



St Francis' Catholic Primary School
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27 September 2022

Dear Parents/Carers,

School Attendance

We are writing this special letter to you about attendance to provide you with a clear outline about absence procedures and the School and Local Authority responses to poor pupil attendance. The Governors have made it clear that they will support the Head of School and Education Welfare Service in promoting high levels of attendance and taking action where there are unsatisfactory reasons for absence.

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 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
- parents' work commitments or business trips
- holidays taken in term time (including long weekends taken on Fridays and/or Mondays)
- parental illness

Unauthorised absences may be referred to the North Somerset Education Welfare Service.

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 us at office@stfrancispri.org or call in in person at the Office. It is useful to know the expected day of return. If you do not supply us with this information we have a duty to contact you so that we may be sure of the 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 in order 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.

Lateness

Please try to ensure that your child arrives at school so that they are present for registration; this is done at 8.45 am each day. Meeting and exchanging news with friends before school is important for the children's social development. Lateness causes problems over lunch money/numbers, register marking and missed instructions. Where a genuine reason for lateness exists this will be an authorised absence but where explanations are inadequate or the lateness is after 9.00am then an unauthorised absence will be recorded.

Leave of Absence:

Holidays

It is not our policy to authorise holidays in term time. Where authorisation is not granted then subsequent term time holiday absence will be reported as a matter of course to the Education Welfare Service; we are under a duty to do this. Where unauthorised leave is taken, the Governing Body has decided that it will support the imposition of a fixed penalty fine. This can be very expensive.

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. The school will also be sympathetic towards leave to participate in a recognized city, county or national sporting event and dance/music exams.

Where parents wish to take their child(ren) out of school during term time for purposes other than holidays, they should complete the 'Pupil Absence Request for Exceptional Circumstances' form found on the school website under the 'Information' tab. This is available from the school website under the Information tab.

What we are aiming for

Average attendance would be around 96% for the year, with outstanding attendance above 97%.

What is considered as poor attendance?

Anything below 94% is weak, under 90% is poor and if attendance dips below 85% we will have serious concerns. Below 85% 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 provide termly reports on each pupil's attendance. At the end of each half term we identify all those pupils whose attendance has fallen below 92% and issue a courtesy letter informing parents. 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 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.

For further information please find attached to this email the school Attendance Policy. The following link is to the North Somerset Code of Conduct for Penalty Notices, <https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/penalty%20notice%20code%20of%20conduct.pdf> 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 we would be very pleased to answer any questions you may have about our approach to maintaining and improving our attendance record.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs C Hanley
Chair of Governors

Mrs S Land
Executive Principal

Mrs C Hunt
Head of School