



Ancaster
Church of England Primary School

Wednesday 29th June 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

Having been monitoring the situation for some time, I am writing to you as I am becoming increasingly concerned with attitudes towards school attendance and the detrimental impact that this is having on the learning of children who are not attending school as regularly as they should. Having been through the pandemic where schools were closed, we have battled through this uncharted territory to ensure that we are able to provide the consistent, high quality education that every family expects and every child deserves. School is therefore open every day for children to continue to thrive and develop in all aspects of their life and attendance remains statutory for ALL children. In short, **every child** should be in school **every day** unless there is a legitimate reason why they are unable to attend.

Whilst we know that many holidays have been rescheduled from the pandemic, we are seeing high levels of learning being missed due to family holidays being taken during term time and our official stance is always going to remain that holidays should be taken within the 13 weeks holiday when term is not in session-we believe that ample time is given away from school for holidays to occur. I am aware that holidays are cheaper during term time and for some holidays during school breaks are unattainable, but I need families to prioritise their child's education to ensure that they are given every opportunity to succeed. Each learning session we offer is carefully crafted to build upon previously taught content and introduce new concepts. Where children regularly miss these sessions, or miss sequences of learning, even more gaps in knowledge and understanding become harder to fill particularly when you sit them alongside those that already exist from the disruption caused by the pandemic lockdowns. It remains in place that absences related to family holidays will be automatically coded as 'unauthorised' and as such, further consequences may take place if certain triggers are met (more outlined below).

We are acutely aware that we have also recently had families using illness/covid as a covering excuse for holidays being taken during term time and also some of the reasons for absence we are being provided with simply do not warrant a child missing education. As a school whose doors are open and poised to deliver our high-quality curriculum, we cannot support families where we have concerns over the legitimacy of the reason being provided or if evidence suggests that we are not being told the truth. We always start from the position of openness, honesty and truth and we do expect that this is offered back to us in return. Where I deem that I have concerns over the legitimacy of a reason being provided, then I will take the decision to automatically 'unauthorise' absences and parents will be made aware of this with the consequence of a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) possibly being issued by the Local Authority.

There is currently a formal consultation in place nationally to review attendance regulations as set by the DfE and this will include, from September, a more consistent national approach to the issuing of fixed penalty notices to parents. Currently, this policy is already in place through Lincolnshire County Council and is triggered by children having 5 days of unauthorised absence in one 6 week period. Up until recently, attendance rates have always been in line with or above national figures and I have not had to resort to fining parents.

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More recently, our Governing Body have agreed the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices is something we now need to do in order to bring attendance figures back to the expected levels. Should I have families where the children meet these triggers, please do expect for us to be handing the information to Lincolnshire County Council, who may issue the FPN and the associated fine.

As we continue to recover from the pandemic, with attendance in mind, I have been undertaking a desk top analysis of every child's attendance figure in school and scrutinising the reasons behind every day of absence for each child. I am taking steps to begin to hold formal conversations with the families of the children where attendance figures, patterns and trends are the most concerning and a target driven action plan for how we can improve children's attendance overall will be created where necessary and monitored until the attendance improves for the child.

Moving forward, if you do not wish for this level of intervention, please may I ask that you consider each of the points I am raising in this letter and if you are aware that it may apply to you, you take steps to ensure your child is in school every day and that their time away from school is reduced to the absolute minimum and is reserved only for the days when they are physically unable to attend (I.e. too ill). Children with cold-like symptoms or mild headaches etc can attend school and will often forget about their ailments as the day progresses-we will always work with parents and carers to ensure that when a child is really not well enough, we send them home in the first instance.

Please note that if your child has a medical need, we are already aware of this and a care plan will be in place that reflects the potential of missing school. The plan we have in place provides the rationale surrounding related absences and parents of these children should be aware that the contents of this letter is not in relation to children with medical needs.

Thank you for taking the time to read this communication and thanks also in anticipation of you working with us to address these issues.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr Sam Eden
Headteacher