



9<sup>th</sup> June 2022

## **RE: School Attendance and Requests for Exceptional Authorised Leave**

Dear Parent(s)/Carer(s),

Understandably, during the past two academic years, attendance statistics for schools across the country have been significantly impacted and often very erratic, with children being regularly absent from school with Covid-19, isolating whilst awaiting PCR results, isolating after being a close contact or even unable to get to school as a result of so many other members of their household testing positive. Thankfully, we are in a much better position now and many of the freedoms which were taken away from us during the height of the pandemic have now returned.

Our attention must now, therefore, turn to restoring the high levels of attendance (and indeed punctuality) which the school saw prior to the pandemic and, in light of new guidance on attendance being issued by the Department for Education in May ('Improving School Attendance: Support for Schools and Local Authorities', May 22), now seems an apt time to review the schools processes and increase the rigor around school attendance.

As it stands, our school attendance for the year sits at 93.5%, which is a fraction lower than national statistics and significantly lower than All Souls pre-pandemic figures. It is important to note that this figure does not include absences due to Covid-19 isolation, which further reduces it. The nationally accepted figure for 'good' attendance is considered to be 95% and all children should be aiming to achieve this as an absolute minimum. Once attendance drops below 90% a child is classified as 'Persistently Absent' and this currently accounts for approximately 20% of the school population. Children who are persistently absent can expect their academic attainment to be affected and are likely to make 'less than expected' progress across an academic year. The school is expected to track all pupils who are persistently absent and work closely with parents to ensure a swift improvement.

Whilst as a school we have been closely monitoring attendance throughout the year, we haven't, up until recently tackled low attendance, other than where it has been significantly poor, as, in most cases, it has been down to pandemic related reasons. Going forward, however, if children are showing signs of becoming classed as 'persistently absent' parents can expect to, in the first instance, receive a letter informing them of this and, should attendance continue to fall, an invitation into school to discuss what strategies need to be put into place, including a formal attendance plan.

Although, as a school, we sympathise with the many genuine reasons for absence, and will always be compassionate towards the needs of our children and families, I hope that you will understand (and share) the school's stance on the importance of good attendance – particularly as we continue to close the attainment gaps that have been created during the pandemic. It is paramount that, as we work hard to recover lost ground, children have as little disruption to their education as possible.

In recent months, there has been a significant rise in the number of children who have been absent for holidays during term time. Many of these holidays have been ones which have been cancelled and rescheduled due to the pandemic and so we have again approached these situations with empathy and compassion in granting them 'authorised' status. With schools becoming increasingly under pressure to only authorise absences classed as 'exceptional circumstances', however, this stance will have to change going forward.

On the school website, in the 'contact us' section there is a form which parents should complete if they are requesting term time absence to be recorded as 'authorised'. Once a request is received, it will be reviewed by the school governor with responsibility for attendance, and a reply will be sent via email notifying of how the absence will be recorded. From this point forward, if this form has not been used, absences for holidays will automatically be recorded as 'unauthorised' as will also be the case if the form is completed retrospectively. Please also note that the school will be unable to grant any authorised absence for children whose attendance for the current academic year is lower than 94% and the school is also very unlikely to grant more than 5 days 'authorised' exceptional leave during an academic year. Please also note that teachers will not respond to requests to provide school work/activities for children whilst on holiday; planning and preparing for a class of children in school is demanding enough and the school governors insist that they cannot be expected to have to adapt materials for children who are on holiday.

As we approach the final few weeks of the academic year, maintaining high levels of attendance and punctuality must become a priority for all. Since the return of the pre-pandemic morning expectations and the closure of the gate at 8:45am, the number of children arriving late has increased significantly. This is a trend that can no longer continue. The importance of arriving at school on time, and fully prepared is well documented and, in light of the pandemic, perhaps more important than ever before. We greatly appreciate your support in ensuring that this expectation is met. For clarification, registers are taken by teaching staff at 8:45am. Only children who are present in the classroom at this point will be marked as present. Children arriving after 8:45am are considered 'late before the close of register' and arrivals after 9:00am are classified as 'late after the close of register'. Being late after the close of register results in a child losing the attendance mark for that morning session and equates to an unauthorised absence.

I am currently in the process of reviewing and updating the school attendance policy which will further reinforce the messages in this letter as well as clearly define the processes and procedures that the school will follow and implement to ensure consistency high attendance going forward.

It is always with a heavy heart that I write a letter of this nature, as I so value the close relationships that the school enjoys with parents, and would not want to risk damaging these in any way. I must, however, also fulfill my statutory duties as I, myself, am held personally accountable for the attendance and punctuality of children at the school. I hope that, together, we can work to achieve a high level of attendance for every child, so that they are given the best possible chance to thrive and succeed. As always, if there is anything regarding attendance that you would like to discuss, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,



Mr Cooke