

Mengham Junior School

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Dear Parents and Carers,

Attendance Update

You may have seen the recent increased focus on school attendance in the news. This has come as a result of a revised government document which comes into force on August 19th of this year;

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65f1b048133c22b8eecd38f7/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_applies_from_19_August_2024_.pdf

As a school, we have always tried to be clear and consistent about our attendance procedures to ensure fairness and transparency across our school community. I therefore feel that it is very important that we inform parents of the revised parts of these procedures so that they are not surprised if we have to make contact if a child is not in school or offended if they receive communication about attendance. I have also attached our attendance flow charts to this e-mail so that parents have the most up-to-date information linked to the new laws that will be introduced regarding attendance.

As you are no doubt aware, attendance in schools has never really returned to pre COVID-19 levels and the new and revised processes within this document, which are statutory, are the Department for Education's response to this.

Local Authorities are being asked to inspect school attendance termly and ensure that we are dealing with persistent absence (any child with less than 90% attendance) effectively. All schools are expected to have a clear action plan and policy in order to ensure attendance is dealt with as a high priority alongside safeguarding.

Penalty Notices

Penalty notices were introduced by the government in 2014 as deterrent to parents taking repeated annual holidays in term time and as a sanction for ongoing unauthorised absence.

A penalty notice will be issued when there have been 10 sessions (5 days) of unauthorised absence in a continuous 100 session period (50 school days).

At Mengham Junior School we strive to be successful learners, healthy and confident individuals, responsible members of our community

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

We fully recognise the issue of rising holiday costs in school holidays and the frustration families feel around this. As staff working in schools, who are also restricted to holidays out of term time, we face exactly the same problems and financial issues when we look at taking our families away.

However, under the Hampshire code of conduct, headteachers are only allowed to authorise an absence if it is exceptional. Exceptional is defined as - “unexpected, rare, unavoidable and short”. A planned holiday in term time would not be classed as unexpected or unavoidable and therefore does not meet this criterion. The new document now goes on to state that “the DfE does not consider a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance.”

10 sessions of absence equate 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 have been 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.

One of the key changes within the new document is the rise in cost of the fine linked to the penalty notices.

The document details this change as follows:

From autumn term 2024, only 2 penalty notices can be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within a 3-year rolling period and any second notice within that period is charged at a higher rate:

- The first penalty notice issued to a parent in respect of a particular pupil will be charged at £160 if paid within 28 days. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.
- A second penalty notice issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.
- A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of issue of the first. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time (or subsequent times) within those 3 years, alternative action should be taken instead. This will often include considering prosecution, but may include other tools such as one of the other attendance legal interventions.

Please be aware that Penalty Notices are issued per parent per child so if, as a Mum and Dad, you plan to take your 2 children out of school you would each receive a Penalty Notice for each of the children (4 PNs in total).

Schools are expected to pass on information about any Penalty Notices previously issued or court proceedings previously instigated when a child moves schools, i.e. between infant and junior school or junior school and college.

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 as missing school due to sickness and we subsequently find out that the family were on holiday/on a day out, we are required to change the coding of the register to an unauthorised absence in the same way we would had the leave been requested through the correct channels. This will also be the case when siblings are repeatedly off school at the same time. Please be aware that via the children, social media and other parents, school do often find out if a child is on holiday.

Persistent Lateness

Schools are asked to follow the same criteria when looking at lateness as we do with attendance. Where a child is consistently late, they are discussed in our regular 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 as mentioned in the previous information.
- A referral to the Hampshire Legal Intervention team which may result in court proceedings.

We know that so many of our families work very hard, alongside school, to ensure the best possible attendance and education for their children and therefore wanted to ensure that everyone is aware of the current attendance expectations and requirements for schools so that no one is caught out or surprised by our actions. As always, where there are genuine ongoing issues that affect attendance we are always happy to work with parents to support the best outcomes for their children and to ensure absences are coded correctly to demonstrate these concerns.

Thank you for your continued support.

Odele Davies

Co-headteacher
Mengham Junior School