



Dear Parents,

Thoughts on Attendance

It is a well-researched and rather obvious fact that there is a strong correlation between attendance and achievement in schools. Salesian therefore prides itself on having one of the highest rates of attendance of any school in the country. Our excellent record in this regard results from the hard work and determination of staff and parents working together to ensure that students make coming to school every day and on time a top priority.

There are only 190 school days in the year and we aim for every child to be present for every one of those days. We fully appreciate that there will be certain occasions when children will miss school but we strive to reduce these to an absolute minimum. The school obviously authorises absence for significant illness, medical appointments that absolutely can not be made out of school hours and for the unforeseen unhappy events that we are all unfortunately susceptible to. Having said that, we often find that we are better placed to support a child in need if they are actually in school but this obviously depends on the individual situation. On a more positive note, we also authorise absence for certain one-off events where we believe that the students will benefit from engaging in a certain activity that we deem to be beneficial to their general education.

What we do not authorise absence for are: holidays, extended family events or any activity that require a regular or series of commitments during term time. Our view is that there are 14 weeks in the year when the children do not need to be in school and this is the time to book a holiday even if this doesn't tie in with other family celebrations or opportunities to travel. We appreciate that for some there are serious cost implications but our responsibility is to provide high quality education not cheap holidays.

The vast majority of parents are pleased that their children attend Salesian and we are very "up-front" about our attendance policy; it is well publicised at Open Evening and all subsequent initial meetings with parents. One of the things people like about the school is that we are strict on standards and this means that we apply the expectations consistently without favour. Although those who have requests for permission for absence turned down are often disappointed we feel that they would be far more disappointed overall if the school was not consistent in its approach or acted without integrity.

The reason why we are so strict is because we feel this is what is in the best interests of the student body as a whole. It may not suit individual families' needs at any particular time but we believe that striving for 100% attendance is a key element in our on-going success.

Where parents choose to take unauthorised absence or worse are not honest with us about a child's absence then we have a number of sanctions at our disposal, including the use of Local Authority enforced fines. We obviously prefer not to pursue this course of action unless attendance or punctuality are blatantly or consistently unauthorised but we are encouraged by the Department for Education to deal with these matters rigorously.

The school's success is in no small part due to the fantastic support we get from parents. Attendance for some is the "thin end of the wedge" i.e. they feel that they can afford to take their children out of school because they generally have good attendance and support us in many other ways. Unfortunately it doesn't work like that, the bottom line is, you either support us or you don't. If you choose not to it sends a very clear message to the children because they know exactly what the expectations are. If you choose not to support the school the message is: "it's important to do as you are asked at school but in certain situations, if it suits you better, you don't have to". I'm sure you'll agree that this isn't the message you want to send to your son or daughter.

In short, we are urging you to make the children's education your number one priority and therefore asking you to please not take them out of school during term time. If you would like the opportunity to discuss this further please make an appointment to see me.

Yours sincerely,

James Kibble
Executive Headteacher