



ST. BERNADETTE'S

CATHOLIC PRIMARY VOLUNTARY ACADEMY

A MEMBER OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES CATHOLIC MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

3rd May 2024

Dear Parents / Carers,

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Multi-Academy Trust has recently updated its **Attendance Policy**, so I am writing to you with an update to our attendance procedures and I hope you will take the time to read the important information set out below.

Many of you will be aware that school attendance has been a prominent topic in the national media over recent months. Following the pandemic, pupil attendance nationwide has fallen significantly in schools at both primary and secondary level, and the Government and Ofsted have made this a key priority for schools to tackle. Clearly, a large onus is on parents to ensure that their own children's attendance is as high as possible, and through school and home working together we can ensure the best possible outcomes for your children.

I am pleased to report that attendance at St. Bernadette's is currently above the national average, and that *persistent absence* is lower than the national average, and this was also the case last academic year. Our *attendance rate* has climbed in each of the last 2 academic years, and our *persistent absence rate* has fallen for the last 2 years, all of which is very positive. Clearly this is in large part down to you as parents and the importance you place on high attendance for your children, and I want to thank you for your excellent support in this regard.

Nevertheless, there is always room for improvement; despite the positive data overall, the academy has a sizeable number of pupils who are persistently absent (attendance at 90% or lower), and this is something we are required to continue to improve, working in partnership with relevant parents. Every school day missed has an impact on a child's education, but when attendance falls to these levels it starts to impact in a very significant way and we must therefore continue to do all that we can to raise attendance levels in these cases.

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Multi-Academy Trust's updated **Attendance Policy** outlines the procedures that all of its academies are now obligated to operate in accordance with. The full policy can be found on our academy website. **There is a lot of information set out on the following pages of this letter with key extracts selected directly from the Trust's near 50-page policy, but it is important that all parents are aware of this information, so I would encourage you to take the time to read through this letter, and particularly the final section on 'Important Changes' that I want all parents to be aware of.**

Striving for excellence in all that we do, reflecting the Light of Christ to the world

ST. BERNADETTE'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY VOLUNTARY ACADEMY

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❖ **The law states that parents/carers have a legal obligation to ensure that children within their care attend school regularly. Schools and the local authority have a duty to ensure that poor school attendance is dealt with swiftly.**

❖ **Persistent absence** refers to pupils whose attendance is 90% or lower

❖ **Severe absence** refers to pupils whose attendance is 50% or lower.

❖ **Pupils must arrive in school before registration closes on each school day. Due to the staggered timetable in operation at the academy, parents should take careful note of registration times relevant to their child/children:**

NURSERY:

Morning registration: 8.45 a.m. – 8.55 a.m.

Afternoon registration: 12.45 p.m. – 12.50 p.m.

RECEPTION:

Morning registration: 8.40 a.m. – 8.55 a.m.

Afternoon registration: 12.45 p.m. – 12.50 p.m.

KEY STAGE 1:

Morning registration: 8.40 a.m. – 8.55 a.m.

Afternoon registration: 12.45 p.m. – 12.50 p.m.

KEY STAGE 2:

Morning registration: 8.40 a.m. – 8.55 a.m.

Afternoon registration: 1.45 p.m. – 1.50 p.m.

❖ **Punctuality**

The importance of arriving at school on time:

- ❖ Arriving late at school may cause embarrassment for the child
- ❖ Pupils' arriving late is disruptive, not only to their own learning but the learning of others
- ❖ Pupils may miss something important such as lesson plans or instructions on how to complete a piece of work
- ❖ Lateness can affect how students form friendship groups. Social interaction with peers before school is important
- ❖ Pupils are marked present. The register is not only a legal document it also provides evidence that pupils have arrived in school and are safe
- ❖ Punctuality shows reliability and is a valuable attribute for future working life. Future universities, colleges and employers look for reliability. A good record of attendance and punctuality is an indication of this and they may request to see this in the future.

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❖ **We aim to engage with families, understand barriers to attendance, and work together to remove them**

In the first instance our school will support pupils and parents by:

- ❖ Working together to understand and address any in-school barriers to attendance
- ❖ Meeting with the families of those at risk of persistent or severe absence and agreeing actions or interventions to improve the situation
- ❖ Making referrals to services and organisations that can provide support.

Where absence intensifies, we will provide additional support, such as:

- ❖ Holding more formal conversations with the parents and pupils
- ❖ Working with our local authority (LA) and other relevant partners.

Where voluntary support has not been effective and/or not been engaged with, we will work with our LA to put formal support in place, such as:

- ❖ Use a parenting contract or an education supervision order
- ❖ Intensify support through statutory children's social care involvement where there are safeguarding concerns, especially where absence becomes severe.

❖ **Leave of Absence and Responding to Non-Attendance**

Parents should report absences on the first day of any illness before the start of the day and continue to report on subsequent days. Only persons with Parental/Carer Responsibility can report absences. Parents/Carers can report via their school's Gateway app/School Coms/texting or via email. CMAT Schools will not accept a verbal message from a child. If we do not receive a message, the absence will be marked as an unauthorised absence.

Home visits where pupils don't attend school: When a pupil is absent from school, and no reason for absence is received, the school will contact parents/carers by text message and phone calls. In the event we are unable to make contact regarding the absence, the school may try other contacts held on a child's record and/or reserve the right to make an unannounced home visit.

Medical appointments: Parents must notify the school in advance of any medical appointments and provide evidence of the appointment. Wherever possible, medical appointments should be made outside of school hours.

Medical sick notes: Where students have had on-going regular absence, medical evidence would need to be provided.

Attendance meetings

Parents/Carers of students with poor attendance may be invited to attend an attendance meeting. This may include a variety of professionals involved with student welfare. The aim of this meeting is to improve future attendance and prevent the need for referral to the relevant Local Authority to begin legal processes.

Should poor attendance continue then a referral shall be made to the relevant Authority for further action (see below):

North Lincolnshire: Each school has a named Education Welfare Officer. They offer support to parents and carers and services to improve attendance at school.

If the leave of absence the parent has requested is not agreed by the school and the child's total unauthorised absences as outlined in the bullet points below amount to 10 or more sessions (5 school days), continuous or odd days within the previous three months, the Education Inclusion Service will be notified and a Penalty Notice will be issued to each parent for each child.

- ❖ A parent has made a request to a school for a period of absence in term time and this has not been agreed by the school
- ❖ A parent has not applied for leave of absence in advance (the regulations do not allow for approval after the holiday)
- ❖ A parent keeps the child away from school for longer than was agreed, the extra time is recorded as unauthorised
- ❖ The school has marked the absence as unauthorised, as they have reason to suspect this was in relation to an unapproved holiday in term time and no alternative evidence has been provided.

❖ **Leave of Absence during Term Time**

Our Lady of Lourdes CMAT will not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Each school within the trust will determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted.

A leave of absence is granted entirely at the headteacher's discretion and is **not a parental right**. In accordance with government guidelines, the application must be made **12 school days** in advance by completing a leave of absence request form. The application form is available from individual schools within the academy trust by request. The headteacher must be satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances which warrant the leave.

If parents take pupils on holiday during term time Our Lady of Lourdes CMAT schools will not provide extra work; students will be expected to catch up with any work they have missed when they return from the holiday.

Our Lady of Lourdes CMAT schools may agree a 'leave of absence' in the following exceptional circumstances:

In order for consideration to be given, requests for absence must be for exceptional circumstances only. The number of days to be agreed with the headteacher.

Exceptional circumstances could include:

- ❖ Service personnel returning from a tour of duty abroad where it is evidenced the individual will not be in receipt of any leave in the near future that coincides with school holidays
- ❖ Where an absence from school is recommended by a health professional as part of a parent's or child's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue
- ❖ The death or terminal illness of a person close to the family
- ❖ To attend a family wedding of a close family member
- ❖ Important religious observances (but only for the ceremony not travelling time)
- ❖ Where there are exceptional and unforeseen circumstances that fall outside of 1 to 4 above, the headteacher agrees to consult with the DPS team prior to any authorisation being given to the parent.

What are NOT considered 'exceptional circumstances':

- ❖ The family cannot afford to go on holiday in school holiday time, or have a special holiday offer for term time
- ❖ To visit family members abroad (unless they are severely ill which may be considered)
- ❖ To spend time with a family member who is visiting from abroad in term time
- ❖ Because you or your partner cannot get time off work during school holiday time
- ❖ You have a family tradition of going at a certain time of year
- ❖ Going away for a birthday celebration (including the child's birthday).

Our Lady of Lourdes Trust will not agree a 'leave of absence' in circumstances such as:

- ❖ Availability of cheap holidays
- ❖ Availability of desired accommodation
- ❖ Poor weather experienced in school holiday periods; and
- ❖ Overlap with the beginning or end of term.

Leave of absence that has not been approved will therefore be unauthorised and may lead to a referral being made to the local authority for action.

- ❖ Schools within North Lincolnshire; a penalty notice will be requested where a child's total unauthorised absences amount to 10 or more sessions (5 school days), continuous or odd days within the previous three months
- ❖ Use of fixed penalty notices will be restricted to two per child per academic year. In situations where a parent meets the criteria for more than one penalty notice to be issued, because there is more than one child with irregular school attendance multiple issue may occur.

Penalties are set at £60 per parent per student if paid within 21 days of issue, if not paid within 21 days the fine doubles to £120 if paid within 28 days. Where a fine remains unpaid the matter may be enforced at the Magistrates Court, under Section 444, Education Act 1996. The maximum fine for this offence is £1000 per parent, per child.

❖ Important Changes

- ❖ With regard to the above, I would particularly draw the attention of parents to the tighter restrictions I now have to operate under in terms of authorising requests for leave of absence. For a number of scenarios, even when I am satisfied that the circumstances are 'exceptional', I am now only permitted to authorise a maximum of 1 day of absence for the day of the event itself. All other dates in the request are to be unauthorised, including where families travel abroad for significant events and any travel dates.
- ❖ Whilst we would strongly encourage parents to not take holidays in term time, I have previously always tried to be understanding of circumstances where parents submitted evidence that they could only take their holidays in term time due to being given no time off by their employer during school holidays. **Under the Trust's updated policy, as highlighted in this letter, I am no longer allowed to do this, other than for service personnel.** Almost all holidays taken in term time from this point forwards will therefore be classed as unauthorised, unless there was to be some other exceptional circumstance that I felt able to approve but not listed here. Where the level of unauthorised absence could trigger a penalty notice, I will, however, always take into account the circumstances provided to me by parents and so letters from employers will continue to be of support to me in trying to make fair decisions for families and I would therefore encourage parents to continue to provide such evidence when relevant.
- ❖ Finally, I would draw parents' attention to the table on pages 17–18 of the policy which outlines the detailed procedures the academy will operate when attendance falls **below 95%**. Mrs. Holland is our Attendance Officer and she has Lead responsibility for administering these procedures, alongside myself. The Trust's target for all pupils is to achieve at least 97% attendance. **Previously, we wrote to parents when a pupil's attendance fell to 90% or lower, when the persistent absence threshold was reached. Under this updated policy, we are now required by the Trust to write to parents when their child's attendance falls below 95%.**

I am drawing parents' attention to this significant change in procedure as inevitably, this higher threshold means that many more parents will receive attendance notice letters than was previously the case. This additional tier of letters and procedures can be thought of as **an early reminder** to parents that their child's attendance is moving closer to being classed as persistent absence and for prompt improvements to be made, thereby avoiding, we hope, the need to issue letters for attendance below 90% and possible penalty notices. Our aim is to work with and to support families to try to avoid this circumstance if at all possible.

We are grateful for your ongoing support in ensuring the best possible attendance for your child/children. I hope that parents have found the above information useful and that together we can continue to make high levels of attendance a top priority for all our children.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. M. Strong,
Headteacher