

St. Nicholas CE Primary Academy

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Dear Parents & Carers,

I am writing to you about school absence and the national (and local) crisis schools have faced since the pandemic.

We are now at the half way point of the current term. On Friday I met with parents to discuss the attendance of those who are causing the school greatest concern, those with attendance below 80%. In a period of two weeks back at school, nearly 10% of our pupils were absent from school on Friday. The lowest attendance rate was in Year 6, along with our pupils designated as having special educational needs. Those who need support as they work towards their transition and with their educational needs, are absent.

We've become used to these statistics and sadly, these patterns of absence are now considered normal in schools. At St Nicholas, our attendance is broadly the same as the national and local averages. Disappointing, given we were above these before the pandemic.

Totals and averages mean little other than to illustrate the problem we face in schools. What matters most, is your own child's attendance.

Missing two weeks for a family holiday taken in term time will mean that your child has missed 50 hours of learning new things which they will never be taught again but will face questions on in the future. Having broken attendance (a day off every week or fortnight, on random days) means that pupils will miss five hours of new learning each time but will struggle to understand that work they do the following week because lessons are taught in sequences which rely on prior knowledge.

I have written before about the significant correlation between absence and pupil outcomes. Put simply, pupils who miss school regularly reduce their lifetime earning potential because they achieve worse exam results than their peers, and develop poor habits to take to the work place where high levels of absence, poor punctuality, or an indifferent attitude to responsibility can result in dismissal. Positive attendance behaviours need to be embedded at primary school to avoid this.

You may think I am over-dramatizing, but my experience tells me that this is a real concern and the Government agrees because they have highlighted the issue again in recent weeks. Please can I ask that if your child is absent from school regularly (pupils should have full attendance most weeks) you seek to address this and ask us for support if you are struggling with your child.

Parents of pupils with SEN, or in Year 6 with poor attendance, this is an urgent situation which needs to be rectified immediately.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Dale



Aquila, The Diocese of Canterbury Academies Trust

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