

Dear Parent/Carer,

### School Attendance

I wanted to write to you to outline the Portico Trust's position in regards to pupil attendance as you may have seen in the news that school attendance has become a very high priority for the government and DFE.

This has led to some changes to our guidance that may affect parent/carer's decisions in the future.

Within our five Portico schools, we consider the attendance of our children to be very important and realise the impact that missed school days can have on a child's education and life chances, as shown in the diagram below:



**DID YOU KNOW? A two week holiday in term time means that the highest attendance you can achieve is 94.7%**

We work very hard to ensure that our attendance remains high and alongside our colleagues in the Local Authority (LA) Attendance Team, we will make decisions and work with parents/carers to help improve a pupil's attendance where necessary.

Our school's attendance target, which the Local Authority sets for individual schools, is 97% and we aim to reach this figure each week. However, we also understand that young children become ill and that bugs and common childhood illnesses get passed on very easily, so it is very much a case of balancing our targets with a 'common sense' and measured approach to all our attendance actions.





However, while any actions are taken on an individual case by case basis, we do have to follow certain criteria when attendance figures reach particular levels and this letter is designed to help you better understand the actions and expectations around school attendance within the Portico Schools.

### **Attendance Falls Below 97% - Level 1 Attendance Letter**

Once a child's attendance drops below our school target of 97%, we are obliged to send a letter to parents/carers stating that attendance is being monitored on a weekly basis and should it not improve, then an Attendance Support Meeting will be called.

Receiving this letter does not automatically mean that you will be called into school or before the Local Authority to explain your child's attendance. However, you will be required to provide medical evidence for any absences during the monitoring period such as an appointment card, text or pharmacy receipt for related medication. If attendance improves, then the school will simply continue to monitor. However, if attendance reduces even further, then it is likely that you will receive an invitation to an Attendance Support Meeting.

### **Attendance Support Meetings (Level 2)**

If you are invited to an Attendance Support Meeting with the school and LA School Attendance Officer, it is important to understand that the aim is for this to be a supportive process where we can discuss and understand the reasons for attendance and offer additional support if it is needed.

At this stage, it does not mean that you will be prosecuted or fined, as this does not happen until further into the process if attendance continues to be a serious concern.

The most common reason for attendance issues escalating further is a lack of parental communication or engagement. Therefore, if you do receive an invitation to an Attendance Support Meeting, it is very important that you attend as this is your chance to explain any issues you may be experiencing in getting your children to school. You will be required to provide medical evidence of any sickness absence, or the absence will be marked as unauthorised.

The staff within our schools are here to listen and to support you where we can, as like you, we want to see our children happy in school each day.

Please rest assured that Portico Academy Trust will always:

- support pupils and parents by working together to address any in-school barriers to attendance.





- work together with other external organisations to find and offer support where barriers are outside of the school's control
- clearly detail any support or actions in a parent/school contract identifying actions for the parent, pupil, school, and external services, where appropriate

### **Level 3**

Following an Attendance Support Meeting, if targets have still not been met, we may proceed with further action.

Our Level 3 actions include weekly attendance meetings with our LA School Attendance Officer in the form of home visits or telephone calls to offer continued support and ascertain the causes of poor attendance, which will have, by now, become a serious safeguarding concern. As mentioned above, these actions can be avoided with good parental engagement and open, honest communication with your child's school.

### **Penalty Notices for Unauthorised Absence/Irregular Attendance**

If following all the above support and an LA review, poor attendance continues and there are no extenuating health issues, the Local Authority can issue penalty notices.

This may happen when, after reviewing the facts of the case, the investigating officer believes that the issuing of a penalty notice will be effective in helping to ensure that the parent secures the regular attendance of the child at school and/or the parent is judged capable of securing their child's regular attendance at school but is not taking responsibility for doing so, for example failing to engage in voluntary or supportive measures.

Please note that all of the above support needs to have taken place before any penalty notices can be issued and you will always be advised in writing.

Should attendance still prove to be a cause for concern, further formal sanctions for unauthorised absence within a three-year period can be referred for a Pupil Planning Meeting and legal proceedings considered.

### **Unauthorised Leave during Term Time**

An area that may affect your parental decisions, is around unauthorised leave during term time. This normally takes the form of family holiday requests but may also include; family weddings, funerals or other significant events such as being selected for a sporting event, a major family birthday or to visit a sick relative.





If you wish to apply for leave of absence during term time, the parent/carer with whom the child resides must apply in writing to their child's school and complete a 'Term Time Leave of Absence Request' form. These can be obtained from the school office.

Please complete the form explaining the **exceptional** circumstances surrounding the request for the leave of absence and attach any supporting evidence.

The government document 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' advises all schools that they should only grant a leave of absence during term time in exceptional circumstances, considering each request on a case-by-case basis. If a leave of absence is granted, it is for the headteacher/principal of each school to determine the length of time authorised for the pupil to be away from school.

Although we recognise the value and benefits of family holidays, it is unlikely a leave of absence will be granted for a family holiday as the Government 'does not consider a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance'.

The school will determine whether an exceptional circumstance ruling applies; if not the application will be declined. Once a decision has been made, you will receive a written response from the school advising whether your application has been approved or declined.

If a holiday is then taken without authorisation, the school will discuss the issue with the Local Authority Attendance Officer to decide if the issuing of a penalty notice is appropriate. From these discussions, parents may be issued with a penalty notice.

To reduce the number of cases where a parent may decide to simply 'call in sick' when they are actually on holiday, a penalty notice may also be issued if the parent did not submit a leave of absence request, but the school has reason to believe the absence was for the purpose of a holiday.

Unless the parent is able to provide any additional evidence which the school deems appropriate to support the absence, it will be marked as unauthorised and parents could still be liable for a penalty notice.

All requests for leave must be made in advance, otherwise we will be unable to consider your individual circumstances and the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. Headteachers/Principals are not obligated to reconsider authorising leave if an application was not made in advance.





## Issuing Penalty Notices

### **The important legal information – New from 19th August, 2024**

The Government has introduced a single national threshold for when a penalty notice must be considered by all schools in England. This threshold is 10 sessions (usually equivalent to 5 school days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period. These sessions do not have to be consecutive and can be made up of a combination of any type of unauthorised absence. The period of 10 school weeks can span different terms or school years.

In line with national guidance, the Local Authority (LA) retains the discretion to issue a penalty notice before the threshold is met. This might apply for example, where parents have taken several term-time holidays below the national threshold.

The LA also retains the discretion to consider going straight to prosecution where appropriate.

A maximum of 2 penalty notices per parent, per child can be issued within a rolling 3-year period. This period will start from the issue of the 1st penalty notice. The national framework also sets out the escalation process which applies to such penalty notices, whereby if parent/s have already been issued with 2 penalty notices within that period, consideration will be given to prosecution under section 444 of the Education Act 1996, which can result in a criminal conviction and fine of up to £2,500.

Penalty notices will usually be issued to the parent/s with day-to-day responsibility for the child's attendance or the parent/s who have allowed the absence (regardless of which parent has applied for a leave of absence). In this instance, a parent includes any person who has parental responsibility for the child or who has care of the child, as set out in section 576 of the Education Act 1996.

The first penalty notice issued to a parent for a child will be charged at £160 to be paid within 28 days. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. Where it is deemed appropriate to issue a second penalty notice, the second penalty notice to the same parent for the same child within 3 years of the first offence, is charged at a flat rate of £160 and is payable within 28 days. There is no reduced sum available in this instance.

Part payments or payment plans are not acceptable, and fines must be paid in full within 21 or 28 days, at the rate specified within the penalty notice. There is no right of appeal against a penalty notice.

The responsibility of the issuing of a penalty notice falls within the statutory duties of the LA Access and Inclusion School Attendance Team.





### **Ongoing support**

I hope that you find the information in this letter useful to help you make informed decisions about your child's attendance in school.

Please remember that our staff are always here to offer any support you may need to maintain or improve your child's school attendance but if you require more information, the Government's document 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' is a useful starting point. It can be found by clicking on the link below:

[Government document - Working together to improve school attendance August 2024.pdf](#)

Finally, may I also remind you of the importance of letting your child's school know about your child's absence (and the reasons behind it) on the first day and each subsequent day by 9:15am. You can do this by calling the office on 01702 468048 or by sending an email to the school office: [office@hjs.porticoacademytrust.co.uk](mailto:office@hjs.porticoacademytrust.co.uk)

If you have any further questions regarding any of the above, please do not hesitate to email me via the school office email address and I will be happy to answer them or seek the answers from the Local Authority.

Thank you for your continued support.



**Mrs C Woolf**  
**CEO**  
**For and on behalf of Portico Academy Trust**

