

Mengham Junior School

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20th July 2015

Dear Parents/carers

You may recall that earlier in the term I explained that we had been warned of some upcoming changes to the local authority's approach to attendance and punctuality. I have now attended a briefing on this matter and I am in a position to share with you the details of the changes. I have to say that the changes are really quite major and there are significant implications for **all** parents and families.

Below I have tried to outline the changes to the policy. Until now we have not pursued a policy of fining parents for taking unauthorised absence in term time. However, from September parents may incur a fine if a child has **5 days** unauthorised absence in a 100 day period. The decision for the fine is taken at a county level.

- The 5 days do not need to be consecutive, for example a two day unauthorised absence in September followed by a 3 day unauthorised absence later in the school year would trigger the fine.
- Significantly, the £60 fine is per child, per parent which means that if a family with two children take a 5 day holiday in term time the fine is likely to be £240.
- It is important to point out that unauthorised absences do not just relate to holidays. For example, if a child is absent from school and no reason provided this is automatically marked as unauthorised. Along with ensuring the safety of your child, it makes giving reasons for absence on the morning of the first day even more important.
- It is also important to note that if a reason for an absence has been given and subsequently this is found out not to be true, the legal attendance record will be changed and a penalty notice will still apply.
- Arriving late for school after registers close on a regular basis is also likely to attract a fine. This is because these are also recorded as unauthorised (of course, medical appointments and one off emergencies are recorded as authorised absences.)
- From September any child whose attendance falls below 90% is considered to be a 'persistent absentee' and the school will be expected to take action to address this. (This is a change from the current 85% threshold).

It was explained to us that it is highly unlikely that the Local Authority would apply a fine for two years in a row, and if unauthorised absence becomes a repeating issue across academic years they would be likely to proceed direct to legal action without a fine.

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We will continue to use the Hampshire template for requesting any absence from school, this document acts as a warning that a Penalty Notice (fine) will be sent to you if you take your child out of school and the absence is not authorised. However I will ask to meet any parents who request a Leave Of Absence form.

Although there will still be some small discretion for schools to authorise leave in exceptional circumstances, it is clear that this is very limited and does not include:

- Extended leave for family events, eg weddings abroad
- Days off to visit or spend time with visiting relatives
- Birthday treats
- Financial reasons eg only being able to afford a holiday in term time

It is not possible to give a definitive list of what would be an authorised absence, but it is fair to say that the criteria are very limited. You will appreciate that regardless of our own views about the rights and wrongs of the detail of this policy, we are obliged as a Local Authority school to follow their guidelines and procedures.

I have worked with the other Island Heads and we have agreed a common attendance policy based on the Hampshire template. This will be on our website from September.

Kind regards

Wendy Bolton
Headteacher

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