

Dear Parents/Carers

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

We are writing this special letter about attendance to provide you with a clear outline about absence procedures and the School and Local Authority responses to poor pupil attendance. Unbroken attendance at school is important for children to learn, make good progress, achieve their full potential and have the best possible life chances.

We expect every child to have as close to 100% attendance as possible and we continuously monitor attendance.

98% attendance = approximately 4 days absent from school

95% attendance = approximately 410 days absent from school

90% attendance = approximately 4 weeks absent from school

85% attendance = approximately 6 weeks absent from school

80% attendance = approximately 8 weeks absent from school

OUR DUTY OF CARE IN RESPONDING TO UNAUTHORISED AND PERSISTENT ABSENCE

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 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 the issue.

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 or sporting events
- Parents' work commitments or business trips
- Holidays taken in term time (including long weekends taken on Fridays and/or Mondays)
- Parental illness

ILLNESS AND FIRST DAY CALL

Parents/carers should be mindful of the possibility that their child may wish to avoid school for a reason other than being ill. It can be easier for a child to tell a parent /carer that they are too ill to go to school, rather than explain that they have fallen out with a friend, haven't done their homework etc. If parents/carers feel their child is experiencing something that is reducing their willingness to attend school, please contact school to share your concern. As long as school are aware of the problem, the problem can often be solved.

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 us at businessmanager@ourladysbishopeton.com or call in in person to the School Office. It is useful to

know the expected day of return. If you do not inform the school before 9.00am on the first day of absence as part of the national safeguarding expectations we have a duty to contact you so that we may be sure of your child's whereabouts.

Where the child is absent through illness this will normally be counted as authorised. Where we have concerns over excessive absence patterns through illness we will arrange a meeting to discuss this with parents in order to gain a better understanding of the problems and to offer support – for example by involving the School Health Service.

MEDICAL AND DENTAL APPOINTMENTS

It is generally better if these can be arranged outside school hours, but we know this is not always possible. Doctor/dentist appointments are not absences unless the child misses the whole session. A child who has a medical/dental appointment may be credited for the whole session provided s/he attends school at the first opportunity. The situation is the same for a child who leaves after registration. Children attending appointments must be picked up from, and returned to, the school Office.

HOLIDAYS

It is not school 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 and a holiday is taken, the school is under a duty to report this to the Education Welfare Service. **Where unauthorised leave is taken, the Governing Body will support the imposition of a fixed penalty fine.**

APPROVED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

Where children are invited to perform in a licensed show or concert (e.g. orchestra, pantomime) parents are required to inform the school 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 recognized city, county or national sporting event.

APPLICATION FOR LEAVE OF ABSENCE DURING TERM TIME

Parents **MUST** complete the application for leave of absence during term time form which is available to download from the school's website to request authorisation for a leave of absence for **ANY REASON**.

LATENESS TO SCHOOL

Good punctuality at school is essential for children achieve their full educational potential. It is also vital for children to form good habits for later life. Lateness also causes problems over friendships and social development, dinner numbers, register marking and missed instructions

In line with DfE guidelines, registers must be closed after a certain time in the morning.

- **If a child arrives between 8.55am and 9.15am they will be marked late.**
- **If a child arrives after 9.15am, they cannot receive a late mark but have to be marked as absent for the whole morning session.**

A letter is sent home to parents informing them of this and the fact that they could be liable for a fixed penalty notice if the child receives 10 or more unauthorised absence sessions.

If the lateness is due to a legitimate reason e.g. a medical appointment, the absence can be authorised.

PARENTS AND CARERS: FAQs (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

Why has my child been marked as absent for the whole morning when they arrived at 9.30am?

As stated above, DfE guidelines state that the register must be closed after a reasonable time in the morning. If arriving after 9.15am, a child will be marked as an unauthorised absence for the morning session.

Could I receive a fine if my child is persistently late?

If your child receives 10 or more unauthorised absences, you could be issued with a fixed penalty notice. This is £50 per parent if paid within 28 days, rising to £100 thereafter.

My child was only a couple of minutes late. It seems harsh that he/she should get a late mark.

The school has to abide by the rules and expectations laid down for all schools. Lateness for school is a failure to arrive on time and will be marked as such.

Our whole family overslept and it is not my child's fault that he/she is late. Will they receive a late mark? This cannot be taken as an acceptable reason for lateness so a late mark or unauthorised absence would be recorded, depending on the time of arrival.

Would you make any allowances for lateness if, for example, there were major traffic problems in the area perhaps because of an accident, so my car/the bus was unavoidably stuck in traffic?

The school cannot make allowances for the individual problem (however genuine it may be). However, it does make allowances when there are known reported major problems that effect a large number of people; very heavy snowfall would be one such example.

What if I phone up/email to say my child is going to be late? Would he/she still get a late mark?

Yes, they would still be marked late, but it is very helpful to know that you are aware and for us to know the expected time of arrival and reason for lateness.

If I know my child is going to be late, do I need to ring/send in a note?

It is very helpful if you do this. If your child is very late, they will be marked as unauthorised absence and your note may give an alternative acceptable reason to allow us to authorise the absence.

What do I do if I don't agree with your policy on punctuality?

Our attendance policy is designed to satisfy DfE regulation but as always, if you feel an approach is unfair or unreasonable, then you can write to the Headteacher and/or Governing Body asking for a review.