



Walcott Primary School
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Headteacher – Mr. A.Sewell BA Art QTS

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5th September 2025

Dear Parents

We have worked hard to ensure that our schools have good attendance as this gives children the best chance to achieve their full potential. I would like to thank all those parents who have really sought to support their child's learning by prioritising attendance and supporting our aims.

Schools are not permitted to authorise term time absences unless they are an exceptional circumstance.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 places upon parents a duty to ensure that their child receives efficient full-time education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise

Where a child is a registered pupil at a school and the parent fails to ensure that child's regular attendance at school the parent is liable to be prosecuted for a criminal offence under Section 444 of the Education Act

In cases where this duty is not being fulfilled Section 444B of the same Act empowers the Local Authority to issue a Fixed Penalty.

Headteachers are able to use their discretion to authorise short periods of absence for exceptional circumstances. Examples of what I would consider appropriate based on our policy are:

Attendance at a funeral or wedding (for the minimum time necessary)

Where a member of the family is leaving or returning from a military posting in an active war zone or exceptionally long posting.

Attending a one off formal exam or significant performance or event with an educational or vocational element contributing towards the child's personal development. Where the child is taking a leading role in the event.

Attending a significant recognised national event in which the parent is taking part. i.e. the parent is being presented with a significant nationally recognised award, a passing out ceremony in the military.

Religious observance linked to a world faith at the time recognised by the religious authority of that faith.

None of these events would be authorised beyond the essential time and would not include full weeks of absence. They would only be considered if there was an existing pattern of good attendance i.e. above 96% attendance.

Illness

We expect children to have minor colds and sniffles but children shouldn't need to be at home for these. Flu, sickness and diarrhoea are a different matter and children should be clear of symptoms for 48 hours before returning.

Save time off for more serious illness.

We have pupils where families notify us at least once a week that their child is ill; ear ache, head ache, upset stomach etc. When this becomes a pattern they may be invited to an attendance panel. Families will need to show evidence that they have sought medical help and that the illnesses are not the result of an underlying condition that requires treatment.

Families can download evidence of doctors appointments for free for their child via the NHS portal. Persistent illness without a reason may be a safeguarding issue as it could be a sign of neglect. We will offer these families a package of support to ensure that they are doing everything possible to reduce illness, this may include a formal notice to improve. These are the cases we are most concerned about, and simply providing an explanation of an illness for each day off will no longer be sufficient. I would like to reassure any one who has a child with a genuine long term medical condition or complex needs that we know about and have documentation such as hospital letters, that we will not be seeking penalty notices. We may however offer further support through Early Help and Team Around the Child.

For more information on the Lincolnshire County Council Penalty Notice – Code of Conduct please visit:

<https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/council-business/fixed-penalty-notices-code-conduct>

Families that take term time holidays will receive penalty notices on two occasions within a three year period. On the first occasion the fine is £80 per parent per child; second occasion the fine is £160 per parent per child; on the third occasion the case goes directly to the magistrates court and a fine of up to £2500 per parent can be issued or other measures such as a parenting order. Families who do not pay fines will also have the case escalated to the magistrates court. Once a penalty notice reaches the court process it is out of the schools hands, any appeal such as proving that you weren't on holiday must be presented to the court. The school does not receive any money from the fines. Administering fines takes up valuable time in effect costs the school in staff time.

In the past, it was only five consecutive days within a ten week period that were considered for penalty notices; but now nonconsecutive days that exceed five days or ten half days in a ten week period will be subject to a fixed penalty notice.

Occasionally families do not inform us that they are taking holidays but we find out because the children, relatives or neighbours tell us. When this happens the school does not need to prove that it was a holiday, the onus rests with the family to prove that they were not on holiday. Some families phone the school daily to provide a reason, this will not be taken as proof of illness without evidence from the NHS portal. Very often if we believe a family is on holiday, a letter will be physically dropped off at the home with a request to contact the school immediately.

Some people will take the holiday during term time regardless, but I must follow the school policy as directed by the governing body and the DfE. I do have sympathy for those people who work in professions where leave can be restricted but the law doesn't make exemptions for NHS workers or those involved in farming or similar. No one who works in education is able to access cheaper holidays so I understand from my own experience how annoying this is.

Many of the holiday applications we receive include reasons linked to elderly relatives and bereavements. If a holiday is booked for two weeks and it includes the attendance at a funeral, the day of the funeral would be authorised and possibly a day each side. We would ask that you provide documentation on your return such as an order of service.

We receive many applications where families have had the holiday booked by relatives who didn't realise the rules. Unfortunately, I cannot accept ignorance of the rules as a reason to authorise; the issue of term time holidays has been very well publicised nationally in considerable detail for many years and we have issued guidance regularly from school.

All of the time spent dealing with absences is a distraction from the core purpose of school; educating children. Please help the school and your child by avoiding term time holidays and repeated absences.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Sewell
HEADTEACHER