Maritime Academy Trust Attendance Strategy

In addition to Bligh Primary's Attendance Policy, below are the actions Maritime Academy Trust Schools undertake to support, monitor and improve pupil attendance.

INSTIL A STAFF MINDSET OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS AROUND ATTENDANCE

Having all of your staff on board will help to make sure your approach to your attendance policy is consistent throughout your school. To do this:

- Give staff the necessary attendance vocabulary and encouraging soundbites, like "every school day is a great day"
- Remind staff to model a 100% expectation for pupils to attend and learn in every lesson.
- Make sure staff members model personal punctuality themselves
- Make sure staff are aware that mental health needs can be a barrier to attendance, whether or not they've been diagnosed. However, if a pupil is anxious about coming to school, long periods of absence can make the issue worse. Therefore, you should emphasise that school attendance will actually help these barriers in the long run.

ESTABLISH A SCHOOL'S CULTURE OF GOOD ATTENDANCE

- Visibly demonstrate the benefits of good attendance throughout school life. This may include in displays, assemblies or in registration periods.
- Make sure attendance support and improvement is appropriately resourced, including where applicable through effective use of pupil premium funding
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence
- Monitor and analyse weekly attendance patterns and trends and deliver intervention and support in a targeted way to pupils and families.

ESTABLISH A SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM PRESENCE AROUND SCHOOL

- Designate a school leader with responsibility for pupil attendance, known as a 'senior attendance champion'.
- Have your senior leaders on the playground each morning.
- Have your senior leaders greet pupils on the playground or at the front of the school each morning, to give pupils a warm welcome.
- Make sure this first interaction is a positive one – avoid telling pupils off for being late or not wearing the right uniform. These are issues that can be addressed later in the day.
- Show that you've noticed when an often-absent pupil makes it to school that day.
- Greet them and let them know you're looking forward to seeing them the next day, too.
- In primary settings especially, this is also a good opportunity to build relationships with parents. This will help you work together to address any attendance issues that may come up.

MAKE GOOD ATTENDANCE EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY
Use this as a soundbite in its own right and regularly remind your school community of this point.

Work with parents

- Parents/carers will be best placed to support their pupil and notice any issues that may be a barrier to attendance.
- Involve parents as soon as you notice an attendance issue with a pupil and frame the discussion around what steps you can take to prevent it becoming a bigger problem.
- Use meetings, newsletters and your school website to get all parents/carers on board with your school's expectation for high attendance.
- Offer parenting classes that include sessions on morning routines and helpful ideas, such as 'getting dressed music'.
- Hold school uniform sales and have a stock from school donations, to help parents who can't afford to purchase new items. This can help parents overcome any self-consciousness about sending their children to school in an outgrown uniform, for example.

Involve your local community

Invite adult role models from your community to:

- Share the importance of good attendance.
- Discuss what happens if someone is late in the workplace or misses work.
- Demonstrate commitment and resilience to pupils You could do this in assemblies or PSHE, for example.
- Consider using your Parent LAC members to stress the importance of attendance and the robustness of school policies and procedures to others, especially if they're influential in your local community.

GIVE PUPILS A PURPOSE TO BE IN SCHOOL EACH DAY

- Younger pupils especially might not make the link between good attendance and achievement.
- Have staff provide low-attenders with a task or responsibility each day, such as tidying the book corner or looking after younger pupils on the playground.
- Encourage staff to remind low-attenders about anything exciting happening the following day, such as, "it will be lovely to watch you play football tomorrow".
- You could also schedule regular pupil voice meetings about non-attendance, so your pupils understand and can share with others the impact of poor attendance.

PROVIDE SECURE CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

- A safe school environment is incredibly important for many reasons, including attendance. It will help to make sure your pupils want to attend every day.
- Be relentless with managing bullying or any other issues between pupils, including on social media.
- Offer safe spaces around school and make sure pupils know who they can talk to if they're experiencing any issues from challenges with their peers, to their mental health.
- If you know a specific pupil is struggling, set up regular times for a trusted member of staff to check in with how they're doing, and find out if they need more support.

- You don't need to wait for an official diagnosis of a mental health issue to do this – take action and put appropriate steps in place as soon as you can when you notice that any pupil is struggling.

USE YOUR EXCITING CURRICULUM TO ENTICE PUPILS

- Your pupils need to feel that their learning is worthwhile. Make your curriculum stand out and highlight what's coming up, so they don't want to miss out on any learning.
- Work teaching about attendance into your curriculum. In lessons, ask your teachers to:
- Use pre-learning and anticipation of the next lesson's content to interest children – for example, "tomorrow we are …"
- Link learning to past and future lessons, split content, and use pole-bridging to link lessons – such as "you will remember in our last lesson we …"

ANTICIPATE FAMILY PATTERNS

These might include:

- Holidays during term time
- Birthdays off
- Younger siblings copying the behaviour of older family members

INCLUDE CLEAR STAGES OF ACTION IN YOUR POLICY

- You want to make it clear that any fines for non-attendance are not a disincentive due to the cost of travel in school holidays.
- Discuss this with parents and outline it on your school website or in a newsletter.
- Make sure you:
    - Have robust systems and structures for attendance, and review them regularly
    - Use data analysis to make sure no pupils fall through the attendance gap
    - Engage outside agencies to help manage persistent absentees

Managing Attendance Policy 2025

Approved by: Ratified by Trust Board	Christian Markham - Headteacher Chair of LAC	Date: January 2026 Date: January 2026
Last reviewed on:	January 2026	
Next review due by:	January 2027	
Bligh Primary School Attendance Champion	Matt Cobb	

Attendance Policy Principles

Promoting excellent attendance is the responsibility of the whole school community. Our schools will promote excellent attendance through their use of curriculum and learning materials. This is reinforced in our school's Behaviour and other policies. Excellent attendance by pupils will be recognised appropriately. All children should be at school, on time, every day the school is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

Our School strives for 100% attendance for all pupils; however, we appreciate that children can be ill or have rare unavoidable absences for other reasons. Therefore our overall school expectation is 96% attendance for every child which is in line with both National and Medway attendance expectations.

All staff are made aware of how each of their roles impacts on attendance and punctuality and that every member of staff, regardless of their role, can make a difference. All staff will receive training commensurate with their roles. The school will listen to and support pupils and parents/carers to achieve good attendance and punctuality and will work closely with them where absence is a cause for concern.

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1. Aims

This policy aims to show our commitment to meeting our obligations with regards to school attendance, including those laid out in the Department for Education's (DfE's) statutory guidance on working together to improve school attendance (applies from 19 August 2024), through our whole-school culture and ethos that values good attendance, including:

- Setting high expectations for the attendance and punctuality of all pupils
- Promoting good attendance and the benefits of good attendance
- Reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence
- Ensuring every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled
- Acting early to address patterns of absence
- Building strong relationships with families to make sure pupils have the support in place to attend school

At Bligh Primary School we follow the DfE Working together to Improve School Attendance Approach:

Expect

Aspire to high standards of attendance from all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school.

Monitor

Rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.

Listen and understand

When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen to and understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.

Facilitate support

Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.

Formalise support

Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through an attendance contract or education supervision order.

Enforce

Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention: a penalty notice in line with the National Framework or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.

It is vital that children develop regular attendance habits at an early age. Therefore, the school encourages parents of nursery and reception children who are not yet of compulsory school age to send their children to every session that is available to them. Every child enrolled at our school is expected to attend every day they are required to, on time, so that they can achieve their full potential. We monitor and manage attendance and punctuality across all year groups and expect parents to notify the school of any absence.

At Bligh Primary School we will support parents to perform their legal duty to ensure their children of compulsory[1] school age attend regularly and will promote and support punctuality in attending lessons.

We want our pupils to attend school every day unless they are not well enough to do so. We believe that children who attend school regularly are more likely to feel settled in school, maintain friendships, keep up with their learning and gain the greatest benefit from their education. We want all our pupils to enjoy school and grow up to become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who are able to realise their full potential. Regular attendance and punctuality are essential requirements in the workplace and children who are used to attending school on time, and on every occasion unless they are too unwell to attend, will be better prepared for the world.

In April 2017 the Supreme Court clarified the definition of regular attendance to be attendance "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school", therefore if an absence is **not** authorised by the school, the pupil's attendance is deemed to be irregular.

We will do all we can to encourage our pupils to attend. We will also make available the best provision we can, for any pupil who may experience any barriers preventing regular attendance.

One of the most important factors in promoting good attendance is the development of positive attitudes towards school and a sense of belonging. To this end, we strive to make our school a happy and rewarding experience for all children, and to foster positive and mutually respectful relationships with parents.

By promoting good attendance and punctuality we aim to:

[1] A child becomes of 'compulsory school age' on the 1st January, 1st April or 1st September following their 5th birthday and ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June of Year 11.

- Make good attendance and punctuality a priority for all those involved and as part of the wider school community.
- Raise pupils' awareness of the importance of good attendance and punctuality.
- Provide support, advice and guidance to parents, pupils and staff.
- Work in partnership with parents and carers, including regularly informing them about their child's absence and attendance levels.
- Work with external agencies where required, such as health, the LA and local organisations to support our pupils, parents and school.
- Support pupils back into school following a lengthy or unavoidable period of absence and provide support to build confidence and bridge learning gaps.
- Celebrate good and improved attendance and punctuality.

1.1 Why is Attending School Regularly So Important?

Evidence shows pupils with excellent school attendance are more likely to reach higher standards of achievement and be at less risk of exposure to crime and other safeguarding risks.

Pupils who attend regularly are more likely to achieve better results than their peers that do not, both at Key Stage 2 tests in the Primary phase, and in GCSEs at Secondary.

Excellent attendance enables pupils to be part of the school community and develop a sense of belonging.
This further supports each pupil's development socially, morally, and ethically, enhancing personal well-being.

If attendance over the school year is:	**…a pupil will miss this many days:**
100%	0
95%	10
90%	19
85%	29
80%	39
75%	49
70%	58

2. Safeguarding and Attendance

At Bligh Primary School we routinely monitor attendance data to identify trends and patterns of absence across all pupils as part of our standard procedures. We recognise that both sudden and gradual changes in a pupil's attendance may be indicative of underlying safeguarding concerns.

In line with the Department for Education's statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education, the school will investigate and report any suspected safeguarding issues to the appropriate authorities. As part of our safeguarding responsibilities, and in accordance with our procedures, we will notify the Local Authority and/or the Police of any pupil who is absent from school and whose whereabouts cannot be established, despite reasonable enquiries such as home visits. This action will be taken where there are concerns for the pupil's welfare or safety.

For further details, please refer to our Safeguarding Policy

3. Legislation and Guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance, and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on School Attendance Parental Responsibility Measures. These documents are drawn from legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance including:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Children Act 1989
- The Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Sentencing Act 2020
- The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2024

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The Local Academy Council, and Trust

The Academy Trust is responsible for:

- Setting high expectations of all school leaders, staff, pupils and parents
- Making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties, including:
    - Making sure the school records attendance accurately in the register, and shares the required information with the DfE and local authority
    - Making sure the school works effectively with local partners to help remove barriers to attendance, and keeps them informed regarding specific pupils, where appropriate
- Recognising and promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos
- Making sure the school's attendance management processes are delivered effectively, and that consistent support is provided for pupils who need it most by prioritising staff and resources
- Making sure the school has high aspirations for all pupils, but adapts processes and support to pupils' individual needs
- Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data and helping school leaders focus improvement efforts on individual pupils or cohorts who need it most
- Working with school leaders to set goals or areas of focus for attendance and providing support and challenge
- Monitoring attendance figures for the whole school and repeatedly evaluating the effectiveness of the school's processes and improvement efforts to make sure they are meeting pupils needs
- Where the school is struggling with attendance, working with school leaders to develop a comprehensive action plan to improve attendance
- Making sure all staff receive adequate training on attendance as part of the regular continued professional development offer, so that staff understand:
    - The importance of good attendance
    - That absence is almost always a symptom of wider issues
    - The school's legal requirements for keeping registers

    - The school's strategies and procedures for tracking, following up on and improving attendance, including working with partners and keeping them informed regarding specific pupils, where appropriate

- Making sure dedicated training is provided to staff with a specific attendance function in their role, including in interpreting and analysing attendance data
- Sharing effective practice on attendance management and improvement across schools
- Holding the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy

4.2 The Headteacher

The headteacher, **Christian Markham**, is responsible for:

- The implementation of this policy at the school
- Appointing a designated senior leader for attendance
- Monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to governors
- Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual pupils
- Monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies
- Authorising the Local Authority to be able to issue fixed penalty notices
- Working with the parents of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to develop specific support approaches for attendance for pupils with SEND, including where school transport is regularly being missed, and where pupils with SEND face in-school barriers
- Communicating with the local authority when a pupil with an education, health and care (EHC) plan has falling attendance, or where there are barriers to attendance that relate to the pupil's needs
- Communicating the school's high expectations for attendance and punctuality regularly to pupils and parents through all available channels

4.3 The designated senior leader responsible for attendance

The designated senior leader (also known as the 'senior attendance champion') Mr Matt Cobb is responsible for:

- Leading, championing and improving attendance across the school
- Setting a clear vision for improving and maintaining good attendance
- Evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes
- Having a strong grasp of absence data and oversight of absence data analysis
- Regularly monitoring and evaluating progress in attendance
- Establishing and maintaining effective systems for tackling absence, and making sure they are followed by all staff
- Liaising with pupils, parents/carers and external agencies, where needed
- Building close and productive relationships with parents to discuss and tackle attendance issues
- Creating intervention or reintegration plans in partnership with pupils and their parents/carers
- Delivering targeted intervention and support to pupils and families
- The designated senior leader responsible for attendance is **Matthew Cobb** and can be contacted via office@bligh-maritime.org or 01634 336220

4.4 The attendance officers

The school attendance officer, Ms Yvonne Lawrence, are responsible for:

- Monitoring and analysing attendance data (see section 9)
- Benchmarking attendance data to identify areas of focus for improvement

- Providing regular attendance reports to school staff and reporting concerns about attendance to the designated senior leader responsible for attendance, and the headteacher
- Working with education welfare officers to tackle persistent absence
- Advising the headteacher (authorised by the headteacher) when to issue fixed-penalty notices
- The attendance officer is Yvonne Lawrence and can be contacted via office@bligh-maritime.org or 01634 336220

4.5 Class Teachers

Class Teachers are responsible for recording attendance for both morning and afternoon sessions on a daily basis, using the correct codes (see Appendix 1), and submitting this information to the school office Registers need to be completed by 9:00am each morning and 1:45pm each afternoon.

4.6 School Office Staff

School Office Staff will:

- Take calls from parents/carers about absence on a day-to-day basis and record it on the school system
- Transfer calls from parents/carers to the attendance officer where appropriate, in order to provide them with more detailed support on attendance

4.7 Parents

Where this policy refers to a parent, it refers to the adult the school and/or local authority decides is most appropriate to work with, including:

- All natural parents, whether they are married or not
- All those who have parental responsibility for a child or young person
- Those who have day-to-day responsibility for the child (i.e. lives with and looks after them)
- Parents are expected to:
- Make sure their child attends every day on time
- Call the school to report their child's absence before on the day of the absence (and each subsequent day of absence), and advise when they are expected to return
- Provide the school with more than 2 emergency contact number for their child
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day
- Bligh Primary School works in collaboration with Medway Local Authority.
- Seek support, where necessary, for maintaining good attendance, by contacting the Family Liaison Officer, **Gemma Coulter**, who can be contacted via office@bligh-maritime.org or 01634 336220.

Parents are expected to refer to and consult the NHS guidance Is my child too ill for school when considering keeping their child home from school.

4.8 Pupils

Pupils are expected to:

- Attend school every day, on time.

5. Recording attendance

5.1 Attendance register

We will keep an electronic attendance register and place all pupils onto this register.

We will take our attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark, using the appropriate national attendance and absence codes from the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, whether every pupil is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances Any amendment to the attendance register will include:
- The original entry
- The amended entry
- The reason for the amendment
- The date on which the amendment was made
- The name and position of the person who made the amendment See Appendix 1 for the DfE attendance codes.

We will also record:

- Whether the absence is authorised or not
- The nature of the activity, where a pupil is attending an approved educational activity
- The nature of circumstances, where a pupil is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 6 years after the date on which the entry was made.

- The school day starts with entry between 8:40am-8:50am for years R-2 and 8:55am for KS2 and ends at 3:10pm (EYFS/KS1) or 3:25 pm (KS2)
- Pupils must arrive in school by 8:50am on each school day for EYFS & KS1 and 8:55 for KS2.
- The register for the first session will be taken at 9:00am and will be kept open until 9:30am. Arriving between this time, pupils will be marked with a L Code. Pupils arriving after 9.30am will be marked with a U Code.
- The register for the second session will be taken at the following times depending on when lunch finishes:
- See Dfe guidance 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' and ***Parent/carers guide to Working together to improve school attendance***

AM Opens	**AM Closes**	**Time L Code**	**Time U Code**
8.50am	9.00am	9.00-9.30am	After 9.30am.
PM opens	**PM closes**	**Time L code**	**Time U code**
1.15pm	1.30pm	1.30pm	After 1.30pm

- Registers will be kept open for 30 minutes after the afternoon registration time.

5.2 Unplanned absence

The pupil's parent must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence by 9:00am or as soon as practically possible, by calling the school office staff, who can be contacted via office@bligh-maritime.org or 01634 336220. Parents are legally obliged to inform the school of their child's absence on a daily basis.

When parents leave a message they are expected to give the following information:

- Name of pupil
- Class
- Specific reason for absence.

Please be reminded that we need a specific reason for your child's absence for our registers.

We will mark absence due to physical or mental illness as authorised, unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

Where the absence is longer than 5 days, or there are doubts about the authenticity of the illness, the school will follow DfE guidance 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance'. This states that if the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask the parent to provide medical evidence, such as a prescription, appointment card, or other appropriate form of evidence.

We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily. In some exceptional circumstances, the school may ask
the parent for further clarification, or the school may seek parental permission to contact the pupil's GP/Paediatrician directly to help support the needs of the individual pupil.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents will be notified of this in advance.

The NHS has produced a helpful guide for parents regarding childhood illness and school: Is my child too ill for school?

5.3 Planned absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the pupil's parent notifies the school in advance of the appointment.

Parents need to inform the school office for any planned absence.

However, we encourage parents to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

The pupil's parent must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence. Go to section 6 to find out which term-time absences the school can authorise.

5.4 Lateness and punctuality

Pupils are marked present if they are in school when the register is taken. If a pupil leaves the school premises after registration, they are still counted as present for statistical purposes.

It is the duty of parents to ensure that children attend school on time. This encourages habits of good timekeeping and lessens any possible classroom disruption.

The attendance officers will meet with parents of those children who are frequently late arriving at school to investigate reasons and suggest solutions to enable more punctual attendance.

Our pupils must arrive by 8:50am on each school day.

Our morning register is taken at 8:50am-9:00am and will be kept open until 9:30am

Our afternoon register is taken at 1:15pm and will be kept open until 1:30pm

A pupil who arrives late but before the register has closed will be marked as late (**L**), which counts as present.

If a pupil arrives after the register has closed (i.e. after 9:30am in the morning or after 1:30pm in the afternoon, they will be marked with the unauthorised absence code "Late after registers close" (U) which is an unauthorised absence mark. However, if the pupil is late arriving due to a valid reason such as an unavoidable medical appointment, the absence will be authorised and coded accordingly.

See DfE guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance and parent/carers guide to Working together to improve school attendance

5.5 Following up unexplained absence

Where any pupil we expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:

- When their child starts at school, they must provide the school with at least two emergency contacts and update us immediately if any of this information changes. The school will do data checks on this information twice during an academic year.
- Identify whether the absence is approved or not.
- Call the pupil's priority one contact on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason.
- Identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained – this will be no later than 5 working days after the session(s) for which the pupil was absent
- Call the parent/carer and emergency contacts on each day that the absence continues without explanation, to make sure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will consider involving Medway Local Authority
- It is the parent/carer's legal responsibility to inform the school of every day of absence.
- Where relevant, report the unexplained absence to the pupils to any external agencies involved with the pupil.
- Where appropriate, offer support to the pupil and/or their parents to improve attendance
- Identify whether the pupil needs support from wider partners, as quickly as possible, and make the necessary referrals
- Where support is not appropriate, not successful, or not engaged with: issue a notice to improve, penalty notice or other legal intervention (see section 6.3 below), as appropriate.

If an unexplained absence continues for 10 school days and the school cannot establish the child's whereabouts, it may:

- Make a safeguarding referral to Children's Services.
- Notify the allocated Local Authority Attendance Officer within 5 school days.
- If the unexplained absence continues for 10 consecutive school days, the school will make a Child Missing Education (CME) referral to the Local Authority in line with statutory duties.

5.6 Reporting to parents

The school will inform parents (see definition of 'parent', as used in this policy, in section 4.7 above) about their child's attendance and absence levels through the End of Year Report.

The school's attendance expectation is in line with both Medway and National expectations of at least 96%.

6. Authorised and unauthorised absence

6.1 Approval for term-time absence

The headteacher will allow pupils to be absent from the school site for certain educational activities, or to attend other schools or settings.

A leave of absence can only be granted at the headteacher's discretion, prior to the event and including the length of time the pupil is authorised to be absent for.

The headteacher will only grant a **leave of absence** to a pupil during term time if the request meets the specific circumstances set out in the 2024 school attendance regulations. These circumstances are:

- Taking part in a regulated performance, or regulated employment abroad
- Attending an interview

- Study leave - attending school entrance examinations
- A temporary, time-limited part-time timetable
- Exceptional circumstances

We define 'exceptional circumstances' as rare, unavoidable, and short-term events that are considered significant. They are unique to each family and are decided by the head teacher based on their assessment of the request. Requests for absence due to an 'exceptional circumstance' must be made in advance to the school.

Unauthorised absences are periods of "leave" which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no authorisation has been given. With unauthorised absence, the school does not agree that the reason given by a parent is acceptable.

As a leave of absence will only be authorised where either unplanned sickness or an authorised leave of absence above including exceptional circumstances as outlined above, family holiday is therefore an unauthorised leave of absence.

Where a leave of absence crosses the national threshold (*10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks*) *it can lead to the Local Authority using sanctions and/or legal proceedings as outlined in 5.2 (Sanctions).

Unauthorised reasons include:

- Parents/carers keeping children off unnecessarily
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Pupils who arrive at school after the register has closed
- Shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
- Day trips and holidays in term time, unless an authorised school trip
- Oversleeping
- Absence to look after an unwell sibling/family member
- Confusion over term dates
- School refusal

Some examples of exceptional circumstances include:

- An example given: religious observance, when the religious body has a day specifically set for that observance, bereavement (close family member, serious illness (child's own or visit seriously ill relative, Service Personnel..
- It also outlines other limited scenarios (particularly for independent/lodging arrangements), such as: Transport not provided by the LA on a given day.
- A child attending an independent school beyond walking distance and not provided with boarding.
- A child without a permanent address traveling for work, under very specific conditions.

Leave of absence will not be granted for a pupil to take part in protest activity during school hours.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant background context behind the request.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and, where possible, at least two weeks before the absence, and in accordance with any leave of absence request form, accessible by emailing office@bligh-maritime.org or calling the school office on 01634 336220.

The headteacher may require evidence to support any request for leave of absence.

Other valid reasons for **authorised absence** include (but are not limited to):

- Illness (including mental-health illness) and medical/dental appointments (see sections 6.2 and 6.3 for more detail)
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parent(s) belong(s). If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parent's religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart

- Parent(s) travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gipsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision
- If the pupil is currently suspended or excluded from school (and no alternative provision has been made)

Other reasons the school may allow a pupil to be absent from the school site, which are not classified as absences, include (but are not limited to):

- Attending an offsite approved educational activity, sporting activity or visit or trip arranged by the school
- Attending another school at which the pupil is also registered (dual registration)
- Attending provision arranged by the local authority
- Attending work experience
- If there is any other unavoidable cause for the pupil not to attend school, such as disruption to travel caused by an emergency, a lack of access arrangements, or because the school premises are closed

6.2 Decision on how to code an absence

The Headteacher is the only person who can authorise absences. Parents/Carers can of course provide evidence of their child's absence, in order to support that decision.

6.3 Sanctions

Our school will make use of the full range of potential sanctions – including, but not limited to, those listed below – to tackle poor attendance. Decisions will be made on an individual, case-by-case basis.

Penalty notices

The headteacher (or someone authorised by them) works alongside Medway Local Authority to request the issue of education penalty notices. The Medway Local Authority can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age, by issuing a penalty notice.

Schools will consider referring to Medway Local Authority for legal proceedings for unauthorised absence. Schools will not have a blanket position of issuing or not issuing penalty notices and will make judgements on each individual case.

- **The threshold is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks.**
- **It is to be noted that, in the case of a holiday-related absence of 10 sessions or more, then the school will NOT issue a Notice to Improve in this circumstance - instead a Penalty Notice will be initiated.**

The school will request Medway Local Authority to issue education penalty notices.

Before issuing a penalty notice, the school will consider the individual case, including:

- Whether the national threshold for considering a penalty notice has been met (10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks)
- Whether a penalty notice is the best available tool to improve attendance for that pupil
- Whether further support, a notice to improve or another legal intervention would be a more appropriate solution
- Whether any obligations that the school has under the Equality Act 2010 make issuing a penalty notice inappropriate

Each parent who is liable for the pupil's offence(s) can be issued with a penalty notice, but this will usually only be the parent/parents who allowed the absence.

The payment must be made directly to the local authority, regardless of who issues the notice. If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice.

If issued with a **first** penalty notice, the parent must pay £80 within 21 days, or £160 within 28 days.

If a **second** penalty notice is issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil, the parent must pay £160 if paid within 28 days.

A **third** penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of the issue of the first penalty notice. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time within those 3 years, alternative action will be taken instead.

A penalty notice may also be issued where parents allow their child to be present in a public place during school hours without reasonable justification, during the first 5 days of a suspension or exclusion (where the school has notified the parents that the pupil must not be present in a public place on that day). These penalty notices are not included in the National Framework, not subject to the same considerations about support being provided, and do not count towards the limit as part of the escalation process.

In these cases, the parent must pay £120, reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days.

Summary

Per Parent Per Child	Penalty Notice Fines will be issued to each parent, for each child that was absent. E.g. if you have 3 siblings absent for Term Time Leave, that will result in each parent receiving 3 separate fines.
5 Consecutive Days of Term Time Leave	Penalty Notice Fines will be issued for Term Time Leave of ***5 or more consecutive days***.
10 Sessions of Unauthorised Absence in a 10 week period	Penalty Notice Fines will be considered when there has been 1***0 sessions of unauthorised absence in a 10 week period***.
First Offence	The first time a Penalty Notice is issued for Term Time Leave, or Irregular Attendance, the amount will be: £160 per parent, per child (if paid within 28 days), this will be reduced to £80 per parent, per child (if paid within 21 days).
Second Offence (within 3 years)	The second time a Penalty Notice is issued for Term Time Leave, or Irregular Attendance, the amount will be: £160 per parent, per child (if paid within 28 days)
Third Offence and any further offences (within 3 years)	The third time an offence is committed for Term Time Leave or Irregular Attendance, a Penalty Notice will not be issued, and the case will be presented straight to the Magistrates Court. Magistrates' fines can be up to £2500 per parent, per child. Cases found guilty in Magistrates Court can show on the parents' future DBS certificate, due to ‘failure to safeguard a child’s education’.

Notices to improve

If the national threshold has been met and support is appropriate, but parents do not engage with offers of support, the school may offer a notice to improve to give parents a final chance to engage with support.

Notices to improve will be issued in line with processes set out in the local code of conduct for the local authority area in which the pupil attends school.

They will include:

- Details of the pupil's attendance record and of the offences
- The benefits of regular attendance and the duty of parents under section 7 of the Education Act 1996
- Details of the support provided so far
- Opportunities for further support, or to access previously provided support that was not engaged with
- A clear warning that a penalty notice may be issued if attendance doesn't improve within the improvement period, along with details of what sufficient improvement looks like, which will be decided on a case-by-case basis
- A clear timeframe of between 3 and 6 weeks for the improvement period
- The grounds on which a penalty notice may be issued before the end of the improvement period

7. Strategies for promoting attendance

The school will aim to promote good attendance and punctuality with a variety of measures including:

- Encouraging good attendance in children, including celebration assemblies, 100% attendance certificates; additional playtime for class attendance winners; celebration boards for attendance and punctuality; and other initiatives to reinforce the message to children.
- Supporting and advising parents, with school and/or outside agency input;
- Working with families, including where appropriate, formalising an attendance contract between school and parents.

NOTE: An attendance contract is a formal written agreement between a parent and school to address irregular attendance at school or alternative provision. An attendance contract is not legally binding but allows a more formal route to secure engagement with support where a voluntary early help plan has not worked or is not deemed appropriate.

8. Supporting pupils who are absent or returning to school

8.1 Pupils absent due to complex barriers to attendance

The school understands that, for some children, there may be complex barriers to attendance and we treat each case on its merits. This individualised approach may include families working in partnership with school staff, including our Family Liaison Officer, and outside agencies such as Early Help or others as appropriate.

8.2 Pupils absent due to mental or physical ill health or SEND

Where a pupil's attendance is affected by either the child's mental or physical or mental health or their SEND need, we would seek to work with families to put together an individualised plan, in conjunction with school staff and external agencies, including medical professionals as appropriate. Where a pupil has an education health and care (EHC) plan and their attendance falls, or the school becomes aware of barriers to attendance that are related to the pupil's needs, the school will inform the local authority.

8.3 Pupils returning to school after a lengthy or unavoidable period of absence

Pupils are entitled to a full-time education, suitable to their age, ability and aptitude, and any special educational needs or disabilities that they may have. If, for any reason, our school is unable to provide a pupil with a full-time education due to the pupil's needs, we will work with the pupil, parent and other agencies where appropriate, to come to a mutually convenient arrangement. Any reduced timetables will be for the shortest amount of time possible (max 6 weeks), whilst arrangements are made to support the pupil's return to full-time provision as soon as possible. Our school will submit all signed reduced timetable agreements to Medway Local Authority (LA) reducedtimetables@medway.gov.uk in line with Medway LA . Reduced Timetable Policy.

Vulnerable children

It is recognised widely that some groups of pupils are more vulnerable to poor attendance than others. Pupils with medical needs, SEN, Disabilities, Young Carers, Pupils with a social worker or in receipt of the pupil premium should receive more targeted support and reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010. These groups will be carefully monitored and intervention targeted appropriately. In certain cases, the school will gain advice from outside agencies.

The school recognises that it must agree with the local authority, the regular interval that the school will inform the local authority of any pupil who fails to attend school regularly or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of 10 days or more", (DfE guidance 2023 and further updated in August 2024). Where pupils have been absent continuously for 10 days and there has been no contact made with the school, the pupil is officially classed as a CME (Child Missing Education). The school is obligated to report such cases to the local authority immediately so that the whereabouts and wellbeing of the child can be investigated. If a pupil is absent and there has been no contact to explain the reason, the school will follow the steps in Appendix 2 of this document.

9. Attendance monitoring

Attendance is monitored on a daily basis by the school office. The school works in collaboration with Medway Council. Regular fortnightly meetings with SLT take place within the School.

Monitoring letters are sent to parents from Bligh Primary School.

Issue Notice to Improve letters (review 3-6 weeks) are reviewed by the School.

If further unauthorised absence is recorded, a referral is made to Medway Local Authority requesting enforcement. Medway Local Authority will consider either issuing an education penalty notice or legal proceedings on behalf of the school.

Medical evidence letters are sent by school.

Unauthorised holidays during term time letters are sent by the School. The School also sends additional unauthorised holiday absences 'Notice to Improve' letters to parents. **It should be noted that issuing a Notice to Improve is not a required step in order to issue an education penalty notice.**

The School keeps a database for attendance.

Referral letters are sent from the School, if attendance falls below the expected 96%. A referral for unauthorised absences are sent to Medway Local Authority when the absence has failed to improve and the school has followed the attendance policy. The School will always endeavour to work with the parent/carer to support their child attending school and may suggest an attendance contract.

9.1 Monitoring attendance

The school will monitor attendance and absence data (including punctuality) half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual pupil, year group and cohort level.

Specific pupil information will be shared with the DfE on request.

Data will be collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics.

The school will benchmark its attendance data at whole school, year group and cohort level against local, regional, and national levels to identify areas of focus for improvement and share this with the local academy council board.

9.2 Analysing attendance

The school will:

- Analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify pupils, groups or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance, and
- Identify pupils whose absences may be a cause for concern, especially those who demonstrate patterns of persistent or severe absence
- Conduct thorough analysis of half-termly, termly, and full-year data to identify patterns and trends
- Look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns
- The school will ensure that data is routinely monitored to identify emerging attendance issues and will seek to prevent any pupil becoming persistently or severely absent. This will include: identifying the individual needs of pupils; working closely with families and wider support services to remove barriers to attendance; and where a formalised approach in conjunction with the local authority is required in line with the statutory DfE guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance.

9.3 Using data to improve attendance

The school will:

- Develop targeted actions to address patterns of absence (of all severities) of individual pupils, groups or cohorts that it has identified via data analysis
- Provide targeted support to the pupils it has identified whose absences may be a cause for concern, especially those who demonstrate patterns of persistent or severe absence, and their families (see section 9.4 below)
- Provide regular attendance reports to facilitate discussions with pupils and families, and to the local academy council board and school leaders (including special educational needs co-ordinators, designated safeguarding leads and pupil premium leads)
- Use data to monitor and evaluate the impact of any interventions put in place in order to modify them and inform future strategies
- Share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities and other partners where a pupil's absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe, including keeping them informed regarding specific pupils, where appropriate

9.4 Reducing persistent and severe absence

Persistent absence is where a pupil misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a pupil misses 50% or more of school. Reducing persistent and severe absence is central to the school's strategy for improving attendance.

The school will:

- Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence
- Consider potential safeguarding issues and, where suspected or present, address them in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Hold regular meetings with the parents of pupils who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable or at risk of persistent or severe absence, or who are persistently or severely absent, to:
    - Discuss attendance and engagement at school
    - Listen, and understand barriers to attendance
    - Explain the help that is available
    - Explain the potential consequences of, and sanctions for, persistent and severe absence
    - Review any existing actions or interventions
- Provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance, in conjunction with the local authority, where relevant

- Consider alternative support that could be put in place to remove any barriers to attendance and re-engage these pupils. In doing so, the school will sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence
- Implement sanctions, where necessary (see section 6.3, above)

9.5 Process for supporting pupils with falling attendance

It is always the school's aim to work with parents wherever possible if their child's attendance starts to fall. The escalation process in supporting families may include (but is not limited to) the following steps:

School sends letter of our expectations to parents at the beginning of the academic year to all parents/carers

School sends falling attendance letter to parents/carers

⇩

School writes to parent/carer(s), inviting them into school to an attendance meeting to discuss current interventions and support in place, enabling parent/carer and pupil to raise any concerns. At the attendance meeting it will also enable any further academic or pastoral support/interventions to be considered / implemented.

⇩

School will send a letter to parents/carers, annotating whether they attended the meeting (or not) and detail all academic/SEN/pastoral interventions in place. If parent/carer did not attend then the school will advise that they should contact to arrange a meeting with the school to raise any concerns. Additionally school may warn parent that medical evidence is required for future absences to be considered for authorisation and that for further absences the school will consider issuing a Notice to Improve (where applicable)

⇩

If further decline in attendance, unauthorised sessions recorded, school will issue a Notice to Improve, clearing annotating all support / interventions in place, time period for improvement - 3-6 weeks.

⇩

If further decline in attendance, unauthorised absence record

⇩

School to consider requesting enforcement from Medway LA, enforce attendance through statutory intervention: a penalty notice in line with the National Framework or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.

10. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed as guidance from the local authority and/or DfE is updated, and as a minimum annually by the headteacher

At every review, the policy will be approved by the full LAC board meeting

Links with other policies

This policy links to the following policies:

- Maritime Safeguarding Policy 2025 2026
- Behaviour Policy

Appendix 1: attendance codes

The following codes are taken from the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Pupil is present at morning registration
****	Present (pm)	Pupil is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Pupil arrives late before register has closed
Attending a place other than the school		
K	Attending education provision arranged by the local authority	Pupil is attending a place other than a school at which they are registered, for educational provision arranged by the local authority
V	Attending an educational visit or trip	Pupil is on an educational visit/trip organised or approved by the school
P	Participating in a sporting activity	Pupil is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
W	Attending work experience	Pupil is on an approved work experience placement
B	Attending any other approved educational activity	Pupil is attending a place for an approved educational activity that is not a sporting activity or work experience
D	Dual registered	Pupil is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
Absent – leave of absence		
C1	Participating in a regulated performance or undertaking regulated employment abroad	Pupil is undertaking employment (paid or unpaid) during school hours, approved by the school

M	Medical/dental appointment	Pupil is at a medical or dental appointment
J1	Interview	Pupil has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
S	Study leave	Pupil has been granted leave of absence to study for a public examination

X	Not required to be in school	Pupil of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend
C2	Part-time timetable	Pupil is not in school due to having a part-time timetable
C	Exceptional circumstances	Pupil has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances
Absent – other authorised reasons		
T	Parent travelling for occupational purposes	Pupil is a 'mobile child' who is travelling with their parent(s) who are travelling for occupational purposes
R	Religious observance	Pupil is taking part in a day of religious observance
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointment)	Pupil is unable to attend due to illness (either related to physical or mental health)
E	Suspended or excluded	Pupil has been suspended or excluded from school and no alternative provision has been made
Absent – unable to attend school because of unavoidable cause		
Q	Lack of access arrangements	Pupil is unable to attend school because the local authority has failed to make access arrangements to enable attendance at school
Y1	Transport not available	Pupil is unable to attend because school is not within walking distance of their home and the transport normally provided is not available

Y2	Widespread disruption to travel	Pupil is unable to attend because of widespread disruption to travel caused by a local, national or international emergency
Y3	Part of school premises closed	Pupil is unable to attend because they cannot practicably be accommodated in the part of the premises that remains open
Y4	Whole school site unexpectedly closed	Every pupil absent as the school is closed unexpectedly (e.g. due to adverse weather)
Y5	Criminal justice detention	Pupil is unable to attend as they are: ● In police detention ● Remanded to youth detention, awaiting trial or sentencing, or ● Detained under a sentence of detention
Y6	Public health guidance or law	Pupil's travel to or attendance at the school would be prohibited under public health guidance or law
Y7	Any other unavoidable cause	To be used where an unavoidable cause is not covered by the other codes
Absent – unauthorised absence		
G	Holiday not granted by the school	Pupil is absent for the purpose of a holiday, not approved by the school
N	Reason for absence not yet established	Reason for absence has not been established before the register closes
O	Absent in other or unknown circumstances	No reason for absence has been established, or the school isn't satisfied that the reason given would be recorded using one of the codes for authorised absence
U	Arrived in school after registration closed	Pupil has arrived late, after the register has closed but before the end of session
Administrative codes		
Z	Prospective pupil not on admission register	Pupil has not joined school yet but has been registered

#	Planned whole-school closure	Whole-school closures that are known and planned in advance, including school holidays

Appendix 2: Children Missing Education/CME

Where pupils are deemed 'Children Missing Education/CME', the school will follow the steps on this guidance form and refer to the local authority. A child is deemed CME if they have not attended school for 10 consecutive school days AND there has been no contact either prior to or during this period from home. The school must take robust steps to ensure the child is safe.

Checklist for Attendance Safeguarding - Unable to contact child/family			
Safeguarding Action for Unknown absence over 10 days - unable to make contact with the family	**Date**	**Completed by (name)**	**Response Y/N** **Notes if appropriate**
Day 1 - phone call and text made to primary number (priority 1)			
Day 2 - phone call, text and email made to primary number (priority 1) plus phone call to priority 2 ● Where other services (e.g. social workers) are known to be involved, check with them to see if they have had contact with the family.			
Day 3 - phone call, text and email made to primary number (priority 1) plus phone call all emergency contacts. Home visit undertaken.			
Day 4 - phone call, text and email to primary number (priority 1). If no contact to primary number (priority 1) and potential home visit. Text and email sent to the family to say that 'contact is urgently required, and the school will need to escalate the concern to Medway Children's Services, or if advised, the police if there is no response to the text and/or email within 24hrs			
Day 5 - phone call, text and email to primary number (priority 1). If no response, home visit undertaken by school. Discuss pupil with allocated Local Authority attendance Officer. Consider: ● Does it look as though the family are still living at the address? ● If no answer, put a letter through the door requesting contact; Date and time the letter. ● Scan the letter and attach the scan to the pupil's record on Bromcom ● If no contact, Headteacher informed.			
Day 6 - phone call, text and email to primary number (priority number 1). Where other known siblings attend other schools, check to see if the other schools are having contact with the family. If no contact, Headteacher informed.			

Day 7 - phone call, text and email to primary number (priority 1). If no contact, speak to the other agencies for advice. Home visit again.			
Day 8 - phone call, text and email to primary number (priority 1). If no contact, speak to Headteacher.			
Day 9 - phone call, text and email to primary number (priority 1). If not able to locate whereabouts following the above attempts and the school have exhausted every option to try to locate the child, then the **child is a missing person** and as such will be reported to the local authority (Children's Social Care) in the first instance to risk assess their vulnerability and			
gain advice as to any further actions that will be taken.			
Day 10 - phone call, text and email to primary number (priority 1). School should complete a CME referral to the local authority when the child's attendance cannot be confirmed after 10 days.			