



Merridale Primary School

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Dear Parents and Carers,

School Attendance and Holidays/Unauthorised Absences During Term Time Changes

From the start of the autumn term 2024-25, there are some changes to our school policy regarding holidays and unauthorised absences during term time which I would like to share with you. I would like to emphasise that these are **national regulations** established by the Department for Education. The implementation of this change is not something we have control over as an individual school and Merridale Primary School **does not** benefit financially from the administration/collection of fines as these go directly to the Local Authority.

Attendance is a national as well as a local concern. Government figures published recently confirmed that, in the Autumn term of 2023, 16% of primary pupils and 27% of secondary pupils were classed as persistently absent from school. In a drive to address this decline in attendance, the DfE have said that fines "must be considered if a child misses five days of school for unauthorised absence". Schools' daily registers will also be shared online with the DfE and Local Authorities. **These future changes regarding attendance documentation and regulations will come into force from August 2024.**

It is imperative that parents and carers understand these changes at the earliest opportunity as we know that some parents may be considering booking holidays now which will, no doubt, be taken in the new school year. **Merridale's existing policy on this remains unchanged: holidays in term time are not permitted and cannot be authorised.**

Holidays or unauthorised absences of five days or more as per the above or where a child has taken a holiday and has already amassed over 5 days of unauthorised absence will mean that a penalty notice will be issued.

- There is a limit of two penalties and escalation in cases of repeat offences. A penalty notice is an out of court settlement which is intended to change behaviour without the need for criminal prosecution. Therefore, from Autumn term 2024, only 2 penalty notices can be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within a 3-year rolling period and any second notice within that period will be charged at a higher rate.
- The first penalty notice issued to a parent in respect of a particular pupil will be charged at £160. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. (The £60 fine was introduced in 2013 and has not been increased in the 11 years since.) A second penalty notice issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.
- A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of issue of the first. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time (or subsequent times) within those 3 years, alternative action should be taken instead. This can include considering prosecution but may include other tools such as one of the other attendance legal interventions.

Please note that the school is merely the administrator of the penalty notice. We do not benefit financially from this in any way. Funds gained from any penalty notices are not given to individual schools, but rather are retained by the Local Authorities. School does have a duty to apply the Department for Education's policies and procedures.

From August 2024, this will be the process that has to be followed by schools so parents should consider the serious implications of taking their child out of school during term time.

Please see a summary chart on the next page for an overview of these changes.

Yours sincerely

Mrs L Towle
Headteacher

Who may be fined?

Penalty Notice fines are issued to each parent who allows their child to be absent from school. For example: three siblings absent for term time leave would result in each parent who allowed the holiday receiving three separate fines.

National Threshold

There will be a single consistent national threshold for when a Penalty Notice must be considered by all schools in England of 10 sessions (usually equivalent to five school days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period.

For example: a 5 day holiday would meet the national threshold.

The 10 school week can span different terms or school years.

First Offence

The first time a Penalty Notice is issued for an unauthorised term time holiday or absence, the fine amount will be:

£80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days.

Increasing to £160 if paid between days 22-28.

Second offence (within three years)

The second time a penalty notice is issued for unauthorised absence, the amount will be:

£160 per parent (who allowed the holiday) per child, payable within 28 days.

Third offence and any further offences (within three years)

The third time an offence is committed, a penalty notice will not be issued and Local Authorities will need to consider other available measures to address the absence concerns. This may mean that cases are presented before a Magistrates' Court. Prosecution can result in criminal records and fines of up to £2500.

Cases found guilty in the Magistrates' Court can show on the parent/carer's future DBS certificate due to "failure to safeguard a child's education".