



12 January 2018

Dear Parents/Carers,

Absence from School

Thank you so much to all those parents/carers who make extraordinary effort to ensure your child arrives on time, attending every day, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Your child will learn good habits which will be of huge benefit throughout their life.

It is very important that I make you aware that from the 1 January 2018 a new *Staffordshire Local Authority Code of Conduct for Issuing Penalty Notices* is in place.

Attendance at school is extremely important and it will be incumbent upon us as an academy to adhere to the Code of Conduct. In effect, this means we must ask the Local Authority to issue penalty notices if your child does not attend school regularly. The Code will apply for all pupils attending the Rural Enterprise Academy, even if the child resides within another authority.

A penalty notice may be considered by the Local Authority if one of the following criteria is met:

- There is unauthorised persistent absence. "Persistent" means at least 20 sessions (10 school days) of unauthorised absence over a period of twelve school weeks, excluding holidays. These absences do not need to be consecutive.
- There is a period of absence not authorised by the Headteacher/Principal or in excess of the period authorised by the Headteacher/Principal (This is likely to be when you take a family holiday.).
- Persistent late arrival at school i.e. after the register has closed. "Persistent" means at least 10 sessions of unauthorised late arrival over a period of 12 school weeks, excluding holidays. These episodes do not need to be consecutive.
- The presence of an excluded child in a public place at any time during school hours in that child's first five days of exclusion.

There is no doubt that the Local Authority is driving improvements in school attendance.

There are a number of reasons why absence may be classified as unauthorised and we will always endeavour to make parents aware when we are beginning to determine absence as unauthorised. For example:

- If your child has unduly high levels of sickness absence without us being in receipt of medical evidence this will necessitate us asking for medical evidence for future absence; without that evidence absence will be unauthorised. We write to parents informing them if this is the case.
- If you have failed to send in confirmation of the reason for an absence (a telephone call is not sufficient) within four weeks an absence is deemed unauthorised. You can inform us by letter or by email. sarah.moore@ruralenterpriseacademy.com
- If you take a family holiday. We do not authorise holiday in term time so any absence resulting from a family holiday is unauthorised. This applies to all holiday, including holiday taken without any formal request.

The new Code also states that there is no limit on the number of penalty notices that can be issued in an academic year and, in cases where there is more than one pupil in a family with unauthorised absence, penalty notices can be issued for more than one child. They can also be issued to both parents.

The cost of a penalty notice, if paid within 21 days, is £60.00 and after that time, but within 28 days, the cost is £120.00.

If a penalty notice is not paid within 28 days the penalty notice is withdrawn and fast track prosecution results. This is under section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996.

You will see, from the information above, that both the Government and the Local Authority take attendance at school very seriously indeed and it falls to individual schools to monitor attendance and then notify the Local Authority when the above thresholds have been met.

The vast majority of our pupils do attend school regularly but we do have very serious concerns about some pupils' poor attendance. We send a number of letters, as well as inviting parents in to discuss high levels of absence, before we reach the stage of applying for statutory action so it should never be a shock to any parent/carer when they receive a penalty notice from the Local Authority.

Late arrival at school is also part of the new Code of Practice. Some pupils do arrive late on numerous occasions. We carefully monitor late arrival and if a pupil is late because their transport has been delayed we will always take this into account. However, we have a number of pupils who are transported by their parents, or other family members, who arrive late almost every day, citing traffic as the reason. This is not a defence so please ensure that you leave the house earlier to you can ensure you are not issued with a penalty notice.

If any parent has any particular circumstances they would like to discuss with us, please telephone and make an appointment to meet with one of the senior leadership team.

Yours faithfully,

Lorraine Makin
Principal