

St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School



Attendance Policy

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School is committed to working **with** families rather than doing things **to** families. We recognise that parents know their children best and that they are often the first people to notice when something is wrong. We will listen to parents, listen to children, identify barriers and seek solutions together. We will provide early support wherever possible and will celebrate improvement. At the same time, we will be clear that regular attendance is a legal responsibility and that children have an entitlement to education.

At St Joseph's, every child matters, every day matters and every day is an opportunity to learn, belong and flourish.

'Inspired by Christ, working together, achieving our best'

Policy Created: September 2026

Updated: September 2028

Aims of St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School

'Inspired by Christ, working together, achieving our best'

Attendance Policy 2026–2027

Catholic Vision and Rationale

At St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, we believe that every child is a unique and precious gift from God and that every child has the right to experience a rich, ambitious and inclusive education within a safe and nurturing Catholic community. Regular attendance is central to this mission because children cannot fully access the academic curriculum, relationships, friendships, spiritual formation, enrichment, pastoral support and wider opportunities provided by the school if they are frequently absent.

Our attendance policy is therefore rooted in our commitment to being ***'Inspired by Christ, Working Together and Achieving Our Best'***. We seek to ensure that every child knows that they belong at St Joseph's, that their presence matters and that the school community is stronger when every child is present.

This approach reflects the Department for Education's statutory guidance ***'Working together to improve school attendance'***, which establishes attendance as a shared responsibility between pupils, parents, schools, trusts, governing bodies and local authorities. The guidance makes clear that schools should develop a culture in which attendance is understood as an important part of school life while also identifying and addressing barriers that prevent children from attending regularly. St Joseph's will therefore combine high expectations with high support, recognising that good attendance is both an educational entitlement and a safeguarding responsibility.

We recognise that attendance difficulties are not always caused by a lack of parental commitment. A child may be absent because of illness, disability, SEND, anxiety, mental health difficulties, bullying, unmet needs, family circumstances, safeguarding concerns, difficulties with transitions, sensory needs or other barriers. Our approach will therefore seek first to understand the circumstances behind an absence before deciding what intervention is appropriate. This is consistent with the DfE's 2026 attendance framework, which places early identification, supportive intervention and partnership with families at the centre of effective attendance practice.

Purpose and Principles of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear, consistent and compassionate approach to attendance and punctuality across St Joseph's Catholic Primary School. It sets out the expectations placed upon pupils, parents and carers, staff, leaders and governors and explains how the school will monitor attendance, identify emerging concerns, provide support and, where necessary, work with Thurrock Council to use formal or legal attendance intervention.

The policy is underpinned by the ***'Education Act 1996,'*** particularly Section 7, which places a legal duty upon parents to secure their child's regular attendance at school, and Section 444, which provides for legal action where a child of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly.

The statutory attendance framework is further governed by the ***'School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024'***, which establish the requirements for school registers and attendance codes. St Joseph's will comply with these requirements and will ensure that attendance is recorded accurately and consistently. The school's approach will also have regard to the ***'Equality Act 2010'***, the ***'Children Act 1989'***, the ***'Children Act 2004'***, the ***'Children and Families Act 2014'*** and the ***'SEND Code of Practice'***, particularly where attendance difficulties relate to disability, special educational needs or other vulnerabilities.

Attendance as an Educational Entitlement

Regular attendance is essential because learning is cumulative. Missing individual lessons may appear insignificant in isolation, but repeated absence can result in gaps in knowledge, reduced confidence, disrupted friendships and a weakening of a child's connection to school. The DfE's attendance guidance makes clear that improving attendance is fundamental to improving educational outcomes and that schools should intervene early when attendance begins to decline.

St Joseph's therefore expects children to attend school every day that the school is open unless there is a legitimate reason for absence which is authorised in accordance with the law. The school will promote the message that everyday matters, while avoiding an approach that reduces attendance to a percentage alone. Where attendance becomes a concern, parents will be helped to understand the actual amount of education their child has missed and the potential cumulative impact on learning and wellbeing.

The national picture reinforces the importance of this approach. DfE data indicates that overall absence was approximately 6.9% in 2024/25, compared with 4.7% before the pandemic, while persistent absence remained a significant national concern.

Under the national definition, a pupil is persistently absent when they miss 10% or more of possible sessions. St Joseph's will not wait until a child reaches the persistent absence threshold before offering support. Emerging patterns will be addressed much earlier because early intervention provides a greater opportunity to prevent attendance difficulties becoming entrenched.

Legal Responsibility for Attendance

Parents and carers have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child receives an education and, where the child is registered at St Joseph's, to ensure that the child attends regularly. Section 7 of the '**Education Act 1996**' establishes this duty, while Section 444 provides the legal framework for offences relating to failure to secure regular attendance. The definition of "parent" in Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 extends beyond biological parents and includes individuals with parental responsibility and others who have care of the child.

St Joseph's will make clear to parents that authorisation of absence is a decision for the school and that parents cannot authorise an absence simply by providing a reason. The school must determine whether the circumstances meet the statutory requirements for an authorised absence. The school will exercise this responsibility fairly, reasonably and consistently and will consider the individual circumstances of the child and family.

The school will always seek to resolve attendance difficulties through support and partnership wherever possible. However, where attendance remains irregular, where support is not engaged with, or where the circumstances warrant immediate formal action, St Joseph's will work with Thurrock Council in accordance with the Education Act 1996, the DfE's Working together to improve school attendance statutory guidance and Thurrock's local attendance procedures.

Persistent and Severe Absence

The national definition of:

- Persistent absence is absence of **10% or more of possible sessions**.
- Severe absence is absence of **50% or more of possible sessions**.

The DfE's attendance guidance expects schools to identify pupils at risk of persistent and severe absence and to put appropriate support in place.

St Joseph's will not regard persistent absence as an arbitrary point at which intervention begins. Attendance will be monitored continuously and intervention will begin when a pattern becomes concerning. The school will consider both the percentage of attendance and the circumstances behind the absence.

Where a child becomes persistently absent, the school will undertake a more detailed assessment of barriers and may establish an Attendance Support Plan and will consider whether a multi-agency response is required.

Where absence becomes severe, the Headteacher, Attendance Lead, DSL and SENCO will consider what further support or legal action may be required.

Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

St Joseph's distinguishes between authorised and unauthorised absence in accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 and the DfE's statutory guidance, *Working together to improve school attendance*:

- **Authorised absence** is absence the school has accepted as meeting the statutory requirements, such as genuine illness, certain medical appointments, religious observance or exceptional leave approved by the Headteacher.
- **Unauthorised absence** is where the school has not given permission and the reason does not meet the statutory requirements.

Parents cannot authorise their own child's absence; the decision rests with the school.

It is important that parents understand that both authorised and unauthorised absence count towards a child's overall attendance percentage. Authorisation means that the reason for absence is accepted; it does not mean that the child is recorded as present or that the absence is removed from the attendance calculation. For example, in a 190-day school year, 10 days of absence would result in approximately 94.7% attendance, whether those days were authorised or unauthorised.

The distinction becomes particularly important in relation to the law. Under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996, parents have a legal duty to ensure their child receives an education and, where registered at school, attends regularly. Section 444 provides the legal framework where a child fails to attend regularly.

While frequent authorised absence may require the school to provide support, particularly where illness, SEND or mental health are contributing factors, persistent unauthorised absence may lead to formal intervention. The national framework allows consideration of a penalty notice where there are 10 sessions (a session is a morning or afternoon) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10-school-week period, subject to the circumstances of the case and local authority procedures.

St Joseph's will therefore consider the whole attendance picture, not simply the percentage or whether individual absences are authorised. Where absence is linked to illness, SEND, disability or mental health, the school will seek to understand and address the underlying barriers. Where absence is unauthorised and persistent, the school will work with parents and, where necessary, Thurrock Council to secure regular attendance in accordance with the law.

Authorised absence is still absence and affects attendance percentage. Unauthorised absence also affects attendance percentage and may additionally lead to formal attendance intervention.

Attendance, Safeguarding and Children Missing Education

Attendance is fundamentally a safeguarding issue as well as an educational issue. **Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026**, specifically highlights the importance of schools having effective procedures for responding to children who are absent from education. KCSIE makes clear that absence can be a warning sign of safeguarding concerns and that schools should understand the relationship between attendance, children missing education and wider risks.

At St Joseph's, unexplained, prolonged or unusual absence will therefore never be considered simply an administrative matter. Staff will consider whether an absence may indicate neglect, abuse, exploitation, domestic abuse, criminal or sexual exploitation, mental health difficulties, bullying, radicalisation or another safeguarding concern. Where concerns arise, the school's safeguarding procedures will be followed immediately and the Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed.

The school's approach will also comply with the DfE's statutory Children Missing Education guidance, which requires schools and local authorities to take action where children are not receiving suitable education and recognises that children missing education may be at increased risk of safeguarding harm.

Where a child's absence becomes concerning, the school will make reasonable enquiries with parents and carers and, where appropriate, other relevant agencies. If the school is unable to establish the child's whereabouts or educational arrangements, the matter will be escalated in accordance with Thurrock Council's Children Missing Education procedures.

Yearly Attendance	Yearly Days Missed	Yearly Learning Hours Missed	Learning Hours Missed Over 5 Years
100%	0	0	0
97%	6	30	150
95%	10	50	250
90%	20	100	500
80%	40	200	1000
50%	100	500	2500

Registration and Accurate Recording

St Joseph's will maintain an accurate electronic attendance register in accordance with the '**School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024**' and the statutory attendance codes issued by the Department for Education. The register is a legal record and must accurately reflect whether a child is present, absent or attending an approved educational activity.

The register will be taken at the beginning of the morning session and again during the afternoon session. Staff responsible for registration will ensure that attendance is recorded promptly and accurately and will not make assumptions about the reason for an absence. Where the reason for absence has not yet been established, the appropriate statutory code will be used until the school has sufficient information to determine the correct code.

Accurate attendance recording is particularly important for safeguarding because attendance data contributes to the school's understanding of whether a child is safe and receiving an education. KCSIE 2026 and the DfE attendance guidance reinforce the importance of schools identifying concerning patterns rather than treating attendance recording as a purely administrative exercise.

St Joseph's – Arbor/DfE Attendance Registration Codes

Code	Meaning
/	Present – morning session
\	Present – afternoon session
B	Attending another approved educational activity
C	Leave of absence for exceptional circumstances

Code	Meaning
C1	Leave of absence for regulated performance or regulated employment abroad
C2	Temporary part-time timetable
D	Dual registered – attending another school
E	Excluded, with no alternative provision
G	Holiday not granted by the school
I	Illness
J1	Interview for employment or educational institution
K	Attending education arranged by the local authority
L	Late – arrived before register closed
M	Medical or dental appointment
N	Reason for absence not yet established
O	Absent for other/unknown reason
P	Participating in an approved sporting activity
Q	Unable to attend because of lack of access arrangements
R	Religious observance
S	Study leave for a public examination
T	Parent travelling for occupational purposes
U	Arrived after the register closed
V	Educational visit or trip
W	Work experience
X	Non-compulsory school-age pupil not required to attend
Y1	Transport normally provided is unavailable
Y2	Widespread disruption to travel
Y3	Part of school premises unexpectedly closed
Y4	Whole school unexpectedly closed
Y5	Pupil in criminal justice detention
Y6	Unable to attend because of public health guidance or law
Y7	Unable to attend because of another unavoidable cause
Z	Pupil's name entered before their official start date
#	Planned whole-school closure

Punctuality

Good attendance includes arriving on time. Persistent lateness reduces the amount of learning a child receives and can also affect their emotional readiness for the school day, their relationships with peers and their sense of belonging. The DfE's attendance guidance expects schools to monitor lateness and to respond when it becomes a pattern of irregular attendance.

St Joseph's will expect children to arrive before the beginning of the school day and to be ready to learn when registration takes place. Where a child arrives after registration has opened, the appropriate late code will be used. Where a child arrives after the register has closed, the statutory code for an absence due to arriving after registration closes will be applied where appropriate.

Where lateness becomes persistent, the school will initially seek to understand the reason. This may include difficulties with transport, morning routines, SEND, anxiety, family circumstances or other barriers. Where

appropriate, practical support will be offered. Continued lateness may nevertheless become a formal attendance concern and may contribute to legal intervention where the statutory threshold is met.

School Gates Open: 8:30am – children supervised by parents

Door Open: 8:40am

Start of school day: 8:45am

Late (L code given) from: 8:45am

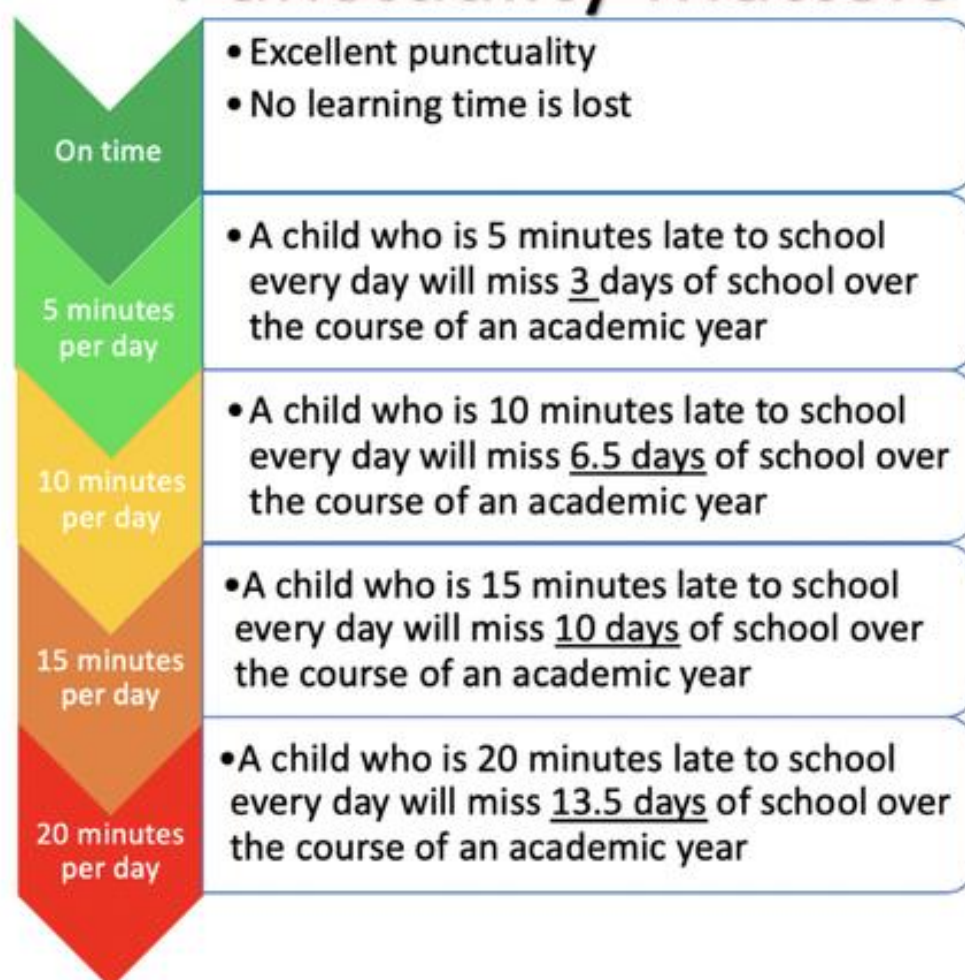
Registration Closes (U code given) from: 9:15am

Afternoon registration: 1:15pm

End of school day: 3:15pm

A 'U' late code will be classed as an unauthorised absence.

Punctuality Matters



First-Day Response and Absence Reporting

St Joseph's will operate a first-day response system because prompt contact with families serves both an attendance and safeguarding purpose. Parents are expected to notify the school on the first day of absence and to provide an appropriate explanation. Where no explanation has been received, the school will make contact with the parent or carer as soon as reasonably practicable.

The purpose of first-day contact is not simply to obtain an attendance code. It provides an opportunity to establish that the child is safe, identify illness or other barriers, understand whether there is a developing pattern and provide support. This approach reflects both KCSIE 2026 and the DfE's attendance guidance, which recognise unexplained absence as an important safeguarding indicator.

Repeated failure to provide an explanation will result in the school seeking further information. Where a parent reports illness but the pattern of absence becomes unusual, prolonged or concerning, the school may request appropriate evidence and may involve health or other professionals where necessary.

Home Visits

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School may undertake a home visit where a child's absence is unexplained, prolonged or concerning, particularly where the school has been unable to make contact with parents or carers through normal communication channels. Home visits may also be appropriate where there are safeguarding concerns, a child has not returned following an expected absence, or where attendance difficulties are preventing effective engagement with the family.

Home visits will be undertaken in accordance with the DfE's Working together to improve school attendance, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 and the school's safeguarding procedures. The purpose of a home visit is to establish that the child is safe, understand any barriers to attendance and offer appropriate support; it is not intended to be punitive. Where a visit raises safeguarding concerns, these will be immediately referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and, where necessary, Thurrock Council or other relevant agencies.

Working in Partnership with Parents and Carers

St Joseph's regards parents and carers as essential partners in securing good attendance. The school will not begin from the assumption that parents do not care about their child's education. Instead, we will seek to establish a constructive relationship in which parents feel able to explain difficulties honestly and seek help before attendance becomes a serious concern.

The DfE's new '**Communicating with Parents About School Attendance**' guidance 2026, places particular emphasis on communication that is clear, supportive, timely, personalised and designed to build partnership with families. St Joseph's will therefore ensure that communication is appropriate to the circumstances and will use telephone conversations, face-to-face meetings, written communication and digital communication according to need.

When attendance is beginning to decline, the school will contact parents early rather than waiting for the situation to become serious. Staff will explain what has been observed, listen carefully to the parent's perspective and explore possible barriers. Where appropriate, the school will agree practical steps with the family and will review whether those steps have improved attendance.

Where attendance continues to be a concern and there is not a robust plan in place, communication will become progressively more formal. Parents will be informed of the school's concerns, the child's attendance record, the impact of absence, the support available and the consequences of continued unauthorised absence. Formal communication will remain respectful and factual and will comply with the DfE's attendance communication guidance and the requirements of the Education Act 1996.

The school will also recognise and celebrate improvement. Attendance conversations should not focus exclusively on what is wrong; they should acknowledge progress and reinforce the message that the school and family are working towards the same outcome: the child's safe, successful and sustained return to regular education.

Understanding Barriers to Attendance

The DfE's 2026 attendance guidance expects schools to understand the barriers that contribute to absence and to work with pupils and families to address them. St Joseph's will therefore consider the individual circumstances of each child before deciding what intervention is appropriate.

Barriers may arise from the child, the family, the school or the wider community. They may include illness, disability, SEND, anxiety, mental health difficulties, bullying, friendship difficulties, sensory needs, communication difficulties, difficulties with transitions, family breakdown, housing problems, financial hardship, transport difficulties, caring responsibilities or safeguarding concerns. The school will consider

whether anything within its own provision is contributing to a child's reluctance or inability to attend and will take action where this is identified.

This approach is consistent with the Equality Act 2010, which requires schools to avoid unlawful discrimination and to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils where required. It also reflects the SEND Code of Practice, which requires schools to identify and respond to the special educational needs of pupils and to work collaboratively with parents and other professionals.

Children with Social Care Involvement and Vulnerable Children

Children known to social care require particular attention because changes in attendance may be an early indicator of increasing vulnerability. St Joseph's will monitor attendance closely for children subject to child protection plans, children in need, looked-after children, previously looked-after children and other children identified as vulnerable.

KCSIE 2026 requires schools to maintain effective safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable children, while the DfE attendance guidance emphasises the importance of understanding the individual circumstances of pupils who are persistently absent. Attendance information will contribute to multi-agency meetings and assessments where appropriate, and the school will ensure that unexplained or concerning absence is shared promptly with relevant professionals.

Attendance and Medical Conditions

Children with medical conditions have the same right to education as their peers. The Children and Families Act 2014 and statutory guidance '**Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions**' require schools to make appropriate arrangements for pupils with medical needs.

St Joseph's will seek to remove unnecessary barriers to attendance for children with medical conditions. Where a medical condition affects attendance, the school will work with parents, healthcare professionals and, where appropriate, the local authority to understand the condition and determine what adjustments are required.

Where a child is absent because of significant medical needs, the school will consider whether Section 19 provision is required and will work with Thurrock Council where appropriate. The school will also ensure that medical needs are considered alongside safeguarding, SEND and attendance rather than being managed as separate issues.

SEND and Attendance

St Joseph's recognises that children with SEND may experience significantly greater barriers to attendance than their peers. Attendance difficulties may be connected to communication needs, sensory processing differences, anxiety, social communication difficulties, neurodivergence, emotional regulation, demand-related difficulties, physical disability, medical conditions, difficulties with transitions or unmet special educational needs.

The school will therefore avoid treating SEND-related attendance difficulties simply as a matter of parental compliance. The Equality Act 2010, Children and Families Act 2014, SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years and DfE attendance guidance require schools to consider the individual circumstances of children with SEND and whether reasonable adjustments or additional support are required. The school will work with parents, the child and relevant professionals to identify the barriers and determine what adaptations may enable the child to attend more successfully.

Where appropriate, support may include adjustments to arrival arrangements, a named adult, visual preparation, sensory adaptations, access to a calm space, changes to transitions, additional pastoral support, modified routines, communication support, targeted intervention or advice from specialist services. Where attendance difficulties indicate that a child's special educational needs are not being appropriately met, the SENCO will consider whether further assessment, additional SEN Support, specialist advice or an EHCP review is required.

Where a child has an EHCP, attendance difficulties will be considered in relation to the provision specified within the plan. The school will work with the local authority where there is evidence that the provision in an EHCP may need to be reviewed or amended.

The school will also recognise that attendance difficulties may sometimes be a manifestation of unmet SEND rather than a separate attendance problem. The Attendance Lead, SENCO and DSL will therefore work together to ensure that attendance information contributes to the wider assessment of the child's needs.

Mental Health and Emotionally Based School Avoidance

St Joseph's recognises that mental health can have a profound impact upon attendance. Anxiety, depression, emotional distress, trauma and other mental health difficulties may result in children becoming increasingly reluctant or unable to attend school. The school will treat such circumstances seriously and sensitively while maintaining the expectation that, wherever possible, children should receive an education.

The Equality Act 2010, Children and Families Act 2014, SEND Code of Practice, KCSIE 2026 and DfE attendance guidance all reinforce the importance of understanding vulnerability and responding appropriately to individual need. KCSIE 2026 also requires schools to consider children's mental health and wellbeing as part of their wider safeguarding responsibilities.

Where mental health is affecting attendance, St Joseph's will seek to understand the underlying reasons rather than simply describing the child as refusing school. The school will listen to the child, engage with parents and consider whether there are factors within school that can be changed. Support may involve the class teacher, SENCO, pastoral staff, DSL, Mental Health Support Team, GP, CAMHS or other relevant services.

Where appropriate, the school may develop a gradual reintegration plan. This will be designed to move the child towards sustainable full-time education rather than unintentionally establishing a pattern of long-term reduced attendance. Any temporary adjustment to the school day will be carefully planned, time-limited, reviewed regularly and recorded in accordance with statutory requirements.

Section 19 Provision and Children Unable to Attend School

St Joseph's recognises that there are circumstances in which a child may be unable to access suitable education through their registered school. Section 19(1) of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on the local authority to make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school for children of compulsory school age who, because of illness, exclusion or otherwise, may not otherwise receive suitable education. Thurrock Council has acknowledged its Section 19 responsibilities and has arrangements for alternative provision for children who fall within the statutory framework.

Section 19 provision is not simply an alternative attendance arrangement. It is a statutory local-authority responsibility where the legal conditions are met. St Joseph's will therefore work closely with Thurrock Council where a child's health, disability, SEND, mental health or other circumstances mean that they cannot reasonably access suitable education at school for a period of time.

Where a child is unable to attend because of significant medical or mental health needs, the school will gather appropriate information from parents and relevant professionals and will consider whether a referral to Thurrock Council for Section 19 provision is necessary. The school will not simply remove the child from the school roll or accept prolonged absence without considering the child's entitlement to suitable education.

The DfE's statutory framework requires education provided under Section 19 to be suitable and, wherever reasonably possible, full-time. Where a child's health means that full-time education is not currently possible, provision should be appropriate to the child's individual circumstances and reviewed regularly with the aim of increasing education when the child's health allows. The Government has reiterated this position in relation to children unable to attend school because of health needs.

For children remaining on the St Joseph's roll while accessing Section 19 provision, the school will maintain communication with the alternative provider and Thurrock Council, monitor the child's educational

engagement and safeguarding, and contribute to planning for reintegration where this is appropriate. The child's attendance record will be maintained in accordance with the statutory attendance coding requirements.

Where a child has SEND, Section 19 arrangements will be considered alongside the child's SEND provision and, where relevant, their EHCP. The school will work with Thurrock Council to ensure that alternative education does not become a substitute for meeting the child's longer-term SEND needs. Where a child requires specialist provision, an EHCP review or a change in placement may need to be considered alongside any Section 19 arrangements.

Leave of Absence and Holidays

Parents do not have an automatic right to remove their child from school during term time. Under the national attendance framework, leave of absence during term time should only be granted in exceptional circumstances and must be authorised by the school in advance, by completing a request for leave of absence form.

St Joseph's will therefore consider each request individually, taking account of the statutory framework, the child's attendance record and the circumstances presented by the family. Holidays, leisure activities, birthdays and parental convenience will not normally constitute exceptional circumstances.

Where parents take a child out of school without permission, the absence will normally be recorded as unauthorised and may contribute to the national threshold for legal intervention. The DfE's national framework provides for penalty notices where the relevant threshold is met.

Attendance Intervention and Legal Action

St Joseph's will follow a graduated approach to attendance intervention. The school's first response will normally be to understand the reasons for absence and provide support. However, the DfE's statutory guidance makes clear that formal legal intervention may be appropriate where support has not worked, is not appropriate, is not engaged with or where the circumstances justify immediate action.

The national threshold for consideration of a penalty notice is **10 sessions (one day equates to 2 sessions – morning and afternoon) of unauthorised absence within a rolling period of 10 school weeks**, subject to the statutory framework and local authority procedures. The sessions do not need to be consecutive.

Where a penalty notice is appropriate, St Joseph's will work with Thurrock Council in accordance with the national framework and Thurrock's current Code of Conduct. The national framework provides that the first penalty notice is £160 per parent per child, reduced to £80 when paid within 21 days, while a second penalty notice within three years is £160 without a reduction. Further unauthorised absence may lead to other legal intervention rather than a third penalty notice.

Legal action will always be considered alongside the individual circumstances of the child. In particular, the school will consider whether SEND, disability, illness, mental health or safeguarding circumstances require a different response.

Attendance Escalation and Graduated Response

St Joseph's will operate a graduated attendance response based upon the principles established within the DfE's statutory '**Working Together to Improve School Attendance**' guidance. The school's approach will begin with universal promotion and early support and will become increasingly formal where support is not engaged with, or where the circumstances require more immediate intervention. This ensures that the school balances its responsibility to support families with its legal duty to promote regular attendance and safeguard children.

Stage 1 – Universal Attendance Promotion

At the beginning of each academic year, the school will communicate clear expectations about attendance, punctuality, illness, leave of absence and the importance of regular school attendance. Parents will receive

information about the school's attendance arrangements and their legal responsibilities under the '**Education Act 1996**'.

Attendance will be promoted positively through assemblies, newsletters, parent communications, school events and conversations with children. The DfE's 2026 communication guidance emphasises that strong attendance communication should begin before concerns arise and should focus on belonging, friendships, learning and the wider benefits of being in school.

Stage 2 – Emerging Attendance Concern

Where a child's attendance begins to decline, the school will make early contact with parents and carers. The purpose of this communication will be to understand what is happening rather than to issue a sanction. The school will share clear information about the child's attendance, preferably explaining the number of days or sessions missed and the impact this may have on learning and the child's experience of school. The DfE's 2026 guidance specifically recommends early, personalised and practical communication and advises schools to assume positive intent when beginning conversations with families.

At this stage, the school will consider whether there are underlying barriers, including illness, SEND, anxiety, mental health, bullying, friendship difficulties, family circumstances, transport, housing, caring responsibilities or safeguarding concerns. Where appropriate, the school may involve the class teacher, SENCO or DSL to ensure that the attendance concern is understood in its wider context.

Stage 3 – Targeted Attendance Support

Where attendance does not improve following early intervention, the school will arrange a more detailed conversation with the family. This may involve an attendance meeting with the Attendance Lead, Headteacher, class teacher, SENCO or another appropriate member of staff. The school will seek to establish what is preventing regular attendance and agree realistic actions with the family.

An Attendance Support Plan may be introduced where appropriate. This will identify the child's current attendance, the barriers identified, the support to be provided, the responsibilities of the school and family, the attendance outcome being sought and a date for review. Where SEND or mental health is contributing to the difficulty, the SENCO and relevant pastoral or safeguarding staff will be involved. The plan will be reviewed regularly and adapted where evidence shows that a different approach is required.

The school will recognise that progress may initially be incremental. The DfE's 2026 communication guidance specifically recommends celebrating small steps forward, particularly for children with SEND or complex needs, because recognising progress can build motivation and trust between school and family.

Stage 4 – Formal Attendance Intervention

Where attendance remains unsatisfactory despite support, or where the family does not engage with reasonable attempts to address the concern, the school will move to a formal attendance process. Parents will receive clear written information explaining the attendance concern, the evidence upon which it is based, the support already offered, the improvements expected and the possible consequences if attendance does not improve.

At this stage, the school may establish a formal attendance plan or contract and may work with Thurrock Council's School Attendance Support Team (SAST). Communication will become more formal while remaining respectful, factual and child-centred. The DfE's 2026 communication guidance states that formal attendance communication should be evidence-led, clearly explain the next steps and remain focused on practical improvement rather than blame.

Where appropriate, the school may issue or request a **Notice to Improve**, in accordance with the national attendance framework and Thurrock Council's procedures. The purpose of a Notice to Improve is to provide a clear opportunity for attendance to improve before further legal action is considered, except where the circumstances justify more immediate action.

The documentation and supporting guidance the school will use can be found here:

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/unauthorised-absence-penalty-code-2024-v01.pdf>

Stage 5 – Legal Intervention

Where attendance remains irregular, where support has not secured improvement, or where the circumstances meet the relevant statutory requirements, St Joseph's will work with Thurrock Council to consider legal intervention. This may include a penalty notice or other legal action under the '**Education Act 1996**' and the national attendance framework.

The national threshold for consideration of a penalty notice is **10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling period of 10 school weeks**, subject to the statutory guidance and the local authority's procedures. The school will not regard reaching the threshold as an automatic requirement to issue a penalty notice; the circumstances of the case and whether a penalty notice is appropriate will be considered in accordance with the national framework.

The school will ensure that parents understand the potential consequences of continued unauthorised absence before legal intervention is pursued, except where immediate action is permitted or required. Any legal action will be proportionate, evidence-based and consistent with the child's individual circumstances.

The documentation and supporting guidance the school will use can be found here:

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/unauthorised-absence-penalty-code-2024-v01.pdf>

Stage 6 – Multi-Agency Escalation and Safeguarding

Where attendance remains severely concerning, or where there are wider concerns about the child's welfare, SEND, health or family circumstances, St Joseph's will consider whether a multi-agency response is required. This may involve Thurrock Council, Early Help, children's social care, health services, mental health services, the SENCO, educational psychology, specialist SEND services or other appropriate agencies.

Where absence indicates that a child may be at risk of harm, the school's safeguarding procedures will take precedence over the attendance escalation pathway. In accordance with '**Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026**', the school will consider whether absence is an indicator of neglect, abuse, exploitation, mental health difficulties or another safeguarding concern and will refer to the DSL where appropriate.

The escalation pathway will therefore never be entirely linear. A child may move directly to a higher level of intervention where the circumstances warrant it, and a child may move back to a lower level where attendance improves and the family is successfully engaging with support.

The documentation and supporting guidance the school will use can be found here:

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/unauthorised-absence-penalty-code-2024-v01.pdf>

Reintegration Following Absence

Where a child has experienced significant absence, the school will support a successful return rather than simply expecting the child to resume normal attendance without preparation.

The reintegration approach will depend upon the reason for absence and may involve the class teacher, Attendance Lead, SENCO, DSL, parents and external professionals. For children returning following mental health difficulties, significant illness or Section 19 provision, the school will consider whether a phased or supported return is appropriate.

Any reintegration plan will have the ultimate aim of achieving sustainable access to full-time education wherever possible. The plan will be reviewed regularly and adjusted according to the child's progress.

Celebrating Attendance, Improvement and Belonging

St Joseph's will develop a positive culture in which good attendance and improvements in attendance are recognised and celebrated. The purpose of celebrating attendance is not to create competition between children or to disadvantage children whose absence is connected to SEND, disability, medical needs, mental health or other circumstances outside their control. Instead, celebration will reinforce the message that attending school regularly enables children to learn, build friendships, develop confidence, participate in the life of the school and experience the opportunities available to them.

The DfE's '**Communicating with Parents About School Attendance**' guidance, updated in August 2026, explicitly recommends that schools recognise effort and improvement and celebrate small steps forward. The guidance emphasises that positive feedback can build motivation and trust and that schools should recognise improvements for all pupils, rather than focusing exclusively on children who achieve a particular attendance percentage.

At St Joseph's, celebration will therefore include recognition of excellent attendance, improved attendance, successful return after a period of absence and sustained progress towards an individual attendance goal. A child who has moved from 70% attendance to 82% attendance has made significant progress and should be recognised for that improvement, even though their attendance remains below the school's aspirational level. Similarly, a child with complex SEND or medical needs who has worked hard with their family and school to increase their attendance should have their effort acknowledged.

Recognition may take place through assemblies, certificates, positive messages home, class recognition, individual praise, attendance displays, celebration events or other approaches appropriate to the child's age and circumstances. Staff will ensure that celebration focuses on the child's effort, progress, belonging and participation rather than presenting attendance as a measure of a child's worth.

The school will also celebrate the role played by parents and carers. Where a family has worked with the school to improve attendance, the school will acknowledge their contribution and thank them for their partnership. This is consistent with the DfE's 2026 guidance, which recommends recognising parents' efforts and maintaining a partnership-focused approach to communication.

Most importantly, St Joseph's will ensure that attendance celebration contributes to a culture in which children want to come to school because they feel safe, valued, successful and that they belong. We will celebrate the experiences that attendance makes possible: friendships made, lessons enjoyed, sporting opportunities, trips, performances, prayer and worship, enrichment, responsibilities, achievements and the everyday moments that make school life meaningful.

Our message to children and families will therefore be:

"We are delighted when you are here. Every day you attend is another day to learn, grow, make memories, build friendships and be part of our St Joseph's family."

Attendance Data, Analysis and Accountability

Attendance will be monitored at individual, class, year-group and whole-school level. Leaders will analyse attendance alongside SEND, disadvantage, safeguarding, attainment, behaviour and wellbeing information so that patterns can be understood rather than simply recorded.

The school will pay particular attention to persistent absence, severe absence, unauthorised absence, lateness and changes in attendance patterns. Attendance will also be analysed for vulnerable groups, including pupils with SEND, children with social care involvement and children experiencing medical or mental health difficulties.

The governing body will receive regular attendance information and will hold school leaders to account for the effectiveness of the school's attendance strategy. This reflects the governance expectations within the DfE's Working together to improve school attendance guidance.

Attendance and School Improvement

Attendance will be regarded as a whole-school improvement priority rather than the responsibility of one member of staff. The Headteacher, senior leaders, governors, teachers, SENCO and DSL will work together to ensure that attendance information informs school improvement.

The school will consider whether attendance patterns indicate issues with curriculum access, behaviour, SEND provision, safeguarding, transitions, parental communication, pastoral support or school culture. This reflects the DfE's expectation that effective attendance practice is embedded within the wider culture and leadership of the school.

At St Joseph's, improving attendance will therefore mean more than increasing a numerical percentage. It will mean ensuring that children feel safe, welcomed, valued, included and successful within school.

Review and Monitoring of this Policy

This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner if there are changes to legislation, DfE statutory guidance, KCSIE, Thurrock Council procedures or Trust requirements. The Headteacher will ensure that the policy remains aligned with the associated guidance and other relevant statutory requirements. The school will also review its procedures against the current requirements of Thurrock Council, particularly in relation to attendance legal intervention, Children Missing Education and Section 19 provision.

Statutory Documents and Guidance

The school will maintain access to and use the most current versions of the following statutory documents and guidance:

- **Department for Education – Working together to improve school attendance**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>
- **Department for Education – Communicating with parents about school attendance**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communicating-with-parents-about-school-attendance>
- **Department for Education – Keeping children safe in education 2026**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education-2>
- **Department for Education – Children missing education**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education>
- **Department for Education – Pupil attendance statistics**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools>
- **Thurrock Council – School attendance and absence**
<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/school-attendance-and-absence>
- **Thurrock Council - Code of conduct for issuing Penalty Notices for school absence**
<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/unauthorised-absence-penalty-code-2024-v01.pdf>

Appendices

- **Appendix 1** – Leave of Absence Form
- **Appendix 2** - Thurrock Council - Code of conduct for issuing Penalty Notices for school absence
<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/unauthorised-absence-penalty-code-2024-v01.pdf>
- **Appendix 3** – Congratulations attendance over 95% letter home.
- **Appendix 4** – Improved attendance letter home.

*Letters to parents regarding attendance are personalized to each family and so a generic template is not available.



ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

REQUEST FOR LEAVE OF ABSENCE

For parents/carers to complete when requesting absence during term time



Please complete this form before the proposed absence (each child in the family needs a separate form). Leave of absence during term time will only be authorised where the circumstances meet the statutory requirements. The Headteacher will consider each request individually and will take account of the child's attendance record and the reason for the request. A request does not automatically mean that leave will be authorised.

1. Pupil details

Child's full name: _____

Year group/class: _____

Date of birth: _____

Parent/carer name: _____

Contact telephone number: _____

Email address: _____

2. Dates of requested absence

First day of absence: _____

Date child will return to school: _____

Total number of school days requested: _____

3. Reason for the request

Please give full details of the exceptional circumstance/reason for which leave of absence is requested. If supporting evidence is available, please attach it to this form.

Reason/details: _____

4. Previous leave of absence

Has your child had any leave of absence during term time in the current academic year? Yes / No

If yes, please give dates and reason: _____

Total number of days previously requested: _____

5. Parent/carer declaration

I understand that school attendance is a legal requirement and that leave of absence during term time will only be authorised in accordance with the school's attendance policy and statutory guidance. I understand that submitting this request does not mean that the absence will be authorised. I understand that if the request is refused and the child is absent, the absence may be recorded as unauthorised and may contribute to the school's consideration of further attendance action, including a penalty notice where the legal threshold is met.

Parent/carer signature: _____

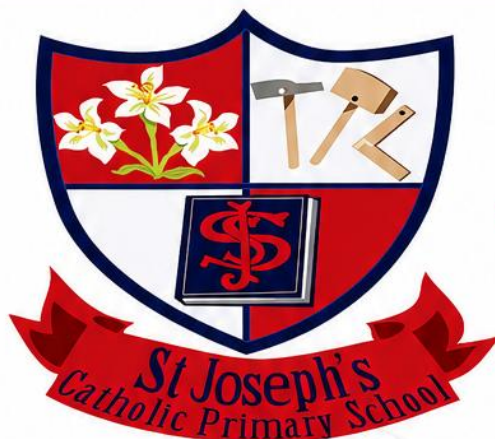
Date: _____

6. School use only

Date request received:	
Attendance to date:	
Decision:	☐ Authorised ☐ Refused ☐ Partially authorised
Number of days authorised:	
Reason for decision:	
Headteacher signature/date:	

Important information for parents/carers

Parents/carers should not assume that a request has been approved unless the school has confirmed this in writing. Where leave is refused, the school expects the child to attend school on all scheduled school days. Requests for holidays during term time will not normally be authorised. The school may request further information or evidence where this is necessary to make a decision.



Congratulations!

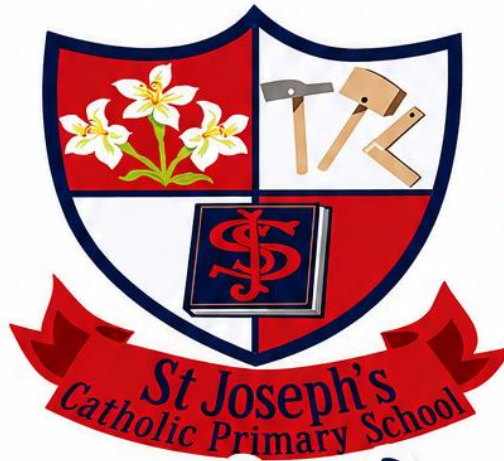
Your attendance this half term

★ has been ★

over 95%!

“ We are delighted when you are here.
Every day you attend is
another day to **learn, grow,**
make memories, build friendships
and be part of our
St Joseph's family.”





Congratulations!

Your attendance has
improved
since last half term!



“ We are delighted when you are here.
Every day you attend is
another day to **learn, grow,**
make memories, build friendships
and be part of our
St Joseph's family.”

