

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

PUPIL ATTENDANCE POLICY

**Date: March 2024
Review: March 2025**

Good attendance at school is important for a pupils' education and establishes a positive working ethos early in life. It is essential that the school is informed of the reasons for absence on the first day of absence. Under current government legislation, unauthorised absence is regarded as truancy and all absence figures have to be reported to the Local Authority (LA), the Government Department for Education, as well as to the school's Governing Body. Attendances are also recorded on a pupil's annual school report. It is important that pupils arrive on time for school, as a prompt start to the day establishes the learning activities for the day. Parents/carers must ensure that they have read the school's attendance policy in respect of authorised absence and unauthorised absences as poor attendance has a detrimental effect on a pupil's learning. Regular school attendance is essential and parents/guardians, pupils and teachers all have their part to play in ensuring this happens.

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

Under section 44 of the 1996 Education Act, a pupil is required to attend regularly at the school where they are a registered pupil. The school is obliged by law to differentiate between authorised and unauthorised absence. A letter or telephone message from a parent does not in itself authorise an absence. Only if the school is satisfied as to the validity of the explanation offered by the letter / message will the absence be authorised.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Improving attendance at St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is the responsibility of everyone in the school community - pupils, parents, governors and all members of staff.

PUPILS

All pupils are expected to attend school and all of their lessons regularly and punctually. Pupils and families who experience attendance difficulties will be offered prompt and sympathetic support, initially from the class teacher.

Strategies for promoting good attendance at school include:

- Announced in Friday assembly which class is the attendance winner of the week
- Children receive an attendance bear if they are 'Class of the Week'
- Attendance published weekly on school website
- Attendance for the month will be shown in the school newsletter
- A letter is sent to parents whose child's has less than 95% informing them that they have fallen below the national expectation.
- Meetings are held with parents whose children consistently fall behind the 90%
- If required parental contracts to ensure attendance of the children.

PARENTS/CARERS

Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school regularly, punctually, properly dressed and equipped, and in a fit condition to learn. If a child is prevented for any reason from attending, parents (not siblings) must notify the school on the first day of absence. A pupil's absence from school must be considered as unauthorised until a satisfactory explanation is received from the parents. Parents will be informed promptly of any concerns which may arise over a child's attendance. Parents should avoid making specialist appointments for their children during school hours. Holidays should not be taken in term-time.

Parents whose first language is not English, or who have literacy difficulties will be offered appropriate support from school in matters of communication.

SCHOOL

Staff will endeavour to encourage good attendance and punctuality through personal example. Attendance is the responsibility of all school staff. The school will employ a range of strategies to encourage good attendance and punctuality and will investigate promptly all absenteeism, liaising closely with parents. Staff will respond to all absenteeism firmly and consistently.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Pupils learn best when parents and staff work in partnership to maximise pupils' attendance at school and everyone is clear about the procedures.

1. The school have an obligation to record attendance using correct and appropriate attendance codes. Accurate recording is essential in order to meet legal requirements and promote the safety of all pupils. Full guidance on the use of codes and an explanation of the regulations governing the keeping of pupil registers can found at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564599/school_attendance.pdf
2. The school staff have an obligation to enquire about the reasons for pupils' absences and/or lateness.
3. There is, likewise, an equally important task for the staff to report concerns over absence and lateness to the Headteacher
4. The school sends out letters to ascertain reasons why pupils are absent or late (see examples in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).
5. The school collects information daily and weekly from registers on authorised and unauthorised absence and enters this information on a termly return.
6. The School emphasises to parents the importance of full attendance for a satisfactory delivery of the National Curriculum to each pupil and for testing procedures.
7. At the end of the academic year, attendance figures are included in the end of year report along with the number of unauthorised absences for that year. Hence, parents are made fully aware of their responsibilities and know that the school is keeping a long term record.
8. The school will liaise with the Educational Inclusion and Partnership (EIP) team when there are significant concerns about a child's attendance.

AUTHORISED AND UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

There are two types of absences:

Authorised Absence:

Some absences are allowed by law and are known as "authorised absences". The Head Teacher approves authorised absences. Examples of authorised absence are:

- genuine illness
- unavoidable specialist appointment (Parents/carers are encouraged to make specialist appointments outside school hours)
- exceptional family circumstances, such as bereavement, graduation or wedding for immediate family (immediate family is defined as parent, grandparent or siblings only).

Unauthorised Absence:

There are times when children are absent for reasons, which are not permitted by law. These are known as “unauthorised absences”. Examples of unauthorised absence are:

- Holidays in term time
- Waiting for a delivery
- Going shopping or for a hair cut
- Going for a family day out
- Because it is your child’s birthday
- Sleeping in after a late night
- Caring for a family member
- Where there is no explanation for the absence or where the explanation or reason for the absence is considered unsatisfactory.

Unauthorised Absences have to be reported to the Local Authority. Educational Inclusion and Partnership (EIP) team may contact you and consider taking legal action against you if your child has unauthorised absences. Parents should be aware that it is for the school to decide whether an absence is authorised or unauthorised. A letter, or other communication, does not in itself authorise an absence.

We are always concerned about the amount of school time pupils miss as a result of family holidays. There is no entitlement to time off in term time.

For very exceptional circumstances, parents will need to complete a written request to the headteacher, asking permission for the time off. No leave will be authorised during assessment periods.

No parents/carers can demand leave of absence for their child/children as a right. Absence taken and not authorised will be liable for a Fixed Penalty fine of £60 per child, per adult. Penalty notices may be issued following assessment of unacceptable levels of unauthorised absence of 5 continuous days but also in the following circumstances: any 5 day unauthorised absence within a six week period.

LATENESS

All pupils are expected to be in school at 8:45am. A pupil receives a late mark if they are not in their classroom by the time the class register is taken. The registers close at 8:50am. Any pupil arriving later than 8:45am should enter the school via the main entrance and report to the School Office. The parent or guardian should give a reason for the lateness. Pupils who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of the other pupils. Parents/carers of pupils who are late more than three times in a half term are reminded about the importance of good time-keeping by sending a “good timekeeping reminder” letter (see Appendix 2). Parents/carers will be asked to visit school to discuss the problem if they have five or more lates in a half-term. We also operate a late register at the end of the day. This register is also monitored and parents/carers will be asked to visit school to discuss any concerns.

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING ATTENDANCE

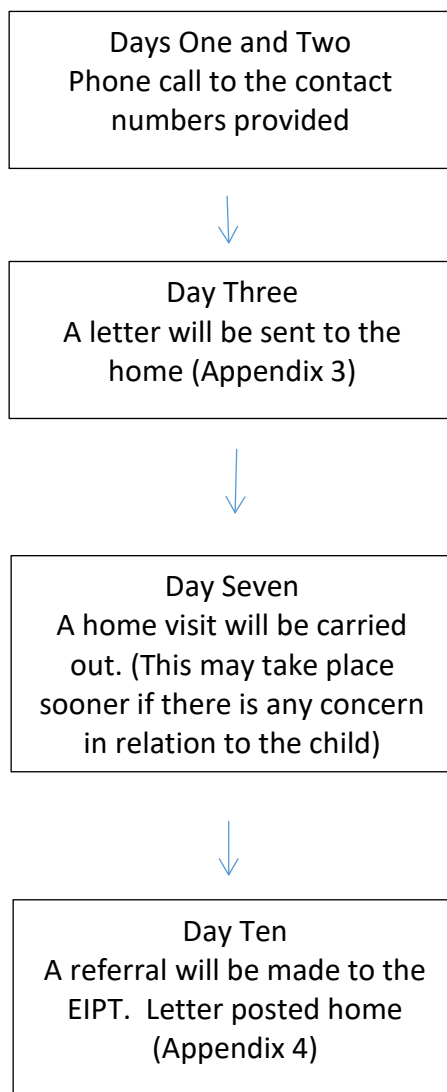
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School will offer an environment in which pupils feel valued and welcomed. The school’s ethos is to demonstrate to pupils that their presence in school is important, that they will be missed when they are absent/late and that follow up action will be taken.

A varied and flexible curriculum will be offered to all pupils. Every effort will be made to ensure that learning tasks are matched to pupils’ needs.

Attendance data will be monitored regularly and analysed in order to help identify patterns, set targets, correlate attendance with achievement and support and inform policy practice.

ABSENCE, EXPECTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Parents should notify the school, either by telephone, or in person, on the first day of absence, giving the reason and, if possible, likely duration of the absence. If the school does not receive contact from parents or carers when a child is absent or does not arrive at the school once a place has been allocated to them, the procedure will be as follows:

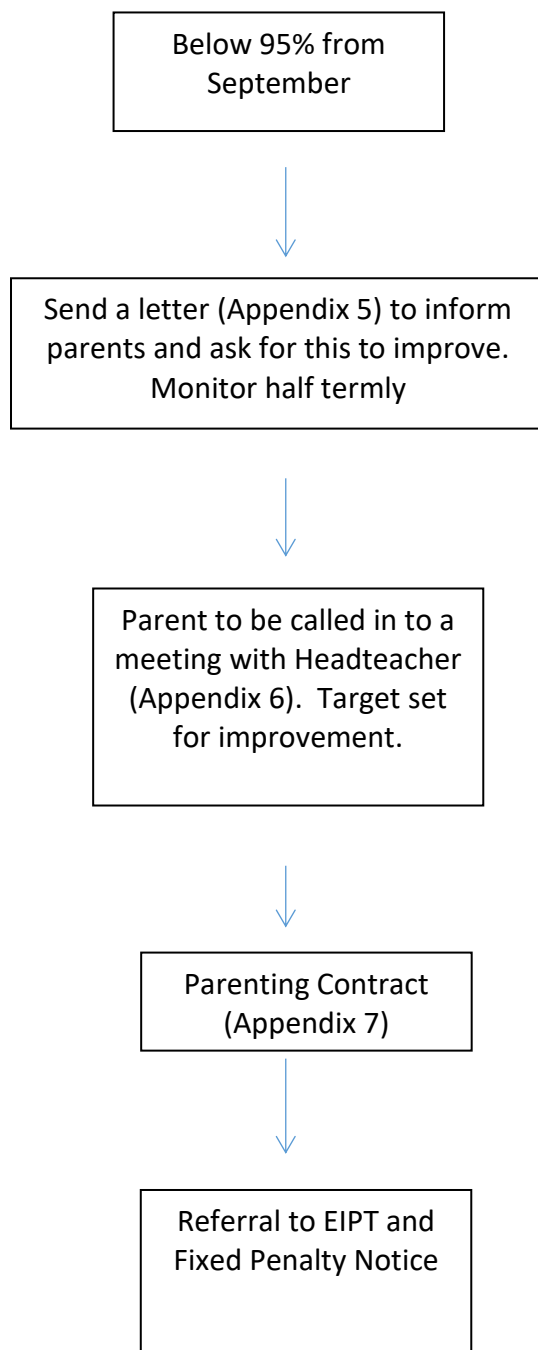


If a pupil returns to school after an absence without any explanation, the Headteacher will send an absence enquiry letter. (Appendix 1)

If a pupil is persistently late or absent, and the school's efforts to improve the situation have been unsuccessful, the head teacher will discuss the matter with the Educational Inclusion and Partnership Team and a formal referral may be considered.

Attendance Over Time

Pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern will be set targets for improvement. We expect at least 95% attendance for children across the school year. This will be monitored closely by Headteacher, Inclusion Lead and the Attendance Clerk. If a child's attendance drops below 95% then the following actions will be taken:



Parents will be reminded regularly (via newsletters, the school website, parents' evening etc.) of the importance of regular attendance.

Pupils who are absent through sickness for any extended period of time will (when appropriate) have work sent home to them and will be re-integrated back into school upon their return.

The Head Teacher will make a report to the school's governing body on attendance termly at Local Governing Body meetings.

Members of staff will, when appropriate, liaise with other services and agencies when this may serve to support and assist pupils who are experiencing attendance difficulties.

The school will have regular contact with the Educational Inclusion and Partnership Team in order to identify how best to support those pupils who are experiencing attendance difficulties.

CHANGING SCHOOLS

It is important that if families decide to send the child/children in their care to a different school that they inform school staff as soon as possible. A pupil will not be removed from this school roll until the following information has been received and investigated:

- the date the pupil will be leaving this school and starting the next;
- the address of the new school;
- the new home address, if it is known.

The pupil's school records will then be sent on to the new school as soon as possible. In the event that the school has not been informed of the above information, the family will be referred to the Educational Inclusion and Partnership Team.

Parents should complete the North Northants County Council School Transfer form and submit this to the school as well as informing the Head Teacher of the proposed move.

Appendix 1: Example Letter

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian

Your child _____ was absent on _____.

We have not yet received notification of the reason for the absence. Please fill in the reply slip below and return to the school within five days. If we do not hear from you by that time, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and you may be contacted by the school to attend a meeting.

Kind regards

Head Teacher

My child _____ was absent from school on _____

because

Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix 2: Example Letter

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian

Your child _____ has been late on three occasions this half term.

It is very important that your child is in his/her class line at 8.45am each morning so that they are here for the start of the school day.

If your child is late again this half term, you will be required to attend a meeting at the school to discuss the matter.

Yours faithfully

Head Teacher

Appendix 3: Example Letter

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian

Your child has now been absent from school for three days and despite trying to contact you, we have had no explanation for their absence.

Please contact the school immediately to inform us of the reasons why your child is not at school.

If we do not hear from you in the next few days, we will be conducting a home visit and may have to consider a referral to the Educational Inclusion and Partnership Team at North Northants council.

Yours faithfully

Head Teacher

Appendix 4: Example Letter

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian

Despite trying to contact you over the past ten days, your child has not returned to school. We are therefore left with no choice but to make a referral with the Educational Inclusion and Partnership Team who will be in touch with you shortly.

Yours faithfully

Head Teacher

Appendix 5: Example Letter

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian of _____

Your child's attendance has fallen below our required standard of 95% and currently stands at
_____ %

This rate needs to improve and we will be monitoring your child's attendance again in two weeks. If it then shows improvement there will be no need for any further involvement. However, if it does not, you may be asked to come into school for a meeting.

Please let us know if there is any way in which we can support you to ensure that your child's attendance improves.

Yours faithfully

Head Teacher

Appendix 6: Example Letter

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian

You received a letter two weeks ago from the school to inform you that your child's attendance was below our expectations.

Unfortunately, there does not seem to have been any improvement in the rate of attendance.

I therefore request that you attend an appointment at the school on:

_____ at _____.

Please contact the school if you are unable to make this appointment so that we can arrange a time and date which is more suitable.

Yours faithfully

Head Teacher

Appendix 7: Parenting Contract

Date _____

Parenting Contract

Name of child/children _____

Expected Attendance	Child's current attendance

Summary of actions taken and involvement so far	
What are the barriers to the child's attendance? Are there any areas of concern: bullying, medical, home related difficulties, transport, peer/staff relationships, academic, behavioural, other?	
Do you consider yourself to have a disability?	
What can the school do to assist in overcoming the barriers? Do we need to consider an EHA or the involvement of other agencies?	
What must the parent do to ensure that attendance improves rapidly?	
Attendance Target	
To be achieved by....	

If the targets are met then this contract will be reviewed and amended as necessary. However, if the targets are not met and there is no legitimate reason for this then the case will be referred to the Educational Inclusion and Partnership Team at Northamptonshire County Council.

This may result in:

- A fixed penalty notice payable up to £120 fine without further reference to you. For a penalty notice this warning is valid for 12 months

Alternatively you may be subject to proceedings by way of:

- Prosecution under S444 (1) Education Act 1996, where if convicted you may be fined up to £1000
- Prosecution under s444 (1) (a) Education Act 1996 where if convicted, you may be fined up to £2500 and/or 3 months imprisonment.

Signed _____ (Parent/Guardian) Date _____

Signed _____ (School representative) Date _____

Appendix 8: Parenting Contract Meeting

Parenting Contract Meetings

What is a Parenting Contract Meeting and what is it for?

It is a meeting of those involved with your child's school attendance. It will consider why attendance is so low and set targets to ensure it improves.

Why have I been called to a parent contract meeting?

You have been called to this meeting because your child's attendance falls below agreed expectations and this needs to improve.

Who will be at the meeting?

At the meeting will be the Parenting Support Worker and a member of the schools' senior management team and/or a member of the Governing Body. You are invited to bring a friend or family member for support.

What will happen at the meeting?

You will be asked to explain why your child's attendance at school is so poor. It is important that you are honest so that we can support with any difficulties that you may be experiencing. At the meeting you will be notified of your child's current attendance levels and will be given a target to reach in an agreed time period. You will be expected to sign the agreement and to keep to the actions agreed at the meeting.

How many meetings will I have to attend?

The parenting contract meeting may be followed by a further 5 week review if attendance has improved considerably but not reached the agreed target. If attendance targets are not met and there is very little improvement then the school will be requesting the involvement of the Educational Entitlement Team at Northamptonshire County Council.

Appendix 9: **Penalty Notice (PN) Request Checklist**

Before completing form

- ☐ Has the period for which the PN is requested been recorded as unauthorised?
- ☐ Are there any missing marks or coding irregularities?
- ☐ Does coding on the register accurately reflect the dates for which the PN is being requested?
- ☐ Is the reason for the request indicated on the form e.g. unauthorised holiday or unauthorised absence?
- ☐ Have the parents/carers been informed that they could receive a PN.

Criteria for issuing PN

- 5 days or more continuous absence if overall attendance is below 90% (in the previous rolling year) or if there are further G codes in the academic year.
- Can be used as a sanction for irregular attendance.

Documentation to accompany irregular attendance request

- ☐ Completed Contact form
- ☐ Attendance certificate ensuring all absences are coded as unauthorised e.g. no 'N' codes
- ☐ Evidence of actions taken – letters issued, notes of meetings held, Parent Contact Meeting (PCM) chronology, offer of Early Help Assessment (EHA)
- ☐ Evidence that the parent/carer has been notified that they may receive a PN (this can be within documentation of school website, in behaviour policy, in newsletters to parents etc.

(If Leave of Absence Request Form is completed by parent/carer)

- ☐ Copy of request for leave of absence received from parent/carer and signed by all relevant parent/carers and any letter pertaining to that request.

- ☐ Signed evidence that school have informed parent/carer in writing that absence will be unauthorised and that this could lead to a PN being issued.
- ☐ Reasons for not authorising the holiday should be clearly stated to parent/carer.
- ☐ Up to date registration certificate showing the period of absence as unauthorised 'G'

(If Leave of Absence Request Form has not been completed by parent/carer)

- ☐ Up to date attendance certificate showing the period of absence as unauthorised 'G'.
- ☐ Evidence as to why the school believe that the absence was for the purpose of a leave of absence.
- ☐ Signed copy of letter to parent from the head teacher stating that the absence will be coded as unauthorised as it is believed to be for the purposes of a leave of absence without exceptional circumstance and that this could lead to a PN being issued.

Completing contact form

- ☐ Parents' full name and surname.
 - If there are two parents, details of both parents should be completed.
 - Address should be checked.
 - A PN will be issued individually to both parent/carers.
- ☐ First language if not English – the PN will be issued in that language.
- ☐ The contact form should only be submitted once the child has returned to school. If the child fails to return then the school should follow their Missing child procedures.
- ☐ Documentation provided by the school which supports the request for a PN by the Local Authority can be used as evidence should any legal action be taken. All cases where there is non-payment of the PN would be considered for a prosecution under s.444 of the Education Act 1996.
- ☐ In the event that the case proceeds to a prosecution school staff may be required to provide a written witness statement and may be required to give evidence in court.