

Dear Parent/Carer,

This is a message for parents about school attendance from September 2020.

Telford & Wrekin Council are working in partnership with all schools across the Borough to welcome all children back to school in September following several very difficult months for parents, children and schools. We would like to say a heartfelt thank you to parents for the work you have done in ensuring your child/ren have received education during this period. We have heard of many cases of parents often in very difficult circumstances who have done their very best to support their child's learning whilst schools have been closed to most pupils.

Some children have been fortunate to have attended school during the lockdown. This may have been because they are the children of critical workers or are vulnerable children, or because they are in the year groups which began a phased return from 1st June.

We are sure parents are delighted that schools are re-opening to all pupils in September 2020 and children can return to their usual routines and benefit from and enjoy all that is on offer to them at school.

The government have pledged significant financial support following this unprecedented closure of schools, to allow schools to begin to address any gaps in learning for children. All children will benefit from this focused approach to teaching, particularly during the first term from September.

In March when the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak was increasing, the government made it clear that no parent would be penalised or sanctioned for their child's non-attendance at school as schools were then closed to all but those specific groups of pupils.

Now the circumstances have changed and the measures taken by the government have meant that children can safely return to school. It is vital for all children to return to school to minimise as far as possible the longer-term impact of the pandemic on their education, wellbeing and wider development. We know that children have not only missed out on learning but also missed being with their friends and the wider social aspects of school.

Missing out on more time in the classroom risks pupils falling further behind. Those with higher levels of absence tend to achieve less well in both primary and secondary school. ***Therefore, the Department for Education have confirmed that school attendance is compulsory again from the beginning of September 2020 when schools re-open after the summer break.***

This means from 1st September 2020, the usual rules on school attendance apply, including:

- It is a parents' duty to send their child to school regularly if they are of compulsory school age;
- It is schools' responsibility to record attendance and follow up absence
- the local authority is able to resume the use of legal sanctions, including penalty notices and processes that may lead to prosecution in court for persistent absence.

If you have any concerns about your child returning to school when they re-open in September you should discuss your concerns with the school directly. The school will be able to offer reassurance about the protective measures they have in place, and all schools work closely with health and other agencies who may also be able to help if needed.

In addition, the local authorities view is that it would not be advisable to take your child out of school for a family holiday or other term time leave once schools re-open, as your child could miss out on the focussed additional support for pupils to close the gap in learning missed during the period of lockdown. If any parents are considering taking their child out of school they must request the leave by following the schools 'request for leave of absence' procedure, allowing ample time for the Headteacher to consider if there are exceptional circumstances. The more regularly your child attends school, the more they will be able to benefit from teaching and catch up. Any leave that is unauthorised by the school may lead to Penalty Notices being issued.

After so much disruption to your child/ren's education over recent months, the most important thing is that schools and parents work together to get children back into school. The school is ready to listen so please contact them if you have any worries and they will try to help you.

We wish you and your child all the best for the coming academic year.