

Attendance Newsletter September 2019



Improving attendance has been a target for the school for several years and we want to make you aware of the changes we are making to how we manage it this year. The Government has a target for **every** school to have attendance at or above **96%**

Attendance

Last year the school's annual attendance was **94.64%**.

A week off school counts for 2.5% of a whole year meaning a child cannot get better than 97.5% attendance and a fortnight's holiday means that a child cannot meet the target of 96% even if they are not ill for the rest of the year.

Why is the school changing how it handles attendance?

We have some children who are late for school more often than they turn up on time.

Last year, we had several times where parents rang in to say their children were ill but:

- the children returned with sweets for their class from their holiday abroad
- the child was seen by staff in a local shop at lunchtime
- the child returned saying that they had not been ill but had had a day out
- some of our children miss a lot of Mondays or Fridays on a regular basis

We find ourselves in the position where the majority of children come to school regularly and on time. However their education is, at times, disrupted by other children's attendance issues and teachers having to support them.

Getting to school on time?

We are so lucky as a school to have nearly all of our children ready on the playground for the bell at 8:50am. The school gates open from 8:30am and we ensure that there are adults on both playgrounds to supervise the children. **All** children should be on the playground ready to line up by **8:50am**.

Over recent years, we have become aware of a small number of children who are regularly late for school. **This year**, school gates will be closed promptly at **8:50am**. Any child late needs to be brought to the school office by you to be signed in.

Medical Appointments

Medical appointments during school hours will not be authorised unless an appointment card, hospital letter or text from the GP/Hospital/Dentist is forwarded to school. Providing these retrospectively is absolutely acceptable. The absence will only be authorised for the duration of the appointment plus any reasonable travel time. We have had to introduce this as a growing number of children now have to visit dentists in surrounding towns and some families are taking the whole day for an appointment.

Illness

Judging whether a child is well enough to attend school is a difficult balance to strike but we would stress minor ailments, such as a headache or slight cold **are not** acceptable reasons for failing to attend school.

If though your child is too poorly to attend school, please contact the school office as soon as possible, preferably before 9 o'clock, on the first morning of absence, providing a reason for the absence. Please make sure you give us an actual reason for absence as this helps us identify if there is a bug going around the school.

If parents/carers do not contact the school and we can get no response from you when we ring, please do expect us to complete a 'Safe and Well' check to your home as part of our safeguarding procedures. This is normally Mr. Lord and an Assistant Head visiting a home to ensure the child is safe. Unfortunately, we are having to make increasing numbers of these visits.

If your child is likely to be off for more than two days, the school will make contact with you again on the third day to find out how your child is and when they are likely to return to school. Where illnesses continue for longer than five days, medical evidence may be required for us to authorise the absence. Repeated absences may also require the school to request that you obtain medical evidence as recommended in Government guidelines in order for us to authorise the absence.

Again, this should not actually affect the vast majority of parents and sounds harsh when in a letter but this is to ensure that we are meeting national expectations.

Can children take time off schools during term time for holidays?

Holidays during term time are actively discouraged. The government removed the right of the Head Teacher to decide on holiday absences in 2011. As a result, a request for leave of absence **will not** be granted for the purpose of a holiday unless deemed exceptional circumstances.

If you wish to seek approval for any request of absence from school, then you must complete a 'Pupil Leave of Absence Application Form', at least TWO weeks in advance of the period of absence. **Please note we have updated our Pupil Leave of Absence Application Form.** Copies are available at the school office and on our website.

Exceptional circumstances include:

- If a parent is service personnel and is returning from a tour of duty abroad where it is evidenced the individual will not be in receipt of any leave in the near future that coincides with school holidays
- Where an absence from school is recommended by a health professional as part of a parent or child's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue
- Where a parent works in a job where their holiday pattern is in school term times
- The death or terminal illness of a close relative, only if Head Teacher is satisfied that the circumstances are truly exceptional

The Government states that leave applied for because parents cannot afford the holiday at any other time **will not** be classed as exceptional circumstance.

If you then choose to take your child out of school during term time and it is not deemed to be exceptional circumstances, and/or has not been approved by the school, then this will be coded as an unauthorised absence.

What is Persistent Absence?

Since September 2015, a child who has an attendance level below 90% is considered a persistent absentee. **Over a year, this is the same as 4 weeks off school.** When a child's attendance is close to or falls below 90%, the Government expects schools to take swift action. These actions may include meetings in school where we try to work with parents to support an improvement in attendance, safe and well checks carried out by school staff or instigation of legal procedures against parents/carers of pupils who are persistently absent. In an attempt to reduce our Persistent Absence, we will also be informing you when your child's attendance drops below 92%, or is in danger of dropping below this.

We are aware that this sometimes happens as a result of a bad year with illness but in some cases, we have children who have been persistently absent every year in school.

Does the school fine families?

The governors and school have traditionally tried to avoid any fining of families but this has left us in the position where some children's attendance and punctuality has been well below targets and they have continued to take holidays in term time. We have issued some fixed penalty warnings in recent terms where families have not engaged in discussions with school and where absences have continued.

We will issue fixed penalty warnings in the future where there is no attempt to improve punctuality and attendance rates.

How will the school reward children with good attendance and improved attendance?

We are aware that most of our children are achieving a high level of attendance and punctuality and so we will continue to reward them. We have revised how we do this to encourage the children.

Each half term we will be holding an '**Early Bird Week**' to improve punctuality and reward children who attend school on time. At the end of the week, children who attend school punctually everyday will be entered into a prize draw to win a £10 gift card. The first 'Early Bird Week' will be week beginning **October 7th**.

Attendance and Punctuality trophies/teddies will be awarded during Monday assembly to the class with the best attendance for the previous week.

At the end of each half term, the class with the best attendance in EYFS/KS1 and KS2 will be given a class treat such as a class non-uniform day, movie and popcorn afternoon or visit to the park.

At the end of each term, children with 96%+ attendance will be rewarded with a certificate, a sticker and entered into a draw to win a £10 gift card. Children with 100% attendance will also receive a fridge magnet. At the end of each term, the child with the most improved attendance (from the previous year) will receive a £10 gift card.