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**Attendance in School**

Dear Parents/Carers, 26.9.23

Over the last 3 years, attendance in schools across the country have been affected by the pandemic in so many different ways: from lockdowns to children and families isolating when they tested positive. We know that, for some children, attending school has become more challenging since the pandemic as their anxiety has increased. We also know that, for some other children, attendance is always difficult because of their additional needs.

However, the information from the Department for Education, Ofsted and Dorset Local Authority is that attendance in schools is **much lower** than it used to be before the pandemic and there are so many more **persistent absences** that we need to improve. This is a national issue but it is also a school issue.

Children are **persistently absent** when their attendance is **less than 90%.** This is when attendance is a **cause for concern** and when schools and families need to work together to improve the child’s attendance.

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| Last March, we wrote to you about **working together** to support your child’s attendance in school as we know that attendance really matters for many reasons. **Thank you *so much* for working in partnership with us last academic year. There have been so many success stories where parents have worked hard to improve their child’s attendance. We are very proud of all of your hard work. A HUGE thank you!** |

**Why does attendance matter?**

All the research shows that attendance matters.

It matters **academically:** children who miss learning find it more difficult to learn as they’ve missed chunks of learning or missed new content when it is taught. They can then not want to come to school because learning becomes more and more difficult.

It matters **socially:** ask most children and friendships and playing with their friends are the most important part of school! Children that are not in school miss playing with their friends and their friends miss them. Children with poor attendance often find friendships difficult. Their friends make new friends and new relationships when they are not in school.

It matters **emotionally:** relationships are the cornerstone to feeling happy in school. The more a child is in school, the more a child builds these relationships with staff and other pupils.

It matters **to us:** we want all children to be at school each day and we miss them when they are not in school.

**What affects attendance figures?**

Any absence affects attendance. In particular, the following all count towards absences:

* **Illness**: this is an authorised absence but will still count towards absence figures.
* **Unauthorised absences:** this includes children being off school but parents have not let us know why they are not in school. Holidays in school term time are also an unauthorised absence.
* **Being late:** if children arrive in school after registration has finished, they are classified as ‘late’. This would mean an absence of ½ a day towards attendance figures. Many children also find it difficult being late. It’s much harder to walk into a classroom when all the children are already settled and part way through their learning.

**Whose responsibility is it to improve attendance?**

As a parent it is **your legal responsibility** to ensure your child receives a suitable full-time education. It is your responsibility that your child attends school each day and is on time.

However, we want to work **together** to improve your child’s attendance if it is below 90% or close to 90% and in danger of falling into being a **persistent absence (less than 90%).** We want to know if you are struggling getting your child into school and how we can work together to improve this.

Once a child’s attendance is below 90%, we believe that **working together** should be the first way of improving attendance before we think of anything else. It is this **working together** that we really want to focus on over the next 5 months and beyond and we hope that you will work with us on improving attendance if you child’s attendance is below or near to 90%.

**What is the school doing to improve attendance?**

Since March 2023, we have been sending home half termly letters to update you on your child’s attendance. We will continue to send these letters home half termly and you will receive your first letter just after half term. We hope that these attendance letters keep you informed of your child’s attendance. We try to personalise these letters e.g. when we know that a child’s attendance has been affected by an operation, we will write this on the attendance sheet.

Since January 2023, we have been celebrating attendance with our pupils. We want children to understand the importance of attendance and that we miss them when they are not here. We celebrate class attendance and children enjoy celebrating when all children are in class each day (100% attendance). We have also celebrated children with 100% attendance throughout the year by presenting them with a special medal in Celebration Assembly at the end of June. We thought long and hard about this but wanted to celebrate this with the children. Some children are very good at maths or PE or dance and they are celebrated. Some children are good at attendance and we wanted to celebrate this. These children are very proud of their attendance record.

We will continue to invite parents with attendance below 90% (or near to 90%) to meet with us to discuss their child’s attendance and how we can **work together** to improve it. This is on a case by case basis. For example, we would *not ask* a parent of a child with medical needs to attend a meeting as we already know the reason for the attendance below 90%.

**What are we asking of parents to help improve attendance?**

* Know your child’s attendance. The half termly attendance letters will support this.
* **Work together** with us when your child’s attendance is below 90% or near 90% so we can discuss the reasons why and how we can improve it.
* Try to make sure your child is at school by **8.45am** so that they have the settling in time with all the other children and do not miss the start of their lessons.
* Try to ensure that holidays are taken out of term time. If they need to be taken in term time, try and keep the days to a minimum (e.g. 1 or 2 days before a school holiday starts) and try to ensure that your child does not miss anything important at school.
* Let us know if your child is struggling to come to school and the reasons why (if we don’t already know).

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| **A note about your first attendance sheet**When you receive your first attendance sheet (after half term), you need to remember that any absences during this first half term will have a **significant impact** on attendance. This is because the children have not been at school for many days yet (3 days from 35 school days is a bigger percentage of absence than 3 days from 70 days!). So, please do not panic if your child’s absence looks very worrying initially. With more days attending school next half term, this will improve attendance quickly! |

**And finally….**

We know that attendance is an **emotive subject**. A child’s absence figures can be for many reasons from illnesses to anxiety to family circumstances to home issues and for many other reasons.

We do not want to judge. We just want to work together and hope that both parents and school want to see their child in school for as much as possible and that their child’s experiences in school are happy ones.