

PETITION

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The County Council has received the following petition:

East Sussex County Council: withdraw the 'Get a Grip' campaign and make a public apology.

We feel that East Sussex County Council's "Get a Grip" campaign for improving school attendance is aggressive, condescending, insulting, inappropriate for the purpose and will probably prove to be counterproductive.

The leaflet distributed to our school children (who had missed a minimum of 3 days in the first half term) was frankly offensive.

The phrase "Get a Grip" is suggestive that parents are out of control and ineffective parents. The vast majority of parents who received this leaflet have NOT kept children off school for the spurious reasons listed on the leaflet - all it takes is a nasty winter bug or stomach infection (which carries a minimum number of days before you can return to school) and you're over this percentage (3+ days in the half term). You are accusing parents of failing their children without ANY concern for context or appropriateness. This is disgusting and offensive... and it is even worse when applied to families who are struggling with serious illnesses, traumas and ongoing disabilities and conditions.

The follow up phrase "Most Parents Do" is divisive and demeaning. It only serves to suggest that parents should be comparing themselves unfavourably with other parents whose children have been lucky enough not to have needed to be off school. Suggesting that "95% attendance is not good enough" is again rude, and spurious without context.

The capital letters and authoritative tone throughout are unnecessarily aggressive and outrageous when you have no way of identifying the circumstances of people you are sending this to.

Of course we don't want our children to miss the curriculum, and of course we don't want teachers wasting their time catching children up instead of teaching the class, but there is NOTHING WE CAN DO ABOUT IT - the decision to take time off work to look after ill children is not one that is taken willingly or lightly.

Furthermore, suggesting to us that our children are more likely to fail their exams because they have had to miss school is a gross misrepresentation - children whose attendance is lower may well be struggling with ill health or chronic conditions, which might also affect their exam performance... your statistics are confusing causality for a correlation which could have many different explanations and causes.

There is no justification for the tone of this leaflet. For those parents (a minority) who are keeping their children at home for reasons not considered serious enough to

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warrant it, this leaflet will only serve to alienate families. It is unsupportive, and the aggressive attitude will hardly encourage those people to reengage with the school system.

A supportive tone, highlighting the serious causes for concern, warning of the strict measures in place for unjustified absence and engaging with parents to identify ways the situation can be improved would be far more appropriate. Even when you are taking a firm stance on the subject, you need to convince and win the commitment of parents, not bully us into submission.

We do not expect to be blindly attacked and undermined by our County Council, and were shocked by your approach in this instance.

We request that you withdraw this campaign and apologise for the insulting treatment of and attitude towards parents.

When submitted the petition contained 10,423 signatures. As the number of signatures exceeds 5000 the Council's Petition Scheme allows for the petition to be presented to, and debated by, the Full Council. A representative of the petitioners will be given five minutes to present the petition at the meeting prior to the debate. A copy of the leaflet has been circulated as Appendix 1.

The relevant extract of the Petition Scheme is set out below

Full Council debates

If a petition has more than 5000 signatures it will be debated by the full council, unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all councillors can attend.

The Council will try to consider the petition at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting. The petition organiser will be given five minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. It may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee. Where the issue is one on which the Council's Cabinet is required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision.