

THE FEDERATION OF MIDDLEHAM (VA) AND SPENNITHORNE (VC)
CE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

EPHESIANS 4:32

7th January 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

School Attendance

We are writing this special letter to you about attendance to provide you with a clear outline regarding absence procedures and the stance of The Governing Body Of Middleham VA and Spennithorne VC CE Primary Schools.

The Governors wish to make it clear that they will support the Headteacher and NYCC in promoting high levels of attendance and will now take action where there are unsatisfactory reasons for absence.

Consistent 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' commitments or business trips
- holidays taken in term time (including long weekends taken on Fridays and/or Mondays)
- parental illness

Illness and First Day Call

If your child is unable to attend school through illness, you should inform us by telephone at either school before 9am on the **first** day of absence. Alternatively you can email us at middlehamadmin@fed-mas.n-yorks.sch.uk or spennithorneadmin@fed-mas.n-yorks.sch.uk, or call in in person at the offices from 9am. It is useful to know the expected day of return. If we do not know this, please ring again to inform us of a continued absence. We chase up any absence as an agreed school safeguarding measure.

When your child is absent through illness or medical appointments, this will normally be counted as authorised. Where we have concerns over excessive absence patterns through illness, we will need to discuss this with yourselves in order to gain a better understanding of the problems and to offer support.

We do understand that illness is unavoidable but this easily adds up. If a request for holiday then comes on top of this, it significantly impacts your child's attendance.

Medical/Dental Appointments

It is strongly encouraged that these are 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 collect their child from the office and we do expect them to return to school afterwards. Once again, please return your child to the office. It is also required for us to have notification as to whether your child we be expecting a school meal. Medical and dental appointments are recorded as authorised absences.

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 promptly. Lateness causes a variety of problems and is recorded in the register as such.

Leave of Absence:

Holidays

It is not our policy to authorise holidays in term time.

Where parents wish to take their child(ren) out of school during term time for purposes other than holidays, they should complete the leave of absence form. This is available on the schools' websites or via the office.

The only exceptions to this are where parents serve in the armed forces (this does not extend to the emergency services i.e. Police, Fire, Ambulance etc.), when families need to come together in time of crisis, when inflexibility of parents' work prevent taking leave during holiday time or a one off never to be repeated event . Each event is considered on its own merit and we appreciate that sometimes, emergencies do happen.

Sadly though, this is beginning to be abused and we as the Governing body have decided that we will support the imposition of a fixed penalty fine for any unauthorised leave of absence. This can be very expensive. This will apply to any parents who request and take unauthorised leave of absence in term time and will apply to requests made from today, Tuesday 7th January 2020 onwards.

Approved Public Performance

Where children are invited to perform in a licensed show or concert, (e.g. orchestra, pantomime) you are asked to consult with staff about how much time away from school is required. We also might need to request a performance licence from NYCC. Where possible, such requests will be granted provided that the child's education is unlikely to suffer. The school will also be sympathetic towards leave to participate in a recognized city, county or national sporting event.

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 90% is regarded as persistent absence by the DFE. In our schools, 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. In a small school, one child has a disproportionate impact on percentages.

Our duty of care in responding to unauthorised and persistent absence – possible consequences

We have a duty of care to challenge poor attendance. Where attendance levels are low and where there are invalid reasons for a pupil's frequent absence or where parents condone absence (e.g. by taking children out of school on unauthorised holidays), then parents might render themselves liable to a fine of £60 per pupil per parent. This could mean a fine of £360 for two parents of three children. This would be doubled to £720 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 the governors want everyone to be very clear about the issue.

This policy is in line with our feeder secondary school.

We hope that these notes will help you to have a clearer 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.

With kind regards

Mrs L Sweeting
Chair of Governors

Mrs L Evans
Head Teacher