

St Thomas More Roman Catholic Academy



Attendance Policy

Introduction

The link between attainment, behaviour and attendance is very clear, and it is the responsibility of both Parents/Carers and the school to ensure that our students attend every day in order to maximise their learning opportunities. We follow government targets and ask that all students and parents aim for a minimum of 95% attendance. Schools and Local Authorities strive to promote good attendance, reduce absence and ensure every student has access to full-time education. Irregular attendance undermines the educational process and leads to educational disadvantage.

The Education Act states that:

‘Parents have the responsibility to ensure that their children receive a suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise’.

Aims

- To emphasise the importance of, and secure from students, high levels of attendance and punctuality at school to enable them to maximise their learning opportunities.
- To make clear to all relevant stakeholders (students, parents/carers, governors, staff) the school’s expectations over attendance and punctuality.
- To promote a consistent approach across the school for all attendance matters.
- To communicate to all relevant stakeholders the legal position with respect to attendance.
- To maintain and improve the close partnerships between home and school to achieve high attendance.

Why is good attendance important?

Good attendance helps students to make progress academically and socially, and feel part of our school community. Building positive relationships in school supports students in having good mental health and wellbeing. Students who are not in school on a regular basis are more likely to get involved with antisocial behaviour, either as a victim or a perpetrator. Attendance at school is important to build confidence and self esteem, to develop awareness of other cultures, religions and ethnicities. Students develop life skills to support them in having the best possible start in life.

The table below shows how a student’s percentage attendance relates to the number of days and lessons missed. As you can see, 94% attendance may initially appear to be good however this translates to a student missing 55 hours of lessons over the course of a school year which will have a negative impact upon their progress

Attendance % during one academic year	Equivalent number of days absent	Equivalent number of lessons missed
98%	4 days	20 lessons
96%	8 days	40 lessons
94%	11 days	55 lessons
92%	15 days	75 lessons
90%	19 days	95 lessons
85%	28 days	140 lessons
80%	38 days	190 lessons
75%	48 days	240 lessons
70%	57 days	285 lessons

How can parents and carers encourage good attendance and punctuality?

- Establish a good routine in the mornings and evenings so your child is prepared for the school day ahead, and arrives on time.
- Encourage your child to have good sleep habits and support them by limiting screen time in the evenings.
- Take an interest in your child's education; ask about school work and homework.
- Encourage your child to get involved with school activities.
- Praise and reward your child's achievements at school.
- Discuss any problems that you think may have a bearing on your child's attendance with the school. Inform their Head of Year at an early stage so the school can take measures to help your child.
- Attend, where possible, Parent evenings and school events.
- Take truancy seriously. If your child is not attending school as you expect they may be putting themselves at risk – Who are they with? What are they doing?
- Encourage resilience and do not let your child take time off for minor ailments.
- Do your best to arrange routine medical, dental appointments etc. after school hours.
- Arrange family holidays outside of term time.
- Talk to your child about the importance of good attendance and punctuality. (For example if their attendance is 92% they would miss 75 hours of learning during the academic year.)
- Regularly check ParentMail messages, text messages and letters sent from school.

We are here to help you so do not hesitate to get in touch with the school if you have any specific concerns to do with attendance matters. Where the attendance of a student drops below a given level the school will contact parents with the aim of improving the attendance of the child. Our Attendance and Family Support Worker can offer advice and support to individual students and families when attendance problems arise. We are very grateful for your support in these matters.

We expect that all students will:

- Attend school regularly.
- Arrive on time throughout the day. To arrive at all lessons punctually and to be in Form or Assembly for 8.55am (at the latest) each morning.
- Tell a member of school staff about any problem which is having a negative impact upon their attendance or punctuality.

We expect that all parents/carers will:

- Encourage their child to attend school every day and on time.
- Ensure that their child arrives fully prepared for school, including wearing appropriate uniform.
- Contact school as soon as possible whenever their child cannot attend school.
- Provide school with **at least two** up to date mobile, home, work and emergency contact numbers.
- Inform the school about any problems which may affect their child's attendance, punctuality or behaviour.
- Attend meetings with staff in school if requested.

Parents/carers can expect the school will:

- Provide a good quality, balanced education appropriate to the needs of your child.
- Follow the guidance on completion of attendance registers outlined in DfE guidelines and appropriate codes will be entered for all students. (Please see Appendix B for attendance codes.)
- Make every reasonable effort to contact the parent/carer if a student fails to attend school and there has been no contact from home with a reason for absence.
- If necessary and appropriate, make a home visit.
- Deal with any issues affecting attendance sensitively and discreetly.

Absence Procedures

Unexpected absence procedures:

If your child is ill or unable to attend school, Parents/Carers are encouraged to use **ParentMail** to email school **by 8.55am on each day** of absence providing the name of their child, the reason for absence (please be specific regarding the nature of the illness rather than stating 'unwell') and when the student can be expected back in school.

Alternatively, Parents/Carers should contact the school **by 8.55am on each day** of absence, by telephone **(0191 2588354)** and give the reason for absence (please be specific regarding the nature of the illness rather than stating 'unwell') and an indication of when the student can be expected back in school.

If you contact school after 8.55am you may still receive a text message or phone call about your child's absence.

Planned absence procedures:

Where possible, all routine medical and dental appointments should be taken out of school time. If your child has a medical appointment during the school day parents need to inform the school before the absence can be authorised, this can be done by ParentMail or telephone **(0191 2588354)**. To assist us in ensuring medical or dental absences are authorised we request that parents/carers provide a copy of the appointment card or letter, the student can bring the letter to school and present it at Reception for our records to be updated. Depending upon the time of the appointment, students should attend school before and after the appointment time to minimise time spent out of school.

Unauthorised absence:

An **unauthorised absence** is defined as an occasion when a student has not attended school and the school is not satisfied with the reasons given for the absence or no reasons have been given.

If a reason for absence cannot be established at the start of the school session, then the register will be marked with an "N" - no reason given. If no reason for absence is provided after a reasonable amount of time the N code will be replaced with code "O" (unauthorised absence).

Unexplained absences will be followed up by the relevant Head of Year and if necessary senior pastoral staff or the Family Support Worker. If in any situation the school is not satisfied about the explanation for absence it will remain unauthorised and we will ask the parent for more information. If, after further investigation any doubt remains in respect of the explanation offered, then the absence will be marked as code "O" unauthorised.

Guidance on decisions to authorise absences:

The decision to authorise an absence can only be taken by the Head teacher, or the person designated by the Head teacher to take this decision (The Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 as amended). If the school decides that the reason given is not valid and your child does not attend school, the absence will be unauthorised. Where attendance is causing a concern, the school will challenge patterns of absence and the matter may be referred to the Local Authority Attendance and Placement Team and legal action by the Local Authority may be considered.

It is important to note that it is for parents to satisfy the school as to the validity of absence, and an email, written note or telephone call in respect of a child's absence does not of itself oblige the school to accept the explanation offered as a valid reason for the absence. In the case of absence due to medical reasons it is for parents to satisfy the school as to the validity of absence and to provide medical evidence to support the absence if requested. Medical evidence can take the form of prescriptions, appointment cards, etc. rather than doctors' notes.

If a child is absent from school for a long term medical condition* the school requires the parents to provide a medical letter from a medical consultant to authorise the absences. The school will work with the Local Authority, CAMHS, NHS and other relevant services to deliver education for children with additional health needs. School will work with parents and other services to set up an individually tailored reintegration plan for the child if appropriate.

*See Appendix A for definition of **long term medical condition**.

If a student is absent from school for 2 weeks or more and no contact has been established between home and school a referral will be made to the Attendance and Placement team following the guidance in the *Children Missing From Education Policy*.

Local Authority

The school will endeavour to work with the student and parents/carers to improve attendance. Where the school is unable to secure an improvement in attendance through informal means the matter will be referred to the Local Authority Attendance and Placement Team for a period of monitoring. If there is no improvement in attendance Local Authority enforcement powers may be used. It should always be remembered that ultimately the Local Authority can issue a Fixed Penalty Notice or prosecute parents for failing in their duty to ensure that their child attends school regularly if the student's absences are marked unauthorised.

The Education Act states that:

'If a child of compulsory school age, who is a registered pupil at a school, fails to attend regularly at the school, his parent is guilty of an offence'.

Applications for leave of absence.

Parents/carers can demonstrate their commitment to their child's education by not allowing their child to miss school for anything other than an exceptional and unavoidable reason. Research suggests that children who are taken out of school may never catch up on the learning that have missed, which may ultimately have a detrimental effect on their future progress.

For example, a student who takes 10 days holiday during one academic year can only attain 94.7% attendance. A student who takes 10 days holiday in each academic year could lose the equivalent of 22 weeks (almost 6 months) during their formal school career.

Parents are required under the Education Act (1996) to ensure their child attends school regularly. There is no automatic right to take a child out of school during term time. Amendments to DfE Attendance Regulations, state that from September 2013, Head teachers may **not** grant any leave of absence during term time (**including family holidays**), however Head teachers may consider individual requests to authorise a leave of absence **in exceptional circumstances**. Head teachers can determine the number of school days a child can be away from school **if** the leave is granted.

A Parent/Carer must complete a **Leave of Absence Application** form (available on the school website) and submit to the Head teacher requesting leave of absence prior to any proposed absence. The school would appreciate the form to be submitted at least 2 weeks in advance of the requested date(s) of absence. Please note that holidays are not classed as exceptional circumstances. The Parent/Carer will be notified of the Head Teacher's decision by letter.

The Head teacher must be satisfied that the exceptional circumstances justify an authorised absence and it is entirely the responsibility of the parent/carer submitting the request to provide sufficient information and evidence in order to establish this fact. The request for an authorised leave of absence must be made in advance and the Head teacher may invite the parent into school to discuss the request before a decision is made.

If the circumstances relating to this request are considered exceptional and the absence is authorised by the Head teacher, the expectation is that the child's attendance will be of a satisfactory level both prior to and after the date covered by the request. School staff may request that the child completes work missed during the absence, it is expected that the child will complete the work within a reasonable period of time.

If the request for a leave of absence is refused the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. The Head teacher may refer the matter to the Local Authority requesting a Penalty Notice be issued against you. The Head teacher will take into consideration your child's overall school attendance when making this decision.

A Penalty Notice is a fine of £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt, rising to £120 if the notice is paid after 21 days but within 28 days.

If the penalty is not paid in full by the end of the 28 day period the Local Authority may prosecute for the offence to which the notice applies.

Where there is more than one child, each parent* may be issued with a Penalty Notice in respect of each child. There is no right to appeal against a Penalty Notice.

*See Appendix A for definition of parent.

Appendix A

Definitions:

Definition of **Parent** under Education Law (section 576 of the Education Act 1996) a parent is defined as all natural parents, whether married or not and includes any person who, although not a natural parent, has a responsibility for the care of the child. This means that a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child, is considered to be a parent in Education Law.

Absence is defined as 'not attending school for any reason'.

An **authorised absence** is defined as: an occasion when a student has not attended school and the school has either given approval in advance for a student of compulsory school age to be away, or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as justification for absence.

An **unauthorised absence** is defined as an occasion when a student has not attended school and the school is not satisfied with the reasons given for the absence or no reasons have been given.

A **long term medical condition** is defined as a condition that has a detrimental affect on the child's attendance. This could be either multiple periods of absence over a long period of time or a single period of 15 days or more. A long term medical condition can be a mental or physical health condition.

Appendix B

Register Code	Description
/	Present AM
\	Present PM
L	Late (before registers closed) (L)
C	Other Authorised Circumstances (C)
E	Excluded (E)
H	Holiday agreed (H)
I	Illness NOT appointments (I)
M	Appointments (M)
R	Religious observance (R)
S	Study leave (S)
T	Traveller Absence (T)
X	For Early Years (X)
B	Off site Ed. not dual (B)
D	Dual registration (D)
J	Interview (J)
P	Sports (P)
V	Visit or trip (V)
W	Work experience (W)
G	Holiday NOT agreed (G)
N	No reason (N)
O	Unauthorised absence (O)
U	Late (after registers) (U)
Y	Enforced Closure (Y)
#	School Closed to all Pupils (#)
Z	Pupil not on roll

Colour	Description
	Present
	Authorised Absence
	Approved Educational Activity - Counted as Present
	Unauthorised Absence
	Not Counted In Attendance Calculations