



St Mary's Road Hayling Island

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Headteacher: Lindsay Rebbitt

7th October 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

### **Attendance Update**

You may have seen the recent increased focus on school attendance in the news. This has come as a result of a new Government document;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

As you can imagine, following the last two years, where children's education has been massively affected by Covid, there is now a significant push for schools to improve their attendance rates and ensure that children miss as little learning as possible.

Local Authorities are being asked to inspect school attendance termly and ensure that we are dealing with persistent absence (any child with less than 90% attendance) effectively and all schools are expected to have a clear action plan and policy in order to ensure attendance is dealt with as a high priority alongside Safeguarding.

As a school we have always been clear on our attendance procedures and these do not need to change. However, I do feel that it is important that we remind parents of these so that they are not surprised when we make contact if a child is not in school or take it personally if we have to make a Children's Services referral. I have therefore attached our contact flow chart to this e mail so that parents have the most up to date information.

### **Penalty Notices**

Penalty notices were introduced by the government as a way of hopefully deterring parents from taking repeated annual holidays in term time and as a sanction for ongoing **unauthorised** absence.

A Penalty Notice will be issued when there has been **10 sessions (5 days)** of unauthorised absence in a **continuous 100 session period** (50 school days).

There are many reasons for an absence being classed as unauthorised but the main reason in schools is when a holiday is taken in term time.

Under the Hampshire code of conduct Headteachers are only allowed to authorise an absence if it is "**unexpected, rare, unavoidable and short**". A planned holiday in term time cannot ever be classed as unexpected or unavoidable and therefore does not meet this criteria. Unavoidable means it cannot be arranged at another time, ie within school holidays.

10 sessions of absence equates to 5 days of school missed, as a day is made up of a morning and an afternoon session. The 10 sessions do not necessarily need to be taken as a block of days. If you were to have 3 days of unauthorised absence followed by two separate days of unauthorised absence within a 50 day period you would still be liable for a penalty notice.

Currently, if paid immediately, a penalty notice comes with a fine of £60 **per parent** per child. Like a parking ticket this amount rises if not paid within a certain time scale and, if not paid at all, then proceeds to court proceedings. The money **does not** come into school's budget. It is paid directly to the Local Authority and goes towards legal and administration costs involved in dealing with persistent absence in Hampshire.

Schools are now advised that, where a family has already received one penalty notice for a holiday in term time, any further leave of absence requests which meet Penalty Notice criteria should go directly to Hampshire who will decide whether to proceed directly to court action.



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Possible penalties for non attendance cases heard in a magistrates court include a community order, a fine of up to £2,500 per parent/carer or a custodial sentence.

Schools are expected to **pass on information** about any Penalty Notices previously issued or court proceedings previously instigated when a child moves schools, ie between infant and junior or junior and college, as these will be taken into account when looking at each set of circumstances.

Further information around Hampshire's approach to attendance is available at;

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/behaviour-attendance-parents>

Please be advised that schools are **not** able to authorise a child's birthday as holiday as, again, this would not be classed as exceptional.

Please also be advised that, on the rare occasion, the school have authorised a leave of absence as exceptional circumstances, this would normally be the only instance this would happen across an academic year.

If a child is reported as missing school due to sickness and we subsequently find out that the family were on holiday/a day out we are required to change the coding of the register to an unauthorised absence in the same way we would had the leave been requested through the correct channels. This will also be the case when siblings are repeatedly off school at the same time. Please be aware that via the children, social media and other parents, school will often find out and it is always better to be honest rather than expecting your child to lie.

### **Persistent Lateness**

Schools are asked to follow the same criteria when looking at lateness as we do with attendance. Where a child is consistently late they are discussed in our regular attendance meetings and next steps action decided upon.

Next Steps can be:

- An initial letter to parents informing them that lateness has become an issue and offering the opportunity to come and talk to staff, the school nurse or support staff regarding strategies for improving future punctuality.
- A further letter to parents informing them that further lateness will be classed as unauthorised absence. Ten sessions of unauthorised absence would leave parents liable to a fine via a penalty notice as mentioned in the previous information.
- A referral to Hampshire attendance which may result in court proceedings.

We know that so many of our families work very hard, alongside schools, to ensure the best possible attendance and education for their children and therefore wanted to ensure that everyone is aware of the current attendance expectations and requirements for schools so that no one is caught out or surprised by our actions.

As always, where there are genuine ongoing issues that affect attendance we are always happy to work with parents to support the best outcomes for their children.

Thanking you for your continued support.

Lindsay Rebbitt  
Headteacher

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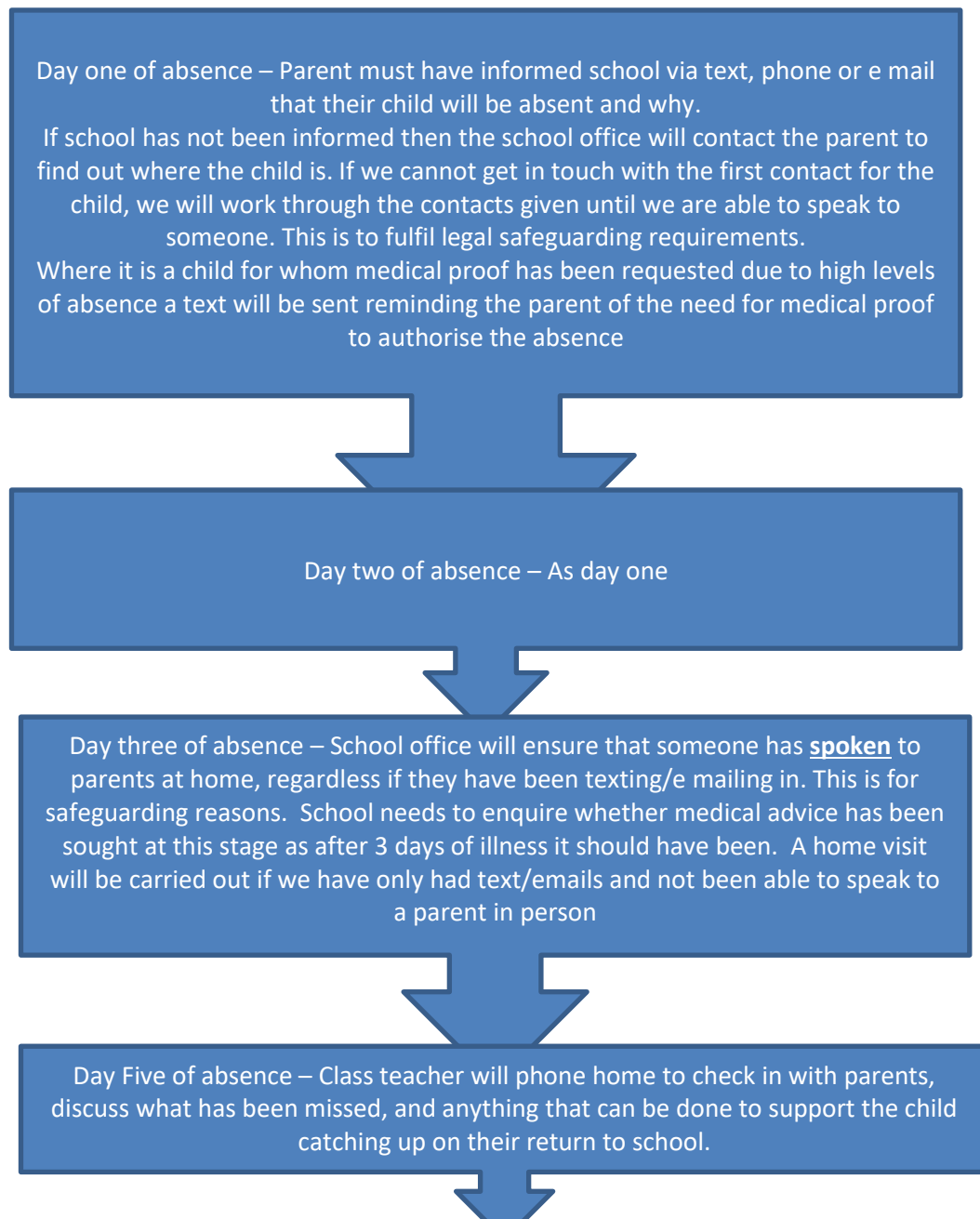
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### Attendance Contact Flowchart

Please be aware that school have a legal duty to inform Children's Services about **any absence** of a child with current children's services involvement or any absence where school perceives there to be a level of risk according to the referral threshold criteria that we are **required** to adhere to. **If school are unable to make contact with a family whose child is not in school this is considered a safeguarding risk and we will carry out a home visit to check that the family is safe.**



Where an absence is over a week school will remain in regular contact with parents/carers.

*"For absences that are expected to last up to 15 school days and that are not part of a pattern of a recurring illness, the parents/carers should discuss with the school whether they are willing to organise for work and homework to be set as soon as the child is able to cope with it. The school should also agree with you how completed work will be collected, marked and returned".*

**Hampshire guidance**