

Headteacher: Mrs Julieann Exley

ATTENDANCE POLICY

‘We learn with God as our Guide’

The Academy Committee Members and Staff at St Thomas More Catholic Primary School Catholic School recognise the importance of good attendance and punctuality and the links between attendance and attainment, and attendance and safeguarding children. The whole school community has a responsibility for promoting excellent attendance: Academy Committee Members, parents, pupils and all school staff.

The aim of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School Attendance Policy is to provide an environment which encourages all our pupils to attend school regularly and punctually, and is framed within the Gospel values.

Wisdom

We will promote good punctuality and attendance as essential – not just to acquire knowledge, but to develop an understanding of how to use it wisely.

Integrity

We will act fairly and consistently in dealing with attendance matters. We will teach children to value good attendance and punctuality as aspects of personal responsibility.

Justice

We will work with others to defend the right of children to an education, in accordance with the law.

Compassion

We will respond sensitively to the needs of families, recognising that there are times when it is appropriate for children to be absent from school.

Why Attendance is Important

Any absence (or lateness) affects the pattern of a child’s schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning.

Any pupil’s absence (or lateness) disrupts teaching routines, and so may affect the learning of others in the same class.

Significant absence and lateness can have a massive impact on a child's self-esteem; walking into a class that is already underway can be distressing for any young child.

Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their children attend school regularly. Permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution.

Children may be at risk of harm if they do not attend school regularly. Safeguarding the interests of each child is everyone's responsibility. Promoting welfare and life opportunities for children encompasses attendance, behaviour management, health and safety, access to the curriculum and anti-bullying

Failing to attend this school on a regular basis will be considered as a safeguarding matter.

If a pupil is prevented from attending school because of sickness or other unavoidable cause, it is the responsibility of the parent to notify the school of the pupil's absence by telephone on the first day of absence.

Wherever possible, parents should avoid making medical/dental appointments for their children during school hours.

Understanding Absence

Every session's (ie morning or afternoon) absence from school has to be classified by the school as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required. It is the school, and not parent/carers that decides whether or not to authorise an absence.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness, medical/dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and necessary. This type of absence may lead to the Local Authority using sanctions and/or legal proceedings. This includes:

- parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily
- absences which have never been properly explained
- children who arrive at school after the register has closed
- shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
- day trips and holidays in term time which have not been agreed (see "Leave of Absence" below)

Whilst a child may be off school because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the

school, the parents and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend school it is better that parents speak to school to resolve the issue, rather than trying to cover up their absence, or give in to pressure to let them stay at home. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and usually make things worse.

Persistent Absenteeism (PA)

A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' when they miss 15% (Government figure) or more of their schooling across the school year for whatever reason. Absence at this level can do considerable damage to any child's educational prospects and we will seek parents' fullest support and co-operation to tackle this.

We will monitor all absence thoroughly. Any pupil whose attendance indicates they are likely to reach the PA threshold will be given priority consideration. Parents will be informed of this immediately.

PA pupils are tracked and monitored carefully. We also combine this with relevant mentoring where absence affects attainment.

When necessary we will hold a panel meeting, which may include representation from the Oxfordshire Attendance and Engagement team, to which the parents/carers of any child who is a persistent absentee is invited to attend. A complete review of each case will be carried out irrespective of whether the child is represented or not.

All PA (identified by the Government figure) pupils and their parents will be subject to an Action Plan, which may include:

- allocating additional support through a mentor,
- individual incentive programmes,
- parenting contracts
- participation in group activities around raising attendance.

PA cases are also made known to the Local Authority School Attendance and Engagement Team where necessary.

Attendance Diamond

National average attendance is 97% and we are working hard to ensure that wherever possible our children's attendance is in line with or exceeding this figure. We believe that regular school attendance is the key to enabling young people to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults.

Every day a child misses school, a total of five hours of learning is lost and whilst we understand that illness can't always be avoided, just a few days of absence can have a huge impact on a child's attendance figure and their education as a whole.

We use the 'attendance diamond' as a way of assessing where children are in terms of their attendance, and the possible impact this may have on their achievement.

Roles and Responsibilities for Attendance

Parents should:

- Ensure children attend regularly and punctually
- Contact school on first day of absence and keep school informed of absence lasting for longer periods
- Avoid time off in term time wherever possible and apply in advance *using the "Request for Leave of Absence" form/ in writing*
- Participate in Attendance Meetings in school
- Participate in Parenting Contracts and Common Assessment Framework, and cooperate in support and interventions offered by the school or other agencies

Pupils should:

- Attend school and register punctually each day
- Speak to their parents or teacher if issues arise that may have an effect on school attendance
- Co-operate and participate in interventions and support offered by the school or by other agencies

The Principal will:

- Take the lead in ensuring attendance has a high profile within the school
 - Ensure that parents are clearly informed about expectations around attendance, including by placing this Attendance policy on the school website and by drawing parents' attention to it at appropriate intervals
- Ensure there are designated staff with day-to-day responsibility for attendance matters
 - Ensure adequate time is allocated to discharge these responsibilities
 - Take overall responsibility for ensuring that the school conforms to all statutory requirements in respect of attendance
- Meet with parents where attendance or punctuality is a continuing concern

Designated Staff (School Administration Team and Principal) will:

- Contact parents on the first day of absence if a reason for absence has not been provided
- Follow up with phone calls to emergency contacts and letters where necessary
- Input and update the attendance registers regularly
- Regularly identify and monitor pupil, class and whole school attendance and punctuality levels, particularly that of vulnerable groups

- Regularly communicate pupil attendance and punctuality levels to parents ●
Work with children and parents to remove barriers to regular and punctual attendance and using Parenting Contracts where appropriate
- Ensure interventions are escalated in a timely fashion where individual attendance is not improving
- Refer to Oxfordshire Attendance and Engagement any pupils whose whereabouts is unknown

School Staff will:

- Provide a welcoming atmosphere for children and provide a safe learning environment
- Provide a sympathetic response to any pupils' concerns
- Be aware of factors that can contribute to non-attendance
- Differentiate appropriately between authorised and unauthorised absence
- Be aware of regular patterns of absence and refer to office for investigation
- See pupils' attendance as the responsibility of all school staff
- Ensure children absent for any periods are re-integrated and supported
- Keep accurate attendance registers

The Academy Committee will:

- Monitor the consistent implementation of the attendance policy
- Regularly review the policy and refer any comments to the Board of Directors

The Board of Directors will:

- Review the policy and consider comments and suggestions provided by the Academy Committees.

Written by

Reviewed by Principals

July 2019

Reviewed and ratified by the Board of Directors

November 2019

Date for Review

December 2022

Appendix 1



St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

To be read in conjunction with the school's Attendance Policy

ATTENDANCE - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

When does my child need to be in school?

Your child should be at school in good time for registration. The morning register will be called promptly at 8.50 am. ***What happens if my child is late?***

Registration finishes at 9am

If your child arrives after these times he/she will be marked late.

If your child arrives after 8.50am he/she will be marked as absent

Pupils who arrive after registration should be brought to the School Office by a responsible adult informing us of the reason for lateness. If a pupil is late on several occasions, parents will be contacted to discuss reasons/difficulties for lateness.

Does the school need letters explaining my child's absence or will a phone call do? Parents should telephone the school on the first and each subsequent day of absence. If we do not receive an explanation, or if the explanation is unsatisfactory, we will not authorise the absence.

If I telephone (and send a letter) will this mean absence is authorised?

For absent pupils of compulsory school age, the register must record whether or not their absences are authorised. If no acceptable reason for the absence has been received at the time of registration, the absence is unauthorised unless or until a satisfactory reason is given. An explanation (or note) from a pupil's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence rests with the school.

Will the school contact me if my child is absent?

The school will phone you if we have not heard from you by 9.30am on the first day of absence. This is because we believe it is our responsibility to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance. In order to do this, we must have up to date contact phone numbers, and it is your responsibility to ensure the school has the correct contact details.

Can we take family holidays during term time?

Holidays during term time will not be authorised. You must write a letter to the Principal if you wish to take your child out of school during term time.

What can I do to encourage my child to attend school?

Make sure your child gets enough sleep and gets up in plenty of time each morning and eats a healthy breakfast. Ensure that he/she leaves home in the correct clothes and properly equipped. Show your child, by your interest, that you value his/her education

My child is trying to avoid coming to school. What should I do?

Contact your child's class teacher immediately and openly discuss your worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with school work, bullying,

friendship problems, family difficulties. It is important that we identify the reason for your child's reluctance to attend school and work together to tackle the problem.

GUIDANCE ON REQUESTING AUTHORISED ABSENCE

The procedure for requesting any authorised absence during term time is as follows.

A *"Request for Leave of Absence"* letter written in advance, and given into the school office with reasons given for the absence.

The 2013 amendment to the 2006 Regulations states: *"Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances"* (see below). The Principal and Academy Committee Members will use their discretion and consider each request individually on its own merits.

Following receipt of the request, the parent/carer will be sent a response indicating whether the school is able to authorise the request.

If parent/carers still decide to take their child out of school for any reason and permission has not been granted, the absence will be deemed unauthorised.

In the first instance, parents will receive a warning letter, but further unauthorised absences will have to be notified to the local authority requesting a "Fixed Penalty Notice" be issued.

If a child lives with a family friend or relative for a period of time who has day to day care of the child, each responsible adult is considered as "Parent" under the Education Act and can equally be charged with the same offence and prosecuted.

The fixed penalty notice amounts to:

£60 per child per parent/carer payable within 21 days, or £120 per child per parent/carer if paid within 28 days.

Failure to pay a Fixed Term Penalty Notice may result in a criminal conviction and a fine in the Magistrates Court of up to £2500 per parent per child.

In exceptional circumstances, magistrates can impose a Parenting Order requiring attendance at a parenting class or even a custodial sentence of up to three months. An appearance at a magistrates' court could result in a criminal record for the parent/carer.

Fixed Penalty Notices have been introduced as part of the Government's drive to improve attendance and are not the responsibility of the school.

Criteria for Exceptional Circumstances

It is not possible to define exceptional circumstances, but examples of what might be considered as such are:

- Where it is company/organisational policy for an employee to take leave at a specified time in the year and there is no opportunity for a family holiday in school holidays. This must be supported by documentary evidence from the organisation
- Service personnel returning from/scheduled to embark upon a tour of duty abroad
- To attend religious festivals or services such as the wedding or funeral of an immediate family member
- Where a holiday is recommended as part of a parent or child's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue. Evidence must be provided, from qualified professionals, such as a doctor
- Where there are other factors which the Principal may consider to be exceptional circumstances, this may be referred to the Local Authority for advice

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*With Christ we **Achieve, Believe and Create***

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Dear Parent/Carer

St Thomas More Catholic Primary school is committed to ensuring that your child receives the best possible education to best prepare them for the next stage of their life. Each school day is carefully planned, and each lesson informs a wider programme of learning. Therefore, every lesson really does count. Your child is a valued member of our school community and every day missed is a day lost without them.

It is the policy of this school not to authorise absence for holidays during term-time. While advance permission can be given in exceptional circumstances, this is rare and can only be granted by me in my capacity as Principal. Any such request should be addressed to me in writing before the holiday is taken and you should not assume that permission will be granted.

If a term-time holiday is taken without permission, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and a referral may be made to the County Attendance Team. This may result in the issue of an Education Penalty Notice under section 444A Education Act 1996 in respect of each absent child, to each parent/carer. The current penalty is £60 per parent per child, rising to £120 per parent per child if not paid within 21 days.

Penalty notices are intended as an alternative to prosecution. If the penalty is not paid in full within 28 days, the usual consequence is a Magistrates' Court prosecution for the underlying section 444(1) Education Act 1996 offence of failure to secure regular school attendance. If further instances of unauthorised absence occur despite a penalty notice having previously been issued, or if the child's attendance is a wider matter of concern, the local authority may consider prosecution in any event.

Yours sincerely

Julieann Exley
Headteacher