



**06 October 2023**

Dear Parent/Carer

## Attendance Matters Update

We wanted to write to provide further clarity on student attendance. Our aim is to be as transparent as possible so we all have a shared understanding of the requirements and approaches being used to support students coming to school as regularly as possible.

Two key factors that are important to understand are: 1) the impact of low attendance on learning; and 2) the legal responsibilities to manage attendance placed on schools by the government.

**The school target for student attendance is 95%.** This equates to 10 days of absence a year, or 19 half days (known as 'sessions'). The more often students are off school, the more learning they miss, and the less time they spend with their peers and teachers in a community setting. The government is determined to raise levels of attendance in schools, and defines students with attendance lower than 90% as 'Persistent Absentees'. We are rightly held to account to effectively monitor attendance and provide support where needed but we also rely on parental support to improve in this area.

We understand that each year, students may miss a few days of school unavoidably through illness or injury. **Our aim is to ensure that students are attending school whenever it is possible for them to do so.** A small number of students face really significant barriers to regular attendance: this might be a debilitating illness or physical impairment. We'll work closely with these families to build a supportive package.

**Some absences can be authorised.** If a pupil has a medical or dentist appointment, this will be authorised as most medical appointments are hard to book outside school hours. Moreover, it is worth noting that if your child registers in the morning at 8.45am, then goes to an appointment and returns after the appointment, they are not penalised and still considered to be present for the full day. **We can also authorise illness or injury that is confirmed by medical evidence.** As such, we would always ask that parents provide medical evidence of appointments or illnesses wherever they can, albeit we completely accept that this is not always possible. Medical evidence can include hospital letters, text or email reminders for an appointment, photographs/copies of medication prescribed for illness, or doctors notes. Please note that we don't routinely authorise absence when a student's overall percentage is below 95%.

**Holidays are not deemed as 'exceptional circumstances'** by the government, and are therefore coded as unauthorised absence. If a leave of absence form is not completed in advance, the holiday would always be unauthorised and it is rare that any trip taken during term time would be authorised. If you feel your reason would be 'exceptional' please complete the request form for consideration. The local authority has set thresholds for issuing penalty notices for holidays taken in term time.



**For every day of absence, please notify the school office before 8.30am;** this is essential so that the attendance team can spend this time ensuring that all vulnerable students can be supported with their attendance. Absence can be notified via [admin@millthorpe.southbank.academy](mailto:admin@millthorpe.southbank.academy) or 01904 686400 and selecting 1 to speak to our Attendance Admin Officer or leave a voicemail.

**We think it's vital that parents and carers are kept aware of the attendance of their child/ren.** To support our shared approach, we continue to share each student's current attendance at the end of the week via text. We also produce attendance information slips each week where a student meets the government's definition of a Persistent Absentee, i.e. below 90% attendance. These are shared with parents and carers to make them aware of this position and to provide clear targets for students to achieve so that we can work together to reintegrate them back into school and improve their attendance. They are intended to be supportive rather than punitive, and we hope they are received in this way. The slips are also used by form tutors to talk to students about improving their attendance.

**Where pupil absence is of concern, we have a graduated response to support students and families.** Initially, we will always get in touch to ask how we can help. There may be something that we need to know or a way that we can assist. If absence persists and/or there is significant concern, this could escalate to a formal meeting with a member of the Attendance Team, or could involve meetings with the Local Authority.

We realise this is a lot of information, but we hope you appreciate that we want to be as open as possible regarding attendance and that we want to work in partnership with you in this regard.

Thanks for your continued support; it is very much appreciated,

Yours faithfully

***Millthorpe School Attendance Team***