St Luke's C. of E.
Aided
Primary School
Ruscoe Road,
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Diocese of Chelmsford

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# Letter to Parents about attendance

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 Headteacher 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 will be referred to the London Borough of Newham.

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 call in in person at the Office. It is useful to know the expected day of return. If your child is absent for 3 days or more, proof of the absence will be required. 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 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 inform the Office. 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. Emergency medical and dental appointments count as authorised absences.

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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. Lateness causes problems over lunch 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 8.50 a.m. then an absence (late) will be recorded.

**Leave of Absence:**

Holidays during term time – The Law
It is not our policy to authorise holidays in term time. The law changed 19th August 2024. Schools no longer have the freedom to allow parents to take their children out of school for up to ten days in term time. Only in exceptional circumstances can you write to the headteacher (using the '**Application for Leave, under Exceptional Circumstances** ' form) and ask to take your child out of school. 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.

What we are aiming for
Average attendance would be around 95% for the year, with outstanding attendance above 96%.

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 95%. 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 90% and issue a courtesy letter or make telephone call 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 £80 per pupil per parent. This could mean a fine of £480 for two parents of three children. This would be doubled to £960 if the fine is unpaid within 21 days and could ultimately lead to a criminal conviction. Of course, no one wants this to happen but we need to be very clear about the issue.

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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.