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Dear Parents and Carers,

Changes to School Attendance

We want to let you know about some important changes to the rules about school attendance. The government has put out new guidance called "Working Together to Improve School Attendance," which will become statutory on 19th August 2024. Until then, the current guidance still applies.

Here are the key points you need to know about:

Leave of Absence:

Schools can only allow time off for specific reasons listed in the new attendance rules. These are:

- *Taking part in a regulated performance or employment abroad,*
- *Attending an interview,*
- *Study leave,*
- *A temporary, time-limited part-time timetable*
- *Exceptional circumstances (the DfE does not consider a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance).*

Schools can also allow absences for education outside of school.

Any leave of absence must be requested in advance by a parent who the pupil normally lives with.

Reporting Unexplained Absences:

If appropriate, schools must report unexplained absences to the pupil's youth offending team worker.

New Rules for Fines:

There will be one set of rules for the whole country about giving out fines for absences.

Fines for unauthorised absences will go up to:

£80 if paid within 21 days.

£160 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days.

Senior Attendance Officer:

Each school will have a senior staff member in charge of improving and keeping up good attendance.

Support for Pupils with Physical or Mental Health Issues:

The new guidance explains how schools should support pupils with physical or mental health problems. It gives information about doctor's notes, support for pupils with special needs, and part-time timetables.

Attendance and School Culture:

Schools will focus more on working with families to find ways to improve attendance.

Attendance Contracts:

These used to be called 'parenting contracts,' but now they will be called 'attendance contracts' to better describe the agreement between parents, schools, and/or local authorities.

Your child's school will soon put the updated **SUAT School Absence and Attendance policy** on their website and inform you of any new procedures and key school information they need to share with you. This will include a link to the 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' framework. We know these changes may bring up questions, and we are here to help you through this transition. We want to make sure every student can do well by coming to school regularly, on time, and getting the right support. Please see for additional information the attached letter from Staffordshire Local Authority.

If you have any questions or need more information, please don't hesitate to contact your School's Attendance Officer.

Thank you for your ongoing cooperation and support.

Best wishes



Dr James Capper
CEO

Date 3rd June, 2024

Changes to issuing penalty notices for leave in term time

Dear Headteacher,

In February 2024, the Department for Education published *Working together to improve School Attendance*. Within this document, in Chapter 6, it lays out the changes to issuing penalty notices.

The changes to the law are introduced through the Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024 and will come into effect from 19 August 2024. This means that any unauthorised leave taken after this date will be dealt with under the new Regulations. However, for clarification if the unauthorised leave took place prior to this date, but we didn't receive the notification from you until after the 19th August 24 then it will still be dealt with under the previous regulations.

The changes to the regulations are significant so it is important to ensure your parents understand them, so they can consider the consequences for themselves before taking leave in term time.

New two penalty notice limit in a three-year period

The three-year rolling period starts for parents when the first penalty notice is issued to them after the 19th August 2024.

The first Penalty Notices for leave in term time will increase to £160 per parent per child but can be reduced to £80 per parent per child if paid within 21 days.

If a second penalty notice is issued within three years of the first penalty notice, then this will be at a fixed rate of £160 per parent per child, with no reduction for early payment. A third penalty notice **cannot** be issued within the three-year period; therefore, the county council will deal with any further unauthorised leave through prosecution in the Magistrates Court. If the parent is found guilty, the potential fine is up to £1000.

Please note.

If a parent books a holiday now to take place after the 19th August 2024, they will be dealt with in line with when the actual unauthorised leave from school occurs, not the date of the booking. If the penalty notice is not paid within the given period, the county council will prosecute for the original offence to which the notice applies.

To clarify in terms of the three-year period, Penalty Notices issued for unauthorised absences taken before the 19th August 2024 will not be included in the three year period. However, all penalty notices issued for any reason connected to unauthorised absences after the 19th August 2024 will be counted in the three-year period, even if they are not paid by the parents. The only penalty notices not counted in the three-year period will be those withdrawn by the county council due to an error related to them been issued.

National threshold for issuing penalty notices.

Parents may have heard about the new national threshold for issuing penalty notices which has been set at 10 sessions (5 school days) of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks.

However, if in an individual case the local authority believes a penalty notice would be appropriate, they retain the discretion to issue one before the threshold is met. For example - where parents are deliberately avoiding the national threshold by taking several term time holidays below threshold, or for repeated absence for birthdays or other family events.

It is important for your parents to know that in the new regulations when a school becomes aware that the threshold has been met, they are expected in every case to consider whether to request the county council issue a penalty notice. Therefore, we will continue to ask schools to notify us of all unauthorised leave in term time that meets the threshold of 5 school days, and any below this threshold that you want us to consider if it falls within our discretionary powers to issue one.

New code of conduct for issuing penalty notices.

We will publish a new code of conduct for issuing penalty notices in August 2024 to coincide with the new regulations coming into force. This will contain the details of how the penalty notices will be issued and other uses of penalty to improve attendance.

We advise you inform that your parents are communicated with as soon as possible about these changes. You are welcome to share this letter with them or use the content in your own communications.

Regards

Karl Hobson
Head of Attendance and Inclusion