

*Through God's grace,
a community growing in knowledge and understanding*

St. Laurence Catholic Primary School

Arbury Road, Cambridge CB4 2JX
Telephone/Fax : 01223 712227
E-mail : office@stlaurence.cambs.sch.uk



Headteacher: Mrs. Clare Clark M.Ed., LL.B (Hons)

4th November 2019

Dear Parents and Carers

St Laurence works closely with the school Education Welfare Office, Melissa Archer, who covers the North City area and supports our school in order to ensure, in conjunction with others, that our children receive education appropriate to their needs through regular school attendance.

The Education Welfare Officer attends the school regularly to monitor attendance level and offer support to parents to help address potential problems through early intervention help. With their support the school implements Cambridgeshire County Council's three letter system to managing attendance.

During our meetings with the Education Welfare Officer we track every child's attendance; including Reception children, the national expectation for attendance is 100%. If a child's attendance is below 96%, parents will receive a Letter One. A Letter One is used to flag an initial concern with attendance and to bring parents attention to the decline. If a child's attendance continues to drop a Letter Two is sent asking parents to come and meet with Mrs Harvey where we will discuss your issues with attendance or lateness and set targets for improvement. From this point any further absence due to ill health will require some form of medical evidence (an appointment card or copy of the prescription), if no evidence is forthcoming absence from school will be coded as unauthorised. If there is no improvement, or attendance is below 92% then the parents will be contacted directly by the Education Welfare Officer. If a child's attendance falls below 85% over a 4 week period and there is no improvement, despite support and advice from the school, a fixed penalty notice could be issued.

St Laurence do not authorise term time absence requests, unless the circumstances are deemed to exceptional by the school (please see attached guidance as what is regarded as exceptional). Any parent who takes a child out of school for term time leave of more than 3 days or more over a 4 week period, not authorised by the school may receive a penalty notice.

We know that parents understand that better attendance at school by pupils improves their educational achievements and, in turn, their lives and prospects. Even a small reduction in absence would result in many pupils receiving greater benefit from their education. If you have any concerns regarding your child's attendance, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Kind Regards,

Mrs V Harvey
Deputy Head Pastoral



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ADVICE & GUIDANCE

Guidance on authorised absence in schools

There is some debate about what 'exceptional circumstances' means when deciding whether to grant absence for students during term time. We believe it is valuable to have some guiding principles to back schools in their decisions and provide consistency. This guidance has no statutory authority and is not imposed upon schools.

1. The decision to authorise absence is at the head teacher's discretion based on their assessment of the situation. Circumstances vary from school to school and so there can be no absolute rules on this subject.
2. Term times are for education. This is the priority. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. Heads will rightly prioritise attendance. The default school policy should be that absences will not be granted during term time and will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.
3. If an event can reasonably be scheduled outside of term time then it would not be normal to authorise absence.
4. Absence during term time for holidays/vacations is therefore not considered an exceptional circumstance.
5. Absences to visit family members are also not normally granted during term time if they could be scheduled for holiday periods or outside school hours. Children may however need time to visit seriously ill relatives.
6. Absence for a bereavement of a close family member is usually considered an exceptional circumstance but for the funeral service only, not extended leave.
7. Absences for important religious observances are often taken into account but only for the ceremony and travelling time, not extended leave. This is intended for one off situations rather than regular or recurring events.
8. Schools may wish to take the needs of the families of service personnel into account if they are returning from long operational tours that prevent contact during scheduled holiday time.
9. Schools have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for students with special educational needs or disabilities.
10. Families may need time together to recover from trauma or crisis.

Guidance on authorised absence in schools (October 2014)



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11. It is acceptable to take a student's previous record of attendance into account when making decisions.
12. It is important to note that head teachers can determine the length of the authorised absence as well as whether absence is authorised at all.

Any examples provided are illustrative rather than exhaustive. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. And by 'unavoidable' we mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time.

Background

The education (pupil registration) (England) (amendment) regulations 2013, which came into force on 1 September 2013, removed references to family holidays and extended leave as well as the notional threshold of ten school days. The amendments made clear that head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless 'exceptional circumstances' exist. The regulations also stated that head teachers should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if leave is granted for 'exceptional circumstances'.

The DfE advice on school attendance (November 2013) should also be considered and read in conjunction with the 2013 regulations.

We believe the guidelines in this document to be compatible with the above policy. They clarify the definition of external circumstances; they do not change it.

Ofsted have confirmed that their focus is on whether recurrent absence is being addressed; only if there is an issue with this will they look more deeply into why the school has authorised absence. Concern about inspection should not govern schools' decisions in this area. Head teachers are under pressure to meet overall absence thresholds however.

Variations to term time

Where schools serve communities whose patterns of work create a regular barrier to attendance and family life schools could consider changes to term times. Where this involves changes to compulsory terms, we strongly recommend this is co-ordinated across schools and local authorities in an area.

Some schools have adopted flexible term patterns, with the same overall number of days of study but some discretion to families under certain conditions.

