



**Downlands Community School**  
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Blandford Forum  
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DT11 8BG  
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**Headteacher: Mr James Rielly**

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Visit our website:  
[www.downlandsschool.org](http://www.downlandsschool.org)

6<sup>th</sup> September 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

Downlands Community School are committed to ensuring that our pupils achieve the best possible outcomes and good school attendance is key to achieving this aim. Our school policy on attendance can be found on our website [here](#). We will work hard to provide a safe and welcoming environment for your child and will monitor attendance closely.

Good school attendance improves your child's chances of success in life. There is clear evidence of the link between good attendance at school and high levels of achievement. Pupils who did not achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 4.7% over the key stage, compared with 3.5% among pupils who achieved the expected standard and 2.7% among those who achieved the higher standard.

We would really appreciate your help in ensuring that your child has good school attendance. We would encourage you to make contact with the school as soon as school attendance becomes a problem or if your child is at all anxious about attending school. We are here to help you and your families.

After a period of 10 weeks in school, we will write to any parent whose child's attendance has dipped below 90%. If there are further concerns beyond this initial period, we will contact you again so that we can work together to identify any barriers that may be preventing your child from attending school and ensuring that support is put in place. We may also contact the Inclusion Team at Dorset Council for advice and support, or other organisations that may be able to help. It is hoped that this will be successful in improving attendance, which will be recognised formally by the school. We will also contact parents before the first 10 weeks if there is an urgent and significant attendance issue.

Here at Downlands, we are determined to ensure that all our students have the opportunity to achieve success and have an excellent record of attendance. If following additional support attendance does not improve sufficiently, you will be invited to meet with the school and an Inclusion Lead from Dorset Council. This meeting is an opportunity to meet and discuss why your child has a high absence rate and seek solutions to any problems, putting in place a plan of action.

A **notice to improve** is a final opportunity for a parent to engage with support offered and improve attendance. Such notices result from an agreed action decided at a Local Authority Inclusion Panel meeting with school representation.



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**Penalty notices** are intended to prevent the need for court action and should only be used where it is deemed likely to change parental behaviour and when support to secure regular attendance has been provided and has not worked or been engaged with, or would not have been appropriate (e.g. an unauthorised holiday in term time).

Whilst schools should not have a 'blanket position' on when to ask for a penalty notice to be issued, the following national threshold has been devised by the DfE:

*The threshold is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks. A school week means any week in which there is at least one school session. This can be met with any combination of unauthorised absence (e.g. 4 sessions of holiday taken in term time plus 6 sessions of arriving late after the register closes all within 10 school weeks). These sessions can be consecutive (e.g. 10 sessions of holiday in one week) or not (e.g. 6 sessions of unauthorised absence taken in 1 week and 1 per week for the next 4 weeks). The period of 10 school weeks can also span different terms or school years (e.g. 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in the Summer Term and a further 8 within the Autumn Term).*

The school would at all times consult with the Local Authority as regards to whether a penalty notice is appropriate and the Dorset LA's protocol on this matter can be found [here](#). The LA Inclusion Panel can recommend several outcomes, which can include a further period of close monitoring with specified targets for attendance or issuing an £80 Penalty Notice. It is hoped that such measures will not be needed and that your child will have a good record of attendance, is happy and achieves the best possible outcomes.

The school now has a form which parents should complete if they would like to request that a period of term-time leave is authorised. It can be found on the website [here](#) or by asking the school office. Term-time leave will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances. However, it is very important to communicate clearly on these matters so that a mutual understanding can be reached.

Yours sincerely

Mr J Rielly  
Headteacher