



Attendance Improvement plan 2022-23

Five main areas for action

Minor
Illnesses



Unauthorised
absence



Term-time
holidays



Late arrival



Child Missing
Education



Minor illnesses – whole school culture – Attendance Officer lead

Illnesses defined by the NHS as common or minor do not necessitate absence from school. Parents should be made aware that their children can attend school with colds, sore throats and headaches and gently challenged by school staff if they report their child as absence for these reasons.

ACTIONS -

1. Informal discussions around importance of good attendance held by form tutors in form groups
2. Form tutors and class teachers to routinely make the point of welcoming back students following absence
3. An informational email based on the DfE expectations to be sent to all parents attention in September, with all staff copied in
4. Posters and brochures to be displayed in school reception area and published on the school's website for parents' attention
5. Use of school newsletters to advise of school expectations with regards acceptable reasons for absence
6. Posters for the attention of pupils to be displayed in classrooms and around the school
7. Where the length of any absence due to illness exceeds three school days, the school will require some supporting medical evidence. The evidence asked for does not incur any cost, and
8. At the point of parents reporting their child as absent due to minor illness, suggested challenge –

Parent - "Jonny won't be in today because he has a headache"

School - "that is fine, give him some paracetamol and bring him in and we'll look after him. If he really can't last the day, we'll let you know and you can come and collect him"....."in line with NHS guidance, it is the school policy not to authorise absences for minor/common conditions".

These expectations should also be reflected on the school's website absence page along with the guidance from the NHS as well as on the school's automated voice message when parents are reporting the reason for any absence.

It should be a positive for the parent that 'Jonny' does not need to miss his education because of a minor/common illness. If the parent wants to discuss this further, pass Aquinas' email or telephone number on to them and we can give a tougher challenge and explain the requirements in more detail. Absence from school should only be permitted where **UNAVOIDABLE**.

Unauthorised absence – Aquinas lead

It will always remain the school's decision whether absences are authorised or not. Absences without a reason provided from the parent and reasons that are not deemed unavoidable by the school should result in unauthorised absence. The second half of the autumn term is highlighted as the time when unauthorised absence is most frequent.

PRE-EMPTIVE ACTIONS FOR SEPTEMBER 2022/23

1. 2022-23's Year 7 intake with poor attendance during their final year of primary school will be invited to a School Attendance Meeting to identify and resolve any continuing issues that may also affect attendance at secondary school
2. In the first few weeks of September, parents of historically Persistently Absentees should be sent a Legal Warning Letters based on the absences over 2021/22. This pre-emptive action is based on the evidence that the lowest attendees will often continue to be absent without regular challenge. Legal Warning Letters are our most effective tool in reducing unauthorised absence and are a prerequisite for legal action.
3. Where unauthorised absence occurs following the issue of Warning Letters, parents are to be invited to attend an Attendance Review Meeting. The option of legal action is then open to the school following these actions.
4. Selected parents of pupils with low attendance over 2021/22 not issued a Warning Letter should be considered for an invitation to attend a School Attendance Meeting the first half term.

Term time holidays

Pandemic travel restrictions aside, since 2014-15, on both a national and Essex level, absence due to holidays has increased; so too has the issuing of penalty notices. The use of penalty notices has not resulted in reducing absence due to holiday over this period. Financially, the amount of the penalty notice does not outweigh the savings made on the cost of a family holiday during term time. Yet there is an obvious disparity between the number of penalty notices issued in relation to holiday in comparison to other unauthorised absence – especially considering that unauthorised holiday is a low cause of persistent absence.

It is a very delicate balance between discouraging parents from taking holidays during school time and implementing the penalty notice scheme fairly. This requires a two-way approach -

ACTIONS TO DISCOURAGE PARENTS FROM TAKING TERM TIME HOLIDAYS -

1. A campaign around the warning of prosecution instead of penalty notices. Parents can be warned that prosecutions can carry a maximum fine of £2500, up to a 3-month custodial sentence and a criminal record. Warnings can be issued to parents via brochures sent home with children, posters in reception area, information within the school's newsletter and on the school's website.
2. Amendments to the warning issued on the holiday application form used by parents to request holidays and within the school response when advising the absence will not be authorised - specifically, siting prosecution and its consequences along with the existing information on penalty notices.
3. Requests for prosecution rather than penalty notices should only be considered in the cases of –
 - a. Second holiday during an academic year, following payment of a penalty notice for the first, and
 - b. Where pupil is currently subject to intervention for persistent absence and a Legal Warning Letter has already been issued.

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE PENALTY NOTICE SCHEME FAIRLY -

4. Consideration is given as to whether penalty notices are to be issued to pupils with very high levels of attendance prior to their holiday with the expectation that high attendance would continue following their return and issuing a PN will have little or no influence on this,
5. All requests for holiday that are not deemed to be made under exceptional circumstances continue to be unauthorised,
6. Holidays for longer than 1 week (10 sessions) will remain subject to penalty notice(s),
7. If a penalty notice was not issued for the first holiday and a second holiday within an academic year is requested penalty notice(s) will be issued,
8. Holidays that are not requested in advance will continue to be subject to penalty notice(s) where no evidence on the contrary is provided by the parent at the school's request.

Late arrival at school

Late arrival at school in the morning is an ongoing problem. Unless a pupil is persistently arriving late and after the school has closed the register there can be no legal consequence and in practice the Essex Code of Conduct on the issuing of penalty notices is very rarely met by late arrival. Therefore, careful consideration should be given as to the time that registers are closed, after closed the pupils are marked as absent with a 'U' code rather than present with a 'L' code.

Most schools in Essex opt to very rarely use the 'U' code to record lateness, 128 of the 448 primary schools in Essex never use the code (2018/19 data).

ACTIONS -

1. A published 'absent due to late arrival time' of after at least after 10:30am, or at the point that more than half the morning session is missed (maybe at break time?) There is no DfE guidance on what time to close the register, as such it is entirely at the discretion of the school's governing body.
2. Alternative deterrents to late arrival such as catch-up sessions for late pupils during lunch/break times.

Child Missing Education (CME) procedures

The new Essex CME referral form is designed to encourage schools to fully undertake their part of joint investigations - it is not a quick form to complete. It is therefore suggested we make every effort to locate missing children ourselves, thus avoiding the need to make a referral. However, children 'missing' with their whereabouts unknown should be reported to the LA within ten school days - this does not mean to say that you have to wait until the tenth day. Regarding any pupil where Social Services are involved, the Social Worker should be informed on the first day of unexplained absence and kept informed until the child returns to school.

ACTIONS -

1. Revised School CME procedures.
2. At any point where a new address 'beyond a reasonable distance to travel' to school is obtained for the child, he/she 'shall' be removed from roll and The LA informed.
3. Where the school have reason to believe the child has been taken on holiday without a request being made, the LA pro-forma letter stating that this is the belief of the school should be sent 1st Class and PN applied for on the child's return to school.
4. If following the 20th day of school absence, the LA and the school have failed to locate the child, he/she 'shall' be removed from roll and the LA informed.

There is no safeguarding advantage for the child remaining on a school roll where he/she has ceased to actually attend.

School Absence calling should happen on EVERY day that any child's absence has not been explained by the parent - any assumption that because a child was absent due to illness the previous day is the reason for their absence on the second day is a very dangerous practise. Circumstances where extended absence may be expected would be term-time holiday, vomiting and/or diarrhoea (where child is given an expected return to school day by the school) or other illness such as chicken pox that requires an exclusion period - again school will set the expected return date and expect explanation from parent where this is not met.

Rewarding Improved Attendance

1. Weekly award in assembly to all students with 100% attendance the previous week. Rewards to 3 random students.
2. Half termly - email to all parents of students and student themselves for 100% attendance that half term.
3. Termly - 100% certificates sent home - breakfast?
4. Yearly - Award for 100% attendance for the year (or much improved?) inflatables day? Lido trip?
5. Summer day sailing trip for ten PPG pupils with excellent/much improved attendance during the summer term aboard the Pioneer Trust's Essex Smack.