

Thriplow Church of England (Aided) Primary School

Attendance Policy

There are only 190 school days in a year and we want to see every child here every day because every day matters!

Thriplow School works together with parents to ensure that all children are registered at the school and attend both punctually and regularly. Under The Education (Pupils' Attendance Records) Regulations 1991, Schools have to distinguish in registers between *authorised* and *unauthorised* absences; we also include specific data on unauthorised absences in the School Brochure and Governors' Annual Report to parents.

Legislation apart, Thriplow Governors believe that co-operation between school and a parent is essential in maintaining regular attendance and thereby ensuring the quality and progression of each child's education. Parents have a legal duty to ensure that children of compulsory school age attend on a regular and full time basis. The school records and monitors attendance in accordance with statutory requirements and with the principle that regular uninterrupted attendance is vital to a child's educational progress.

Procedures

Registers are called twice daily at 9.00a.m. and 1.00p.m. Thriplow registers close at 9.10a.m. and 1.05p.m. Any child arriving after the closure of the register is regarded as *late* for that session. Parents are asked to visit the school office and make an entry in our Late Book. Any child who is absent will have the appropriate code entered into their register. If no explanation for absence is received then the school office will try to make contact with the parent. We will normally do this within hours of a child's absence being apparent. The office collects attendance data and enters it onto SIMS attendance package. This data is used to trigger letters to parents in order to ensure that any unauthorised absences are accounted for. The head works with the administrator in charge of attendance matters to ensure that a running total of authorised and unauthorised absences is kept and updated. If necessary the head writes to and talks to parents on these matters, and follow up sessions with the Education Welfare Officer may be needed

Authorised Absence

Absences which are justifiable in the view of the headteacher are called *authorised* absences. At Thriplow these may include medical and dental appointments, illness, religious observance, bereavement, educational visits, approved public examinations or performances, including sporting activity, and interviews. If parents know that their child is going to be absent from school for any unavoidable reason they should contact the school as soon as possible, or preferably prior to the first morning of absence to tell us.

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Unauthorised Absence

Unjustifiable absences are called *unauthorised* absences. These are all regarded by the LA as truancy. A parental note explaining an absence from school is not acceptable unless the reason is covered under the authorised reasons above. If there are attendance problems then each individual child's attendance record will be considered together with timing of absences and impact on their learning. Long weekends as a consistent pattern of absence will have to be explained.

Procedures

- **For the parent or guardian**

Parents/guardians should ensure that their child arrives at school between 8.50am and 9.00a.m. when registration begins. If the child arrives after 9.10am when the registers close then the adult accompanying the child, or the child her/himself should report directly to the school office and make an entry in the Late Book kept for this purpose. Registration is at 1.00p.m. and closes at 1.05pm. All absences must be explained by letter addressed to the class teacher *even if a telephone call has been made to the school office*. If a written explanation is not received soon after the pupil's return to school, a standard form of reminder is sent. If the absence is due to an annual holiday entitlement of a parent, a form must be completed, which is available from the school office. The headteacher then decides whether to authorise these absences or not. The Head teacher deals with individual queries and considers these in the light of the policy outlined above. The head will consider the number of absences the child has had during the year and any other relevant factors which need to be taken into account. Her decision on these matters is final.

- **For the class teacher (marking procedure)**

The register remains open for 15 minutes in the morning and 5 minutes in the afternoon. All pupils arriving while the register is open are counted as present. Pupils arriving after this period are deemed absent and have to report to the office and sign the late book.

Registers are marked in black ink, denoting present, and red ink, denoting absent.

A system of symbols, detailed on the cover of each register, indicates how the class teacher differentiates between the reasons for pupil's absences.

Telephone messages are sent to the class teacher from the office, but it is the class teacher's responsibility to ensure that a parental note is received for all absences, which is then attached to the register. The office will follow up any letters which are two weeks and more overdue. As from May 2005 a computer register of all attendances in SIMS. Net is also being kept. This produces profiles for all pupil absences, detailing the different reasons for non-attendance.

- **For the Headteacher**

Mrs Lodge follows up areas of concern expressed by the class teacher. She does this with the parents initially, and then with the EWO if needed.

Each Autumn Mrs Lodge reports to governors the results of the annual FORVUS attendance return. The governing body has an important monitoring role in this respect.

- **For the Governing Body**

OFSTED are keen that the attendance figures submitted each half term via Pupil Level Annual Census (PLASC) reflects our view that children should attend school regularly.

How will we improve this attendance figure?

We track each child's attendance patterns carefully and supply detailed information about absences for the Annual Report. Information is also available in the school brochure, in school newsletters and we include advice on the form to request leave to withdraw children for annual holidays. Parents are contacted by letter when their child's attendance rate falls below 95% and asked to discuss the matter with the headteacher.

Term Time Holidays

What the law says

The regulations make it clear that parents do not have any right or entitlement to take a child out of school for the purposes of a term-time holiday. The regulations do state that headteachers may, in certain circumstances, grant up to 10 school-days leave in a school year for the purposes of an annual family holiday but parents should not expect such leave to be granted as of right. Indeed, it is likely that in many cases Mrs Lodge will refuse to authorise leave.

The Government's own guidance on the issue of term-time holidays states: *'Parents should not normally take pupils on holiday in term'*.

Parents should be aware that if leave is granted it will be for the purposes of an annual family holiday – that is, a single period of absence which occurs once in the school year. An annual family holiday is not a series of long weekends nor several two or three day breaks.

How Thriplow School deals with requests for term-time holidays

At Thriplow School, parents and carers are asked not to plan family holidays during term time. If parents and carers wish to apply for leave to be granted, they are asked to fill out a form to request leave to withdraw children for annual holidays which is available from the school office. Only in exceptional circumstances will permission for term-time absence be granted.

What are “exceptional circumstances”?

It is the decision of the headteacher, Mrs Lodge, as to what might constitute exceptional circumstances and each request for term-time leave will be considered on an individual basis. Mrs Lodge will not generally accept as an exceptional circumstance the fact that a holiday is cheaper during term-time. An exceptional circumstance is much more likely to be a one-off, unique situation eg a parent, grandparent or other close relative is seriously ill and the holiday proposed is likely to be the last such holiday; or there may have been a significant trauma in the family recently and Mrs Lodge might consider that an immediate holiday might enable the child concerned to better deal with the situation; or the holiday might be a unique, one-off never-to-be-repeated occasion which can only take place at the time

requested. Also, as a Christian centred family school we do appreciate the need for and value of quality family time in a holiday setting.

Mrs Lodge will also look very carefully at the child's previous attendance record and should he or she have any concerns, for example should the child's average attendance be below 95%, it is highly unlikely that she will agree to authorise any further absence.

Issues parents need to be aware of

- Should the school not agree to grant leave and the parents take their child on holiday regardless then this will be counted as unauthorised absence - this is the same as 'truancy'. (Schools are now legally required to record as a specific category all absences which accrue as a consequence of family holidays which have been taken without authorisation.)
- Should leave be granted but the child remain absent for longer than agreed then this extra time will be recorded as unauthorised absence.
- Should a child fail to return to school within 10 school days of the agreed return date and there is no contact from the parents the school may remove the child's name from the school roll. The school may also inform its Education Welfare Officer. In these circumstances the parents would be responsible for ensuring that their child was registered at and attended another school.
- Should leave be granted, then it will be for an annual family holiday, not a series of long weekends not several two or three breaks.

Extended visits overseas

Occasionally holidays of more than 10 days to visit family overseas may be unavoidable. In such circumstances, Thriplow School will recognise the importance and significance such visits often have and will wish to ensure that a positive discussion with the parents takes place beforehand. However, the school will stress to parents the likely educational impact upon their child if extended leave is taken during term-time. We will also seek to explain what work the child will miss at school, how this may be addressed on return and how the parents can help the child. It is possible that the child may be given work to do while he or she is away.

Avoiding term-time holidays

The headteacher and the Governing Body at Thriplow School recognise that parents' circumstances (financial circumstances, working commitments, etc) vary enormously, but we are nonetheless required to ensure that children only miss school if it is absolutely unavoidable. We aim to limit the amount of time lost to term-time holidays because we believe that a child's absence during term-time can seriously disrupt his or her continuity of learning. When a child is absent from school he or she misses not only the teaching provided on the days when he or she is away, but is also less prepared for the lessons building on that after his or her return. There is a consequent risk of underachievement which we obviously wish to avoid.

Policy agreed at Governing Body Meeting July 2008

To be reviewed July 2009