



Nursery Attendance policy

Portsmouth Primary School and Early Years

Approved by: Governing
Body

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1. Rationale

At an early age, continuity and consistency are important contributors to a child's well-being and progress and good attendance and punctuality in the Early Years are the foundation for lifelong learning habits. Although attendance in nursery and pre-school is not statutory, every day a child attends provides valuable opportunities to develop their language, social skills, independence, and early academic foundations. Children who attend regularly are more likely to feel secure, build strong relationships with peers and adults, and make consistent progress across all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

We recognise that young children may experience illness more frequently than older pupils, and we understand that families sometimes face challenges in maintaining consistent attendance. However, establishing routines of regular attendance from the beginning of a child's educational journey helps prepare them for compulsory schooling and gives them the best chance to thrive.

This policy sets out the expectations of parents, carers, and the setting in working together to promote and support good attendance. It also highlights the procedures we follow for monitoring attendance, addressing concerns, and ensuring the safeguarding of all children. By working in partnership, we aim to ensure that every child enjoys a positive early years' experience that supports both their immediate development and long-term educational success.

Aims

- To work in strong partnership with parents and carers to ensure that every child attend nursery regularly and is punctual.
 - To support families in understanding the importance of regular attendance.
 - To identify and address any barriers to children's attendance in nursery.
 - To ensure safeguarding responsibilities are met.
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2. Legislation and statutory requirements

This policy is based on requirements set out in the 2026 statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). It also follows the local authority's Children Missing Education procedures and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) health protection guidance on infection control in schools and childcare settings.

3. Expectations

Expectations below will be explained to parents as part of their child's home visit and parents will be asked to sign to say they agree to follow.

Parents/Carers should:

- Ensure children attend nursery for their booked session and arrive on time.
- Notify the setting on the first day of absence either by telephone, email or via Tapestry app, giving the reason.
- Contact the nursery if this absence is continuing i.e. later that day/session if your child will be absent the following day.
- In the case of lengthy absence keep the nursery well informed.
- Provide up-to-date contact numbers and notify us of any changes of address or contact details.
- Work with us to identify any barriers to attendance, including medical or SEND needs, so reasonable adjustments can be put in place.

The setting will:

- Record attendance daily, including each child's name, hours of attendance, and their key person.
 - Monitor patterns of absence and lateness.
 - Follow up promptly on unexplained absences (safeguarding duty).
 - Offer support to families where attendance is a concern.
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4. Procedures

Reporting absence: Parents must inform the setting by phone, Tapestry app, or email before the start of the session.

Absences may include illness, medical appointments, religious observances, exceptional family circumstances, or family holidays. While we recognise that nursery attendance is non-statutory, we strongly discourage holidays in term time as they can disrupt children's learning and routines.

Persistent absence: If a child's attendance is low or levels of punctuality are poor, the setting will meet with parents to discuss concerns and agree on a plan of support.

Unexplained absence: If a child is absent without notification, we will attempt to contact the parent/carer using the primary contact number provided. If we are unable to reach the parent/carer, we will attempt to contact the secondary emergency contact provided. All contact attempts and outcomes will be recorded in the child's attendance record. If we are unable to make contact and have concerns about the child's welfare, we will follow our safeguarding procedures.

Prolonged absence: A prolonged absence is defined as 3 consecutive sessions of absence without a valid explanation. If a child is absent for a prolonged period, we will:

- Make repeated attempts to contact parents/carers and emergency contacts.
- Send a written communication (e.g., email or letter) to the parent/carer.
- Consider a home visit, if appropriate and following internal procedures.
- Consult with our safeguarding lead if there are concerns about the child's welfare.
- Where appropriate, notify the local authority in line with Children Missing Education guidance.

5. Punctuality

Sessions begin promptly with children going into small group time; lateness can cause children to miss out on structured learning part of the session. Parents are expected to collect their child on time at the end of sessions.

Morning sessions 9am until 12pm.

Afternoon sessions 12pm until 3pm.

6. Illness

If your child is unwell, please keep them at home to prevent the spread of infection. Please inform us of any contagious illnesses, such as chickenpox, measles, or COVID-19.

Children should not return to the setting until they are symptom-free or as advised by a medical professional. We follow the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) guidance on infection control in schools and childcare settings when advising families about exclusion periods and return times.

7. Safeguarding and Children Missing Education

7.1 Our safeguarding duty

Safeguarding is at the heart of everything we do, and attendance is a key part of keeping children safe. A child who is absent or persistently late may be at risk of harm, missing important support, or experiencing difficulties at home.

While nursery attendance is not compulsory by law, we have a statutory duty under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework to safeguard all children in our care. For this reason, our attendance and safeguarding policies work hand-in-hand.

7.2 Supporting families and our response to absence

At Portsdown Primary School and Early Years Nursery, we recognise that nursery attendance is not compulsory. However, we believe that regular attendance supports your child's development, wellbeing, and preparation for school. We also have a statutory duty to safeguard all children in our care.

When a child's attendance pattern changes or they are absent for several sessions, we will respond with support and care. **Our approach is always about understanding barriers, offering help, and ensuring children are safe - never about sanctions or penalties.**

Our graduated response to absence:

After 3 consecutive sessions of absence without contact:

- We will contact you by phone, Tapestry message, or email to check on your child's wellbeing
- We will ask if there's anything we can do to support you

- We will record the reason for absence and any support offered
- **Purpose:** Welfare check and early offer of support

After 5 consecutive sessions of absence:

- We will invite you to a supportive meeting (in person, by phone, or video call) to:
 - Understand any barriers to attendance (e.g., illness, family circumstances, transport, settling-in difficulties)
 - Discuss how we can help remove these barriers
 - Agree a plan to support your child's return to nursery
 - Explore whether you need access to additional support services (e.g., Family Hubs, health services)
- We will record the discussion and agreed actions
- **Purpose:** Understanding barriers and agreeing supportive solutions

After 10+ consecutive sessions of absence, or if we have ongoing concerns:

- We will consult with our designated safeguarding lead
- We may consider whether an Early Help referral would support your family
- If we have safeguarding concerns, we will follow our safeguarding procedures
- If we cannot make contact with you despite repeated attempts, we will consider informing the local authority's Children Missing Education team
- **Purpose:** Ensuring your child is safe and your family has access to appropriate support

Important points to remember:

- ☑ **We're here to help, not punish** - Our response to absence is always supportive. We want to work with you to understand and overcome any barriers.
- ☑ **You won't receive fines or penalties** - Because nursery attendance is not compulsory, we cannot and will not issue penalty notices or take legal action for absence.
- ☑ **Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility** - If we're concerned about your child's welfare, we have a duty to follow up. This is about keeping children safe, not enforcing attendance.
- ☑ **Communication is key** - Please keep us informed about absences, even if they're for routine reasons like illness or family commitments. This helps us know your child is safe and well.

If you're facing barriers to attendance:

If you're finding it difficult to bring your child to nursery regularly, please talk to us. Common barriers we can help with include:

- **Settling-in difficulties** - We can adjust session times, provide additional settling support, or create a gradual return plan
- **Illness or medical needs** - We can discuss reasonable adjustments, liaise with health professionals, or provide information about support services
- **Family circumstances** - We can signpost to Early Help services, Family Hubs, or other local support
- **Transport or practical issues** - We can discuss flexible arrangements or connect you with local support
- **Concerns about your child's development or behaviour** - We can arrange meetings with our SENCo or access specialist advice

Please contact your child's key person, the nursery manager, or our designated safeguarding lead to discuss any concerns. We're here to help.

7.3 Following up unexplained absence

If a child is absent without notification, we will:

Day 1 (same day):

- Attempt to contact the parent/carer using the primary contact number provided
- If we cannot reach the parent/carer, we will attempt to contact the secondary emergency contact provided
- Record all contact attempts and outcomes in the child's attendance record

Day 2:

- Continue attempts to contact the parent/carer and all emergency contacts provided
- Send written communication (via email or letter) to the parent/carer
- Inform our designated safeguarding lead of the unexplained absence

Day 3:

- If we still have not made contact and have concerns about the child's welfare, we will consider a home visit following our internal safeguarding procedures
 - Consult with our designated safeguarding lead to determine next steps
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7.4 When we inform the local authority

While nursery attendance is not compulsory, we have a duty to ensure that every child is safe and receiving appropriate care. We will inform the local authority if:

- A child stops attending nursery without explanation **and** we are unable to contact the family despite repeated attempts over several days
- We have concerns about a child's welfare or safety based on their absence or the circumstances surrounding it
- We believe a child may be at risk of harm
- A family has "disappeared" and we do not know the child's whereabouts or whether they are safe

In these circumstances, we will:

- Follow our safeguarding procedures
- Consult with our designated safeguarding lead
- Inform the local authority's Children Missing Education (CME) team and/or Early Help services as appropriate
- Consider whether a referral to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or children's social care is needed

This is to ensure that every child is safe and receiving appropriate care and education, even if they are no longer attending our setting.

7.5 The difference between withdrawal and disappearance

We understand that families may choose to withdraw their child from nursery for various reasons, and this is absolutely their right. However, there is an important difference between:

Choosing to withdraw (this is fine):

- Parents inform us in writing with 4 weeks' notice
- Parents tell us what arrangements they are making for their child (e.g., attending another setting, care at home)
- We can transfer records and support a smooth transition

Disappearing without contact (this is a safeguarding concern):

- Child stops attending with no explanation

- We cannot contact the family despite repeated attempts
- We do not know if the child is safe or receiving appropriate care

If you are considering withdrawing your child from nursery, please speak to us. We are here to support you and can provide information about other local services and settings.

7.6 Reporting contagious illnesses

In addition to safeguarding concerns, we ask parents to inform us of any contagious illnesses, such as chickenpox, measles, or COVID-19, so we can:

- Take appropriate infection control measures
- Inform other families where necessary (without identifying individual children)
- Follow UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) guidance on exclusion periods

Children should not return to the setting until they are symptom-free or as advised by a medical professional. We follow UKHSA guidance on infection control in schools and childcare settings when advising families about exclusion periods and return times.

7.7 Support for families

We recognise that families sometimes face challenges in maintaining consistent attendance. If you are experiencing difficulties, please speak to us. We can:

- Discuss any barriers to attendance and work with you to find solutions
- Provide information about local support services
- Make reasonable adjustments for children with medical needs or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Signpost you to Early Help services, Family Hubs, or other appropriate support

Our aim is always to work **with** families to support children's attendance and wellbeing, not to penalise or blame.

Key points for parents:

- ☒ **Nursery attendance is not compulsory** - you will not receive penalty notices or fines for absence
 - ☒ **Safeguarding IS compulsory** - we must follow up on unexplained absences to ensure your child is safe
 - ☒ **Please keep us informed** - if your child is absent, let us know on the first day via phone, Tapestry app, or email
 - ☒ **You can withdraw your child** - just give us 4 weeks' notice in writing and let us know your plans
 - ☒ **We're here to help** - if you're facing barriers to attendance, talk to us so we can support you
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8. Withdrawing your child from nursery

If parents/carers decide to move their child to another setting, they must inform us as soon as possible so that we can take them off our register. Parents/carers are required to provide 4 weeks' notice for the change in funded early education sessions. We will ensure that your child's records and Learning Journey are forwarded to the new setting that they will be attending. This is essential to support the smooth transition of your child between settings and their well-being at this time of change.