Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

My ref: MJ/AMC

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Please ask for: Michael Jarrett

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Dear Parent/Carer

Attend School for the best start in life

As the Director of Children's Services and Education, I know that getting the most out of education is so important for children, their families, and their communities. For pupils to do well at school, they must be in the classroom and ready to learn.

Department for Education research has shown poor attendance reduces a child's likelihood of achieving good results at school. It showed the pupils with the lowest overall absence rate at primary school achieved much better results at GCSE level. But the benefits of being in school go beyond exam results.

It's important for wellbeing and wider development. We heard from children and young people themselves in the Children's Commissioner's recent Big Ask survey of more than half a million children from every part of England, the importance that they themselves place on face to face education. As one child put it in her response, "people don't realise how much education is important for life in general...if they don't learn in school, they might not be able to enjoy life to the fullest."

Excellent levels of attendance (97%+) are also proven to protect children and young people from the risk of harmful behaviours and becoming involved in crime. Ministry of Justice and Department for Education research shows 90% of young offenders, and 83% of knife possession offenders, had been persistently absent from school.

The law gives all children in England between the ages of 5 and 16 the right to a full-time education, suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational need they may have. This is more important, than ever for the current pupils who have missed so much time from school during the pandemic.

Because education is so important, the Education Act 1996 gives parents a duty to ensure their child receives the full-time education they are entitled to. Where parents register their child at school, the law requires them to secure their regular attendance at that school whenever the school is open for education unless a statutory exemption set out in the Act applies. (For example: sickness, unavoidable cause, a day set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the child's parents belong or a leave of absence has been granted by the school).

Michael W Jarrett MBE, Director of Children and Education (DCS)
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Sandwell schools must promote good attendance by working with you and local services to unblock barriers to attendance. Where poor attendance persists, the law protects children and local authorities can, as a last resort, go to the Magistrates Court; where possible sentences include, fines, parenting orders and custodial sentences etc.

Where families are struggling with regular school attendance and absence, schools and the council will work together to offer help and support.

As HM's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman said, 'children only get one chance at school'. The government is determined to address the wider underlying causes of children not being in school plus give families the support they need. As we approach a new calendar year it is more important than ever, for parents and schools to work together to minimise unnecessary absence and support pupils back into the classroom so they can succeed.

Please support your child/children to **Attend School for the best start in life**.

Yours sincerely

Michael W Jarrett MBE
Director of Children and Education (DCS)

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