

Whitby Area Schools Partnership



Absence Questions and Answers for Parents and Carers

Parents of a registered pupil whose child fails to attend the school regularly are committing an offence.

We hope that this Q and A document will help address some of the frequent queries that we get in our schools.

They are only children; does it really matter?

Yes. Research shows that children who attend school for less than 95% of the time can underperform significantly and can have ominously reduced lifetime opportunities.

Can I take a holiday in term time?

That is your choice but you should be aware that there are consequences. Holidays in term time are recorded as unauthorised absences as Headteachers are unable to grant requests unless there are extreme extenuating circumstances. These circumstances would need to be discussed with your school.

What will happen if I choose to take my child on holiday in term-time?

You will be asked to complete a Leave of Absence Request Form. In the majority of cases, you will receive a letter from the headteacher informing you that your application is unauthorised. Your child will get an unauthorised mark on the register. If the unauthorised absence is 5 school days (10 sessions) or longer a request to issue you with a penalty notice will be made.

What is a penalty notice?

This is a fine. A penalty notice of £60 is payable within the first 21 days and rises to £120 thereafter. The Local Authority will take legal action if the penalty notice is not paid within 28 days of date of issue. Legal action may also result in a fine of up to £1000 and a criminal record for each parent/carer.

I cannot afford a fine, how will I pay the school?

Fines are not issued by, or paid to the school. The courts issue fines and the revenue is taken by them. If you cannot pay a fine, this is a matter for the courts and is dealt with in line with any other unpaid debts to the Crown. The school has no say in this.

I will not pay the fine, what can they do to me?

The fine increases to up to £1000. If you continue not to pay, you can get up to a 3 month prison sentence.

I did not realise this and I have received a letter re my child's absence. What can I do?

Speak to your child's school. The school is here to help you when and where we can.

The first step is to attend a meeting and work with the school. This will be your chance to seek support if there are underlying reasons for the absences. Whilst we cannot act on your behalf, we can point you in the right direction and look to see if there is anything we can do to help. Recognise that there is an issue, and do all you can to reverse any absence trends. Act promptly if you receive notices, attendance letters and/or court notices.

My child has been ill and I have told you this?

All absence impacts on a child's learning and wellbeing, regardless of the reason. Whilst schools respect parents who state that absence has been a result of specific unavoidable illness, this does not negate the fact that their child's learning has been impacted by it. A child, who is absent due to intermittent illness, has missed the same amount of time as a child who has been absent as a result of a parent's failure to bring them to school for unauthorised reasons.

If a parent is subjected to a fine, this can be appealed against on medical grounds, but it should be noted that the absence is not ignored owing to circumstance and may not be seen as 'good reason' in court without specific, long term, medical support and evidence.

To be clear, under policy, absence through illness has the same impact as absence for any other reason and as such is included in your child's absence figures. This is a national requirement.

So, are you saying you want me to bring my child into school when they are ill?

No. Schools must operate under the guidance and advice from the Health Protection Agency for infectious diseases and bugs. But schools do ask parents to consider carefully if absence is really necessary and discuss this with your school.

My child always attends school, yet you say that there are 'unauthorised absences', how can this be?

If your child arrives late, beyond the close of register, the late mark is converted to an unauthorised absence. This is a national requirement, not the schools. This is done because too much time in school has been missed. Arrive late and children may be considered absent; arrive persistently late, and it is easy to fall below the expectation.

I'd like to take my child out of school for a special day on their birthday. Can I do this?

No, children do not have a right to a day off for their birthday. In fact, most children like to be at school to be with their friends on their birthday. Absence for a 'birthday day' will be marked as an unauthorised absence and can contribute to your child's overall absence figure which may lead to a fine.

One of my children is ill. Can I keep the rest of my children home?

No. As a parent it is your legal responsibility to ensure that your child/children attend school. Siblings and other children in the family must still attend school even if one child is poorly. Sibling absence will be marked as an unauthorised absence and can contribute to your child's overall absence figure which may lead to a fine. Your school may be able to offer a solution. Contact your school.

I am poorly and am unable to bring my child to school. Can I keep them at home with me?

No. As a parent it is your legal responsibility to ensure that your child/children attend school. The Absence will be marked as an unauthorised absence and can contribute to your child's overall absence figure which may lead to a fine. Your school may be able to offer a solution. Contact your school.

My child takes part in lots of activities after school. Please can I take them home early?

No. Even if your child is missing the last 15 minutes of the day, they will still be missing an important part of their school day. Early release for clubs and events will only be allowed if your child is competing or the event is recognised as gifted and talented in this area.

What if I have children in other schools?

The schools in the Whitby area liaise closely together. When a Leave of Absence form is submitted and there are siblings in other schools contact is often made between schools.

As a parent it is your legal responsibility to ensure that your child/children attend school. Siblings and other children in the family must still attend school even if one child is poorly/absent who attends a different school.