

PARENT FOCUS GROUP

Friday 4th February 2017 at 2.30pm

Present – Mr Ord, Mrs Boyce (children in Yr4 and 2), Mrs Miller (Yr2), Mrs Cooke Thomas (Yr2), Mrs Clague (Yr4 and 2), Mr Derrick (reception), Mrs Harrison (Yr6 and 1) Mrs Watson (reception), Mr Shutler (Yr1), Minuting – Mrs Warren

Mr Ord thanked everyone for coming and explained that Parent Focus Groups are an opportunity to hear the opinions of parents on a range of subjects. Different parents are invited each time, and we aim to hear a variety of different opinions.

Today's subject is Attendance.

Mr Ord explained that any time out of school can only be authorised if a parent can explain that it is exceptional circumstances. He said that he likes to meet parents face to face, to discuss absence requests because he believes the conversations should be done with mutual respect (A school value that is very important to all the staff).

Mr Ord shared that the school's target is for absence from school to always be less than 4% because every day in school is very important.

The role of our Pastoral Team was discussed. They can support families with attendance issues, and have a dedicated phone line. 01803 855300. The Pastoral Team have begun to use texting as a way of informing parents if their child's attendance falls below a particular trigger point. They can also look out for patterns of absence and support families.

A parent discussed a recent Daily Mail piece that said Torbay achieved a very high rate of revenue from fines (over £30,000). It was asked if schools receive money from fines. They do not. Preston receives no money from fines.

Another point raised was what wriggle room for movement is there in authorising an absence. Mr Ord explained that the wriggle room has been removed and exceptional circumstance might allow a day for a wedding to be authorised, but holidays are not. The point was firmly made that it is unfortunate that there is no flexibility in the system for schools and parents alike.

Therefore parents raised that the fines make no benefit to education, but when making the decision to take time out of school it makes a huge difference to the cost of a holiday. Parents said you can save £3000 by going 3 or 4 days earlier.

It was raised by the parents that the positive side of being a family unit on holiday is hugely beneficial, not just culturally but also to enable the family to talk about their experience. Parents said we must respect the family unit and how beneficial family time is.

Mr Ord said he was a believer in the benefits of travel and the challenge is how do we get the benefits of time away as a family without taking time out of school.

Mrs Clague made the point that school staff have to take their holidays at this allocated time also. So also suffer from the price rises.

There was a discussion around basic supply and demand and that commercially, people vote by their feet and whilst the mass of people go at that time the companies are making money and will capitalise on those times. It was then raised that some families are not bothered about paying the fine, it is so much less than the saving made on the holiday.

Then the point was raised – Is there a possibility to bring non pupil days in line with some other schools in the area and add another week to an existing half Term? Parents gave examples of schools adding a week to May or October half term. For example, Paignton Community College add a week to October.

Mr Ord said we could explore the idea. Most pupils feed from Preston into Paignton, so matching their 2 weeks in October would make more sense.

One parent asked if we could extend the Summer Holiday. Mr Ord explained that teachers' contracts end 31st August so that could have impact when teachers move schools. So this would not work, however we could look at the argument for changing to a two week October half term. Parents said it would be easier in we had an extra week in October – *gives me some flexibility and brings the price down*. One parent said her holiday a week after October half term cost her between £1500-2000 less than the week before. Other parents gave other similar examples.

Mr Ord thanked everyone and said these minutes would feed into a Senior Management discussion and go on the school website.