

26 January 2024

Dear Parent / Carer,

I am writing to you today to talk about school absence, and the national (and local) crisis that schools are facing since the pandemic. Yesterday, in only the third week back, 14% of our students were absent from school. 19% of Year 11 students, those in the most important examination year of their lives, were absent.

Pre-pandemic, schools were regularly seeing attendance levels at 95%, with Year 11 often at 97% or higher, giving them the best chance of success. Examinations aren't any easier now, so this lack of attendance will simply result in worse grades.

We've become so used to these lowered statistics and, sadly, these absence levels are becoming all too common. Schools around the country are facing similar, if not worse, attendance issues.

So I start by saying a heartfelt thank you to all of you who support us in ensuring that your child is here every day with attendance above 95%, but unfortunately, there are too many of our young people who aren't attending school regularly enough.

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 an examination. Having broken attendance (a day off each week or fortnight, on random days) will mean that students will miss five hours of learning each time, and will struggle to understand the learning upon their return to school, because lessons are taught in sequences which rely on prior knowledge. So, the 'only one day' of absence can actually have a really negative impact.

I spoke to all students about the correlation between exam results and attendance - those who are here achieve, and those who aren't, don't. Whilst exam results are not the be-all and end-all, it is a simple fact that students who achieve less well in their examinations reduce their lifetime earning potential. Moreover, regular absence means that students develop poor learning habits to take into the workplace, where high levels of absence and poor punctuality will likely result in dismissal.

There is only one solution to this, and that is to ensure that your child attends school regularly. The Government also recognises how serious a problem this is because they have highlighted this in their most recent campaign. Our attendance team is tasked with ensuring that all of our young people are present to help them succeed, yet they are often met with hostility and rudeness. Please can I ask that if your child is absent from school regularly (students should have full attendance most weeks) that you seek to address this issue and ask the attendance team for support in getting your child to attend.

For parents of Year 11 students, this is an urgent situation which needs to be rectified immediately.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alison McQueen', written in a cursive style.

Alison McQueen
Principal