St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Attendance Policy

Acting Head of School: Mrs P Le Breton

Executive Head: Mrs N Collins

Chair of Govenors: Simon De Souza

Attendance Lead: Mrs L Murphy

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St Thomas More Catholic Primary School Attendance Policy

At St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, our Attendance Policy reflects our strong belief that all children have entitlement to a broad and varied education and experiences in a caring and safe environment, which reflects the values and beliefs of our Catholic faith. We see ourselves as a loving, supportive and happy community following Christ's way, educating children and adults to develop their talents and share them for the good of others. We believe that, together with parents, we are at the foundations of our children's future.

Regular and full-time attendance is essential if children are to benefit fully from their school life. It is important that children learn the importance of being punctual as part of their preparation for adult life. The school and parents, will work together in order to achieve high standards of attendance and punctuality.

Aims

We are committed to meeting our obligation with regards to school attendance through our whole-school culture and ethos that values good attendance, including:

> Promoting good attendance

> Reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence

> Ensuring every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled

> Acting early to address patterns of absence

> Building strong relationships with families to ensure pupils have the support in place to attend school

We will also promote and support punctuality in attending lessons.

Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the Working Together to Improve Schools Attendance https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

> Part 6 of The Education Act 1996

> Part 3 of The Education Act 2002

> Part 7 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006

> The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (and 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016 amendments)

> https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/717/contents/made

> https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/210/contents

It also refers to:

> School census guidance
> Keeping Children Safe in Education
> Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools

Roles and responsibilities

The governing board

The governing board is responsible for:

> Promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos
> Making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
> Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data
> Monitoring attendance figures for the whole school
> Making sure staff receive adequate training on attendance
> Holding the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy

The headteacher

The headteacher is responsible for:

> Implementation of this policy at the school
> Monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to governors
> Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual pupils
> Monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies
> Issuing fixed-penalty notices, where necessary
> Leading attendance across the school
> Offering a clear vision for attendance improvement
> Evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes
> Having an oversight of data analysis
> Devising specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data
> Building relationships with parents/carers to discuss and tackle attendance issues
> Creating intervention reintegration plans in partnership with pupils and their parents/carers
> Delivering targeted intervention and support to pupils and families

The attendance officer

The school attendance officer is responsible for:

> Monitoring and analysing attendance data

- Benchmarking attendance data to identify areas of focus for improvement
- Providing regular attendance reports and reporting concerns to the headteacher and senior leaders
- Working with the attendance advisory practitioners to tackle persistent absence
- Advising the headteacher when to issue fixed-penalty notices

Class teachers

Class teachers are responsible for recording attendance on a daily basis (morning and afternoon), using the correct codes, and submitting this information using the electronic register.

School office staff

School office staff will:

- Take calls from parents/carers about absence on a day-to-day basis and record it on the school system
- Transfer calls from parents/carers to the pastoral manager in order to provide them with more detailed support on attendance

Parents/carers

Parents/carers are expected to:

- Make sure their child attends every day on time
- Understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality and promote this with their child.
- Call the school to report their child's absence before 10am on the first day of the absence with a reason as to why they will be absent and each subsequent day of absence, and advise when they are expected to return
- Provide medical evidence on the 3rd day of absence
- Provide the school with more than 1 emergency contact number for their child
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day
- Provide a note indicating attendance at the dentist, doctor or optician before the arranged appointment unless an emergency situation has arisen
- Inform the school if their child is going to be late e.g. if a car breaks down; if an urgent appointment has been made

Pupils

Pupils are expected to:

- Attend school every day on time

Recording attendance

Attendance register

We will keep an attendance register, and place all pupils onto this register using our BromCom Attendance Module.

We will take our attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark whether every pupil is:

> Present

> Attending an approved off-site educational activity

> Absent

> Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Any amendment to the attendance register will include:

> The original entry

> The amended entry

> The reason for the amendment

> The date on which the amendment was made

> The name and position of the person who made the amendment

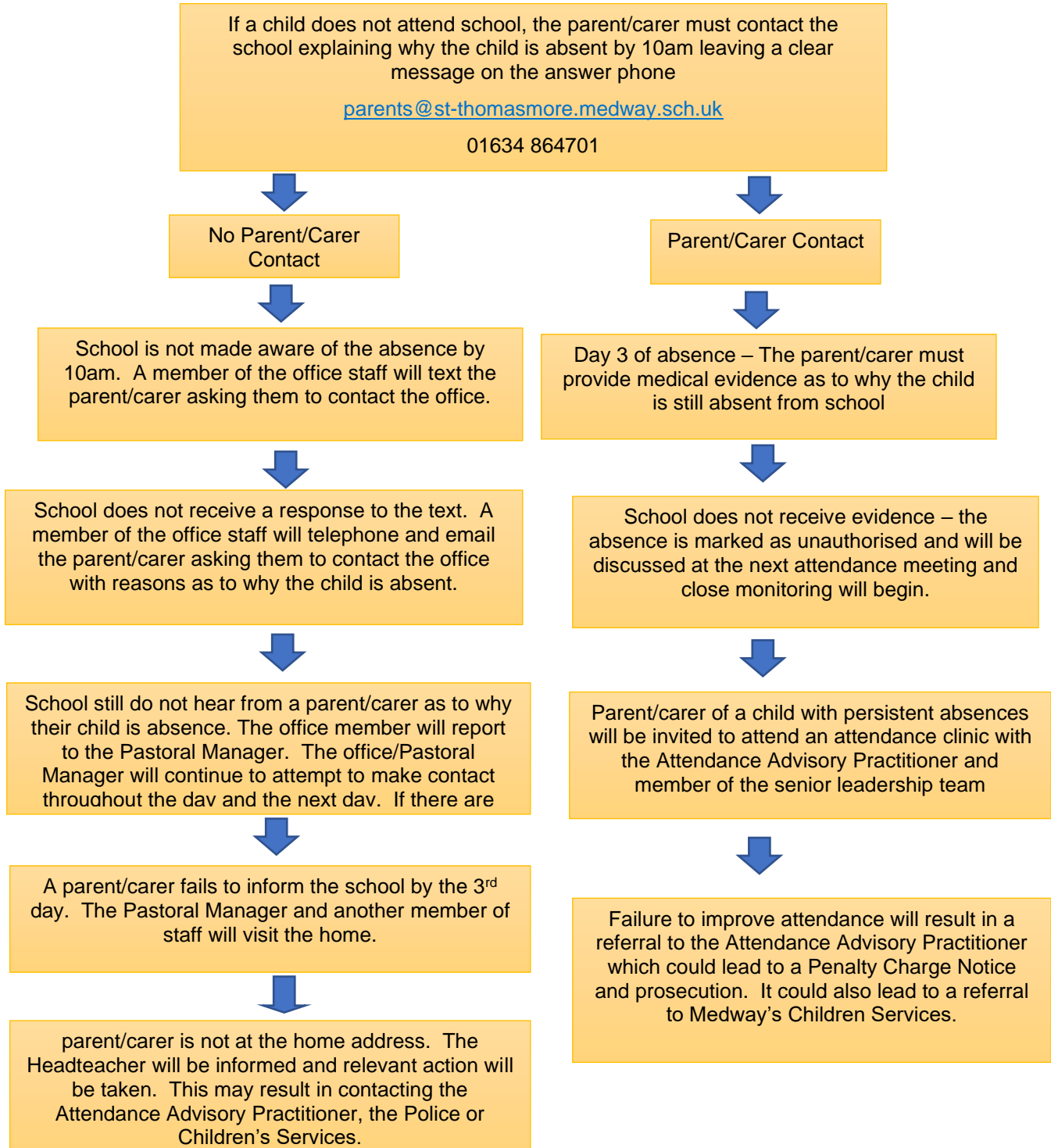**See appendix 1 for the DfE attendance codes.**

We will also record:

> For pupils of compulsory school age, whether the absence is authorised or not

> The nature of the activity if a pupil is attending an approved educational activity

> The nature of circumstances where a pupil is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 3 years after the date on which the entry was made.

Morning Session		Afternoon Session	
8:40am	Gates open	1:15pm	Registration
8:55am	Registration in class	1:40pm	Any child who arrives after 1:15pm but before 1:40pm will be recorded as late (Code L)
9:00am	Registration closes (any child who arrives after registration has finished but before 9:30am will be recorded as late - Code L)	1:40pm	Any child arriving after 1:40pm will be recorded as Code U (late after register closes)
After 9:30am	Any child arriving after 9:30am will be recorded as Code U (late after register closes)	3:15pm	End of school day

Unplanned Absence

The pupil's parent/carer must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence by 10am or as soon as practically possible by calling the school office.

If a child does not attend school, the parent/carer must contact the school explaining why the child is absent by 10am leaving a clear message on the answer phone

parents@st-thomasmore.medway.sch.uk

01634 864701

No Parent/Carer Contact

School is not made aware of the absence by 10am. A member of the office staff will text the parent/carer asking them to contact the office.

School does not receive a response to the text. A member of the office staff will telephone and email the parent/carer asking them to contact the office with reasons as to why the child is absent.

School still do not hear from a parent/carer as to why their child is absence. The office member will report to the Pastoral Manager. The office/Pastoral Manager will continue to attempt to make contact throughout the day and the next day. If there are

A parent/carer fails to inform the school by the 3rd day. The Pastoral Manager and another member of staff will visit the home.

parent/carer is not at the home address. The Headteacher will be informed and relevant action will be taken. This may result in contacting the Attendance Advisory Practitioner, the Police or Children's Services.

Parent/Carer Contact

Day 3 of absence – The parent/carer must provide medical evidence as to why the child is still absent from school

School does not receive evidence – the absence is marked as unauthorised and will be discussed at the next attendance meeting and close monitoring will begin.

Parent/carer of a child with persistent absences will be invited to attend an attendance clinic with the Attendance Advisory Practitioner and member of the senior leadership team

Failure to improve attendance will result in a referral to the Attendance Advisory Practitioner which could lead to a Penalty Charge Notice and prosecution. It could also lead to a referral to Medway's Children Services.

If you would like further support with your child's attendance or punctuality, please contact the school and ask to speak to our Pastoral Manager so that we can work together. You can contact us for more information by emailing aassa@medway.gov.uk or by phoning 01634 337 310.

https://www.gov.uk/school-attendance-absence

Where a pupil has not returned to school for ten days after an authorized absence.

Children being absent from education for prolonged periods and/or repeat occasions can be a warning sign of a range of safeguarding concerns and therefore, St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, will work together with other professionals such as the Attendance Advisory Practitioners, Social Workers and Early Help Coordinators to raise any concerns and seek further support.

We will mark absence due to physical or mental illness as authorised, unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

Where the absence is longer than 3 days or there are doubts about the authenticity of the illness, the school will ask for medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents/carers will be notified of this in advance.

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/

Planned absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the pupil's parent/carer notifies the school in advance of the appointment and provides evidence of the appointment card, text message or letter.

However, we encourage parents/carers to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

The pupil's parent/carer must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence via email to the school office or telephone. Requests for holiday absences will be recorded as unauthorised.

Lateness and punctuality

A pupil who arrives late:

> Before the register has closed will be marked as late, using the appropriate code

> After the register has closed will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code

> Children who are persistently late may be reported to the Attendance Advisory Practitioner

Following up unexplained absence

Where any pupil we expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:

> Text the pupil's parent/carer on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If we do not hear from the parents we will call all emergency contacts. If the school cannot reach any of the pupil's emergency contacts, the school may visit the home.

> Identify whether the absence is approved or not

> Identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained – this will be no later than 5 working days after the session

> Call the parent/carer on each day that the absence continues without explanation to ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will consider involving Medway's Children's Services, the Attendance Advisory Practitioner or the Police.

Reporting to parents/carers

The school will regularly inform parents/carers about their child's attendance and absence levels via attendance letters, telephone calls home and end of year reports.

Authorised and unauthorised absence

Approval for term-time absence

The headteacher will only grant a leave of absence to a pupil during term time if they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. A leave of absence is granted at the headteacher's discretion, including the length of time the pupil is authorised to be absent for.

We define 'exceptional circumstances' as one off events which are unavoidable, examples may include the death of a close relative, attendance at a funeral, respite care of a looked after child, a housing crisis which prevents attendance.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and, where possible, at least 2 weeks before the absence, and in accordance with any leave of absence request form, accessible via the school office. The headteacher may require evidence to support any request for leave of absence.

Valid reasons for **authorised absence** include:

> Illness (including mental illness) and medical/dental appointments

> Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents/carers belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents'/carers' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart

> Traveller pupils travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision

Legal sanctions

As part of the measures introduced by the DfE, if a pupil has 10 sessions of absence within a 10-week period, the pupil's parent(s)/carer(s) may receive a 'Notice to Improve' notification sent via email or letter. Each day of absence is recorded as two sessions (morning and afternoon). Unauthorised absences include:

- unauthorised absence (where there is no reasonable circumstance for the absence taking place, O code),
- arriving late after the register has closed (U Code),
- or a combination of these with holidays taken during term time (Unauthorised holiday – G code)

These 10 weeks can span different terms and even different educational settings, such as transitions in-year school changes and alternative provision. For instance, if your child misses 3 days of school for a holiday in September (6 sessions) and is late after the register closes on 4 occasions (4 sessions) between September and October, you may be issued a 'Notice to Improve' notification.

The 'Notice to Improve' notification will set out the expectations and period notice for the improvement of attendance such as 'no further unauthorised absences'. Should the expectations not be met in the improvement period, then a Penalty Notice may then be requested by the school and issued by the Local Authority (LA) to each parent/carer responsible for the child.

Any holiday-related absence taken that includes 10 sessions in 10 weeks, may result in a Penalty Notice. In this instance, a 'Notice to Improve' notification **will not** be issued beforehand.

The penalty notice amount is increasing from August 2024 with a maximum of two penalty notices within a rolling three-year period:-

• First offence - The first time a Penalty Notice is issued the amount will be: £80 per parent, per child paid within 21 days. This increases to £160 per parent, per child if paid after day 21, until day 28. Any non-payment of the Penalty Notice may be referred to the Magistrates Court.

• Second Offence (within 3 years) - the second time a Penalty Notice is issued the amount will be £160 per parent, per child paid within 28 days. Any non-payment of the Penalty Notice may be referred to the Magistrates Court.

• Third Offence and Any Further Offences (within 3 years) - the third time an offence is committed a Penalty Notice will not be issued, and the case may be presented straight to the Magistrates' Court under s.444 of the Education Act (1996) or other legal interventions considered. The Magistrates' Court can order fines up to £2500 per parent, per child.

Parents with parental responsibility, and adults residing with the child, including for example, stepparents who have day-to-day responsibility for the child, may be fined, and this applies to each child who is absent. For example, if two adults take two children out of school, the total fines would be £640 (reduced to £320 for a first offence paid within 21days).

If a Penalty Notice is not paid within the time limits set out in the letter to the parent, the Local Authority may proceed the case to court.

We recognise that these Penalty Notices may be unpopular with families, but it is important to inform you of these changes promptly.

Nationally, Headteachers are:

- not permitted to approve term-time holidays except in genuinely exceptional circumstances, and
- are to consider each application for a leave of absence individually before making our decision.

The law clearly expects Headteachers to enforce these penalties strictly.

The new policy also states that all schools must consider issuing Penalty Notices if the criteria is met. This is a national statutory process and will be followed by all English state funded schools.

Strategies for promoting attendance

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School will encourage school attendance by providing an engaging, broad and balanced curriculum, an ethos where children feel loved in a place of care, kindness and happiness where children want to come to school. Weekly attendance and punctuation awards with a 'Punctuality Peacock' and an 'Anteater Attendance' mascot, termly celebration certificates for attendance and end of year school reports. Regular information on the school newsletter will keep parents/carers up to date with the impact of absences on academic, growth and developmental progress and regular communication with the Pastoral Manager and Attendance Officer to support parents/carers who may have difficulties. St Thomas More Catholic Primary School also engages the wider community by inviting parents/carers into school for 'Bring Your Parent/Grandparent to…' sessions, coffee mornings and parent workshops.

Monitoring attendance

The school will:

> Monitor attendance and absence data half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual pupil level

> Identify whether or not there are particular groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern or require support

> Meet termly with the school's Attendance Advisory Practitioner to seek advice where necessary

> Communicate with social workers and early help workers

Pupil-level absence data will be collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics. The school will compare attendance data to the national average, and share this with the governing board.

How we address attendance concerns

A child's attendance starts to drop due to regular days off through illness, family holiday or other circumstances and there are unauthorised absences recorded

School will closely monitor attendance and advise parent in writing that their child's attendance is falling and asking if there is any support we can put in place to assist and advise that the parent call the school.

If attendance continues to drop and we continue to see unauthorised absence recorded we will write to the parent and explain it is now necessary for medical evidence to be provided in order to have further illness/medical absences authorised.

If there is still no improvement we will write to the parent inviting them in for an attendance meeting and giving them a period to improve their child's attendance. You will also be sent an Attendance Contract.

If there is no improvement, or the parent did not attend the meeting and there is no improvement, we will send a School Attendance Notice to Improve giving a period of time to show an improvement.

If no improvement is seen or there are further unauthorised absences a penalty notice may be issued. A penalty notice is £160 if paid within 28 days, or £80 if paid within 21 days.

Analysing attendance

The school will:

> Analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify pupils or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance, and use this analysis to provide targeted support to these pupils and their families

> Look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns

Using data to improve attendance

The school will:

> Provide regular attendance reports to school leaders, to facilitate discussions with pupils and families

> Use data to monitor and evaluate the impact of any interventions put in place in order to modify them and inform future strategies

Reducing persistent and severe absence

Persistent absence is where a pupil misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a pupil misses 50% or more of school.

The school will:

> Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence

> Hold regular meetings with the parents/carers of pupils who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable, or are persistently or severely absent, to discuss attendance and engagement at school

> Provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance

Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed as guidance from the local authority or DfE is updated, and as a minimum annually by the Headteacher. At every review, the policy will be approved by the full governing board.

Links with other policies

This policy links to the following policies:

> Safeguarding & Child Protection policy

> Behaviour, Relationships & Anti-Bullying policy

https://st-thomasmore.medway.sch.uk/key-information/policies-documents/

Reviewed Date:	October 2024
Next Review Date:	October 2026

Appendix 1: attendance codes. The following codes are taken from the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Pupil is present at morning registration
\	Present (pm)	Pupil is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Pupil arrives late before register has closed
B	Off-site educational activity	Pupil is at a supervised off-site educational activity approved by the school
D	Dual registered	Pupil is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
J	Interview	Pupil has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
P	Sporting activity	Pupil is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
V	Educational trip or visit	Pupil is on an educational visit/trip organised, or approved, by the school
W	Work experience	Pupil is on a work experience placement
Code	**Definition**	**Scenario**
Authorised absence		
C0	Authorised absence	Absent with leave for other circumstances.
C1	Authorised absence	Absent with leave for the purpose of participating in a regulated performance.
C2	Authorised absence	Absent with leave, of compulsory school age and temporary reduced timetable does not require them to attend

E	Excluded	Pupil has been excluded but no alternative provision has been made
I	Illness	School has been notified that a pupil will be absent due to illness
M	Medical/dental appointment	Pupil is at a medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance	Pupil is taking part in a day of religious observance
S	Study leave	Year 11 pupil is on study leave during their public examinations
T	Gypsy, Roma and traveller absence	Pupil from a traveller community is travelling, as agreed with the school

Unauthorised absence

G	Unauthorised holiday	Pupil is on a holiday that was not approved by the school
N	Reason not provided	Pupil is absent for an unknown reason (this code should be amended when the reason emerges, or replaced with code O if no reason for absence has been provided after a reasonable amount of time)
O	Unauthorised absence	School is not satisfied with reason for pupil's absence
U	Arrival after registration	Pupil arrived at school after the register closed

Code	Definition	Scenario
#	Planned school closure	Whole or partial school closure due to half-term/bank holiday/INSET day