

Attendance Policy

Policy written: February 2019 by Catherine Stephenson, Owner of Therapeutic Teaching

Review: February 2020

Therapeutic Teaching was set up to prevent loss of learning time for young people with anxiety who have become anxious, for whatever reason, about the mainstream school environment. This policy describes the responsibility Therapeutic Teaching holds to support the partnership between parents, pupil and school to enable regular engagement in learning through attending the sessions and onto attending school.

The key responsibilities that Therapeutic Teaching as a Complementary Education provider holds are as follows:

- liaise with the named person in the school where the child is on roll;
- liaise, where appropriate, with outside agencies;
- be sensitive to the needs of the child and family;
- provide a flexible teaching programme;
- provide regular reports on the pupil's progress and achievements;
- provide an opportunity for the pupil to comment on their report;
- ensure appropriate course work and any other relevant material is returned to school;
- attend review meetings;
- help set up an appropriate reintegration programme at the earliest opportunity as soon as the pupil is ready to return to school.

Attendance and engagement in the learning sessions, be it at home, library or school, are dependent on key factors.

- At the heart of the ethos is a trusting relationship that can enable the pupil to feel safe in the learning situation. There may not be a trusting relationship in the school for the pupil at the beginning of our work so this is exactly what we aim to build. Anxiety can thrive in the absence of a trusting relationship. Our role is to act as a trusted 'bridge' to key relationships, for pupil, parents and key staff.
- The amount of attendance and engagement the pupil can manage will depend on their level of mental wellbeing so this is carefully assessed and managed to improve mental wellness with the therapeutic nature of the teaching sessions. Increases in engagement time will be assessed on a weekly basis or less depending on the pupil's demeanour and views of all involved. The engagement in learning can be very supportive of mental health when sensitively balanced to avoid unmanageable stress.
- Level of self-confidence as a learner. The use of assessments, sensitively carried out, can provide a fuller picture of need and enable personalisation of the curriculum and teaching methods used.

When the pupil gains enjoyment in learning through educational experience outside of the school environment it can improve confidence and esteem and increase the likelihood of re-entering school and potentially speed up the process of reintegration.

This policy is written with the above statements in mind and underpins our ethos to:

- prioritise children’s wellbeing and safeguarding
- ensure every pupil has access to the education to which they are entitled
- ensure that pupils make the best progress they can in their individual circumstance towards their agreed outcomes
- ensure, through working closely with their school, that pupils have access to the widest possible range of opportunities for learning and to develop their social confidence.

Maximising engagement in learning

We aim to raise engagement and improve attendance by:

- Supporting the development of trusting partnerships. Helping to create a pattern of regular attendance is the responsibility of parents, students and members of school staff and we act as a coach in this partnership
- Providing engaging personalised learning opportunities
- Promoting a warm, positive learning relationship to enable the pupil to feel safe, secure and valued.
- Raising awareness of the importance of good attendance and punctuality
- Ensuring that attendance is monitored effectively and reasons for absences are recorded promptly and consistently.

To gain the greatest benefit from our involvement it is vital that the pupil attends regularly and arrives to the sessions on time. Therapeutic Teaching is open every term date, (with the exception of 5 training days) and attendance is expected unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

Involvement begins with sessions of a minimum of one hour per day to develop the relationship and routine. An engagement plan is agreed by the end of the first week and reviewed weekly.

Any absence can affect the pattern of a child’s mental wellbeing, the pace and momentum of a reintegration plan and consequently impact on their level of confidence and seriously affect their learning. Ensuring regular attendance at school is a parental responsibility and permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution.

Recording attendance

If the pupil has been home educated and not yet on roll at a school then Therapeutic Teaching records attendance from point of start date of our involvement and hands over this responsibility to the school when the pupil goes onto roll at a school.

With young people who are on roll and it is the intention to return to school then records of attendance are also kept by Therapeutic Teaching while we are actively involved in supporting increases in attendance until the case is closed. Attendance is reported to school in the daily communication and also weekly to referring agency/ school.

Young people who have less than full time attendance at school should be monitored very closely and supported towards full-time where deemed fit to do so depending on medical assessment.

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by a school (not by the parent/carer), as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. Therapeutic Teaching records absence with the reason given by the parent using the same criteria as a school. Information about the cause of any absence is always asked for on the first day of absence.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness (although you may be asked to provide medical evidence for your child before this can be authorised), medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been given. This type of absence can lead to the Local Authority using sanctions and/or legal proceedings. Unauthorised absence includes:

- parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily e.g. because they had a late night or for non-infectious illness or injury that would not affect their ability to learn.
- absences which have never been properly explained
- children who arrive at school too late to get a mark on the attendance register
- shopping trips
- looking after other children or children accompanying siblings or parents to medical appointments
- their own or family birthdays
- holidays taken during term time without leave- 5 days unauthorised absence will lead to a penalty notice being triggered by the Local Authority
- day trips
- other leave of absence in term time which has not been agreed

School Attendance and the Law

There is no longer any entitlement in law for pupils to take time off during the term to go on holiday. In addition, the Supreme Court has ruled that the definition of regular school attendance is "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school".

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 were amended in September 2013. All references to family holidays and extended leave have been removed. The amendments specify that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are "exceptional circumstances" and they no longer have the discretion to authorise up to ten days of absence each academic year.

Therapeutic Teaching also considers that a leave of absence should not be taken unless there are reasons considered to be exceptional by the Local Authority, irrespective of the child's overall attendance. Therapeutic Teaching consults the referring school/agency and Attendance Compliance about any intentions for a leave of absence. A recommended action will then be carried out.

Absence Procedures

If the pupil is absent from the session the parent/carer must follow the following procedures:

- Contact Catherine Stephenson (Therapeutic Teaching) on the first day of absence before 9.00 am. Telephone 07864037596 and use voicemail or text. An email is also acceptable but may not be picked up before making the journey to the session. Expenses for travel made unnecessarily will be charged for so advance warning is preferred.
- Contact as before on every further day of absence.

Home based session:

If parent/carer is not at home (or no-one answers the door) at the agreed arrival time we will wait for up to 10 minutes and repeat the door contact.

We will then contact the parent/carer on numbers provided and wait locally for 15 minutes.

If there is no contact from the parent/carer the referring agency and/or school will be contacted.

It will not be assumed that the pupil is safe unless the parent/carer or any other agreed contact has provided an acceptable reason for the absence.

Library based session:

We will telephone or text the parent/carer on the first day of absence if we have not heard by 9.15 am or 15 minutes after the agreed start time for the session. If we do not speak to the parent carer then we will start to call all the contact numbers provided in order to gain an explanation for the absence. If we still have not been able to ascertain where the child is then we will make a home visit (and follow procedures above). However, if we still haven't been able to get a response then we will report it to the police as the pupil will then be classed as a 'missing child'.

If absences persist in conjunction with the referring agency we refer to the Local Authority to request a formal School Attendance Meeting if attendance deteriorates.

Lateness

There will always be a reason for lateness. Everyone involved needs to consider the impact of lateness on other people involved and to provide an honest reason and be assured of no judgement about this. We recognise that supporting a pupil with anxiety to engage in learning particularly in the early stages of support can be very challenging indeed. It is our intention to understand and support. We encourage openness and collaborative approaches to supporting engagement. Taking a collective responsibility for the punctuality is important and everyone is encouraged to play a part. Forming an agreement at the beginning can help to pre-empt problems. The Agreement of Involvement and the Personal Learning Plan are designed to support such collaboration and responsibility for attendance. We promote involvement and mutual understanding from the outset and build in discussion and practice for managing time and routines.

The **Children Missing Education Policy and Procedures** document outlines the procedures that are to be followed within Essex to identify, locate and engage children who are Missing from Education, and to ensure that Essex County Council is effectively meeting its obligations under the Education Act (1996).

Schools, including Academies and Free Schools are required to inform the LA (The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations, 2006) of the details of pupils who have been absent from school for 10 continuous school days and contact cannot be made with the parent/carer to establish the reason for the absence and the absence has not been reported. In Essex schools are required to notify the LA via the **Missing Pupil Checklist**.