

Our Ref: MPE/JDY

20 September 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

New DfE statutory attendance guidance - 'Attendance Matters'

There has been growing national concern regarding declining school attendance rates across the UK. In response, the Department for Education has introduced new statutory guidance, effective from August 2024, aimed at reducing term-time holidays and unauthorised absences, and supporting families whose children are struggling to attend.

'Support First'

As the DfE notes, *'Improving attendance is everyone's business'*, and it is important that we, as your child's school, work together in partnership with you, your family, your child, and the wider community.

The new 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' Guidance emphasises a 'Support First' ethos, and recognises that *'the barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families... [It] is essential for pupils to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances.'*

If you are concerned about your child's attendance, then please contact your child's tutor and/or Head of Year via the enquiries email address enquiries@aldworth.hants.sch.uk as soon as possible so that barriers to attendance can be understood, and appropriate support can be put in place to support you, your family, and your child to prevent further absences. This may include a bespoke support plan for your child and/or an attendance contract between the school, parent and child which lays out agreed actions to support improvement.

Formalising and intensifying the support

Where support has not been effective and/or has not been engaged with, we will work with partners, including the local authority, to formalise and intensify the support.

As part of the measures introduced by the DfE, if a student is persistently absent (below 90% attendance) or accumulates 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absences the student's parent(s)/carer(s) is likely to receive a 'Notice to Improve' notification, a fixed Penalty Notice fine and/or a referral to the Legal Intervention Team for a possible prosecution in a court of law. It is important to remind parents that if their child arrives late to school, they may be recorded as an unauthorised absence and this will contribute to their overall attendance figure and number of unauthorised absences, as detailed above.

Parents are also reminded in the guidance that holidays should not be taken during term time- these would be unauthorised in almost all cases and therefore may lead to an immediate fixed Penalty Notice should the threshold for unauthorised absences be met. The law clearly expects Headteachers to enforce these penalties strictly. Only requests considered to have exceptional circumstances will be granted by the Headteacher.



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Parents wishing to request absences for exceptional circumstances are required to complete the required form which is available from reception in advance of the absence.

We recognise that these Penalty Notices may be unpopular with families, but it is important to inform you of the changes, especially as they are a statutory requirement of all schools in England. As a school, we do not benefit from these Penalty Notice fines – the money is paid to the Local Authority, and **not the school**. As such, we are keen to ensure the right support is in place for our families and students, in the hope of avoiding such sanctions. However, for more details on the new DFE guidance around penalty notices please see the accompanying Parents' guide.

To summarise some key responsibilities, please see below :

What Parents must do:

- Telephone or email the school before 8.30am each day of your child's absence. If your child is unable to attend due to sickness
- If you are not sure whether your child is well enough to attend school, you can refer to the NHS guidance <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/>
- Book medical appointments outside of the school day where possible and inform the school in advance of any medical appointments and bring in appointment cards/letters where this is not possible. If this is not possible students should attend school before and/or after the appointment
- Ensure students arrive on time to school – managing leaving times (i.e. leaving early) when traffic is predictably heavy is a reasonable expectation on parents
- Contact the school and inform us If you and your child are experiencing difficulties with school attendance, so that we can try to find the right support for your child.

What School will do:

- Check your child's attendance every day.
- Contact home to discuss your child's attendance with you if it starts to become a concern
- Ensure bespoke support plans are in place where required
- Provide regular attendance updates for all students
- Conduct home visits if absences become severe
- Follow Statutory guidelines as expected by the DFE

The main aim of these measures is to ensure that children do not miss their education. Every lesson is a crucial part of your child's learning journey, and frequent absences can significantly hinder their academic progress and wider development.

Thank you for your continued cooperation in supporting your child's education.

Yours sincerely

Mrs M Pearce

Mrs M Pearce
Assistant Headteacher

School Absence Penalty Notices 2024/2025- A Parent's Guide

With the introduction of the new Department of Education National Framework for Penalty Notices, the following changes will come into effect for all Penalty Notices issued due to unauthorised absence that has taken place after 19th August 2024.

When will Penalty Notices be issued?

- Penalty Notices can be issued when a statutory school-aged child has had 10 sessions (5 school days) or more of unauthorised absence within a 10 school week period.
- Only two penalty notices will be issued to the same parent for the same child within a 3 year period. Also see below.

Who will Penalty Notice be issued to?

- A Penalty Notice will be issued to each parent for each absent child.
- For example, for a family of four, the mother would receive 2 penalty notices (1 for each child) and the father would receive 2 penalty notices (1 for each child), totalling 4 penalty notices.

How will Penalty Notices be issued?

- All schools can request the Council to issue penalty notices. If the school's request meets the criteria for issue, the penalty notice/s will be issued with a accompanying letter.
- The penalty notices and accompanying letters are sent via first class post to the recorded home address of each parent.

First Offence/ First Penalty Notice

- The First Offence/ First Penalty Notice issued for 10 or more sessions for unauthorised absence within 10 school week period will be payable within 28 days.
- If the Penalty Notice is paid on or before the 21st day of payment, the amount due is £80 per parent per child.
- If the Penalty Notice is paid between the 21st day and the 28th day of payment, the amount due is £160 per parent per child.

Second Offence/ Final Penalty Notice within 3 years

- The Second Offence/ Final Penalty Notice issued for 10 or more sessions for unauthorised absence within 10 school week period for the same child and same parent will be payable within 28 days.
- The amount payable is £160 per parent per child.
- There is no option to pay this Penalty Notice earlier at a reduced rate.

Third (and any further offences within 3 years)

- The Third Offence of 10 or more sessions for unauthorised absence within 10 school week period for the same child and same parent will instigate Court Proceedings via the Single Justice Procedure.
- The Council can use its discretion to instigate other alternative actions such as an Education Welfare Officer becoming involved.

Further information can be found on Hampshire County Council's website,
<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/behaviour-attendance-parents>