

Attendance and Unauthorised Leave Policy

Regular attendance at school is essential to ensure uninterrupted progress and to enable children to extend their potential.

Our expectation is that every child who is on roll should attend school every day, when the school is in session as long as they are fit and healthy enough to do so. We do all we can to encourage the children to attend, and to put in place appropriate procedures to support this. We believe that the most important factor in promoting good attendance is developing positive attitudes towards school and learning.

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school. It is a legal requirement for all schools to record attendance of all pupils and registers to be electronic.

Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

Poor attendance can seriously affect each child's:

- Attainment in school
- Relationships with other children and their ability to form lasting friendships
- Confidence to attempt new work and work alongside others

At St Thomas More RC Primary School, we use the SIMS Attendance Module to register children, monitor individual children's patterns and analyse attendance data.



1. Working Together to improve school Attendance 2024

[Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

The government's expectations below have been adopted by St Thomas More RC Primary
Expect

Aspire to high standards of attendance from all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school.

Monitor

Rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.

Listen and understand

When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen to and understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.

Facilitate support

Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.

Formalise support

Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through an attendance contract or education supervision order.

Enforce

Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention: a penalty notice in line with the National Framework or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.

Non-attendance at school is an important issue that is treated seriously. However, we recognise that each case is different and that no one standard response will be appropriate in every case. Consideration is given to all factors affecting attendance before deciding what intervention strategy to apply. Ensuring a child's regular attendance at school is a parent's legal responsibility, but we encourage parents to approach school if they experience any difficulties with attendance and punctuality, so that we can offer our support.

Our aim is to work closely with parents, staff and children to promote good attendance and this policy explains the ways in which we do this. Parents agree to this working relationship once their child enrolls at St Thomas More RC Primary.

We use a number of incentives to encourage regular attendance at school, though we highlight that the prime benefit derived from regular attendance is that continuity and progression in learning are ensured.

- *Weekly Incentives* – Assemblies that celebrate the class with the best attendance and the class receive a reward.
- *Individual Incentives* – Staff will work collaboratively with parents and children to tailor a package of support, which meets the needs of individual children whose attendance has become a concern.

In cases where improvement in attendance or punctuality is required, we may:

- Report to you when your child's attendance/punctuality is causing a concern either in writing or verbally.
- Invite you to an Attendance Panel to discuss these concerns with the Headteacher and the Education Welfare Officer.
- Make a referral to the Education Welfare Service for further intervention and support.
- Submit a Fixed Penalty Notice Fine (see section 2) to the Education Welfare Service.
- Submit a Fast Track to Court referral to the Education Welfare Service.

2. Understanding Absence

Punctuality & Registration

Regular monitoring will take place by the Senior Leadership Team and the 'Improving Attendance Action Plan.'

Governors monitor attendance through the termly Head teacher report.

We welcome children into school at 8.40am daily, to encourage a calm start to the day. Each school day is made of two sessions - AM and PM. Registration is taken at each of these sessions from:

AM - 8.40 - 8.50am EYFS, KS1 & KS2

PM - 12:30pm EYFS; 1:00pm KS1; 1:30pm KS2

The gates are closed at 8:50am, if a child arrives after this time parents are required to record the arrival on the school Inventory system which will feed into the electronic register.

Children are expected to be present in the classroom and ready to learn by these times.

- Registers are kept electronically at St Thomas More R.C. Primary and are monitored daily by the attendance officers.
- Details of all absences and lateness are recorded via Inventory arriving after school starts at 8.50am
- Children arriving after the close of registers at 8:50am will be required to sign their children into school using the Inventory system situated at the main office.
- The Attendance Officers and Senior Staff monitor the pupils who are absent on a daily basis and use a range of strategies to reduce individual pupil attendance.
- A log is kept of all texts and telephone correspondence between parents and school.
- We will use a variety of letters to ensure that we keep parents/carers informed of any concerns.
- We promote positive school attendance.

Authorised/Unauthorised – The Definition

Every half-day absence has to be classified by the school (not by the parents) as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the reason for each absence is always required, preferably in writing or by telephone.

Authorised Absence

Authorised absences are when a child is absent from school for a morning/afternoon/full day and school deems the reason for this absence as acceptable. Only the Head teacher can make the final decision as to whether an absence is authorised.

Unauthorised Absence

Unauthorised absences are those which are unexplained by parents, which the school does not consider 'reasonable' or the Head teacher has not given permission for.

This includes:

- Parents keeping children off school unnecessarily (e.g. shopping, looking after other children, absences when parents are ill, birthdays)
- Truancy before or during the school day.
- Absences that have never been properly explained.
- Holidays during term time.

Illness and Medical Appointments

When a child is absent, it is a parent's responsibility to contact the school before 9.30am on the first day of absence, informing of the reason for absence.

As part of our Safeguarding Procedures, if no reason for absence has been received, we will attempt to contact the parent or carer and all other emergency contacts. This may be done by text message or telephone call.

- Parents have a duty to provide **more than one** emergency contact for their child's record.
- Every effort should be made to arrange medical appointments outside school hours. If regular medical appointments are made during school hours, there will be a request for evidence to support the child's attendance. (Code M will be used)
- Hospital/consultant appointments may be authorised if school is provided with relevant evidence. (Code M will be used)
- Vomiting and diarrhoea – school follows NHS advice around infection control and suggests that parents keep their child off school for 48hrs until the symptoms have stopped.
- A longer-term illness e.g. chicken pox or scarlet fever, parents to update school every 3 days via email or phone call to the office.

Fixed Penalty Notice Fines

Penalty Notice Fines may be issued by the Education Welfare Service to adults with Parental Responsibility when a child has been absent from school for 10 (equivalent to 5 school days) or more sessions in any 10 week period during the academic year. **For example if a child is late after register closes for 20 days in a 10 week period, this would action a Penalty Notice.**

Appropriate reasons for the issuing of Penalty Notices:

- Persistent lateness after the register has closed
- Parentally-condoned absences
- Holidays in term time in accordance with government guidance
- Holidays of 4 days with a 1 day absence either side – **if a child is absent for day either side of the holiday dates without medical proof, this will be classed as a 5 day absence and a Penalty Notice will be actioned.**
- Excessive delayed return from extended holidays
- Persistent absenteeism

All Penalty Notice Fine referrals are checked by the Education Welfare Service to ensure that the request meets the conditions of the Code of Conduct.

- A penalty notice is an out of court settlement which is intended to change behaviour without the need for criminal prosecution. If repeated penalty notices are being issued and they are not working to change behaviour they are unlikely to be most appropriate tool.
- Therefore, from autumn term 2024, only 2 penalty notices can be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within a 3 year rolling period and any second notice within that period is charged at a higher rate:
 - The first penalty notice issued to a parent in respect of a particular pupil will be charged at £160 if paid within 28 days. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.
 - A second penalty notice issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.
 - A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of issue of the first. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time (or subsequent times) within those 3 years, alternative action should be taken instead. This will often include considering prosecution, but may include other tools such as one of the other attendance legal interventions.

Leave of absence for exceptional circumstance:

- Only exceptional circumstances warrant a leave of absence. Schools should consider each application individually taking into account the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind the request.
- If a leave of absence is granted, it is for the headteacher to determine the length of the time the pupil can be away from school.
- As head teachers should only grant leaves of absence in exceptional circumstances it is unlikely a leave of absence will be granted for the purposes of a family holiday.
- Generally, a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation would not constitute an exceptional circumstance.
- This code is classified for statistical purposes as authorised absence.

3. Unauthorised Leave (Term Time Holidays)

We recognise that pupil absence during term time can seriously disrupt a pupil's continuity of learning. In line with DFE and Local Authority guidance, St Thomas More R.C. Primary School operates a 'zero- tolerance' policy with regards to Unauthorised Leave. **Parents are therefore strongly urged to avoid booking a family holiday in term time.**

Parents do not have an automatic right to withdraw pupils from school for a holiday.

Parents must notify the school in advance of taking a holiday using a 'Notification of Term Time Unauthorised Absence' form available from the office and on the website. In some circumstances, we understand that this may not be possible, however it is a parents responsibility to ensure that school are notified as soon as practically possible.

Parents are reminded that under the Working Together to improve school Attendance 2024

Head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless **'exceptional circumstances'* exist.

Unauthorised Leave of 10 or more sessions (5 or more school days) will qualify for a Fixed Penalty Notice Fine for each adult with Parental Responsibility, regardless of whether they travelled with the child. Included is 10 sessions of absence in 10 weeks (equivalent to 5 days in 10 weeks).

In addition to this measure, where a pupil has not returned to school for 10 days after an authorised absence or is absent from school unauthorised for 20 consecutive school days the pupil can be removed from the admission register, resulting in the loss of the child's school place. Each case for removing a child from roll is reviewed independently with the Education Welfare Service and the Children Missing Education Team.

Absence codes September 2024

Attending the school

<u>Code</u>	<u>Reason</u>
/	Present in School AM
\	Present in School PM
L	Late arrival before register is closed

Attending a place other than the school

<u>Code</u>	<u>Reason</u>
K	Attending education provision arranged by the local authority
V	Attending an educational visit or trip
P	Participating in a sporting activity
W	Attending work experience
B	Attending any other approved educational activity
D	Dual registered at another school

Absent - leave of absence

<u>Code</u>	<u>Reason</u>
C1	Leave of absence for the purpose of participating in a regulated performance or undertaking regulated employment abroad.
M	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending a medical or dental appointment
J1	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending an interview for employment or for admission to another educational institution
S	Leave of absence for the purpose of studying for a public examination
X	Non-compulsory school age pupil not required to attend school
C2	Leave of absence for a compulsory school age pupil subject to a part-time timetable
C	Leave of absence for exceptional circumstance

Absent - other authorised reasons

<u>Code</u>	<u>Reason</u>
T	Parent travelling for occupational purposes
R	Religious observance
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointment)
E	Suspended or permanently excluded and no alternative provision made

Absent - unable to attend school because of unavoidable cause

<u>Code</u>	<u>Reason</u>
Q	Unable to attend the school because of a lack of access arrangements
Y1	Unable to attend due to transport normally provided not being available
Y2	Unable to attend due to widespread disruption to travel
Y3	Unable to attend due to part of the school premises being closed
Y4	Unable to attend due to the whole school site being unexpectedly closed
Y5	Unable to attend as pupil is in criminal justice detention
Y6	Unable to attend in accordance with public health guidance or law
Y7	Unable to attend because of any other unavoidable cause

Absent - unauthorised absence

<u>Code</u>	<u>Reason</u>
G	Holiday not granted by the school
N	Reason for absence not yet established
O	Absent in other or unknown circumstances
U	Arrived in school after registration closed

Administrative codes

<u>Code</u>	<u>Reason</u>
Z	Prospective pupil not on admission register
#	Planned whole school closure

School fines for unauthorised absence are changing from 19 August 2024.

You may know that the government (Department for Education) is introducing a new national framework for penalty notices which parent/carers must pay if they take a child out of school during term time. The changes will come into effect for fines issued after 19 August 2024.

How are parents fined?

If parents/carers take a child, or children, out of school for an unauthorised absence, each parent will be issued with a penalty notice fine, for each absent child.

For example: two siblings absent for leave during term time would mean that each parent will receive two separate fines.

What will happen the first time?

The first time a penalty notice is issued for term time leave or unauthorised absence the amount will be £160 per parent, per child when paid within 28 days.

The amount is reduced to £80 per parent, per child if the fine is paid within 21 days.

What will happen a second time? (within three years)

If parents/carers take a child, or children out of school for a second time a penalty notice will be issued for £160 per parent, per child and paid within 28 days. There is no reduction for prompt payment.

How many days does the government count as an unauthorised absence?

Penalty notice fines will be issued for term time leave or unauthorised absence of five or more days (10 sessions), in a 10 week school period.

What happens if parents don't pay the fine?

If parents/carers do not pay the fine within the timescales, the council may refer the case to the Magistrates Court for non-school attendance proceedings under the Education Act 1996 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

What happens after a third time? (within three years)

If parents/carers are issued with a penalty notice a third time for either term time leave or unauthorised absence the case will be presented directly to the Magistrates' Court and a fine of up to £2,500 can be issued.

We urge parents/carers not to interrupt their children's schooling and talk to their head teacher before requesting leave of absence.

For more information,
please visit the government website or scan the QR code
education.welfare@rochdale.gov.uk



**'Exceptional Circumstances' can be described as "rare, significant, unavoidable and short, and that the leave could not reasonably be scheduled at another time".*

For further support or advice on school attendance, you can contact:

Education Welfare Service
Number One Riverside
Smith Street
Rochdale
OL16 1XU

Tel: 01706 925115