



Wood Ley Community Primary School

Stowmarket, Needham Market & Ringshall Policy for Attendance

January 2017

Policy Statement

This policy has been jointly written by representatives from all the Stowmarket schools, during the Autumn term 2014. The policy first comes into effect as of January 2015.

We wish for all parents to be committed to supporting their children's education and make every effort for their children to attend school as much as possible. Regular attendance at school is vital if a child is to make good progress and is to achieve academic success.

A Joint Approach

As a group of schools, known as *The Stowmarket Pyramid of Schools*, we have agreed the following interpretation of the Department for Education's guidance on school attendance. The intention is to ensure uniformity in the way absence and the request for absence, is managed within the Stowmarket area, which in turn will be fair and easily understood by parents and children alike.

Parents are required by law to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Children who miss lessons unnecessarily can cause a great deal of disruption for staff and other children.

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 over five years. 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, even if due to work commitments, this is **not** considered to be an exceptional circumstance. The Gipping Valley 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 during a school holiday or outside of school hours, then it will not be authorised in term time. This includes family 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.

N.B. 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 the school office or from our website 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 may decide not to 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 an absence. Authorised absence is where the school has either given approval in advance for a child 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. Again, this process of requesting approval must be made well in advance.

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 be present in school before such appointments – if a whole session is missed due to a local appointment, then this may not be authorised.

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. It is not the role / responsibility of schools to prove authenticity but the parents.

Days of religious observance - The school will be sensitive to such requests; once again, parents are required to give notice in advance for these leave of absence request. Where necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body about authenticity and 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 short term absence for close family members i.e. parent, sibling (other family members such as grandparents would typically be 1 day).

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 and a licence obtained.

Examination – children entered for examinations during normal school hours will not have this time authorised. It is expected that examination boards will arrange such examinations outside school hours.

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 or prior authorisation not requested
- children who arrive at school too late after registration (after registration has closed)
- Shopping, looking after other children,
- Birthdays

Where unauthorised absence is deemed to be a concern for a particular child the school will:

- write to parents to alert them to concerns regarding their child's attendance
- request support from the Education Welfare Service

Persistent Absenteeism (PA)

The Department for Education states that a pupil becomes a ‘persistent absentee’ when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year **for whatever reason**. This means the 6th unauthorised session will trigger a penalty notice referral. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to a child's education and we need parent's fullest support and co-operation to tackle this.

We monitor all absences and the reasons given for them are recorded thoroughly. Any case that is seen to have reached PA level 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.
- Where a pupil is stopped with parents/carers during a truancy sweep and the absence is not authorised by the school.

How this Works in practice:

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. These do not have to be consecutive, each unauthorised absence is counted and once they total 6, the penalty referral is made.

Parents and carers will be issued with a penalty notice as a result of the referral being made. The penalty issued is charged at £60 per parent, per 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. The money does not go to the school!

Unauthorised absences stay on a child's school record.

Please note:

- If fines are not paid within the stipulated time, they are doubled
- If fines are still not paid, then it is most likely that Suffolk County Council will take the parents to court to seek action be taken. Ultimately, a custodial sentence can be given.
- If unauthorised absence continues after a fine has been paid, again, Suffolk County Council will most likely take the parents to court to seek action be taken. Ultimately, a custodial sentence can be given.

Next Review: January 2018