

## Stowmarket Pyramid Attendance Policy (2015)

We know that parents are committed to supporting their children's education and make every effort for their children to attend school most of the time.

Regular attendance at school is vital if a student is to make satisfactory progress and is to achieve the academic grades required. Parents are required by law to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Students who miss lessons unnecessarily can cause a great deal of disruption for staff and fellow students.

Figures show that 90% of persistent non-attendees fail to achieve 5 or more good grades of GCSE and around one third achieve no GCSE's at all. Employers want to recruit people who are reliable and have attended school regularly. Every day that a child misses school is a missed opportunity. For example, if a child only attends school for 90% of the school year, they are missing the equivalent of four weeks a year or half a year out of the five they spend in secondary education. For this reason, our schools take the non-attendance of children very seriously.

The Department for Education guidance on School Attendance has been revised. Schools are required to ensure that pupils attend school unless:

- they are ill or have a medical appointment
- the school is closed (e.g. due to bad weather)
- the school transport service is not running

or

- the day is a religious festival for that family

Any other occasion for absence **must be** an exceptional circumstance. If parents wish to take a family holiday during term time, due to work commitments, this is **not** considered to be an exceptional circumstance. The Stowmarket Pyramid of Schools has agreed that it is highly unlikely that we will authorise a holiday in term time. Our general principle is that if an event could have been organised in a school holiday, then it will not be authorised in term time. This includes family weddings, reunions and visits from relatives.

Amendments to the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 remove reference to „Family Holidays“ and extended leave as well as the statutory threshold of ten school days.

Great Finborough Church Primary School will only consider authorising holiday leave in the following circumstances:

- for armed service personnel (Army, Navy, RAF) whose specific tours and duties prevent them from taking holidays during term-time;
- for emergency services personnel (Fire, Police, Ambulance, Coastguard) who are unable to take leave at any other time due to a national event or a period of national significance;
- for a family which needs to spend time together during or after a significant emotional crisis (this should be supported by at least one external agency).

**There is no automatic right to any holiday in term time.**

## **Leave of Absences during term time**

We are not permitted to and will not authorise leave of absence during term time except for exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances may include such occasions as family bereavement or participation at a high level in a representative activity. The exceptional circumstances must be made clear on the Leave of Absence form which must be approved in advance for the absence to be authorised. A Leave of Absence form is available from your child's school office and must be completed before any absence from school, for any reason other than illness. All local schools will use the same form.

Parents will be fined by means of Penalty Notices or Prosecutions in the Magistrates Courts by the Local Authority for taking their child on holiday during term time without consent from the school.

Attendance at less than 90% will lead to involvement from the local authority and may lead to the issuing of a fixed penalty notice by the County Council after referral from the school. Schools will not refer if it is satisfied that the absence is unavoidable and that every effort is made by parents to ensure maximum attendance.

## **AUTHORISED AND UNAUTHORISED ABSENCES**

### **Authorised Absence**

Schools can authorise any absence. Authorised absence is where the school has either given approval in advance for a student to be out of school, or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as satisfactory justification for absence. All absences will be treated as unauthorised until the school has agreed on a satisfactory explanation.

### **Family Holidays During Term Time/ Leave Of Absence Requests**

Schools are now encouraged not to allow **any** absence of leave unless in exceptional circumstances. We will not authorise family holidays as a matter of course. If a parent works in a sector including the armed forces and the police service and a letter from the employer states that leave will not be granted during school holiday periods then schools will, usually, authorise these requests.

### **Categories Of Authorised Absence**

Illness, medical and dental appointments - Where the school believes that a child is genuinely unwell the absence will be authorised. When attending a medical or dental appointment it is important that such appointments be made outside school hours unless in extreme, unavoidable cases. Your child must return after or before such appointments to obtain a present mark for that session. If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, the school may request that parents provide proof that the child is unfit for school. Please note that it is the parents' responsibility to provide such evidence and that a school is not in a position to speak to doctors about this and will not do so.

Days of religious observance - The school will be sensitive to such requests and parents are encouraged to give advance notice in advance for leave of absence. Where necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance.

Traveller child when the family is travelling - A number of different groups are covered by the generic term Traveller – Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Showmen (fairground people) and Circus people, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers. When Traveller families are known to be travelling for occupational purposes and have agreed this with the school but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision T coding should be used but it should not be used for any other types of absence by these groups.

To help ensure continuity of education for Traveller children it is expected that the child should attend school elsewhere when their family is travelling and be dual registered at that school and the main school. Children from these groups whose families do not travel are expected to register at a school and attend as normal. They are subject to the same rules as other children in terms of the requirement to attend school regularly once registered at school.

Weddings – Schools will authorise time for a child to attend the wedding of an immediate family member, such as a parent or sibling as follows: In Suffolk 1 day; outside Suffolk **up to** 3 days to include travel to, the wedding day and travel from.

Family bereavements – The schools will respond sensitively to requests to attend funerals or associated events and have the discretion to authorise such absences. We will authorise absence for close family members i.e. parent, sibling, grandparent.

Public performances, including film or TV work - The Local Authority must licence a student to take part in a public performance. The school will only authorise absence where participation has been agreed.

### **Unauthorised Absence**

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no “leave” has been given. This includes:

- parents keeping children off school unnecessarily;
- truancy
- absences which have never been properly explained;
- children who arrive at school too late to get a mark (after registration has closed)
- Shopping, looking after other children or birthdays

Where the unauthorised absence appears to be a problem with a particular student, or deemed to be a concern the school will:

- write to parents to alert them to concerns regarding the attendance of a student;
- request support from the Education Welfare Service.

### **Persistent Absenteeism (PA)**

A pupil becomes a “persistent absentee” when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year **for whatever reason**. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to a child’s education and we need parents’ fullest support and co-operation to tackle this.

We monitor all absences and the reasons given thoroughly. Any case that is seen to have reached PA mark or is at risk of moving towards that mark is given priority and we will seek to take action immediately.

## Penalty Notices

There are 2 reasons a Penalty Notice might be used:

- Where a pupil has 6 or more unauthorised absences in one school year.
- Where a pupil is stopped with parents/carers during a truancy sweep and the absence is not authorised by the school.

A school will refer a family to Suffolk County Council if a child has six or more unauthorised absences. Each half day is one absence. Parents and carers will be issued with a penalty notice when a referral is made.

- The amount payable on issue of a Penalty Notice is £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice, rising to £120 if paid after 21 days and within 28 days;
- If the Penalty Notice is not paid within 42 days the Local Authority is then obliged to prosecute for failing to ensure regular school attendance;
- Penalty notices are issued to each parent/carer for each child.

A parent is classed as any person who normally cares for the child. For example, if a family has 3 children and 2 parents, this will result in a fine of £360.

The money from a fine is paid to the Department for Education, once Suffolk has taken out the cost of issuing it.

Unauthorised absences stay on a child's school record.