

Dear Parent / Carer

As we approach the end of the first month of the New Year and the new decade it seems a suitable point to write to update you on a few items of school housekeeping.

Quite a number of you may shortly receive letters regarding attendance and the need to improve or sustain improved attendance; this is not an isolated Cookstown High School concern. The Department of Education target for school attendance is over 95% and therefore we are duty bound to notify you if your child's attendance is below this rate. Your support in this matter is vital. Please ensure that you contact school on the first day of any absence and pass on via the Form Tutor any reason for absence in the relevant section of the pupil homework diary. With the Parent App, you will easily be able to monitor and review your child's attendance figure as well as Achievement and Behaviour Points; may I commend this facility to you, in the event you do not already have this?

It is worth noting that unfortunately the decision to move the internal Winter examinations to pre-Christmas, following stakeholder feedback in favour of same, may have had an adverse impact on whole school attendance. It is with regret that I must inform you that some pupils decided to afford themselves study leave in the lead up to these tracking assessments. Legally, study leave is only permissible for formal external examinations and as such any absence due to pupils staying off school to revise is unfortunately recorded as an absence and has a negative impact on the child's attendance. The examination timetables often have revision slots built in, but these may not be taken at home. When the examinations were held post-Christmas it would appear that pupil attendance was significantly better; this inevitably means that whilst we would like to continue to offer examinations pre-Christmas, we will keep this situation under review, with the best interests of learners at the forefront of our minds. Furthermore, it is important to remind you that non-essential appointments cannot be approved as legitimate reasons for absence and so should be avoided as far as possible during the school day. If there is a valid medical appointment, this can be accounted for and will not negatively impact upon the attendance percentage.

Pupils should be reminded of the need to arrive punctually to school. Please do not be surprised or offended if you receive a text message or a phone call to request that you verify a reason for your child's lateness to Registration or class. Failure to attend Registration punctually also has a negative impact on your child's overall attendance percentage. It is only by working in a positive home-school partnership that we can hope to reinforce to your child the importance of engagement in school and the impact of good attendance on learning outcomes.

On a more positive and optimistic note, it has been very encouraging to learn that some 200+ pupils volunteered to showcase our great school on the annual Open Night 16 January and I thank you, as parents and carers, for making the effort to bring children in and out for this and other extra-curricular commitments. The amazing evening in celebration of the absolute school and sporting legend Aaron Hughes was also a highlight of school and community life. There is such a great deal of excellent work going on in school it really is a case of "Miss School, Miss out"!

If you have any feedback or concerns please contact me or the relevant member of staff via the school reception on 02886763620.

Yours sincerely  
  
C Allen

Vice-Principal Pastoral