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Dear Parents and Carers,

New DfE statutory attendance guidance - 'Attendance Counts'

You may have heard in the news over the summer about changes and drives to improve school attendance. This is because there has been growing national concern regarding declining school attendance rates across the UK. In response, the Department for Education (DfE) 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. We all know that the more a child is in school, the more they learn, with data clearly showing that persistent absence has a significant negative effect to progress and attainment. The term 'persistent absence' is used when a child's attendance falls below 90%.

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 office (office@maidenbowerjunior.co.uk) 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.

Medical evidence

In the majority of cases, a parent's notification that their child is too ill to attend school will be evident and can be accepted without question or concern. Only where the school has genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the illness will medical evidence be requested to support the absence and when attendance is a cause for concern, evidence will also be requested to authorise absence/s.

We encourage medical appointments to take place out of school time but appreciate this is not always possible for emergency appointments. Eye test appointments are needed to be booked for out of school hours. We request proof of all appointments, and these can be issued by doctors/dentists, etc.



Formalising 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, a 'Notice to Improve' may be issued to parents. It is a final opportunity for a parent to improve attendance and engage in support before a Penalty Notice is issued. Reasons that a Notice to Improve could be issued :

- if a pupil is absent from school, other than those associated with an unauthorised holiday in term time, whether it be authorised or unauthorised absences.
- if a pupil has a high number of absences through illness and insufficient evidence has been provided.

There is a recommended length for the improvement period of between 3-6 weeks. This period is flexible, but a referral may be made to the Local Authority prior to the conclusion of the period if a parent fails to engage with the school and/or the absences continue.

A Notice to Improve may not be issued if there is unlikely to be any impact on parent's behaviour (a parent has already received one for a similar offence) and therefore, when this occurs, the expectation is for the school to address their rationale in any referral submission to the Local Authority rather than with a Notice to Improve.

Support Meetings

Attendance data is regularly monitored, with full analysis at least each half-term and the following escalation of support measures are in place for children who have persistent absence (below 90%).

- Level 1 - informal telephone conversation with Mrs Bracher to discuss attendance and support. These will take place when a child is late on 5 occasions / a total of one hour, or when there are two unauthorised absences, or when a child's absence is identified as a concern during school attendance meetings.
- Level 2 - Attendance Support Meeting with Mrs Bracher, with formal documentation and targets set.
- Level 3 - Meeting with a Deputy Headteacher and involvement of the school's Dedicated Schools Team, as part of Early Help.
- Level 4 - Meeting with the Headteacher.
- If progress is not made and agreed targets are not met, school will liaise with outside agencies and any future absence may be unauthorised and consideration about making a referral to the Integrated Front Door will be made.

Penalty notice

Any holiday-related absence taken that includes 10 sessions (5 days) in a 10 school week period, may result in a Penalty Notice. In this instance, a 'Notice to Improve' notification will not be issued beforehand.

The penalty notice amount is increasing from August 2024 with a maximum of two penalty notices within a rolling three-year period:-

- First offence - The first time a Penalty Notice is issued the amount will be: £160 per parent, per child if paid within 28 days. Reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.



- Second Offence (within 3 years) - the second time a Penalty Notice is issued the amount will be £160 per parent, per child paid within 28 days, with no reduction offered for early payment.
- Third Offence and Any Further Offences (within 3 years) - the third time an offence is committed a Penalty Notice will not be issued, and either the case may be presented straight to the Magistrates' Court under s.444 of the Education Act (1996) or the matter being addressed via an alternative pathway with an investigating officer being allocated with other legal interventions considered. The Magistrates' Court can order fines up to £2500 per parent, per child.

Parents with parental responsibility and adults residing with the child, including for example, step-parents 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 and that they are issued in line with the guidelines set.

Nationally, Headteachers are:

- not permitted to approve term-time holidays
- to consider each application for a leave of absence individually before making our decision

The law clearly expects Headteachers to enforce these penalties strictly.

School timings:

The doors open at 8:40am and there is a ten-minute window for children to enter school. The doors close at 8:50am and after this time, children are marked as late. We request that any child who is late is accompanied by an adult and brought into school via the school office. Dropping a child off and expecting your child to walk into school by themselves without staff present could be a safeguarding concern.

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 and please talk to us at an early stage if you have concerns or difficulties.

This letter will be saved on the school website, but we encourage you to keep this so you can refer it at a later date.

Yours sincerely

Simon Pike
Headteacher