



St. James' Church of England Primary School

**'Building One Faith, One
Family,
Our Future'**

Discretionary Pupil Leave of Absence Policy

Written by M.Tindall – Spring 2026
Approved by Governors – Spring 2026

Review Date – Spring 2028 (Resources Committee)

Foundation, Vision and Intent

St James' Lower Darwen

Church of England Primary School



"Building One Faith, One Family, Our Future."

"We offer a holistic curriculum that champions our community and is aspirational."

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
through

ENRICHMENT

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

SKATS

FORGIVENESS

COMPASSION

LOVE

TRUTH

JUSTICE

Jeremiah 29:11

John 10:10

For I know the plans I have for you,
declares the Lord, plans to prosper you
and not to harm you, plans to give you
hope and a future.
Jeremiah 29:11

John 10:10

*I came that they may have life, and may
have it abundantly.*

We want our children to know that **God has a plan for them** that means **they live their best life possible**.

Each **policy** and procedure within school, alongside the ongoing **curriculum** delivery, our **SKATS** programme, **enrichment** and the **spiritual development** offered to our families through Worship, RE and our links with Church, work towards making this happen.

St James' Church of England Primary School

Discretionary Leave of Absence Policy

St James' Church of England Primary School applies a robust, fair and consistent approach to discretionary leave of absence, aligned with statutory attendance guidance, ensuring pupils' learning, wellbeing and safeguarding remain the highest priority.

Vision and Rationale

At St James' Church of England Primary School, we believe that **regular school attendance is vital to pupils' learning, wellbeing and life chances**. Our Christian vision places high value on commitment, responsibility and ensuring every child can live life in all its fullness.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the **St James' Attendance Policy** and reflects the Department for Education's statutory guidance *Working Together to Improve School Attendance* (September 2024).

1. Legal Framework

This policy is underpinned by:

- Education Act 1996
- Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended)
- DfE *Working Together to Improve School Attendance* (2024)

Parents/carers have a **legal duty** to ensure their child attends school regularly. Schools may only authorise leave of absence during term time where **exceptional circumstances** apply.

2. Principles

- Attendance is **everyone's responsibility**
- Time away from school, even when authorised, **negatively impacts learning**
- Discretionary leave is **not an entitlement**
- Each request is considered **individually**
- Decisions are made in the **best interests of the child**
- The school works **supportively but robustly** with families

3. Leave of Absence During Term Time

3.1 Exceptional Circumstances

The Headteacher may grant leave of absence during term time **only where exceptional circumstances apply**. Exceptional circumstances are defined as **rare, significant and unavoidable events** that cannot reasonably take place outside of term time.

Examples **may include** (this list is not exhaustive):

- Bereavement or significant family crisis
- Attendance at a funeral of a close family member
- Serious illness of a close family member
- Religious observance on a recognised day of celebration

- Forces personnel returning from active deployment
- Other circumstances agreed at the Headteacher's discretion

Examples **that are not considered exceptional** include:

- Family holidays
- Cheaper travel or accommodation
- Visiting relatives
- Birthdays or celebrations
- Extended weekends or travel convenience

4. Requesting Discretionary Leave

Parents/carers must:

- Complete a **Discretionary Leave of Absence Request Form**
- Submit requests **at least 4 weeks in advance**, where possible
- Provide **supporting evidence such as official documentation, appointment letters or other verifiable information**, if requested

Failure to submit a request does not imply authorisation.

5. Decision-Making Criteria

In line with the Attendance Policy, the Headteacher will consider:

- The **nature and significance** of the request
- The **child's current attendance and punctuality**
- Any **previous leave of absence**
- The **impact on learning and progress**
- Whether the circumstances are **truly exceptional**
- The child's **safeguarding and wellbeing needs**

The decision of the Headteacher is **final**.

6. Recording and Coding Absence

Where leave is authorised, absence will be recorded using the appropriate **DfE attendance codes**, including:

- **C** – Leave of absence for exceptional circumstances
- **R** – Religious observance

Where leave is not authorised and the pupil is absent, the absence will be recorded as:

- **G** – Holiday not granted by the school

7. Unauthorised Leave and Legal Consequences

Where a child is absent following a **refused request** or without a request being submitted:

- The absence will be recorded as **unauthorised**
- The school may be required to notify the Local Authority
- A **Penalty Notice** may be issued

In line with current regulations:

- A penalty notice may be issued for **10 sessions (5 days)** of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10-school-week period
- Penalty notices are issued **per parent, per child**
- Repeated offences may result in **prosecution or further legal action**

8. Children Missing Education (CME)

Where a child does not return following unauthorised leave:

- The school will follow **CME procedures**
- The child may be removed from roll after **20 school days**, in line with regulations
- Safeguarding checks and Local Authority notification will occur

9. Safeguarding and Support

The school recognises that attendance issues may reflect **wider challenges**. Where appropriate, the Attendance Team will:

- Offer early help and support
- Work with external agencies
- Implement attendance contracts or action plans

However, support does not remove parents' **legal responsibility** for attendance.

10. Monitoring and Review

- All discretionary leave requests are monitored by the Attendance Team
- Patterns and trends are reviewed termly
- This policy is reviewed annually or in response to updated DfE guidance

11. Links to Other Policies

- Attendance Policy
 - Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
 - Children Missing Education Policy
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