St Mary's CE Primary School

'Trust in the Lord and Flourish' (Proverbs 11:28)

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Friday 22nd September 2023

Dear Parents/Carers,

Attendance

I am writing this letter to you about attendance to provide a clear outline of absence procedures and the School and Local Authority responses to poor pupil attendance. The Governors have made it clear that they will support the Headteacher and Education Welfare Officer in promoting high levels of attendance and taking action where there are unsatisfactory reasons for absence. I am happy to inform you that to date, we have good attendance at St Mary's and this is something to be celebrated. Indeed, we intend to introduce a reward system for good attendance to both individual children and classes shortly.

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 follow 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

Unauthorised absences will be referred to the school's Education Welfare Officer.

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 9.00am. Alternatively, you can email or text the school or call in person at the Office. It is useful to know the expected day of return where possible. If you do not supply us with this information, we have a duty to contact you so that we may be sure of your 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 parents to gain a better understanding of the problems and to offer support – for example by involving the School Health Service.

Medical/Dental Appointments

It is generally better if these can be arranged outside school hours, but we know this is not always possible. Where children need to attend such appointments during the school day it is important that parents come first to the Office before collecting children. Please bring your child to the office on returning from the appointment. Please indicate in advance whether s/he 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.

Punctuality

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. Where a genuine reason for lateness exists, this will be an authorised absence but where explanations are inadequate then an absence (late) will be recorded.

Leave of Absence: Holidays

If parents believe they have exceptional circumstances for taking their children out of school, they must submit a 'Leave of absence' request form in advance of the leave. As per government guidance, holidays in term time will not be authorised unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where authorisation is not granted, then subsequent term time holiday absence will be reported as a matter of course to the Education Welfare Officer; we are under a duty to do this. Where unauthorised leave is taken, this may result in a fixed penalty fine issued by the Local Authority.

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.

We are aiming for good attendance to meet our whole school target of 96%.

What is considered as poor attendance

Anything below 94% is weak and under 90% is poor. If attendance dips below 90%, we will have serious concerns. Below 90% is regarded as persistent absence by the DFE. In this school we are aiming for every pupil to achieve attendance levels of at least 96%. We monitor attendance and analyse termly reports on each pupil's attendance. At the end of each half term, we identify all those pupils whose attendance has fallen below 90% and issue a letter to inform parents and share our concerns. 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 Education Welfare Service, 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 fixed penalty fine. Of course, no one wants this to happen but we need to be very clear about the 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 for supporting us in ensuring St Mary's continues to maintain an excellent attendance record.

Nathalie Milbay-Jones