Nacton C of E Primary School
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Dear parents/carers,

RE: Attendance Updates

I am writing to share the attendance updates that we are legally required to follow.

New DfE statutory attendance guidance – 'Attendance Counts'
There has been growing national concern regarding declining school attendance rates across the UK. In response, the Department for Education has introduced new statutory guidance, effective from August 2024, aimed at reducing term-time holidays and unauthorised absences, and supporting families whose children are struggling to attend. This document can be found **here**.

The national picture
School attendance is currently very much a serious national issue, and has been particularly since the pandemic. Some 20% of children on a national level are now classed as being 'persistently absent', i.e. with an attendance of less than 90%. This is a **huge** national challenge from multiple angles: from safeguarding to academic achievement, through to ensuring a robust attitude to life and its inevitable challenges.

The impact of non-attendance from school
Although 90% attendance may seem to be rather high, it is in fact the equivalent of a day out of school every fortnight. Looked at in another way, a child who has 90% attendance throughout their time at school, from 5 years old to the age of 16, misses out on over a year of their legal entitlement to their education. It is therefore no great surprise that those with the poorest attendance end up with the poorest chances of doing well with their GCSEs and so on, and with greatly reduced life choices as they move forward with their lives. We all want our children to be able to choose as far as is practically possible their life's path; poor school attendance deprives them of precisely that. It is every child's legal right to an education. By enrolling them at this or indeed any school, we as parents are also assuming the legal responsibility for making that happen.

New Attendance Rules Parents Need to Know for September 2024

'Support First'
As the DfE notes, 'Improving attendance is everyone's business', and it is important that we, as your child's school, work together in partnership with you. The new guidance emphasises a 'Support First' ethos, and recognises that 'the barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families… [It] is essential for pupils to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances.'

If you are concerned about your child's attendance, then please do get in contact as soon as possible so that barriers to attendance can be understood, and appropriate support can be put in place to support you, your family, and your child to prevent further absences.

Medical evidence
In the majority of cases a parent's notification that their child is too ill to attend school will be evident and can be accepted without question or concern. Only where the school has genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the illness will medical evidence be requested to support the absence and when attendance is a cause for concern, evidence will also be requested to authorise absence/s.

Formalising and intensifying the support
Where voluntary support has not been effective and/or has not been engaged with, we will work with partners, including the local authority, to formalise and intensify the support.

As part of the measures introduced, if a pupil has 10 sessions of absence within a 10-week period, you may receive a 'Notice to Improve' notification sent via email or letter. Each day of absence is recorded as two sessions (morning and afternoon). Unauthorised absences include:

- unauthorised absence (where there is no reasonable circumstance for the absence taking place, O code),
- arriving late after the register has closed (U Code)
- or a combination of these with holidays taken during term time (Unauthorised holiday – G code)

These 10 weeks can span different terms and even different educational settings, such as transitions in-year school changes and alternative provision. For instance, if your child misses 3 days of school for a holiday in September (6 sessions) and is late after the register closes on 4 occasions (4 sessions) between September and October, you may be issued a 'Notice to Improve' notification.

The 'Notice to Improve' notification will set out the expectations and period notice for the improvement of attendance such as; 'no further unauthorised absences'. Should the expectations not be met in the improvement period, then a Penalty Notice may then be requested by the school and issued by the Local Authority (LA) to each parent/carer responsible for the child.

Any holiday-related absence taken that includes 10 sessions in 10 weeks, may result in a Penalty Notice. In this instance, a 'Notice to Improve' notification will not be issued beforehand.

The penalty notice amount is increasing from August 2024 with a maximum of two penalty notices within a rolling three-year period:-

- First offence – The first time a Penalty Notice is issued the amount will be: £80 per parent, per child paid within 21 days. This increases to £160 per parent, per child if paid after day 21, until day 28. Any non-payment of the Penalty Notice may be referred to the Magistrates Court.
- Second Offence (within 3 years) – the second time a Penalty Notice is issued the amount will be £160 per parent, per child paid within 28 days. Any non-payment of the Penalty Notice may be referred to the Magistrates Court.

- Third Offence and Any Further Offences (within 3 years) – the third time an offence is committed a Penalty Notice will not be issued, and the case may be presented straight to the Magistrates' Court under s.444 of the Education Act (1996) or other legal interventions considered. The Magistrates' Court can order fines up to £2500 per parent, per child.

Parents with parental responsibility, and adults residing with the child, including for example, stepparents who have day-to-day responsibility for the child, may be fined, and this applies to each child who is absent. For example, if two adults take two children out of school, the total fines would be £640 (reduced to £320 for a first offence paid within 21 days).

If a Penalty Notice is not paid within the time limits set out in the letter to the parent, the Local Authority may proceed the case to court.

We recognise that these Penalty Notices may be unpopular with families, but it is important to inform you of these changes promptly.

Nationally, Headteachers are not permitted to approve term-time holidays except in genuinely exceptional circumstances, and are to consider each application for a leave of absence individually before making our decision. The law clearly expects Headteachers to enforce these penalties strictly. The new policy also states that all schools must consider issuing Penalty Notices if the criteria is met.

This is a national statutory process and will be followed by all English state funded schools.

Our revised DMAT attendance policy in line with these requirements can be found here **https://www.nacton.suffolk.sch.uk/attendance/**.

Our revised application form for an exceptional leave of absence is also available at the above link on our website.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any queries in regard to the above. I know that absence during term-time can sometimes be very emotive, and likely even more so now with the increased levels of fines. At Nacton, we believe we offer a supportive approach to attendance and encourage our families to contact us should there be any barriers to your child arriving at school on time every day. On a more positive note, Nacton has always enjoyed good levels of attendance and that is excellent as it means that the maximum amount of children are receiving their full, legal entitlement to an education, and with all the choice that that gives them as they move forward with their lives.

Thank you very much for that continued support.

Kind regards,

Gemma Taylor
Headteacher