



31 January 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

## Attendance Update

I wanted to write to you again, following my letter (<https://tinyurl.com/2p9dfx6f>) on the 13 January, to thank you for your continuing support with your child or children's attendance and punctuality, and also to explain a little about a number of new processes we have introduced and refined recently.

As you may be aware, the City of York is struggling across the city to get student attendance back to pre-pandemic levels across its schools. It is not clear why the situation is better in many other cities across the country. Quite rightly, the Department for Education (DfE) is challenging the Council to improve attendance in our area, and as a result all York secondary schools are working collectively to increase the rigour and support around attendance and absence procedures.

Attendance at Millthorpe School is currently below 90%, which is below the national average and well below our historic average pre-pandemic of being consistently above 95%. We have set an aspirational target of 97%, based on our research into best practice, and working directly with schools that have restored attendance to where it needs to be.

It is important to note that the DfE classifies any student who has attendance below 90% as being a 'persistent absentee', within its guidance to schools on encouraging good attendance. We are keen to ensure that students aim for our aspirational attendance target, but in particular do not fall below 90%, which is the equivalent of being absent from school for a full day every four weeks on average. There is of course evidence on the impact of this on student progress and indeed their qualifications. The City of York Council (CYC) leaflet goes into more detail about this here: <https://tinyurl.com/mryd3s7a>

The CYC has a 'Fast Track' attendance system, agreed in partnership with schools, for students who fall below 90% attendance, but please be aware that we support students and their families on a case-by-case basis, there is not one blanket approach for all.

Please also note that this below 90% 'Fast Track' process relates to unauthorised absences that students have accrued, rather than authorised absences such as approved visits, approved sporting engagements, and medical or dental appointments (with evidence).



The September 2023 DfE guidance reminds us that *“all schools have a continuing responsibility to proactively manage and improve attendance across their school community”* and that *“the most effective schools consistently promote the benefits of good attendance at school, set high expectations for every pupil, communicate those expectations clearly and consistently to pupils and parents, systematically analyse their data to identify patterns to target their improvement efforts, and work effectively with the local authority to overcome barriers to attendance.”*

As you will be aware, we have introduced a new process to address relatively high levels of lateness to school, particularly within the first 10 minutes of the school day, i.e. after 8.45am. At this time, students should be in their Tutor period receiving important messages, accessing our personal development curriculum and getting ready for learning. Parents/carers now receive a text if their child is late that day, including the number of minutes, with the opportunity to reply. You will appreciate this is an important part of safeguarding too, so we are quickly aware of which students are on site, and which are absent. From next Friday, at the end of the week, where a student has had one or more lates to school, their parent/carer will also receive a lateness summary text, with the number of lates, and the total minutes. I am pleased to report that, whilst the vast majority of students have always been on time to school at Millthorpe, punctuality levels have dramatically improved in the last two weeks.

Parents in the past have often expressed surprise when annual school reports have listed the number of lates for their child, and have wanted to be informed earlier in order to support the school, hence the introduction of these lateness texts, in a much more prompt fashion. Thank you in anticipation of your support around the reasoning for this.

We have also introduced weekly percentage attendance texts, as you will know. Again, this is based on best practice and DfE guidance, but we appreciate that the necessity of the brevity of SMS texts can sometimes lead to frustration. Instead of sending a relatively uninformative standard text, listing simply a % attendance figure, we wanted to give a little context and in particular praise where it is due. Experience in other schools is that parents/carers appreciate seeing their child’s % attendance increase each week, particularly when there have been absences earlier in the year, using it as another opportunity to praise and encourage. In our busy lives it can be difficult to keep track of cumulative attendance, hence our wish to be open and transparent. We are refining the wording in some cases, based on helpful feedback from parents.

There are other attendance initiatives as well, including around rewards and inter-form/year competitions, that will be launched shortly, as well as increased bespoke support for students who are particularly struggling to attend school regularly.



Millthorpe  
School

**Headteacher: Ms G Greenhalgh**

---

Millthorpe School  
Nunthorpe Avenue  
York YO23 1WF

Tel: 01904 686400  
admin@millthorpeschool.co.uk  
www.millthorpeschool.co.uk

---

In all of this we recognise that the best way to get students into school is by making our lessons and other activities as high quality as possible and this continues to be our number one priority as a school. Miss Greenhalgh will write to you about this and the rationale behind other recent improvement initiatives in the school within the next few days.

As ever, thank you for your continued support, it is greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Rob Beever  
Deputy Headteacher