



Hobb Lane
Hedge End, Southampton
Hampshire, SO30 0GG

Telephone: (01489) 782295
E-mail: admin@freegrounds-jun.hants.sch.uk
Website: www.freegrounds-jun.hants.sch.uk

Headteacher: Mrs Deborah Johnson, BEd, MSc

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Dear Parent/Carer,

Over the course of the last year, attendance has been hitting the headlines. However, since the Supreme Court case (-Isle of Wight Council versus Platt) judgement was published earlier this year, there is much more clarity on the position of schools and the Local Authority.

A Department for Education (DfE) spokesperson said after the ruling:

“We are pleased the Supreme Court unanimously agreed with our position – that no child should be taken out of school without good reason. As before, head teachers have the ability to decide when exceptional circumstances allow for a child to be absent but today’s ruling removes the uncertainty for schools and local authorities that was created by the previous judgment.”

The National Association of Head Teachers have published a definition of what the term exceptional means and for greater clarity I include this below.

“The fundamental principles for defining ‘exceptional’ are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. And by ‘unavoidable’ we mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time.”

Regular and punctual attendance at school is a legal requirement, as well as essential if pupils are to maximise their educational opportunities. As a school we have really tried to keep parents/carers informed about their children’s attendance and offer support should parents need it.

To encourage high attendance, certificates are given out to children who have achieved 100% attendance over the preceding half term and to those who achieve 100% attendance over the course of the year. Letters are sent to parents/carers where there are concerns about their child’s attendance and/or punctuality. In addition, from this year, parents/carers will receive a traffic light letter each half term indicating whether your child’s learning is being affected by their attendance.

The thresholds on these letters are as follows:

100% - 96% Good Attendance In line with national	95% - 90% Starting to impact on learning	-90% Serious impact on learning.
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These thresholds are in line with the Hampshire average for primary school attendance – this was 96.5 % in 2015-16.

For your additional information the average level of absence due to illness in Hampshire was 2.3% in 2015-16.

We are constantly trying to take all reasonable steps to ensure good attendance without the use of Penalty Notices and will endeavour to make contact with parents and carers to try and resolve any difficulties.

It is important that parents and carers are aware of the circumstances in which a Penalty Notice may be issued. This information is contained in the Code of Conduct issued by Hampshire County Council, based on DFE guidelines.

Penalty Notices can only be issued in cases where a pupil of compulsory school age has been absent or late and the absence or lateness has not been authorised by the school.

Penalty Notices will be issued for any unauthorised absence where the pupil has been:

- absent for 10 or more half day sessions (**ie five school days**) of unauthorised absence during any 50 school days – these do not need to be consecutive;
- persistently late (coded U) for up to 10 morning sessions after the register has been closed;
- persistently late before the close of the register (coded L), but the school has met with parents and has clearly communicated that they will categorise as unauthorised any further lateness (code O), and where the threshold of 10 morning sessions has been met;
- absent for any public examinations of which dates are published in advance;
- absent for any formal school assessments, test or examinations where the dates have been published in advance;
- unless the issuing of a Penalty Notice would conflict with other intervention strategies in place or other sanctions already being process.

The Department for Education (DFE) guidance indicates that a Penalty Notice can be issued for a first offence in exceptional circumstances, for example **where a parent/carer takes a child on holiday during term time without the school authorising the absence**. Parents need to be aware of this.

It is essential that a '*request to authorise absence from school due to exceptional circumstances*' form is completed and returned to the school office for any period of planned absence. The form must be given to the school office for the attention of the Headteacher prior to the absence and will be returned to the parent / carer indicating whether or not the absence is authorised.

The school is open and supervised from 8.45am and children can drift into their classroom from this time. The school day begins at 8.55am and all pupils are expected to be in school at this time. The register officially closes 15 minutes after the start time at 9.10am and arrival after this time will be marked as unauthorised absence for the morning session (Code U) in line with County and DfE guidance. This mark shows the child to be on site but is legally recorded as an absence.

Full details are outlined in our attendance policy which has been approved by governors and is available on our school website.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Deborah Johnson
Headteacher