8 Sept 2026

Norfolk County Council: Penalty Notices regarding school absence

Guidance for parents

Regular school attendance and parent's legal responsibilities

At Queen's Hill Primary School, we work closely with parents and carers to ensure that all pupils receive the best possible education and achieve their full potential.

Good school attendance is essential for children's learning, wellbeing and future opportunities. Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child attends school regularly when they are registered at a school.

The Government is clear that children should only miss school in exceptional circumstances, Schools and local authorities are expected to work with families to promote good attendance and reduce avoidable absence.

When could a Penalty Notice be issued?

Under the national framework for school attendance, a Penalty Notice may be considered when a child has 10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling period of 10 school weeks.

What does this mean?

- A school day consists of two sessions – a morning session and an afternoon session
- 10 sessions is usually equivalent to 5 school days
- The unauthorised absences do not need to happen on consecutive days
- The 10-school-week period can span different terms or school years

Examples of unauthorised absence may include:

- Holidays taken during term time without authorisation
- Keeping a child away from school without an accepted reason
- Persistent late arrival after the close of registration

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Can a Penalty Notice be issued before the threshold is reached?

Yes. In some circumstances, the Local Authority may decide to issue a Penalty Notice before the threshold is reached. For example, this could apply where there have been several unauthorised term-time holidays. The Local Authority may also consider alternative legal action where appropriate.

How many Penalty Notices can be issued?

A maximum of two Penalty Notices per parent, per child can be issued within a rolling three-year period. The three-year period begins on the date the first Penalty Notice is issued. If the national threshold is met for a third time within three years and two Penalty Notices have already been issued to the parent(s), the Local Authority may consider prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

A successful prosecution could result in:

- A criminal conviction
- A fine of up to £2,500
- Any other penalties available to the court

Who can receive a Penalty Notice?

For the purposes of school attendance law, a parent includes:

- A child's natural parent
- Any person who has parental responsibility for the child
- Any person who has day-to-day care of the child

Penalty Notices will usually be issued to parent(s) responsible for the child's attendance or who allowed the absence to occur. This may apply regardless of which parent submitted a request for leave of absence.

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How much is a Penalty Notice?

First Penalty Notice	Second Penalty Notice
The first Penalty Notice issued to a parent for a child will be: • £160, payable within 28 days; or • £80, if paid within 21 days.	If a second Penalty Notice is issued to the same parent for the same child within three years of the first Penalty Notice: • The charge will be £160 • Payment must be made within 28 days • No reduced payment option is available.
Important information about payment • Penalty Notices must be paid in full. • Part-payments are not accepted. • Payment plans are not available. • There is no right of appeal against a Penalty Notice. • Penalty Notices are issued per parent, per child. This means that where two parents are liable for a child's absence, each parent may receive a separate Penalty Notice and will be responsible for paying their own fine.	

Requests for leave of absence during term time

Government guidance states that schools should only grant leave of absence during term time in exceptional circumstances. Each request will be considered individually, taking account of the specific circumstances presented. Although we recognise the value of family time together, requests for family holidays during term time will not normally be authorised. Government guidance states that a need or desire for a holiday or other leisure activity is not considered an exceptional circumstance. If leave is granted, the Headteacher will determine the length of time authorised.

How to request leave of absence

Requests for leave of absence should be made in advance of the planned absence. Making a request in advance allows the school to consider the circumstances before a decision is made. Where leave has not been requested in advance, the school may be unable to consider individual circumstances, and the absence is likely to be recorded as unauthorised. The school reserves the right to request evidence in support of absences reported immediately before or after a holiday period.

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Support with school attendance

We understand that children and families can sometimes face challenges that affect attendance. If you are experiencing difficulties or require support to help your child attend school regularly, please contact our school office.

We will work with you to understand any barriers to attendance and discuss the support available.

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