



Sacred Heart RC Primary School



Co-headteachers: Mrs S. Walker & Mrs J. Botham
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‘Where Every Heart is Sacred’

26th July 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that you are enjoying a wonderful summer and I apologise for interrupting your family time with a message from school. However, as you may have read recently in the press, the Department for Education (DfE) has recently shared with schools and Local Authorities changes to attendance guidance that will become statutory and must, by law, be implemented from 19th August 2024. These changes must be made by all schools and Local Authorities across the country, with the aim of ensuring consistent approaches in managing school attendance. I wanted to make sure that you were fully aware of these changes prior to their statutory implementation date of August 19th. At the end of this letter, there are also reminders about water bottles, labelling school uniform and the revised finish times for KS1 and KS2.

As a Manchester school, we firmly believe that regular school attendance is essential for the educational progress and overall wellbeing of our pupils and we share the Department for Education’s (DfE) ambitions to improve school attendance. We are proud of our overall attendance at Sacred Heart but we are committed to returning to our very high pre-pandemic levels of attendance because we know that being in school on time every day gives our children the best chance of succeeding both academically and socially.

In this letter, shared initially by Manchester LA, we have highlighted some of the support that is available at Sacred Heart with regards to school attendance. However, we also need to make you aware of the important nationwide changes that come into force on 19th August 2024 in relation to the issuing of fines.

Why Regular Attendance Matters

Consistent school attendance allows your child to:

- * Fully engage in learning and make academic progress
- * Grow in confidence in a supportive and nurturing school environment
- * Develop essential social skills by interacting with children, friends and staff
- * Build the sense of routine and responsibility that is critical for future success





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Support First

At Sacred Heart, we understand that some pupils may face challenges that impact their attendance. Our attendance team is here to provide support and guidance to pupils and families in such situations. If you encounter any difficulties related to attendance, please do reach out to myself (Mrs Botham), Miss Dolan, Mr Wilson, Miss Garland or your child’s class teacher/s or teaching assistant/s. We are also ably supported by Alexis Slater, a Caritas family support worker who is on-site at Sacred Heart every Tuesday. The best way to make an appointment with Alexis is to email admin@sacredheart-jun.manchester.sch.uk using the subject line ‘FAO Alexis Slater’. A copy of our attendance policy can be found [here](#).

What happens if my child has a period of unauthorised absence?

One of the main changes from the Department for Education is how sanctions for unauthorised absence are used. If you take an unauthorised holiday in term time or have other periods of unauthorised absence, Manchester City Council may issue you with a fine (known as a fixed-penalty notice). If issued with one, you’ll need to pay this directly to the local authority. The new Education Penalty Notice fine amount will be £160 per parent, per child if paid within 28 days; reduced to £80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days. Please note that each parent will be issued a separate education penalty notice, for each child who is absent. For example, for a family with 2 parents and 3 children, each parent will receive 3 education penalty notices for £160 each, with a family total of £960 in fines, reduced to £480 if paid within 21 days. The decision whether to issue a fine will take into account whether a national threshold has been met - this is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks - as well as other factors. If there was a second period of unauthorised absence within a three-year period then a second penalty notice could be issued, and this would be at the higher rate of £160. Fines are paid directly to Manchester Local Authority. Manchester Local Authority retains this money and does not redistribute it to the school. Further periods of absence within three years, could mean that parents would be taken to court with no option of a penalty notice.

Irregular Attendance

‘Irregular attendance’ refers to a child having 10 unauthorised absence sessions or more in any 10-week period. Sessions refer to each half a school day (schools have 2 sessions a day: morning and afternoon). The school must consider the reasons for the absence, the support already offered, and the engagement of the parents/carers and young person. These 10 sessions could be made up of unauthorised term time leave, unauthorised late marks, or unauthorised absence. Where a child has unauthorised absences of 10 sessions (5 school days) or more in any 10-week period, the school must consider escalation to prosecution.





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It is therefore important to notify school every day that your child is absent, providing a reason and, where appropriate, evidence of medical appointments or prescribed medication. Schools will consider NHS Guidance Health Protection in Children and Young People Settings, including <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/> and government documentation such as <https://www.gov.uk/school-attendance-absence> when deciding whether to authorise absences due to illness.

Exceptional Circumstances

We recognise that there may be exceptional circumstances for term-time absences, such as attending external exams for grammar/drama schools or competing in elite sporting competitions. In such rare cases, please submit a formal absence request to the headteacher well in advance. The headteacher will carefully consider each request on an individual basis. Term-time holidays are not permitted during the school year.

Reminders

As well as labelling all school uniform so that it can be returned to you as efficiently as possible, please remember to send a clean, full, labelled water bottle to school with your child each day. Unfortunately, water bottles will no longer be provided by school and water bottles will no longer be kept in school overnight.

From Tuesday September 3rd, our school gates will continue to open at 8:45am and will close promptly at 8:55am so that phonics and reading lessons can start on time. In line with government guidance, children in Nursery and Reception will finish their school day at 3:05pm. KS1 children in Classes 1, 2 and 3 will finish their school day at 3:15pm. KS2 children in Classes 4, 5, 6, 7 8 and 9 will finish their school day at 3:25pm.

Thank you for your attention to this unusually long letter and thank you for your co-operation and commitment in ensuring your child is in school on time every day. I very much look forward to welcoming you all back to school on Tuesday September 3rd 2024 and I wish you peace and joy for the remainder of your summer.

Yours in Christ,

Mrs J. Botham

Co-headteacher

