



~ Every Child Matters Every Day ~

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School Attendance

There is no doubt, the last two years have had a huge impact on everyone's health, mental well-being and resilience. Sometimes the effort to get children to school has needed superhuman strength, when we are all struggling ourselves. Covid itself, isolation, when we should come to school and when do we not, how we get children to school if we are ill – it has all been a bit of a minefield to negotiate and I thank you all for your efforts and determination to ensure your children are at school as much as possible.

But it is not over yet and rates are still high in the area. **We will still be maintaining our one way system around the outside of school for the moment**, along with other internal measures as Wolverhampton Public Health have advised we keep our school risk assessments of cleaning, ventilation and unnecessary mixing/close contact in place.

Government Guidance as of 1st April is:

- adults with the symptoms of a respiratory infection, and who have a high temperature or feel unwell, should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people until they feel well enough to resume normal activities and they no longer have a high temperature
- children and young people who are unwell and have a high temperature should stay at home and avoid contact with other people. They can go back to school, college or childcare when they no longer have a high temperature, and they are well enough to attend (if sickness and/or diarrhoea, then 48 hours after the last bout)
- adults with a positive COVID-19 test result should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 5 days, which is when they are most infectious. For children and young people aged 18 and under, the advice will be 3 days.

So, it is not surprising that the DfE are looking at school attendance and reinforcing the expectation that children should now be back at school as before, especially if they are to make up for any lost learning. But it is not yet happening.

'Catching up on lost learning during school closures will only be possible with good school attendance, but attendance rates remain below pre-pandemic levels.' (DfE March 22).

There is increased pressure on schools to reinforce the legal requirements of children's school attendance and punctuality. **Our school weekly attendance currently stands at 92.5% which is far below the *minimum* expected of 96%.** We have a growing number of persistent absenteeism – children who are under 90%. In some cases, this may be due to covid, but many have dropped due to odd days off and as parents, you may not be aware of how these have added up.

For clarity, I have explained all the different absence scenarios, expectations and actions that should be taken below. It may seem very negative, but I wanted to make it very clear what procedures and actions school is legally expected to take to ensure good attendance at school, so there is no confusion.

- **General Absence**

If your child is ill, you must ring school, preferably leaving a message on the school absence line (School Number 01902 558787, Option 1). You need to do this every day that they are absent unless we have spoken with you and know the day they are due back e.g. 48 hours after a sickness bug. If we do not hear from you, an absence text request will be sent. **YOU MUST REPLY TO THIS PLEASE.** Otherwise concerns for your child's safety may be raised.

If your child is off for longer than two days, you may be asked to provide medical evidence or it will be deemed unauthorised absence.



Absence is continually monitored by the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and our Administrative Staff. If attendance drops below 95% you will be sent a letter to make you aware and to stress the importance of your child being at school. If attendance continues to fall, you will be invited in to meet with the EWO and our Family Worker for an Early Help Meeting, to try and understand why your child is absent so often and if there is any support we can offer. Non attendance at that meeting and a continuation of absence will result in your case being referred to the legal team in the council who will decide whether to prosecute or not.

- **Punctuality**

What parents may not see as an attendance issue is punctuality. We can have 20-30 children arrive late to school every day! If your child is persistently late, this will count against their attendance as it is also monitored by the EWO. Ten minutes late every day adds up to a whole lesson missed every week.

Of great concern, is that children arrive late unaccompanied, having been dropped off on the road outside. Once the teacher on the gate has gone in, we can not monitor when children arrive. Therefore, you cannot be sure they have actually come in to school and not been distracted from entering for some reason. This is a major safeguarding risk, so we do ask that, if there is no longer a teacher on the gate when your child arrives, you must come to the office and sign them in, not let your children come in by themselves. If your child is in EY or KS1, you still need to sign them in at the office before walking them round to the correct entrance door. Our Office Staff can not walk them round for you. Do remember, we run a Breakfast Club if some parents would find it easier to arrive earlier with children.

If you are going to be late picking up children, please ring the office to let us know. We will keep children supervised at the gate till 3.30pm but after that they will be taken to After School Club, as staff have meetings and directed time to fulfil. If this happens more than once, we will have to charge at the After School Club rate.

After School Club finishes at 5.30pm. If you are running late, you must inform Mrs Penfold. Again, if this happens more than once, the late pick up fee will be added to your bill as described in the ASC agreement. Fees should be paid in advance using the SIMS payment app, however, some have discussed paying at the end of the week with Mrs Penfold. If fees go beyond two weeks, the place can no longer be offered at the club till all debts are paid or a payment plan is in place. If you are struggling with fees, please do talk to us to see if we can help rather than let things mount up. We will always help in any way we can.

- **Medical Appointments/holidays**

Finally, another absence issue, is taking children out for medical appointments and holidays. Doctor and dentist appointments should be made outside school hours. Only hospital appointments that are sent to you that you can not book yourself should be taken in school time but if it is one that can wait for a school holiday, we do ask that you request for this. Please inform the school office with proof of appointment and arrange time of pick up with them, not the class teacher. Holidays can not be authorised unless there are real exceptional circumstances. Recently, we have been understanding about those who have had to work through the pandemic and not been allowed to take holidays at the normal times, however, that is no longer an option to authorise. Good attendance through the year is also not a justification to be authorised holiday. Any days taken beyond the authorised absence is deemed unauthorised and will be penalised. If attendance is poor, holidays will not be authorised even in exceptional circumstances. Although guidance states it is up to the Headteacher to authorise or not, we have strict advice from the DfE not to beyond exceptional reasons.

Any leave of absence, including holidays, whether they are to be authorised or not, must be applied for using the request form available at the Office or can be sent to you if you write to the school email address warstonesprimaryschool@wolverhampton.gov.uk. Any unauthorised leave of absence is reviewed by the EWO and if this goes beyond five days, then legal action becomes likely. If your child is not in school for a period of time and we have not had notification from you, then your child may also be deemed missing from education and police and social services informed.

A heavy letter and I am sorry for that. But the DfE have asked schools to make it very clear to parents what the school attendance expectations are post covid so we all work together to support our children maximise their learning and narrow any gaps in knowledge from the last two years.

To help, we have attached a leaflet to keep safe as a reminder.

If you have any queries about your child's attendance or are in need of support in any way, do e mail the school and we will always support you if we can.

