



Stretton Handley C of E (Controlled) Primary School,

Beresford Lane,
Woolley Moor,
Alfreton,
Derbyshire.
DE55 6FH
Tel/Fax: 01246 590418

Head Teacher: Mrs L. Nicolson

15th February 2024

Dear Parent/Carer,

We are working hard to improve attendance and punctuality in school because we know the impact good attendance has on your child's personal, social, and academic achievements in education.

There will be some changes at school after February half term on how we manage attendance. This letter outlines these changes and explains the school's position regarding attendance, and our official duties and responsibilities to the Department for Education (DfE) and Derbyshire County Council (DCC).

Impact of absences

Absences do affect how well children do in school and it is important to look at the impact attendance has over time. For example, 90% attendance might sound reasonable. But if you stretch that out over a child's time in school, 90% from Reception to Y9 means that a child has missed a whole school year!

Normally, lessons in school are progressive. At the start of a new topic, children learn the first ideas and 'building blocks' which are then built on over a week or term to help each child secure their knowledge and skills. Later, more advanced lessons rely on this earlier understanding to move the children forward. Some parents have asked for extra homework to help keep their children on-track during term-time holidays; and while this can help somewhat, it is the consistent learning and interaction in the classroom that makes the best impact on a child's academic progress.

Reporting an absence

There are several ways a parent or carer can inform us of absence:

- by telephone, in which case the office staff record this information and communicate it to the teachers.
- by email, letter or note.
- by personal contact.

If we don't hear from you

For safeguarding reasons, it really is **vital** that you let us know why your child is absent from school. There have been high-profile cases in the media recently, and these have reinforced and highlighted the importance of organisations like schools knowing that children are safe and well.

If we don't hear from parents:

1. We will call you from the first day of absence.
2. If we don't hear back within a few hours, we will try again.
3. If we are unable to make contact, we will inform all people with parental responsibility that the child is not in school.
4. If we have concerns about the child's safety and wellbeing, we will visit the child's home, and/or contact the local police, who will do a 'Safe and Well' check on a child at our request.

It is essential that we hold up-to-date contact details. If you change your phone number or address, please contact the office to let us know immediately.

Attendance records

There are several codes that school use for recording attendance and absences. Two are recorded each day, for the morning and afternoon sessions. Here are the most common:

- Code **M**: appointment with a doctor or dentist, etc.
- Code **I**: genuine illness.
- Code **G**: unauthorised holiday. **This counts as an unauthorised absence.**
- Code **L**: late before register closes.
- Code **U**: late after register closes. **This counts as an unauthorised absence.**
- Code **O**: other unauthorised absence, or no reason given.

Looking at this from a parent's perspective, it really is essential that you let us know the reason for absence, otherwise it must be marked on the register as an 'O'. Unauthorised absences (including code U for late arrivals after the register closes) are the reason that some parents nationwide have been fined or taken to court for their child's poor attendance.

Here is a reminder of the timings at the start of our school day:

8:15am – doors open for pupils attending breakfast club (*bookable via ParentPay*)

8:40am – doors open for all pupils.

8:50am – doors close, and pupils are expected to be in class for register.

After half term we will be introducing a “sign-in” sheet at reception – if your child arrives at school after the doors close at 8:50am they will have to sign in and will be marked under the “L” late code. If they arrive after 9:15am this will be marked as unauthorised under the “U” code.

Letters to parents regarding absence

After February half term, we will start to send information to you with your child's attendance data on so you can keep a track of your child's attendance.

If your child's attendance falls below 94%, we may contact you to discuss your child's attendance. This could be due to genuine reasons such as a spell of illness, particularly in the autumn and spring terms when the flu and cold bugs are thriving. However, it could also have been due to frequent lateness or holidays.

Ongoing poor attendance is shared with our Education Welfare Officer (EWO), to whom we report each term. This can lead to an Attendance Panel Review Meeting at school. The aim of these meetings is to give school, parents and the EWO the chance to sit together and look at reasons for absence, the impact this is having, and then discuss ways to improve the situation.

Persistent absence

If attendance drops below 85% over a year, we have a statutory duty to make a referral to the School Nurse for a Health Assessment. This referral is a statutory duty and does not require parental consent. To put this 85% in perspective, it works out at 29.5 missed sessions - or just under fifteen days. Fifteen may sound a lot, but a week's holiday, delays in flights to add another day, a cold in February, flu bug in March etc., and these days quickly add up.

Illness:

Absences due to illness are unavoidable in most cases, and we know that you make every effort to get your children to school on time, each day. More often than not, occasional headaches or tummy aches often soon disappear when children get into class with their friends. There are times when a child is ill in school, and we have to ask you to pick them up early. If a child has been physically sick, they will need to remain away from school for 48 hours.

Term-time absences, including holidays

In line with Government and Local Education Authority policy, any holidays taken in school time must be recorded as an **unauthorised** absence. Our school is accountable to the DfE and DCC for attendance.

Holidays in term-time are the main reason for lower attendance, and DCC ask schools to refer absences

to them for the issuing of a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN). We use official guidance for 'exceptional circumstances' when making a decision about what is deemed authorised or unauthorised - and our reasons are closely monitored and scrutinised by those above us. We have authorised a few days off due to exceptional circumstances (e.g. for a wedding or funeral, etc.) but most do not fall under this category and must be designated as unauthorised. This is then relayed to DCC. Not all parents are fined, as the previous year's attendance is also considered. Please be aware that the FPN is not a school matter - it is not levied by school, and we do not see a penny of the fine being issued!

Regarding holidays, we really do empathise with parents, as we know that holidays taken in term-time are considerably cheaper than those taken in school holidays, and we also know that some of our parents can only get time off work on specific dates. Ultimately it is your decision, but if you are going to take your child away in term-time, please do send a letter to our headteacher and inform the school office so that we know where your child is, and that they are safe.

We hope this information and guidance is helpful, and please do not hesitate to contact the school office or head teacher if you have any queries or would like to discuss anything in more detail.

Kind Regards,

Mrs Louise Nicholson
Headteacher