



Joy Lane Primary School

A Love of Learning, for Life, for All

SCHOOL
counts!

Oyster Bay Nursery & Oysters SRP (ASD)

Executive Headteacher: Ms D J Hines

Head of School: Mr M Ashley-Jones

September 2024

Dear Parents/Carers

Back to School week and Important Attendance Information

As we begin the new academic year, I am writing to you to emphasise the continuing importance of pupil attendance at school. Back-to-school week is a critical moment for attendance, and I thought it appropriate to share some alarming figures with you from the outset. Recent data tells us that nationally,

'Of children who are absent for at least one day during back-to-school week, more than half go on to be persistently absent over the whole school year'

This is why this week should have been back to school, not just for some children, but for all children. At Joy Lane we recognise that parents and carers will be doing everything they can to support children on their return to school, and we understand that there are many factors that must be considered when measuring pupil attendance rates. At school, we recognise that parents and carers will be managing poor mental health and wellbeing, special educational needs or chronic illnesses that may make it hard for some children to be in school.

In contrast to the above, reasons for not being in school do not include birthday treats, cheaper holidays or minor illnesses, such as a runny nose. For many years research has informed us that days of lost learning does serious harm to children's learning for example, children who attend school regularly and are not persistently absent achieve better results in their GCSE's

Persistent absence doesn't just harm the child not in school but affects the dynamics of the classroom. Children thrive on stability and inconsistent attendance affects every child especially when the teacher is trying to cultivate a sense of belonging and community with a new group of children.

The importance of consistent school attendance will be emphasised by the class teacher at the 'Meet the Teacher' sessions. I am sure you will have seen on the news or read on social media that the authorities will be working very closely with schools in tackling this 'absence epidemic' to **improve school attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism and persistent late arrivals**. Perhaps the most media attention recently has been focused on the increase in Penalty Notices being issued by local authorities for unauthorised holidays taken during term time as well as persistent absence by some pupils. As we start the new academic year this continues to be the case.

Consistent attendance at school is so important for pupils to thrive and vice versa: poor attendance may mean that children will struggle with their learning, behaviour and ability to make or renew friendships. There is also a growing amount of research that suggests poor attendance can have a detrimental impact on wellbeing and mental health. Please also consider the unspoken message you are giving your child by letting them think it is acceptable to miss school or go on holiday when everyone else is at school.



Joy Lane Primary School

A Love of Learning, for Life, for All

Oyster Bay Nursery & Oysters SRP (ASD)

Executive Headteacher: Ms DJ Hines

Head of School: Mr M Ashley-Jones

Please may I also remind you that 'unwell' is not a specific enough reason for an absence from school so please be specific regarding non-attendance at school.

Our attendance officer, Mrs Allen, works hard to monitor Joy Lane's attendance figures, patterns and trends as well as working closely with our wellbeing and safeguarding team to support pupils and their families when needed. In fact, the government and local authority have recognised that 'a consistency of support' may be needed with some families to secure more regular attendance for pupils. Joy Lane is no different and I would like to re-assure you that our staff are very experienced and adept at working with different agencies to support families and children in many ways. Moving forward, Joy Lane staff will continue to challenge and support our families if unauthorised absence or persistent lates becomes an issue for your child's wellbeing and learning. Please remember that children have a legal right to a full-time education.

All schools have very specific guidelines that they work from with regards to the authorisation of a pupil's absence. In most cases absence is as a result of a short illness which would be authorised in the majority of cases on the basis of a parent/carer communication. Please be aware that the only acceptable reasons for absence are:

- **The school and Chair of Governors/Executive Headteacher gives permission for leave due to exceptional circumstances**
- **Sickness or an unavoidable reason related to the child**
- **Religious observance**
- **Failure by the Local Authority to provide transport**

With regards to unauthorised absence and term time holidays guidance continues to raise expectations that schools/Joy Lane enforce the rules around unauthorised absence and the requesting of penalty notices. This is the clear message coming through from the local authority attendance team and these recommendations are discussed together locally within our Coastal Alliance Attendance network too.

The recommendations from the DFE and the School Liaison Officer mean that any unauthorised absence that reaches the threshold set out in the Kent County Council Penalty Notice Code of Conduct will result in a referral to the Inclusion and Attendance service and a Penalty Notice may be issued. This will cover both poor attendance (including term time holidays) and persistent lateness. Where exceptional circumstances for absence are requested, these will be considered; however, the fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. 'Unavoidable' also implies that an event cannot be reasonably scheduled at another time. For example, where an event such as a close family wedding is part of a longer holiday, it is likely that not all the absence would be authorised. Likewise, where the reason for an absence is given as illness, but it is likely that this is not the case, authorisation will not be given unless further evidence is received. The final decision on whether to authorise absence is with the school. Please see the [link](#) with information for parents and carers.

Moving forward, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs Allen or myself if you have any questions around attendance or the statutory requirements of the school.

Yours Sincerely

Mr M Ashley Jones

Head of School



Joy Lane Primary School

A Love of Learning, for Life, for All

Oyster Bay Nursery & Oysters SRP (ASD)

Executive Headteacher: Ms D J Hines

Head of School: Mr M Ashley-Jones

IMPORTANT CHANGES TO THE LAW REGARDING ATTENDANCE

A new National Framework for Penalty Notices for school absence, including unauthorised holiday absence, is being introduced following changes to the law. These new Government regulations will come into effect from 19 August 2024, and we wanted to bring this to your attention now, as it will affect when penalty notices are issued in Kent.

What are the changes?

1. There will be a new national threshold of 10 unauthorised sessions for any reason (equivalent to 5 school days) within a rolling 10 school week period for when a penalty notice must be considered.
2. The new rules mean you will no longer be able to take your child out of school for one week's holiday without a penalty notice being issued.
3. There will be an increase in the penalty fine from £60 to £80 if paid in 21 days. If the fine is not paid by the first 21 days, it will rise to £160 if paid within 28 days of being issued.
4. If a second penalty fine is issued to the same parent for the same child within a 3-year rolling period, the fine will automatically rise to £160 with no option to pay the lower rate of £80.
5. If a parent then commits a third offence in a 3-year rolling period, the local authority will need to consider other enforcement options available to them.

FAQs

If I have already booked a holiday for next year, could I receive a penalty fine at the new higher rate?

Yes, if the absence has not been authorised by the Head Teacher of your child's school. Remember, only a Head Teacher can agree whether an absence can be authorised in exceptional circumstances.



Joy Lane Primary School

A Love of Learning, for Life, for All

Oyster Bay Nursery & Oysters SRP (ASD)

Executive Headteacher: Ms DJ Hines

Head of School: Mr M Ashley-Jones

Who can be issued with a penalty notice?

Each parent can receive a fine for each child who has had unauthorised absence from school. In education law, anyone who lives with a child and who has day-to-day care of the child is also considered to be a parent whether they are the biological parent or not. For example, this will include step-parents and partners.

Do the new rules only apply to holidays during term time?

No, it applies to all unauthorised absence from school including holidays. Unauthorised absence includes other absence that has not been agreed such as truancy, arriving late after the register has closed at 9.15am and failing to provide reasons for absence.

How do I request for my child to have leave granted during term time?

It will be for your child's Head Teacher to decide as to whether there are exceptional circumstances that will allow them to grant the time off. Do not assume that the absence will be granted until you have received confirmation from the school. Any request must be put in writing at least 20 days before the proposed absence.

Do the 10 sessions of unauthorised absence have to be taken all at the same time before a penalty fine is issued to the parent/carer?

No, a penalty fine can be issued for any combination of absences over a 10-week rolling period. They can be consecutive or non-consecutive and can span over two terms.

What happens if I am issued with a penalty fine and I don't pay it?

Unauthorised absence from school is an offence under s444 of the Education Act 1996. A penalty fine is an opportunity for you to settle out of court. If you don't take this opportunity, you can be prosecuted for the offence of failing to ensure your child's regular attendance.

What should I do if I am worried about my child's attendance?

In the first instance you should contact the Attendance Team at Joy Lane Primary School and ask for advice on how they can support you to improve the situation.