Cranbrook
Primary School

DRAFT

Attendance Policy

Adopted by the Governing Body on 17th October 2019

To be reviewed Autumn 2021

Signed by the Chair of Governors:…….

London Borough of Redbridge

Redbridge Children's Services

Attendance Strategy

(Reviewed: September 2018)

Vision and Aims

The London Borough of Redbridge has a corporate plan designed to support its vision in accordance with the Children and Young People's plan. We envisage a future for children and young people in Redbridge where they can fulfil their dreams and achieve their full potential. They will be aspiring, independent and confident, enjoying family, school play, learning and life. They will be proud of themselves and able to make informed choices, while growing up in a safe and secure environment.
Children and young people will respect themselves and others, and be respected within their communities. They will have a voice and be listened to and heard, fully contributing to an inclusive, multi-cultural society.

Children and young people will develop a sense of responsibility and fairness and justice, becoming positive and informed members of their communities. They will continue to learn and develop throughout their lives, becoming healthy, creative, responsible and successful adults.

Redbridge Education & Inclusion aims to ensure that all school aged children access their entitlement to education. The Education Welfare Service will take steps to improve school attendance and ensure that all welfare needs of school-aged children are addressed. The Education Welfare Service works collaboratively with partner and external agencies and services to address any barriers to learning and/or social inclusion and promote school improvement.

Regular attendance at school contributes effectively to the Children and Young Peoples plan.

Key Principles

The Local Authority shares with its schools the wish to provide an excellent education for all of Redbridge's pupils.

All those with parental responsibility have a legal obligation to ensure that their children receive an education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

The Role of the Local Authority

- The Local Authority will strive to achieve excellent outcomes for all its schools and all its pupils in an inclusive education setting.
- Education Welfare (EWS) is a service within the Local Authority, which works to ensure that children and young people benefit from the education provided. To achieve this, the EWS aims to work in partnership with parents, pupils and schools.
- EWS must also fulfil their statutory functions as set out under the Education Act 1996.
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.
- The Education Act 2002.
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003.
- The Education Act 2005.
- The Education & Inspections Act 2006.
- The Education (Parenting Contracts and Parenting Orders) (England) Regulation 2007.
- Magistrates Court (Parenting Orders) (Amendment) Rules 2007.

- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 as amended.
- Children Act 1989 s36(3) Education Supervision Order
- Sections 444A and 444B of the Education Act 1996 (introduced by Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced Penalty Notices as an alternative to prosecution.

The key priorities of the EWS, in terms of attendance are to: -

- Improve Attendance and Punctuality
- Reduce levels of persistent absence
- Apply appropriate sanctions in accordance with the Redbridge Attendance Strategy and Legislation.

The Law

- A child of compulsory school age who is registered at school must by law attend regularly in accordance with the 1996 Education Act.

- Only schools can authorise the absence of a registered child. (Headteachers should seek clarity from the Education Welfare Service Manager if examples are required.)

Role of the Education Welfare Service (EWS)

The Local Authority has a statutory responsibility in law under the Education Act to enforce regular attendance of registered pupils at school. This duty is undertaken by the EWS working with schools.

EWS will have an understanding of each school(s) Attendance Profile to inform the Attendance Strategy that ensures a focus on identifying and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable young people including those who are persistently absent pupils or are at risk of becoming so.

The work of the service can be broadly divided into three categories.

1. Strategic Policy

- Analysing borough wide data and identifying trends and areas of action and need
- To work within DfE guidance and the legal framework.
- Developing police initiatives and ensuring co-ordination and consistency across the borough.
- Liaising with DfE and other external bodies to ensure that government initiatives and best practice exemplars are communicated to schools.
- Developing a strategic role that encourages a consistent approach between nursery, primary and secondary levels.

2. School Action

- Working closely with schools to analyse school level data and trends.
- Devising action plans with Headteachers to meet the specific needs of individual schools by, for example contributing to school assemblies, attending parent evenings and undertaking late gates

- Monitoring action taken by school(s) to improve attendance and reviewing school targets at regular intervals
- Ensuring effective and regular liaison between the EWS, school management teams and other key agencies or organisations.

3. Direct Intervention with Pupils and /or Parents and Carers

- Providing direct intervention with pupils who fall below target levels of attendance and devising strategies to improve their attendance in partnership with schools.

- Ensuring that Local Authority and school policies on attendance are implemented appropriately including the use of legal sanctions against parents where they are failing to fulfil their child's regular school attendance.

- Working closely with schools at transition stages to ensure that identified vulnerable children are provided with all possible support to reduce the likelihood of increased non-attendance and where necessary working and liaising with partner agencies.

The Policy on Leave

"Leave" in relation to a school means leave granted by any person authorised to do so by the governing body or proprietor of the school.

A Headteacher should only consider authorising an absence during term time where an application has been made in advance and where s/he is satisfied that there are exceptional or special circumstances to justify the request. The DfE (2013) now state that leave of absence requests for holidays should not be granted.

Exceptional Circumstances and Special Considerations

We are recommending this Strategy be used as a guide in addition to the School Attendance Policy.

- School can require evidence, particularly if a family are travelling abroad in the form of confirmation of booking and/or tickets.
  It is recognised that relatives may also need to attend funerals abroad and children and families need time to grieve but it is documented that children with prolonged absences from school find it harder to return and settle. Therefore a maximum of 3 days leave is recommended

- Sudden loss of housing through eviction or domestic violence, up to a maximum of 3 days.

- Teenage parents of compulsory school age will be supported outside of this guidance and each case will be dealt with on its individual circumstances in accordance with the Redbridge Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.

- Out of school programmes such as music, arts or sport will be considered on individual circumstances.

- Time off relating to Child Entertainment Performances, which is subject to a licence being issued by EWS, will be considered on an individual basis.

- Religious observance subject to a maximum number of 3 days per academic year. Pilgrimages (for example, Lourdes, Mecca, Rome or Jerusalem) are not religious observance that require absence during school term time.

Specific Circumstances not Included on the List

- Serious illness of a close relative. We feel that such a category would be very difficult to define and invite exploitation. In principle leave should not be granted for the illness of a relative unless a Headteacher is convinced that the circumstances are truly exceptional. The EWS would be happy to discuss individual circumstances

- Prison visits. Most prison visits can be achieved during weekends and holidays, but there may be exceptions when for example a parent is held in a prison a long way from home and when a Headteacher believes there is a justification to grant a days leave.

- Weddings of parents and siblings. Weddings can be arranged at weekends or during holidays and we would not recommend their inclusion on the list of exceptions. If however a Headteacher is convinced that there is a persuasive reason as to why a wedding cannot be held out of school time we would recommend 1 day's leave. We would not recommend that leave for weddings abroad should be agreed in term time in view of the potential for such an absence being of considerable duration.

Where a Headteacher is exercising discretion, a maximum number of 3 days is recommended. This is subject to the caveat of "avoidable absence", which should only be authorised for exceptional circumstances.

Sanctions for an Unauthorised Leave of Absence without Permission

- A Penalty Notice can be considered for unauthorised leave of absence taken without permission after the third day of absence. It will be issued by the EWS at the request of a Headteacher in accordance with the Local Authority Code of Conduct.

  If issued, this will incur a fine of £60.00 per child, per parent, being imposed if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice, rising to £120.00 per child, per parent thereafter to be paid by day 28. Subsequently, consideration will be given for the matter to be investigated by the Education Welfare Service and possible legal action.

- A penalty Notice can be considered for any unauthorised absence where there is no justifiable cause. In the first instance an Education Provider can request a Penalty Notice to be issued once 12 unauthorised sessions have been recorded in any 12 school week period. Thereafter, if further absences are documented the Education Welfare Service will conduct further investigations to establish why there has been no improvement.

- There is no statutory right of appeal against the issuing of a Penalty Notice.

- Arrangements for payment will be detailed on the penalty notice.

  In cases where unauthorised leave of absence has been taken without permission, which exceeds 10 days or more, the school should advise the EWS immediately in order that investigations can be implemented. The EWS will have a checklist of requirements before a pupil can be removed from the school roll. Procedures will be used in accordance with statutory instruments – The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 – No 1751.

- Prosecutions are brought under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 but alternatively legal interventions will be considered, such as Education Supervision Orders under the Children's Act 1989.

Absence due to Ill Health

Any absence relating to illness of 5 days or more should be supported by medical evidence. Prescriptions will not be accepted for medication of paracetamol or calpol, as these can be administered within the school environment.

Medical evidence will also be requested when patterns of absence have been identified.

Authorised Absence

Authorised absence is defined as:

- When a pupil is absent as a result of illness and an acceptable explanation has been received
- Religious Observance (as defined in the exemptions list)
- Where a child has been temporarily excluded from school
- Medical/dental appointments (sight of appointment card should be requested). Appointments should be made outside of school hours wherever possible and the minimum amount of time should be taken.
- Exceptional circumstances (unavoidable absence)

Punctuality

Persistent lateness does not constitute as full school attendance (Section 444 of Education Act, 1996).

Responsibility of the School

All pupils arriving late either with the 'L' or 'U' coding should sign in at school reception in order that times of arrival can be recorded to be used in evidence in the event of court action. This information should be shared with the schools allocated Education Welfare Officer.

The EWS will challenge persistent lateness both before and after the close of registration, schools (after their pre-referral action) should make the necessary referral to the EWS.

An Education Welfare Officer will undertake a late gate inspection at the request of the school.

Sanctions for Persistent Lateness

- Legal proceedings can be initiated on behalf of the Local Authority under the Education Act 1996, Section 444 (1) and (1a) after all other formal procedures have been exhausted, subject to school unauthorising the lates after the close of registration.

- In cases of lateness after the close of registration this will be deemed as unauthorised absence and a penalty notice for persistent lateness can be requested by the Headteacher (a minimum of 7 unauthorised lates in any one half term).

  If there is no subsequent improvement after the implementation of a penalty notice, the Education Welfare Officer for the school will undertake the necessary investigation.

Examples of Exceptional Circumstances and Special Consideration for Late Arrivals

- Adverse weather and/or travel conditions
- Delay by a school bus/local authority vehicle
- Pupil on a reduced timetable
- Pregnant pupil with prior agreement with Headteacher

Redbridge Special Schools

Given the complexity of the needs of many of the children in special schools, the reasons behind any absence need individual consideration before any enforcement action is taken and separate procedures will be followed outside of this Strategy.

Cases of Dual Registration

In cases of dual registration, the Education Welfare Officer of the 'Lead' school will undertake register trawls and monitor attendance. It will be the Education Welfare Officers responsibility to liaise with the dual education providers and their Education Welfare Officers and monitor attendance.

Guidance/Strategies

Strategies that have been successfully introduced into local schools to improve attendance include:-

- Attendance audits
- Disproportionality Toolkit
- Governor training for attendance and on the use of Penalty Notices.
- Training on the analysis of data and accurate register recording
- Awarding certificates/prizes for good attendance and punctuality
- Holding inter-class competitions for the best and most improved attendance
- Recording attendance in reports sent home with positive comments for effort. Sending children to senior members of staff for commendation of efforts made towards improving attendance
- Encouraging a successful transition from primary to secondary
- Identifying vulnerable children to ensure that appropriate support can be provided.
- Displaying attendance information in school such as graphs, bar charts etc

Responding to Continued Non-Attendance

- The Education Welfare will consider the use of "Education Supervision Orders (ESO's)" when it is deemed that legal intervention is needed.
  The purpose of ESO's is very clear, that of improving school attendance through supporting parents to exercise their parental authority.
  An ESO places a child or young person under the supervision of the Local Authority for a prolonged period and empowers the supervising officer to direct parents and children in matters relating to school attendance.
  These are implemented under the Children Act 1989.

- Further investigation into the causes of the non-attendance must to be carried out in cases of continued absence. Consideration should be given to those factors, which may influence attendance at school. Bullying, school refusal, parentally condoned absence, disaffection and learning difficulties are just a few of the many reasons children have given for continued absence from school.

- Once the investigation has discovered the cause of pupil's absence from school, it is important to negotiate a return to school programme that everyone is committed to, including the pupil, their parents, class teacher(s) and any support agencies. Without an agreed, well-structured programme the pupil is likely to feel insecure about their return. Particular support in language, literacy numeracy or for special education needs should be identified and a plan made for their inclusion in the return to school programme.

  All programmes named above can be targets used in a 'Parenting Contract' overseen by the Local Authority.

- In very exceptional circumstances the 'return to school programme' might consider whether it is appropriate for the head teacher to apply for modification or disapplication from the National Curriculum for individual students. Arrangements to modify or disapply from the National Curriculum must comply with regulations made under The Education Act 2002 and for the purposes of the strategy must comply with the relevant legal framework in force at the time.

  Returning to school after an absence can be difficult for some pupils. A great deal of persuasion by parents, EWO or teacher may have taken place to get the child to agree their return to school programme. Often, considerable courage is being shown by the pupil. Therefore, pupils need to feel secure in the knowledge that their return will be handled sensitively by staff.

  In these circumstances considerations will be given in supporting the young person for example; work being sent home for a fixed period.

- In secondary schools form tutors and learning mentors can positively help the pupil in returning to school by informing other teachers of the return of the individual. They can also help prepare a programme, which ensures the child has a realistic period of time to reduce their backlog of work.

  Governors have a valuable role to play in establishing the importance of attendance at individual schools. They help schools to focus upon the need for a clear policy on attendance and ensure that data on attendance is accurate and meaningful, and that trends and patterns are closely monitored. The Authority recommends that governors receive termly reports on attendance for this purpose. Governors should support the initiatives, which are taken by a school to promote good attendance by monitoring the relative success of such measures.

Partnership work with Schools - Parents and Parental Links

Other groups have an important role to play in supporting the school to achieve good levels of attendance. Parents have a duty to secure education for their children - normally this is achieved by sending their children to school. Establishing good links with parents must therefore, be a central objective for schools. The establishment of these good links is also an important pre-requisite for achieving good attendance.

A variety of factors have been found to be important in establishing relationships between schools and parents. These include:

- Consultation with parents on sanctions that may be imposed for non school attendance.

- The need for schools to be perceived as accessible, warm and welcoming with a well furnished, designated room for meetings with parents and the active encouragement and development of a parents' group.

- Communications with parents need to be undertaken with care and tact. Letters home need to reflect this and be personal, or personalised, whenever possible. The school prospectus is a very important means of communicating information about the school. The school can help parents to understand the school's policy on attendance by including clear statements regarding their expectations within the prospectus if one is available.

- The need for an understanding and knowledge of the local community that the school serves. Language support in certain schools has produced good results in developing relationships with local community groups.

The Use of Legal Proceedings

The Education Welfare Service initiates legal proceedings on behalf of Redbridge Children's Authority against parents where children of compulsory school age are not receiving full time education by regular attendance at school or otherwise all matters will be overseen by the Education Welfare Operational Manager.

Only Local Authorities have the power to prosecute parents and must consider the Attorney General's guidelines for Crown Prosecutors in all prosecutions.

Parenting Contracts (Attendance)

A parenting contract is a formal written signed agreement between parents and Local Authority and/or the governing body of a school.

Parenting contracts can be used in cases of misbehaviour or irregular attendance at school or alternative provision.

Parenting Contracts are voluntary but any non-compliance should be recorded by the Local Authority/School as it may be used in evidence in court.

Parenting Orders

Parenting Orders are imposed by the court and parent's agreement is not required before an order is made.
Parenting Orders are available as an ancillary order following a successful prosecution by the Local Authority for irregular attendance or breach of a school attendance order.

Circumstances where a Penalty Notice may be Issued

- Leave of absence taken without permission (a minimum of 3 days)
- Unauthorised leave of absence without justifiable cause (12 unauthorised).
- Persistent lateness (7 unauthorised lates in any one half term)

A Penalty Notice may only be considered in accordance with the Local Authority Code of Conduct and must be sanctioned by the Education Welfare Operational Manager and/or the Penalty Notice Administration Officer.

The Redbridge Children's Authority must consider every aspect of a pupil's well being before considering whether a Penalty Notice would be appropriate. This must include discussions with Headteacher, the assigned EWO and any other significant person who have involvement with or knowledge of the pupil/family.

Please Note

This document is intended as guidance for schools and/or education establishments and the Education Welfare Service Manager will discuss individually with schools, strategies and interventions that meets the need of the establishment.

Sue Bendon
Education Welfare Service Operational Manager