



Attendance Policy

St Thomas More Catholic Secondary School



Policy last reviewed: June 2023

Policy due for renewal: Sept 2024

1. Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states it is a parent's duty to ensure their child of compulsory school age receives a full-time education suitable to a child's age, ability, aptitude, and to any special educational needs they may have. This can be by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

If a child of compulsory school age who is registered at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, then the parent may be guilty of an offence under Section 444(1) / (1A) of the Education Act 1996.

This document should be referred to in conjunction with the latest release of guidance from the Department for Education. This is currently 'working together to improve school attendance, May 2022'.

2: Expectations of stakeholders

Schools

All schools have a continuing responsibility to proactively manage and improve attendance across their school community. Attendance is an essential foundation to positive outcomes for all pupils and should therefore be everyone's responsibility in school.

Schools are expected to:

- Develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance.
- Have a clear school attendance policy which all staff, pupils and parents understand.
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence.
- Regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place.
- Build strong relationships with families, listen and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them.
- Share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners where absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.

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 need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education by attendance at school or by education otherwise than a school.

Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends 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.

Parents are expected to:

- Promote and explain the value of good attendance with their child/children.

- Encourage good attendance and punctuality.
- Work in collaboration with the school to notify us of any absence before
 - 8.30am daily.
- Respond to any communication from school promptly.
- Contact us immediately if they have any attendance concerns.
- Take family holidays during school holidays.
- Participate in any interventions offered by the school to support the good attendance of their child.

Pupils

Pupils are expected to:

- Attend school regularly and punctually.
- Notify their parents or the school of any attendance concerns they have.
- Participate in any intervention offered to improve attendance and/or punctuality.
- Understand the law around school attendance, and the requirement for them to attend.
- Our commitment to every child means we will:
- Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence;
- Ensure every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled; and
- Act early to address patterns of absence.

Governors (LAC)

- Governors are expected to:
- Take an active role in attendance improvement, support the school to prioritise attendance, and work together with leaders to set the whole school culture.
- Ensure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties.
- Ensure school staff receive training on attendance.
- Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.

To meet these objectives, the school will establish an effective and efficient system of communication with students, parents, and appropriate external agencies to provide mutual information, guidance, and support.

The school has a computerised attendance package which is used to take twice daily registers and monitor attendance data continuously.

3. Pupil Absence:

Parents must inform the school by 8.30am if their child is absent and give the reason for and likely duration of the absence. This should be completed using the school's designated absence line or by contact with the school office.

- Students are required to be on-site for 8.50 am.
- Morning registers will open at 9am and close at 9.30am.
- The register is taken by the class teacher at the start of each lesson, including registration.

- Any child arriving after 9.10am must report to student services – our single point of entry for late students.
- The registers will be checked promptly after completion to identify students who are absent without notification.
- Before 11am, we shall attempt to contact the parents of those students not in school and for whom no reasons for absence have been given via text message.
- We will call all parents where an absence is without note to establish the reason for absence.
- We will continue to ensure that absence is followed up where no response from home can be sought.

Home visits may be used as a mechanism of support where absence remains unexplained. Attendance codes are applied using guidance from the DfE publication: working together to improve school attendance.

4: Children missing in education

Where an unexplained absence remains unexplained after day 1, we will formally risk assess the absence and take steps to contact parents via alternative means. This includes contact to all numbers from school, via a withheld number, a letter and email and a home visit. Where we are unable to reach the parents and/or have sight of the child, we will refer to the local authority's children missing in education team who will then investigate further.

Whilst the local authority requests this information on day 10 of absence, we seek to send this by day 5. We continue rigorous first day response following a referral until the child is located and/or the local authority confirm removal from roll.

The school follows the local authority's processes for ensuring that children who are at risk of missing in education are given the appropriate, prompt support to identify their whereabouts and safeguard their welfare.

We also maintain a list of children 'at risk of CME' where additional specific provision is put in place in the case of absence.

5: Categorising absence

It is at the Headteacher's discretion if an absence is to be authorised. The designated senior leader for attendance oversees the authorisation of absences on the Headteacher's behalf. Absences that are not authorised typically include any absences not relating to a child's ill-health, absences not considered as authorised circumstances or avoidable absence.

An example of these are as follows:

- Looking after siblings or visiting relatives
- Awaiting delivery drivers or helping an adult
- Illness that is not genuine
- Holidays or leave during term time

A request form or notification of absence does not automatically give authorisation of an absence.

An example of authorised absences include:

- Absence due to sickness or other unavoidable cause

- An absence for religious observance sanctioned by the religious body to which the parents belong
- Medical or dental appointments agreed prior to the absence (parents should seek to return their child within 30 minutes of the appointment)
- Agreed leave of absence under exceptional circumstances

Only the school can authorise absence, not the parents, and the school is not obliged to accept the explanation offered as a valid reason.

We reserve the right to not authorise absences where a child's attendance is below 90% unless medical evidence is provided by the parents.

The best interests of the child will be the deciding factor in authorising or not authorising an absence request.

6: Leave during term time for extended periods or holidays:

We expect all students to attend school regularly and, as such, will not authorise any extended leave or holidays during term time unless in exceptional circumstances. We also expect parents to share the same commitment to learning by planning holidays and leave during the school holidays. If, in the extreme case, parents wish to request leave for exceptional circumstances, they must contact Mrs David, Attendance Officer at ldavid@stm.beds.olicatschools.org or on 01234 400222 Ext231, to request the appropriate form, giving at least ten school days' notice. The Headteacher will consider each application and a nominated officer within the school will respond to parents with the outcome of the application.

We are obliged to follow the local authority's policy with the escalation of unauthorised absence. As a parent, you are entitled to make representation to the Headteacher using our 'exceptional circumstances form' detailing the exceptional circumstances in which your request is based upon. If the reasons for absence detailed in the request are not deemed to be exceptional, the school may refer the absence to the local authority and an initial Penalty Notice of £120 per parent/adult for each child, reducing to £60 for early payment may be issued by them.

This would require payment being made directly to the Local Authority within 21 days.

Please note that the school does not benefit financially from this action.

Non-payment may mean that the Penalty notice will rise to £120 after 21 days but within 28 days of receipt. If the penalty has not been paid within 28 days of issue the Local Authority may choose to instigate legal proceedings under section 444 (1) of the education act 1996. If found guilty of an offence under this Act, parents may receive a criminal record and could be fined up to £1000.

7: Lateness:

A child is late if they arrive at school after 9am.

Students who arrive after the start of the school day but before registers have closed will be marked as L on the official register. Students who arrive after registers have closed will be marked as U. A U code is unauthorised absence and frequent U codes can lead to the school being obliged to refer cases to the local authority when the absence threshold is met for further investigation. This could result in a fixed penalty notice being issued.

Students who arrive late to registration/lessons on more than 3 occasions will be issued with an after-school detention. Persistent lateness will be followed up using our punctuality escalation system. Parents are notified of our concern promptly and are invited to participate in the student punctuality improvement process. We may take advice and/or refer a case of persistent lateness to the local authority.

8: Medical appointments:

Where possible, routine medical appointments should be booked for outside of the school day. In certain circumstances, where this is not possible, parents / carers should notify the school in writing or by showing the appointment letter or by telephone message of the time and date of the child's medical appointment. Students must attend school before and after the medical appointment as far as is practically possible. We ask where possible that students miss no more than two hours of school for appointments.

9: Identification & Monitoring:

- Parents/carers of students not in school are contacted on each day of unexplained absence.
- All verbal messages from parents are recorded centrally in the official register.
- Parents/carers will be notified in writing if an absence remains unexplained.
- Home visits may be used to ensure the safeguarding of children not in school.

Leadership monitoring:

- The Headteacher checks registration procedures to ensure consistency by all staff.
- Attendance data for the whole school is presented to the Governing Body regularly.
- Governors are given an overview of strategies used and future action to be implemented for raising attendance and support the school in setting targets for the academic year.

10: Managing persistent absence and severe absence

Our school target is 96% and we expect students to aspire for 100% attendance. All students whose attendance falls below a nominated threshold for that individual term will be monitored weekly and will be treated as a child 'at risk of persistent absence'.

Persistent absence is the official term for more than 10% of absence during the school year. This could be referred to as PA.

We also track, monitor and provide intervention for children who are severely absent. This is the official term for children whose attendance is below 50%. This could be referred to as SA.

We may be obliged to refer cases to the local authority when the absence threshold is met for further investigation. This could result in a fixed penalty notice being issued. Additional specific provision will be offered to all students, including early help, as part of our support process.

Our process for managing absence is as follows:

Stage	Threshold	Intervention
1	<p>Any session of absence</p> <p>Category: Expect</p> <p>Voluntary intervention</p>	<p>Universal Support</p> <p>This is the support all students receive to inform them of attendance expectations and to support their regular attendance.</p> <p>For example: tutor discussions, home visits, first day response, morning welcomes, return to school conversations.</p>
2	<p>6 sessions</p> <p>Category: Monitor</p> <p>Voluntary intervention</p> <p>Attendance concerns</p>	<p>Early Intervention / Targeted Support</p> <p>Our Pastoral Support Team will provide targeted intervention to children who reach this threshold. This includes discussions about absence, meet and greet, referrals to external agencies and mentoring.</p> <p>Phone call home to notify you of our attendance concerns.</p>
3	<p>9 sessions</p> <p>Category: Listen and Understand</p> <p>Voluntary Intervention</p>	<p>A phone call home will be made to notify you of our attendance concern.</p> <p>This will allow you to have a conversation with a member of staff about your child's attendance. We are more than happy to discuss any concerns you have no matter how small.</p>
4	<p>16 sessions</p> <p>Category: Facilitate Support</p> <p>Voluntary Intervention</p>	<p>A letter home is sent to notify you of our continued concerns.</p> <p>This letter will contain information relating to absences and will signpost support to increase attendance.</p>
5	<p>23 sessions</p> <p>Category: Formalise Support</p> <p>Statutory Intervention</p>	<p>All adults with parental responsibility will be invited into school for a formal parenting contract meeting.</p> <p>The purpose of this meeting is to formally identify any barriers leading to the poor attendance of a child. Targets will be set during this meeting which will be reviewed in 4-6 weeks.</p>

6	When required Category: Formalise Support Statutory Intervention	All adults with parental responsibility will be invited into school for a formal parenting contract review. The outcome of this review could be as follows: i. Attendance has improved therefore the case is closed. ii. Attendance hasn't improved – continue the contract iii. Attendance hasn't improved – referral to LA.
7	When required Category: Enforce Statutory Intervention	A referral will be made to the local authority for statutory support in the event of continued low attendance. If our support system does not lead to an increase in attendance, we will seek further support from the local authority. The local authority will seek to identify formally the barriers to attendance and the support provided by the school. It is important to be aware that they may take further action if they feel absences were not for a statutory reason. Our school does not benefit financially from fixed penalty notices.

Parents are made aware that the Headteacher or a nominated officer acting on their behalf may escalate the process and/or make a referral to the Local Authority during any point of the escalation process if they feel attendance is deteriorating at a pace which may harm the continuity of learning.

We maintain a register of all children in the severely absent category. Additional specific provision is provided to all individuals on a bespoke basis to support them to return to a fulltime education. This will include signposting to wider support services to remove barriers to attendance.

Where long-term sickness absence takes place, we will work with parents/carers to source education otherwise to support the child's continuity of learning.

11. Rewards

The school invests in rewards and incentives to raise the profile of, and encourage, high attendance. This includes inter-form activities, ballots, raffles, and celebration assemblies. Good attendance will also be recognised as a virtue and will be acknowledged in the virtues based rewards scheme.

12: Exclusions

If a child is excluded from school, they will be coded as E – excluded. This is an authorised absence. If a child is identified within a public place, the parent/carer may be issued with a fixed penalty notice by Bedford Borough Council.

13. Removal from school roll

Where an elective home education request is received, or where a child is absent from our school for 20 days or more, we will work with the local authority to identify further details. As a result, a decision may be made by local authority to remove a child from school roll. It would be the parent/carer's responsibility to contact admissions to seek readmission should the need arise.

14. Part-time timetables.

As a rule, the school does not use part-time timetables. Where this does take place, timetables are constructed in partnership with parents and other key stakeholders following a robust assessment of risk. The local authority's procedures for managing part time timetables are followed every time.

15. Referrals for additional support

The school works closely with local safeguarding partners and may complete referrals for additional support to the Local Authority's specialist teams in the following circumstances:

- The school has concerns in relation to safeguarding
- The absence threshold in each period has been reached
- The school requires additional support in securing the regular attendance of a child
- The escalation process has failed, and targets haven't been met
- The child is missing in education with no contact for up to 10 school days
- The school is in receipt of a request for elective home education
- Any other concerns which the Headteacher deems a referral necessary to support the child

16. Contact details

The designated senior leader responsible for our strategic approach to attendance is:

Name & Role	Contact Details
Mrs Vanessa Millar, Assistant Headteacher	vmillar@stm.beds.olicatschools.org

Further information, advice and guidance can be sought via the following people:

Name & Role	Contact Details
Mrs L Belcher, Head of Y7	lblcher@stm.beds.olicatschools.org
Mr B Wilkinson, Head of Y8	bwilkinson@stm.bedsolicatschools.org
Mr A Meredith, Head of Y9	ameredith@stm.beds.olicatschools.org
Mrs L Minchin, Head of Y10	lminchin@stm.beds.olicatschools.org
Mrs K Dosanjh, Head of Year 11	kdosanjh@stm.beds.olicatschools.org
Mr A Winfield, Head of Year 12	awinfield@stm.beds.olicatschools.org
Mrs K Bernard, Head of VI Form	kbernard@stm.beds.olicatschools.org

Our attendance officer:

Name & Role	Contact Details
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Miss L David, Senior Attendance Officer	ldavid@stm.beds.olicatschools.org
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