



Thames Ditton Infant School

Attendance Policy

Written By: Elspeth Leach

Approved By: Safeguarding and Wellbeing Committee

Date Approved: Autumn term 2025

Next Review Date: Autumn term 2026

This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

We have carefully considered and analysed the impact of this policy on equality and the possible implications for pupils and staff with protected characteristics, as part of our commitment to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Regular and punctual attendance at school is essential if pupils are to receive the full benefits of the education system. The school is therefore committed to promoting regular attendance by all pupils and to working in partnership with parents to achieve this aim. To this end we will do all we can to encourage parents to ensure that the children in their care achieve maximum possible attendance and that any problems that prevent full attendance are identified and acted on promptly.

In order for the school's attendance policy to be successful, every member of staff makes attendance a high priority and conveys this to the pupils at all times. Parents need to support these views in the home to ensure that children are receiving corresponding messages about the value of education.

The aim of this policy is to clarify for parents, staff and governors the school's procedures and practices regarding attendance, absence and lateness.

2. EXPECTATIONS

We expect that all pupils will:

- Attend school regularly
- Attend school punctually
- Attend school appropriately prepared for the day.

We expect that all parents will:

- Encourage regular school attendance and be aware of their legal responsibilities
- Ensure that the child/children in their care arrive at school punctually, prepared for the school day
- Ensure that they contact the school whenever the child/children is/are unable to attend school
- Contact the school promptly whenever any problem occurs that may keep the child away from school

School staff will

- Keep regular and accurate records of attendance for all pupils at least twice daily
- Monitor every pupil's attendance
- Contact parents as soon as possible when a pupil fails to attend where no message has been received to explain the absence
- Follow up all unexplained absences
- Encourage good attendance
- Provide a welcoming atmosphere for children
- Provide a safe learning environment
- Make initial enquiries of parents of pupils who are not attending regularly, express their concern and clarify the school's and the Local Authority's expectations with regard to regular school attendance
- Refer irregular or unjustified patterns of attendance to **Surrey County Council's Schools Attendance Advice and Intervention Officers (AAIO)**
- Surrey CC's Schools (AAIO) to monitor and review attendance.

3. LEVELS OF ATTENDANCE

Although there is no precise definition of what constitutes 'good' attendance, the national average for attendance in primary schools is around 95%. We therefore aim for overall attendance at Thames Ditton Infants to be at least at this level if not higher. For individual pupils, therefore, we would broadly regard attendance of 95% (or above) as a reasonable and achievable target. Attendance may be affected by a number of factors, and children may go through periods when their attendance is lower than usual due to illness or other reasons. When considering a child's attendance record, therefore, we will always look carefully at the reasons for absence.

Parents of registered pupils have a legal duty to make sure that children of compulsory school age attend school on a regular and full-time basis. Although the principal responsibility for ensuring regular attendance rests with parents, schools also have specific responsibilities with regard to attendance. These include the day-to-day administration of registration, monitoring attendance, reporting rates of absence and taking action to improve attendance.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2006 set out the broad framework in respect of school attendance. These regulations were amended and updated with effect from 1st September 2013, and these amendments make specific changes in respect of family holiday (Section 4) and Penalty Notices (Section 11)

Attendance of 90%, which may sound high, in fact represents the equivalent of a day per fortnight away from school, or a total of 19 days in a school year. If sustained over 5 years, this would equate to nearly half a year of schooling missed in that period. Such levels of absence would clearly have a negative impact on attainment and progress, and that is why we aim for children to attend school as regularly and punctually as possible.

4. AUTHORISED ABSENCE

When a pupil is absent at the time of registration in the morning/afternoon, the law requires all schools to indicate in their registers whether the absence is **authorised** or **unauthorised**.

An absence may be authorised if it has been approved in advance by the school or if it falls into one of the categories listed below. It is essentially a morning, afternoon or day away from school for a good reason. No absence from school is ever automatically authorised.

The headteacher will only grant a **leave of absence** to a pupil during term time if the request meets the specific circumstances set out in the [2024 school attendance regulations](#).

These circumstances are usually for:

- Taking part in a regulated performance, or regulated employment abroad
- Attending an interview for educational purposes
- A temporary, time-limited part-time timetable
- Exceptional circumstances

Absences cannot be authorised by parents - only the school can do this. Notification of an absence by parents does not in itself guarantee that the absence will be authorised.

Absences for the reasons listed below are more likely to be authorised, provided that parents provide an adequate explanation:

ILLNESS AND MEDICAL/ DENTAL APPOINTMENTS

Absence through illness is the most common reason for pupils to be away from school, and such absence is authorised when parents provide confirmation of the illness. Absence through illness cannot be authorised if the only confirmation received is from the pupil or a sibling. In cases where absence through illness is excessively high or where there is a continuing pattern of such absence, this will be discussed with the parents.

MEDICAL/DENTAL APPOINTMENTS

Whilst the school will grant requests for absence for dental or medical treatments, parents are encouraged, whenever possible, to book appointments outside of the school day. When appointments during school hours are unavoidable, the school office should be notified in advance in writing, of the date and time of the appointment and when the child will be collected and/or returned to the school. Evidence of the appointment may be requested.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

Parents are able to request that a pupil is absent on a day set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the family belongs. This includes festivals.

ATTENDING AN INTERVIEW

If a pupil attends an interview or makes a visit in connection with applying for a place at, or transferring to, another school, this absence may be authorised provided that prior notice is given.

ABSENCE FOR A PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

Absence for amateur productions and one-off performances may be authorised at the school's discretion. Children's involvement in professional work is regulated by the Local Authority under the **Children (Performances) Regulations 1968**, and parents must apply for a licence from the Local Authority before an absence may be authorised.

FAMILY BEREAVEMENT

The school will respond sensitively to requests for leave of absence to attend funerals. If the funeral is to take place some distance away this will be accounted for in terms of the number of days to be authorised. This would be authorised under the category of 'exceptional circumstances'.

OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS (including holidays during term time)

There may be other occasions when absence from school is requested, and much will depend on the circumstances of the particular case in determining whether such absences are authorised.

Under the 2013 Regulations, leave of absence shall not be granted unless

- i. An application has been made in advance to the Headteacher by a parent with whom the child normally resides, and
- ii. The Headteacher considers that leave of absence should be granted due to the 'exceptional circumstances' relating to that application.

In considering each case, the school will consider

- The nature of the event
- Its frequency (i.e. is it a 'one-off' or is it likely to become a regular event)
- The overall attendance pattern of the child

If a parent needs to request absence in term-time an Absence from School for Exceptional Circumstances Request form must, wherever possible, be completed prior to the leave date and preferably at least two weeks before.

The 2013 Regulations **no longer make specific reference to 'family holiday'**, and such requests for absence will therefore be considered under the category of 'exceptional circumstances'. The school and governing body have decided that family holidays **will not**, be classified as meeting the criterion of 'exceptional circumstances' and will therefore **not be authorised**.

5. UNAUTHORISED AND PERSISTENT ABSENCE

UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

Absences are 'unauthorised' when they are either unexplained or unjustified. Unauthorised absences are those which, in general, do not fall into any of the categories listed above.

Examples of absence which **would not normally** be authorised include:

- a day out or a birthday treat;
- going shopping
- looking after another child, a parent or keeping a family member company
- holiday in term time

Lateness after the close of the register may also be recorded as an unauthorised absence if no acceptable reason for the lateness is provided.

In determining whether absences should be authorised or not, each case will be considered on its individual merits and with reference to the principles outlined above.

PERSISTENT ABSENCE

Persistent absence is defined as absence, whether authorised or unauthorised, of 10% or more. In 'real terms' this is the equivalent of 1 day's absence from school per fortnight, and children with such low attendance are those who are least likely to benefit from school and whose attainment is likely to be lower. The school and Schools AAIO regularly monitor attendance, and will discuss with parents if their child's attendance is causing concern.

There may be a number of factors which contribute to low attendance, and for some children their attendance may only be very low for a short period of time, for example due to illness. Although the attendance of these children is still tracked, it is those children whose attendance is low over a period of time who cause most concern and for whom a referral to the Schools AAIO is likely to be made. The AAIO, school and other support services will work closely with families with the aim of improving attendance.

Reducing persistent and severe absence is central to the school's strategy for improving attendance.

The school will:

- Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence
- Consider potential safeguarding issues and, where suspected or present, address them in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Hold regular meetings with the parents of pupils who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable or at risk of persistent or severe absence, or who are persistently or severely absent, to:
 - Discuss attendance and engagement at school
 - Listen, and understand barriers to attendance
 - Explain the help that is available
 - Explain the potential consequences of, and sanctions for, persistent and severe absence
 - Review any existing actions or interventions
- Provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance, in conjunction with the local authority, where relevant
- Consider alternative support that could be put in place to remove any barriers to attendance and re-engage these pupils. In doing so, the school will sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence

6. APPROVED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Pupils who are engaged in programmed educational activities cannot be marked present since they are not on site. However, school visits, field trips, approved sporting activities and work experience are classified as 'approved educational activities' and do not, for the purposes of registration, count as absence. To qualify for authorisation under this category, activities would normally be attended by a member of staff or another individual authorised by the school.

7. REGISTRATION

Registers are an important legal document and all staff involved in registration (teaching and administrative staff) complete registers clearly, to an agreed school format and with a common understanding of the definitions of authorised and unauthorised absence.

Registers are completed by class teachers, usually within the first five minutes of the morning or afternoon sessions, and if children arrive after the register is completed they will receive a late code. There is a difference between children who arrive just after the register is completed and those who arrive some time into the morning session without an explanation for their lateness. The register is officially 'closed' at 9.00am and children arriving after that time will be recorded as a U (Unauthorised) code. A note will be made of the time of arrival in your child's SIMs record. If no adequate explanation for the lateness is given by the parents, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence for the whole morning session.

8. PUNCTUALITY AND LATENESS

If children are late for school on a regular basis it can be very disruptive, not only for the children who are late but also for the rest of the class. If patterns of regular lateness are observed this will be referred to the Headteacher, who may also discuss the case with the AAIO.

9. RESPONDING TO NON-ATTENDANCE

When a pupil does not attend school we will respond in the following manner:

- If no note or telephone call is received from the parents by 9.30am the school will endeavour to contact them that day by phone, text message, or email.
- If there is no response, the school will continue to try to contact the parent every day of absence without limitation.
- If, by then end of the third day, there has still been no contact made, the school will send a letter of concern to parents and invite them into school to discuss their concerns and the reasons for the absence. The school will tell parents that if the absence persists that a referral will be made to Surrey CC's AAIO. In line with the Regulations 2006, all unexplained absences of 10 days or more are required to be reported to the Local Authority.
- Attendance of all Looked after Children is monitored daily by the Local Authority responsible for them. The school will also notify the relevant Local Authority of any unexplained absence.

10. THE ROLE OF ATTENDANCE ADVICE and INTERVENTION OFFICERS (AAIO)

The school has an attached AAIO who visits the school on a regular basis. The principal role of the AAIO is to ensure regular attendance through working closely with schools in identifying attendance and behavioural need. The AAIO also has more general responsibilities for the welfare of children, and the AAIO therefore has an important role in liaising between various agencies.

The AAIO will monitor registers and record:

- patterns of illness or other authorised absence which may be causing concern
- any instances of unauthorised and/or persistent absence (above the occasional day)
- any patterns of persistent lateness

The AAIO will then liaise with the school and decide if any action is required. This may include home visits to offer support and guidance. The AAIO is empowered to commence legal proceedings on behalf of the Local Authority.

11. PENALTY NOTICES

The headteacher (or someone authorised by them), local authority or the police can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age, by issuing a penalty notice.

If the school issues a penalty notice, it will check with the local authority before doing so, and send it a copy of any penalty notice issued. Before issuing a penalty notice, the school will consider the individual case, including:

- Whether the national threshold for considering a penalty notice has been met (10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks)
- Whether a penalty notice is the best available tool to improve attendance for that pupil
- Whether further support, a notice to improve or another legal intervention would be a more appropriate solution
- Whether any obligations that the school has under the Equality Act 2010 make issuing a penalty notice inappropriate

A penalty notice may also be issued where parents allow their child to be present in a public place during school hours without reasonable justification, during the first 5 days of a suspension or exclusion (where the school has notified the parents that the pupil must not be present in a public place on that day).

Each parent who is liable for the pupil's offence(s) can be issued with a penalty notice, but this will usually only be the parent/parents who allowed the absence.

The payment must be made directly to the local authority, regardless of who issues the notice. If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice.

If issued with a first penalty notice, the parent must pay £80 within 21 days, or £160 within 28 days.

If a second penalty notice is issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil, the parent must pay £160 if paid within 28 days.

A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of the issue of the first penalty notice. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time within those 3 years, alternative action will be taken instead.

12. NOTICES TO IMPROVE, MONITORING AND REVIEWING

The school will monitor attendance and absence data (including punctuality) half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual pupil, year group and cohort level. The implementation of this policy will be monitored by the Senior Leadership Team, Governing Body, and the AAIO.

If the national threshold has been met and support is appropriate, but parents do not engage with offers of support, the school may offer a notice to improve to give parents a final chance to engage with support.

Notices to improve will be issued in line with processes set out in the local code of conduct for the local authority area in which the pupil attends school.

They will include:

- Details of the pupil's attendance record and of the offences
- The benefits of regular attendance and the duty of parents under [section 7 of the Education Act 1996](#)
- Details of the support provided so far
- Opportunities for further support, or to access previously provided support that was not engaged with
- A clear warning that a penalty notice may be issued if attendance doesn't improve within the improvement period, along with details of what sufficient improvement looks like, which will be decided on a case-by-case basis
- A clear timeframe of between 3 and 6 weeks for the improvement period
- The grounds on which a penalty notice may be issued before the end of the improvement period

13. CHANGING SCHOOLS

It is important that if a family decides to send the child/children in their care to a different school, that they inform the school staff as soon as possible. A pupil will not be removed from this school roll until the following information has been received and investigated:

- The date the pupil will be leaving this school and starting the next
- The address of the new school
- The new home address, if it is known

The pupil's school records will then be sent on to the new school as soon as possible. In the event that the school has not been informed of the above information, the family will be referred to the AAIO.