

Dear Parents and Carers

Firstly, may we thank parents and carers who regularly ensure that their children always attend school, and to you all who strive for the highest possible school attendance for your young people on good days, tough days, and all points in between. As parents ourselves, we understand the challenges. There is of course a strong correlation between high attendance and high achievement, and the best possible future life chances, which is why home and school must work together on this one. We are genuinely thankful for the strong partnerships that we have with you, and we appreciate that there, indeed, tough days out there with respect to getting our young people into school.

Following the two so heavily disrupted and impactful years of the lockdowns and the worst of the Covid times – we hope – we are thrilled to feel more settled in school once again, as we commence this year. It is the moment where we need to pull together afresh to have the highest ambitions for your children's attendance for one reason alone: we want them to have the widest possible options open to them at the end of their time with us.

We are providing all the key information you need below:

Key Attendance Information:

- All schools are tasked by the DfE to achieve a goal of 100% attendance, though we recognise that, even taking illness and medical matters aside, this is not possible for other exceptional and understandable circumstances.
- **Headteachers are not able to authorise holidays** – visits and other activities/appointments/unique and special family events away from the school site in exceptional circumstances can be authorised by completing our usual form which can be found here: <https://www.noadswood.hants.sch.uk/student-absence>
- **Over the last year or two, I have authorised as exceptional those holidays which have been postponed because of Covid cancellations/postponements in the throes of the pandemic** or because families could not travel owing to their own ill health, or even because they could not take their customary leave owing to demands placed upon them during the lockdowns and other key times.
I stand by those decisions 100%.

As we commence this new year though, accompanied by new guidance from the DfE ref attendance, I need to make clear we cannot continue to do this now that we are in more typical school times.

If you really feel your request for holiday absence during term time is just and valid owing to circumstances outside your control, you will need to provide Jael Robinson, our Attendance Officer, with significant written evidence to consider, and I need to flag that it will remain unlikely even then that we can authorise against the new guidance to which all schools must adhere, which is aspirational for student success and the best life chances, as I say.

I did not want simply to start doing this without writing to you first.

- For your information, **the 'persistent absence' threshold** in DfE guidance is where a child misses 10% or more of schooling, (equivalent to nearly three weeks or more schooling across the year). We must monitor, make contact with you and offer support if your child hits this threshold.
- **A Penalty Notice** will be issued for any unauthorised absence (so no plan in place, no partnership between us about the absence and what we can all do to help with it) where the student has been:
 - o absent for 10 or more half-day sessions (five school days) of unauthorised absence during any 100 possible school sessions – these do not need to be consecutive
 - o **persistently late for up to 10 sessions (five days)** after the register has closed
 - o **persistently late before the close of the register**, but the school has met with the Parent and has clearly communicated that they will categorise as unauthorised any further lateness if, and when, the threshold of 10 sessions (five days) has been met

- absent for any public examinations, formal school assessments, tests or examinations of which dates are published in advance
- Penalty notices will be issued if a child’s attendance crosses any of the above thresholds. If a fine is raised, then each responsible parent will be fined £60 per child, per week of absence. Failure to pay within a set period of time will incur further penalties. **Clearly, we all want to avoid these.**
Therefore please keep in touch with your child’s tutor in the first instance, and then their Assistant Year Leader or Year Leader if you are beginning to experience difficulties in getting your child into school and we will do the same, including about that all important lateness. The sooner we know about it, the sooner we can work together to help.
- The Hampshire Code of Conduct states that if a Penalty Notice has previously been issued and this has been ineffective in addressing the absenteeism, the case must be referred to the Attendance Legal Panel (ALP) who will then decide whether to issue a subsequent Penalty Notice or recommend alternative intervention, which may include parental prosecution – again, nothing like this needs to happen if we are in good communication, working together to resolve and plan past the challenges re attendance being faced.

I’ll end where I began: research shows that absence from school, for whatever reason, can disadvantage a child by creating gaps in learning, which affect a child’s ability to succeed. As such, we monitor all absence thoroughly and all attendance data is shared, as it has to be, with the Local Authority. We will contact you if we have any concerns regarding your child’s attendance, particularly if it drops below 95%, but you can contact us at any time, reaching out to your child’s tutor or Year Leader team, or by sending an email to info@noadswood.hants.sch.uk. All schools within our Cluster are committed to working together in exactly the ways I have outlined above to support the improvement of children’s attendance and punctuality to school. We thank you, as always, for your support and partnership in this, as in all else.

Yours faithfully, and with all my best,

Kathryn Marshall
Headteacher

