



Headteacher: Mrs C. Mason

Deputy Headteacher: Mrs. S. Stirrup

E-mail: enquiries@admin.sacredheart.wigan.sch.uk

Web site www.sacredheart.wigan.sch.uk

18th April 2016

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: Your child has attendance below 90%

I am writing to all parents and carers whose children have unsatisfactory attendance at school because they fall into the persistent absence category.

Following the letter, which was circulated in November 2015 regarding attendance, I write again to remind parents and carers of their responsibilities in ensuring their children attend school regularly

Too many pupils at Sacred Heart have low attendance which is falling below 96% and which is beginning to affect their education. A significant number of pupils have attendance below 90% which is recorded as persistent absence and which is having a detrimental effect on their child's social, emotional and academic life.

We understand that a minority of pupils may have long term identified and diagnosed conditions which may prevent regular attendance at school. It is our responsibility to support families in enabling these children to continue to succeed, managing any difficulties on an individual basis and ensuring that professional help is sought.

However, there are too many parents and carers who are not sending their children to school and providing insufficient evidence for non-attendance. As you are aware, our recent OFSTED Report (24th and 25th February 2016 which is available on our school website) raises the issue of attendance at Sacred Heart and provides the following area for development:

Improve pupils' rate of attendance by:

- Strengthening relationships further with the number of parents who do not send their children to school regularly so that they understand the role they must play in securing good learning
- Continuing to utilise all powers available to school leaders to encourage parents to bring their children to school regularly

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This is a strong message to our school and one which OFSTED intends us to take seriously. We must improve our attendance figures and we cannot do this without taking swift and strong action. Pupil attendance is directly related to pupil attainment and progress and we want every child to achieve the very best possible results by being in school regularly. I am sure that this is what you want for your child too.

In order to address this OFSTED Area for Improvement our school will be carrying out the following actions:

- 1. Sending out a summary of our Attendance Policy (included with this letter) to all parents and carers at the school to ensure that everyone knows the procedures regarding school absenteeism. The full policy is also available on the school web site.**
 - The policy outlines all of our agreed procedures for ensuring good attendance and it the responsibility of all staff to implement and adhere to this adopted Governing Body Policy (November 2015).
 - Any parents and carers who are unsure about the policy and their responsibilities should make this known to our Children and Families Support Worker, who will be able to explain it to you.

- 2. Asking all parents and carers to identify the specific reason for their child's absence on the first day of absence (as per the policy for Attendance)**
 - Our staff will ask specific questions about this so that accurate records are formed. These records can be monitored, patterns identified and absences followed up where needed.
 - Should you wish to discuss your child's absence in a private place (as the front of school is often busy) please make this known to our office staff.
 - When phoning to leave a message please be specific about your child's illness as we are unable to record 'ill' as a reason for absence. Please let us know the nature of the illness e.g. cold, cough, vomiting, headache etc.
 - We will determine whether illness is to be recorded as authorised or unauthorised absence. This is the responsibility of the Headteacher, who may request further information from health or medical professionals.
 - We will support parents and carers with genuine barriers, which prevent them getting their children to school. This may involve a wider range of professionals e.g. Gateway Service, Social Care, the School Nurse, etc.

- 3. Using all powers to ensure parents and carers bring their children to school**
 - The Attendance and Enforcement Team will continue to issue Penalty Notices to parents and carers for non-attendance
 - Prosecuting parents and carers for non-attendance where needed

- 4. Strengthening Relationships with parents and carers of pupils with low attendance through:**
 - Appointing a Learning Mentor to our Pastoral team to increase capacity for working with parents
 - Carrying out first day phoning where there is no known reason for absence, making home visits and direct contact with parents of pupils with poor attendance
 - Putting an action plan in place for individual cases to support improvements

- 5. Addressing punctuality and lateness through:**
 - A visible presence at the school gate, which is locked each morning at 8.55am
 - The Learning Mentor to be on duty at the front of school to meet with parents of late pupils each day.

- 6. Rewarding good attendance**
 - Reporting each classes' attendance each week and awarding the attendance bear to the winning class
 - Reviewing our rewards system for good attendance so that families are recognised for their achievements in school attendance

We are aware that occasionally it may be necessary for children to be absent from school but we do ask for support in ensuring your child's regular attendance. In order for your child to achieve an expected attendance of at least 96% they should have no more than 7.5 days (15 sessions) absent in a school year. One day equates to

two sessions and parents can be unaware of how “the odd day/session of absence” can add up to a significant amount.

Please note that requests for leave in term time are not normally authorised, other than in exceptional circumstances. If a child is taken out of school for a two week holiday, this equates to twenty sessions and your child is then recorded as a persistent absentee and this may result in a penalty notice and/or prosecution.

Should you need any advice regarding school attendance please do not hesitate to contact our school office and ask to speak to the following people who will be able to help:

| Staff Member | Position | For help with.... |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Mrs Roach | Children and Families Support Worker | Improving attendance, barriers to learning, family difficulties |
| Mrs Taberner | Admin Officer | Specific reason for absence |
| Mrs Stirrup | Deputy Headteacher | Absence related to Safeguarding and health and safety |
| Mrs Mason | Headteacher | Attendance related to unauthorised absence decisions |
| Miss Fouracre | Learning Mentor | Improving attendance, barriers to learning, family difficulties |

In the meantime, I will be working with our Pastoral Team to ensure that strong relationships are established with all parents and carers of pupils with unsatisfactory attendance. Thank you in advance for your co-operation in this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs C. Mason

Headteacher