

# LOSELEY FIELDS

## PRIMARY SCHOOL



Dear parents / carers

### **New DfE statutory attendance guidance - 'Attendance Counts'**

I am writing to inform you of some new important information recently published in regard to your child's attendance at school. I ask that all parents read this information and the accompanying policy and attachments really carefully.

There has been growing national concern regarding declining school attendance rates across the UK. 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.

### **'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 the school's Attendance Champion, Mrs Emma Baker (SENDCo) or the Head of School (Mrs Faye Johnstone) as soon as possible so that 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.

### **Formalising and intensifying the support**

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

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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 requested by the school and 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 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, stepparents 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 21 days).

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

We recognise that these Penalty Notices may be unpopular with families, but 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 making our decision.

The law clearly 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 will be followed by all English state funded schools.

Our revised school attendance policy in line with these requirements is attached to this letter along with a Leave of Absence Request form which must be completed by parents and returned to school in advance of any leave of absence (this does not need to be completed if your child is ill. In this instance, please call the school office to report your child's non-attendance on the morning of the absence). I have also included a leaflet for parents which explain the routes through for support with attendance if you need it.

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Compassion



Aspiration



Integrity

The primary goal of these measures is to ensure that 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.

Just a quick reminder to new parents. Gates open in the morning at 8.30am. Teachers open their classroom doors for early work at 8.40am and all children are expected to be in class for registers, which are taken promptly at 8.50am. For the safeguarding of all children, school gates are locked at 8.50am. If you arrive after this time, you will need to take your child to be signed in at the front office reception area.

Amanda Pedder

Executive Headteacher  
Farncombe Infants / Loseley Fields Primary

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