

Letter to Parents about attendance

Dear Parents/Carers

School Attendance

We are writing this important letter to you about attendance, to provide you with a clear outline about absence procedures and the School and Local Authority responses to poor pupil attendance. Following a recent attendance and register check completed by the Local Authority, I thought it was important to share the approach we are following to manage attendance.

Unbroken attendance at school is important for learning. However, there will be times when absence is unavoidable and acceptable. This letter explains the approach we are following to manage attendance.

Types of Absence

Each absence is classed as authorised or unauthorised. Absences are coded as authorised where reasons are considered valid, and unauthorised where no explanation or unacceptable reasons are given.

Unacceptable Reasons

The following reasons are not acceptable:

- shopping visits
- care for family members
- days out to theme parks or to attend concerts/shows
- parents' work commitments or business trips
- holidays taken in term time (including long weekends taken on Fridays and/or Mondays)
- parental illness/medical appointments

Unauthorised absences will be referred to the Stockton Local Authority Attendance Team.

Illness and First Day Call

If your child is unable to attend school through illness, you should inform us by telephone on the first day of absence, before 9.30am. We ask for you to phone the school every morning, informing us if your child will not be attending – this is part of our Safeguarding Policy. If you do not supply us with this information, we have a duty to contact you so that we may be sure of the child's whereabouts, as this is a safeguarding measure. Where the child is absent through illness or medical appointments, this will normally be counted as authorised. Where we have concerns over excessive absence patterns through illness, we will need to discuss this with you (the parents) in order to gain a better understanding of the problems and to offer support – for example by involving the School Health/Nursing Service. You may be asked for medical evidence if your child has regular days off for illness.

Medical/Dental Appointments

It is generally better if these can be arranged outside school hours, but we know this is not always possible. Please note, we will ask for evidence of these appointments. Please could you inform the school office in advance whether your child will be returning for the midday meal. Medical and dental appointments count as authorised absences.

Emergency Occasions

There are some occasions e.g. bereavements, family problems etc., where it may be inappropriate for children to attend school; we will be sympathetic to such needs.

Lateness

Please try to ensure that your child arrives at school so that they are present for registration; this is done at 9.00 am each day. Meeting and exchanging news with friends before school is important for the children's social development. Lateness causes problems over lunch numbers, register marking and missed instructions.

Leave of Absence:

Holidays

It is not our policy to authorise holidays in term time. The only exemption to this is where parents serve in the armed forces (this does not extend to the emergency services i.e. Police, Fire, Ambulance etc.). Where authorisation is not granted, then subsequent term time holiday absence will be reported as a matter of course to the Attendance Team; we are under a duty to do this.

Where unauthorised leave is taken, the Governing Body has decided that it will support the imposition of a fixed penalty fine. This can be very expensive and will apply to any parents who book holidays during term time.

Approved Public Performance

Where children are invited to perform in a licensed show or concert (e.g. orchestra, pantomime), you are asked to consult with staff about how much time away from school is required. Where possible, such requests will be granted, provided that the child's education is unlikely to suffer. The school will also be sympathetic towards leave to participate in a recognised city, county or national sporting event. Where parents wish to take their child(ren) out of school during term time for purposes other than holidays, they should complete the leave of absence form.

What we are aiming for

Average attendance would be around 95% for the year, with outstanding attendance above 96%.

What is considered as poor attendance?

Anything below 94% is weak, under 90% is poor and if attendance dips below 85% we will have serious concerns. Below 85% is regarded as persistent absence by the DFE. In this school, we are aiming for every pupil to achieve attendance levels of at least 95%. We monitor attendance internally and complete termly reports on attendance. At the end of each half term, we will begin to identify all those pupils whose attendance has fallen below 90% and issue a courtesy letter or make a telephone call informing parents. We then monitor the pupils' attendance on a weekly basis and hope to see a pattern of unbroken weeks developing.

Our duty of care in responding to unauthorised and persistent absence – possible consequences

We have a duty of care, shared with the Local Authority, to challenge poor attendance. Where attendance levels are low, and where there are invalid reasons (judged by the Attendance Team, not the parent), for a pupil's frequent absence or where parents condone absence (e.g. by taking children out of school on unauthorised holidays), then parents render themselves liable to a fine of

£60 per pupil, per parent. This could mean a fine of £360 for two parents of three children. This would be doubled to £720 if the fine is unpaid within 21 days and could ultimately lead to a criminal conviction. Of course, no one wants this to happen, but we need to be very clear about this issue.

We hope that these notes will help you to have a clear understanding about the school's expectations in this matter. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and we would be very pleased to answer any questions you may have about our approach to maintaining and improving our attendance record.

Kind regards,

Helen Gregory