Birklands Primary School
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www.birklandsschool.co.uk
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Head Teacher
Amy Watson *BSc, PGCE, NPQSL*

BIRKLANDS
PRIMARY SCHOOL

Dear Parents/Carers

Regular attendance is important in helping children to feel settled, build friendships and make good progress at school.

We understand that children will sometimes be genuinely unwell and unable to attend. We also recognise that attendance procedures can sometimes feel complicated, particularly when deciding whether a child is well enough to come to school or understanding how unauthorised absences are recorded.

We have therefore put together a new **Parent and Carer Attendance Guide** to clearly explain:

- how to report an absence;
- when a child with a cough, cold or minor illness should attend school;
- how medication can be administered in school;
- when we may ask for further information or evidence;
- what happens when we identify a pattern of absence;
- our safeguarding and home visit procedures;
- our expectations regarding term-time holidays; and
- when unauthorised absence may be referred to the Local Authority for consideration of a Penalty Notice.

We ask all parents and carers to read the guide carefully and keep it for future reference. We understand that every family's circumstances are different. If your child has a medical condition, additional needs or another difficulty that is affecting their attendance, please speak to us as early as possible. We are here to listen, offer support and work with you to help your child attend school regularly.

We also ask families to be open and honest when reporting the reason for an absence. This helps us to keep accurate records, fulfil our attendance and safeguarding responsibilities, and apply our procedures fairly and consistently.

Thank you for your continued support in helping us keep children safe and giving every child the best possible opportunity to learn and succeed.

Yours sincerely,

AVWatson

Miss A Watson
Headteacher

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A Parent and Carer Guide to Attendance, Illness and Term-Time Holidays

What should I do if my child is unwell?

Please contact the school by 8.30am on **each day of absence.**

Phone **01623 842 163** or email **Absent@birklandsschool.co.uk**

When reporting an illness, please give a clear explanation of:

- your child's symptoms;
- why they are not well enough to attend school; and
- when you expect them to return.

Simply telling us that your child is "unwell" may not provide enough information for us to record the absence appropriately. We may contact you to ask for further details.

Should my child stay at home with a cough or cold?

A **mild cough or common cold will not usually be a reason for your child to remain at home**, provided they are otherwise well and do not have a high temperature.

Children can usually attend school with minor symptoms such as:

- a slight cough;
- a runny nose;
- a mild sore throat; or
- a minor headache.

Children should remain at home if they have a high temperature or are genuinely too unwell to take part in their normal school day. NHS guidance confirms that children with a slight cough or common cold symptoms can attend school if they are otherwise well and do not have a high temperature.

If you are unsure, please contact the school office to discuss your child's symptoms.

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Can school give my child medication?

Yes. Where appropriate, school staff can administer medication during the school day.

A parent or carer must:

- bring the medication directly to the school office;
- ensure that it is clearly labelled for the child; and
- complete a parental consent form.

Please do not place medication in your child's bag or ask your child to bring it into school themselves. Medication must be handed directly to the school office by an adult so that it can be safely stored and the correct records can be completed.

The school's ability to administer medication may help your child to remain comfortable and continue attending school.

Why is it important to give the correct reason for an absence?

We ask all parents and carers to be open and honest when reporting an absence. Accurate information allows us to:

- fulfil our attendance and safeguarding responsibilities;
- keep accurate attendance records;
- provide appropriate support;
- apply our procedures fairly to all families; and
- avoid unnecessary welfare visits when a family is away from home.

If your child is away on holiday, please do not report the absence as illness. Reporting a holiday as illness will not prevent the absence from being investigated, recorded as unauthorised or considered as part of a Penalty Notice referral.

Will school ask for evidence of illness?

We may ask for additional information or supporting evidence where appropriate. This helps us to make a fair and informed decision about how the absence should be recorded.

Appropriate evidence could include:

- confirmation of a medical appointment;
- a prescription or medication label;
- information or advice from a healthcare professional; or
- other relevant information relating to the illness.

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We do not expect parents to make an unnecessary GP appointment simply to obtain evidence. However, we may ask you to provide appropriate information that is already available.

When is school particularly likely to request additional evidence?

We are particularly likely to ask for further information or evidence when:

- illness is reported immediately before or after a school holiday;
- illness is reported immediately before or after a requested leave of absence;
- a leave of absence has been requested and illness is then reported for the same or surrounding dates;
- illness absences are frequent or prolonged;
- there is a repeated pattern of absence;
- absences regularly occur on the same day of the week;
- illness is regularly reported next to weekends or school holidays; or
- we have reason to suspect that the child may be away on holiday.

Each situation will be considered carefully, based on the information available.

What happens if school suspects that an illness absence may be a holiday?

If an absence is reported as illness but we have reason to suspect that your child may be away on holiday, we will make further enquiries.

We may:

- contact you for further information;
- ask to speak with your child;
- request appropriate evidence of the illness; and
- consider the information available to the school.

If the information indicates that the absence was a holiday rather than illness, the absence may be recorded as unauthorised.

Reporting a holiday as illness does not prevent the absence from being recorded as unauthorised or referred to the Local Authority for consideration of a Penalty Notice.

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Will school visit my home if my child is absent?

As part of our safeguarding procedures, school staff carry out welfare visits for extended illness absences or where there are outstanding queries regarding the reasons given.

From the third day of absence, daily home visits will be carried out by two members of staff. These visits are an important part of our responsibility to check that absent children are safe and supported.

If a child is away on holiday but the absence has been reported as illness, two members of staff may make repeated visits to an empty home. This can result in staff spending significant time away from school unnecessarily and may divert staff from supporting children and families who genuinely require safeguarding assistance.

Being honest from the beginning helps us to use our staff time and safeguarding resources appropriately.

Can I take my child on holiday during term time?

No. **Family holidays must be arranged during the school holidays.**

Parents and carers do not have an automatic right to take their child out of school during term time. Holidays taken during term time will be recorded as unauthorised and may count towards the national Penalty Notice threshold.

This includes:

- holidays taken without informing the school;
- holidays taken after the school has advised that the absence will be unauthorised;
- holidays reported to school as illness;
- additional days taken before or after the stated holiday dates; and
- additional days taken immediately before or after a school holiday.

Completing a leave of absence form does not mean that the absence has been agreed. Families should not make bookings on the assumption that the absence will be authorised.

What is the Penalty Notice threshold?

The national threshold is **10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling period of 10 school weeks**.

There are two attendance sessions in each school day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

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This means:

- **one full school day equals two sessions; and**
- **10 sessions are usually equal to five school days.**

The 10 unauthorised sessions:

- do not have to be consecutive;
- do not have to relate to one period of absence;
- can occur on different dates;
- can include different types of unauthorised absence;
- can include unauthorised holiday, other unauthorised absence and lateness after the register has closed; and
- can fall across different terms or school years, provided they are within the same rolling 10-school-week period.

Nottinghamshire County Council confirms that the threshold can include a mixture of holiday absence, lateness and other unauthorised absences.

What does a rolling 10-school-week period mean?

A rolling period means that the school considers the relevant 10 school weeks. The count does not automatically restart at the beginning of a new term or school year.

For example, unauthorised sessions recorded at the end of one term may be combined with further unauthorised sessions at the beginning of the next term if they fall within the same rolling 10-school-week period.

Can four days of unauthorised leave result in a Penalty Notice?

Yes, if there are other unauthorised absences.

Four full days of unauthorised leave would normally equal eight unauthorised sessions. Although this is below the national threshold on its own, the Local Authority may consider a Penalty Notice if the child has other unauthorised sessions within the same rolling 10-school-week period.

For example:

- four days of unauthorised leave equal eight sessions;
- one additional full day of unauthorised absence equals two sessions; and
- together, these total 10 unauthorised sessions.

The additional sessions do not have to be part of the holiday. They could come from:

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- another unauthorised absence;
- an absence for which no acceptable reason or evidence has been provided; or
- lateness after the register has closed.

Different types of unauthorised absence can therefore be added together when considering whether the national threshold has been met.

Does reaching 10 sessions mean that a fine is automatic?

No. Reaching 10 unauthorised sessions means that a Penalty Notice must be **considered**. It does not mean that one will automatically be issued.

The school will consider the circumstances and decide whether a referral to the Local Authority is appropriate. The Local Authority will then consider the referral in line with the national framework and the Nottinghamshire Code of Conduct.

The Local Authority also retains discretion to consider a Penalty Notice below the national threshold where it believes this is appropriate, including where there is clear evidence of an ongoing pattern of unauthorised absence.

Who can receive a Penalty Notice?

Penalty Notices relate to children of compulsory school age. A Penalty Notice may be issued to each parent or carer who is considered responsible for the child's attendance in relation to the unauthorised absence.

For school attendance purposes, the legal meaning of parent is wider than only a child's biological mother or father. It can include:

- a child's natural or biological parent, whether or not they live with the child;
- a person who has parental responsibility for the child; or
- another adult who has care of the child, meaning someone with whom the child lives and who looks after them.

This could therefore include a step-parent or another adult who lives with and has day-to-day care of the child, depending on the individual circumstances.

A Penalty Notice will not necessarily be issued to every adult connected to the child. When deciding who may be liable, the circumstances will be considered, including:

- who had responsibility for the child's attendance at the time;
- who the child was living with on the dates of the unauthorised absence; and
- which parent or carers were involved in, or took part in, an unauthorised holiday.

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This means that a Penalty Notice may be considered for more than one parent or carer. It is not determined only by:

- who completed a leave of absence form;
- who contacted the school;
- which parent made the holiday booking; or
- whether the parents live at the same address.

The Local Authority will consider the information provided and determine which parent or carers are liable in the individual circumstances.

Are fines issued per family?

No. A Penalty Notice is not one fine per household or family.

Where the relevant requirements are met, a fine may be issued **to each liable parent, for each child**. Government guidance confirms that a local council can give each parent a fine and that the national limits apply to each parent in respect of the same child.

For example, where two parents are both considered liable for the unauthorised absence of two children, each parent could receive a separate Penalty Notice for each child. This would be considered by the Local Authority according to the circumstances of the case.

Can a fine be issued for a child who is not yet of compulsory school age?

Attendance Penalty Notices are issued in relation to pupils of **compulsory school age**.

A younger child's attendance will still be monitored, and the school's absence-reporting and safeguarding procedures will continue to apply. However, this particular Penalty Notice process applies once the child is of compulsory school age.

What if my child has a medical condition or additional needs?

Please speak to us as early as possible if a medical condition, special educational need, disability or other difficulty is affecting your child's attendance.

We will work with you to:

- understand the circumstances;
- consider appropriate support and reasonable adjustments;
- involve relevant members of staff where needed; and
- help your child attend school as regularly as possible.

Providing information early allows us to understand the situation and work together to reduce barriers to attendance.

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What can parents and carers expect from school?

We will:

- listen to the information you provide;
- consider each situation carefully and fairly;
- explain any attendance concerns clearly;
- ask for further information or evidence where appropriate;
- offer support where there are barriers to attendance; carry out our attendance and safeguarding responsibilities;
- follow our attendance policy and relevant guidance; and
- treat families with respect.

What does school ask of parents and carers?

We ask parents and carers to:

- ensure their child attends school every day they are well enough to do so;
- send their child to school with a mild cough or common cold if they are otherwise well and do not have a high temperature;
- report every absence promptly;
- contact school on each day of absence;
- provide a clear, accurate and honest reason for the absence;
- respond to calls and messages from school;
- provide appropriate information or evidence when requested;
- bring medication directly to the school office and complete a consent form;
- arrange family holidays during the school holidays;
- not take their child out of school for a term-time holiday; and
- work with us when concerns or patterns of absence arise.

If you have any questions or concerns then please contact Miss Verity, our School Attendance Officer on **016523 842163** or email **Absent@birklandsschool.co.uk.**