learn new things
- Join in in with activities
- Have fun at clubs
- Go on school trips
- Are kept busy and active all day

Not coming to school means they miss out!

- Children miss out on developing their friendships
- They may fall behind in their learning
- Miss events like school trips, sports days, or celebrations
- May not be as active and not sleep very well
- They are missed by the school community

It can be very difficult for a child to catch up on their learning if they are absent. For example, if they miss a few days when the class are developing their understanding of equivalent fractions, this is the foundation of many areas of fraction calculation and the learning that rests upon this conceptual understanding will be hard to build. Teachers and teaching assistants will, of course, try to catch them up but a ½ hour catch up cannot fully replace a sequence of well-planned lessons and, as the adults works with a child who has been absent, they are pulled away from their timetabled group or session. Absence effects everyone in the class. **Ofsted's new chief inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver, said regular absence from classrooms negatively affects teachers as well as pupils. "Teaching is a tremendously difficult job, and it's even more difficult if you have a class of 30 and five are absent one day and five another day, that becomes really disruptive not just for that child's learning but for all the children in that class."** Of course, sometimes absence is due to illness and, whatever the reasons for absence, we will attempt to help a child access the learning to the best of our ability and within the time constraints of the planned lessons.

OUR DATA

Our absence rates mirror the decline seen in the National picture, although thankfully they rest above the national curve. However, it is important that we as a school community tackle the issue before it gets worse.

OUR RESPONSE:

The main area of absence for us to work on is 'unauthorised absence', which is generally a holiday taken during term time or a day or two in term time either side of a weekend or a school holiday. As such, we have started to apply the Essex approach to absence very strictly since September 2023. Every parent is required by law to educate their child/children. Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they then have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being 'too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence deemed as an exceptional circumstance in advance from the school. Each time a parent takes a child out, they are breaking that promise and making it very difficult for the school to fulfil their part of the promise to educate the child. Absence has a huge impact on both attainment, friendship relationships and well-being for the child, some impact on the other children and an additional impact on staff workload. **Absence in school time, other than for illness is not acceptable and is deemed as 'unauthorised'**. Staff will not be supplying work for children if holiday is taken during term-time – they are too busy teaching the children who are present; added to which, a worksheet does not replace a sequence of well-planned lessons.

It is the responsibility of both parents and all the adults with day to day care, living in a property with a child to ensure that the child attends school. Nearly 90% of our families have not had an 'unauthorised absence' since September, but the 10% who have are having a negative impact on our attendance data and more importantly having a significant and negative impact on their own children's outcomes. **However, it is important that everyone understand the process that Essex Local Education Authority requires us to apply.**

LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY PROCEDURES:

NOTE: Section 576 of The Education Act 1996 defines a 'parent' as: All natural (biological) parents, whether they are married or not; Any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person; Any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person.

- If a parent/carer wishes to take their child out of school the parent/carer is required to apply for that planned leave via the Headteacher by filling out a 'Leave of Absence Request' form. The content of the form is set by Essex County Council. This form is available on the school website
- If the absence requested is four weeks or more before the leave dates requested then school must respond within 5 school days. If the request is with less than 4 weeks prior to the leave then the school must respond within 3 school days.
- Once the form is handed in or emailed in the school then completes the section B – the school response section and the Headteacher actions a letter to accompany the response form. Both of these are then posted to the parent/carers home address via Royal Mail.
- If the requested absence is authorised by the Headteacher then the school should respond by writing to each parent/carer simply with the school response section of the form. In some cases, an authorised absence will be simply responded to by emailing the

response to the parent/carer. If the absence is authorised then the child will have an authorised absence code applied to the days of absence (Code H for an approved holiday or a code C for other authorised circumstances)

- If the absence is deemed unauthorised then the school will write to all parent/carers in the same household (Adults with day to day care, that live in the same family home are equally responsible for the child's school attendance and should also receive a warning letter eg. Step parents or partners of those with parent/carer responsibility) Absent parents should be considered when the child does not reside there. In this case each case is assessed as to whether a letter is sent or not. A G code is used on the register for unauthorised family holidays and O for other unauthorised absence.
- The school are then required to apply through Essex County Council for any penalty notices due to be enforced. Penalty notices can be served after an instance of unauthorised absence. Penalty notices can be applied for if the unauthorised time spans either end of a school holiday, non-pupil days or bank holidays.
- Unauthorised time off in the first two weeks of September after the end of the summer holiday break may also induce an application for a penalty notice.
- Penalty notices must be applied for by the school within 10 school days of the child/children returning to school after the requested leave or unauthorised time off school.

ATTENDANCE 'HERO':

We encourage good attendance through many avenues, other than our rich and engaging curriculum and good relationships in class. In addition, we have, or will be putting in place, the following strategies:

- REGISTER ROB (a cuddly toy dressed in Birch school uniform) is awarded to the class with the best attendance each week during the children's Friday assembly.
- Launch ATTENDANCE HERO Spring Term 2 (Where **HERO** stands for: **H**ere, **E**very day, **R**eady and **O**n time) We encourage the children to attend if they possibly can.
- 100% attendance certificates each term and each year. Clearly this is a very difficult thing to achieve, hence all the other encouraging strategies, but for those who are fortunate enough to avoid illness and make every effort to be at school on time every day, it is something worth celebrating and noting.
- We will trial certificates for IMPROVED attendance from the previous term and the previous year

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL CATEGORISING ATTENDANCE BY LOST HOURS OF LEARNING:

We have included in this document the data, developed by the Local Authority, on lost days and hours of learning linked to percentage – just be aware that this percentage is a percentage of the whole year and therefore does not relate to attendance percentages at this stage of the year – it is just for information. I will also make available a similar Local Authority document that shows this information term by term 'A Rough Guide to Education Missed'

Categorising attendance and learning hours lost

Descriptor	Threshold attendance	Actual attendance (days)	Whole days absent	Lost learning hours	Level of concern
Excellent	100%	190	0	0	Green
	99%	188	2	10	
Good	98%	186	4	20	Green
	97%	184	6	30	
	96%	182.5	7.5	37.5	
Cause for concern	95%	180.5	9.5	47.5	Orange
	94%	179	11	55	
	93%	177	13	65	
	92%	175	15	75	
	91%	173	17	85	
Unsatisfactory	90%	171	19	95	Red
	89%	169	21	105	
	88%	167	23	115	
	87%	165	25	125	
	86%	163	27	135	
Critical	85%	161.5	28.5	142.5	Red
	84%	159.5	30.5	152.5	
	83%	158	32	160	
	82%	156	34	170	
	81%	154	36	180	
	80%	152	38	190	