

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Dear Parents / Carers,

Happy New Year.

I hope this message finds you well as we enter the new calendar year and, I hope that it allays any concerns regarding communications about the attendance of your child or their peers as well as signposting our attendance policy and some key information which outlines expectations.

As I am sure you have seen in the media, one of our Government's priorities is attendance and in particular, persistent absence (attendance below 90%). Our Education Secretary has set up an attendance alliance to work with trusts to review good practice and improvements in order to ensure all children attend school each and every day: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-launches-new-attendance-alliance>

We have reviewed our policy and procedure in the light of these expectations and offer the following information to support understanding, particularly if you are in receipt of an attendance letter.

A child is deemed persistently absent at 90%. We know there can be a range of legitimate reasons for this but it is our responsibility to ensure that parents/carers know their child's attendance and to offer support in order to improve attendance at school. It is for this reason that parents/carers will receive a letter when their child's attendance reaches 93% in order to outline the position and, again when a child reaches 90% (point 5.2 of our policy). Both of these letters offer the opportunity to discuss the situation and to seek support. Please do not be alarmed by this, it is our responsibility to do this and, as you all have good relationships with your child's class teachers and leaders who have the information for absences, they can provide explanations when the circumstances are understood. Please note that Headteachers and office staff will be personalising the letters in order to recognise the reasons for absence. We completely understand Covid related absences and yet, once a positive case has been identified, the absence has to be logged as normal attendance and therefore affects your child's percentage. Additionally, we realise that sometimes, human beings are simply ill or have medical appointments which are set and this is understood. That said, we still have to explore absences and work with you and we are sure you understand that.

This link <https://www.tssmat.staffs.sch.uk/governance/policies/attendance-policies> is to our attendance policy in full but we point you to the following key information which has been shortened for this letter:

- Pupils must arrive in school on each school day by: 8:30 am.
- The register for the first session will be taken at: 8:30 am.
- The register for the first session will close at: 8:45 am.
- A child will be marked as 'L' (late) if they arrive between these times: 8:45 am - 9:00 am.
- Children arriving after this time will be marked as 'U' (Unauthorised absence): 9:00 am.
- The register for the second session will be taken by: 1:15 pm.

We will mark absence due to illness as authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness. If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask the pupil's parent/carer to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the pupil's parent/carer notifies the school office in person, by phone or email, at least one day in advance of the appointment where possible.

*Cont/...*

Lateness and punctuality. A pupil who arrives late:

- Before the register has closed will be marked as late, using the appropriate code.
- After the register has closed will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code.

The school monitors the late arrival of children. In the morning those arriving through the school gate later than 08:45 am will be marked as arriving late via a 'L' in the register.

Children arriving after the close of register (09:00 am) will have a 'U' (unauthorised absence) recorded on the register, unless there is an acceptable reason verified by a parent / carer.

#### Approval for term-time absence

Headteachers will only grant a leave of absence to pupils during term time if they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. A leave of absence is granted at the Headteacher's discretion. The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request.

Valid reasons for authorised absence include:

- Illness and medical/dental appointments.
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart. The trust will authorise 2 days of religious observance across the year.
- Traveller pupils travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Showmen (fairground people) and Circus people, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a Traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision.

Other possible 'exceptional circumstances' where the Headteacher may grant term-time leave are:

- The death or terminal illness of a close relative.
- Weddings of close friend or relative.
- Out of school programs such as music, arts or sport operating at a high standard of achievement.

Documentary evidence of this event will be required.

All cases will be considered on individual requests.

Information about Legal sanctions can be found in the policy under 5.3.

We shall provide you with your child's attendance figures three times per year in order to empower you with the information you need and so that there are no surprises! This will be after each Christmas and Easter period and, with your child's final school report in July.

I am grateful for your understanding in the communications and work we may need to conduct with families and ask that you continue to engage with your child's school with whom you have a good relationship and with staff who understand your child / family circumstances.

I hope that this letter helps you appreciate the responsibilities and the expectations of our schools and Trust and thank you once again for your understanding.

Kind regards,



**Mrs Charlene Gethin**  
**CEO**