



16<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Dear Parents and Carers,

Here is this week's newsletter.

First of all, well done to Y6 who tried really hard with their SATs last week. The tests were challenging and no doubt will give us cause to reflect on what more we can do to prepare children for these important assessments in future.

For now though our focus turns to Y2 and we would ask that parents support the school by ensuring that the pupils attend, arrive on time and have had good rest and a proper breakfast so that they are as ready as they can be for the assessment. Miss Adlington has worked really hard with the children and they have made great progress however we need this to be translated into a strong assessment result in order to demonstrate the improvements that have been made in school. Thank you in anticipation of your help with this.

Next, as most of you will by now be aware, a recent high court judgement regarding term time holidays has thrown things in to disarray. As if schools have not been put in a difficult enough position already, this does nothing to help the situation. There are two key points to note-

1. For now, the school will still continue to record as unauthorised term time holiday if it does not meet the existing criteria for exceptional circumstances. This does not prevent you taking your child out of school however you should be aware that if it contributes to an overall attendance rate that falls below 90% (persistent absenteeism as defined currently) then the Local Authority may choose to take action in regard to this.
2. The second trickier element concerns what is considered to be an acceptable level of attendance and this is the part that has now become even more difficult for schools to manage. The national average attendance rate in 2015 was around 96%. This is also our school target for this year and as some of you are aware we recently sent out letters to families where attendance, for whatever reason, was below 95% as a reminder of your duty to ensure that your children attend school regularly. The high court judgement found in favour of a parent whose child's attendance was around 91%, the suggestion being that this constituted 'regular' attendance. Clearly this is well short of the national average and the school target

and makes it difficult for schools to challenge anything above 90% even where there is good reason to do so.

There is nothing to be done at this stage but watch this space! I would however remind parents that New Park has always taken a sensible approach to attendance management even under pressure from local and national parties. For example parents should note that the school has never requested the issuing of a fixed penalty notice for unauthorised holidays and has also worked directly only with families where attendance has been a serious cause for concern and even then, in a manner which was designed to support the families make an improvement for the child's benefit.

I know that most of you understand that this is a national, legislative matter which catches individual head teachers between a rock and a hard place and is not just the school being difficult. We are monitored remotely by the Local Authority and the DfE and in turn are expected to monitor and challenge poor attendance - it is a statutory duty. For all concerned this is a completely unsatisfactory situation and one which we hope is resolved as soon as possible. Finally, though, please be aware that it is still very much our view that good attendance is essential to improving progress and attainment for all children.

I think that is probably enough about that for now! Y2 SATs aside, the next two weeks are relatively quiet before we move in to the final half-term of what has been, so far, a successful year. I hope to have some news for you regarding the staffing and class structure for next year shortly- things have been complicated this year with an increase in the number of Y1 pupils, severe financial pressure and the likelihood of a larger than anticipated Reception intake in September.

Yours Sincerely,

Andrew Tomlinson