



Dear Parent/Carer

## DFE Attendance Guidance and The Importance of Good School Attendance

Following the DFE-guidelines, that came into effect on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2024, we are writing to inform you about our beliefs, practices and processes about attendance and how the new guidelines will continue to affect our school community in the 2025-2026 academic year.

We know the impact which absence has on learning and at Holywell, we encourage good attendance. We pride ourselves on our good attendance record and appreciate the support we have from families to ensure students are in school. We also appreciate that there are times and circumstances when absence is unavoidable and we do all we can to support families in these circumstances to mitigate any absence. We have a clear policy about unauthorised absence and holidays in term-time in line with the DfE guidance. You may also be aware that there has been a national 'push' to improve attendance and the DfE has updated the role they want schools to play in ensuring good attendance for all students – this has required us to adapt some of our practices. There are certain things which we have to action once specific thresholds (as defined by the DfE) are met and, whereas, we previously had some discretion, exceptions are now more difficult. All schools are now required to submit all attendance data to the Local Authority (Central Bedfordshire Council in our case) on a daily basis and any attendance that hit certain bench marks will automatically be flagged and schools challenged on the action they are taking. One key change is that, until 2024, where a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) for term time holiday is necessary, we have always tried to meet with parents before issuing that FPN. Unfortunately, due to the latest and much stricter guidance, we are no longer in a position to do this. Parents and carers will be notified by letter of FPNs related to term time holiday the same as we did last year.

Further information can be found in our Attendance Policy that is available on the school website.

The biggest change is that the DfE has now made a single, consistent, national threshold for when a penalty notice must be considered: this is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period. (Each day counts as 2 sessions). Fines have also been increased.

The changes to the FPN are: (see poster)

- An increase to the rate of a penalty notice from £120 to £160 if paid within 28 days, and £60 to £80 if paid within 21 days.
- A second penalty notice issued to the same parent for the same child within a rolling 3-year period being charged at a higher rate of £160 with no option for this second offence to be discharged at the lower rate of £80.
- A national limit of 2 penalty notices that can be issued to a parent for the same child within a rolling 3-year period, so at the 3<sup>rd</sup> (or subsequent) offence(s) another tool will need to be considered (such as prosecution or one of the other attendance legal interventions).
- There is no right of appeal against a penalty notice.

The Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations state that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are **exceptional circumstances**. It is important to note that headteachers can determine the length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all. The fundamental principles for defining **exceptional** are **rare, significant, or unavoidable**, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. Circumstances where absences may be regarded as **exceptional** will vary from school to school and family to family.

There is, however, no legal entitlement for time off in school term time to go on holiday and, in the majority of cases, holidays will not be authorised. Parents/carers wishing to apply for leave of absence need to fill in an application form (Absence request forms are available on the school website and also from the school office) in



Headteacher: Mr MG Simpson MA, NPQH

Deputy Headteacher: Mr S Van Der Merwe – Deputy Headteacher: Mrs A Stewart-McAlpine – Deputy Headteacher: Miss A Craddock

Designated Safeguarding Leads: Mrs A Stewart-McAlpine & Mrs J Johnson

Senior Leaders: Mr M Eames & Mrs J French – SENDCos: Ms C Patterson & Mrs S Davidson

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advance and before making any travel arrangements.

If term-time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised and if the number of sessions of absence reaches the thresholds in Central Bedfordshire Council (as directed by the DFE.) Penalty Notice Code of Conduct (10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period), parents/carers will most likely be issued with a penalty notice or other legal action in accordance with the code.

Detailed information can be found by following this link:

[https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/4/pupil\\_support/522/school\\_attendance/4](https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/4/pupil_support/522/school_attendance/4)

# EVERY SCHOOL DAY MATTERS



## Penalty Notice Fines for absence from school are changing

**From 19<sup>th</sup> August 2024 Penalty Notice fines  
increase to £160 for each parent, for each child.**



You can be fined if your child has a total of 5 days of unauthorised absences in 10 school weeks, for things like:

- being late after the register has closed
- truancy
- taking a holiday without permission from the school
- or if a headteacher isn't satisfied for the reason for missing school

Over a rolling 3-year period the sanctions are:

- 1st offence – £160 reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days
- 2nd offence – £160
- 3rd offence – Court hearing and up to £2,500 fine, or up to 3 months in prison and a criminal record

For more information go to:  
[www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/missing-school](https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/missing-school)



## **Attendance Guidance and Procedures**

### **Reporting an absence**

- All absences must be reported before 8.30am each day by notifying the school.
- If you know your child is going to be absent, please let us know in advance and ensure you give a clear and precise reason for the absence.
- Written notification, giving the details of all absences, must be given to the attendance office on your child's return to school. If your child has been absent due to a medical appointment, please attach the appointment card/hospital letter.
- Unexplained absences will be unauthorised by the school.
- Absences of 5 or more days must be supported by medical evidence.
- Absences of 5 or more days without supporting medical evidence will not be authorised.
- Holidays during term time will not be authorised.
- Any form of unauthorised absence may be subject to a Penalty Notice from the Local Authority.

### **Examples of authorised absence**

- Hospital or Orthodontist appointment (evidence required).
- Reported illness of less than 4 days (unless medical evidence has been requested).
- Illness of 5 or more days with medical evidence.
- Emergency doctor or dental appointments (evidence required). Routine appointments should be made outside school hours.

### **Examples of unauthorised absence**

- Leave of absence not approved by school **including any term time holidays**.
- Absence not reported on the day or supported by written explanation upon return to school.
- Absence of 5 or more days without medical evidence.
- Arriving late after registers have closed.
- Truancy (both internal and external).

### **Examples of medical evidence**

- Medical appointment card confirming attendance.
- Medical appointment letter.
- Copy of prescription showing name and date.
- Prescribed medication with pharmacist label showing name and date.
- Hospital discharge letter.

Please note that with regard to long term absences – the school needs medical evidence from a consultant, a paediatrician or from CAMHS that stipulate a student is not fit to attend school.

Please help your child to maintain good attendance by booking doctor, dentist, and optician appointments either in the school holidays, in the afternoon after school or at weekends where possible. Please provide the school with an appointment card/letter if your child needs to leave school for an appointment. If your child feels unwell in school, they must go to reception where a member of the Office Team will contact you should your child need to go home. If a student needs to go home due to illness, a parent or carer must collect the child from school. Students are not allowed to travel home on their own in these circumstances.

As the guidance states: "Central to raising standards in education and ensuring all students can fulfil their potential. Missing out on lessons leaves children vulnerable to falling behind. Children with poor attendance tend to achieve less in both primary and secondary school." Research shows that every lesson missed leads to

students being academically 'left behind'. Unsurprisingly, students with better attendance achieve better academic and later, GCSE outcomes. There are 175 non-school days a year for holidays, cultural experiences and family time.

If your child's attendance during the school year is .....	Your child would have lost approximately.....	Your child would have missed approximately....
95%	9 days	50 lessons
90%	19 days	100 lessons
85%	29 days	150 lessons
80%	38 days	200 lessons
75%	48 days	250 lessons
70%	57 days	300 lessons
65%	67 days	350 lessons

The DfE have the following definitions/terminology for attendance linked directly to the percentage attendance:

<b>Above 98%</b>	<b><i>Excellent Attendance</i></b> Less than 3 days absence in a year
<b>96%</b>	<b><i>Good Attendance</i></b> Less than 9 days absence in a year. Holywell attendance target for all students is 97% and above.
<b>90%</b>	<b><i>Persistent absentee / low attendance</i></b> 19 days absence over the year. Students have missed 100 <u>lessons</u> . Students with 90% or below are persistently absent from school and parents of students with this level of attendance could be issued with a Penalty Notice from the Local Authority.
<b>Below 90%</b>	<b><i>Cause for concern</i></b> Without good reason for absence, court process can begin to take place at this level of absence.

### Requests for absence during term time

The law does not grant parents an automatic right to take their child out of school during term time. Any absence from school will disrupt your child's learning. You may consider that a holiday will be educational, but your child will miss out on the teaching that their classmates will receive during your holiday. Attendance is vital to academic success and lost education poses a potential risk of under achievement. This is something we all have a responsibility to avoid.

If you consider your request for absence to be an exceptional circumstance then please complete the relevant form which can be collected from school, or can be downloaded from our website. If you have any concerns about your child's attendance, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Please note that postponed holidays in term time, cheaper holiday rates or family living far away unfortunately do not fall under the DfE guidance for special circumstances. Although the school remain sympathetic to such instances, we cannot authorise such holidays. The school is required by law to inform the LA of unauthorised absences. Unauthorised holidays will lead to an FPN (fix penalty notice) being issued.

Please help us to avoid the situation where we have to inform the LA to raise a FPN for any of our families in the Holywell school community.

### Punctuality

Arriving late to school and into lessons is very disruptive for the teacher and other class members. It also means that late students themselves miss important input from teachers. Late students must sign in at reception.

**Further Information**

- Guidelines for parents regarding mild illness.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/>

As mentioned before the link to the new changes that took effect from the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2024.

[https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/4/pupil\\_support/522/school\\_attendance/4](https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/4/pupil_support/522/school_attendance/4)

Thank you for your support in ensuring excellent attendance and attainment for your child at Holywell.

Yours sincerely,

The Attendance Team.