

# St Dunstan's RC Primary School

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Dear Parents/Carers

## School Attendance – Persistent Absence

I am writing to you about attendance to provide you with a clear outline about School and Local Authority responses to poor pupil attendance. As a parent/carer, you have a legal duty to ensure that your child attends school on a regular basis. The Education Act 1996 makes it a criminal offence for a parent/carer to “fail to secure their child’s regular attendance at the school”. An amendment to this makes it very clear that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence (holiday) during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. The amendment gives a parent/carer no entitlement to take their child out of school for a holiday in term time and requires the Headteacher to determine what the exceptional circumstances are. The decision will be made by the Headteacher who will use their discretion to consider each request individually. This letter explains the clear approach we follow 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.

### Unauthorised Reasons - The following reasons are unauthorised:

- holidays taken in term time (including long weekends taken on Fridays and/or Mondays)
- shopping visits
- care for family members
- days out to theme parks or to attend concerts/shows
- parents’ work commitments or business trips
- parental illness

### Leave of Absence: Holidays

It is not our policy to authorise holidays in term time. Where authorisation is not granted and subsequent term time holidays are taken, each absence will be reported as a matter of course to Manchester City Council’s Attendance Team. We have a legal duty to do this. Where unauthorised leave is taken, Manchester City Council’s Attendance Team will be instructed to impose a fixed penalty fine. This can be very expensive and will apply to any parents who book holidays in term time.

Following the pandemic, which impacted greatly on children’s education, teachers have been working extremely hard to ensure that children’s learning has been paramount. Gaps in learning have been and continue to be identified and addressed so that each child has the best possible chance for their future. Many additional sessions have been further funded through Catch-Up lessons and boosters initially to more recently, the National Tutoring Programme. When children have holidays during term time, the gains made in their learning can be quickly lost. You may consider that a holiday will be educational/cultural, but your child will still miss out on the teaching that their classmates will receive whilst they are away. Children returning from a term-time

holiday are also unprepared for the lessons that build on the teaching they have missed. When teachers give more time to help individual children who have had a term-time holiday catch up on missed work, other children in the class may miss out and under-achieve as a result. This is a situation that we all have a responsibility to avoid.

Unbroken attendance at school is important for learning. Although there will be times when absence is unavoidable and acceptable, there has been a rise in absence that is avoidable and unacceptable.

Regular school attendance is vital and missing school can have a significant impact on a child's achievement over a one-year period, as illustrated below:

**What we are aiming for** - attendance should be around 97% and in line with the National Average.

**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 our school we are aiming for every pupil to achieve attendance levels of at least 97%.

- 97-100% attendance – your child has the best chance of success as they are taking full advantage of every learning opportunity.
- 94-97% attendance - at least 2 weeks of learning is missed; your child may have to spend time catching up with work.
- 90-94% attendance - at least 4 weeks of learning is missed; your child may be at risk of underachieving; they may need extra support from you to catch up with work.

We monitor attendance daily and provide termly reports on each pupil's attendance.

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) 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 £240 for two parents/carers of two children. This would be doubled to £480 if the fine is unpaid within 21 days and could ultimately lead to a criminal conviction. If after 28 days the fine remains unpaid, you may be summonsed to appear before Magistrates to explain why your child has unauthorised school absences and you may be liable for a fine of up to £1000).

Of course, no one wants this to happen, but we need to be very clear about this issue.

Support and guidance on attendance is always available and if you have any questions about this, or if you need help to achieve an improvement, then please contact us to discuss this.

We trust that you will support us in our drive to increase pupil attendance and arrange holidays around the existing 175 days in the year when the school is closed (through weekends and school holidays) No term-time holidays will be authorised. We trust that this letter helps you to have a clear understanding about the school's expectations in this matter and how jointly, we will achieve improving both attendance and the outcomes for our children and young people at St Dunstan's.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs G Eccles  
Headteacher