



MEDINA PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Friday 8th September 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

Last year, following more than two years of Covid related disruption, our overall attendance at Medina improved and was on par with many schools. I was really pleased with this improvement and the reintroduction of incentives, such as the weekly class award and the termly 100% certificates, all helped to drive our attendance towards our 96% target.

You may have heard recently in the media that Portsmouth's school attendance is significantly below the national average, with a very high number of pupils being classed as 'persistent absentees' – less than 90% attendance (the equivalent of four weeks missed schooling). It goes without saying that, if a child is absent, their learning will be affected – hence the reason why schools try so hard to improve attendance for all individuals.

As I've stated, the attendance for Portsmouth pupils is amongst the poorest in the country and, although secondary schools contribute the worst figures, it is vital that primary aged children get into the right habits early in their school career. As a result, Portsmouth will be initiating a city wide campaign to raise the profile of attendance during the coming academic year. I am sure you will soon see the promotional materials in newspapers, on advertising boards and, of course, we will be sending information to you via StudyBugs and on our website.

I will, as I do at the start of every year, write to those parents of children who, last year, fell into the 'cause for concern' category. Last year I spoke to 22 parents whose children had 'poor attendance' and I was delighted that over 75% of those children improved their attendance and a number, over the year, received rewards for improved attendance

I thought it useful to remind parents that it is a legal requirement that children attend school, however we do understand that there may well be valid reasons why something is preventing this from happening. However if we are not aware of these reasons we are not able to support you and your child. Please do let us know and we will endeavour to support you rather than you end up receiving a fixed penalty notice from Portsmouth City Council's School Attendance Team. Having said all of the above, I thought I would use this letter to remind parents of some of the systems and language associated with school attendance:

What is authorised and unauthorised absence?

Any term-time absence must be approved by the school's head teacher – this is called authorised absence. At the head teacher's discretion, absence may be authorised for genuine illness/exceptional circumstances. Any absence not approved by the head teacher is an unauthorised absence. Unauthorised absence includes time off for shopping, birthdays, holidays, weddings, visiting relatives, getting up late and days out. All absence must be requested by completing a Leave of Absence Form (LOAF) which is available from the school office.

School attendance - penalty notices

It is a legal requirement that children have access to education. If a child misses 10 half-day sessions, the equivalent of a full week's school, through unauthorised absence in one term, parents can be issued with a penalty notice – which are issued per parent per child.

Contrary to popular belief, individual schools do not receive money from these fines. It is the local authority who are responsible for fining. No school wants to fine parents and at Medina we work hard with parents whose child's attendance is a concern before it gets to the point of issuing a penalty notice.

I would urge parents to be honest with us and not tell us that their child is ill when they have clearly gone on holiday. We encourage all children to be truthful and it puts them in a very awkward and difficult position if they are asked to lie to staff. Please note that the same rules regarding penalty notices apply to pupils who are off school due to unauthorised illness and therefore you may still receive a penalty notice for irregular attendance.

On numerous occasions, children wake up and say to parents that they feel unwell. I would urge you to give your child some medication (Calpol for example) and bring them into school. We will always contact you if your child is genuinely unwell, however the vast majority of children once in school, become focussed on learning, seeing their friends and then cope well with the day in school – they then don't 'Miss School Miss Out'!

If you have any concerns regarding your child's attendance in school please, in the first instance, email the address at the top of this letter.

Yours sincerely

H J Payne
Headteacher

