



1<sup>st</sup> September 2025

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we eagerly anticipate the start of the new academic year, we're filled with excitement for the learning and growth that lies ahead for all of our students. We're busy preparing a vibrant and supportive environment, and your partnership is, as always, incredibly valued.

To ensure the best possible start for every child, we want to highlight the significance of attendance during the very first two weeks of the Autumn term. This initial period is not just about settling in; it's a critical foundation that sets the tone for the entire academic year.

## Why the First Two Weeks Are So Important

Research and our own experience consistently shows a strong link between early attendance and a student's overall success. Absence during these crucial initial days can have a significant and lasting impact due to a range of reasons:

- **Sets a Negative Trajectory:** Students who miss school in the initial weeks are more likely to develop a pattern of non-attendance throughout the year. It's often harder to break a habit of absence once it's established.
- **Falling Behind Academically:** The first lessons introduce new topics, establish classroom routines, and set expectations for the year. Missing this foundational content can make it incredibly difficult for students to catch up, potentially leading to feelings of frustration and disengagement.
- **Missing Out on Social Integration:** For all students, but especially those transitioning to new year groups or joining us for the first time, the beginning of term is vital for building relationships with new classmates and teachers. Absence can lead to feelings of isolation and make it harder to form those essential social bonds.
- **Establishing Poor Habits:** A consistent return to school from day one helps reinforce the importance of education and regular attendance. Conversely, early absences can inadvertently signal that missing school is acceptable, making it harder to enforce attendance later in the term.
- **Signalling Underlying Issues:** Sometimes, early absence can be an indicator of deeper, underlying challenges such as anxiety, difficulties with transition, bullying, or family issues. Identifying and addressing these promptly is crucial for a child's well-being and academic progress.
- **Impact on Learning Routines:** The first weeks are dedicated to re-establishing the rhythm and demands of school life after the holidays. Absence disrupts this crucial readjustment process, making it more challenging for students to adapt.
- **Data Prediction:** Attendance patterns observed in the first few days and weeks are surprisingly predictive of a student's overall attendance for the entire term. Missing even a few days early on significantly increases the likelihood of higher overall absence.

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The Impact of attendance overall is a crucial factor in all students achieving their expected outcomes and future aspirations.

National Data shows that there is a clear link between a student's attendance and how well they achieve in school. From our own data, we know that of those students who maintain the expected 95% attendance level, those students go on to achieve a minimum of a strong (Level 5) pass grade especially in English and Mathematics GCSE qualifications.

Building on this focus, this academic year we will be working with an external partner called **Aquinas (School Attendance Provisions)** to help improve attendance, and ensure the wellbeing, and aspirations of our students. As a specialist service provider, Aquinas' role is to deliver high-quality practices and procedures that best enable every student at our school to fully access their education. Aquinas currently works in partnership with over 50 schools in Essex, Southend and Suffolk, and is a member of The National Association for Support Workers in Education (NASWE).

Aquinas is also a company accredited by Essex Police under The Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) to issue penalty notices, where appropriate, to tackle persistent unauthorised absence from school. They will also work very closely with our own internal attendance and pastoral teams, as well as the Local Authority's Attendance Compliance Team.

**Although Aquinas holds Police Accreditation, the legal enforcement aspect of their role is secondary to their priority of finding a positive, support-centred response to any identified barrier to the regular school attendance of our students.**

Please be reminded that parents are requested to contact the school at an early stage and to work together with our staff to resolve any problems that may arise. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be resolved in this way, the school may refer you to Aquinas. The process of pastoral intervention implemented by Aquinas is designed to overcome any identified barrier to a student's absence – so if you are requested to attend a meeting at school regarding attendance, please do attend, or contact us to explain any difficulties that may be preventing your child from accessing school.

Just to remind parents and carers, the school opens at 7:30am and the school day begins at 8:30am with the start of registration. It is important students arrive in time for the 8:25am bell which signals 5 minutes to registration. The school site is large and therefore students need to allow themselves enough time to travel to their form rooms for registration. Registers are then taken at **8.30-8:35 am**. Children arriving after **8.30 am** are required to come into the front of the school via student services and sign in through Inventory. There are various levels of sanctions for lateness, which are described in the attendance policy. We much prefer to reward organised students who allow for any potential delays in travel to school and arrive in good time for 8:25am.

If an occasion arises when it is unavoidable for your child to miss school, we ask that you contact the school before 8:30am by telephone on 01268 794215 or email at [absence@theappletonschool.org](mailto:absence@theappletonschool.org) **on every day of absence. When leaving a message, kindly state a clear reason for absence, and not just unwell.**

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Information regarding the school day, our attendance procedures and how we monitor and follow up on absences can be found in our attendance policy on our website.

We expect all our students to attend school as regularly as possible and to aim for 100% attendance. However, we do recognise that children may sometimes experience illness or exceptional circumstances that prevent regular attendance.

Regarding illness, the NHS advises us that it is usually appropriate for parents and carers to send their children to school with common or minor illnesses. For example, common colds, minor coughs, sore throats or headaches alone do not mean children are too unwell to attend school. To help parents decide whether certain illnesses or symptoms require time off school, the NHS has produced the following guidance: NHS - [Is My Child Too Ill For School \(guidance from the NHS\)](#)

In addition to mild illnesses, we are aware that more of our students have been absent from school due to feelings of anxiety in recent years. The specialist advice regarding anxious thoughts and feelings, which is also accessible via the above NHS link, is that worry and mild or moderate anxiety, whilst sometimes difficult emotions, can be a normal part of growing up for many children and young people. It is recognised that a prolonged period of absence is likely to heighten a child's anxiety about attending in the future, rather than reduce it. With the support we have available for our students, being in school can often help alleviate the underlying issues. If your child is struggling with anxious thoughts and feelings, please contact us as early as possible (if you haven't done so already) so that an effective support plan can be arranged.

Finally, please do make yourselves familiar with the Appleton School's Attendance Policy. The policy will provide all information regarding systems and processes detailing attendance, punctuality, our expectations and the law.

We look forward to working together to ensure the best possible year for all our students. If at any point you feel that you or your child needs support, guidance or advice, please feel welcomed and encouraged to contact us at an early stage so we can work together to resolve any problems that may arise.

Yours sincerely,



Mr J Gill  
Assistant Headteacher

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