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Friday 15th November, 2024

Dear parents and carers,

I am writing to inform you of important changes to attendance policies that took effect in August 2024. These changes specifically address persistent absence and holiday requests during term time. It is essential that you are fully aware of these changes so that you understand the potential implications if your child is persistently absent or if you request a holiday during term time. Please note that these updates have been introduced by the Department for Education (DfE) and they have asked that schools to be responsible for implementing them.

Holiday Requests in Term-Time

I am very aware that parents are feeling the cost of living and holidays out of term-time are very expensive. However, the government guidance is now that schools must be more proactive in their attendance approach. Therefore, the government is putting increasing pressure on schools to take more decisive action where holidays are booked in term-time in such circumstances as:

- 1) Leave of absence which is taken without a prior request being made.
- 2) Leave taken after a request has been declined.
- 3) Days taken in excess of an agreed period of leave, without good reason.
- 4) Other unauthorised absence that meets the required threshold, including sessions marked as late after the register has closed (code U).

Penalty Notices

On 19 August 2024 new penalty notice arrangements came into force, with changes to the cost of a penalty notice and to the thresholds at which penalty notices may be requested by school. The DfE now requires that schools **must** consider if a penalty notice is appropriate when the thresholds are met. The changes to be aware of are:

- Penalty notices issued for offences that take place after 19 August 2024 will be charged at £160 per parent per child. This will reduce to £80 if paid within 21 days.
- Any second penalty notice issued to the same parent for the same child within a rolling 3-year period will be issued at the rate of £160 to be paid within 28 days with no option for a discounted rate.

- The threshold at which a penalty notice must be considered is set at 10 sessions (equivalent to 5 days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period. This may include absences as a result of arriving late after the register closes. The 10 school weeks may span different terms or consecutive school years.
- A maximum of two penalty notices may be issued to a parent for the same child within a rolling 3-year period, so at the 3rd (or subsequent) offence(s) another course of action will need to be considered (such as prosecution or one of the other attendance legal interventions).
- If a school requests a penalty notice for absences other than unauthorised holidays, including being late after the register has closed, the local authority School Attendance Legal Team may issue a Notice to Improve to parents. A Notice to Improve is a final opportunity for parents to engage in support and improve attendance before a penalty notice is issued. If the national threshold has been met and offers of support have not been engaged with by parents or have not worked, a Notice to Improve may be issued to give parents a final chance to engage with support and improve their child's attendance.

Whilst I wholeheartedly agree that children need to be at school for every day that they are fit and well, and there is no denying that missed time at school leads to slower progress, I also believe that these sanctions above should not be given to schools to impose. They could potentially break down the trust we work so hard to build with you and they put us in a challenging position. For this reason, I wish to underline that we have no choice in taking action regarding holidays over the threshold. School will, however, continue to act to improve persistent absences as these are concerning and undoubtedly affect a child's life chances. This includes persistent lateness to school, which, as noted above, a parent could be fined for.

We have given some leeway with these changes this Autumn term, based on the fact that holidays were pre-booked before the summer break before the new guidance was issued. However, from this point on, we will have to enforce the new guidelines. Please ensure that you have read them carefully and plan ahead of time with holidays to ensure that you don't end up with a fine. This is the last thing we want for you and your family.

Thank you for your continued support, it is appreciated. Please be assured that we always wish to work with you and in the best interests of our children.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Hamilton-Thorpe