

Dear Parents / Carers,

September 2024

New DfE statutory attendance guidance - 'Attendance Counts'

I am writing to share with you how schools are now required to manage pupil attendance. This is different to previous years. Attendance, specifically the national picture of declining school attendance, has been made a government priority. In response, the Department for Education has introduced new statutory guidance, effective from August 2024, aimed at reducing term-time holidays and unauthorised absences and supporting families whose children are struggling to attend school.

'Support First'

As the DfE notes, *'Improving attendance is everyone's business'*, and it is important that we, as your child's school, work together in partnership with you, your family, your child, and the wider community.

The new 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' Guidance emphasises a 'Support First' ethos, and recognises that *'the barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families... [It] is essential for pupils to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances.'*

If you are concerned about your child's attendance, then please contact Mr. Whitfield, as soon as possible, so barriers to attendance can be understood, and appropriate support can be put in place to support you, your family, and your child to prevent further absences. This is via admin@thomaskeble.gloucs.sch.uk

Formalising and intensifying the support

Where voluntary support has not been effective and/or has not been engaged with, we are directed to work with partners, including the local authority, to formalise and intensify support.

As part of the measures introduced, if a pupil has 10 or more unauthorised absences within 10 school weeks, the pupil's parent(s)/carer(s) may receive a 'Notice to Improve' notification sent via email on behalf of the school and issued by the local authority (LA). Each day of absence is recorded as two sessions (morning and afternoon). Unauthorised absences include:

- unauthorised absence (where there is no reasonable circumstance for the absence taking place),
- arriving late after the register has closed,
- or a combination of these with holidays taken during term time.

These 10 weeks can span different terms, academic years, and even different educational settings, such as transitions to secondary school or in-year school changes. For instance, if your child misses 3 days of school for a holiday in July (6 sessions) and is late after the register closes on 4 occasions (4 sessions) between September and October, you may be issued a 'Notice to Improve' notification.

The 'Notice to Improve' notification will set out the expectations, and period notice, for the improvement of attendance such as 'no further unauthorised absences'. Should the expectations not be met in the improvement period, then a Penalty Notice may then be issued by the LA to **each** parent/carer responsible for the child.

Any holiday-related absence taken that includes 10 sessions in 10 weeks, may result in a Penalty Notice. In this instance, a 'Notice to Improve' notification will not be issued by the LA beforehand.

The penalty amount is increasing to £160 from September (reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days for the first offence). If a parent receives a second penalty notice within a rolling three-year period, the fine is £160 and there is no option to pay the fine at a reduced rate.

Parents with parental responsibility, and adults residing with the child, including for example, step-parents who have day-to-day responsibility for the child, may be fined, and this applies to each child who is absent. For example, if two adults take two children out of school, the total fines would be £640 (reduced to £320 for a first offence paid within 21days).

If a Penalty Notice is not paid within the time limits set out in the letter to the parent, the LA may proceed with the case to court.

The government recognise these Penalty Notices may be unpopular with families, however it is important to inform you of these changes promptly.

Nationally, Headteachers are:

- not permitted to approve term-time holidays except in genuinely exceptional circumstances, and
- are to consider each application for a leave of absence, individually, before deciding.

The law expects Headteachers to enforce these penalties strictly.

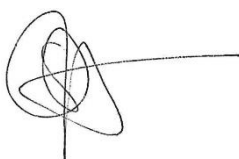
The new policy also states that all schools must consider issuing Penalty Notices if the criteria is met. This is a national statutory process and all English state funded schools have been directed to follow this.

Our revised school attendance policy, in line with these requirements, can be found on our website!

If you would also like more information, please visit the LA's public attendance pages after the 19th August: [Attendance and absence from school | Gloucestershire County Council](#)

The primary goal of these measures is to ensure children do not miss out on their education. Every lesson is a crucial part of your child's learning journey, and frequent absences can significantly hinder their progress.

Thank you for your continued cooperation in supporting your child's education.



Steve Shaw
Headteacher