

21 October 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

### School attendance update 2024

The Department for Education (DfE) has introduced new legislation for schools and Local Authorities for managing school attendance. They have also introduced a new National Framework for Penalty Notices and amended the law. These changes came into effect from 19 August 2024 and all schools and Local Authorities across the country will be expected to follow this new statutory guidance. In this letter you will find information regarding the key changes and some important reminders regarding school attendance.

All schools are expected to promote school attendance and provide support to remove barriers where a pupil is struggling to attend school. This may mean that we raise the issue of attendance even if your child has only had a couple of days off ill. This is not because we do not believe you, in working with you, we can step in early to help prevent patterns of absence developing. We may be able to identify other underlying issues that are making your child reluctant to attend school and be able to help you and your child.

Where it is deemed that there has not been an improvement in attendance and further engagement in the above processes is unlikely to see a pupil return to regular attendance at school, **schools are legally obligated to begin formal prosecution proceedings via the Magistrates Court**. Clearly this is something that we will do our utmost to avoid. However, we feel it is important to inform parents/carers that this is now a **statutory requirement** placed on schools. We aim to work with families to address any issues affecting attendance. If you are facing challenges that impact your child's ability to attend school, please contact us so we can work together to find solutions.

### Absence procedures

The following procedures apply for notifying the school of an absence:

**Unplanned absences** (e.g. illness): Parents/carers can contact the school via the Arbor app or by emailing [pupilabsence@five-acre.kent.sch.uk](mailto:pupilabsence@five-acre.kent.sch.uk) **on each day of the absence**, with clear and specific reasons for the child's absence. Alternatively, parents can leave a voicemail message for our Attendance Officer by calling 01622 743925, option 1. The school cannot accept updates from transport drivers regarding pupils' absence.

**Planned absences** (e.g. medical appointments): Please notify the school in writing, in advance of the appointment, via the Arbor app or by emailing [pupilabsence@five-acre.kent.sch.uk](mailto:pupilabsence@five-acre.kent.sch.uk). We appreciate it is not always possible, but appointments outside of school hours are preferable.

**If we have not received notification of absence, you will receive a phone call and/or email from the Attendance Officer requesting you contact them to notify the school of the reason for your child's absence. This is a safeguarding requirement, so that all parties know that the pupil is safe.**

**Requests for Leave of Absence:** Parents must request permission in advance from the school for a leave of absence for any reason. Head Teachers cannot grant leave during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances and permission cannot be granted retrospectively. Generally, a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation would not be an exceptional circumstance.

### Punctuality

Morning registration is between 09:30-09:45. Pupils arriving at school after 09:45 must be taken directly to Reception for collection by class staff.

Pupils will be marked as "late before the register has closed" (Attendance code "L") should they arrive between 09:45 and 10:00.

Registers close at 10:00. Pupils arriving after this (apart from those attending medical appointments) will be marked as "late after registers have closed" (Attendance code "U"). This is counted as an unauthorised absence for the morning session.

We are aware that there are times of unavoidable traffic issues, particularly for pupils using school transport and can confirm that there is provision in the new guidelines for coding absences due to transport issues.

### **National Framework for Penalty Notices**

To provide consistency, the Government has introduced a new National Framework for when schools and Local Authorities believe that they have exhausted all offers of support and the parent/carer is not engaging with the attempts to improve their child's attendance at school. The threshold for when a school should consider next steps is 10 sessions (5 school days) of unauthorised absence in a period of 10 school weeks (including across academic years). At this point, the school will consider if it is likely that the attendance will improve with further support and may then decide to refer the case to the Local Authority for formal monitoring. This may proceed to legal action if the attendance does not improve. Education Penalty Notices are issued to parents of statutory school age children. They can be issued to each parent or carer who is deemed liable for the child's absence from school. The new costs and process are outlined below:

- **First Offence** – the first time a Penalty Notice is issued for Term Time Leave or Irregular Attendance the amount will be:

£160 per parent, per child (if paid within 28 days)  
Reduced to £80 per parent, per child (if paid within 21 days).

- **Second Offence (within 3 years)** – the second time a Penalty Notice is issued for Term Time Leave or Irregular Attendance the amount will be:

£160 per parent, per child (paid within 28 days)

- **Third Offence and Any Further Offences (within 3 years)** – the third time an offence is committed, a Penalty Notice will not be issued and the case may be presented straight to the Magistrates' Court under s.444 of the Education Act (1996) or other legal interventions considered. The Magistrates' Court can order fines of up to £2500 per parent, per child.

### **Term time holidays**

Pupils should not be taken out of school during term time unless it is unavoidable. If a request of leave is denied and the pupil has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling period of 10 school weeks, the school is expected to refer the case to the Local Authority. The Local Authority will issue a Penalty Notice with no requirement for a formal warning to be issued.

Full details of all of the changes can be found by visiting the Government webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

Many of these changes are out of our hands, but we will work with you to get the best outcome for your children. We appreciate that there are a lot of changes and for many of you these will have little or no impact. However, if your child is anxious about attending school, please speak with your class teacher or our Attendance Officer. They are there to explore what support can be provided to help your child to attend school regularly.

Kind regards

*Peggy*

Peggy Murphy

*Principal*