



ABSENCE AND ATTENDANCE POLICY

This policy was adopted:	September 2022
This policy was last reviewed:	This version replaces the 2019 version
This policy will be reviewed:	September 2023
Source:	Local Authority Guidance/ School/DfE guidance/EPS ARNA guidance

Our School Vision and Core Values

At Berry Hill, our ethos is built upon three simple values: Be Kind, Work Hard, Be Brave.

Our aim is to produce outstanding individuals who know the importance of kindness, hard work and being brave and who will leave us with a sense of responsibility to make positive contributions to society.

We want our pupils to achieve well in all areas and make good progress in relation to their starting points. To achieve this, pupils must attend school every day possible.

ABSENCE AND ATTENDANCE POLICY

We are committed to meeting our obligations with regards to school attendance by:

- Promoting good attendance and reducing absence, including persistent absence
- Ensuring every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled
- Acting early to address patterns of absence

We will also support parents to perform their legal duty to ensure their children of compulsory school age attend regularly, and will promote and support punctuality in attending lessons.

Legislation and Guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the school attendance guidance from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- Part 6 of The Education Act 1996
- Part 3 of The Education Act 2002
- Part 7 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (and 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016 amendments)
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013

This policy also refers to the DfE's guidance on the school census, which explains the persistent absence threshold, and to "Improving School Attendance" July 2021

Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, the parent is responsible for making sure that their child of compulsory school age receives efficient full-time education that is suitable for the child's age, ability and aptitude.

Roles and responsibilities

The governing board is responsible for monitoring attendance figures for the whole school, including key groups, on at least a termly basis. It also holds the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy.

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Implementation of this policy at the school
- Monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to governors
- Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual pupils
- Issuing fixed-penalty notices, where necessary

Class Teachers are responsible for recording attendance on a daily basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information to the school office.

School [admin/office] staff are expected to take calls from parents about absence and record it on the school system. They may also support in identifying patterns of absence, in building positive relationships with parents. Carers and guardians, and in contacting on the first day of absence.

Recording attendance:

Attendance register

We will keep an 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 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

Attendance

School gates will open daily at 8.40. Registration begins at:

Foundation/Keystage 1

8.55am and children arriving after 9.05am but before 9.20am will be given an 'L' late mark (denoting that the child arrived before the registers closed). After 9.20am, children will be given a 'U' late mark (denoting that the child arrived after the registers closed) and meaning unauthorised absence.

Keystage 2

8.55am and children arriving after 9.05am but before 9.20 am will be given an 'L' late mark (denoting that the child arrived before the registers closed). After 9.20am, children will be given a 'U' late mark (denoting that the child arrived after the registers closed) and meaning unauthorised absence.

We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 3 years after the date on which the entry was made.

Absence

Only the school within the context of the law (Section 199 of the Education Act 1993) can approve absence, not parents/carers. If school does not accept the explanation offered as a valid reason

for absence (having conducted further investigation) or where there is no explanation forthcoming at all, the absence will be treated as unauthorized. In the event of any unauthorised absence, the school will contact the parent/carers enquiring as to the reason/s.

Absence will usually be authorised in the case of illness, leave for medical or dental appointments, family bereavement and days of religious observance. The school will request evidence of medical and dental appointments and may ask for evidence to be provided for sustained periods of illness.

Unplanned absence for medical reasons

Berry Hill Primary & Nursery has an established system in place to enable parents/carers to report their child's absence because of illness.

They should phone the school on the morning of their child's absence, leaving a message on the school answerphone if they are unable to speak to a member of staff, giving details of their child's name, class and reason for absence. It is reasonable for the school to ask the nature of the illness, ask the parent/carer the expected length of absence and make arrangements for the parent/carer to call school again if the situation changes. Should you fail to report your child's absence, you will be contacted by telephone by a member of staff to establish the reason for your child's absence.

Berry Hill Primary & Nursery School has a right to consider whether to accept the parent/carers position with regard to medical absence as there are occasions when parents falsely report absences to the school as medical absence. If the school has concerns that the illness may not either be genuine or warrant the amount of absence accruing, the school may ask the parent to substantiate the illness by asking to see additional evidence such as an appointment card or medical certificate. It is at the discretion of the Headteacher whether to authorise absence and they can refuse to authorise absence if, after considering all the available information, they believe that the pupil's absence does not appear to be caused by genuine illness. If the school chooses not to authorise the absence it will notify the parent or carer of this.

Unfortunately there are occasions when a child can suffer from more sustained health problems. If this is the case, the school will contact the medical professionals involved with the child in order to be able to support the child in the most appropriate manner. The school would like the parent/carer to give permission for the medical professionals to be able to speak to the school about the best way to support the child. In these circumstances it is not appropriate for the parent/carer to contact the school every day and a more appropriate frequency of communication will be established with the parent/carer. This bespoke arrangement will be put into place by the Headteacher or deputy headteacher. It will be monitored on a four weekly basis and reviewed to see if this response is still appropriate.

Planned absence

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

However, we encourage parents/carers 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/carer must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence.

Approval for term-time absence

The headteacher will only grant a leave of absence to pupils during term time if they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. A leave of absence is granted at the headteacher's discretion.

Each individual request will be considered taking into account the circumstances, such as:

- The nature of the event for which leave is sought
- The frequency of the request
- Whether the parent gave advance notice
- The pupil's attainment, attendance
- Possible impact on learning or examinations
- The student's ability to catch up on missed schooling.

Valid reasons for **authorised absence** include:

- Illness and medical/dental appointments
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart
- Traveller pupils travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, 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

Following up absence

If the school has not been notified of an absence, the school will phone parents/carers as soon as possible. Office staff will check with the class teacher to discuss if they have been contacted by parents/carers about the absence.

Where school has been unable to talk to a parent/carer and the reason still remains unknown for the absence, they will attempt to call the parent/carer again.

If school is still unable to make contact with the parent/carer, they will phone down the emergency contact list provided by parents/carers.

If contact still has not been made or the reason for absence not ascertained, two members of the Senior Leadership Team will conduct a home visit.

If there are still concerns and no contact has been made, the school may call the police and ask for a welfare check to be made. All attempted contact with the parents/carers will be recorded on the child's information file.

On day 10, if contact has not been made and the child is still not attending school, a referral will be made to the Local Authority Children Missing in Education team.

Reporting to parents

Attendance will be reported to parents, carers and guardians at Parent's evenings and in the end of year pupil report. It may also be considered during SEND review meetings, Team around the child meetings, Early Help meetings, or in meetings specifically to support and improve attendance and punctuality.

Lateness and punctuality

A pupil who arrives late:

- Before the register has closed at 9.20 will be marked as late, using the appropriate code
- After the register has closed at 9.20 will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code

A Penalty Notice may be issued by the Local Authority if your child is persistently late for 10 separate instances over a period of 6 school weeks.

Reducing persistent absence or lateness

Attendance will be monitored at the end of each half term (approximately a six week block).

Pupils attending below 95% will be identified.

Phase Leaders will consider support for pupils who's attendance is between 90- 95%. This may include additional parent contact, a tailored reward programme, pupil voice initiated support or access to the school ELSA. .

For pupils working below 90%, an Improving Attendance letter will first be sent, offering parents a meeting will be held with a member of Senior Leadership to discuss support and set targets for improvement over the next three weeks. Support will be sought from Early Help at this point by referral. If attendance fails to improve over the next three weeks, and the pupil misses nine sessions in a six week block, Attendance enforcement (a legal sanction) will be sought through the Early Help Pathway, or where parents fail to engage with school, a legal sanction may be issued.

Legal sanctions

The school or local authority can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age. This can be triggered by three days unauthorized absence (six sessions) over three weeks.

If issued with a fine, or penalty notice, each parent must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the local authority.

Penalty notices can be issued by a headteacher, local authority officer or the police.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice may take into account:

- The number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year
- One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission
- Where an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice.

Promoting attendance

Absence from school is a potential Safeguarding risk, and school has a role in monitoring this in order to keep children safe. In the longer term, better school attendance is linked with better attainment, wellbeing and wider outcomes. Children who attend school well have better social and educational outcomes, feel more settled and are better able to keep up with learning.

Within school, support may be offered for both parents and pupils affected by attendance issues. This could include, and is not limited to, check in sessions, additional interventions, increased communications, target setting through an Improving attendance plan, buddy support for social situations, tailored praise and encouragement when pupils do attend.

ARNA

Anxiety about going to school at any age, children and young people can find going to school difficult. Young Minds identified that 1 in 6 young people will have significant anxiety at some point during their school life. Anxiety is a natural response to something that is perceived as threatening and is a normal emotion around new, different, stressful or changing situations. It is therefore very common for children and young people to experience anxiety around school at some point in their education, particularly during periods of significant change or uncertainty. For most young people, this anxiety is usually short lived. However, for others the prolonged anxiety can lead to a period of non-attendance at school. In Nottinghamshire we refer to this as Anxiety Related Non-attendance (ARNA). Berry Hill will work with parents and pupils to support those experiencing ARNA. (Appendix 2)

Excluded Pupils

Where a pupil has been temporarily excluded he/she will remain on the school roll. The absence will be treated as authorised. Where a pupil has been permanently excluded, his/her absence will be treated as authorised while any review or appeal is in progress but, on conclusion of that process, if the permanent exclusion is confirmed, he/she will be struck from the school roll. While the pupil remains on the school roll, the school will recognise the responsibility towards the pupil out of school by setting work.

Attendance monitoring

Senior leaders at our school monitor pupil absence on a half termly basis.

The persistent absence threshold is 10%. If a pupil's individual overall absence rate is greater than or equal to 10%, the pupil will be classified as a persistent absentee.

Pupil-level absence 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 compare attendance data to the national average, and share this with the governing board.

This data is collected and stored in the school office, helping staff to :

- track the attendance of individual pupils
- Identify whether or not there are particular groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern
- Monitor and evaluate those children identified as being in need of intervention and support

The school is set an absence target by the Local Authority and we aim to achieve this by reducing holidays in term time, encouraging and supporting punctuality, supporting pupils and parents to attend well, and working with outside agencies where necessary.

Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed as guidance from the local authority or DfE is updated, and as a minimum annually by the SLT. At every review, the policy will be approved by the full governing board.

Links with other policies

This policy links to the following policies:

- > Child protection and safeguarding policy
- > Behaviour policy

Supporting Attendance Letter for pupils below 90%



DATE

NAME

ADDRESS

ADDRESS

ADDRESS

ADDRESS

Dear Parent/Carer Name

Our records show that last term your child's attendance was below 90%. To put this into perspective, 90% attendance is equivalent to missing half a day of school each week.

Ongoing low attendance is a factor often linked to low levels of attainment. Many pupils have difficulty maintaining friendships if they have long or numerous periods of absence.

It is a parent's legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school. School has a legal duty to address attendance; if attendance does not increase, and instead drops below 85%, school will be obligated to contact Education Attendance Enforcement. This could then lead to a Penalty Notice, which is a fine of either £120 or £60. An unpaid fine can lead to prosecution.

As a school, we wish to improve attendance before it reaches this point and would be more than happy to talk with you about supportive strategies we might put in place. If you would like to discuss your child's attendance, please contact the school office to arrange a meeting with a member of the senior leadership team, who will be happy to talk with you and, if required, arrange support.

We would appreciate your support to make sure your child's attendance now improves. The school will continue to monitor the situation.

Thank you for your co-operation

Yours sincerely

Mr B Trenowden
Headteacher

Headteacher: Mr. B Trenowden
Black Scotch Lane, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, NG18 4JW
www.berryhillprimary.co.uk
Telephone: 01623 478477

In case of Covid related absence



DATE

NAME

ADDRESS

ADDRESS

ADDRESS

ADDRESS

Dear Parent/Carer Name

Our records show that last term your child's attendance was below 90%. We have considered individual attendance records to assess the continuing impact of Covid-19 on attendance, but must express concerns regarding the impact of your child's attendance on their education. To put this into perspective, 90% attendance is equivalent to missing half a day of school each week.

Ongoing low attendance is a factor often linked to low levels of attainment. Many pupils have difficulty maintaining friendships if they have long or numerous periods of absence.

We do appreciate that over the past few weeks in particular, there have been exceptionally high transmission rates of Covid-19 in some classes which have accounted for the bulk of our non-attendance. Therefore, at this time, we are merely sending this letter out to parents of all pupils whose attendance falls between 85% and 90% to draw your attention to this fact. This is with the understanding that there is an expectation that we shall see this figure improve.

We have a legal responsibility to monitor attendance and take action where it is deemed necessary. If attendance does not climb above 90%, we will be obliged to contact you again regarding this matter and may need to escalate this.

We thank you for your continued support. We wish to help your child improve his/her attendance. If you would like to discuss your child's attendance, please contact the school office to arrange a meeting with a member of the senior leadership team, who will be happy to talk with you and if required arrange support.

Thank you for your co-operation

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Trenowden", written over a large, stylized circular flourish.

Mr. B Trenowden
Headteacher



DATE

NAME
ADDRESS
ADDRESS
ADDRESS
ADDRESS

Dear Parent/Carer Name

Our records show that last term your child's attendance was below 85%. To put this into perspective, 80% attendance is equivalent to missing a whole day of school each week.

Ongoing low attendance is a factor often linked to low levels of attainment. Many pupils have difficulty maintaining friendships if they have long or numerous periods of absence.

We have a duty to make it clear that you, as parent, have a legal responsibility under Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996, for ensuring that your child attends school regularly. With attendance below 85%, it is highly likely that we will now need to refer this case to the local authority for either a Penalty Notice fine or prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 for failing to ensure the regular attendance of your child.

Additionally, if attendance does not improve, we may require you to provide medical evidence for each time he/she is too ill to attend. Any other reason for absence should be discussed with the school and it is the school's decision whether to authorise any absence that is not covered by medical evidence. If your child is ever too ill to remain at school, we will always contact parents to collect.

We will continue to closely monitor attendance and will contact you again if figures do not sufficiently improve. In the meantime, please contact us if you feel there are any ways that Berry Hill can support you in this matter.

Thank you for your understanding.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Trenowden", written over a large, stylized circular flourish.

Mr. B Trenowden
Headteacher

Appendix 1 – Warning Letter for Unauthorised Absences



Berry Hill Primary & Nursery School
Black Scotch Lane
Mansfield
Nottinghamshire
NG18 4JW

Date

Mr XXX & Ms XXX
XXX Meadow Lane
Nottingham
NG7 5HP

Dear Mr XXX & Ms XXX

PENALTY NOTICE WARNING

Child X (dob XX/XX/XXXX)

The registers at Berry Hill Primary School show that, to date, your child has missed 3 days (6 sessions) of school due to unauthorised absences over the last 3 weeks. This means that your child's absence from school now meets the persistent absence threshold.

You, as parent/carers, have legal responsibility under Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996, for ensuring that your child attends school regularly. As such unless your child's attendance improves, you will be referred to the local authority for a Penalty Notice to be issued under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 for failing to ensure the regular attendance of your child.

Should **(insert child's name)** have any further absence which result in them having in excess of 3 days (6 sessions) over a 6 week rolling period, we will request that the local authority issue a penalty notice of up to £120. **The penalty will be enforced for each child who is absent (delete if not appropriate).** The notice can be issued to both parents/carers for each child whose absence meets the Penalty Notice threshold.

Please take immediate steps to ensure **(insert child's name)** is in school on time every day and obtain medical evidence if **he/she** is too ill to attend. Any other reason for absence should be discussed with the school and it is the school's decision whether to authorise any absence that is not covered by medical evidence.

Yours sincerely,
Mr B Trenowden
Headteacher

Appendix 2 – Example letter advising parent/carers that school have requested Penalty Notice to be issued for unauthorised absence



Berry Hill Primary & Nursery School
Black Scotch Lane
Mansfield
Nottinghamshire
NG18 4JW

Date

Mr XXX & Ms XXX
XXX Meadow Lane
Nottingham
NG7 5HP

Dear Mr XXX & Ms XXX

Child X (dob XX/XX/XXXX)

Further to our letter dated (insert date) notifying you that a 30 day period of formal monitoring would commence on (insert date) for **Child XX (insert date)**, we are now writing to advise you that a request has been made to the Local Authority to issue a Penalty Notice for failing to ensure that your child attends school regularly.

Should you wish to discuss any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Mr B Trenowden
Headteacher

Appendix 3 – Example letter warning of Penalty Notice for Holidays taken during term time



Berry Hill Primary & Nursery School
Black Scotch Lane
Mansfield
Nottinghamshire
NG18 4JW

Date

Mr XXX & Ms XXX
XXX Meadow Lane
Nottingham
NG7 5HP

Dear Mr XXX & Ms XXX

PENALTY NOTICE WARNING

Child X (dob XX/XX/XXXX)

I note your application to take out of education for days to go on holiday. Schools are only allowed to agree a leave of absence during term time in exceptional circumstances.

I have considered your application and do not feel it meets the exceptional circumstances criteria and therefore your request has been declined. Should you decide to remove your child from school on the dates indicated in your application then their absence will be marked in the register as unauthorised.

An unauthorised leave of absence of more than 3 days/6 sessions (over a 6 week rolling period) for the purpose of a family holiday can lead to you being issued with a penalty notice fine of up to £120 for each child who is absent. The fines can be issued to both parent/carers for each child.

If you do remove from school for the period stated in your application, I will request that the local authority issues a penalty notice.

Yours sincerely,

Mr B Trenowden
Headteacher

Appendix 4 – Example letter accepting a request for a Withdrawal from Learning for Exceptional Circumstances

Berry Hill Primary & Nursery School
Black Scotch Lane
Mansfield
Nottinghamshire
NG18 4JW

Date.

Mr XXX & Ms XXX
XXX Meadow Lane
Nottingham
NG7 5HP

Dear Mr XXX & Ms XXX

PENALTY NOTICE WARNING

Child X (dob XX/XX/XXXX)

I note your application to take out of education for days to go on holiday. Schools are only allowed to agree a leave of absence during term time in exceptional circumstances.

I have considered your application and feel that in this instance it meets the exceptional circumstances criteria and therefore your request has been approved. Should you decide to remove your child from school on the dates indicated in your

Yours sincerely,

Mr B Trenowden
Headteacher

Appendix 5 – Example letter accepting a request for a Withdrawal from Learning for Exceptional Circumstances



Berry Hill Primary & Nursery School
Black Scotch Lane
Mansfield
Nottinghamshire
NG18 4JW

Date

Mr XXX & Ms XXX
XXX Meadow Lane
Nottingham
NG7 5HP

Dear Mr XXX & Ms XXX

Child X (dob XX/XX/XXXX)

On (insert date) we wrote to you to explain that Berry Hill Primary would not authorise (child name) absence from school for days for a holiday. We also informed you that this could lead to a Penalty notice being issued to you.

I am now writing to advise you that a request has been made to the Local Authority to issue a Penalty Notice for failing to ensure that your child attends school regularly.

Should you wish to discuss any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Mr B Trenowden
Headteacher

Appendix 6 – Example letter informing parents that absence due to illness has not been authorised

Berry Hill Primary & Nursery School
Black Scotch Lane
Mansfield
Nottinghamshire
NG18 4JW

Date

Mr XXX & Ms XXX
XXX Meadow Lane
Nottingham
NG7 5HP

Dear Mr XXX & Ms XXX

Child X (dob XX/XX/XXXX)

On (insert date) you reported your child as being absent from school due to illness.

After considering all of the available information, I am unable to authorise the absence on this occasion because the absence does not appear to have been caused by genuine illness. This will be considered as an unauthorised leave of absence.

An unauthorised leave of absence of more than 3 days/6 sessions (over a 6 week rolling period) for the purpose of a family holiday can lead to you being issued with a penalty notice fine of up to £120 for each child who is absent. The fines can be issued to both parent/carers for each child.

Should you wish to discuss any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Mr B Trenowden
Headteacher

Appendix 7 - Example letter warning of Enforcement due to Non-Attendance related to COVID19

Berry Hill Primary & Nursery School
Black Scotch Lane
Mansfield
Nottinghamshire
NG18 4JW

Date

Dear Mr XXX & Ms XXX

Child X (dob XX/XX/XXXX)

The registers at Berry Hill Primary School show that, to date, your child has missed X days (X sessions) of school due to unauthorised absences over the last X weeks

In March 2020 when the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak was increasing, the Government decided that no parent should be penalised or sanctioned for their child's non-attendance at school. However, now the circumstances have changed and the Government decided that all children must return to school from September 2020 unless they are unable to attend in line with public health advice because they are self-isolating and have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves; or because they are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19).

In addition, shielding advice for all adults and children were paused on 1 August, following a continued decline in the rates of community transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). This means that even the small number of pupils who were identified on the shielded patient list can also return to school, as can those who have family members who were required to shield. I refer you to the current advice on shielding.

We are concerned to minimise as far as possible the longer-term impact of the pandemic on your child's education, wellbeing and wider development. Your child's recent irregular attendance we believe increases that risk further. We appreciate that this the return to school can be an anxious time for both pupils and parents. If this is the case then we would want to talk to you about the support that is available for your child and explain to you the various measures we have put in place in response to COVID19 to safeguard your child. If you wish to discuss either of these then please get in touch with the school office to arrange an appointment virtually or on the phone.

You, as parent, have a legal responsibility under Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996, for ensuring that your child attends school regularly. As such unless your child's attendance improves you will be referred to the local authority for either a Penalty Notice fine or prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 for failing to ensure the regular attendance of your child.

Please take immediate steps to ensure your child gets to school on time every day and obtain medical evidence if he/she is too ill to attend. Any other reason for absence should be discussed with the school and it is the school's decision whether to authorise any absence that is not covered by medical evidence.

Yours sincerely
Mr B Trenowden
Headteacher

Appendix 8

Supporting Anxious learners

Anxiety about going to school

At any age, children and young people can find going to school difficult. Young Minds identified that 1 in 6 young people will have significant anxiety at some point during their school life. Anxiety is a natural response to something that is perceived as threatening and is a normal emotion around new, different, stressful or changing situations. It is therefore very common for children and young people to experience anxiety around school at some point in their education, particularly during periods of significant change or uncertainty. For most young people, this anxiety is usually short lived. However, for others the prolonged anxiety can lead to a period of non-attendance at school.

In Nottinghamshire we refer to this as Anxiety Related Non-attendance (ARNA). Regular attendance at school is crucial for social, emotional and academic development. Not attending school over a period of time can impact social interactions with peers, self-esteem and mental health and emotional wellbeing, in both the short and longer term.

How ARNA presents, differs from individual to individual. However, a parent/carers may have noticed some of the following signs:

- Reluctance or refusal to attend school;
- Physical responses to anxiety:
 - headaches, sickness, stomach ache;
- Emotional responses:
 - tearful, anger directed at others or objects or withdrawn;
- Behaviour: difficulty separating from you, refusal to leave the home or bedroom;
- Worrying about school which may increase on Sunday evening or following a school holiday;
- Difficulties with sleeping.

There may notice a reduction in these difficulties when the child is not in school, for instance during the holidays. Likewise, if he/she is allowed to stay at home on a school day then they may report a temporary relief from such feelings. This is because the source of anxiety has been removed. However, ***missing school is not a solution to the emotional difficulties a child is experiencing and actually is a short-term fix with potentially long-term problems associated with it.***

There is an established graduated response within the local authority. This will include:

An initial conversation with parents about the difficulties they are experiencing - listening to both parent and child's view

- Work with parents to plan a way forward
- Make constructive suggestions, for example changes to the timetable, Identify a key person in school to be the point of contact for parent and child
- Continue to monitor child's attendance
- Continue to communicate with parent regarding child's progress and well-being

At Berry Hill, we have a range of strategies which may be employed in supporting parents and pupils with anxiety around attending school. These could include:

- Meet and greet
- Home visits
- Key worker
- Neutral work area
- Removal of anxiety triggers - no involvement with peers/involvement with selected peers.
- Reduced timetable for transition
- RAG -rated timetable to reduce anxiety

- Home learning to support before lessons are experienced
- Laptop to support home learning
- Meetings with parents, pupil or professionals to discuss strategies.
- Seeking support from a wider group of professionals.