

St Thomas à Becket Catholic College

Attendance Policy

Principles:

Good attendance and punctuality at College facilitate a good education and job/career prospects and minimise the risks of pupils conducting antisocial behaviour or becoming victims or perpetrators of crime or abuse. Children's social skills are also enhanced by regular attendance.

Aims:

- ❑ to share the responsibility for promoting College attendance amongst everyone in the College and the broader College community;
- ❑ to develop and implement an effective attendance policy that touches all aspects of the College's life and relates directly to the College's values, ethos and curriculum.
- ❑ to these ends staff particularly strive to:
 1. register pupils accurately and efficiently;
 2. set attendance targets for individual pupils and year groups;
 3. contact parents the same day when reasons for absence are unknown or unauthorised;
 4. regularly monitor pupil attendance and punctuality;
 5. report college attendance statistics to parents, LA and DCSF as appropriate.
- ❑ to reinforce good attendance and to encourage improved attendance by using such measures as:
 1. informal comments from pastoral and subject staff;
 2. the issue of attendance certificates in assemblies.
- ❑ to monitor and evaluate this policy and its implementation by, amongst other means, rigorously collecting and analysing data about attendance to check our progress against measurable outcomes, e.g. National and LA level targets.

Section 1 Roles and Responsibilities:

Parents:

All children of compulsory school age (5 -16) should receive suitable education, either by regular attendance at College or otherwise. If a child is registered at College, parents have the primary statutory responsibility for ensuring that their child attends regularly. In addition to statutory obligations parents have all signed the Home/College Agreement – a section of which describes the agreed responsibilities of the parents.

The following extract is taken from the Home College Agreement:

The Parents' Responsibilities:

St Thomas à Becket Catholic College needs the active support of parents to fulfil its Mission of Care and Education for your child. Our College seeks to develop an effective partnership between home and College, based on mutual understanding and trust.

We the parents/guardians, will:

- ❑ *ensure that our child arrives at College safely, on time, in full College uniform and with the correct equipment each day;*

- ❑ *in circumstances preventing attendance, notify the College on the same day, confirming the reasons in writing on the child's return to College;*
- ❑ *avoid keeping our child out of College in term time, (e.g. family holidays) apart from exceptional circumstances such as illness and bereavement.*

To discharge their agreed responsibilities parents should always:

- ❑ encourage good attendance making sure that their child goes to College regularly, arrives on time and keeps to the College's rules on going to all lessons;
- ❑ take an interest in their child's work;
- ❑ make sure their child understands that the parents do not approve of absence from College;
- ❑ support the College in its efforts to control bad behaviour;
- ❑ inform the College on the first day of non attendance;
- ❑ co-operate with the College staff and the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) to make sure their child overcomes his or her attendance problems and receives a proper education;
- ❑ discuss planned absences with the College and apply for permission well in advance, e.g. a wedding or other special occasions, etc.
- ❑ Parents should not normally:
 1. expect the College to agree to shopping trips during college hours;
 2. take their own family holidays outside of the College holidays;
 3. take their own family holidays during examination or test time;.

Pupils:

1. Pupils are actively encouraged to attend College regularly and to arrive punctually at College and at the start of lessons.
2. Pupils should inform staff if there is a problem that may lead to their absence, e.g. bullying, racism, etc.
3. Pupils should use their best endeavours to pass on absence notes from parents/guardians to the Attendance Officer and to pass college correspondence to their parents.
4. Pupils who arrive late must ensure that they sign in at Reception before going to class.

LA & Educational Welfare Service (EWS):

LAs need to cooperate about any attendance problems, and where many children attend school in neighbouring authority areas they should have standing arrangements for coordination to prevent truancy. Early warning of attendance problems will normally be to the LA where the pupil attends college, but any necessary legal action is the responsibility of the LA where the child lives.

It is the responsibility of the LA to ensure that parents/guardians meet their statutory responsibilities either by registering the child at a school or by making other effective educational arrangements. If a child is registered as a pupil at a particular school, that school must give permission for a child to be absent. If a child does not go to the school at which he or she is registered, the relevant LA can take legal action against the parents.

LAs' legal powers to enforce attendance are via:

- ❑ **School Attendance Orders** – these enforce the parents'/guardians' responsibility for ensuring that children of compulsory school age receive suitable education.
- ❑ **Prosecution** for irregular attendance this can result in parents/guardians being fined up to £1000 for each child who is not going to school.

- ❑ **Parenting Orders** – these are court orders which require certain actions to be taken by parents with the purpose of improving pupil attendance, e.g. parents/guardians may be required to attend counseling or guidance sessions or to ensure that their child is escorted to and from school.
- ❑ **Education Supervision Orders** this means that the court appoints a supervisor to help and give advice to the parents/guardians and the child.

LAs are responsible, by law, for making sure that registered pupils of compulsory school age attend their school regularly. Wakefield employ an EWO to work in St Thomas à Becket Catholic College to monitor college attendance and to help parents/guardians meet their responsibilities.

EWOs should check registers regularly to ensure that they are being completed in accordance with the college's policy and to identify any patterns of absence which have not already been notified. The EWO should promptly follow up incidents where the staff have identified a possible attendance problem.

EWOs should work closely with schools and families to resolve attendance issues, arranging home visits where necessary. The key to success is an effective working relationship between schools and the EWS including:

- ❑ shared policies and operational practices between the EWS and the schools;
- ❑ clearly defined roles of school staff and EWOs;
- ❑ how much time the EWO will devote to the school;
- ❑ expectation of the quality of EWO service;
- ❑ arrangements for referral, regular review, monitoring and evaluation;
- ❑ procedures for resolving enquiries.

Although enforcing school attendance is the EWO's main responsibility s/he also undertakes other important related duties, these include:

- ❑ regulating child employment;
- ❑ advising on child protection issues;
- ❑ helping to arrange alternative educational provision for excluded pupils, e.g. this may include liaising with the 'pupil support' section of the LA provision;
- ❑ preparing reports on pupils with special educational needs as part of the statementing process.

The Governing Body:

The Governing Body is legally responsible for many aspects of College management including the attendance register and so it is registered with the Data Protection Registrar under the Data Protection Act 1998. However, the Headteacher manages the day-to-day running of the College and in so doing takes responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of this policy.

The Headteacher:

Headteachers are required to tell the LA if a pupil fails to attend regularly or has been absent for a continuous period of ten days and the absence is treated as unauthorised (this also applies to independent schools). Headteachers can, of course, notify the LA earlier if there are areas of concern. The precise point at which school staff should refer a case to the Education Welfare Service is laid out in the LA Behaviour Support Plan. The initial contact with the LA will be made with the EWO.

Normally the College itself will have made and recorded efforts to address the non-attendance through:

- ❑ action by the class or form tutor, as part of their day-to-day duties;

- ❑ involvement of others within the College, e.g. Academic Tutor, Headteacher or Assistant Head;
- ❑ contact with parents.

Referral to the EWO would normally take place if:

- ❑ a pattern of irregular attendance or lateness is either continuing or worsening;
- ❑ parents/guardians do not accept their responsibilities for ensuring the child attends College, and are refusing to discuss ways of improving attendance with the College;
- ❑ condoned, unjustified absence is increasingly a problem;
- ❑ the parents/guardians ask for excessive authorised absence.

Referral to the EWO may take place if referrals are made by Academic Tutors, e.g.:

- ❑ the pupil attendance rate falls below a certain predetermined level, e.g. 80%.

Headteachers are also required to maintain two registers:

- ❑ an admission register (known as the school roll) which contains a list of all pupils at the College;
- ❑ an attendance register (unless all pupils are boarders) for all pupils of compulsory school age on the admission register.

The Attendance Register must be completed twice a day, once at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. Similarly, the College keeps a register of pupils present on the college site during lunch time, this is needed to show which pupils need to be accounted for in the event of an emergency. No pupils are normally allowed to leave the college premises at lunch time unless they have written permission from their parents/guardians.

The Headteacher should ensure that a clear policy on attendance is in place, which is known to staff, pupils and parents. The positive link with parents can be strengthened if the arrangements for notifying absence and the College's policy towards absence (authorised and unauthorised) is regularly publicised. Each year, the College is required to submit to the DCFS details of the level of absence within the college. The report details how many half days were missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence.

Form Tutors & Academic Tutors:

Form Tutors and Academic Tutors must enforce this policy rigidly. If a pupil is absent without explanation when the Register is called, the Attendance Officer should contact the parents the same day wherever possible. The absence should also be followed up with the parent/guardian to ensure that a written note is received explaining the absence.

Subject Teachers:

When a pupil is missing from his/her lesson for no apparent reason, subject teachers should inform an Academic Tutor or the College office so that the pupil's absence can be further investigated. Subject teachers can also contribute to the reduction of unauthorised absence by delivering interesting and engaging lessons and insisting on punctuality for themselves, colleagues and pupils.

Police:

Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 the police now have powers to remove truants found in public places and to return them either to their schools or a place designated by the LA.

Section 2 Initiatives To Improve Attendance Rates:

There are many reasons why pupils miss College without permission and therefore there is no one solution to the problem of absenteeism. It is important that wherever possible the College works alongside the LA in supporting and implementing attendance initiatives which:

- ❑ help children develop the habit of regular attendance;
- ❑ show parents/guardians clearly that unjustified absence will be noticed and challenged;
- ❑ minimise problems in secondary schools by helping pupils transferring from primary schools.

The College has considered initiatives that are best for the College and always takes into account a pupil's individual circumstances, e.g. setting reward schemes such as certificates, for 100% attendance or effort to attend. Other helpful initiatives include:

- ❑ implementing first day response with parents/guardians of children who are absent from College without prior knowledge. It is hoped that this sends a clear signal to pupils and parents that absence is a matter of concern and will be followed up;
- ❑ sending back to College letters to parents/guardians who have not sent an absence note;
- ❑ encouraging attendance checks, scheduled or unscheduled, which is effective in monitoring post registration truancy;
- ❑ having a senior member of staff responsible for attendance;
- ❑ the introduction of a breakfast club.

Section 3 Keeping The Register:

Registers should be treated as legal documents – indeed they may be used as evidence in court cases. For this reason they should be retained for a minimum of six years. For each pupil, the register must be marked either as present or absent. If the pupil is absent, the register **must** clearly differentiate between whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised by the College.

Authorised Absence:

Authorised absence is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the College, this includes instances of absences for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided, e.g. ill health.

Unauthorised Absence:

Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the College this includes all unexplained or unjustified absences.

N.B. Authorised absences are equivalent to 'present' for performance table purposes. Even when pupils are engaged in Approved Educational Activity offsite, they must not be marked as present, as good Health and Safety practice requires that the college needs to know who is on the premises in the case of a fire drill or a real emergency. In the case of a pupil leaving college during a session and/or returning later, care must be taken to maintain the accuracy of who is known to be on site in the case of an emergency – for this reason Visitors, Staff and pupils must sign out before leaving the premises.

All registers (either manual or electronic) must allow for the original entry and any subsequent correction to be clearly distinguishable and that, on retrieval, they appear in chronological order.

N.B. When computers are used for registration, the attendance register must be printed at least once a month. At the end of each college year sheets must be bound into annual volumes and, like manual registers, retained for at least six years.

For Attendance Codes, descriptions and meanings see appendix 1

Lateness:

The College actively discourages late arrival by staff, setting a good example to pupils and by challenging it whenever it occurs. Normal register entries do indicate the severity or degree of lateness to a point and the College therefore has systems to detect patterns of late arrival, e.g. tutors will investigate and report as necessary. Pupils who arrive late more than once in a week or fail to register will be placed in after-school detention. Frequent lateness of pupils can provide grounds for prosecution of parents. The College allows the register to be kept open for up to twenty minutes from the beginning of registration – however, in the case of known delays such as bus breakdowns or severe weather the register may be kept open for longer. Pupils who arrive after the register has closed must report to Reception to sign in.

Temporary school closures:

Where a school has to close due to severe weather conditions, fire or other structural damage or for INSET, no attendance registers are needed.

Deleting pupils from the admissions register:

There are strict rules on when schools can delete pupils from their admissions register. Where a school has decided to remove a pupil from their admission roll, they should notify their LA.

If a pupil is to be taken off the admissions register because the child is moving to another area or school, staff should first find out the name and address of the new school and when the pupil will start, confirming this information with the receiving school. School staff should be concerned:

- ❑ if the parents/guardians do not name the receiving school;
- ❑ if a pupil has 'disappeared' from the area without explanation;
- ❑ if a pupil has not returned to school within ten school days of the agreed return date after an agreed absence in term time.

If schools are concerned they should alert the EWO, who can decide whether to alert Social Services. Social Services may in turn involve the police. If, however, schools have good reason to believe that a crime may have been committed, they should contact the police directly.

When a family returns to their country of origin for a long period of time it should be considered as authorized absence – however, it is now becoming much more common for the school to consider taking them off role.

Attendance Registers – Security:

The College keeps the attendance registers secure when they are not in use and they are retained for three years from the last date of entry.