



# Thomas Hickman School

## ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY

### POLICY

Adopted by Thomas Hickman School

Adopted by Governors Full GB: July 2014

Date of review: July 2022

Date of next review: July 2023

Signed: .....

Date: .....

Alan Sherwell - Chair of Governors

## **1. Introduction**

Regular school attendance is essential if children are to achieve their full potential.

Thomas Hickman School believe that regular school attendance is the key to enabling children to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who are able to realise their full potential and make a positive contribution to their community.

Thomas Hickman School values all pupils. As set out in this policy, we will work with families to identify the reasons for poor attendance and try to resolve any difficulties.

Attendance Policy should not be viewed in isolation; it is a strand that runs through all aspects of school improvement and achievement supported by additional policies such as Safeguarding, Behaviour and Relationships, Hand on Heart, SEND Policy. This policy also considers the Human Rights Act 1998, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Race Relations Act 2000. It also encompasses the principles included in DfE guidance on Working together to improve school attendance September 2022.

## **2. Legal Framework**

Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act states that Parents/Carers must ensure that children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

A child is of Compulsory School Age at the beginning of the term following their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Under the Education Act 1996, the Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that Parents/Carers secure education for children of compulsory school age and where necessary, use legal enforcement.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, require schools to take an attendance register twice a day, once at the start of the morning session and then again during the afternoon session.

The register must record whether the pupil was:

- present;
- absent;
- present at approved educational activity; or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

## **3. Categorising absence**

Where pupils of compulsory school age are recorded as absent, the register must show whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Absence can only be authorised by the school and cannot be authorised by Parents/Carers. To ensure an absence is authorised, Parents/Carers must provide a satisfactory reason for absence.

It is imperative that Parents/Carers/Carers phone the school by 9am on the first day of absence and provide the school with an expected date of return; emailing the school is not permitted. The phone call should be followed up in the form of a written note from the parent/carer, though verbal explanations may be acceptable where this is considered appropriate. Alternative arrangements will be agreed with non-English speaking Parents/Carers/carers.

Absence will be categorised as follows:

Illness: In most cases a telephone call or a note from the parent informing the school that their child is ill will be acceptable. Parents/Carers may be asked to provide medical evidence (including LFT result if the illness is Covid) where there are repeated absences due to reported illness. This will usually be in the form of an appointment card, prescription etc. or a completed 'purple slip' which is available from the school office.

Medical/Dental Appointments: Parents/Carers are advised where possible to make medical and dental appointments outside the school day. Where this is not possible, pupils should attend school for part of the day. Parents/Carers must show an appointment card or letter or forward the text message or email to school.

Other Authorised Circumstances: This relates to occasions where there is cause for absence due to exceptional circumstances, for example family bereavement, visiting a parent in prison or part-time timetable agreed as part of a reintegration package or a specific intervention for individual children.

Excluded (no alternative provision made): Exclusion from attending school is counted as an authorised absence. The child's class teacher or Phase Leader will make arrangements for work to be sent home.

Late Arrival: The gates are opened at 8:30am which allows plenty of time for the children to make their way to the classroom for registration at 8:45am. The gates close at 8.45am. Any child who arrives in class after 8.45am is late for school and when registers are closed, they will be marked as late (code L). Pupils arriving after 9am will be marked as unauthorised (code U) and this will count as an absence for that session.

All children who arrive to school late after the gates have closed at 8.45am must immediately report to the school office to register; their parent/carer will need to sign them in via the electronic system.

The absence will only be authorised if a satisfactory explanation for the late arrival can be provided, for example, attendance at a medical appointment (Code M).

The absence will be recorded as **unauthorised** (Code U) if the pupil has arrived after 9am without justifiable cause, for example, if they woke up late or were waiting for their uniform to dry.

Unauthorised absence: Absence will not be authorised unless Parents/Carers have provided a satisfactory explanation which has been accepted as such by the school.

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
- Holidays taken without the authorisation of school
- Parent's non-critical illness

Family Holidays and Extended Leave: Parents/Carers/carers are not permitted to take holiday during term time. Parents/Carers/carers do not have an automatic right to remove their child from school during term time for the purpose of a holiday and should be made aware that if their child is absent for 10 school days they will miss 5% of their education during that academic year.

If a child needs to be absent from school for a period of time for extenuating circumstances, a meeting with the Attendance Officer and/or Headteacher needs to be arranged. The Headteacher can grant discretionary leave if there are compelling mitigating reasons.

Parents/Carers wishing to take their child out of school for a fixed period of time need to complete an absence form. Retrospective requests for absence from school will not be considered and therefore will result in the absence being categorised as unauthorised. Each request will be considered individually and will take the following factors into account:

- Circumstances of the request
- Purpose of the leave
- Urgency of the absence

All requests for leave of absence will be responded to in writing. Where a request has been granted the letter should state:

- The expected date of return and the reason why the absence was authorised
- That Parents/Carers must contact school should any delays occur (Parents/Carers should be prepared to provide evidence of any delay)

Governors have instructed the Headteacher not to authorise extended leave, such as holiday, unless there is an extenuating circumstance (this does not include cheaper flights or bookings).

If the permission to take leave is not granted and the pupil still goes on holiday for example, the absence will be **unauthorised**. In such cases the school may refer the matter to the Education Welfare Service who may issue a Penalty Notice.

Only in **exceptional circumstances** will absence be agreed. In such cases, consideration will also be given to cultural needs and family circumstances, such as minority ethnic children returning to their country of origin. In these cases granting leave for longer periods than normal may be considered justified. In all cases though, Parents/Carers will be required to justify why the holiday needs to be taken during term time.

Religious Observance: Thomas Hickman School acknowledges the multi-faith nature of British society and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside school holiday periods or weekends and this necessitates a consideration of authorised absence or special leave for religious observance (Code R).

It is reasonable for a parent/carer to allow their children not to attend school on a day of religious observance if recognised by the parent's/carers religious body. It is identified as reasonable that no more than one day be designated for any individual occasion of religious observance/festival and no more than three days in total in any academic year

Parents/Carers/Carers are requested to give advance notice to the school if they intend their child to be absent for these reasons.

Any further absence will be categorised as unauthorised.

Traveller Absence: The aim for the attendance of Traveller children, in common with all other children, is to attend school as regularly and as frequently as possible. The school will work closely with the family to help ensure continuity of education for pupils when their parent(s) is travelling for occupational purposes. The school will support the child to attend school elsewhere i.e. dual registered at an additional school for the period the family is travelling.

To protect Traveller Parents/Carers from unreasonable prosecution for non-attendance, the Education Act 1944, section 86, states that a Traveller parent is safe from prosecution if their child accrues 200 attendances (i.e. 200 half days) in a year. This is only when the family are engaged in a trade or business that requires them to travel and when the child is attending school as regularly as that trade permits.

It does not mean that part-time education for Traveller children is legally acceptable, nor does it relieve Parents/Carers of their duties to ensure that their children are receiving suitable education when not at school.

When in or around Buckinghamshire, if a family can reasonably travel back to their Base School (see below) then the expectation is that their child will attend full-time.

Thomas Hickman School will be regarded as the base school if it is the school where the child normally attends when they are not travelling. However, the pupil must have attended in the last 18 months. Traveller children can register at other schools temporarily while away from their base school - in such cases, the pupil's school place at Thomas Hickman School will be kept open for them whilst travelling. This is to protect them from unfairly losing their place at their school of usual attendance.

Thomas Hickman School can only effectively operate as the child's base school if it is engaged in on-going dialogue with Traveller families. This means that Parents/Carers must:

- advise of their forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen; and
- inform the school regarding proposed return dates

Thomas Hickman School will authorise absence of Traveller children if we are satisfied that a family is travelling and has given indication that they intend to return.

Traveller children will be recorded as attending an approved educational activity when:

- The child is on roll and attending another visited school
- Undertaking supervised educational activity under the jurisdiction of another Local Authority's Traveller Education Service
- The child is undertaking computer based distance learning that is time evidenced

Where Traveller children are registered pupils at a school and are known to be present either at a site (official or otherwise) or in a house and are not attending school, the absence will be investigated in the same way as that for any pupil.

#### **4. Deletions from the Register**

In accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, pupils will only be deleted from the register when one of the following circumstances applies:

- The school is replaced by another school on a School Attendance Order
- The School Attendance Order is revoked by the local authority
- The pupil has ceased to be of compulsory school age
- Permanent exclusion has occurred and procedures have been completed
- Death of a pupil
- Transfer between schools
- Pupil withdrawn to be educated outside the school system
- Failure to return from an extended holiday after both the school and the local authority have tried to locate the pupil
- A medical condition prevents their attendance and return to the school before ending compulsory school-age
- In custody for more than four months (in discussion with The Youth Offending Team)
- 20 days continuous unauthorised absence and both the local authority and school have tried to locate the pupil
- Left the school but not known where he/she has gone after both the school and the local authority have tried to locate the pupil

Thomas Hickman School will follow Buckinghamshire Council's Children Missing Education Protocol when a pupil's whereabouts is unknown.

## **5. Roles and Responsibilities**

Thomas Hickman School believe that improved school attendance can only be achieved if it is viewed as a shared responsibility of the school staff, governors, Parents/Carers, pupils and the wider school community.

All staff will:

- Actively promote the importance and value of good attendance to pupils and their Parents/Carers
- Form positive relationships with pupils and Parents/Carers

SLT will:

- Ensure that the Flying Start curriculum is active across the school and that all teachers are providing good teaching and learning experiences that encourage all pupils to attend and to achieve
- Promote the 'No Outsiders' agenda to ensure that every family feels welcome in our school and that attendance isn't hindered by discrimination or intolerance
- Regularly analyse data for their phase and investigate reasons for persistent absence with Class Teachers

Class-teachers and TAs will:

- Comply with the Registration Regulations, England, 2006 and other attendance related legislation by completing their registers on SIMs at 8:50 each morning and as soon as they return to class after lunch (by 1:40pm at the latest)
- Check cloakrooms, toilets and intervention areas for any absent children before submitting their register
- Encourage the children in their care to be curious and develop their love of learning so that children want to come to school
- Follow-up any absence with a conversation on the child's return to see if future absences of this nature can be avoided
- Address persistent absence with Parents/Carers and offer support to help improve attendance in the future

The attendance officer will:

- Monitor registers every morning to check for unexplained absences
- Send a text to Parents/Carers of any child who is unexpectedly absent to remind them to call school to explain their child's absence
- Send a second text to alert Parents/Carers/cares of a Welfare check/visit if the school is not contacted by phone
- Call first contact for any child whose absence is still unaccounted for by 9.15am
- Alert the Pastoral Team to any child whose whereabouts is unknown and first contact unavailable by 9:30am
- Implement systems to report, record and monitor the attendance of all pupils, including those who are educated off-site
- Analyse attendance data and work with the Head and Deputy to identify causes and patterns of absence
- Contribute to the evaluation of school strategies and interventions
- Work with other agencies to improve attendance and support pupils and their families
- Document interventions used to a standard required by the local authority should legal proceedings be instigated

The Pastoral team will:

- Try to establish the whereabouts of any child whose absence is unexplained by calling/emailing all contacts listed for that child
- Liaise with Social Care as necessary if the child has an allocated Social Worker
- Carry out a home visit (after dynamic risk assessment) to establish the whereabouts of any child who is still unaccounted for
- Report as a missing child to police (101) any child who is still unaccounted for despite attempting all contacts and a home visit

Governors will:

- Request regular updates on attendance data and analysis
- Hold leaders to account for their attendance data, including variations in attendance of vulnerable groups
- Challenge leaders on their strategies for improving attendance and their plans for overcoming barriers to attendance

Through our home/school agreement, Parents/Carers meetings and information on our website, THS request that Parents/Carers will:

- Talk to their child about school and what goes on there, taking a positive interest in their child's work and educational progress
- Instil the value of education and regular school attendance within the home environment
- Contact the school if their child is absent to share the reason why and the expected date of return.
- Avoid unnecessary absences at all costs. Wherever possible make appointments for the Doctors, Dentists etc. outside of school hours
- Ask the school for help if their child or family is experiencing difficulties – do not wait as the school will do all they can to help.
- Inform the school of any change in circumstances that may impact on their child's attendance or well-being
- Support the school; take every opportunity to get involved in their child's education, form a positive relationship with school and acknowledge the importance of children receiving the same messages from both school and home
- Encourage routines at home, for example, appropriate bed times, homework, preparing school bag and uniform the evening before
- Not keep their child away from school to go shopping, to help at home or to look after other members of the family
- Avoid taking their child on holiday during term-time.

## **6. Using Attendance Data**

Pupil's attendance will be monitored and will be shared with the Local Authority and other agencies if a pupil's attendance is a cause for concern.

The Attendance Officer will provide all class teachers with attendance data for the previous five weeks for each pupil in their class. The list will be presented in numerical descending order with the highest attendees at the top.

Phase Leaders will receive a complete set of data for their year groups.

This pupil level data will be used to trigger school action as set out in the escalation of intervention (Appendix 1).

Attendance data will also be used to identify emerging patterns and trends to inform whole school strategies to improve attendance and attainment.

Thomas Hickman School will share attendance data with the Local Authority as required. All information shared will be done so in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

## **7. Support Systems**

Thomas Hickman School recognise that poor attendance is often an indication of difficulties in a child's life. This may be related to problems at home and/or in school. Parents/Carers should make school aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and/or behaviour in school, for example, bereavement, divorce/separation. This will help the school identify any additional support that may be required.

Thomas Hickman School also recognise that some pupils are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, those pupils with Special Educational Needs, those with physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee pupils and Looked After Children.

The school will implement a range of strategies to support improved attendance. Strategies used will include:

- Discussion with Parents/Carers and pupils
- Referrals to support agencies
- Friendship groups
- Reward systems (both whole school and individualised)
- Time limited part time time-tables
- Additional learning support
- Behaviour support
- Reintegration support packages

Support offered to families will be child-centred and planned in discussion and agreement with both Parents/Carers and pupils.

## **8. Legal Sanctions**

Where intervention fails to bring about an improvement in attendance, Thomas Hickman School will notify the Buckinghamshire Education Welfare Service of the irregular attendance.

The Education Welfare Service may invite Parents/Carers to attend a Parenting Contract Meeting and issue a formal warning of a Penalty Notice.

Parenting Contracts: (Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003) A Parenting Contract is a voluntary agreement between LA, school and the parent; it can also be extended to include the child and any other agencies offering support to resolve any difficulties leading to improved attendance.

The contract will outline attendance targets and will detail agreed actions that will help to achieve the target. The contract will be reviewed regularly.

The contract can be used as evidence in a prosecution should irregular attendance continue.

Penalty Notices: (Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003) Penalty Notices will be considered when:

- Intervention has failed to bring about improvement and further unauthorised absence has occurred following written warning to improve.
- A pupil is absent from school for the purpose of a holiday in term time and the absence has not been authorised by the school

A Penalty Notice gives the parent the opportunity to discharge themselves of their legal responsibility if a £60 fine is paid within 28 days or £120 if paid within 42 days of the date the Notice was issued.

Failure to pay the Penalty Notice may result in a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

Prosecution: The school will provide the Local Authority with evidence required for a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996. This is to ensure that Parents/Carers realise their own responsibilities in ensuring attendance at school and most importantly about returning children to education.



## Intervention Flow Chart

School will notify parent of the child's irregular school attendance and offer them the opportunity and support to improve.

If you receive a letter informing you of concerns regarding your child's attendance you should:

- Speak with your child to see if there are any reasons why they are reluctant to attend
- Contact the school to discuss any difficulties you or your child may be experiencing.
- Ensure your child attends school regularly

If there is no improvement and the parent has not provided a good reason for the absence, the school will refer to the Education Welfare Service

The Education Welfare Service will invite you to attend a Parenting Contract Meeting and issue a Warning of a Penalty Notice.

A Parenting Contract is a voluntary agreement between yourself and the Local Authority aimed at supporting you in improving your child's school attendance.

Whilst your involvement in a Parenting Contract is voluntary, if you fail to engage with the support offered and your child's attendance remains irregular, the Education Welfare Service may issue a Penalty Notice or begin legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court.

If you are issued with a Penalty Notice of £60 this must be paid in full within 28 days otherwise the Penalty will increase to £120. If you fail to pay the Penalty the Education Welfare Service may instigate legal proceedings against you.

If you are found guilty of this offence you can be fined up to £2500 and or be imprisoned for a period of three months.

