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Dear parents/carers

I am writing to make you all aware of my concerns over the high rate of pupil absence at the school. I am also aware that this letter is likely to frustrate some parents who know that their child has good attendance and is doing well at school – this is not my intention but I feel it is important that all parents are aware of the situation.

A child is regarded as persistently absent from school by the Department for Education if they have an attendance of 90% over the school year: another way of looking at this is having one day away from school every two weeks. We have just submitted our data to the Department for Education and we have 15% of our children which fall into this category, almost double the national average.

This is particularly concerning for me since national data shows that a poor attendance at primary school is strongly related to poor academic performance at 11 and then at 16, with a knock on effect for employment prospects. There is also the less cited impact of children not developing the understanding that, just as when they go to work, they should have an expectation that school is to be attended every day unless there is an exceptional circumstance.

The school has undertaken an audit of our absences and they fall under the following categories:

- Sickness
- Unauthorised term time holidays
- Authorised holidays associated with different school term dates
- Exceptional, short term circumstances such as a funeral

The vast majority of pupil absence is related to the first two in this list. In relation to term time holidays, the head teacher of any school cannot authorise these, even when parents have difficult shift patterns or if it is to witness a wedding abroad, for example. Ibstock Junior School will continue to follow government policy and mark these holidays as unauthorised and refer them to the educational welfare officer. These could well result in the local authority issuing fines of £60 per child.

In relation to sickness, there are a significant number of children who have not had a significant illness, but just a lot of individual days which have mounted up. Repeated sickness will also be investigated by the educational welfare officer; children with concerning levels of attendance will be asked to provide medical evidence for absence, otherwise this will be marked as unauthorised and again could lead to prosecution.

As I know the majority of you understand, I would not be caring for the children of this school if I did not point out my concerns to parents about attendance and try to address this issue for the children both now and in the future. In light of our persistent absence problem and recent cases in the media, I feel all parents need to be

reminded of the school's responsibilities and parents' responsibilities with regards to attendance. I would also like to point out that the governors have been discussing this over the last year and have been accommodating to parents, for example in relation to the holiday clashes with ICC and the collapse of Monarch Airlines. In addition, the school is investing in Education Welfare Officer services and is to employ a family support worker to help parents who are finding it hard to ensure their child attends school regularly.

I trust this letter clarifies the situation for all parents and carers, but I am more than happy to discuss things with people on an individual basis should it be required. Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely



Mr P Lewin

Head Teacher

