Walk On Water

St. Paul's C of E VA Primary and Nursery School

Head Teacher: Miss M. A. Cohen

18th September 2026

Dear Parents

Important updates based on DfE on School Attendance: Penalty Notices and Unauthorised Absence

As part of our commitment to good school attendance, I would like to inform you about some important changes regarding holiday absences and unauthorised leave.

The Department for Education (DFE) updated guidance on improving school attendance, effective from 19th August 2024 in collaboration with the Local Authority, which all schools must adhere to. We have been working with our Attendance Officer during the last year and are making further changes to ensure that we are compliant.

Our school consistently emphasises the significance of good attendance. We recognise that absences impact not only a pupil's academic performance but also their social well-being within the school community. We closely monitor the attendance of all our pupils and communicate with families when concerns arise. Our aim is to continue to work together with you, as families, to address any issues and we will provide support and explore solutions together to support all pupils to be in school regularly and on time.

As well as the information below, please see the one-page flyer with the key points.

Reporting Absence

If your child is going to be absent from school, you should notify school by 8.30am, providing the reason on each and every day of the absence. This should be via a phone call or in person and not via email which may not be checked until later that day. Accurate and detailed attendance records are essential, and your swift action helps our admin staff with this.

Medical Appointments

Medical appointments should be booked outside of school hours, but we understand that it's not always possible. If you must have an appointment during the school day, please take only the essential time away from school to minimise disruptions to your child's education. Where time has to be taken for appointments in the school day, you must provide school with the appointment card / letter / text / email etc – a screen shot is fine for our records.

Term time holidays

The DFE emphasises that term-time holiday should not be taken. Absence during this time can significantly impact your child's education. You should plan holidays during breaks to minimise disruption in learning. Any such absences will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. If you believe there are exceptional circumstances that require a term-time holiday, a leave of absence form must be completed two weeks in advance. We will assess each case individually and provide guidance accordingly. However, if we determine that the circumstances do not qualify as **exceptional,** we will let you know that you may be subject to a penalty notice issued by the local authority, which could result in legal action.

Unauthorised absence

These could be situations where a pupils is absent without valid reason or permission. This could include being absent without notifying the school of the reason, taking term-time holidays, arriving late to school, leaving early without a valid reason or truanting. Occasionally, we may request evidence to validate an absence. For instance, providing a medical appointment letter can change an absence from unauthorised to authorised. It is your responsibility to read this information before commencing any holiday/ leave of absence in term time

Penalty notices and prosecution

It is important to be aware that poor attendance may result in the issuing of penalty notices to parents. These notices can apply to term-time holidays, any unauthorised absences, or a combination of both. The national threshold for issuing a penalty notice in England is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a 10-week period. This typically equates to 5 school days. (e.g. 4 sessions of holiday taken in term time plus 6 sessions of arriving late after the register closes all within 10 school weeks). These sessions can be consecutive (e.g. 10 sessions of holiday in one week) or not (e.g. 6 sessions of unauthorised absence taken in 1 week and 1 per week for the next 4 weeks). The period of 10 school weeks can also span different terms or school years (e.g. 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in the Summer Term and a further 8 within the Autumn Term). A Penalty Notice can be issued under the following legislation:

- Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 places upon parents a duty to ensure that their child receives efficient full-time education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise
- Where a child is a registered pupil at a school and the parent fails to ensure that child's regular attendance at school the parent is liable to be prosecuted for a criminal offence under Section 444 of the Education Act
- In cases where this duty is not being fulfilled Section 444B of the same Act empowers the Local Authority to issue a Penalty

Penalty Notice Details

First Notice in a 3 year period: Issued to each parent. Charged at £80 if paid within 21 days. £160 if paid between 21-28 days.

Second Notice in a 3 year period: Issued to each parent. Charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.

Third Notice in a 3 year period: Alternative action should be taken, for example prosecution or other attendance legal interventions. Fines per parent are capped at two within any three-year period. If a parent is prosecuted for their child's non-attendance, they could face a magistrates court appearance and a fine of up to £2,500 and/or prison.

Where a child is absent through regular non-attendance, parents are offered support from school to improve their child's attendance. This will still be the case before a fine is issued. We appreciate that some children and families need additional support to ensure that attendance improves. Where the absence which meets the 10-session threshold is due to a family holiday, fines will be sought.

Thank you for your cooperation in ensuring that your child's education remains a priority.

Yours sincerely

M. A. Cohen
Head Teacher