

Swavesey Primary School

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Dear Parents and Carers,

As you will be aware, earlier this year a Supreme Court judgement upheld the fine given to a father for taking a term time holiday and this has resulted in the county making changes to its 'Code of Conduct' for attendance in light of new DfE guidance.

After discussions with the Educational Welfare Office, the cluster and our Governors, we have updated our cluster attendance policy (which is available on the school website). This letter sets out the new attendance protocol that has been agreed with all changes being brought into effect across the cluster schools from 1st January 2018.

Legislation

Amendments to the 2006 regulations in 2013 removed references to holidays and extended leave as well as the statutory threshold of ten school days. The amendments made clear that headteachers **may not grant** any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Headteachers should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted.

Absence due to Exceptional Circumstances

Having sought advice from the Department of Education and Cambridgeshire County Council, the cluster agreed the exceptional circumstances which are to be taken on the merit of each individual case, these may include immediate family funerals, major religious observance, external exams and medical and dental appointments which cannot be taken outside of school time. Please see the policy for the broader list.

Changes to Statutory Intervention

The county's amendment to their Code of Conduct for attendance (August 2017) now states:

"A. UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE: As the Government changed the PA (Persistent Absence) threshold to 90% (in effect from Sept. 2015), the Local Authority may issue a Penalty Notice in relation to a child whose attendance at school is less than 90% over a given period. To allow time and opportunity for early intervention work with the family, attendance will be monitored by school and Local Authority before enforcement actions are considered. Such a Fine is intended to offer a rapid intervention, which may be used to address non-school attendance before it becomes entrenched, following guidance in section 13.



B. UNAUTHORISED TERM TIME LEAVE(includes Holiday): Any parent who takes a child out of school for term time leave for 6 consecutive sessions (3 days) or more over a 4 week period, not authorised by the school (under exceptional circumstances rule), may receive a Penalty Notice. **Therefore Penalty Notices will be issued for single event absences of at least 3 consecutive school days or more where these absences are unauthorised because they are neither exceptional nor unavoidable. The absences must be recorded with a ‘G’ code in the attendance register.** Such cases will have to be supported by evidence of parents being warned about a potential Penalty Notice. *(The Supreme Court Judgement in the case between Isle of Wight Council v Platt (6th April 2017) clarified the meaning of regular school attendance in relation to Section 444 Education Act 1996. To attend school “regularly” means “in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school”.)*”

As you will be aware schools are now duty bound to review attendance on a 4 week basis monitoring attendance which has dropped below 90%. Letters are then sent half termly to parents. Please note one day off is classed as 2 attendance sessions, this equates to 5% absence in a 4 week period.

If a child’s attendance due to unauthorised absences drops below 90% the system will automatically generate a warning letter. If within a given monitoring period attendance does not improve, further legal steps may be taken which could include a Penalty Notice or prosecution. (Please note lateness after registers close counts as an unauthorised absence unless this is due to an exceptional circumstance). The new County requirements also mean that for any term time leave for 6 consecutive sessions (3 school days) or more over the 4 week period that does not meet the requirements of exceptional absence, and is therefore unauthorised, may also receive a penalty notice.

If a child’s attendance due to authorised absences drops below 90%, the reasons for these absences will be investigated and a letter issued with next steps to aid improvement, i.e. if the drop in attendance is due to illness a Doctors Certificate may be required for future illnesses.

We appreciate the impact to our families that the changes will bring, but working together to ensure good attendance will benefit our children’s’ development.

“Receiving a good full-time education will give your child the best possible start in life. Attending school regularly and punctually is essential if children are to make the most of the opportunities available to them. Government research suggests that 17 missed school days a year = 1 GCSE grade DROP in achievement at secondary school level.” DfE 2013

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Anna-Claire Norden
Headteacher



