

St Thomas' CE VA Primary School



Attendance Policy

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22.03.23

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Introduction

At St Thomas' C of E VA Primary School, we believe that all children and young people have a right to an education as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in UK Law. The opportunities provided by education are fundamental to enabling all children and young people to reach their potential and lead happy and rewarding lives.

Evidence shows that there are clear links between good attendance and high achievement in school. Pupils who attend school regularly are more likely to feel settled in school, maintain friendships, make progress and gain the greatest benefit from their education. We will work with families to ensure pupils engage in education and maximise their full potential.

This policy outlines our approach to attendance and summarises the legal duties and expectations of the whole school community. It reflects the key principles of the Department for Education's attendance guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities: [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance) and locally agreed processes.

Our vision for attendance

At St Thomas' C of E VA Primary School, we recognise that good school attendance can only be achieved if it is viewed as a shared responsibility of all school staff, the governing body, parents, pupils, the local authority and the wider school community.

1.1 School

As a school, we will:

- Make improving attendance integral to our wider school improvement efforts, recognising how it connects with the quality of the school's curriculum, behaviour, safeguarding, and our approach to inclusion, well-being and support for disadvantaged pupils.
- Promote the importance of good attendance and set high expectations for every pupil's attendance and punctuality at school.
- Communicate these expectations clearly, strongly and consistently to parents and to pupils.
- Record attendance accurately and follow up absences with parents.
- Listen carefully to parents about the reasons why children are not attending regularly to identify and understand the barriers to attendance.
- Make sure staff have a good understanding of attendance-related matters and that the right people are in place to work with parents where attendance is a concern.
- Offer support and make reasonable adjustments where needed to overcome barriers to attendance.
- Work closely with support services and agencies where pupils and families need additional support.
- Analyse attendance information to identify patterns and trends, and use this analysis to target our actions, both for individual pupils and at a whole-school level.
- Regularly review our attendance-related messaging, processes and strategies with a view to continued whole-school improvement.

The designated Senior Leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance at St Thomas' C of E VA Primary School is Mrs B M Billington, School Business Leader.

1.2 Governing Body

To support our vision for attendance, the Governing Body will:

- Ensure regular ongoing support, guidance, and challenge in relation to attendance, recognising the importance of good attendance and promoting it across the school's ethos and policies.
- Ensure that there is a named senior leader responsible for the strategic approach to attendance in school.
- Ensure that the school's leadership team fulfil their expectations and the relevant statutory duties as set out in attendance related legislation and guidance.
- Regularly review attendance data, discuss and challenge trends, and help the school leadership team focus improvement efforts on the individual pupils or groups of pupils who need it most.
- Ensure school staff receive adequate training on attendance.

1.3 Parents

Parents are expected to support the school to improve and maintain high standards of attendance by:

- Ensuring their child attends regularly as required by law (see Section 7 – school attendance and the law).
- Ensuring the school has up to date contact information including home address, telephone numbers, email addresses and emergency contacts. This would include providing new address and school details in the event of a move away from the area.
- Supporting the school's absence procedures by:
 - Telephoning school on every day that their child is unable to attend school due to illness (except where a doctor's report has already been provided indicating an expected return date).
 - Requesting leave of absence only in exceptional circumstances and in advance.
 - Providing medical or other evidence in relation to absence if required by the school.
 - Arranging medical or dental appointments to take place outside school hours wherever possible.
 - Not taking family holidays in term time or any leave of absence for any reason without prior agreement.
 - See section 3 for information on the school's day-to-day absence procedures.
- Raising any issues or concerns affecting attendance with school staff at the earliest opportunity.
- Attending meetings with school staff to discuss concerns if requested by the school.
- Working in partnership with school and other agencies to address any attendance problems.
- Encouraging good routines at home to ensure children are prepared for school each day.

Absence procedures

1.4 Parents

If a pupil is absent from school, **parents are expected to:**

- Contact school on the first day their child is absent, giving the reason for absence, and on every further day of absence (except where a doctor's report has already been provided indicating an expected return date).
- St Thomas' arrangements for this are:- Infants: Contact Mrs Fairfax or Miss Egan at the school office by telephoning the absence line 0161 432 6809 (option 2) or emailing admin@st-thomasheaton.stockport.sch.uk. Juniors: Contact Ms Jones or Mrs Thomas at the school office by telephoning the absence line 0161 432 6809 (option 3) or emailing admin@st-thomasheaton.stockport.sch.uk. Please report your child's absence before 8.45am.
- Ensure that their child returns to school as soon as possible.
- Provide any medical evidence, if requested, to support the absence.
- Proactively contact school for support where they are concerned about their child's attendance by speaking to Mr P Campen (Infant Deputy Headteacher) 0161 432 6809 (option 2) or Mr C Silk (Junior Deputy Headteacher) 0161 432 6809 (option 3).

1.5 School

The school will:

- Contact parents by telephone on the first day of absence and further days of absence (if we haven't already been notified of the absence)
 - If we are unable to make contact this way, we will attempt to reach parents by email, letter, use of emergency contacts and home visits where necessary.
- Report any child with 10 consecutive days of unauthorised absence to the local authority.
- Make a safeguarding referral to the local authority where there are concerns about the welfare of a child who is not attending school.

1.6 Late arrival to school

- Pupils are expected to be in school by 8.55am.
- Registers are taken at 8.55am. Pupils will receive a late mark 'L' in the register if they are not in school by that time. School gates are locked at 8.55am.
- Children arriving after 8.55am are required to sign in at the school office.
- The registers will be closed at 9.25am. In accordance with the Pupil Registration Regulations, any pupils arriving after that time will be marked as 'U' in the register for that session – late after the registers have closed. This is classed as an unauthorised absence.

Parents will be contacted in cases where pupils are regularly late to discuss the reasons for lateness and offer support where appropriate.

Parents should note that unauthorised absences due to lateness could lead to the school making a referral to the local authority for sanctions and/or legal proceedings where attempts to improve punctuality have been unsuccessful.

Recording of absences

All absences must be recorded in the school register and categorised as either authorised or unauthorised.

1.7 Authorised absence from school

Authorised absence is an absence agreed by the school. Examples of authorised absence:

a) Illness

- Parents are asked to contact school each day their child is unable to attend school due to illness, except where information from a health professional has been provided indicating an expected return date (see section 3 – absence procedures)
- Where a child or young person has frequent absence due to illness, parents may be asked to attend a meeting in school to agree a medical action plan.
- Parents may also be asked for medical evidence, particularly where absences due to illness are frequent or result in the pupil having long periods of time off school.
- Where pupils are likely to miss more than 15 days of school due to illness, they may be entitled to educational provision from their home local authority. In most cases, it would be the school's responsibility to make a referral where appropriate. We will work in partnership with parents and health professionals to identify and refer pupils entitled to this provision in line with the relevant local authority's policy for 'Children who cannot attend school due to health reasons'.

b) Medical/Dental appointments

- Parents are requested wherever possible to make routine medical or dental appointments outside of the school day. However, we understand that hospital appointments and specialist clinic appointments often occur in the school day. Pupils should only be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary for the appointment.

Parents can visit the school offices and show the appointment letter to the office staff or email admin@st-thomasheaton.stockport.sch.uk explaining the reason for the absence. Parents will also need to attach a copy of the appointment letter.

c) Other leave of absence may only be granted in exceptional circumstances

- Parents must put their request in writing in advance to the head teacher. Term time holidays are unlikely to be agreed.
- If the absence is not authorised by the head teacher and the child does not attend school, we may request that Stockport Council issues an Education Penalty Notice (see Section 8 - legal sanctions).
- Please complete the 'Leave of Absence Request Form' which can be obtained from the school offices or on the school website www.st-thomasheaton.stockport.sch.uk/virtualoffice

d) Other examples of authorised circumstances include:

- Part-time timetables may be agreed in exceptional cases, for example where medical issues prevent a pupil from attending full time or as part of a re-integration package. This should only ever be used as a temporary arrangement, with full consent of parents and be regularly reviewed with a view to increasing attendance to full-time as quickly as possible.
- Where a pupil is absent from school because of a suspension or permanent exclusion.
- Absence to take part in any day set aside exclusively for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong, including religious festivals.

- When traveller families are known to be travelling for occupational purposes and have agreed this with school, but it is not known whether the pupil is attending another school. (In order to fulfil legal requirements, in such cases, pupils must attend school for at least 200 sessions in every 12 months).

1.8 Unauthorised Absence from School

Unauthorised absences are absences from school for which the school has not given permission, including arriving late at school after the registers have closed. Absence will not be authorised unless parents have provided a satisfactory explanation that has been accepted by the school.

Understanding barriers to attendance

At St Thomas' C of E VA Primary School, we recognise that poor attendance is often a sign of wider difficulties in a child's life whether at home or at school. Parents should make school aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance or behaviour at school. This may include bereavement, divorce/separation, or other family difficulties; friendship issues; concerns relating to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), medical needs or mental health/anxiety. This will help the school identify any additional support that may be required.

Additionally, we recognise that some pupils face greater barriers to attendance than their peers and are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), those with physical or mental health needs, young carers and children with Social Workers. We still maintain high expectations of attendance, but we will be mindful of the way in which additional barriers may affect attendance. Reasonable adjustments will be made and additional support from other services sought where appropriate.

Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) – the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCO) will ensure that reasonable adjustments are made where appropriate to support good attendance and that attendance issues are addressed in all assessment and review processes.

Pupils with a Social Worker – we will notify the Social Worker of any unauthorised absences, any concerns about attendance/punctuality and support them in addressing attendance issues as part of the child or family plan.

Looked After pupils – the designated teacher will ensure that attendance issues are addressed in Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and in regular looked after review meetings. The Social Worker will be notified of any unauthorised absences and we will contact the relevant Virtual School Headteacher for more support where necessary.

Staged Attendance Process

St Thomas' C of E VA Primary School, uses a range of methods to identify pupils whose attendance is causing concern including:

- Regular analysis of attendance data by attendance staff, the leadership team and governing body, including vulnerable pupils and pupils with SEND.
- Regular attendance monitoring meetings between the school's attendance officer and relevant teachers/pastoral staff/SENDCO.
- Termly meetings with the Local Authority's Education Welfare Service to discuss cases where persistent absence is a concern.

We use Stockport Council's Staged Attendance Process as a framework for dealing with individual pupils with low attendance. We recognise that, in most cases, improvement in attendance can be brought about by good communication and strong partnership working between parents, pupils and the school, identifying and addressing the barriers to attendance.

Offering and involving early help services is also an integral part of this staged process in cases where more support is needed to help improve attendance.

1.9 Summary of the Staged Attendance Process

Stage 1 – Attendance cause for concern

- Where attendance has been identified as a concern, we will contact parents to ask about the reasons for absence, try to identify any barriers to attendance and to discuss/offer support where appropriate. Contact may be made by telephone, email, text message or through face-to-face conversations, meetings in school or home visits.
- School staff will also share information to try to identify any concerns or issues that may be affecting attendance, for example any special educational needs or disabilities, medical needs or issues with peers.
- We will attempt to resolve any issues that arise from these conversations and offer support/advice.
- Where medical issues are advised as the reason for absence, we may consider the use of a medical action plan to bring together health information and consider support to increase attendance.
- Where mental health/anxiety about school are identified as the reason for absence, we will offer support, which may include:
 - arranging for a key adult to provide a point of support in school,
 - signposting to skilled colleagues in school, online sources of support, the school counselling service, the school nursing service, GP, CAMHS or other mental health services if appropriate.
 - The use of the local authority's Anxiety Based School Avoidance guidance documents.

- Where there are early indications that a family's support needs may go beyond what the school can offer, we will offer early help through completion of an Early Help Assessment (EHA), a referral to the Team Around the School (TAS) or to specific services that may be able to offer support.
- If there is already an Early Help Assessment or other family assessment in place, we will work with the lead professional to ensure that attendance issues are addressed through the child or family's plan and will carry out any school-related actions.

Stage 2 – School Attendance Meeting

- Where attendance has not improved despite the support offered at Stage 1, or where there are concerns about the level of engagement from parents, we will proceed to Stage 2.
- Parents will be sent a letter outlining concerns about attendance and advising that any further absences will not be authorised unless adequate medical evidence is provided. Parents will also be invited to a School Attendance Meeting.
- Discussion at the meeting will focus on the barriers to attendance and agree a clear, personalised plan with actions and targets to increase attendance at school. A review period will also be agreed.
- Early help support will be offered if previously refused by the parent.
- A medical action plan may also be considered if parents advise that the absences are related to medical reasons.
- If the pupil is already in the Team Around the Child (TAC), Team Around the Family (TAF) or Child Protection Process, we will work with the lead professional to ensure that actions to improve attendance are included in the child or family's plan and be reviewed through regular multi-agency meetings.
- We will continue to monitor attendance and make contact with parents to discuss any absences and the progress of the agreed action plan. If a pupil has a Social Worker, we will advise them of any unexplained absences.

Stage 3 – Attendance enforcement referral

- If attendance hasn't improved despite the support offered at Stage 1 and Stage 2, or where there has been insufficient engagement from parents, we will consider making a school attendance enforcement referral to the local authority's Education Welfare Service. If the referral is accepted, it may lead to:
 - A formal warning being issued, leading to an Education Penalty Notice (fine) if there are further unauthorised absences within a specified period (see Section 8 - legal sanctions), or
 - An assessment leading to a formal Parent Contract process led by an Education Welfare Officer from the local authority's Education Welfare Service. This will involve a series of meetings and an agreed action plan relating to attendance concerns. The Parent Contract will be kept under review. If attendance does not improve and/or there is insufficient engagement from parents, the local authority will consider whether to proceed to prosecution (see Section 8 - legal sanctions).
- Emphasis is placed on trying to understand barriers to attendance and put appropriate support in place, with Stage 3 processes only being used where voluntary support has not been effective and/or has not been engaged with.

School attendance and the law

1.10 Parents

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational needs they may have.

Parents have a legal responsibility to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

For children receiving full time education at a school, parents have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. Regular attendance means their child must attend every day that they are expected to attend, except in a small number of allowable circumstances.

If a child of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly at the school at which they have been registered the parents may be guilty of an offence and can be prosecuted by the local authority (see Section 8 - legal sanctions).

1.11 Schools

Schools are required by law to:

- Carry out all their functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all pupils at the school.
- Maintain and preserve accurate attendance registers as required by regulations (Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006) and make them available for inspection by the local authority.
- Comply with legal requirements regarding adding or removing pupils' names to or from the admissions register, ensuring that:
 - Pupils' names are added to the school roll on the expected date of attendance.
 - Pupils' names are removed from roll only when one of the legal grounds in the Education (Pupil Registration) England Regulations 2006 is satisfied.
 - All removals from roll are reported to the local authority.
 - Information is shared and enquiries made jointly with the local authority to locate missing pupils.
- Report pupils who fail to attend regularly and pupils who are continuously absent for 10 days or more without reasonable explanation to the local authority.

Legal Sanctions

Regular school attendance is a legal duty on parents and carers. If a parent fails to ensure their child attends school regularly, they are guilty of an offence under section 444(1) or (1A) Education Act 1996.

A parent who commits this offence may be liable to prosecution in the Magistrates' Court and, depending on which offence they are convicted of, may be liable to a fine of up to £2500, or a term of imprisonment of up to three months.

Although school will offer support in addressing attendance issues, it will also refer pupils whose attendance fails to improve, or who take leave of absence from school without agreement, to the Education Welfare Service within Stockport Council. This can take several routes:

1.12 Education Penalty Notice

Education Penalty Notices are fixed penalty notices issued by Stockport Council of £60 per parent per child. These are payable within 21 days and rise to £120 if paid between 22-28 days. If unpaid after 28 days, the parent will be prosecuted for the offence of failing to ensure regular school attendance. Penalty Notices are issued in accordance with Stockport Council's Code of Conduct. There are two types of attendance-related Education Penalty Notice:

- **Education Penalty Notices for Irregular Attendance**

Before being issued with an Education Penalty Notice, parents will receive a written warning. This gives them an opportunity to avoid a fine by ensuring that no unauthorised absences – including late after the close registration marks – are recorded against their child during the next 15 school days. The minimum criteria for sending such a warning is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a three-month period.

- **Education Penalty Notices for unauthorised leave of absence**

Education Penalty Notices may also be issued where a pupil is taken out of school for five days or more without the school's consent – such as for a term time holiday. In these cases, the fine is sent by the Council without an initial warning being issued.

1.13 Parent Contract

A Parent Contract is an agreement which usually involves the school, parents, members of Stockport Council's Education Welfare Service and, in some cases, the pupil. The agreement sets out the actions required by all parties to overcome the barriers to improved attendance. Compliance with the contract and the progress of improving attendance are reviewed regularly at Parent Contract Review Meetings. If a parent fails to participate and/or fails to ensure that attendance improves, they may be prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court.

1.14 Education Supervision Order

An Education Supervision Order (ESO) is an order granted in the Family Proceedings Court requiring a parent and child to follow directions made in the Order and work alongside a Supervising Officer to improve the child's school attendance. The Supervising Officer will be put in place by Stockport Council and may be a Social Worker, Education Welfare Officer or other early help professional.

Where parents persistently fail to comply with the directions given under an ESO, they may be prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court.

ESOs usually last for a year, but can be extended to up to three years.