



Blundeston CEVC Primary School



A Place to Flourish

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10)

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School Newsletter - Friday 21st June 2024

Transition

As we are nearing the end of the school year, children's thoughts start to turn to the next step of their journey. Whilst most children make the jump from one class to the next relatively smoothly, for some of our children, change can be incredibly challenging. It can bring on anxieties and fears because they are facing the unknown.

Transition can help to bridge that gap. When the children get to spend some quality time with their new class, they suddenly realise that the adults and the classroom environment are not that scary. Once they get their heads around the new routines, then many of those barriers are broken down.

For the next academic year, a few changes will be taking place. Some teachers will be staying in their current year group, whilst some will be moving to a new year group.

For the academic year 2024 / 2025, the teachers will be working in the following year groups:

Year R – Mrs Allen

Year 4 – Mrs Ward / Mrs Barber

Year 1 – Miss Johnson / Miss Gowen

Year 5 – Mrs Houlgate

Year 2 – Miss Moore

Year 6 – Miss Sweeney

Year 3 – Miss Holt-Whittaker

At Blundeston, we are really lucky to have such knowledgeable and highly skilled TAs who understand and work exceptionally well with the children. Going forward, I am going to direct them to be far more flexible in the way they work.

Long gone are the days when every class expected and had their own teaching assistant. Instead, our TAs will be directed by where the level of needs are most across the school. This will mean using the data we have from tests and professionals who come in to give advice, plotting the progress of the children to identify which gaps in their learning and social development need addressing.

The TA role in school is truly all encompassing, as one moment they can be working with an intervention group and the next cleaning up sick! However, they are an integral part of the fabric of school and model our core school values of family, flourish, respect, supporting our aspiration to help the children reach their full potential.

Attendance

It is the goal of every school to ensure that the children are attending as often as possible. This is because it sets good trends which are continued throughout life. Businesses, for example, use attendance information in many ways, most often whilst recruiting. One electronics firm only employed workers who had 100% school attendance and cut their staff sickness rates to close to zero, improving productivity and staff well-being, which ultimately saved them millions of pounds.

Attendance is the hottest topic in education at the moment because since the pandemic, attendance rates have never recovered to pre-Covid times. It is statistically proven that the more often children are out of school, the worse their grades will be on leaving school.

It can also be unhelpful to think of attendance rates using percentages. Having an attendance rate in the 80s sounds good – it is not. The government classifies children with an attendance under 90% as persistently absent. It is probably better to think about how many sessions, days or weeks are lost rather than a percentage. An attendance of 90% means a child is missing one day out of every ten - one day a fortnight.

If a child goes through school with an attendance of 90% this means from YR to Y6 they have lost well over two full terms of education. No wonder then, when compared to children who average close to 100% attendance, are those children struggling to match the grades of their peers.

Lower attendance affects children's learning because schools organise their curriculums to be sequential. Start putting some holes in the work that should have been covered and you can see why the problems occur. Of course, it is our job to plug those gaps and with skilled interventions we can overcome many minor blips.

We fully understand and expect every child to be off from time to time. There are too many sickness and diarrhoea bugs doing the rounds not to be. A bout of sickness or diarrhoea results in 48 hours away from school, in order to limit it being spread. Likewise, at some point it is to be expected that children will pick up something like chicken pox which would require some time away from school. What is interesting is that, unless many everyday conditions are accompanied by a high temperature, then it is to be expected that a child will not be kept off for things like, coughs, colds, cold sores, conjunctivitis, hand foot and mouth disease, head lice, scarlett fever (once antibiotics have started), sore throat and threadworms.
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/>

Where Covid has had a profound impact is in children (and parents) feeling more anxious or worried. It is normal for children to feel a little anxious sometimes. They may get a tummy ache or headache, or have problems eating or sleeping. However, avoiding school can make a child's anxiety about going to school worse. It is good to talk about worries they may have such as friendship problems, school work or sensory problems. By working together, we can overcome many of the issues faced.

You may be wondering, why go over this again? Read on and all will become clear...

New Attendance Regulations

I mentioned in my last newsletter that the DfE had put out new legislation relating to attendance and that I was waiting for Suffolk LA to give the LA schools their interpretation and implications of what this meant. Well, after attending a headteacher's conference last week, I am now in a position to share that information and at the same time clarify a few issues that have clearly been bothering parents – especially those with older children in high schools!

The bottom line is that government is really keen to avoid parents removing their children for term-time holidays. It exacerbates and compounds the gaps in a child's learning, thus making it far harder for the child to reach their full potential. Fines have been used as a deterrent in the past but, such is the differential between the money a family can save on a holiday in term time, compared to a holiday taken in the school holidays, the deterrent has proved ineffectual. Most families build in the cost of a fine as part of their holiday expenses.

We could go in to why government has not tackled the huge disparity in costs the tour operators use when marking up school holiday packages (trust me, as somebody who can only go on holiday in the school holidays, it really smarts!) but they have chosen not to go down that road.

Instead we are left with a new system starting from this September that really ramps up the level of deterrent of taking children out of school. At the conference, it was explained to the headteachers to think of the new policy as 10 in 10. If ten unauthorised absences are recorded in any ten-week period, this means the school is duty bound to investigate the reasons as to why this has occurred. If a school can work with families and try to find ways to overcome the absence in future, fines may not be the best way forward.

However, can school prevent a family from going on holiday? Would anything a school does stop that from happening? Of course not. In this case, schools are expected to process the paperwork which will lead to a penalty notice – a fine.

For a first offence this equates to a £160 fine per parent, per child paid within 28 days. This is reduced to £80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days.

A second offence within three years will lead to a fine of £160 per parent, per child, paid within 28 days.

A third offence and any further offences within three years will not lead to a penalty notice. Instead, the case will be presented straight to the Magistrate's Court. Prosecution can result in a criminal record and fines of up to £2,500. Cases found guilty in Magistrate's Court can show up on the parent's future DBS certificate due to the 'failure to safeguard a child's education.' Of course, for many parents, dependent on having a clean DBS, this could ultimately lead to them losing their job!

As a grant-maintained school, we are subject to scrutiny and monitoring carried out by the Local Authority. We have Education Welfare officers delving into our attendance data, asking questions about children's attendance that is falling short of the 90% government target. It is expected that we follow the LA's policy on attendance, which is what our own school policy is based upon. More recently, Ofsted have now been instructed to be ruthless in following up concerns over poor attendance data and the reasons behind them.

As an LA school, there is nowhere for us to hide as we feel the pressure constantly from these sources. Nearby schools, nearly all of which are academies, have in the past, not been subject to the same levels of scrutiny. They have employed their own Trust policies or in some cases, not adhered to any policy at all, it would seem.

This of course leads to parental frustration and resentment that two different schools are using different criteria to consider term time holidays. Trust me, it has been a growing source of frustration to me too. It is not fair that we are following the guidelines as stated in our policy/LA policy guidelines and then feel the heat when other schools are not.

I was assured at the Headteacher Conference that this new system and government policy should bring all schools into line. All schools are now duty bound to look into the '10 in 10' unauthorised absences. Schools must be able to show what they have done to improve the child's attendance: how they have worked with parents, supported them, signposted them for help, worked with the child, nurtured them, comforted them, etc. The list goes on and on.

What schools cannot now do is turn a blind eye to term time holidays. If a school does not have the ability to stop them (and rightly or wrongly, government has deemed that no amount of leisure-based activities or museums you visit whilst on holiday will make up for not being in school) then a penalty notice should be given.

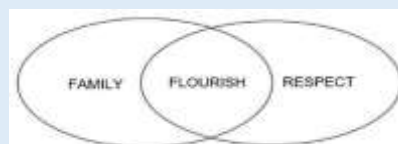
This last thing I will say on this matter is in part a plea of please don't shoot the messenger. This policy should now be the norm for all schools from this September. If you have concerns, queries, are angry or confused and wish to take it up with somebody, please get in contact with Alison Coote. She is the Lead Attendance Officer for Suffolk Local Authority. Alison.Coote@suffolk.gov.uk By all means, copy me into any correspondence you have with her, but I am sure she will echo all of the information I have laid out in this newsletter and confirm that the school is implementing the Local Authority's wishes.

Respect

When I started last September, I was really keen to build good relationships with our families. I believe having those open lines of communication are essential in order to get the best outcomes for the children. We will continue to work hard at this as we want that holistic approach to your child's education and welfare to be at the forefront of all our thinking.

Building those good relationships is dependent on there being mutual respect. In almost all cases this is what we see. However, there are occasions when our staff are not treated with the level of respect we should expect to see. Nobody who works in school should be shouted or sworn at, intimidated or threatened. We understand that emotions can run high sometimes, that there may be a lot going on in a parent's personal life but that does not give anybody the right to disrespect our staff.

Bear in mind that we only ever want the very best for your child. That means we want to see them arriving on time for the start of the school day. If you are asked to fill in a late form, please accept this is necessary, rather than take out your frustrations on the office staff.



Packed Lunch Boxes

We are working hard with our children to get them to understand the importance of recycling, reusing and reducing our waste. Educating the children to know which bin/container they put their waste into is crucial in ensuring it ends up in the place.

Unfortunately, at lunch time, many of the children are forgetting to check which bin they should be using for the rubbish. As a result, the rubbish is getting mixed up with recycling and this has caused issues for staff, who then have to sort it all out. As you can appreciate, this is not a pleasant job at all and can be very time consuming.

What we are proposing from next week is that all the children who have a home packed lunches take their rubbish home in their packed lunch box. Apart from the obvious advantage of helping to cut down the issues at school, there are two other benefits of this approach.

Firstly, we know that the rubbish the children generate will go in exactly the right place. If your rubbish collection is like ours at school, your bins must be in order, otherwise collection can be refused.

Secondly, and most importantly, if all the contents of a child's packed lunch are returned home, you will be able to monitor exactly how much has been eaten. This way, you can see which foods are going down well and which keep reappearing at the end of the day! From here, you can have a conversation with your child about their lunch time habits, hopefully ensuring that their lunch is an enjoyable meal.



Term Dates and Events

Tuesday 25 th June	Y1 RE Showcase to parents in Blundeston Church – Pentecost 2:30pm start
Tuesday 25 th June	Y6 Cricket Tournament in Ipswich
Wednesday 26 th June	Y3 Carlton Marshes Trip
Wednesday 26 th June	Y6 Dance Rehearsals pm
Wednesday 26 th June	Y6 Dance Show at marina Theatre 6:30pm
Thursday 27 th June	Sports Day
Friday 28 th June	Y5/Y6 Girls Futsal Tournament
Monday 1 st & Tuesday 2 nd July	Y5 Bikeability Group
Wednesday 3 rd July	Y1 + Y2 Africa Alive Trip
Thursday 4 th July	Y6 Bowling Trip
Friday 5 th July	School Fete/Fun day 2.30-5.30pm
Monday 8 th & Tuesday 9 th July	Y5 Bikeability Group
Tuesday 9 th July	Whole School Transition Day
Tuesday 9 th July	New YR children 'Stay and Play' sessions
Tuesday 9 th July	Climbing Wall in School for Y3/Y4
Tuesday 9 th July – Thursday 11 th July	Y6 Transition to Benjamin Britten High School
Friday 12 th July	Y4 Music showcase to parents in the school hall 1:00pm start
Friday 12 th July	School Reports Sent to Parents
Monday 15 th July	Choir Performance to Parents
Wednesday 17 th July – Friday 19 th July	Y6 Transition to John Leman High School
Wednesday 17 th July	Y5 OB Water Sports Trip
Thursday 18 th July	YR, Y1 & Y2 Trip to Adventure Island
Friday 19 th July	Last Day of Term
Friday 19 th July	Y6 Leavers Assembly
Monday 2 nd & Tuesday 3 rd September	Teacher Training Days
Wednesday 4 th Sept.	Children return to school – Autumn Term starts
Monday 28 th October – Friday 1 st November	Autumn Half-Term
Monday 4 th November	Teacher Training Day
Tuesday 5 th November	Children return to school
Friday 20 th December	Last day of Autumn Term
Monday 23 rd December - Monday 6 th January 2025	Christmas Holiday
Monday 6 th January 2025	Teacher Training Day
Tuesday 7 th January 2025	Children return to school – Spring Term starts
Friday 14 th February	Last day of half-term