

# St Thomas' CE VA Primary School



## Attendance Policy

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The right of children and young people to an education is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in UK Law. The opportunities provided by education are fundamental to enabling children and young people to reach their potential and lead happy and rewarding lives.
- 1.2. Evidence shows that there is a clear link between low levels of school attendance and poor outcomes for children and young people. This is not just in relation to academic achievement. Poor attendance also leaves children and young people at greater risk of neglect, social isolation and offending.
- 1.3. At St Thomas' CE VA we believe that it is vital that attendance problems are followed up at an early stage, and we are committed to doing so, in partnership with parents and the Local Authority. We will work with families to address any barriers to attendance and ensure support is offered which addresses any underlying issues.
- 1.4. St Thomas' CE VA recognises that the causes of poor attendance are diverse and that all responses to absence must take account of the specific needs and circumstances affecting the pupil concerned.

## 2. Legal Framework for School Attendance

### 2.1 Legal Duties on Parents

- 2.1.1 Parents are responsible for making sure that their children of compulsory school age receive a suitable full-time education. Children are of compulsory school age from the beginning of the term following their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday until the last Friday in June in the school year in which they reach the age of 16.
- 2.1.2 Under section 576 of the Education Act 1996 (EA 1996), the definition of parent includes natural parents or other people with legal parental responsibility (whether or not they live with the child), and anyone who has care of the child.
- 2.1.3 For children receiving full time education at a school, parents must ensure that attendance is regular. Regular attendance means attending at every timetabled session required by the school. Non-attendance will not go unchallenged and parents are accountable for any sessions that their children miss from school for **any** reason.
- 2.1.4 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.

### 2.2 Legal Duties on Schools

St Thomas' CE VA is required to:

- 2.2.1 Maintain and preserve accurate registers as required by regulations (Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006) and (*for maintained schools only*) make them available for inspection by the Local Authority. This includes:
- Monitor pupils educated Off-Site and ensuring that the school register mirrors the attendance information held by the off-site provision.
  - Have clear procedures for the closure of registers during each session.
- 2.2.2 Comply with legal requirements regarding adding or removing pupils' names to or from the school roll including 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 in order to locate missing pupils.
- 2.2.3 Report pupils who fail to attend regularly to the Local Authority via regular meetings with the Education Welfare team. This includes both authorised and unauthorised absences. (In the case of pupils on part-time timetables, the Local Authority also requires a part-time timetable Notification Form to be completed).
- 2.2.4 Report Missing Pupils (pupils who are continuously absent for 10 days or more without reasonable explanation) to the Local Authority via the Children's Services Contact Centre.
- 2.2.5 Carry out all their functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all pupils at the school.
- 2.2.6 Promote good attendance and identify patterns of poor attendance at an early stage.

### 3. Absence from School

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

## 3.2 Authorised absence from school

3.2.1 Authorised absences are those which the school has determined are for a justifiable reason. This could be because a child is ill, or because of other exceptional circumstances. It is for the school, not the parents, to determine whether an absence should be authorised.

### 3.2.2 Illness

Parents are asked to contact school on every day that their child is unable to attend school, except where a doctor's report has been provided indicating an expected return date.

3.2.3 Where pupils miss a lot of school due to illness, St Thomas' CE VA] will seek medical evidence before authorising absences. Where this arises we will write to parents to inform them of this requirement. If medical evidence is not produced the absences will not be authorised, and this could result in a referral to the Local Authority.

3.2.4 Where pupils are likely to miss more than 15 days of school, they may be entitled to educational provision from the Education of Sick Children Service, and it is the school's responsibility to ensure that a referral is made in appropriate cases. St Thomas' CE VA will work in partnership with parents and health professionals to identify and refer pupils entitled to such provision in line with the Education for Sick Children Policy.

### 3.2.5 Medical/Dental appointments

Parents are requested wherever possible to make medical or dental appointments outside of the school day. Where this is not possible, pupils should attend school for part of the day, and whenever possible return to school after the appointment. The appointment card should be submitted to school as evidence.

3.2.6 Leave of absence may be given in exceptional circumstances such as family bereavement, or for other legitimate reasons such as an interview at another school or college. The absence should be restricted to the minimum time required and parents are asked to request permission in advance by completing the Leave of Absence Request Form.

### 3.2.7 Family Holidays

Parents should be aware that there is no right to time off school for a family holiday. Leave of absence for any reason is only granted in exceptional circumstances and is very unlikely to be granted for the purpose of a holiday.

### 3.2.8 Other examples of authorised circumstances include:

- Part-time timetables which 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.
- Where a pupil is absent from school due to an 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.

## 3.3 Unauthorised Absences from School

3.3.1 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 as such by the school.

3.3.2 Examples of unsatisfactory explanations include:

- A pupil's/family member's birthday
- Shopping for uniforms
- Having their hair cut
- Closure of a sibling's school for INSET (or other) purposes
- "Couldn't get up"
- Illness where the child is considered well enough to attend school
- Illness where parents have been asked to produce medical evidence but have failed to do so
- Leave of absence for holidays or other reasons taken without the authorisation of school
- Waiting for a place at a new school

## 3.4 Late Arrival at School

3.4.1 AM Registration begins at 8.55am; pupil arriving after this time will be marked as present but arriving late (L). The register will close at 9.25am; pupils arriving after the close of register will be marked as late (U). This will not be authorised and will count as an absence for that school session.

3.4.2 On arrival after the close of register pupils must be signed in by parents/carers.

## 4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 St Thomas' CE VA believes that improved school attendance can only be achieved if it is viewed as a shared responsibility of the school staff, governors, parents, pupils and the wider school community.

4.2 As such, the Governing Body will:

- 4.2.1 Support and hold to account the leadership team regarding its obligations in relation to attendance.
- 4.2.2 Ensure that the legal duties in the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 and other attendance related legislation are complied with.
- 4.2.3 Ensure that the importance and value of good attendance is promoted to all school staff, pupils and their parents.
- 4.2.4 Identify a member of the governing body to lead on attendance matters who will, as part of this role, review attendance reports at least termly.
- 4.2.5 Monitor the school's attendance through termly reporting at governing body meetings and on a half-termly basis to the lead governor for attendance.
- 4.2.6 Ensure that there is a named senior manager to lead on attendance and ensure that that manager is allocated sufficient time and resources.
- 4.2.7 Contribute and participate in initiatives to promote good attendance across the school.

4.3 The leadership team will:

- 4.3.1 Ensure that the legal duties in the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 and other attendance related legislation are complied with.
- 4.3.2 Return school attendance data to the Local Authority and the Department for Education as required.
- 4.3.3 Respond to requests for information and recommendations from the Local Authority in relation to specific compliance issues.
- 4.3.4 Actively promote the importance and value of good attendance to pupils and their parents and the wider staff team.
- 4.3.5 Ensure that there is a whole school approach which reinforces good school attendance.

- 4.3.6 Ensure good teaching and learning experiences that encourage all pupils to attend and to achieve.
- 4.3.7 Monitor the implementation of the Attendance Policy and ensure that the policy is reviewed annually.
- 4.3.8 Ensure that all staff are aware of the Attendance Policy and adequately trained to address attendance issues.
- 4.3.9 Report the school's attendance and related issues through termly reporting to the Governing Body and on a half termly basis to the lead governor for attendance.
- 4.3.10 Ensure that attendance data is collected and analysed frequently, on a weekly basis to identify causes and patterns of absence. In addition, termly meetings are held to discuss data, especially where there are families and children causing concern.
- 4.3.11 Monitor the implementation of the Attendance Escalation Interventions (See Appendix One).
- 4.3.12 Interpret the data to devise solutions and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.
- 4.3.13 Develop a multi-agency response to improve attendance and support pupils and their families.
- 4.3.14 Ensure all interventions around attendance are accurately recorded and documented.

#### 4.4 Teaching and pastoral support staff will:

- 4.4.1 Actively promote the importance and value of good attendance to pupils and their parents.
- 4.4.2 Contribute to a whole school approach which reinforces good school attendance.
- 4.4.3 Contribute to the provision of good teaching and learning experiences that encourage all pupils to attend and to achieve.
- 4.4.4 Ensure that the legal duties in the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 and other attendance related legislation are complied with.
- 4.4.5 Implement the Attendance Escalation Interventions in relation to individual pupils (See Appendix One).
- 4.4.6 Actively work with the Education Welfare team to identify pupils with poor attendance and agree strategies to improve attendance.



4.4.7 Work with other agencies such as Stockport Family to implement strategies to improve attendance and to support pupils and their families.

4.4.8 Contribute to the evaluation of school strategies and interventions.

4.4.9 Accurately record and document interventions around attendance.

#### 4.5 Parents will:

4.5.1 Ensure their child attends regularly as required by law.

4.5.2 Ensure school has up to date contact information including:

- Parents' and pupils' addresses
- Parents' telephone numbers and email addresses
- Telephone numbers for emergency contacts
- Details of new addresses and schools in the event of a move away from the area

4.5.3 Comply with 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 by application using the Leave of Absence Request Form which is available from the school office and the school's website.
- 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.
- Not taking leave of absence for any reason without prior agreement.
- Raise any issues or concerns which may impact on attendance with school staff at the earliest opportunity.
- Attend meetings with school staff to discuss concerns if requested by the school.
- Work in partnership with school and other agencies to address any attendance problems.
- Encourage good routines at home to ensure children have good sleep patterns and are prepared for school each day.
- Take an active interest in their child's educational progress and instil the value of education and good attendance.

## 5. Managing attendance in school

- 5.1 St Thomas' CE VA recognises 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 which may affect their child's attendance or behaviour at school, such as bereavement, divorce/separation, or incidents of domestic abuse. This will help the school identify any additional support which may be required.
- 5.2 St Thomas' CE VA will use the Attendance Escalation Interventions (Appendix 1) to ensure that every pupil with attendance concerns receives a red, amber or green rating and that an appropriate response is made to address the situation.
- 5.3 St Thomas' CE VA recognises that some pupils are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance – for example, pupils with special educational needs, those with physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee pupils and looked after children.
- 5.4 St Thomas' CE VA will implement a range of strategies to identify cases requiring support including:
- 5.4.1 Regular attendance monitoring meetings between the lead attendance officer and relevant teaching/pastoral staff and, at agreed periodic intervals, with the school's designated Education Welfare team member.
  - 5.4.2 Regular analysis of attendance data by the leadership team and governing body.
- 5.5 St Thomas' CE VA will implement a range of strategies to provide support to pupils and families including:
- 5.5.1 Early contact with parents by telephone/text – school will attempt to make immediate contact with parents whenever a child is absent without explanation.
  - 5.5.2 Attendance letters – St Thomas' CE VA will notify parents in writing if there are attendance concerns and offer support. Where the offer of support is not taken up and/or those concerns persist, school will notify parents in writing that absences will only be authorised if medical evidence is provided.
  - 5.5.3 Meetings in school – school will invite parents to meetings in school at an early stage to discuss attendance concerns.
  - 5.5.4 Home visits – school staff will visit pupils' homes to check on a pupil's welfare and/or offer support to improve attendance.
  - 5.5.5 Early Help Assessments – school will use Early Help Assessments to support families in identifying barriers to good attendance and attainment and put in place plans to overcome them.

- 5.5.6 Team Around the School – After appropriate action by school and where internal interventions have not been successful, pupils and families requiring further support around attendance will be referred to the Team Around the School (TAS). The TAS includes representatives from services working with children and families in Stockport so that appropriate support can be allocated.
- 5.5.7 Referrals to the Education Welfare team – the school will refer cases to the Education Welfare team who offer a range of measures to improve attendance including Parent Contracts and Education Penalty Notices (see below).
- 5.5.8 St Thomas' CE VA will also consider a range of other strategies to improve individual pupils' attendance including:
- Whole School Strategies – St Thomas' CE VA will promote good attendance using a range of initiatives including:
    - Pupil Voice activities
    - Restorative approaches
    - Implementation of the Stockport Emotional Health and Well-being Strategy
    - PSHE activities
    - Whole school assemblies
  - Attendance Panels – parents and pupils may be invited to discuss attendance at attendance panels consisting of pastoral staff, senior staff and governors.
  - Reintegration Support Packages – where a pupil has missed a significant amount of school a reintegration package can be arranged in consultation with parents and pupils so to ensure a smooth return to school.
  - Part-time timetables – in exceptional circumstances where a pupil is unable to manage full time attendance a temporary part-time timetable may be put in place.
  - Alternative provision – in exceptional circumstances where it is felt that a pupil's needs may be better served outside of the mainstream curriculum; referrals may be made to alternative education providers.

## 6. Legal Sanctions

- 6.1 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.

- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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 team within Stockport Council. This can take several routes:
- 6.3.1 Education Penalty Notices – 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.
- 6.3.2 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.
- 6.3.3 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.
- 6.3.4 Parent Contract referrals – a Parent Contract is an agreement which usually involves the school, parents, members of the Local Authority Education Welfare team 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. Should a parent fail to participate and/or fail to ensure that attendance improves, prosecution in the Magistrates' Court is likely to ensue.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 - Escalation of Attendance Interventions

#### 1. Introduction

At St Thomas' CE VA we categorise attendance into green, amber and red, which in turn indicates the rewarding of positive attendance and any course of action that may be needed to improve pupil attendance at school.

#### **Attendance Indicators**

We believe that attendance and punctuality are key to promoting high levels of achievement and ensure that students develop good habits for their working future. We want **all students to attend every day**. To put this in perspective:

1 day off per school year means attendance will only ever reach 99.5%

10 days off per school year means attendance will only ever reach 94.7%

20 days off per school year means attendance will only ever reach 90%

At St Thomas' CE VA we will use the following thresholds to categorise each pupil's attendance and identify the action required:

Colour Code	% attendance	Number of sessions absent in a 10 week period.
Green	97.0 – 100	3
Amber	90.0 - 97.0	4 - 9
Red	Below 90	10 or more

***A session is a morning or an afternoon in school. There are two sessions per day.***

We recognise that there is a wide range of reasons why a pupil's attendance may not fall into the Green category. The purpose of these attendance escalation interventions is to ensure that all pupils whose attendance falls below 97%, and/or who miss school for unauthorised term time holidays regardless of their overall attendance, receive a suitable response. In all cases we will exercise judgement and consider the particular needs of the pupil and the circumstances surrounding the case. Our attendance target for children in deprivation is 95%.

#### **1.1 The following tasks in relation to pupil absence will apply to all pupils irrespective of current attendance level:**

##### **❖ Unexplained Absence**

The designated attendance lead will attempt to make immediate contact with parents whenever a child is absent from school without explanation. Where it is not possible to make contact the attendance lead will liaise with the nominated Safeguarding Officer to agree on further action.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive day of absence the designated attendance lead will report the pupil as Missing from School to Stockport Children's Services Contact Centre.

❖ **Requests for Leave of Absence**

All requests for Leave of absences will be dealt with by the Headteacher/designated member of staff.

❖ **Referrals to the Education Welfare team to use the Education Penalty Notice system for Unauthorised Leave of Absence**

All referrals will be made by the Headteacher/designated member of staff.

❖ **Referrals to the Education of Sick Children Service**

All referrals will be made by the Headteacher/designated member of staff.

❖ **Notification of Removal from Roll**

The designated attendance lead will complete a Notification of Removal from Roll form and submit to the Local Authority whenever a pupil is deemed to meet legal criteria for removal.

The designated attendance lead will work jointly with the Education Welfare Service to ensure that all pupils removed from roll are confirmed as starting in a new educational provision.

## **1.2 Actions for Pupils in the Green Category**

### **GREEN 97% to 100%**

**At this stage, with the exception of referrals to use the Education Penalty Notices system for unauthorised Leave of Absence (see above), all action is at class teacher and admin level and will be monitored by the Head or Deputy Head.**

When a pupil is absent and returns to school, if their attendance is above 97%, all action is at class teacher and administration level.

This will include:

- Welcoming the pupil back to school
- Confirming the reason for the absence and recording as required in the register
- Updating the pupil on any work they have missed and supporting any catch up as required

The Attendance Reward Programme will be used to recognise and celebrate pupils with the best attendance levels, i.e. in relation to pupils with attendance levels of 97% and above.

## **1.3 Actions for Pupils in the Amber Category**

### **AMBER 90 – 97% attendance**

**The attendance levels and reasons for absence for this group will be analysed by the class teacher and attendance lead to determine the level of need and in particular if the case requires monitoring only, whether**

**communication with the parent is needed or if a package of support should be put in place to overcome a particular barrier to attendance. The Headteacher /designated member of staff will maintain regular oversight of decisions for this group of pupils.**

In addition, for each incidence of absence for pupils with attendance of 93.0% to 97.0% the class teacher will speak to the pupil and parent / carer to:

- Welcome the pupil back to school
- Confirm the reason for the absence and record as required in the register
- Update the pupil on any work they have missed and supporting any catch up as required or appropriate

In addition, pupils with attendance of 90.0 – 93.0% the attendance lead will write to parents. The letter will:

- Provide details of the current attendance
- Convey the school's concern about the level of attendance
- Invite the parent to make contact with [Headteacher/ designated member of Pastoral or teaching staff to discuss attendance and how it can be improved (see Pre-Referral LETTER 1 – Initial attendance contact letter)

Attendance will continue to be closely monitored whilst in this band with further contact made with the parent at regular intervals discuss the progress until the pupil's attendance moves above 93.0%

#### **1.4 Actions for Pupils in the Red Category**

##### **RED Below 90%**

**The attendance levels and reasons for absence for this group will continue to be analysed by the class teacher and attendance lead with additional input from a member of Stockport Family Education Welfare Team to determine the level of need and in particular if the case requires monitoring only, whether communication with the parent is needed or if a package of support should be put in place to overcome a particular barrier to attendance (Under 90% meetings). The Headteacher/designated member of staff will maintain regular oversight of decisions for this group of pupils.**

If not sent already, Pre-Referral LETTER 1 – Initial attendance contact letter shall be sent and the case shall be monitored as above to see if attendance improves.

If Pre-Referral LETTER 1 – Initial attendance contact letter has previously been sent, then the attendance lead will send a second letter indicating that absences will no longer be authorised without medical evidence. (Pre-Referral LETTER 2 – medical evidence required/legal duties letter)

Where absences are not authorised, either due to no contact from the parent, or no medical evidence being provided following Pre-Referral Letter 2 being sent, further action should be taken. Depending on the reasons for poor attendance, the strategies already attempted and the parent(s)' willingness to engage with support, this could be:

- Referral to the Team Around the School (TAS)
  - When pupils with poor attendance are discussed at the TAS the level of absence and action agreed to improve attendance should be clearly written into the minutes
- Completion of an Early Help Assessment (EHAs) and commencement of Team Around the Child (TAC) process

- When EHAs and TAC processes are put in place for pupils with poor attendance the EHA should clearly identify the barriers to attendance and the plan should clearly identify actions and interventions to improve the attendance.
- Referral to the Education Welfare team for Enforcement Action:  
This may result in a Parent Contract being undertaken, where this is the case:
  - a member of school staff will be nominated to take part in the contracting process alongside the parent and Education Welfare Team member
  - nominated member of school staff will update the Education welfare officer of any absences on a daily or weekly basis
  - The nominated officer will liaise directly with the Education Welfare Team member before authorising any absencesThis may result in the Formal Warning and Education Penalty Notice system being used.
- Liaison with education services, the ethnic diversity service or with voluntary agencies to access appropriate support to address identified needs.
- Referral to an attendance panel

Contact will be made with the parent on a weekly basis by a named member of staff to discuss progress until the child moves to Amber.



## Appendix 2

Pre-Referral LETTER 1 – Initial attendance contact letter

Date

Dear

**Re: Name of child**

I am writing to you to advise you of the school's concerns about [name of child's] school attendance record.

Currently [forename of child]'s attendance stands at % which is well below the level of attendance which we expect from our pupils. I enclose a copy of the registration certificate which shows the attendance record for the current school year.

We hope that bringing this issue to your attention may lead to an improvement in attendance.

If there are any issues which you believe are affecting [forename of child]'s attendance, please contact the school and make an appointment to see me to discuss how the situation can be improved.

Please also be aware that where pupils have a substantial amount of absence from school, schools are expected to investigate the reasons for the absences and where appropriate request medical evidence before agreeing to authorise further absences.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Pre-Referral LETTER 2 – Medical evidence required/legal duties

Date

Dear

**Re: Name of child**

I am writing to you again with reference to our concerns about [forename of child]'s attendance record.

Please find enclosed an up to date copy of the registration certificate. You will see that [forename of child]'s attendance remains concerning and now stands at [] %.

As I previously advised you, where pupils have a substantial amount of absence from school, schools are expected to investigate the reasons for the absences and where appropriate request medical evidence before agreeing to authorise further absences.

I am now writing to advise you that in view of [forename of child]'s continued poor attendance, the school is no longer willing to authorise any future absences unless supported by medical evidence (for example, a doctor's note) and it will not be sufficient merely to report the absence by telephone or letter. Absences not supported by such evidence are likely to remain unauthorised.

I must also remind you that ensuring regular school attendance is a legal responsibility and that failure to do so may result in your case being referred to the Local Authority for further action, which can include Education Penalty Notice fines or prosecution.

Yours sincerely,