

9th March 2021

School Attendance – Covid Update March 2021

A very important message for all parents/carers whose children are believed to be abroad

Dear Parent/Carer,

This is a message about school attendance.

Westminster Primary School is working in partnership with parents and Birmingham City Council to encourage children back into school.

We understand that many families have suffered worry and bereavement during this period and have wanted to see loved ones abroad.

We believe your child/children may be abroad at this time. If your child/children are not abroad, please contact the school as soon as possible.

When schools reopen to all pupils it is vital for all children to return to school to minimise the longer-term impact of the pandemic on their education, wellbeing and wider development. Missing out on more time in the classroom risks pupils falling further behind. Those with higher overall absence tend to achieve less well in both primary and secondary school.

The government has advised that school attendance is again compulsory when schools fully reopen to pupils this month. This means that absence without the authorisation of the Head teacher is once again an offence in law.

When schools reopen (unless parents are formally notified of new lockdown arrangements where schools are closed or a child is required to self-isolate), the usual rules on school attendance apply, including:

parents' duty to send their child to school regularly where they are of compulsory school age;
schools' responsibilities to record attendance and follow up absence
the option for local authorities to again consider the use of legal sanctions, including penalty notices and prosecution in court.

If your child/children are currently abroad, you will need to make arrangements for them to return to their Birmingham school as soon as possible. **Please be aware that your children's absence from school may not be authorised when schools fully reopen.** The expectation is that all children currently abroad should have returned to school no later than 19th April 2021 which is the start of the new term.

If your child/children are attending a school abroad but are still resident in the UK, the law states they must attend the Birmingham school at which they are registered. Despite being enrolled at a school abroad, the UK school must record the children as absent.

You are advised to contact the school immediately and provide a date of return. Upon the children's return to the UK they will need to quarantine for 10 days as per the government travel restrictions. Parents will not be penalised for absence during the quarantine period.

If you are worried about your child/children attending school because of coronavirus the first port of call is to discuss your concerns with the school directly. The school has specialist staff who may be able to help, and all schools work closely with health and council teams who may also be able to help if needed. There is also information for parents and carers on attending school during the pandemic here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

No school or local authority wants to take legal action, and every attempt to resolve parents' concerns and improve children's attendance will be made before any formal action is considered. However, if children don't return to school and the absence is unauthorised legal action may be considered.

In some circumstances your child/children may also lose their school place or be reported to the local authority as a missing child.

After so much disruption to your child/children's education over the past year, the most important thing is that the school and parents work together to get children back into school. The school is ready to listen so please contact them if you have any worries and they will try to help you.

We look forward to seeing your child/children back in school and wish you and your family all the best for the rest of the academic year.

Kind regards

Education Legal Intervention Team

Birmingham City Council