

Aims of this policy

In striving to enable each child to reach their full potential, all schools stress the importance to both children and parents of the need for maximum attendance and punctuality.

There is a clear link between poor attendance at school and lower academic achievement. Of pupils who miss more than 50 per cent of school only three per cent manage to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including Maths and English. 73 per cent of pupils who have over 95 per cent attendance achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C. Evidence shows that children who miss significant amounts of their education in primary school are more likely to truant later on.

It is the parents who allow their child to have Monday off because the family is tired after a weekend away, who keep their child back from school because they are waiting for a delivery, or for whom a doctor's appointment in the afternoon becomes a reason for taking the whole day off who need to be challenged early, and supported to get their children back to school. It is the children in these families who are most likely to truant in Years 10 and 11.

One of the most effective ways that schools can improve achievement is by improving attendance. Even the very best teachers struggle to raise the standards of children who are not in school regularly. Schools that relentlessly pursue good attendance also get better overall attainment and behaviour.

Rights and Responsibilities

School:

- We expect pupils to attend school regularly and to arrive in a fit condition to learn.
- We will encourage good attendance and will investigate all absenteeism.
- School staff will set a good example in matters of attendance and punctuality and will promptly investigate all absenteeism and lateness.
- We will work closely with parents should attendance/punctuality give cause for concern. One strategy will take the form of a termly assessment check, with parents who children with attendance below 90% receiving a letter explaining what will happen if their child's attendance does not improve.

Pupils:

- Pupils will ensure that they attend regularly and on time.
- Pupils will have individual records of attendance / punctuality acknowledged by the school.

Parents:

- Parents are responsible for ensuring their children attend school regularly, punctually and are properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn.
- Parents are responsible for informing the school as early as possible of the reason for any absence (by letter, phone call or personal visit).
- Parents are required to complete a Request for Authorised Absence before a holiday. *Authorisation of holidays within term time are the exception and not the rule.*
- Parents can expect the school to keep them fully informed of their child's attendance, and ask them to take measures to improve it should it fall to a worrying level.

Authorising absence

All absences must be explained by a parental note or message. The school will then decide whether or not it will authorise the absence. All absence-related messages received by any member of staff will be conveyed to the school office. If no information from home is forthcoming, the school office will contact the child's parents. The school office will pay particular attention to the possibility of unauthorised absence and take speedy action if this is suspected. Only exceptional circumstances warrant leave of absence. Schools should consider each request individually taking into account the circumstances, such as: the nature of the event for which leave is sought; the frequency of the request; whether the parent gave advance notice; and the pupil's attainment, attendance and ability to catch up on missed schooling.

Absence from school will be authorised if it is for the following reasons:

- Sickness
- Unavoidable medical / dental appointments
- Days of religious observance
- Exceptional circumstances, such as bereavement
- Seeing a parent who is on leave from the armed forces
- External examinations
- When Traveller children go on the road with their parents

Absence from school will not be authorised for:

- For any type of shopping
- Looking after brothers, sisters or unwell parents (an exception to this might be where a child is looking after a disabled parent)
- Minding the house
- Birthdays
- Resting after a late night
- Relatives visiting or visiting relatives
- Holidays

Parental requests for holidays or authorised absence in term time

Currently head teachers may in special circumstances grant leave of absence of up to ten days for the purpose of family holidays during term time. The application must be made in advance and the head teacher must be satisfied that there are special circumstances which warrant the leave. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the head teacher's discretion and is not a parental right. **Holidays in term time will be the exception rather than the rule.**

If a school does not authorise a leave of absence and the parents still take the child on holiday, or the child is kept away for longer than was agreed, the absence is unauthorised. The regulations do not allow schools to give retrospective approval. If the parents did not apply for the leave of absence in advance the absence must be recorded as unauthorised.

If children are taken away for a two week holiday every year and have an average number of days off for sickness and appointments, then by the time they leave at sixteen they will have missed a year of school.

A parent must complete an **Absence Request Form** from the school office when asking for absence to be authorised. Such absences from school are discouraged, but the Head teacher is allowed to give permission for a child to be out of school up to a maximum of 10 days per school year (September to September).

School will always put the education of the child first when deciding whether or not to authorise an absence. In doing so, school will also take into account the child's age, stage of education, internal assessment weeks and educational progress when making a decision. It is not the school's decision to fine parents for unauthorised absences, but is at the discretion of Devon's Educational Social Welfare Service.

The Governing Body has agreed that the school will not authorise any requests for holidays unless there are exceptional circumstances. For example cheaper holidays, or a chance to holiday with extended family does not constitute exceptional circumstances.

Fines for unauthorised absence

It is now Devon County Council policy to issue Penalty Notices or fines for unauthorised absence. Details of the implementation of fines can be found in Devon County Council's Penalty Notice Code of Conduct, of which the following is an extract: "*Following the implementation of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 it is possible that certain cases of unauthorised absence can be dealt with by way of a Penalty Notice. Penalty Notices will require each parent of a child of compulsory school age, whose attendance has been unsatisfactory, to pay a fine, currently £50.00 if paid within 28 days or £100.00 if paid within 42 days.*"

These Penalty Notices can be issued for unauthorised holidays within term time and unauthorised absence from school when the circumstances appear to have been avoidable, (e.g. child too tired after a late night, a birthday treat, family friends/relatives visiting).

Strategies for promoting attendance / punctuality

- Parents, pupils and staff are to be made aware of the importance of good attendance including distribution of Local Authority generated information where appropriate. Pupils are to be constantly reminded of the importance and value of good attendance.
- The school will award certificates through its usual policy to pupils whose attendance / punctuality is much improved or high.
- Following an initial letter, if parents of pupils whose attendance is below an acceptable percentage does not improve, they will be invited in to school by the Head teacher to discuss strategies to improve their child's attendance.
- Structured meetings will be held at appropriate times with the school's Education Welfare Officer in order to identify and support those pupils whose attendance / punctuality is a source of concern [persistent absence].
- Pupils whose attendance falls below 80% will be referred to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO).

Equal Opportunities

We aim to offer an education and working environment appropriate to each individual pupil's needs regardless of their race, colour, ethnic or national origins, gender, sexuality, disability or religious beliefs.

Frequently Asked Questions

The following information gives more details to help you to understand these changes and the specific new details of our policy, and any impact they may have on your future holiday plans.

The new application form is herein and the questions and answers below cover some of the main issues that were raised during consultation, and may be useful for you.

The Education Welfare Service and the Government make it clear that habits of absence and attitudes to attendance are formed much earlier on in a student's education – particularly at Primary School.

What if I go on holiday, and then later in the year my child has illness and their attendance becomes low?

We have a series of procedures that we follow to try and work with families to try and help them to ensure good attendance. However if these do not work and a student fails to attend adequately there are a range of actions which can be taken. If absences are legitimate and a parent is doing all that can be reasonably expected to ensure good attendance – then there is no cause for concern. Each case is dealt with based on its own individual circumstances and the process is communicated throughout. It does reinforce our view that holidays in term time have a negative impact.

Does this mean we can't go – even if we have already booked and paid for our holiday?

No, the holiday may still be taken, but there are potential consequences which should be understood by all families considering taking a term time holiday before they make their decision.

If we have already said no to authorisation, the details of any holiday exceeding 5 school days will be sent to the Education Welfare Service's legal team to follow their fixed penalty notice system. In the first instance they would send a warning letter indicating that any future unauthorised holidays taken within the following 12 months would lead to a Fixed Penalty Fine of £100 per adult per student. This would also be issued if any additional unauthorised absence takes place in the 15 days after the warning letter was issued.

These fines are halved if they are paid within 28 days, but will lead to immediate prosecution if not paid within 42 days. If a family is already involved in a 'Fast Track Prosecution Process' this unauthorised holiday would further compound the warnings and potential for court action in their specific case.

If no application is received but a significant absence is noted, families would be asked for a reason for the absence.

If illness is offered as a reason we reserve the right to request satisfactory medical evidence to prove the illness. In all cases of absence, the school has the right to refuse authorisation if it is not satisfied that reasons given are genuine.

How would this be recorded on my child's absence record and what problems might this cause?

An unauthorised holiday is recorded as a 'O' on the attendance certificate. Any unauthorised absence or low attendance figure looks unimpressive.

TERM TIME SCHOOL LEAVE INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

IMPORTANT: Please read carefully the information below.

If you take your child on holiday in term time after 1st September 2004 without the prior approval of the school, you may be liable for a £50 Penalty Notice* per parent per child.

As a parent / carer, you can demonstrate your commitment to your child's education by, whenever possible, taking your holidays during school holidays.

THE FACTS	THE LAW
<p>We recognise that it is often expensive to take a holiday during school breaks and that is why some parents may ask for term-time leave for their child. However, it is important that parents carefully consider the implications of taking their child out of school during term time.</p> <p>Research suggests that children who are taken out of school may never catch up on work they have missed. This may affect test results and can be particularly harmful.</p> <p>Children who struggle with English or Mathematics may also find it even harder to cope when they return to school, while younger children may find it difficult to renew friendships with their classmates.</p> <p>WHAT YOU SHOULD CONSIDER</p> <p>There are times during a school year when a child may experience particular problems because of term-time leave such as:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Closeness to exams or tests. [Standard Attainment Tests in year two, six and nine.] ▪ During the first year at a new school. ▪ At the beginning of a new school term. <p>If the school refuses a request for term-time leave and the child is still taken out of school, this will be recorded as unauthorised absence and you may receive a £50* fine per parent for each child.</p>	<p>The law does not say that parents have an automatic right to take their child out of school for holidays during term-time.</p> <p>However, in exceptional circumstances school may authorise, in advance, request(s) for a total of 10 days leave in any academic year. Requests for leave must come from a parent with whom the child normally resides, and must be for the purpose of an annual holiday with their immediate family.</p> <p>If a child then stays away from school for more than the authorised period this must be recorded as unauthorised absence and could be quoted in a prosecution for poor attendance.</p> <p>If the child is away from school for a total of four weeks or more, the school may have to take the child off roll unless there is a good reason for the continued absence, such as illness. In these circumstances it is up to the parent to inform the school as once removed from roll, there is no guarantee that the child will regain a place at the same school.</p> <p><small>* Penalty notice £50 if paid within 28 days, increasing to £100 if paid after 28 days and before 42 days.</small></p>

Please contact your child's head teacher if you wish to discuss this issue.

Children should attend school for 190 days each year, and every day is important. Please help them not to miss any of this valuable time.

We hope that when you have read this leaflet you will consider that your child's education is too important to take holidays during term time.