



Monday 26th February 2018

Dear Parents and Carers,

RE: LETTER 1 OF 5 – ATTENDANCE

We hope that you received and have now read the recent Ofsted report and like us have dwelled on the judgments and comments that we received. For those amongst you familiar with our website (and in particular the section, "[How good are we at Colmers?](#)"), you will be aware that our own views about our school were very similar to that of Ofsted and that is partly why the report stated:

“Leaders, governors and teachers are united in having the highest aspirations for pupils. They are highly reflective, accurate and honest about the school’s strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors scrutinised all of the school’s action plans and monitoring information. This showed that leaders pinpoint the exact actions that they need to take to improve the school and that they think deeply about the effectiveness of most of their actions.” (Ofsted, January 2018)

With that in mind I shall be writing to you each day this week and focusing on something different every day, starting with attendance.

Attendance on the second day of the Ofsted inspection was close to just 92%. That means that almost 90 students were absent on that day. Where were they? We certainly expect that they were very poorly, or had important appointments that could not be rearranged. However that figure was very, very high and begs questions about us all: as a school, as families and as students.

The good news...

Over the past three years the numbers of student’s with 100%, 97%+ and 95%+ attendance has risen each year. This means that about 60% of Colmers students’ attendance is great and improving. These students help the overall school attendance to be broadly in line with national averages.

The bad news...

Over the past three years the numbers of students who are persistently absent (that means they average one day off per fortnight or more) has stayed pretty much the same at about 15%. Yes, that means that we have about 160 students, each year, whose attendance is less than 90%. In addition, a further 25% of Colmers students have unsatisfactory attendance – that means somewhere between 90% and 95%.

So, how do we improve matters?

Every child has ups and downs in their attendance and a good school would not waste time or needless worries on those children who have a bad week or even a one-off bad term. The problem is at its most worrying when a student’s attendance is poor every term and every year and steadily worsens the older they get.

As a school we have a large support team that helps individual families and students whose absence is a serious and complex problem. We have mixed success in turning those attendance rates around but there is no lack of trying or commitment on our part. In addition, we have adapted the school to create new curriculum provision, or indeed the

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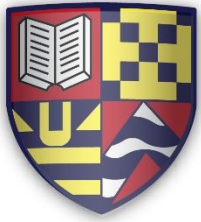
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Renaissance Centre, to enable children to ease back into a normal school life. We've also refreshed our key stage 3 curriculum, The Bridge, to ensure we do all we can to motivate and excite young people to be in school.

But if the solution was simply my colleagues and I working harder then we'd have cracked the problem a long time ago. Inevitably, some of the solutions lie in the hearts and minds of the children and families who are most affected by poor absence. Warning them of the dire consequences on their academic or social development can simply make matters worse and make a return to normality that bit harder to face and overcome. But, ultimately, each child whose attendance is not good enough has to be courageous and show a determination to improve their attendance record.

Meanwhile all students must take a look at themselves. Whilst 95.0% attendance is deemed acceptable, it still amounts to a day off every four school weeks and in adulthood such an absence record could prove problematic in the workplace. This is why every student has to raise the bar of what they consider to be 'fit for school'.

Good attendance is one sign of a student's resilience and stamina. Good attenders tend to do very well in school and are much more likely to be able to show that grit and determination that is needed to get through the GCSE and A-level examination seasons as well.

What must we do?

Students: Show much greater resilience when you are a bit poorly and get into school. Seek to improve for your own benefit, not the school's or even your family. Good attendance will certainly lead to better examination results and it gets you ready for your working life when poor attenders find themselves overlooked or out of work.

Families: Reconsider your own threshold of when your son or daughter is allowed to be at home ill and when they must go onto school. Agree termly and annual goals that involve both rewards and penalties. Until they have left the sixth form, you are very much in charge and must decide if and when they are fit for school and put your foot down when you believe your son or daughter needs to toughen up.

Colmers: We will continue to reward the best attenders and remind students of the benefits of great attendance. We will continue to find creative ways to help individual students get back into school more regularly and never stigmatise students or families with low attendance. But we will expect support and shared determination from students and their families to improve.

Yours sincerely,

Barry Doherty, Headteacher

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