



SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

BECKET KEYS CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL

In conjunction with Essex County Council

**Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it.**
Proverbs 22:6 New King James Version (NKJV)

CONTENTS

Page 1 – Introduction and rationale.

Page 2 – Attendance summary and key terms.

Page 3 – Day to day absence procedures.

Page 4 – Medical appointments, evidence types and prolonged absence.

Page 5 – When absence declines which could lead to legal procedures.

Page 8 – Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and Attendance

Page 9 – Leave of absence requests and procedures.

Page 10 – Home visits.

Page 11 – Punctuality.

Page 12 – Frequently asked questions.

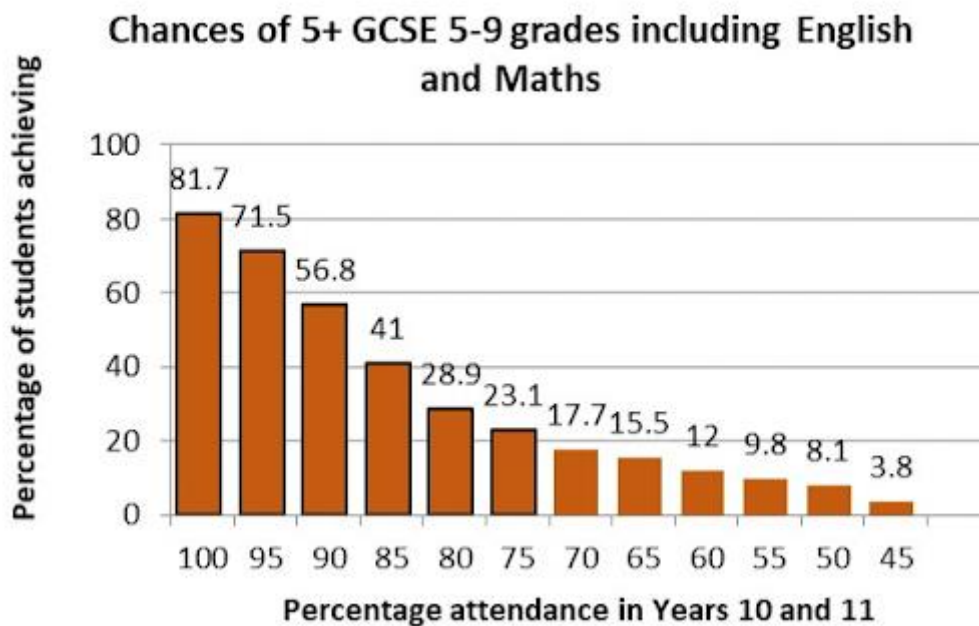
Page 13 – Appendix 1: Absence linked to days lost in school.

Page 14 – Appendix 2: NHS traffic light guide to illness and school attendance.

Introduction

Becket Keys is an outstanding school where students are happy and want to attend. Our attendance is the highest in Brentwood and in the county. Attendance is one of the most important elements in what makes a successful student. Various studies have been completed that show there is a significant link between attending school and being successful. In a nutshell, if students are not here, we cannot teach them!

This graph illustrates the chances of success at GCSE linked to attendance over time. As you can see when attendance decreases the chances of success also decreases and continually keeps declining the more school is missed. Which simply says: **the more you are in school, the better the chance of success.**



If a student's attendance is consistently 80% from Year 7 to Year 11, he/she will have effectively **missed one entire year of school.**

However, attendance goes beyond school, it is also a life skill and is fundamental to a student's future as a citizen.

Rationale

The aim of this document is, to ensure clarity between what is expected of the students, parents, the school, and the legal processes that are undertaken. This document will cover a variety of topics including recording absence, evidence for a prolonged period of absence to leave of absence requests and punctuality. Of course, if after reading this you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Assistant Head Teacher for Pastoral Care and he will be happy to help.

Attendance Summary

The general guidance for good attendance is that students should attend school at least **96%** of the time.

This equates to no more than 8 days of absence across an academic year. Anything less than 90% attendance (around 20 days or more of absence across an academic year), is classed by the government as “persistently absent” and without sufficient evidence to explain this level of absence, families are open to prosecution by the local authority, in this case Essex County Council.

Key Attendance Times

If your son/daughter is sick, please ensure you make contact **every day** before **8.30am** with a **reason** for absence. You can contact the absence line on 01277 286612 or register the absence on the StudyBugs website. The only exception is a planned absence applied for via a leave of absence request form.

Punctuality is a crucial life skill, if there is a reason for lateness that is out of control of the student or the family please call the school to inform us. Our morning register closes at **9am**, anyone arriving after this time without reason would result in having their lateness marked as “unauthorised”.

Attendance Glossary of Terms

Authorised Absence – The school authorises the student’s absence, this could be for the following reasons:

- Sickness – (Up to 3 days in succession);
- Unavoidable medical appointments (evidence must be provided of the appointment, prior to or on the day of the appointment);
- Immediate family engagements (weddings/funerals) – 1 day approval, we do not authorise long periods of absence, such as weddings abroad;
- Approved leave of absence requests – outlined in the leave of absence section later on.

Unauthorised Absence – The school does not authorise the student’s absence, this could be for the following reasons:

- Unexplained sickness (3+ days of sickness with no evidence);
- Unexplained absence on a specific day;
- Absence that falls outside of NHS traffic light guide (e.g. Headache, sore throat)
- Unapproved leave of absence requests – outlined in the leave of absence section later on.

Persistently Absent – Where a student’s attendance drops below 90%

Day to Day Attendance

As a parent, you have a legal requirement to inform the school regarding your son/daughter being absent on a particular day. You can call the school on the main switch board (01277 286600), where you can talk to a member of our administrative team or leave a message on our absence line (voicemail: 01277 286612), or you can register the absence via our “StudyBugs” app.

If you fail to call the school, we are required, by law, to make contact with you, or a named contact if we cannot reach you. Prolonged periods of absence with no contact could result in the school having to call the police and report your son/daughter as missing. From time to time we will make a visit to your home address.

Day to Day illness

We always want to encourage students to attend! When feeling a bit poorly, sometimes getting out of bed, showering and putting uniform on, is all it takes. Coming in on days like this can make a big difference. We will always send a student home who is not well enough to be in school.

Commentary

Having sporadic days off school can quickly add up. It is often recommended to give students painkillers, plenty of water and send them in, if they really are ill, our medical team will send them home.

We have a “48 hour” rule when it comes to sickness and diarrhoea bugs. **One** instance of sickness and/or diarrhoea does not require a student to be absent for two days, this only comes into force when sickness and diarrhoea is regular, over a period of time.

We do allow a common-sense approach though. For example, “Tommy’s” last “episode” is Sunday afternoon and there is no issue Monday. Although it is not quite 48 hours, “Tommy” is ok to return to school Tuesday.

If you are unsure about whether to send your son/daughter into school with a certain illness, please see the NHS traffic light guide to illness and attendance at the back of this booklet.

Prolonged illness

We do not require any evidence for illness that lasts up to **three days**. However, we may start requesting evidence for repeated absence for the same ailment, even if each bout is for a span of less than three days. **Anything longer than three days will require evidence** (proof of illness – see below *Evidence Types*). If this is not provided, then the attendance for this period can be logged as unauthorised. If you are unsure about anything, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Medical Appointments

We understand that medical appointments may be hard to come by; you could wait weeks to see your GP and often hospitals will book appointments during school time. However, we do stress that, where possible, you seek medical appointments outside of school time and during holidays. Any medical appointments during the school day require evidence, without this we cannot authorise the absence.

Students should, where possible, not be out all day for medical appointments and either come to school before hand, or return afterwards to maximise learning time.

Example: Dentist and Orthodontist. Many dentist surgeries offer flexible hours of late evenings and weekends. We are unlikely to authorise a standard dentist check-up during the school day, so please organise them for outside of school time. Orthodontists, however, have limited availability and often only run during the day, we would authorise an orthodontist appointment, with evidence.

Evidence Types

Evidence is needed to prove illness (more than 3 days) and medical appointments. We understand that GPs are reluctant to provide medical notes, especially without charge. Evidence can be (however not exclusive to):

- A Doctors notes
- Prescriptions
- Labels from medicine that have a date within the absence period
- Appointment letters
- Referral letters

Prolonged absence

For prolonged absence relating to long term medical conditions, we require more detailed evidence stating:

- Name and nature of the long-term medical condition.
- Reason related to the absence.
- In what way the condition affects school attendance.
- For how long attendance will be affected for.

Most evidence has a time limit unless it is a lifelong condition. We may ask you to update the evidence periodically as the condition develops/improves.

When attendance declines

Schools are required, by law, to discuss attendance with families when it starts to decline. We employ Aquinas Provisions to support the school in attendance support and prosecutions.

Our aim is for all students to attend school for more than 96% of the time and we take a proactive approach to attendance which declines below certain levels.

Commentary

As always, if we are aware of medical issues and have sufficient evidence to prove potential poor attendance, we will not initiate attendance protocols.

When attendance begins to drop

If attendance begins to drop, then families should expect contact from the school to discuss current attendance levels and how they can support their son/daughter in attending school.

If attendance continues to drop

If attendance continues to drop then families should expect further contact from the school to discuss any issues, potential problems and support we can put in place.

When attendance is between 90-92%

A student at this level of attendance, is close to becoming persistently absent and the student's Head of Year will initially make contact via telephone to discuss the issues at hand and potential support needed. If attendance does not improve, at this point parents/carers will be invited to attend an Early Help Meeting with our Education Welfare Officer (EWO) from Aquinas Provisions. This meeting is designed to be supportive. Parents/Carers and our EWO discuss issues around current attendance levels and how to improve attendance. Early Help Meetings are conducted in person and failure to attend these meetings could work against the family if proceedings are taken forward.

Commentary

As attendance declines, you will receive various letters and/or phone calls from the school informing you of declining attendance and discussing how we can support individuals.

Persistent Absence

Persistent absence is where a student's attendance drops below 90%. In real terms, this means that the student will have had 20 school days or more off throughout the year.

As soon as this happens, parents will receive an Attendance Contract Meeting letter which informs them that attendance is now persistently absent and it needs to immediately improve and if attendance does not improve, parents could be open to legal action.

Parents will be required to attend an Attendance Contract Meeting with our Education Welfare Officer (EWO) from Aquinas Provisions or the Assistant Head Teacher for Character Education and Pastoral care or the Head of Year; attendance issues will be discussed, support put in place and a target for attendance set with a review date.

Attendance Contract Meetings are conducted in person and failure to attend these meetings could work against the family if proceedings are taken forward.

Targets are reviewed 3-4 weeks later, allowing time for attendance to improve. At this time, three outcomes are possible.

1. Attendance improves – This is recognised via an email and students remain closely monitored.
2. Attendance improves, but not quick enough – Next steps will be decided on a case by case basis
3. Attendance does not improve quickly.

Notice to improve

If attendance does not improve, then you will receive a Notice to Improve letter stating that a penalty notice is imminent. You are advised that you son/daughter should attend school every day and evidence is necessary for every absence.

During this time, if attendance remains as persistently absent and without sufficient evidence to prove illness, the school may apply for a penalty notice fine of £160 from Essex County Council. After the first day of unauthorised absence, you will receive a penalty notice warning letter explaining that if attendance does not improve then prosecution will be processed.

Legal intervention

- If attendance still does not improve, the process will continue and could lead to further legal intervention, decided by Essex County Council.
- Possible sentences could involve a fixed penalty notice fine, or even prison.

This is a fluid process, and the support/intervention does not necessarily follow this list in order. We treat each family individually and provide bespoke support/intervention depending on the need.

Commentary

Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, school can enforce attendance through statutory intervention: a penalty notice in line with the National Framework or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.

Legal proceedings can continue across academic years, so if attendance is poor and is unauthorised in at the end of one academic year, this will continue into the new academic year in September.

We are required to follow certain legal procedures; this is not something we want to engage in. However, we have statutory duties and expectations from the Local Authority. We take these seriously.

Legal Notice and Penalty Notices

We are required by law to inform you of the legal notice regarding potential prosecution, this is outlined in our letters and on various documents.

“It is recommended that you take immediate steps to ensure school is attended regularly. If this is not achieved and there are further unauthorised absences a referral will be made to the Local Authority and you may be prosecuted in the Magistrates Court under section 444 of the Education Act 1996 for failing to ensure regular attendance at school. However, depending upon the circumstances, you may be provided with an opportunity to discharge the offence by paying a penalty notice. The local council can give each parent a fine of £80, rising to £160 if you do not pay within 21 days. From the 2024 to 2025 school year, each parent will only get up to 2 fines for the same child in a 3-year period. If you get a second fine in 3 years it will be £160. If you do not pay the fine in 28 days you may be taken to court for keeping your child out of school.”

In a nutshell, this means that poor attendance is prosecuted. Aquinas Provisions are police accredited and therefore can distribute fixed penalty notice fines. However, if attendance does not improve, or penalty notices are unpaid, court proceedings will take place through Essex County Council.

Penalty Notices are processed by Essex County Council and they will contact you regarding any prosecutions. “The Essex Code of Conduct for issuing Penalty Notices” is regularly updated and outlines the process that is taken when prosecuting families. This information can be found on the Essex County Council website through the following link:

[Essex County Council - Penalty notices for school absence/suspended pupils from 1 September 2024](#)

Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and Attendance

We understand that from time-to-time students may suffer from anxiety and mental health issues. Becket Keys has a number of mechanisms in place to support those who are struggling with mental health problems, and these are arranged through our SENCO and Heads of Year.

Early intervention is crucial with any issues involving mental health, the earlier we can support, the better. If you are worried that your son/daughter is suffering from potential mental health issues, please contact the school.

With regards to SEMH and absence, we still require evidence as to why students cannot attend school, unfortunately we cannot take “anxiety” as a reason for absence without evidence.

As always, this only applies to regular absence due to mental health. We would require a letter for a doctor, therapist or counsellor explaining the following.

- A diagnosis – This does not need to be “official” but it outlines concerns and comes from a mental health professional.
- A supporting statement that this condition will affect attendance.

We will do everything we can to apply reasonable adjustments to allow attendance to improve.

Prolonged Absence due to mental health issues

On rare occasions, a student might not be able to attend school at all due to a mental health condition. As with any medical condition, a doctor (GP or specialist) can be the only person to sign a student off school. Evidence must be provided as such, identifying the reason and a timeframe for return.

Having this evidence will allow us to approve absence. It will, like any evidence, need reviewing.

Commentary

We do understand that appointments with mental health professionals can take time and getting “evidence” can take longer. However, we do stress that having prolonged time off school due to these issues can heighten the problem and make it hard to get into a routine. We can put support in place in a variety of ways to ensure a sense of “normality” is maintained as much as possible.

It is regularly stated by medical experts that routine and structure are key to overcoming mental health issues. Good sleep, diet, and exercise form part of this routine. We need to acknowledge feelings but develop a resilience to “carry on” day to day.

Leave of Absence Requests (LOA)

For every planned absence we request a leave of absence request form to be completed at least **4 weeks** prior to the absence.

LOA forms can be found on our website and collected directly from reception. They must be fully completed with reasons (and attached evidence where appropriate).

We review LOAs on a case-by-case basis, but as a general rule we do not approve leave of absence, unless there are exceptional reasons. We have approved the following situations in the past.

- *Immediate* family weddings (1 day) – Weddings abroad during term time are not authorised.
- *Immediate* family funerals (1 day).
- Approved sporting events – with evidence.
- University/apprenticeship visits – with evidence.
- University/apprenticeship interviews – with evidence.
- Music and Dance Exams – with evidence.
- Cub Scout Jamboree – with evidence.
- Duke of Edinburgh expeditions – with evidence.

Holidays will almost never be counted as exceptional.

Common Example

In general, “family holidays” are not exceptional. We have had many LOAs that state because of an “unavoidable shift change” or a “a change to a medical procedure” or “sickness or bereavement in the family”, holidays have had to be moved. The change in a medical procedure or family bereavement is exceptional, the family holiday is not. A family holiday can be taken at a different point of the year.

Commentary

As a rule of thumb we consider, “would a teacher be allowed to take this absence?” Would a teacher be allowed to take holiday to match their non-teaching spouse’s shift patterns? No. So we apply this judgement to deciding on LOAs.

Other circumstances of absence

The school is extremely thorough when investigating prolonged absence. We trust our parents to be honest with us and inform us of planned absences and holidays, no matter the potential outcome. In the past, we have had incidents of parents not being honest with us, which leads to difficult conversations.

All situations like this can lead to not only a fixed penalty notice fine (see page 7), but also to families and students having to lie to the school about their whereabouts. Clearly, we would rather this not happen as it is not a pleasant experience for anyone.

Commentary

Parents worry about unauthorised absence. Unauthorised absences only take affect when attendance remains low.

Commentary

“I will take the fine for a cheap holiday” is a phrase used by some parents. Where this is true, this fine will be seen negatively and used against you if you are further prosecuted for poor attendance.

Home Visits

Home visits are when members of staff will attend a home to check on the wellbeing of a student. We rarely conduct home visits but will do for one of the following reasons:

1. If we believe a child is in danger.
2. Parents have not made contact for the absence of a student two days in a row.
3. If a student is refusing to come into school.
4. If attendance is poor and students are not attending.

During a home visit, someone from the school will attempt to make contact to inform parents that this is happening. Staff conducting the home visit will attend in pairs.

You do not have to invite us in. However, parents usually do and appreciate the support.

Punctuality

“Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable!”

Punctuality is a key life skill for students that translates into the working world and we strive to ensure students are in good habits from a young age.

We expect students to attend school on time, every day. Lessons start at 8.30am, students should be at their classroom door **before** this time.

Students should **not** be arriving to school at 8.30am, this means they will arrive to lesson late and therefore disrupt the class as they enter.

Students are moved to their lessons at 8.25. At this time, a member of staff will start clearing the playground and students will get into school quickly. Students **who arrive to the school gate after 8.28am** will be marked down as late as they cannot arrive to their lessons on time.

Genuine issues

Brentwood is a busy town and in close proximity to the M25 and A12, so we understand that traffic can be bad at times. We also understand that “life happens” and unavoidable events such as punctures, sickness etc can make people late. If there is a genuine reason for lateness parents should call the school, as they would do for work, to inform us of the reasons.

If these reasons are persistent, you may be invited into school to discuss them, to see if we can support in some way.

No reason for lateness

If students are late to school for no reason, they will attend a late detention on the same day at lunch time (no matter how late they are). Failure to attend this will result in further consequences and more time with their Head of Year.

Prosecution for persistent lateness

If a student is persistently late for no reason, then parents are liable to be prosecuted in the same way prosecution happens for poor attendance. Parents of students who are persistently late will receive an initial warning letter stating that punctuality needs to improve or we will start the process of unauthorising late marks and this could lead to a potential prosecution.

Unauthorising late marks mean your son/daughter loses their AM attendance mark. This counts negatively against their attendance and can lead to a fixed penalty notice fine from Essex County Council.

Concerns and Support

The key to a successful relationship with us is communication.

- Communicating when your son/daughter is off school, every day.
- Communicating if your son/daughter has prolonged medical issues (with evidence).
- Communicating if there are on-going issues which could stop your son/daughter attending.
- Communicating if there are genuine reasons why your son/daughter may be late.

Frequently Asked Questions/Concerns

Parent: I have received a letter and I do not like the tone.

School: We are sorry you feel this way, however, we must state certain phrases in our letters and make things really clear to leave no ambiguity. If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to discuss this with the Head of Year.

Parent: I have received a letter, but my son/daughter has just been unlucky with sickness this year.

School: This is understandable; bugs can be passed easily. However, we still must address this with parents, most meetings and calls are supportive. Some parents do not know how many days their son/daughter has had off school. These discussions provide some focus and will remind families of attendance when students are sick in the future.

Parent: We have had to move our family holiday as our son/daughter is having an emergency operation, but the letter states we could get a fine. This does not seem fair.

School: We can see why you feel this way and we are sorry your son/daughter is having this operation. However, family holidays are not exceptional, they can be re-arranged for a different time of the year during a different school holiday. The operation is an exceptional circumstance that we can authorise absence for, however the family holiday is not.

Parent: I was abroad during the Lent Break and could not fly back for a further week as I was ill, I emailed but you have sent a letter saying I will be fined, why is this?

School: We require evidence to support your email, this is crucial to approving the absence. This could be a discharge form from the hospital or doctor or medicine you were taking with a date on it.

Parent: My son/daughter is anxious, and her attendance has dropped, but you will want to meet me to discuss this matter. You know why she can't attend, what is the point of this meeting?

School: Anxiety, along with any other prolonged absence requires medical evidence, explaining why he/she cannot attend school. Please see the section on Social, Emotional Mental Health and attendance section of this booklet for more guidance.

Parent: My son/daughter has the same sickness issue that he/she had the day before, do I need to call in again?

School: Yes, absolutely. You need to contact the school every day your son/daughter is off sick. The only exception to this is if we are aware of the absence beforehand for example a pre-arranged operation.

Parent: It says that after 4 days of sickness you require medical evidence. Doctors' appointments are hard to come by, is evidence necessary?

School: Yes, it is. A student being sick for 4 days or more should be attended to by a Doctor. Remember, you do not need a Doctor's note, a prescription with a date on during the absence is sufficient.

Parent: My son has a bad headache and sore throat. You are unauthorising his attendance, why?

School: A headache and sore throat is not a reason to miss school. NHS guidance states as such. Please provide your son with painkillers (paracetamol/Calpol) and send him into school. More often than not, being active will take his mind off it. If he is really ill we will send him home.

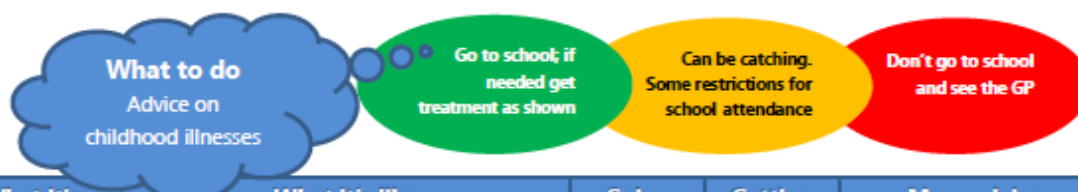
Appendix 1

This simple diagram outlines the number of says off a student will have if attendance declines. Less than 90% attendance is **20 days** or more absent, which equals **4 weeks** or more of school, which is over a **100 hours** of lost learning!

Descriptor	Threshold Attendance	Actual Attendance	Whole Days Absent	Learning Hours Lost
Excellent	100%	190 days	0	0
	99%	188 days	2	10
Good	98%	186 days	4	20
	97%	184 days	6	30
	96%	182.5 days	7.5	37.5
Cause for concern	95%	180.5 days	9.5	47.5
	94%	179 days	11	55
	93%	177 days	13	65
	92%	175 days	15	75
	91%	173 days	17	85
Unsatisfactory	90%	171 days	19	95
	89%	169 days	21	105
	88%	167 days	23	115
	87%	165 days	25	125
Serious Cause for Concern	86%	163 days	27	135
Critical	85%	161.5 days	28.5	142.5
	84%	159.5 days	30.5	152.5
	83%	158 days	32	160
	82%	156 days	34	170
	81%	154 days	36	180
	80%	152 days	38	190

Appendix 2

This document outlines common illnesses children can suffer from. This is good guidance as to whether children should attend school, or not.



What it's called	What it's like	Going to school	Getting treatment	More advice
Chicken Pox	Rash begins as small, red, flat spots that develop into itchy fluid-filled blisters	●	Pharmacy	Back to school 5 days after on-set of the rash
Common Cold	Runny nose, sneezing, sore throat	●	Pharmacy	Ensure good hand hygiene
Conjunctivitis	Teary, red, itchy, painful eye(s)	●	Pharmacy	Try not to touch eye to avoid spreading
Flu	Fever, cough, sneezing, runny nose, headache body aches and pain, exhaustion, sore throat	●	Pharmacy	Ensure good hand hygiene
German measles	Fever, tiredness. Raised, red, rash that starts on the face and spreads downwards.	●	G.P.	Back to school 6 days from on-set of rash
Glandular fever	high temperature, sore throat; usually more painful than any before and swollen glands	●	G.P.	Child needs to be physically able to concentrate
Hand, foot & mouth disease	Fever, sore throat, headache, small painful blisters inside the mouth on tongue and gums (may appear on hands and feet)	●	G.P.	Only need to stay off ill feeling too ill for school
Head lice	Itchy scalp (may be worse at night)	●	Pharmacy	
Impetigo	Clusters of red bumps or blisters surrounded by area of redness	●	G.P.	Back to school when lesions crust or 48 hours after start of antibiotics
Measles	Fever, cough, runny nose, and watery inflamed eyes. Small red spots with white or bluish white centres in the mouth, red, blotchy rash	●	G.P.	Back to school 4 days from on-set of rash
Ringworm	Red ring shaped rash, may be itchy rash may be dry and scaly or wet and crusty	●	G.P.	
Scabies	Intense itching, pimple – like rash Itching and rash may be all over the body but commonly between the fingers, wrists, elbows, arm	●	G.P.	Back to school after first treatment
Shingles	Pain, itching, or tingling along the affected nerve pathway. Blister-type rash	●	G.P.	Only stay off school if rash is weeping and cannot be covered
Sickness bug/diarrhoea	Stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea	●	Pharmacy	See GP if symptoms persist after 48 hours
Threadworms	Intense itchiness around anus	●	Pharmacy	Ensure good hand hygiene
Tonsillitis	Intense Sore throat	●	Pharmacy	See GP if temperature lasts more than 48 hours or cannot swallow
Whooping cough	Violent coughing, over and over, until child inhales with "whooping" sound to get air into lungs	●	G.P.	Back to school after 5 days of antibiotics or 21 days from onset of illness

See www.patient.co.uk for further information on each of these conditions

This leaflet has been produced in partnership between



This information is a guide and has been checked by health professionals however, if you are unsure about your child's wellbeing we recommend you contact your pharmacy or GP to check.