



Backwell School

An Ofsted Outstanding School
A National Teaching School

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Headteacher: Jon Nunes MA

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Dear Parent / Carer

School Attendance

I hope that your child has settled in to the new year at Backwell School.

As the Assistant Headteacher with the overview of student attendance, I wanted to write to you at the start of the year to highlight the importance of maintaining a very high student attendance at school. The link between poor attendance and lower attainment is very clear and well documented by research and is visible again in our GCSE and A level results.

The government sets a base level expectation of 95% attendance and states that any child whose attendance drops below 90% is classed as a Persistent Absentee. Although this may be seen as harsh, 10% absence is equivalent to one day off every fortnight or 19 full days of absence in a school year and this will clearly impact on their attainment and progress. We want our students to be successful after they leave Backwell and this level of absence would be concerning in any work place.

I understand that children can be ill and we certainly don't want children attending school if they are not in a fit state to do so; however, we receive many phone calls and emails at school from parents explaining that a child 'has a bit of a headache' or 'is feeling a bit poorly' or that they are 'tired after a school trip' or a 'busy family weekend'. None of these are acceptable reasons for absence and I would remind you that is the **decision of the school as to whether we authorise a child's absence**. We reserve the right to ask for evidence before we authorise this and this evidence can include a Doctor's appointment card, a prescription or a letter from the GP. Unauthorised absences can lead to the Education Welfare Service being informed and Fixed Penalty Notices being considered. Parents who do not have the school's permission for their child's absence face a maximum fine of £60 per pupil, per parent. That rises to £120 if not paid within 21 days. Those who refuse to pay can face court action and, if prosecuted, a fine of up to £2,500 and a possible jail sentence of up to three months. It is now likely that we will ask for medical evidence before authorising the absence for ANY child who has an attendance record of below 90%.

Many children exhibit anxiety about coming to school and we have noticed an increase in the number of days lost which are being attributed to anxiety issues. It is really important to understand that anxiety is a natural part of being a human and we can support you and your child in overcoming these concerns if we are made aware of them quickly. If your child is becoming anxious about coming to school, please contact his/her tutor in the first instance as they may be able to support your child through this period. There is also a section on the school website entitled 'Are you worried about your child?' which may be able to support you.

<http://www.backwellschool.net/Worried-about-your-child>

The vast majority of students at Backwell School have excellent levels of attendance and we appreciate the support from parents in maintaining this.

To support your child's attendance at school, please try to book routine dental or medical appointments outside school hours and where this is not possible, please return your child to school after the appointment. I would also remind you that term time holidays will only be authorised in very exceptional circumstances and will almost certainly count as unauthorised absences.

If you are aware of a developing or ongoing medical condition that could impact on your child's attendance at school it is vital that you communicate this with your child's tutor and pastoral team so that support can be put in place to make sure they do not fall too far behind.

If you have any questions about attendance at school please contact your child's tutor and pastoral team in the first instance or you can contact the School's Education Welfare Officer, Peter Noble, via the school mailbox, mailbox@backwellschool.net.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MS', with a horizontal line underneath.

Martin Sills
Assistant Headteacher