

	 Mill Rythe JUNIOR SCHOOL	 THE HAYLING COLLEGE <small>Learning, Growing, Achieving and Celebrating Together</small>	 MENGHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL	 MENGHAM INFANT SCHOOL
Headteacher: Mrs Lucy Ford Havant Road Hayling Island PO11 0PA Tel 023 9246 5531	Headteacher: Mr David Bessant Havant Road Hayling Island PO11 0PA Tel 023 9246 3663	Headteacher: Mr Colin Rainford Church Road Hayling Island PO11 0NU Tel 023 9246 6241	Co Headteachers: Mr Ed Harrison and Mrs Odelle Davies Palmerston Road Hayling Island PO11 9ET Tel: 02392462162	Headteacher: Mrs Lindsay Rebbitt St Mary's Road Hayling Island PO11 9DD Tel: 02392462470

19th October 2020

Hayling Schools - Attendance Update

Dear Parents and Carers,

We would like to thank you for your support in ensuring that the vast majority of our children have returned to school this term with excellent attendance and punctuality together with a determination to make up for their lost learning time from the summer term. With so many children having missed such a significant amount of learning with the closure of schools in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, good attendance in both this and future academic years is essential as we support children to address gaps in learning that may have developed. Whilst there will be times in the next 12 months when children and their households are asked to self-isolate at home if they or their family develop symptoms of Covid-19, it is essential that children are not removed from school for other reasons.

As such, we are writing to advise all parents and carers of the current position regarding school leave taken in term time and subsequent issuing of penalty notices.

Penalty Notices

Penalty notices were introduced by the government as a way of hopefully deterring parents from taking repeated annual holidays in term time.

A Penalty Notice will be issued when there has been **10 sessions (5 days)** of unauthorised absence in a **100 session period** (50 school days).

In the current circumstances, where a child is isolating because they have been advised to do so following the current guidance, by a health professional or because they are directly affected by a school bubble closure, due to Covid-19, this absence is authorised using the isolation code.

Where a family choose to keep a child at home to isolate, who has **not** been advised to do so by a health professional, or under the current guidance, schools are not able to authorise this absence and it will be classed as unauthorised.

There are many reasons for an absence being classed as unauthorised but the main reason in schools is when a holiday is taken in term time.

Under the Hampshire code of conduct Headteachers are only allowed to authorise an absence if it is **"unexpected, rare, unavoidable and short"**. A planned holiday in term time cannot be classed as unexpected or unavoidable and therefore does not meet this criteria. Unavoidable means, cannot be arranged at another time, ie within school holidays.

10 sessions of absence equates to 5 days of school missed, as a day is made up of a morning and an afternoon session. The 10 sessions do not necessarily need to be taken as a block of days. If you were to have 3 days of unauthorised absence followed by two separate days of unauthorised absence within a 50 day period you would still be liable for a penalty notice.

Currently, if paid immediately, a penalty notice comes with a fine of £60 **per parent** per child. Like a parking ticket this amount rises if not paid within a certain time scale and, if not paid at all, then proceeds to court proceedings.

The money **does not** come into school's budget. It is paid directly to the Local Authority and goes towards legal and administration costs involved in dealing with persistent absence in Hampshire.

Previously, there has been a grey area around how many penalty notices could be issued to a family before it was deemed no longer appropriate and a case instead needing to be heard at Hampshire Attendance Legal Panel with a view to starting court proceedings.

However, schools are now advised that, where a family has already received one penalty notice for a holiday in term time, any further leave of absence requests which meet Penalty Notice criteria should go directly to Hampshire Attendance Legal Panel who will decide whether to proceed to court action.

Possible penalties for non attendance cases heard in a magistrates court include a community order, a fine of up to £2,500 per parent/carer or a custodial sentence.

Schools are also expected to **pass on information** about any Penalty Notices previously issued or court proceedings previously instigated when a child moves schools, ie between infant and junior or junior and college, as these will be taken into account when looking at each set of circumstances.

Further information around Hampshire's approach to attendance is available at;

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/behaviour-attendance-parents#step-1>

Please be advised that schools are **not** able to authorise a child's birthday as holiday as, again, this would not be classed as exceptional.

If a child is reported sick and we subsequently find out that the family were on holiday/a day out we are required to change the coding of the register to unauthorised absence in the same way we would had the leave been requested through the correct channels. Please be aware that via the children, social media and other parents school will often find out!

Persistent Lateness

School follows the same criteria when looking at lateness as we do with attendance. Where a child is consistently late they are discussed in the attendance meetings and next steps action decided upon.

Next Steps can be:

- An initial letter to parents informing them that lateness has become an issue and offering the opportunity to come and talk to staff, the school nurse or support staff regarding strategies for improving future punctuality.
- A further letter to parents informing them that further lateness will be classed as unauthorised absence. Ten sessions of unauthorised absence would leave parents liable to a fine via a penalty notice.

- A referral to attendance Legal Panel which may result in court proceedings.

We know that so many of our families work very hard, alongside schools, to ensure the best possible attendance and education for their children and would hate for any of you to be caught out by this change. Therefore, if you have any further queries please, as always, get in touch with your child's school to discuss them further.

Thank you for your continued support.

Best Wishes

Mrs L Ford	Mr D Bessant	Mr C Rainford	Mr E Harrison Mrs O Davies	Mrs L Rebbitt
Mill Rythe Inf.	Mill Rythe Jun.	Hayling College	Mengham Jun.	Mengham Inf.