

# **School Attendance**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**My child has a medical appointment that cannot be arranged out of school time, do I need to complete an exceptional leave form?**

No, please just notify the school office and show the staff the letter, email or text message confirming the appointment.

**Our family holiday was educational, will this be authorised?**

Unfortunately not. The school cannot be in a position of deciding whether one family's holiday is more or less educational than another family's holiday. We have to treat all families equally. The government guidance is clear that headteachers can only authorise leave for exceptional circumstances, this does not include a family holiday. The school is open to pupils for 38 weeks of the year. This leaves 14 weeks where the school is closed in which to arrange a family holiday.

**What is considered to be exceptional leave?**

There is not a fixed list of exceptional circumstances as each application is decided within the full context of the family and the reason for the request. However, examples of exceptional circumstances could include to following: the day of a family funeral or wedding; participating local and national sporting events; participating in an accredited music or dance exam.

**Does the school make the decision on whether to fine families for unauthorised term time holidays?**

No. The school has a legal duty to refer any unauthorised holiday to the Local Authority Attendance team if the thresholds set out in 'Working Together to Improve Attendance are met' (see webpage and policy) The Local authority then make the decision on whether to award a fine.

**What happens if we go on holiday and do not complete a leave request or notify the school?**

In this case we follow our school attendance procedures. We try to make contact with the parents on the first day of absence. We will complete a doorstep welfare check if we cannot get a response from parents to ensure everyone is safe. If we have had no contact with the family on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, we will refer the family to the local authority attendance officer and the Children Missing Education team.

**What is a welfare check and why do they happen?**

A welfare check is when two members of school staff will visit the family home to check the family are safe and well. This happens if a pupil has not attended school and we have not received any communication from the family (see Q&A above). We have a legal duty to ensure the safeguarding of all our pupils and families, and the welfare check is part of this commitment.

**We received an attendance letter and the wording was very formal and we felt intimidated. Why does the school send these letters?**

We have a statutory duty to inform parents of their child's attendance if it falls below 95%. We understand that this sometimes happens for pupils if they have had a genuine illness that has taken them out of school for more than a day or two, however, we still have a legal duty to send the letters. The section in the letter that states '*Failure to secure the regular school regular attendance of a registered pupil is a criminal offence under section 444(1) Education Act 1996*' must be included in the letter under the local authority and government attendance code guidance. We understand that this wording is very formal but we have a duty to provide parents with this information in any letter regarding persistent absence.

**My child did not miss any school days last term but I have still received a letter telling me their attendance is lower than 95%?**

Sadly, depending on the number of sessions missed, it can take more than one term to make a difference to the overall year to date percentage of attendance so this is something that may well happen. Please be assured this is unlikely to be an error but more a reflection of a significant previous absence which is being caught up on.

**Do emergency school closures or closure due to strike action impact on my child's attendance record?**

No. On days where the school is closed, pupils are not marked as absent and the closure does not affect their attendance record. The school only closes if there is an emergency or there are not enough staff on site to be able to keep all the pupils safe. This is always a last resort measure as we take attendance very seriously.