

# Thomas More Catholic School



## ATTENDANCE POLICY, PRACTICE and PROCEDURE

### Mission Statement

**To Care** for, respect and value all people and our environment.

**To Learn** that justice and love are the foundations of our Faith.

To make these the guiding principles of our community in its commitment to academic excellence and personal integrity.

**To Achieve** beyond our highest expectations, creating challenging opportunities, which take us all confidently through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

This policy will be adopted by the Governing Body of Thomas More Catholic School in July 2016, and is subject to an annual review

<b>Date Reviewed</b>	<b>Autumn Term 2018</b>
<b>Review Confirmed by</b>	<b>Full Governing Body</b>
<b>Next Review Due</b>	<b>Autumn Term 2019</b>

## **PHILOSOPHY**

Every child has a fundamental right to be educated.

Good attendance is the key to personal development, learning and achievement in all areas. Parents and teachers have a duty to ensure and encourage maximum attendance at Thomas More Catholic School and lessons.

Parents sign a 'home-school' agreement making this commitment to TMCS.

Good attendance is of vital importance to good achievement. There is a very clear relationship between the regularity with which students attend school and their achievements at both Key Stages. It is therefore essential that everyone involved, both parents and teachers, encourages each student aim for 100% attendance throughout the academic year.

## **PRINCIPLES**

**Thomas More Catholic School uses the following principles on attendance:**

- High attendance rates are valued and rewarded
- A partnership with parents – to ensure understanding, support and co-operation about high attendance rates
- Students are encouraged to take full advantage of their educational opportunities by attending school regularly
- To work in partnership with parents and the Attendance and Welfare Officer (AWO), to address difficulties and recognise external factors which influence student attendance
- To identify patterns of non-attendance at an early stage and work to resolve personal/social difficulties
- To follow efficiently TMCS systems, policies and procedures for accurate recording and monitoring of attendance and punctuality
- Students can only achieve their potential if they are in school every day and on time. It is therefore essential that everyone involved, both parents and teachers, encourage each student to aim for 100% attendance throughout the academic year.

## **Responsibilities**

**Thomas More Catholic School with ensure that:**

- Students on roll are registered accurately and efficiently using an electronic registration system. Form registers will be taken punctually at 8.20am.
- A student arriving late to school after 8.20am will be recorded as late and a late detention will be set. Students who arrive later than 8.40am must report to the Attendance Office where the Attendance Officer will record the lateness in the register and issue the appropriate sanction.
- If a student fails to register they will be marked as an unauthorised absentee and notification of absence will be reported to the Parent/Carer by text message.
- Attendance targets are set for the school, year groups and individual students. We expect our students to achieve over 96% attendance.

- Attendance and punctuality are monitored regularly further actions imposed where appropriate.
- Students are rewarded for achieving excellent attendance records.

#### **Students will ensure:**

- They attend school regularly and on time.
- They inform the attendance officer, Form Tutor or Head of Year if there is a reason which may lead to their absence from school.
- They produce written notification from their parent/carer in the Student Planner that explains any absence from school.
- When given a late mark that they attend detentions.

#### **Parents/Carers will ensure:**

- Their child attends school regularly and on time.
- When a student is absent, the parent/carers will telephone the School before 8.20am on each day of the student's absence. The student must provide a written note, signed by the parent/carer in the Student Planner on the student's return to the School. In the event of a telephone call not being forthcoming from a parent/carer, the school will use the contact numbers on the relevant student's record in order to contact parent/carers to establish the reason and the anticipated length of absence and also to eliminate the possibility of truancy. If a student has been absent or subsequently returned but no explanation was received for the absence, a letter will be sent by the school asking for a reason to cover the date(s) concerned. Medical evidence should be provided if the absence is for 3 days or longer. Medical evidence may be requested if there are regular absences from school due to illness.
- To arrange routine medical appointments outside of School hours and the parent/carers must provide a note from the medical organisation to cover any appointment necessitating absence during the school day. Only in exceptional circumstances, can whole days be authorised for medical appointments. The student is expected to attend the School either side of the appointment in order to minimise absence
- They inform the school in writing and discuss unavoidable absences well in advance of the event with the Form Tutor or Head of Year. The School **cannot** authorise any leave of absence in term-time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Only the Headteacher can authorise any absence and determine the number of school days that a child can be away from school, if granted. It is for the Headteacher to decide what constitutes an 'exceptional circumstance'. Leave of absence that is taken and not authorised by the Headteacher may result in the issue of a Penalty Notice (ie fine of £60) per parent/carer per student on the students' return to school.

#### **Registration Times**

A punctual and purposeful start to the day is essential. Lessons begin promptly at 08.20; all students must be in their tutor room and the teacher taking that lesson, must call the register.

Students should be seated and silent, ready to answer their names. If a student is not present when the register is called, that person must be marked 'absent'- 'N' code. **On no account** should a student ever be marked 'Present' on the word of another student.  
The register, as a legal document, may only be taken by an adult, never a student.

The register is a legal document. Registration at TMCS is done electronically; the register should be called and saved within **10 minutes** of the start of the lesson. Should a paper copy of the register need to be taken, this must be returned to the Attendance Office within 15 minutes. Students arriving after 8.20am will be marked as late. The member of staff will need to un-"preserve" the register for the student to be marked in Late (L) and the minutes late recorded.

Registers close at 10am. Any student arriving after the close of registration, will be marked with a "U" Code, which acts as an unauthorised absence for the AM period.

### **Guidelines for the Completion of Registers**

As a legal document the register can be required in court as evidence in cases where attendance is an issue and legal proceedings are taking place. In order to fulfil our legal obligations, and for their own protection, staff must adhere to the following procedures –

1. The class should be silent and seated while the register is marked
2. Check that the number of students in the room tallies with the number marked present
3. Registers must be saved within 10 minutes of the start of the lesson.
4. Registers **must never** be left blank and completed at a later time in the day
5. See separate sheet of instructions regarding electronic registration

### **Punctuality**

Punctuality is as important as regular attendance, in that students who are persistently late miss out on the curriculum such as being part of a form group, taking part in PSHE, Citizenship, collective worship and reflection. Late arrivals to school also means that students don't get the opportunity to bond with their peers and form friendships. Students miss important messages and information that are a key part of their day to day organisation and success in the School.

*Persistent lateness after registration has closed constitutes the same offence for parent/carers as non-attendance and will therefore be dealt with in the same way by the Leadership Group, Heads of Year, Form Tutors and could be referred to the Education Welfare Service.*

### **Register Procedure for late students.**

If a student arrives late for tutor group after the 10 minute 'cut off' point, the teacher must record the number of minutes late electronically and a break-time detention can be issued. All student's attendance records must be updated before the start of the next lesson.

Arriving at school after the registers have closed will be counted as an 'Unauthorised Absence'.

Students must sign in at the Attendance Office and an hour detention may be issued. A text will be sent home by the school informing parents of any after school detentions issued.

*N.B. It is the responsibility of Form Tutors and Year Leaders to monitor attendance, punctuality and set the consequences for persistent lateness and non-attendance. Letters informing parents of poor punctuality should be sent and meetings with parents arranged if poor punctuality continues.*

## **Authorising Absences**

All absences must be covered by an email, letter or medical evidence. Appointment cards and prescriptions can be accepted as confirmation of absence and handed in to TMCS.

Parents are reminded that non-urgent medical appointments should be made outside the school day. Equally, a routine medical appointment need not result in a whole day's absence.

Only the Headteacher can authorise any absences during term time and parents should apply using TMCS "Leave of Absence in Term Time for Exceptional Circumstances" form. Holidays in Term Time are not deemed as exceptional circumstances and will not be authorised. Parents that take holidays in term time are at risk of receiving a fine from the Local Authority.

If the Form Tutor is unsure whether to authorise an absence s/he should seek advice from the Attendance Officer.

## **Following Up Absences**

Parents are expected to telephone the school before 8.15am on the first day of absence. If no telephone call is received, contact will be made by the school. Parents are required to contact the school each day of absence. If a student has been absent and does not hand in a letter of explanation within a week, a letter will be sent home from the Attendance Office.

The Form Tutor and Year Leader are responsible for monitoring patterns of attendance and taking appropriate action, which may involve intervention strategies such as mentoring, meeting parents, placing students on attendance and punctuality reports or maintaining regular contact with home.

Should a Year Leader be concerned about a student's pattern of absence this should be referred to the Education Welfare Service, where further action can be taken in the form of parent meetings, attendance agreements, issuing a Penalty Warning Notice or referring the case to Croydon's Court Officer for legal proceedings. Fortnightly meetings are held with Year Leaders and the Education Welfare Officer to discuss individual cases and The School offers rigorous support to students and parents in resolving attendance issues.

## **Internal Truancy**

All staff must take a register at every lesson and keep a record of attendance. Electronic registration will pick up on any student who truants from a lesson.

If a member of staff is suspicious about any absence, this should be emailed immediately to the Attendance Office.

The school is regularly patrolled by Senior Leaders, Safeguarding Officers and Heads of Year, who keep a look out for any truancy. A student can be placed on an attendance report by a Tutor or a Year Leader. A student may be required to make up any lost time after school.

### **Permission to Leave the School Premises**

Students requesting permission to leave TMCS premises during the course of the day should show their letter/appointment card to the Attendance Officer at the appropriate time. Parents should call the school with instructions for leaving times should an appointment be in the school day. This should be red flagged on the system to ensure Teachers pass messages onto students and allow students to leave the classroom. Students must sign out in the Attendance office before leaving school premises.

### **A student will be referred to the Education Welfare Officer by the Year Leader if there is:**

- a pattern of absence e.g. every Monday
- a lengthy absence e.g. more than a week
- the student's percentage falls below 90%
- a number of U marks are acquired
- a student goes on holiday in term time

The Education Welfare Officer will meet with parents/carers to discuss attendance issues and initiate and manage a school attendance improvement agreement as part of the parent/carers commitment to improve their child's attendance. Should attendance not improve, the education welfare Officer will discuss the concern with the school and then give consideration to the issue of a Penalty Notice or make an application for legal proceedings.

## **PENALTY NOTICES**

### **What is a Penalty Notice?**

The law says that parent (s)/carer (s)/guardian(s) whose children of compulsory school age are absent from school without good reason are committing an offence, and those parent/carers may be prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court.

Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced additional powers under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 authorising Local Authorities & Schools to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school.

Section 444A and 444B of the Education Act 1996 (introduced by section 23 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003) introduced penalty notices as an alternative to prosecution under section 444(1). Parent/carers may discharge potential liability for conviction for an offence under section

If the Penalty Notice is not paid in full by the end of the 28 day period, the local authority will prosecute for the offence to which the notice applies. The prosecution relates to irregular school attendance under the Education Act 1996 Section 444. Where a prosecution is an appropriate course of action a caution may be offered by the local authority as an alternative method of disposal.

## **When will a Penalty Notice be issued?**

The School considers that regular attendance at school is of such importance that Penalty Notices may be used in a range of situations where unauthorised absence occurs:

- Overt truancy (including pupils found during truancy sweeps)
- Inappropriate parentally-condoned absence
- Holidays in term time or excessive delayed return from an extended holiday without prior school permission
- Persistent late arrival at school (after the Register has closed)

The School never takes such action lightly and would prefer to work with parents/carers to reduce unjustified absence without having to resort to any enforcement actions. School attendance is of such importance to all of us, however, that the School **will** use these powers, if this is the only way of securing a child's schooling.

There is no set number of times a formal warning of possible Penalty Notice issue may be made in any particular case.

A parent/carer will be issued with a formal written warning that their child has unauthorised absences and that they have become liable for the issue of a Penalty Notice.

There is no statutory right of appeal against the issuing of a Penalty Notice.

Details of payment arrangements will be included on the Penalty Notice. The penalty must be paid in full. The penalty is £60 if paid within 21 days, or £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days.

If the Penalty Notice is not paid in full by the end of the 28 day period, the Local Authority will prosecute for the offence to which the notice applies. The prosecution relates to irregular school attendance under the Education Act 1996 Section 444. Where a prosecution is an appropriate course of action a caution may be offered by the Local Authority as an alternative method of disposal.

## **THE OFFENCE OF FAILING TO ENSURE REGULAR ATTENDANCE**

There are two offences relating to parent (s)/carer (s)/guardian(s) responsibility for ensuring regular attendance at the School:

1. If a registered student is absent without authorisation from the School or alternative provision then the parent/carer is guilty of an offence under section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996; if the parent/carer knows that the child is failing to attend regularly at the School and fails to cause her to do so, he/she is guilty of an offence under section 444 (1A) of the Education Act 1996.
2. No offence is committed if the parent (s)/carer (s)/guardian(s) proves any of the following statutory grounds:
  - The student was ill or prevented from attending by any unavoidable cause;

- The student's absence was authorised by the School or, in the case of alternative provision, by a person authorised to grant leave by the School;
- The absence was on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the parent (s)/carer (s)/guardian(s) belongs;
- The local authority is under a duty to provide transport to the school and has failed to do so, or in certain circumstances, that the School is not within walking distance of the student's home and the local authority has made no suitable arrangements for the student's transport to and from the School;
- If the student has been excluded under section 52 of the Education Act 2002 (as they do not have to attend the School they are excluded from) providing that the student attends alternative provision as directed;
- If the student is receiving education otherwise than by regular attendance at the School (for example, by home education); Sue asks if the student would be on roll if home educated? or
- If the student has no fixed abode and the parent(s)/carer(s)/guardian(s) can show that their trade or business requires them to travel, and the student has attended the School as regularly as the nature of the trade or business permits, and the student has attended the School for at least 200 sessions during the preceding twelve months from the date on which the proceedings were instituted.

### **Duties of the Form Tutor**

1. to register the Tutor Group in the morning at Tutor time / Assembly (08.20 – 08.40) and carry out the agreed procedures in connection with lateness and absence
2. to monitor attendance and punctuality rigorously, informing the Year Leader of either 'authorised' or 'unauthorised absence' when persistent, shows a particular pattern, or is a cause for concern.
3. to inform the Attendance Office and Student Services of any change of address
4. periodically, a full register printout, with totals, will be placed in the register and this should be used to check the accuracy of records, with particular reference to 'N' entries which indicate that no reason for absence has been given – these should not appear. O, G and U indicate unauthorised absence and should be checked carefully
5. individual attendance reports can be obtained from SIMS if a Form Tutor is concerned about a particular student.
6. contact parents with any concerns surrounding attendance and punctuality, logging the contact on SIMS
7. Report any concerns shared by a student that may have a direct impact on regular attendance and punctuality (e.g. being asked to take siblings to school)

### **Duties of Year Leaders**

One of the most important responsibilities of Year Leaders is ensuring good attendance and punctuality in a Year Group. Specific tasks include

1. check the percentage printouts at least once a fortnight to look for patterns and concerns over attendance and punctuality
2. monitor students where there is a known problem with attendance, ensuring support and advice is being given

3. monitor and support the Form Tutors in working on attendance and punctuality
4. refer students to SLT/other agencies for support as needed
5. implement and monitor programmes that have been agreed to facilitate a return to school or to maintain school attendance. Regular interviews regarding students with attendance problems need to take place. Supportive targets need to be met, monitored and reviewed. Clear evidence must be kept of action taken including dates of phone calls, copies of letters and brief minutes of meetings.
6. refer students to SLT/the Education Welfare Officer as necessary and to liaise with the Attendance Officer over these students
7. lead the implementation of rewards and sanctions to ensure good attendance and punctuality
8. where there is an ongoing issue about a student, liaise with parents by phone, letter and by arranging meetings
9. pursue all absences of two or more
10. maintain regular contact with the Attendance Officer with regards to areas of concern

#### **Duties of the Manager of Attendance:**

1. liaise with and support Year Leaders on all issues with attendance and punctuality
2. take an overview of whole school attendance and to keep staff at all levels informed with regard to the school's current position
3. take the lead in the implementation of the Attendance policy
4. take discretionary decisions regarding Leave of Absence
5. assist the Year Leaders with particularly challenging cases regarding attendance
6. promote Attendance for Learning across the school and to maintain a high profile
7. liaise regularly with SLT about attendance
8. keep up to date with new initiatives and legal requirements surrounding attendance
9. work collaboratively with the Education Welfare Officer
10. report to Governors as required with regard to attendance

#### **Duties of Attendance Officer:**

##### **Daily:**

1. check all registers have been completed on time
2. send reminders through SIMS if a register has not been taken within the first 10 minutes of the start of a lesson.
3. record marks in SIMS for all phone/email messages received contact all outstanding absentees on the first day of absence and record on computer
4. record U codes and send letters home regarding these
5. inform Year Leaders daily about Attendance Office investigations

##### **Weekly:**

1. print registers
2. print standard absence letters for all absences of a week or more
3. print weekly list of lates for Heads of Year

## As required:

1. produce statistics, official registers and registration certificates as and when required
2. alert SLT and Year Leaders to any problems encountered with attendance

## Requests for additional Holiday Time

No holiday leave will be permitted in term for any student. Under exceptional circumstances, *leave of absence* will be agreed for example:- on compassionate grounds, where there is a mitigating situation which requires time off school or for unexpected situations which may arise. This must be requested in writing by the parent/carer and agreed with the school in advance, in which case the absence will be recorded as authorised. Forms can be collected from the School Office and returned to the Head teacher who will use discretion in these cases.

If a student is taken on holiday or on leave of absence **without** prior agreement, the absence will be recorded as 'unauthorised' and the matter will be referred to the Education Welfare Service. A Penalty Notice and fine will be issued to parents.

Where a student does not return on the date agreed, reasonable inquiries will be made as to the student's whereabouts and the Croydon guidelines for removing a student from the school roll will be followed as necessary.

## Religious Observance

Thomas More Catholic School realises that this is a multi-cultural, multi-faith school and wishes to exercise justice and equality when request for time off are made on the grounds of Religious Observance.

Parents/carers must request any time they wish students to take off for any religious observance in writing. They must take a Leave of Absence Request form from the Attendance Office. If the school, has satisfied itself that absence is reasonable or necessary, **one day's leave** may be granted. If leave is taken without prior permission, the absence will be recorded as 'Unauthorised'.

## Children Missing from Education (CME)

A Child Missing from Education is defined by the DfE as "a child of compulsory school age who is not on a school roll, nor being educated otherwise (e.g. privately or in alternative provision) and who has been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time (usually four weeks or more)." In Croydon, referrals for CME are accepted after 10 working days of reasonable checks being carried out by the educational provider and their Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Where a pupil has not returned to school for ten days after an authorised absence or is absent from school without authorisation for twenty consecutive school days, the pupil can be removed from the admission register when the making reasonable enquiries, to establish the whereabouts of the child. This only applies if the school does not have reasonable grounds to believe that the pupil is unable to attend because of sickness or unavoidable cause.