

Dear Parent/Guardian/Carer

Working together to improve attendance

You may already be aware through various communications and media reports that, effective from 1st September 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) released a white paper outlining the school's responsibility to manage and improve attendance in their school community.

The Governing Body is working closely with the Senior Leadership Team and Attendance Lead to ensure the school is proactively working with parents and families to improve attendance.

This letter explains the laws around the child's rights to a full-time education and the parent's legal duty to ensure their child/children attend school regularly.

The law on school attendance and the right to a full-time education

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

Why is attendance important?

Current guidelines are that children are in full-time education for a total of 13 years. (4/5 – 18 years)
The table below highlights how much education a child could potentially miss out on over the 13 years they are in school.

If a child misses	that equals...	which is...	and over 13 years of school that's...
1 day per fortnight (90% attendance)	19 days per year	≈ 4 weeks per year	Nearly 1½ years
1 day per week (80% attendance)	38 days per year	≈ 8 weeks per year	Over 2½ years
2 days per week (60% attendance)	76 days per year	≈ 16 weeks per year	Over 5 years
3 days per week (40% attendance)	days per year	≈ 24 weeks per year	Nearly 8 years

But it's not just about the numbers.

School has a very busy timetable. So much is packed into the school day that even one day's absence can mean that your child may miss a whole chunk of crucial information.

They could start to feel ...

- **Left out** - (if groups and partners have already been chosen)
- **Confused** - because they haven't really understood (they have missed the initial overview of what they are learning)
- **Overwhelmed** – because they can't catch up.

We could start to see ...

- **Minor ailments** – Tummy aches, Headaches, feeling sick (School avoidance)
- **Anxiety** – Confidence issues - worries about feeling useless because they don't understand
- **Behaviour problems** – Disengagement and/or low-level disruption to disguise feelings.

What the school will be doing to improve attendance

We will be asking parents/guardians/carers to read and sign the Home School Agreement.

The Attendance Lead will be working proactively with families to:

- Aspire to high standards of attendance from all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school.
- Rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.
- When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen to understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.
- Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.
- Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through a parenting contract or education supervision order

- Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.

The DfE has clearly outlined in this document the school's legal responsibilities in relation to maintaining attendance and their obligation to impose fines for persistent and unauthorised absences. We are hoping that by working closely with families to improve attendance that this action will be minimal, however, as this is now a legal obligation, we will be imposing fines where these absences occur. Below is a statement from DfE in relation to issuing fixed penalty notices.

Failure to ensure a child's regular attendance at school is a criminal offence. If with support from the school's attendance officer and/or the Local Authority, your child's attendance does not improve, the Local Authority will consider one of two actions:

- **Penalty Notice.** *We can give each parent a fine of £60, which rises to £120 each if you do not pay within 21 days. If payment is not received within 28 days from the issue of the penalty notice, we may prosecute you for the offence of 'irregular attendance'. You could then be subject to a fine of up to £1,000 on conviction.*
- **Prosecution in the Magistrates' court.** *Both parents could get a fine of up to £2,500, a community order or a jail sentence up to three months each. The court may also give you a Parenting Order.*

The offence will apply to each child individually. Both parents are liable for the offence. The Education Act considers each 'responsible adult' as a 'parent'. This includes a family friend or relative if the child lives with them and they provide day-to-day care.

We hope to continue to build strong relationships with our families, listen to and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them. The Senior Leadership Team and the Attendance Lead, with our backing, will be doing everything they can to ensure that school is a happy and enjoyable environment for your children to learn and grow.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss this matter further.

Yours faithfully

Buckden C of E Academy Trustees

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