



Tomlinscote School

An Academy within The Prospect Trust



Attendance Policy

Policy Type:	Mandatory
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Attendance Policy

Introduction

This policy reflects the DfE statutory guidance in the document 'Working together to improve school attendance' (March 2024) and incorporates guidance from the Surrey Attendance Service, acting on behalf of Surrey County Council. This policy is further informed by DfE statutory guidance in the documents 'Keeping children safe in education' (2024), and 'Children missing education' (2016).

Tomlinscote School is committed to providing a full and engaging education to all students and seeks to ensure equal opportunities for all. We endeavour to provide an environment where all students feel valued and welcome.

Regular school attendance is essential for students to reach their educational potential. We will work with parents/carers and students to support every student to achieve 100% attendance. The school will work in partnership with students and their parents/carers to identify any barriers preventing them from achieving this goal.

Every opportunity will be used to communicate to students and their parents/carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance. Each year the school will examine its attendance figures and set attendance/absence targets. Students are expected to attend 100% of the time. The school will review its systems for improving attendance at regular intervals to ensure that it is achieving its targets.

The school will use opportunities as they arise to remind parents/carers that it is their responsibility to ensure that their children receive their education. The Home/School Agreement recognises the importance of good attendance. The school will support families sensitively where attendance issues are related to a student's special needs.

Responsibilities of Tomlinscote Staff

- Ensure that all students are registered accurately.
- Promote and reward good student attendance with students at appropriate opportunities.
- Liaise with the attendance leader on matters of attendance and punctuality.
- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a student's absence.
- Support absent students to re-engage with their learning once they are back in school.

Responsibilities of Students

- Attend school every day unless they have an authorised absence.
- Arrive at school on time.
- Go to registration and lessons on time.
- Take responsibility for registering with the main office if they are late or they are leaving the school site during school hours.

Responsibilities of Parents/Carers

- Regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility. A parent/carer may be guilty of an offence if their child of compulsory school age, who is a registered pupil at school, fails to attend regularly (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act).
- Where reasonably practicable, parents should provide at least two emergency contact numbers.
- Parents must ensure that contact details are kept up to date through the parent Edulink app.

Parents/Carers will:

- Support the school and the student in achieving 100% attendance each year.
- Inform the school by telephone, email, text message, or Edulink app on the first day of absence, and every day thereafter.
- Discuss with the form tutor any planned and unavoidable medical appointments/procedures well in advance.
- Only request leave of absence in exceptional circumstances (see Appendix 2).

Academy Trustees and the AQC are expected to:

- Take an active role in attendance improvement, supporting Tomlinscote to prioritise attendance, and work together with leaders to set whole school cultures.
- Ensure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties.

- Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the students who need it.

Elective Home Education

- School will inform the local authority on receipt of written notification to home educate.
- Parents have a duty to ensure their child of compulsory school age receives suitable full-time education, but this does not have to be at a school.

School Procedures

Any child who is absent from school at the morning or afternoon registration must have their absence recorded as being either authorised or unauthorised. Only the Principal, SLT member responsible for Attendance, or Head of Year acting on their behalf can authorise absence. If there is no known reason for the absence at registration, then the absence must be recorded in the first instance as unauthorised. Attendance will be monitored in a weekly meeting between the Attendance Officer and SLT member responsible for attendance.

Understanding types of absence

There are two main categories of absences:

Authorised absence is when the school has:

- accepted the explanation offered as satisfactory justification for the absence (for example, an illness preventing the student from attending school); or
- given approval in advance for such an absence (for example, for an approved sport activity).

Unauthorised absence is when the school has:

- not received a satisfactory explanation for an absence;
- has not approved a child's leave of absence from school after a parent/carer's request.

The school will not authorise a student to be off school unnecessarily, such as for shopping, birthdays, leisure activities or to look after siblings. Truancy will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

If a parent/carer does not ask for, or receive, permission from the school to take a student out of school, any such absence will be recorded as unauthorised and will be treated as truancy.

The school may, if new information is received or comes to light, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence (and vice versa). Any changes will be communicated to parents/carers. This may occur if there is evidence that a student authorised for illness

absence is suspected to have been absent for another reason. In such circumstances, the school may ask for medical evidence of the illness as stated by the parent/carers.

Legal Registrations & School Sessions

Each school day is recorded as 2 sessions, one in the morning (form time), and the other in the afternoon (period 5 register).

The morning and afternoon registers are formal legal documents, and the school is legally obliged to ensure they are completed accurately.

Lateness

Morning registration (form time) will take place at the start of the school day at 8.35am.

When the first bell rings at 8.30am, students should be on the school site and must make their way to their form room or assembly.

All students must be in their form room or assembly by 8:35am.

A second bell will ring at 8:35am. Any student arriving to form or assembly after this bell will be marked as late in the register (L). A detention will be issued for any student recorded as late.

The morning register will formally close at 9:15 am and any student arriving to school after 9:15am will be marked as having an unauthorised absence for that session (U), unless there is an acceptable explanation i.e. school transport was delayed.

In cases where the absence at registration was for attending an unavoidable medical appointment, the appropriate authorised absence code will be entered.

Students arriving late, for any reason, are required to sign in at the main school office.

First Day Absence

Parents/carers are expected to contact the school as soon as possible if the student will be absent.

There are a variety of ways to contact the school to report absence and parents/carers may use the automated telephone system, email (attendance@tomlinscoteschool.com), Edulink app, or text message leaving an appropriate message.

Absence Text & Safeguarding

An absence text will be sent to the parent/carer if the school has not received a message by 10:30am to explain an absence.

In order to safeguard all students, the school must know that every student is accounted for and safe.

Tomlinscote School recognises that regular absence or unexplained absence could indicate a safeguarding issue. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) monitors attendance and will address any concerns promptly.

If a student is reported missing from school staff will contact home and where necessary/appropriate the police will be called. School staff will work closely with the parents/carer and, where required, the necessary authorities, to ensure that the student is found and returned to effective supervision.

Unauthorised absence by students with an allocated social worker will be reported to the social worker on their first day of absence.

Continuing Absence

Continuous absence is a sustained period of absence from school.

A courtesy phone call may be made if absence is continuous. It may be necessary to arrange a school attendance meeting for the school to better understand the nature of the absence, and to identify appropriate support for students.

Surrey County Council requires the school to notify them of any student who has been absent for 10 successive days without explanation.

Frequent Absence

It is the responsibility of the Head of Year to be aware of, and draw attention to, any emerging attendance concerns.

In cases where a student begins to develop a pattern of absences, the school will try to resolve the problem with the parents/carers.

The school may request medical evidence in cases where we need clarification to accurately record absence in the attendance register. Please see Appendix 2 for a non-exhaustive list of examples of medical evidence which may be accepted.

Persistent Absence (Attendance of 90% or below)

If a student's attendance falls to 90% or below across the school year, for whatever reason, they will be classed as a *persistent absentee*.

Persistent absentees miss out on the opportunities school creates for students. This includes social interaction with their friends, opportunities to engage in sports and extra-curricular activities, and school trips. Furthermore, absence from school creates gaps in a student's learning. Research shows these gaps affect attainment when attendance falls below 95%. Accordingly, we monitor all absence thoroughly and all attendance data is shared with the local authority and the Department for Education. If student attendance is falling towards 90% after the first half term, we will contact the parent/carer and, depending on the reasons for the absence, we may ask for medical evidence or invite the parent/carer to a meeting with the relevant Head of Year.

Severe Absence (Attendance of 50% or below)

If a student's absence drops below 50%, this is known as severe absence. While the school recognises that severe absence may arise in a number of circumstances, it may be a sign of neglect. We will work with both the family and outside agencies to support the child and family as appropriate.

Absence notes

Absence notes received from parents explaining an absence should be kept by the attendance officer for the remainder of the academic year. In cases where there are concerns about student absence that may require investigation, absence notes may be retained for a longer period.

Request for Leave of Absence in term time

Parents are reminded of the detrimental effect of term time absence on students. Requests for leave of absence during term time are therefore strongly discouraged.

The school will not authorise term time absences except in exceptional circumstances. See Appendix 2 for guidance on what may be considered exceptional circumstances.

Circumstances where a Penalty Notice may be issued (As outlined by Surrey Attendance Service, acting on behalf of Surrey County Council):

The Surrey Attendance Service, acting on behalf of Surrey County Council may issue a Penalty Notice as an alternative to the prosecution of a parent/carer for their child's unauthorised absence from school and require the recipient to pay a fixed amount.

Circumstances where a Penalty Notice may be issued

1. Pupils identified by police and Surrey Attendance Advice Officers engaged on Truancy Patrols and who have incurred unauthorised absences.
2. The Education (Pupil Registration)(England)(Amendment) Regulations 2013, state that Head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. The Head teacher is required to determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if leave is granted.

Where a child is taken out of school for 10 sessions (1 session is a morning or afternoon) or more and the 'leave of absence' is without the authority of the head teacher, each parent is liable to receive a penalty notice for each child who is absent. In these circumstances, a warning will not be given where it can be shown that parents had previously been warned that such absences would not be authorised and that they will be liable to receive a Penalty Notice if the leave of absence is taken.

3. The issue of a Penalty Notice will also be considered where a pupil has incurred 10 or more unauthorised sessions during the preceding 10 school weeks. The parents' failure to engage with supportive measures proposed by the school will be a factor when considering the issue of a Penalty Notice. Unauthorised absence will include late arrival after the close of registration without good reason.
4. Section 103 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 places a duty on parents to ensure that their child is not in a public place without justifiable cause during school hours when they are excluded from school. This duty applies to the first five days of each exclusion. Failure to do so will render the parent liable to a Penalty Notice. If the Penalty Notice is not paid, the recipient will be prosecuted for the offence under Section 103. Alternative education provision will be made from the sixth day of any exclusion and failure to attend such provision without good reason will be treated as unauthorised absence.

With the exception of unauthorised leave of absence taken in term time (Paragraph 2 above) parents will be sent a 'Notice To Improve' their child's attendance, warning them of their liability to receive such a notice before it is issued.

Amount Payable Under a Penalty Notice: The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

1. If a parent/carer has not incurred a penalty notice relating to the relevant child/children since 19 August 2024, then the penalty notice will be charged at the rate of £160.00, **per parent/carer per child**, if paid within 28 days. This will be reduced to £80.00 if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice. Failure to pay the Penalty Notice will result in Surrey County Council considering legal proceedings against you in the Magistrates Court.
2. If you have incurred a penalty notice relating to this child/children since 19 August 2024, the rolling 3 year period will be activated from the date of the first penalty notice and the second penalty notice will be charged at the flat rate of £160.00, **per parent/carer per child**, if paid within 28 days. There will be no reduction for payment within 21 days. Failure to pay the Penalty Notice will result in Surrey County Council considering legal proceedings against you in the Magistrates Court.
3. If you have incurred 2 penalty notices relating to this child/children in the rolling 3 year period since the first penalty notice was issued, then you will NOT receive a third penalty notice – Surrey County Council will have no option but to consider a prosecution, **per parent/carer per child**, in the Magistrates Court under s 444 Education Act 1996.

What can I do to encourage my child to attend school?

Make sure the student gets enough sleep and gets up in plenty of time each morning. Ensure that he/she leaves home in the correct clothes and is properly equipped. Show the student, by your interest that you value his/her education. Let them know that there is support in school, either through their form tutor, Student Support Officer, or Head of Year. Encourage them to seek out a member of staff with whom they feel comfortable to talk through any worries or concerns that they have which may be preventing them from coming to school.

Be interested in what the student is doing in school, chat to them about the things they have learnt, the friends they have made and even what they had for lunch!

My child is trying to avoid coming to school. What should I do?

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents/carers and the student. If a student is reluctant to attend, it is never better to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and may make things worse.

Contact the student's form tutor immediately to discuss any worries and concerns. The student could be avoiding school for a number of reasons: difficulties with schoolwork; bullying; friendship problems; or family difficulties. It is important that the reason for the student's reluctance to attend school is identified early and we all work together to tackle the problem. For some students, the extra support of the Student Support Officer may be called upon. In addition, it may also be helpful to discuss the circumstances of the student's difficulties with a professional support worker.

What is EBSNA and how might it impact my child?

EBSNA is Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (also known as Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), and Anxiety Related Non-Attendance (ARNA)). It describes students who are unable to attend school, rather than choosing not to attend, because of increased feelings of fear and anxiety that school may be unsafe. Spotting the signs of EBSNA and taking action quickly can enable a student to remain in education and achieve their aspirations. Students can display a range of behaviours, which on their own may not be a sign of EBSNA. However, parents/carers of children experiencing EBSNA have reported the following behaviours:

- Frequently feeling unwell
- Separation anxiety
- Frequent minor absences
- Tearfulness and general irritability
- Sleep difficulties

- Emotional volatility
- Lack of appetite
- Friendship issues
- Changes in personality
- Poor academic attainment

If you are concerned that your child may be showing signs of EBSNA we encourage you to contact their tutor and Head of Year to arrange a meeting. In this meeting the potential triggers and causes can be discussed and identified, and parents/carers can work in partnership with School to ensure that their child is fully supported.

Appendix 2

Leaves of Absence due to exceptional circumstances

Term time is for education. Students have 175 days a year for activities outside school, including weekends and school holidays. School policy is that authorised absences will not be granted during term time, except in exceptional circumstances authorised by the Principal.

Requests for a leave of absence for exceptional circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The decision to authorise such absences is at the Principal's discretion.

Short absences to visit seriously ill relatives or for bereavement (including attending a funeral and reasonable travel time) on the loss of a close family member will usually be considered to be 'exceptional circumstances'.

Short occasional absences for important religious observances and reasonable travel time may also be authorised as exceptional circumstances, but not for extended periods. Furthermore, brief absence for the wedding of a close family member (parent or sibling) may be regarded as an exceptional circumstance.

Periods of absence for holidays, recreational activities or the wedding of person who is not a close family member (parent or sibling) are not regarded as exceptional circumstances during term time.

Periods of absence for students who are involved in elite sporting activities (at County or National level) are regarded as exceptional circumstances.

What medical evidence can I provide to school?

If the school requires further information in respect of a medical issue reported as preventing a student from attending, we may request medical evidence.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of evidence that may be accepted to support an absence on medical grounds:

- Confirmation texts/letters/emails of GP/Dental/Hospital appointments;
- Copies of letters produced by medical professionals treating ongoing medical issues;
- A GP Sicknote; and
- Prescription notes/receipts.

Any medical evidence the school receives will be stored securely for the purposes of accurate coding of the register and working together with families to support students with medical conditions which may prevent them from attending school. Where a student has an ongoing medical condition, the school asks that the Head of Year and Attendance Officer are kept updated so that appropriate, bespoke support can be offered to the student and family.

Links with other policies:

- Admissions Policy
- Behaviour and Discipline
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Attendance Matters

