

Eich cyf • Your ref :

Fy nghyf • My ref : RS/JP

Dyddiad • Date : October 2016

Gofynner am • Please ask for : Mr Robert Sully

Llinell Uniongyrchol • Direct Line: 01267 246522

Dear Parent/Guardian,

School Attendance and Outcomes for Children

We at Carmarthenshire County Council, in partnership with our schools, are fully committed to ensuring that every child attending a school in our county receives the best possible education and is supported to achieve their full potential.

In September 2013 I wrote an open letter to all parents and guardians of pupils in Carmarthenshire's schools asking for your cooperation in ensuring that your children attend school regularly as this is so important for their education and future life opportunities. In my letter I emphasised the clear link between regular school attendance and achievements in examinations across Wales by reference to the table below, which clearly demonstrates that for children to do well in their examinations it is vitally important that they attend school regularly:

% Attendance	% of pupils who achieved 5A* - C at GCSE
95+	72
90 – 94.9	57
80 – 89.9	30
Less than 80	6

It is clear that **good school attendance contributes to good results**. It may be an obvious thing to say but it is nonetheless true that if children are not in school their teachers are unable to teach them. We are proud that here in Carmarthenshire the GCSE results of our pupils have been improving steadily over recent years and for the past three years our pupils, with excellent support from their schools, have achieved the best ever results in their examinations. Similar progress has been achieved in teacher assessments at Key Stages 3.

There is no doubt in our minds that the simultaneous improvement of standards over recent years, in terms of teacher assessment and examinations results, together with improved school attendance is not a coincidence. The **evidence** locally and nationally **confirms** that in order **to reach their full educational potential children need to attend school regularly**.

Experience has shown that good school attendance from an early age in primary school establishes a pattern of behaviour that extends into secondary school.

I would like to thank all parents and guardians for your support over the past few years in improving school attendance. As we embark upon a new school year I think that this is a timely opportunity for us all to remind ourselves of the importance of regular school attendance.

We do appreciate that the issue of holidays during term time can be a challenge for some families. However, the link between good school attendance and outcomes for children is so strong and clear that we believe firmly that the justification exists to continue to apply a policy that children should not routinely be taken out of school during term time for the purpose of a holiday.

The law does not give parents a right to remove children from school for a holiday. Head teachers have a **discretionary** power to grant authorised leave of absence where parents seek permission but parents should not assume that permission will be given. **Head teachers** will consider each case on its merits and **will apply their discretion based upon the best interests of the child's education and welfare**. I ask once more for the cooperation of parents and guardians in not arranging family holidays during term time. We all have the best interests of your children at heart and all of us in the education service sincerely believe that it is vitally important that children are not removed from school unless this is completely unavoidable.

Furthermore, I would like to repeat previous requests that routine appointments, such as dental check-ups, optical examinations, etc, are arranged outside schools hours wherever possible. There is no question that children must access all medical, orthodontic or other professional health or care services that they need but we do ask that non-urgent consultations are arranged outside school hours.

If you are having difficulties with your child's attendance please talk to your school, which can arrange support for you.

The progress that we have made over recent years by working together to ensure good school attendance will stand our children in good stead as they prepare for their future lives. I am grateful to you for your support to date and look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that the children of Carmarthenshire have the very best education in our schools and have their life opportunities maximised.

Yours sincerely



R. A. Sully

Director of Education and Children's Services