

# King Edwin Primary School



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Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

We like to think that we have good support from our school community and generally the relationship between parents and school is very positive however, I am afraid that my letter to you today isn't as positive as I would like it to be. I didn't enjoy writing it and feel slightly apprehensive about sending it but I hope that, once you have read it, you will understand the reason for this correspondence, whether it applies to you or not.

Please understand that in this instance... we really do need your support. I am not simply moaning, I am asking for your backing with a **couple of issues that are beginning to rise to the surface**, albeit perhaps not as much as in many other school communities but nevertheless, they are evident at KEPS.

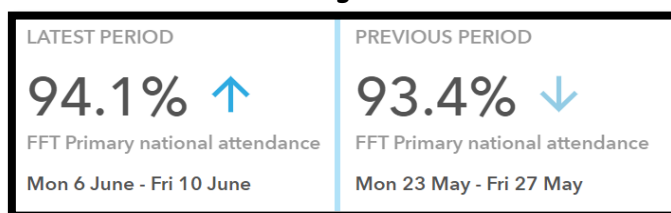
## Attendance concerns

Earlier in the year I wrote to our families with a plea for support regarding attendance. You have probably seen several reports in the national media stating that **school attendance has dropped across the country this year** and that families are receiving record numbers of fines for unacceptable levels of absence.

At KEPS, we have generally observed attendance levels of at least national or slightly above the national attendance figure. This may be one of the reasons why our KingEdwinners do so well at school.

Fortunately in recent years, fines have not been required at KEPS. However, as stated earlier in the year, fines will be introduced where necessary in line with national guidance for **term time unauthorised absence**. We must insist that children attend every session possible unless they are ill or have a very good reason for absence.

At present our attendance in school is **94.1%** and in the week before it was only **93.4%**. **This is much lower than what is generally observed at our school although it is in line with the national data figure.**



We have noticed a significant increase of **'term time' holidays** being taken or planned this year. We have received many more requests than usual and whilst we do fully understand that some of the holidays are carried over from the Covid period, none of the requests are authorised. **We must keep reiterating the need for children to attend school every day.**

In order to support KEPS families, our INSET days were placed at the end of the school year and many parents have taken advantage of this by booking holidays from **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> July**. **We have also placed INSET days for the start of September and we will return on the Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September.**

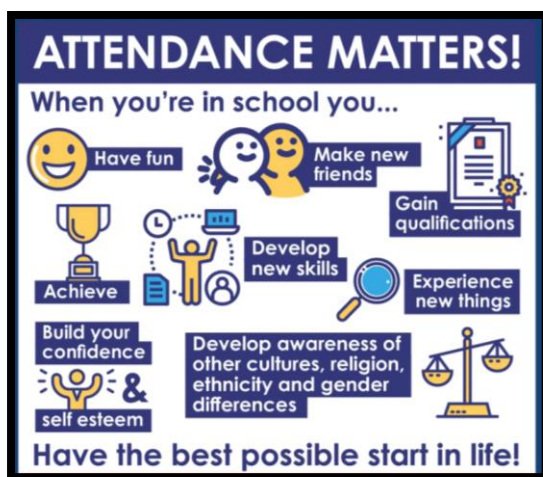
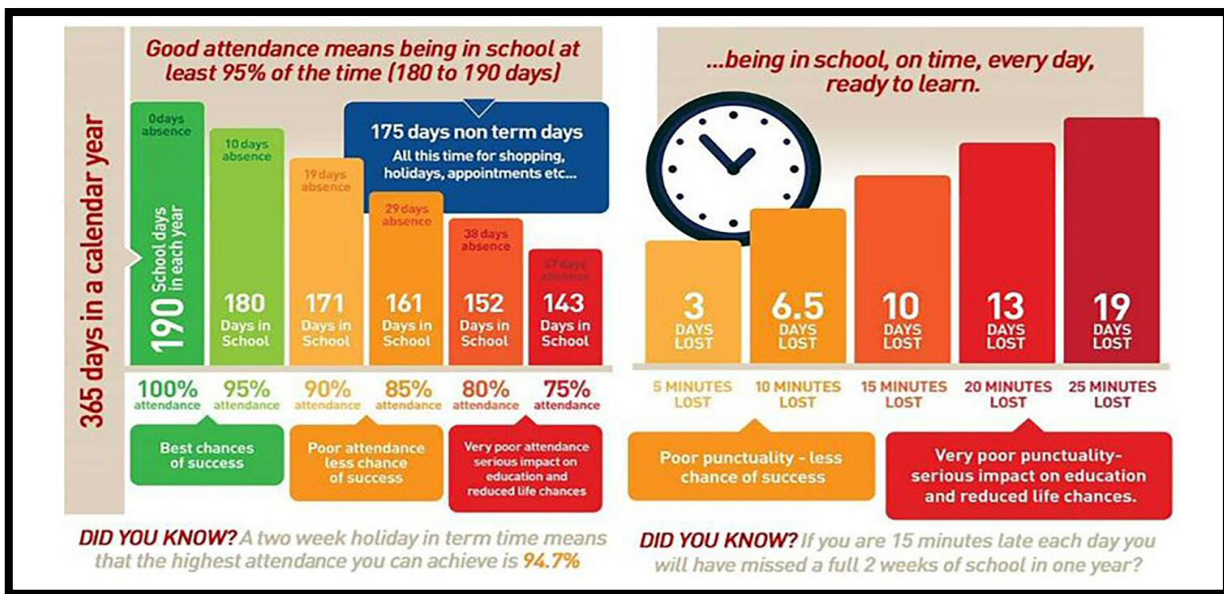
Whilst we sympathise with families regarding costs associated with term time holidays, I must point out that if our staff took term time holidays... who would teach the children? Once again, I must remind families about the process of issuing fines for poor attendance in **the new academic year**.



- As a school, we do not authorise term time absences
- The law states that 'for a child to be considered to attend school *regularly*, they must be at school every day they are required to'
- Headteachers are only permitted to agree leave of absence in term time for *exceptional circumstances*
- Penalty notices are issued at **£120 (per child, per parent) and must be paid within the statutory 28-day deadline**
- Penalty notices are only reduced to **£60 if they are paid in full, within 21 days of issue.**
- All fines must be paid within 28 days of issue otherwise you may be prosecuted in court
- If you are prosecuted at court you could get a fine of up to **£2,500**, a community order or a jail sentence of up to three months. The court could also give you a Parenting Order

This entire issue of school attendance is quite contentious and everyone will have their own personal opinion. In the past, King Edwin families have been reasonably supportive and our school attendance **has been at least good or better**. The fact of the matter now is that we simply cannot ignore the increased levels of 'holidays' taken by families and consequently much greater numbers of days lost in terms of education.

The illustrations below give our parents a little more **insight into the impact that attendance has on the chances of success of a child**. We want the very best for our KingEdwinner children and this is best achieved when they are in school for as many days as physically possible.



## Respect towards all staff at KEPS

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support. The positive changes and huge progress we have made over the last five years at KEPS would not have been possible without your trust and support. I am incredibly grateful that our parents are generally so supportive of the school and hope you will read the remainder of this letter with that in mind.

In order to ensure that KEPS continues our impressive improvement journey, it's important that we are able to keep our wonderful staff and not lose them to other schools or even worse... they leave the education profession altogether.

I have written before about the fact that we live in a society where blaming others has become commonplace and where it is seemingly quite easy to sit behind a keyboard or smartphone and fire off complaints or negative comments through email or social media. Quite often, there is little thought to the workload, offence or hurt that such comments can cause to staff. With many years of experience of working in all types of schools, I know that the situation is much worse now than it has ever been and it is certainly not unique to us; it is affecting all schools across the country.

Despite the fact that my letter concerns a very small number of KEPS parents, the impact of negative emails, complaints, phone calls and sometimes verbal abuse is quite significant. Whilst we do understand the challenges of being a parent and we can often empathise with views expressed, there is only so much that our thick-skinned and resilient staff can accept; at the end of the day we are only human.

When I started here in 2018, I tried to make the school more outward facing, communicate more regularly with parents, and make better use of social media, with regular news and updates. Perhaps our own high standards of communication may have dipped very slightly recently but on the whole ...we are still pretty good!

This letter is not aimed at stifling legitimate concerns; it is aimed at stopping unreasonable, rude or aggressive communication, but also the often excessive communication (however well intentioned). We now have over 480 students on roll, and if every parent phoned or emailed us, or called in regularly, we simply couldn't do our job properly. Every minute spent dealing with inappropriately directed issues is time when we could be planning great lessons, running fantastic extra-curricular experiences and ensuring that every student is safe, happy and doing well in school. Just because our staff work in public service does not mean they should accept regular questioning of their judgment or professionalism, constant criticism and in some instances unacceptable abuse.

I must keep reiterating, as I've already stated, **the overwhelming majority of our parents are supportive of KEPS** and I imagine that some people may well be quite shocked reading this communication.

In September we will be holding Parents' Information Events after what seems far too long since we have welcomed large numbers onto site during the pandemic. We want parents back in school, feeling 'a part of it again'. We want parents to feel even more connected, in such a way that they can politely address any concerns with staff and communicate more amicably - this is better for all of us.

In recent years, our school data results have improved significantly, the school has grown in popularity at an exceptional rate (25% more students), we have a very special ethos and we embrace the latest research to ensure high quality teaching. This has only been possible because of the amazing staff that we have and the support of the vast majority of parents.

I know that most of you will find the following list of non negotiables quite obvious, if not perhaps slightly patronising, but please be assured that they are probably not aimed at you.



I have written this list with consideration of what is ultimately the best for our children. Again... to be clear, we are addressing a small number of parents:

- Abuse against our staff will not be tolerated
- We will no longer respond to abusive emails and we will end abusive conversations abruptly
- Every time a person contacts us to criticise, complain or challenge us in this manner, it is time away from supporting children in the school, we simply ask parents to consider others
- Please accept that our high standards help children learn and achieve their potential
- Please support us in upholding our high expectations for behaviour

Every parent has every right to consider alternative schools if they aren't happy, but I would rather them trust the staff at KEPS to do our job (we do know what we are doing - at least most of the time) and remember we are human beings who work incredibly hard and care deeply about the children.

To the significant and vast majority of our supportive parents:

- Thank you to those who stand up to the negativity and challenge those who criticise or spread misinformation
- Thank you to those who talk to us in a friendly manner and respect and accept the decisions we make, however difficult this may sometimes be
- Thank you to those who are appreciative of the work of our staff - this means a lot to them and it motivates them to do their best for all

I have said many times before that we do make mistakes and it is important that self reflection is practised by everyone at KEPS - children, staff and parents. When we do make that mistake, I can assure you, they are simply that. There is no malicious intent or hidden agenda. We will apologise when we make them and seek to do better next time.

Many thanks for your support and for taking the time to read this communication. I realise that this is another long one and whilst I worry it may seem a little 'preachy', it is certainly very much needed. It is so important to seek to protect our staff because, ultimately this will help your children, our special KingEdwinners!

We have such a lovely, successful school with brilliant children and thankfully a lot of very supportive parents. With your support, I very much look forward to making KEPS an even better school in the years to come.

Kind regards,  
Mr Callaghan-Wetton , Headteacher

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