

Thornford CE Primary School



Attendance Policy & Procedures

Written Adopted February 2014
Updated October 2021

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL ETHOS

This policy will make it clear to parents / carers that attendance at school is vital and a key aspect of safeguarding. It will also help protect our children to know their whereabouts at key times (see *Safeguarding File*). There is also much research that demonstrates the direct link between high attendance and achievement throughout pupils' school careers.

Good attendance means that children usually make good, consistent progress in their school work.

Thornford C of E Primary School expects good attendance from its pupils, in order for them to make the most of the opportunities that the school has to offer. We rely on our partnership with parents to ensure that this is achieved.

The Department for Education remains firmly of the view that unnecessary absence is unacceptable and must be addressed robustly by schools. The Department therefore expects all schools and local authorities to continue focusing on reducing overall absence, particularly unauthorised absence and persistent absence.

Information & Responsibilities for Parents/Carers

- **The School Attendance Leader is the Headteacher of Thornford Church School**
- Parents have a legal responsibility for ensuring that their child attends school regularly, punctually, properly equipped and in a fit condition to learn.
- If a child is prevented for any reason from attending, or is late, parents must notify the school as soon as possible on the first day of absence. ***Please ensure any absence is reported to our school office by TELEPHONE before 9:00am (we cannot always guarantee e-mails will be checked)***
- A pupil's absence from school will be considered as unauthorised until a satisfactory explanation is received.
- Attendance issues will be raised with parents through Parents' Evenings, Governors, school, newsletter, and/or letter prior to commencing school.
- Parents will be promptly informed over concerns about attendance and given the opportunity to discuss this with a member of staff.
- Attendance will be discussed with individual pupils if there is a level of concern or pattern of absence and with parents if necessary (*age appropriate*).
- Pupils who do experience attendance difficulties will be offered prompt and sympathetic support, initially from class teacher, and should the need arise, from a senior member of staff.
- All families will inevitably go through periods when life can be very challenging. This could be to do with a family bereavement, redundancy and debt, children's challenging behaviour etc. In these circumstances it is important that you talk to staff in confidence as to how this might be affecting your child's ability to focus at school, their behaviour and attendance. There are many additional people who can support families e.g. Early Intervention Team, School Nurse, Educational Psychologist etc.
- Children and young people who are unable to attend school because of medical needs have access to as much education as their medical condition allows so that they are able to maintain the momentum of their education and to keep up with their studies. *See our school office for further details*

Pupils

- Pupils are made aware of the importance of maintaining their attendance at the highest possible level.
- All pupils are expected to attend school regularly and punctually.
- Attendance will be monitored using individual attendance records.
- Pupils should be aware that bullying will not be tolerated but also if they find they are being bullied they know how to get support. This is monitored by staff & link governors
- Many positive steps are in place to encourage pupils to attend school, from productive & exciting learning, reward certificates & systems

Governors

- Attendance will be an agenda item at full governors meetings & delegated to the Staffing & Curriculum Committee
- The Governors will nominate a 'Safeguarding Link Governor' to liaise with the head teacher on attendance issues.
- The school's policy should be ratified by the governing body.

Senior Staff:

- Ensure all students are aware of rewards and sanctions policy for good attendance and behaviour for learning.
- Ensure there is a robust system for recording attendance
- Ensure that attendance rate is noted for every pupil
- Ensure that attendance is promoted with parents via attendance reports, regular items in newsletter, using presentations at parents evenings / parents events
- Ensure that the importance of good attendance and its link to attainment is promoted to all staff via INSET / CPD and regular reminders
- Ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the review of attendance policy and practice.
- Support parents / carers with attendance issues to support families. This might require contact with other agencies if required – e.g. Local Authority Attendance Officer etc.

Other Staff:

- Promote good attendance
- Accurately take the register (morning and afternoon)
- Collect absence messages on the same day
- Talk to parents / carers, picking up on patterns of absence, supporting pupils
- Boost pupils self-esteem
- Refer students of concern to Senior Staff for further support as necessary
- Submit a concern on @my concern online safeguarding tool, if they feel safeguarding & the welfare of pupils is an issue
- Office staff are responsible for recording & monitoring attendance on behalf of the school & will liaise with Senior Staff with concerns

DATA ANALYSIS

- The LA, Early Intervention Team + other agencies are aware (or can be made aware) of the data analysis of attendance as necessary
- Attendance Data is reviewed within our Full Governors Committee

First Day Response

Our school day starts at 8.55am. Registers are marked shortly after this. Pupils who are not present for registration will be marked as absent initially. If they arrive before **9.10 am**. This will be changed to present but late. Any pupil arriving after this time will require a letter of explanation.

The school computer system can record how many minutes late a pupil arrives and will log this information to be used if a concern arises.

Letters to Parents / Penalty Notices.

- **1st Warning Letter** - Pupils with attendance below **92%** that is not due to on-going medical condition
- **2nd Warning Letter** - If no improvement in attendance ie attendance drops to 90% or below - appointment to see parents / carers (*15 days for improvement*)
- **3rd & Final Warning Letter** - If no improvement in attendance ie attendance drops to 85% - Parenting contract agreed, parents informed of likelihood of penalty notice etc.
- **Penalty Notice Issued**

Please see – Dorset County Council Penalty Notice Code of Conduct (Revised August 2013) – available from the School Office for further details of ‘Penalty Notices’

Holidays in Term Time

Children and young people should attend school **190 days (380 sessions)** a year and could miss a substantial part of their education if they do not. That means **175** days worth of holiday.

No parent can demand leave of absence for the purpose of a family holiday as a right. Only in ‘exceptional circumstances’ may leave be granted. Furthermore, DfE Guidance has removed parental entitlement to holiday / leave from school unless there are **exceptional circumstances**.

‘Amendments to the 2006 regulations remove references to family holiday and extended leave as well as the statutory threshold of ten school days. The amendments make clear that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Headteachers should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted’
– DfE We-site

Each request for absence should be considered individually. It is the responsibility of the head teacher and the governors to decide whether or not to grant the leave of absence. When making the decision the following factors should be considered:

- The pupil’s absence/attendance record.
- Amount of time requested and when it was made.
- General welfare of the pupil and ability to catch up.
- Exceptional circumstances of the request.
- Proximity to SATs and public examinations.
- Purpose of the leave and its educational value.
- Religious holiday and festivities.

Request for Absent

Any absence which is known in advance should be notified to the school in writing beforehand, using the appropriate ‘Leave of Absence Request Forms’ (available from the school office).

Our children are praised for good attendance; we give prizes at the end of each term and the end of the school year for children whose attendance has been excellent. Attendance is also noted on

reports which are passed on to Parents / carers and our feeder Secondary Schools (Year 6 pupils).

If parents take their child away without permission or even fail to apply for it the absence should be recorded as 'unauthorised'.

Gypsy and Traveller Families

See separate DfE Guidance

EXTENDED TRIPS OVERSEAS DURING TERM TIME

In deciding whether to grant extended leave of absence, schools should consider the particular circumstances of each individual case. It is important that schools show an understanding of the parents' perspective whether or not they are able to agree to the request for absence.

Schools should ensure that all parents are aware of the school's attendance policy.

Only in very exceptional circumstances should a school grant leave of absence during term time, however the school considers the following in reaching our decision:

- A visit involving family overseas has an entirely different significance than the normal associations with a holiday.
- Visits may be very important in terms of a child's cultural identity and self-esteem as they grow up.
- Parents may feel that the reasons for their visit outweighs the importance of their child's uninterrupted attendance at school – maintaining family links in extended family situations may involve greater significance and greater pressures in some cultures than it does currently in many western cultures.
- The reasons for parents making a visit may be, for example, family illness or bereavement. It is less easy for parents to undertake these normal and necessary activities where long distances and high costs are involved.
- If it is possible to include school holidays in the leave of absence so as to limit the amount of term time the pupil is absent.
- **Governing bodies may wish to consult with local minority groups.**

If leave of absence is agreed our school will consider:

- Explaining the work the pupil will miss how it can be made up on return and how the parents could help the pupil.
- Whether work can be given to the pupil while he or she is away.
- Preparing a study pack.
- Asking the pupil to make notes and observations on a class topic.
- Going through any work done by the pupil on return.
- Sharing experiences in a positive way with the class and teacher on return.

Parents should be informed of the regulation on removal from the school roll if the child does not return on the agreed date. Parents should be asked to contact the school if the return is delayed. Schools should ensure that they have a contact number in the UK so that they can make enquiries if the pupil does not return at the agreed time.

Failure to return on the agreed date

When granting leave of absence for an extended trip overseas, schools should ensure they have a date when the pupil will return to school. Regulation 8 (f) details in what circumstances pupils may be removed from roll if they do not return by the agreed date.

Penalty Notices and Prosecution

Please also refer to 'Dorset County Council Penalty Notice Code of Conduct (Revised August 2013)

The decision to issue a penalty notice or prosecute the parent is taken by the school with the Local Authority's support, in most cases after extensive work with the family by the school, Locality Team and other agencies.

Circumstances where Penalty Notice may be issued are:

- Truancy
- Persistent lateness after the register is closed
- If the Headteacher does not authorise a request from a parent/carer for term time leave and the parents take that leave (our school will advise parents of this and how the action conforms to the school attendance policy)
- A pupil is stopped by an attendance officer, Policy, staff and is out of school without reason
- An excluded pupil is found in a public place without their parents/carer, during the school day

A Penalty Notice of £60 (from September 1st 2013) may be issued as an alternative to prosecution. This rises to £120 if unpaid after 28 days. Failure to pay will normally lead to prosecution. The decision to use Penalty Notices rests with the school in liaison with Locality Social Worker supported by their Team Leader. A range of issues will be taken into account, particularly how engaged and compliant the parents/carers are.

Parents can be fined up to £2,500 or imprisoned for failing to ensure that the child attends school regularly.

Magistrates can also enforce a Parenting Order, which means that the parent has to attend a parenting class.

Please click on the link below linked to the DfE Web-site concerning Penalty Notices:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2007/1867/contents/made>

How are they issued and who are they issued to?

They are issued by post to your home. No more than one will usually be issued for each child in any academic year to each parent/carer. More than one maybe issued to excluded children or for multiple unauthorised holidays in term time. **Each parent/carer** issued with a Penalty Notice has to pay a Penalty Fine

Is a warning given?

The deliberate taking of a holiday in term-time without/against school permission, (where the parent/carer understood that permission had not/would not be given) and where this has created a period of unauthorised absence will result in a penalty notice being issued by the School / Education Social Work Service **without warning**. The school having already warned that such action will be taken in their letter refusing the holiday application.

A written warning will be sent from the School / Education Social Work Service using the criteria above & attendance data.

The written warning will indicate the extent of your child's absences and give you 15 school days in which to effect an improvement.

A Penalty Notice can then be issued if there has been little improvement or if your child has been identified truanting during a Truancy Patrol / Police / Early Intervention Team.

Is there an appeal process?

There is no statutory right of appeal once a Notice has been issued, but you can make representation to the West Dorset Education Social Work Service if you believe the Penalty Notice contains factually inaccurate information and has been wrongly issued.

What are the costs and how do I pay?

Payment within 28 days of receiving a Notice is £60 and £120 if paid after this within 42 days. Details of payment arrangements will be included on the Penalty Notice. You need to be aware that payment in part or by instalment is not an option with Penalty Notices.

What happens if I don't pay?

You have up to 42 days from receipt to pay the Penalty Notice in full, after which the Authority can under the Act commence proceedings in the Magistrates' court for the offence of failing to secure the regular attendance of their child at their registered school. If the case is proven at court, the court can impose a fine, or community or custodial penalty.

Can I be prosecuted if I pay the Penalty Notice but my child is still missing school?

Not for the period included in the Penalty Notice – payment discharges your liability in this respect. However it may be the case that a prosecution might be considered for further periods of poor attendance not covered by the Notice, depending on the circumstances. If this is an issue, it is vital that you work closely with your child's school and support agencies such as the Education Social Work Service / Early Intervention Team.

Can I get help if my child is not attending regularly?

Yes, the Local Authority and Thornford Church School will give you advice and support if you need help to secure an improvement in your child's attendance.

It is very important that you speak with the school or with the Education Social Work Service at the earliest opportunity if you have any worries at all about ensuring your child's school attendance.