

8 July 2024

Dear parents and carers

Changes to dealing with unauthorised pupil absence from school

I hope you are well. As we near the end of the school year, I am writing to confirm the changes that are happening nationally with regard to unauthorised pupil absence. The national changes come into force from Monday 19 August which is obviously during our summer holiday period. Across the schools within the St Thomas Aquinas CMAT, these changes will apply from the first day of the school year, Thursday 29 August 2024.

Included within this letter, and on your child's school website, is a useful summary of the changes which, in summary are:

- Penalty notice fines are increasing to £160 per parent per child (reduced to £80 per parent per child if paid within 21 days);
- These Penalty Notice fines will be used for both first and second offences. In the event of a third (and any further) offence within 3 years there will be no fine but the case will proceed to the Magistrates' court. Magistrate's fines can be up to £2,500 per parent per child;
- Penalty notices will apply if a pupil has been absent for 5 or more consecutive days, or for fewer days if this has happened before;
- Penalty notices will be considered if a pupil has been absent for 10 sessions (a session is a half day) in a 10-week period.

It is important to note that the government has taken the decision to introduce these higher penalties due to the importance of education and the impact on a young person's life chances of missing school; the statistics on this are powerful and very concerning.

For clarity, taking holidays in term time, visiting relatives abroad, attending weddings and a variety of other such activities are classed as unauthorised absence. If school leaders and staff suspect that a young person's absence is not authorised (i.e. due to illness, a medical procedure or other *pre-authorised* reason), they are required to look into this.

I want to emphasise two things to you as parents and carers: firstly, the issuing of Penalty Notices are not the decision of the Headteacher, the school or the Trust, they are nationally



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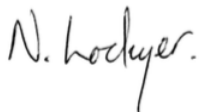


regulated by the government; and secondly, neither the school nor the Trust receive any of the money paid in relation to these fines. Please bear this in mind in your communications with your child's school.

Finally, in sharing this information with you, I am very conscious that so many of you place huge importance on your child's education and work closely with their school to ensure very high levels of attendance. I am delighted to report that attendance in our schools is significantly above the national average. We must never be complacent about this, and we will continue to prioritise the highest levels of attendance across our schools with your support for which I am very grateful.

I wish you a wonderful summer.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "N. Lockyer." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Neil Lockyer
Chief Executive Officer

Penalty Notices for unauthorised absences: What you need to know about the changes.

With the introduction of the new National Framework for Penalty Notices, the following changes will come into force for unauthorised absences that occur after 19th August 2024.

5 Consecutive Days of Term Time Leave.

Penalty Notice fines will be issued for term time leave of 5 or more consecutive days, and for fewer days where this has happened before.

10 Sessions of Unauthorised Absence in a 10-week period.

Penalty Notice fines will be considered when there have been 10 sessions of absence in a 10-week period.

Per Parent, Per Child

Penalty Notice fines will be issued to each parent, for each child who was absent.

For example: 3 siblings absent for term time leave will result in each parent receiving 3 separate fines.

First Offence

The first time a Penalty Notice is issued for Term Time Leave or irregular attendance the amount will be:

£160 per parent, per child when paid within 28 days.

Reduced to £80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days.

Second Offence (within 3 years)

The second time a Penalty Notice is issued for Term Time Leave or irregular attendance the amount will be:

£160 per parent, per child when paid within 28 days.

(No option to pay at £80 level)

Third offence and Any Further Offences (within 3 years)

The third time an offence is committed for Term Time Leave or irregular attendance a Penalty Notice will not be issued. The case will proceed to the Magistrates' court.

Magistrate's fines can be up to £2,500 per parent, per child.



Please consult your school's attendance policy and speak with your school if you are thinking of taking your child out of school during term-time. It is likely you will need to make a written request to take your child out of school and any leave of absence will need to be agreed by your Headteacher before it is taken.

For further advice and guidance please refer to the attendance policy which can be found on our school's website.