



Hawes Side Academy

Principal: Mrs C Boothroyd
B.Ed (Hons) NPQH

Johnsville Avenue,
Blackpool, FY4 3LN

(Registration No.8161246)

7th November 2024

Dear parents and carers

Changes to attendance rules, including illness and medical appointments

As you may be aware from our previous update in July 2024, the government has renewed appeals to parents asking for them not to take their children out of school during term time. We thank those parents who have supported both the government and our academy in improving school attendance by taking holidays outside of term time. As part of a national strategy, the government have made changes to improve attendance in schools, which came into force on the 19th August 2024. This means that pupils will now only be given permission to take leave in term time if there are exceptional circumstances, with evidence to support this.

As a school, we are asked to inform you that in line with the government's regulation changes and Blackpool Council's school attendance strategy and policy, that unauthorised absence may result in a penalty notice being issued to you by the local authority. Where a pupil has been absent from school for 10 sessions (the equivalent of 5 school days) within a 10-week rolling period, the local authority may issue a fine. The fine will be £160.00 per parent per child and reduces to £80.00 per parent per child where the fine is paid within 21 days. If a second penalty notice is issued by the local authority within a rolling 3-year period, then there will be no reduction to the fine for early payment. The local authority may in certain circumstances prosecute or follow another legal attendance initiative for unauthorised absences, including for lateness arriving in school.

Our key priority is to ensure that your child is as successful as possible and can achieve his or her full potential. Where a pupil is absent or arrives late to school, it impacts on their learning. The school day is full of lots of opportunities for pupils to learn new knowledge and skills, as well as to develop their social skills and friendship groups; absence negatively impacts on this. We appreciate that some absences cannot be avoided, such as an emergency medical appointment, however where possible, we ask that you work with us by arranging routine appointments outside of school hours and avoid term time holidays. In line with the local authority and government policy, leave should be restricted to the 13 weeks of school holidays, except in exceptional circumstances.

To reflect the changes to attendance, we have an updated attendance policy on our website, which provides further information on authorised and unauthorised absence along with the new attendance rules. Key points to be aware of include:

- The 10-week rolling period referred to in the new regulations and guidance includes school weeks only, meaning that the 10-week rolling period could overlap different school years for your child.

"Everyone Matters, Everyone Succeeds"

- If your child is not well enough to attend school, then please telephone the academy office before 9am on each day of the absence. Please provide details of the illness, as we are unable to accept an explanation that they are 'unwell, poorly or ill' meaning the absence would be recorded as unauthorised. Remember that being unwell does not always prevent a child from attending school. If you are unsure, please consider the advice contained within the NHS Guidance on school absence and childhood illness 'Is my child too ill for school' <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/> In some circumstances, evidence of illness may be requested, such as a doctor's note, prescription or appointment card.
- Routine appointments should be made outside of school hours. Where this is not possible, such as an emergency, please bring evidence of the appointment (e.g. appointment letter, text or card) to the office when you collect your child.
- Where a request is made for authorised leave to be treated as an exceptional circumstance, please provide 3 weeks written notice and complete the form attached to our attendance policy.
- In the unlikely event that you decide to take an unauthorised leave of absence, we would ask that for the purpose of safeguarding you contact the office to notify us beforehand.

Please be aware that the local authority has shared additional advice where a request is received to authorise a holiday for a child with additional needs, including health needs. This advice from the local authority can be found at the bottom of this letter and states that this would not generally be an exceptional circumstance.

We would ask you to also note that we do not always have the staffing capacity over the lunchtime period (12.15-1.15pm) to accommodate children being collected for emergency appointments. The reason for this is because we must maintain staffing ratios in the lunch halls and playgrounds, making it difficult to release staff to accompany children to the office for collection. We would therefore please ask that where possible you avoid this period on the rare occasion when you need to collect your child during the school day.

Our office staff are here to help you with any queries regarding attendance. As we hope you will agree, our office staff work hard and are an important part of maintaining communications between the academy and home. Please be aware that when they are passing messages on about attendance or are seeking clarification from you about an absence, they are fulfilling an essential role in school and are ensuring we are compliant with various rules and regulations. Please remember that our office staff want to help and work with you; the academy office is a positive environment and a zero-tolerance zone, as you would no doubt expect.

We thank you for your understanding and support and hope this letter explains why your child's attendance in school is so important to us. We look forward to working together to improve children's outcomes through improving school attendance.

Your sincerely
Mrs Caroline Boothroyd

Advice from the local authority

The new statutory document is clear about all children having the right to access education, despite additional needs or health needs the Equalities Act is clearly written in to protect these children from missing their right to education. It also puts more emphasis on travel companies and airports to accommodate these young people so their experience when travelling is as positive as it can be. Please see below extract from a national association.

In this situation parents are advised to make prior contact with either the Passenger Support Service or Additional Needs Team at the relevant airport. These Teams can often support in the provision of or the identification of quiet areas where families can wait until boarding. There are also occasions where these teams can support with Early Boarding which lessens the queuing time, although it is advisable to have prior communication with them first.

Further information and advice can be found on the attached link from the **[National Autistic Society.](#)**

Headteachers are reminded that the DFE Working Together To Improve School Attendance Statutory Guidance which came into force on 19/8/24 (page 84) is very clear for all children and families that,

- Leave of Absence can only be granted by a Headteacher at their discretion and only then in 'Exceptional Circumstances'.
 - Each application should be considered individually and should a Headteacher allow the leave of absence, they will determine the number of days.
- Any application must be made in advance and by the parent who the child normally lives with.

The DFE are very clear in this guidance that

- Generally, a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation would not constitute an exceptional circumstance.