



St. Helens Council

People's Services
Education Welfare Service
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Dear Parents,

This letter is to make you aware that Oakdene Primary School are now being supported by The Education Welfare Service (EWS) with regard to all school attendance matters including legal interventions for unauthorised absence from school.

The EWS will be supporting school to improve school attendance and reduce the number of pupils arriving into school late. This will help us to improve our school attendance and punctuality and reduce the number of pupils who fall into the category of ***Persistent Absentees (PA's)**.

***A Persistent Absentee is a pupil who has 10% or more absence recorded on the schools register. This means that if your child has a school attendance of 90% or below they will fall into this group. The government collect and publish information regarding the percentage of PA pupils on every school roll.**

To give you an understanding of what this might mean to your child, the table below shows **estimated** cumulative absent sessions/days thresholds for around 10% (Persistent Absence) Please be advised that two school sessions = one school day.

Please note; the Government count all absence even that agreed by school because poor attendance may impact on all aspects of your child's school life.

Half-term	Number of sessions	Number of days
Half-term 1	7 or more	3.5 or more
Half-term 1-2 (end of autumn term)	14 or more	7 or more
Half-term 1-3	20 or more	10 or more
Half-term 1-4 (end of spring term)	25 or more	12.5 or more
Half-term 1-5	31 or more	15.5 or more
Half-term 1-6 (full academic year)	38 or more	19 or more

We hope this information helps you to understand Persistent Absence and how this is measured by the government.

With the above information in mind, you are reminded that Oakdene Primary School have adopted the use of **Penalty Notices** into their attendance policy. This means that if your child has unacceptable levels of unauthorised absence that meets the criteria laid down in **St Helens Council Penalty Notice Code of Conduct**, you may be subjected to a fine.

For further information on penalty notices please find enclosed Penalty Notice guidance for parents or it can be found on St Helens Council website <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/schools-education/education-welfare-service>

We look forward to your support on this matter.

Julie Stirrup

Senior Education Welfare Officer

Penalty Guidance for Parents

Can I take my child on holiday in term time?

From the 1st September 2013 the law around allowing time off for a family holiday in term time was changed. Up until that time Headteachers could allow up to 10 days for the purpose of a family holiday in 'special circumstances'.

The changes in the law mean that Headteachers cannot allow any time off for the purpose of family holidays. Headteachers can now only authorise leave of absence in 'exceptional circumstances'.

If you apply for leave of absence during term time you must ask for a 'Leave of absence form' from the school office, you must provide evidence with the form about the circumstances around the leave. You must be honest and provide as much information as possible so that the headteacher can consider the request fully before making a decision. Asking for leave for a holiday which may be a 'chance of a lifetime' or 'more affordable' would not be acceptable.

The headteacher will also look at:

- Your child's current and past attendance
- If you have asked for time in the past
- Significant times of school year i.e. beginning of term, SAT's week
- The number of siblings involved
- Your child's ability to catch up on lost learning

You may be invited into school to discuss your request with the Headteacher and the schools Education Welfare Officer.

The Department for Education states the following:

'Headteachers have the discretion to grant leave, but they should only do so in exceptional circumstances. If a headteacher grants a leave request, it will be for them to determine the length of time that the child can be away from school. This leave is unlikely, however, to be granted for the purposes of a family holiday'.

Parents can be fined for taking their child on holiday during term time without consent from the school.

Can I be fined for taking my child on holiday during term time? YES

If the headteacher has made a decision not to allow the leave of absence and you decide to take the leave anyway, your child's absence will be recorded as 'UNAUTHORISED' on the schools register. Unauthorised absence can result in a Penalty Notice fine to be issued by the Local Authority

What is a Penalty Notice?

A Penalty Notice is a fine; it looks the same as any other fine you may be issued by the local Authority. The fine will give you details of where and how you can pay. If the fine is paid no further action will be taken against you for the absence that the fine was issued for.

Each parent can be issued with a Penalty Notice fine for each child who has taken leave of absence.

How much does it cost?

- The fine is £60 if it is paid in 21 days
- If the fine is not paid in 21 days it goes up to £120
- You are then given a further 7 days to pay
- At the end of 28 days (4 weeks in total) the fine is withdrawn. This means that you can no longer pay the fine because it has been removed from the council payment system.

Penalty Guidance for Parents

What if I do not to pay the fine in the 28 days?

If you do not pay the fine within 28 days you may be prosecuted for the original offence of 'failing to secure regular attendance at school'

The law that covers this offence is the Education Act 1996

What will happen if I do not pay the fine and the education Welfare Service decide to prosecute me?

The Education Welfare Service will submit a court file to St Helens Council Legal Department and you will then be issued with a summons to appear before the Magistrates Court.

What will happen in court?

If you are summoned to appear in court, you may consult legal advice before you enter a plea. The Magistrates will then hear your case and will make a decision on the outcome. If the Magistrates find you to be guilty of the offence they can issue you with a fine of up to £1000 with added costs and a victim surcharge or any other penalty suitable for the offence.