

Parent Forum

Thursday 11th January 9.15am

(12 attendees)

Main points of focus: Attendance & Communication

Mr Proctor opened the session by outlining recent changes in the law and guidelines surrounding attendance. Currently, 8% of our pupils fall below 90% attendance. The national average is 3%.

The recent Supreme Court ruling has led to changes surrounding absences from school, Headteacher's no longer have the power to authorise holidays during term time. The recent court case also determined that 'regular attendance' should be considered every day; attendance policies are being updated to reflect this ruling. Absence of 10 sessions (equivalent to 5 full school days) within a 10 week period will be fineable. These absences do not have to be successive in order for the fines to be imposed.

The fines are £60 per child, per parent. This increases to £120 if the fine is not paid within 21 days.

The school's current attendance is 94%; this is below the 96% target set by the government. Ofsted will look at this and rigorously investigate the reason for this. They will also examine what measures have been taken by the school to improve attendance. If evidence is lacking the school will be under intensive scrutiny, which could ultimately lead to Ofsted's overall judgement of the school being down -graded from good.

We are introducing attendance rewards. These will be family orientated activities that will appeal to children and parents. This term the rewards will be £50 Odeon Cinema vouchers and £50 Harvester vouchers. Children achieving 96% or above will be entered into the draw.

Question: Does late count as absent?

Answer: Yes, but only after a certain time.

Question: Under 5's are not required to attend to school. Does this impact the 96%?

Answer: It is true that under 5's do not, by law, have to attend school full time. It is difficult to monitor and will ultimately impact the attendance percentage. This is something that will need looking into further, it may be possible to exclude the under 5's but then trying to reward the under 5's with excellent attendance becomes more challenging.

Suggestion received via email: Is the school considering an additional weeks holiday like some other schools in the area?

Answer: Mr Proctor advised that some local schools had extended their school day, by shortening the lunch break or moving inset days together, allowing an additional weeks holiday. Commonly, this week is taken in October.

A recent meeting has taken place with a group of local Headteachers regarding the possibility of doing something similar. Discussions are in the very early stages and will be ongoing.

Question: A parent felt that October was not an ideal time of year for an extra week long holiday.

Answer: The holiday does not need to be taken in October. Other periods of the year could be considered. For example, May half term. However, this would not suit secondary schools as this is when students are taking GCSE's.

Question: How close is the relationship with Hadleigh Junior School? Would holidays be agreed?

Answer: Both schools would need to agree. A consultation would take place, with parents, staff, pupils and governors all being involved from both schools.

A parent suggested that, in the case of two working parents, an extra week holiday would prove very difficult.

Question: Is there currently a preference between May and October

Answer: The subject needs further discussion with views sought from all those affected.

A parent commented that, if this were being done to address the absence due to sickness then June would be ineffective. The height of sickness seems to occur around November. However, June is the month when most unauthorised holidays are taken.

Comments were made that the ad-hoc inset days were not a problem, as long as advance notice is given, short term child care was not an issue. The long summer holiday proves much more difficult to manage.

Answer: The school providing affordable childcare is something that is being discussed and thought about.

Question: Local holiday clubs that are currently available do not start early enough or stay open late enough to be of any real benefit.

Answer: A trial of holiday childcare provision is already planned. Feedback from this will hopefully give a good indication of what is required.

A parent commented that the long weekend in the spring is much missed.

Parents were shown holiday price comparisons for 3 destinations for May/June and October, in and out of the current school term.

Question: If a child is sick in the classroom, does a deep clean take place?

Answer: If a child is sick in class, the area is cleaned immediately with an appropriate disinfectant. A deep clean of a classroom is very expensive, however has been used on occasions when appropriate. Therefore we have to carefully consider when that would be appropriate. If, for instance, there were a high number of children becoming ill, with the same thing, in the same class, a deep clean would be considered.

A parent commented that parents have to do their bit to assist the containment of germs.

Mr Proctor commented that education plays its part in this too. There are lessons, assemblies and workshops that are being considered for the children

Parents were keen on this idea.

A parent commented that whilst good hygiene is a must we should also allow children to build up their natural immunity. Over sanitising is proven to lead to a less effective immunity and an increase in allergies. Living too clinically is detrimental to overall health

Question: Are under 5's included in the attendance award. There is no legal obligation for children under 5 to attend school.

Answer: This is an area that needs investigating. They are not obliged to attend but are automatically included in the statistics.

Mr Proctor explained that Mrs Reader had recently undertaken training regarding administering non-prescription medication. We are now able to administer Calpol, etc. It is hoped that this will help parents and children, if a child has a cold and feels slightly poorly but, with regular medication well enough to attend school. This may reduce the number of days taken off of school for illnesses such as coughs, colds, sore throats, etc.

A parent commented that their child had had to have a full 2 weeks off of school due to an operation. The amount of time taken was unavoidable. This resulted in the attendance part of the report showing as red. The parent felt this was unfair as it could not be helped.

Mr Proctor acknowledged that this may seem unfair; he explained that the absence would have been recorded as an authorised medical absence. As with all of the reports, this would have been discussed with the child and explained. Any absences; authorised or not are counted in the percentages and have to be reported this way.

A parent commented that they did not like the colour coding used on the reports, nor did they agree with the title 'Behaviour'. The parent commented that their child had been very upset about having the yellow on the report, after discussing the reason for the yellow the parent didn't feel that the mistake should be classed as bad behaviour.

Mr Proctor explained that children would only receive yellow for behaviour if there was more than one incident. Mr Proctor advised that he would investigate this particular case before commenting. Mr Proctor said that he would review the Behaviour Policy and ensure that it was followed consistently throughout the school. Any sanctions for behaviour should be fair and uniform throughout the classes.

A parent commented that a lack of reading at home is not the fault of the child but of the parent, seeing this area marked as red in the report had a detrimental effect on the child. It was in fact due to a misunderstanding by the parent as they did not fully understand the expectation or how to show what had been worked on at home.

A parent agreed, saying that there needed to be a clearer idea given of what was expected from parents, what the school day entails, topics, etc. It was suggested that the school could produce a year group manual, for the start of each academic year that the parents could be given to have a

much clearer understanding of the expectations for the year ahead. The general feeling by the parents in attendance was that this would be a good idea. Mr Proctor also agreed that this is something the school could do, starting in the next academic year.

Mr Proctor agreed that there are still areas of improvement required. He felt that communication as a whole was better but is always looking for ideas on how to improve further.

A parent said that there had been lots of changes happening in a short space of time, while this is seen as a positive it is felt that these changes need to be communicated and explained to parents more fully.

Mr Proctor showed parents the new website, explaining the main features. These include recent newsletters, school calendar and social media feed being visible on the front page. The new app for eschools was explained, it is hoped that both the app and the website will improve communication further.

A parent suggested that key dates be broken down into year groups to make them more visible. It is generally felt that the earlier the better when it comes to dates and information. Publishing key dates at the start of term is generally felt to be helpful with reminders nearer the time on Facebook, newsletter and school website.

A Nursery parent felt that communication could be improved for them. More information earlier and not in the form of notices in the window of the classroom. A parent discussed if the communication linked to incidents of bumps, bruises and falls could be improved further. Mr Proctor agreed that he would be willing to review the current systems with Mrs Bennett regarding this matter.

After a discussion it was deemed that the general feeling was that boards outside the classroom and notes in windows and book wallets do not work. The way forward is to have class pages and year group pages on the website. This will be reliant on teachers updating their pages and parents accessing the website to find information.

A parent commented that the new format of newsletter was much easier to read and informative.

A parent commented that they felt that communication between the midday staff and teachers could be improved. Mr Proctor advised that all incidents at lunchtime should be written in the MDA log book and anything of note be communicated verbally to the teaching staff. Mr Proctor encouraged parents to inform the school of incidents that had not been reported to them.

Mr Proctor advised that all of these points had been recorded and would be looked into.

The meeting concluded at 10.30am

Parent Forum

Thursday 11th January 7pm

(5 attendees)

Mr Proctor started the meeting off with the same information as the morning session surrounding attendance.

Question: If a child is sick for several days and then shortly after is absent due to a holiday, would both absences be fineable?

Answer: No – Sickness is authorised so not fineable, unless the school had cause to believe that the absence was due to something other than illness. If there was cause for the school to think that the child was in actual fact on holiday but had been told by the parents it was due to sickness. The school has the authority to mark the absence as unauthorised, if medical evidence is not provided when requested.

Question: Is it fair that children are rewarded for good attendance, whatever the reason for their absence it is not their fault. The parents yes, but not the child.

Answer: We have to tackle attendance; our attendance is lower than the expected level. As a school, we believe in the importance of the children receiving high quality education 100% of the time. We will do everything in our power tackle it and make improvements where possible. One way we are doing this is by introducing a gold and silver award with the chance to be entered into a prize draw. We are always willing to work with the whole family in order to improve attendance, whatever the reason. As a school, we have successfully worked with families to improve their child's attendance and look forward to carrying on doing so when required.

A parent commented that a child with long term illness will have unavoidable low attendance. This low attendance impacts not only them but also the overall attendance of their class.

Mr Proctor asked for ideas how this could be tackled in a fair and inclusive way. Possibly identifying those that fall into that category and devising a separate reward system. It is our intention for the school to be wholly inclusive and allow all children to achieve in an area and be rewarded as such. Mr Proctor will look into this and attempt to provide a solution. There is a cluster of local schools who we work with who may be able to offer ideas.

Mr Proctor advised that the attendance target is 96%. This is a primary school target and there is no specific guideline for an infant only school, therefore we have no choice but to take our benchmark as 96%.

A parent suggested the installation of gel hand pumps may be beneficial for reducing the spread of germs.

Mr Proctor advised that this is something we have considered, however, the functionality and cost implications has so far prevented the school from moving forward with this idea. We also feel that the children would benefit from education surrounding personal hygiene. Assemblies, workshops

and class exercises can all be used to help with the children's knowledge and understanding. There are also school nurse drop-ins that could be effective.

Question: Would it help if when parents reported an absence they were more specific about the reason. For example, does the child have a cold or have they been sick. Is the 48 hour absence for sickness and diarrhoea enforced by school?

Answer: Yes, it would be very beneficial to know the reason for absence as it would allow us to be aware if there was a specific problem in a specific class. For instance if a high proportion of children were off with a stomach upset we may consider a deep clean of the classroom. This would have to meet a certain level due to cost.

Question: There are certain times of the year that stomach upsets are more common, at these times do you think it would be a good idea to have alcohol gel available in order to minimise the spread of germs.

Answer: It is something that we could look into.

Mr Proctor explained that our attendance is lower than what is expected, as a school we have to do everything in our power to address this. One way we are looking at doing this is by changing the school term time to facilitate families going on cheaper holidays.

Question: Families where both parents work would be caused complications regarding childcare. Current holiday care providers will not automatically offer cover for these changes.

Answer: Mr Proctor advised that we have already been looking into solutions for this. This topic will form part of any consultation that would take place.

Question: Is it possible to have any dates that require a day off of work or that the parents need to supply something for be given as early as possible. For instance sports day, do you know the date and if so can it published now rather than waiting until the beginning of the term it falls in.

Answer: We need to strike the correct balance where information is concerned. The concern being that publishing dates very early often get forgotten about, feedback received seems to confirm that little and often isn't desirable. I agree that dates such as sports day, performances, leaver's assemblies, etc should be given out as soon as practically possible.

Question: With the early finishing at the end of term can Nursery be brought in line with the rest of the school. A pick up from Nursery at 11.30am and then a pick up from Year 1 at 1.30pm is not practical.

Answer: Mr Proctor confirmed that he would discuss this with the Nursery staff and report back.

Question: Are there any plans to increase the variety of clubs? Specifically clubs that appeal to a broader range of children, not all children are sporty but would still benefit from attending an extra-curricular club.

Answer: Couldn't agree more. This is something that we have already been looking into as a staff.

A parent commented that the Bedtime Stories event was very popular and well run, lots of good feedback heard about the event.

A parent commented that the new style reports were a vast improvement on previous ones. Gave clear and concise information and were easy to follow and understand where improvements were needed.

A parent commented that the presence of the Headteacher in class was seen as a very positive step. Although one class in particular had benefited from this more than others due to staff absence Mr Proctor advised that upon joining he had taught every class, this is something that he intended to carry on with when time allowed as he feels it is a very important part of being a Headteacher.

Actions moving forward

- Look into and clarify the implications of a late mark on the register to a child's attendance level.
- Consider how absences for children under 5 are recorded.
- Hold conversations with School Governors and Mr Moore regarding potential changes in holidays.
- Inform parents of the school's new policy for administering non-prescribed medication.
- Roll out the school's new attendance reward system and consider how the system can be adapted for children with exceptional circumstances.
- Investigate the possibility of the school providing additional care during holidays.
- Provide a document for parents at the beginning of the next academic year linked to year group expectations and procedures.
- Release the school's new website.
- Develop the year group pages, on the website, to share information.
- Consider the use of hand sanitisers around the school during the times of the year when illness is more prevalent.
- Ensure that key dates, such as Sports Day, are communicated well in advance.
- Termly key dates will be split into year groups and whole school.
- Consider Nursery times when the school day is finishing early.
- Look at the school's extra- curricular activities and consider how this can be improved.
- Develop systems to improve communication between parents and staff relating to injuries at school.