

SOUTHEND EAST COMMUNITY ACADEMY TRUST

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Chair of Trust Board: Karen Dovaston

Dear Parents/Carers

School Attendance

We write this letter to you about attendance to provide you with a clear outline about School and Local Authority responses to poor pupil attendance. The Governors and Trust Board have made it clear that they will support the Headteacher and Education Welfare Service in promoting high levels of attendance and take action where there are unsatisfactory reasons for absence. This is directly in line with the government's stance.

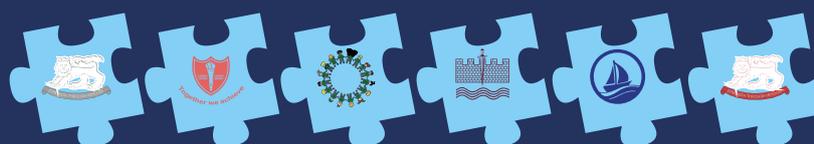
As a parent/carer, you have a legal duty to ensure that your child attends school on a regular basis. The Education Act 1996 makes it a criminal offence for a parent/carer to *"fail to secure their child's regular attendance at the school"*. The amendments to the 2006 Regulations remove any previous reference to family holidays, extended leave, and the statutory threshold of ten school days (only in agreement with the Headteacher) for a leave of absence. The amendments also make it very clear that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence (holiday) during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. The amendments give a parent/carer **no entitlement** to take their child out of school for a holiday in term time and require the Headteacher to determine what the exceptional circumstances are. The decision will be made by the Headteacher who will use their discretion to consider each request individually.

Regular school attendance is vital and missing school can have a significant impact on a child's achievement over a one-year period, as illustrated below:

- **95-100% attendance** – your child has the best chance of success as they are taking full advantage of every learning opportunity.
- **90-95% attendance** - at least 2 weeks of learning is missed; your child may have to spend time catching up with work.
- **85-90% attendance** - at least 4 weeks of learning is missed; your child may be at risk of underachieving; they may need extra support from you to catch up with work.
- **80-85% attendance** - at least 5 ½ weeks of learning is missed; your child's poor attendance has a significant impact on learning.
- **Below 80% attendance** - at least 7½ weeks of learning is missed; your child is missing out on a broad and balanced education. Furthermore, you are at risk of prosecution.

Following the recent pandemic, which impacted greatly on children's education, teachers have been working extremely hard to ensure that children's learning has been paramount. Gaps in learning have been and continue to be identified and addressed so that the children have the best possible chances for their future. Many additional sessions have been further funded by the Government through Covid Catch-Up lessons and boosters initially to more recently, the National Tutoring Programme. When children have holidays during term time, the gains made in their learning can be quickly lost. You may consider that a holiday will be educational/cultural, but your child will still miss out on the teaching that their classmates will receive whilst they are away.

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Children returning from a term-time holiday are also unprepared for the lessons that build on the teaching they have missed. When teachers give more time to help individual children who have had a term-time holiday catch up on missed work, other children in the class may miss out and under-achieve as a result. This is a situation that we all have a responsibility to avoid.

Unbroken attendance at school is important for learning. Although there will be times when absence is unavoidable and acceptable, there has been a rise in absence that is avoidable and unacceptable.

This letter explains the clear approach we follow to manage attendance.

Types of Absence

Each absence is classed as authorised or unauthorised. Absences are coded as authorised where reasons are considered valid and unauthorised where no explanation or unacceptable reasons are given.

Unacceptable Reasons

The following reasons are not acceptable:

- holidays taken in term time (including long weekends taken on Fridays and/or Mondays)
- shopping visits
- care for family members
- days out to theme parks or to attend concerts/shows
- parents' work commitments or business trips
- parental illness

Unauthorised absences will be referred to the Academy Committee, Trust Board, and the Education Welfare Service.

Leave of Absence:

Holidays

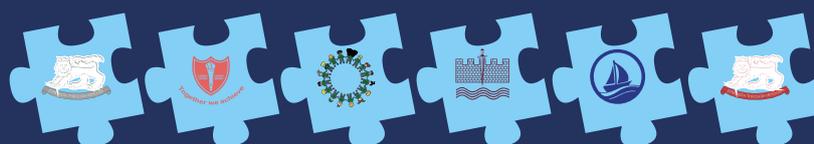
It is not our policy to authorise holidays in term time. The only exemption to this is where parents serve in the armed forces (this does not extend to the emergency services i.e. Police, Fire, Ambulance etc). Where authorisation is not granted then subsequent term time holiday absence will be reported as a matter of course to the Education Welfare Service; **we have a duty to do this.**

Where unauthorised leave is taken, the Trust Board has decided that it will support the imposition of a fixed penalty fine. This can be very expensive. **This will apply to any parents who book holidays in term time.**

What we are aiming for

Attendance would be around 96% and in line with the National Average.

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What is considered as poor attendance

Anything below 94% is weak, under 90% is poor and if attendance dips below 85% we will have serious concerns. Below 85% is regarded as persistent absence by the DfE. In our schools we are aiming for every pupil to achieve attendance levels of at least 96%. We monitor attendance daily and report it to the Trust Board and provide termly reports on each pupil's attendance.

Our duty of care in responding to unauthorised and persistent absence – possible consequences

We have a duty of care, shared with the Local Authority, to challenge poor attendance. Where attendance levels are low and **where there are invalid reasons** (judged by the Education Welfare Service, not the parent) or where parents condone absence (e.g. by taking children out of school on unauthorised holidays) then **parents render themselves liable to a fine of £60 per pupil per parent.**

This could mean a fine of £360 for two parents/carers of three children. This would be doubled to £720 if the fine is unpaid within 21 days and could ultimately lead to a criminal conviction. If after 28 days the fine remains unpaid, you may be summonsed to appear before Magistrates to explain why your child has unauthorised school absences and you may be liable for a fine of up to £1000. Of course, no one wants this to happen, but we need to be very clear about this issue. Support and guidance on attendance is always available and if you have any questions about this, or if you need help to achieve an improvement, then please contact the school to discuss this.

We trust that you will support us in our drive to increase pupil attendance and arrange holidays around the existing 175 days in the year when the school is closed (through weekends and school holidays), the inset days around half terms/ holidays that give extra flexibility to travel at non-peak times and help us support your child in achieving success in school. **No term-time holidays will be authorised.**

We trust that this letter helps you to have a clear understanding about the school's and Trust Board's expectations in this matter and how jointly, we will achieve improving both attendance and the outcomes for our children and young people in SECAT.

Yours sincerely,



Karen Dovaston

Chair of Trust Board

