

THRIFTWOOD SCHOOL & COLLEGE



Attendance Policy

September 2023

1. Aims

Thriftwood recognises that positive behaviour and good attendance are essential in order to raise standards of pupil attainment and to give every child/young person the best educational experience possible.

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

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

The DfE has produced guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities. Our Attendance Policy reflects the key principles of that guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance/toolkit-for-schools-communicating-with-families-to-support-attendance> . Essex County Council have also produced a supportive document of best practice guidance https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/social_emotional_mental_health_portal_for_schools/Documents/Lets%20Talk...we%20miss%20you.pdf

This policy is written with the above guidance in mind and underpins our school ethos to:

- promote children's welfare and safeguarding
- ensure every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled
- ensure that pupils succeed whilst at school
- ensure that pupils have access to the widest possible range of opportunities at school, and when they leave school
- work with families and pupils who have a history of persistent absence and emotionally based school avoidance.
- ensure families have the care and support they need to improve previous patterns of poor attendance.

Our policy aims to raise and maintain levels of attendance by:

- Promoting a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure and valued
- Raising awareness of the importance of good attendance and punctuality
- Ensuring that attendance is monitored effectively and reasons for absences are recorded promptly and consistently

For our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly and be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. **It is a rule of this school and college that**

pupils must attend every day, unless there are exceptional circumstances and it is the Executive Headteacher, not the parent, who can authorise the absence.

If there are problems, which affect a pupil's attendance we will investigate, identify and strive in partnership with parents, carers and pupils to resolve those problems as quickly and efficiently as possible. We aim to resolve these issues in a supportive and non-judgmental way without the need for fines and prosecution.

2. School Attendance and the Law

By law all children of compulsory school age must receive an appropriate full-time education (Education Act 1996). Parents have a legal duty to ensure their child attends school regularly at the school at which they are registered.

Unauthorised absence may result in the school referring to the Local Authority for sanctions and/or legal proceedings. This may include issuing each parent with a Penalty Notice for £120, reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days or referring the matter to the Magistrates Court whereby each parent may receive a fine up to £2500 and/or up to 3 months in prison. If a parent is found guilty in court, they will receive a criminal conviction.

There is no entitlement in law for pupils to take time off during the term to go on holiday. Executive Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are "exceptional circumstances" and they no longer have any discretion to authorise up to ten days of absence each academic year.

It is a rule of this school that a leave of absence shall not be granted in term time unless there are reasons considered to be exceptional by the Executive Headteacher, irrespective of the child's overall attendance. Only the Executive Headteacher or her designate (not the local authority) may authorise such a request and all applications for a leave of absence must be made in writing on the prescribed form provided by the school. Where a parent removes a child when the application for leave was refused or where no application was made to the school, the issue of a penalty notice may be requested by this school in accordance with the Essex Code of Conduct.

A Penalty Notice may be issued where there have been at least 10 consecutive sessions of unauthorised absence for the purpose of a holiday, however, due to the importance of pupils settling into school at the commencement of the school year, Penalty Notices may also be issued if there have been at least 6 consecutive sessions of unauthorised absence during the first two calendar weeks of September due to a term-time holiday.

At Thriftwood School 'exceptional circumstances' will be interpreted as:

... being of unique and significant emotional, educational or spiritual value to the child which outweighs the loss of teaching time (as determined by the Executive Headteacher). The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are events that are "rare, significant, unavoidable and short". By 'unavoidable' we mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time, outside of school term time.

We will not consider applications for leave during term time:

- at any time in September. This is very important as your child needs to settle into their new class at the start of the academic year as quickly as possible.
- during assessment and test periods in the school's calendar affecting your child.
- when a pupil's attendance record already includes any level of unauthorised absence or they have already been granted authorised leave within that academic year.

If leave of absence is authorised, the school will not provide work for children to do during their absence. Parents are however advised to read with their children and encourage them to write a diary while they are away.

3. School procedures

3.1 Attendance register

By law, all schools are required to keep an attendance register, and all pupils must be placed on this register.

The attendance register will be taken at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark whether every pupil is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Every entry in the attendance register will be preserved for 3 years after the date on which the entry was made.

Pupils must arrive in school by 8.50am each school day. The register for the first session will be taken at 8.50am on arrival and will be kept open until 9.30 am. The register for the second session will be taken at 1.05pm.

3.2 Unplanned absence

Parents must notify the school on the first day of an unplanned absence – for example, if their child is unable to attend due to ill health – by 10.00 or as soon as practically possible.

Please contact the school on 01245 266880 or the college on 01245 262779. Absence due to illness will be authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask parents to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents will be notified of this in advance.

If there is an extensive period of absence due to medical reasons the school may ask for the permission of the parent/carer to contact the child's GP to clarify details of the illness / medical condition and to establish a possible return date for the child.

3.3 Medical or dental appointments

Missing registration for a medical or dental appointment is counted as an authorised absence; advance notice is required for authorising these absences.

However, we encourage parents and carers to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

Parents and carers are required to request leave for medical or dental appointments in writing with a copy of the appointment card and to give as much notice as possible of such appointments.

3.4 Lateness and punctuality

A pupil who arrives late but before the register has closed will be marked as late, using the appropriate code. Most pupils are transported by taxi, so lateness is rarely problematic.

A pupil who arrives after the register has closed will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code.

When a pupil is persistently late the school will write to the parent or carer inviting them to a meeting.

3.5 Following up absence

Attendance that falls below expectation will be addressed with parents and carers through attendance calls and planning meetings. Due to the complexity of the attendance issues and previous patterns of absence some of our pupils arrive with from previous settings, each case is dealt with on an individual basis.

The school will follow up any absences to ascertain the reason, and may request a doctor's note if appropriate, ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary, identify whether the absence is approved or not and identify the correct attendance code to use.

The school will contact parents/carers if reasons for absence are not received by 10.00 am on any school day. Records of reasons for unauthorised absence are recorded.

Class teacher / tutor will call to have a 'we miss you' conversation to support the child's transition back into school or college, and talk through the next days plan to help ease anxiety.

4. Authorised and unauthorised absence

A pupil is defined by the Government as a 'persistent absentee' when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year for any reason; this can be authorised or unauthorised absence. Absence at this level will cause considerable damage to any pupil's education and we need the full support and co-operation of parents to resolve this.

4.1 Granting approval for term-time absence

The Executive Headteacher may not grant any leave of absence to pupils during term time unless they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'.

We define 'exceptional circumstances' as absence that is out of the control of the parents or carers or child. Examples are bereavement, transport arranged by Local Education Authority (LEA) failed to arrive where pupil lives beyond statutory walking distance.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the Executive Headteacher's discretion.

Requests for holidays during term time is something that the department of education strongly encourage Executive Headteachers to refuse.

Valid reasons for authorised absence include:

- Illness and medical/dental appointments/ mental health – as explained in sections 3.2 and 3.3
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart

Absences may be recorded unauthorised when due to:

- Shopping
- Haircuts
- Missed bus
- Slept late
- No uniform
- Looking after brothers or sisters or unwell parents
- Minding the house
- Birthdays
- Holidays

4.2 Children missing from education

A child going missing from education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect, and such children are at risk of being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation.

We will follow our procedures for unauthorised absence and for dealing with children who go missing from education, particularly on repeat occasions, to help identify the risk of abuse and neglect, including sexual and criminal exploitation, and to help prevent the risks of going missing in future. This includes informing the Local Authority if a child leaves the school without a new school being named, and adhering to requirements with respect to sharing information with the Local Authority and SENDOPs, when applicable, when removing a child's name from the admission register at non-standard transition points.

Schools are required to inform the Local Authority - as stated within The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations, 2006 - of the details of pupils who have been absent from school for 10 continuous school days and where contact cannot be made with the parent/carer to establish the reason for the absence and the absence

has not been reported. Thriftwood will notify the Local Authority, via the Missing Pupil Checklist, of any child falling into one of the following categories:

- A pupil has gone missing and no contact can be made with parent/carer to establish reason for absence
- A pupil ceased to attend the school and forwarding address of the family is not known
- A pupil has not returned from holiday within 10 school days of the expected date of return
- A pupil fails to take up their place at the start of the academic year and the whereabouts of the young person is unknown

Pupils deemed at high risk

If a pupil is missing from school and the child is subject to a child protection plan and/or is a looked after child, the school will notify the key worker within the first 24 hours of the unauthorised absence. Where it is suspected or known that a pupil is at potential risk of harm, or where the school has information or reason to suspect that the pupil has been the victim of criminal activity or is at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, the DSL will notify the Children and Families Hub and/or police without delay and then make a referral to the CME Team as soon as possible afterwards.

Staff will be trained in signs to look out for and the individual triggers to be aware of when considering the risks of potential safeguarding concerns which may be related to being missing, such as travelling to conflict zones, FGM and forced marriage.

If a staff member suspects that a child is suffering from harm or neglect, we will follow local child protection procedures, including with respect to making reasonable enquiries. We will make an immediate referral to the Local Authority Children's Social Care and the Police, if the child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm. All low level safeguarding concerns are recorded on My Concern and/or reported to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Understanding barriers to attendance

Whilst any child may occasionally have time off school because they are too unwell to attend, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any barriers preventing regular attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents and the child. If a parent thinks their child is reluctant to attend school, then we will work with that family to understand the root problem and provide any necessary support. We can use outside agencies to help with this, such as the School Nurse, Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing support services, a Child and Family Support Worker or the relevant Local Authority team/s. Where outside agencies are supporting the family, you may be invited to attend a Team Around the Family meeting (TAF) to consider what is working well and what needs to improve. An individualised early help plan will be agreed and subsequently reviewed.

Some pupils face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include pupils who suffer from long-term medical conditions or who have special educational needs and disabilities, or other vulnerabilities. High expectations of attendance remain however, we will work with families and pupils to support improved attendance whilst

being mindful of the additional barriers faced. We can discuss reasonable adjustments and additional support from external partners where appropriate.

5. Attendance monitoring

The attendance officer (admin) monitors pupil absence on a daily basis.

Parents are expected to call the school in the morning if their child is going to be absent due to ill health.

Parents are expected to phone into school daily unless a medical letter has been received to advise the reason for absence.

If a pupil is absent and no reason has been provided by 10.00 am the school will contact parent/carers and ask reasons for absence.

The school has a legal duty to ensure that a pupil has been seen or spoken to within a 10 school day period.

Pupil-level absence data is collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics. We compare our attendance data to the national average, and share this with the Trust executive team who share this with trustees.

6. Roles and responsibilities

6.1 The Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is responsible for monitoring attendance figures for the whole school on at least a termly basis. It also holds the Executive Headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy.

6.2 Executive Headteacher

The Executive Headteacher is responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented consistently across the school, and for monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to the Trust and committee members. The Executive Headteacher will also support other staff in monitoring the attendance of individual pupils, developing programmes to improve attendance and the issuing of fixed-penalty notices, where necessary.

6.3 The Attendance Team

The responsibility of monitoring attendance at Thriftwood is shared amongst the staff team, but is overseen by the Executive Headteacher who monitors data.

Admin Team – Collate data and registration information, inform Class Teachers / Tutors and Senior Leadership Team of absence and manage 1st day contact. **Pastoral Teams** – Work with pupils, liaise with parents and carers to overcome barriers to engagement.

Senior Leadership Team – Monitor attendance

The Trust – Support the Executive Headteacher and monitor outcomes through the Executive Committee to ensure policy is followed and all pupils are receiving the support they need