St Mary's School
Gerrards Cross

ATTENDANCE POLICY

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Related Policies	Safeguarding Policy Children Missing from Education Mental Health Policy Missing Child Policy	**Policy Ref.**	

Policy Statement

Our school is committed to equity, safety, and transparency, ensuring all policies protect and support our community. Every policy translates our core values into clear practices to maintain an inclusive environment where the welfare of students, staff, and families remains paramount. To achieve this, our guidelines actively promote equal opportunities, celebrate diversity, and prioritize physical, emotional, and digital safety. We provide straightforward, accessible guidance that relies on shared community accountability. Finally, we subject all policies to regular reviews to stay aligned with statutory updates, local needs, and current best practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a partnership between the family and the School. St Mary's School is committed to providing the highest quality of education, and we look to parents and guardians to support us in fulfilling this objective by ensuring full and prompt attendance of all students at school.

St Mary's School believes that regular school attendance is key to enabling children to achieve their full potential. Attendance at school enables our students to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and to become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who are ready to take their place in the world.

St Mary's School values all students, and we will always work with families to identify reasons for low attendance and try to resolve any difficulties through appropriate support.

WIDER REFERENCES

This policy operates within a wider national framework, which includes:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- Working together to improve school attendance 2026
- Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance February 2023

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Every student from Reception to Year 13 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 in advance from the school. Nursery children must attend the days that they are registered for. See grounds for 'authorised' absences below.

Attendance forms part of the school's safeguarding arrangements and all concerns regarding attendance, absence, patterns of absence or punctuality may be considered safeguarding concerns and managed in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy.

Parents can only allow their child to miss school if they are too ill to go in or they have advance permission from the Head. The *'School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024'* makes it clear that Heads may only grant leave of absence *in exceptional circumstances*.

School attendance is essential for the wellbeing of students. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates. They are often specific to individual students and families. Some students find it harder to attend than others and therefore at all stages of improving attendance the school will work with students and parents to remove any barriers by building strong and trusting relationships and putting the right support in place.

The Assistant Head Pastoral Mrs Stacey is the designated Senior Attendance Champion and the Deputy Head (Head of Prep) Mrs Carney is the designated Prep Attendance Champion. They are both supported by Heads of Year and Form Tutors to support the students with their attendance. The pastoral team will track and monitor patterns of attendance and ensure there is a positive culture of school attendance. The attendance champions will ensure all school-based staff complete their attendance responsibilities in line with the school's policies and procedures. The attendance champions work closely with the attendance officer to monitor, track and record all students' attendance.

REQUEST FOR TERM-TIME ABSENCE

If a student is going to be absent from school for reasons other than ill health, this must be discussed in advance with the school on each separate occasion. Parents should note that they should make every effort to avoid making medical/dentist appointments during the school day.

For Prep and Senior: medical appointments, music examinations, school open days/interviews, religious observance, bereavement, compassionate reasons, sporting opportunities e.g., World Cheerleading Competition, National Golf Competition. Requests for these types of planned absence should be made in writing as soon as parents are aware of the date and time to the following:

- absence@stmarysgx.co.uk and copy in the form tutor and HOY (senior house). For Prep, please copy in Mrs Carney and for Senior House please copy in Mrs Stacey.

All other requests for term-time leave of absence which are longer than one day for both Prep and Senior School must be addressed to:

- the Head and Deputy Head (for Prep only) via the absence@stmarysgx.co.uk

Requests for leave in genuinely exceptional circumstances should be made by submitting a request, with supporting evidence, at least 2 weeks in advance to allow sufficient time for the request to be decided upon. Suitable evidence might, for example, be a wedding invitation, a letter inviting the child to participate in an exceptional opportunity, such as a national sporting competition.

If a term-time leave of absence is granted in exceptional circumstances, then it is unlikely that any future term-time leave of absence would be granted for the same child. Records are kept from year-to year documenting these requests and tracking where students have been absent including the start/end of school holiday periods.

The school always sends parents term dates a year in advance so that holidays can be arranged without disruption to education. St Mary's School already has generous holidays and therefore parents should make every effort to avoid taking holidays during term time. Term-time travel due to availability or cost of flights is not a valid exceptional circumstance for a leave of absence and will not be authorised by the school. Students are expected to participate in all activities at the start and end of terms such as induction days, profiling, team building days and House Competitions which help to build resilience and school culture. In addition, students may be invited to attend additional events at the school including Open Day, Carol Concert and Speech Day for which attendance is compulsory. Parents should note that if their child is unable to attend these, a request for absence should be made in the same way as for any other school day.

UNPLANNED ABSENCE

If your child is ill, parents should notify the school before 8.30am on the first day of absence by emailing absence@stmarysgx.co.uk or leaving a voice mail message. Parents should continue to do this for every day of continued absence so that the school can account for them. If a student is absent and the school is not aware of a valid reason, the office will phone parents by 9.40am to alert parents that their child has not arrived at school, and follow up with an email to ensure the child is accounted for and has not suffered an accident on the way to school.

If your child is ill due to sickness or diarrhea, please note that they should not be attending school for **48 hours** after their symptoms have cleared to reduce the chance of transmitting the virus.

St Mary's School acknowledges that we all fall ill from time to time and that children may need to be at home to rest and recuperate fully. However, we also encourage parents to develop their child's resilience to cope with minor illnesses and acknowledge that being in the classroom is the best place to learn. We have a medical room at St Mary's School which is fully staffed at all times by trained staff. Should your child feel ill during the school day they should go to/be accompanied to the medical room where a member of staff will look after them. After some time out and appropriate medical support the student may feel that they are able to return to class and complete the school day. Should this not be the case a member of staff will contact parents to arrange for them to collect their child.

The school may ask parents to provide supporting evidence of medical/dental appointments especially where a student's attendance falls below 90%. Acceptable forms of evidence could be an appointment slip, text from the surgery, GP or hospital letter.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES FOLLOWING AN ABSENCE

Other than in exceptional circumstances due to prolonged periods of absence for an authorised medical reason, parents should note that if their daughter is not well enough to attend school, they should be resting in order to return to school as soon as they are well enough and school will not set any form of home learning or remote education.

Following any absence, students are expected to catch up, and their teachers will support them to do this. In Senior House, it is the responsibility of the student to make contact with their teachers if they are not sure what they need to catch up on or do not understand the task.

LATENESS

In order to monitor attendance, it is essential that the registers are accurate and that procedure is followed. It is the practice of this school to register all students twice a day. This is done electronically on the school information management systems 'iSAMS' at the start of the morning and at the end of the afternoon session in both sections of the school.

The school day starts for both Prep and Senior House at 8.30am and all students should be on site by this time. Morning registers are open at 8.35am and close at 8.45am and any student arriving after 8.45am will be required to sign in on the InVentry System at Reception, explaining the reason for their lateness. In Prep and Senior House if there is a late arrival after 9am this is recorded as a code U and, for the purposes of statistical attendance reporting to the Local Authority, is classed as a half-day absence, as the student has arrived after the registration period without a justifiable reason.

To support students with their punctuality the following interventions are put into place:

- In Senior House Heads of Year receive regular late reports which they use to address patterns with individual students.
- Subject teachers log late arrivals to lessons.
- Staff vigilance in corridors and on duty to ensure that students move to and from lessons promptly.
- Form Tutors and Heads of Year contact parents where there are patterns of lateness, to discuss strategies for improvement.
- Form Tutors and Heads of Year liaise with the Attendance Champions if improvement has not been made.
- Where there is a pattern of lateness to school involving a student who travels independently the DSL/DDSL Team will consider whether there could be an underlying safeguarding concern leading to a pattern of lateness and make a referral to Children's Services where appropriate.

MORNING REGISTRATION PROCEDURE

1. Form Tutor completes iSAMS register at the designated time. If there is problem with iSAMS registration staff should complete a paper copy from the Office or email the list of girls to the Attendance Officer.
2. Any absence emails from parents should be shared with the Attendance Officer.

3. The morning receptionist checks the registers, any contact from parents via email or phone and emails the Attendance Officer and relevant staff.
4. A list of students who are absent without explanation is produced and emailed to the unaccounted group email.
5. The Attendance Officer will double check to see if the student has arrived in school. If this is not the case, they will phone parents by 9.40am to alert them that their child has not arrived at school and then will follow up with an email if no response is received. A minimum of two contact numbers are held for every student.
6. If by 10.35am the student remains unaccounted for the Attendance Officer will inform the DSL and attendance champions. They will consider if it is appropriate to make a home visit and/or contact emergency services or social care. If the student is already known to social care, they must be informed of this absence.

PREVENTION OF PERSISTENT AND SEVERE ABSENCE

Persistent absence is where absence escalates and students miss 10% or more of school, school will work together with family and, where appropriate the local authority to put additional targeted support in place to remove any barriers to attendance. Parents will work in collaboration with the school to ensure positive school attendance for their child/children.

Severe absence is more than 50% of the time, by which point school and the local authority will be supporting families to reduce barriers. Where attendance concerns may be linked to bullying, peer-on-peer abuse or other welfare concerns, these will be investigated through the school's safeguarding and anti-bullying procedures. If school have explored all avenues of support, then the local authority and other agencies will support parents and the child to support them to attend school.

STUDENTS WHO ARE ABSENT FROM SCHOOL DUE TO MENTAL OR PHYSICAL ILL HEALTH OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND/OR DISABILITIES

St Mary's School understands that on occasions for exceptional reasons due to medical or mental health issues a student may need additional support to enable their access to education. Part-time timetables could be offered and will only be used in exceptional circumstances, be time-limited, regularly reviewed and agreed with parents.

The Head of Year and/or DSL will work with the family to make any reasonable adjustments and to seek appropriate support if required. Support offered may include mentors, school counsellor or other external agencies such as family support services. Any support or intervention offered is child-centered and planned in discussion and agreement with parents and the child. The support is regularly reviewed and monitored to ensure that there is an improvement in the situation, or take further advice/action should this not be the case. This may involve informing the local authority/children's services in cases where support has not been effective or parents have not engaged with the support offered.

St Mary's School recognises that absence can act as a warning sign of safeguarding issues such as neglect, child criminal and sexual exploitation and increases the risk of abuse, or of other Early Help support required for the child or family to improve the situation.

Where a student is unable to attend school because of physical or mental health needs, the school will work with parents, medical professionals and the local authority (where appropriate) to ensure suitable educational provision and support are put in place.

MONITORING ATTENDANCE

Attendance is monitored by the attendance officer, champions and Heads of Year half termly to identify any students falling below our expected level. This is taken from the AM register (8.35am) and PM register (2.00pm). The windows of attendance are 8.35am-9am for morning registration (AM) and 2.00-2.30pm in the afternoon registration (PM).

The attendance champions and Heads of Year/Form Tutors monitor absence and punctuality carefully throughout each term. Where an absence is of 3 or more consecutive school days, or attendance is close to dropping below 90% in a term Heads of Year/Form Tutors will make contact with parents to discuss any support/intervention required to support their daughter attending school. This will also apply if there is a persistent trend and pattern of lateness. Parents should make school aware of any difficulties or barriers that may affect their child's attendance so that school can work with them and their child to provide appropriate support. Attendance data, trends, persistent absence and severe absence will be reviewed regularly by Senior Leadership and reported to the Governing Body to support strategic oversight and compliance.

Schools have a duty to report certain attendance issues to Bucks County Council. This includes:

- 10 consecutive days of unauthorised absence (Child Missing in Education will also be contacted).
- 15 days of authorised absence due to illness.

Bucks County Council will work with the school, child and families and other external agencies if necessary to support the student to attend school.

Removal from the school roll

1) If a child leaves to attend another school they will be removed from school roll.
2) When an authorised leave of absence has been granted and a child does not attend school within the **10 school days immediately after** this period. There is also no reason to think they are unwell/unable to attend school or are attending any other educational provider.
3) A student has been continually absent from school for **20 or more school days** (unauthorised) even though the school and local authority have made attempts to locate them and believe they are not unwell/unable to attend school or are attending another educational provider.

If a student is removed from school roll then the County Council will work with external services to locate the family and place the student in a new educational provider.

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING AND IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The school follows these steps to maintain and improve school attendance:

- Have a clear school attendance policy which all staff, students and parents understand.
- Develop and maintain a positive culture and ethos about attendance, promoting positive reasons for high attendance.
- Build strong relationships with parents and students to listen and understand barriers to attendance and work to remove them, working with the local authority and other partners where appropriate.
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day-to-day processes to follow up on absence.
- Regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify effective early intervention strategies.

STUDENT ABSENCE REQUESTS STAFF RESPONSIBILITY

Staff are reminded that any student requests for absence for medical, examinations, open days/interviews, sporting opportunities, religious observance, dental or orthodontic appointments must be passed onto the Attendance Officer on the absence email absence@stmarysgx.co.uk so that this can be logged on our system. Staff are also reminded that any requests for a day or more absence must be authorised by the Head or Deputy Head (Head of Prep). All such requests should be emailed to absence@stmarysgx.co.uk.