



**St. Alban & St. Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery**  
Cecil Road, St Albans, AL1 5EG



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### **Changes to Attendance Policy**

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2024

Dear Parents and carers,

In July, we sent out details of upcoming changes to attendance and absence policy in schools. These changes have now become law. All schools have to follow the new government guidance titled *Working Together to Improve School Attendance*. These changes are aimed at enhancing school attendance across all educational institutions. It is essential that you are aware of how these updates may affect you.

As a Catholic school, we have always tried to work alongside parents and carers to support children’s attendance. We know that excellent punctuality and attendance will enable our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education and to make the most of their God-given gifts and talents. Our attendance figures have always been above the national average, despite our previous policy not to use penalty fines for unauthorised absence. However, we have now had to make several changes to comply with the new guidance. These changes apply to all children of compulsory school age from the term after they reach their fifth birthday.

#### **Key Changes:**

1. **Increased Focus on Attendance Monitoring:** Schools are now required to more closely monitor attendance and take early action if a student begins to miss school. Our target for attendance is above 95%. If your child’s attendance falls to 95% or below, we will contact you to discuss their absences.
2. **More Support for Families:** Schools will provide more tailored support to families experiencing challenges that may affect their child's attendance. This could include working with external agencies to provide additional help.
3. **Parental Responsibility and Clear Communication with School:** The guidance emphasises the importance of parents working closely and actively with schools to ensure their child’s regular attendance. Parents are required to inform the school about absences promptly and provide the necessary documentation for authorised absences and requests for leave. This may include medical evidence. Parents must also support the school to improve attendance when necessary.
4. **Planned absence:** There is a new form provided by Herts which parents must fill in to request a leave of absence. Leave will only be granted by the Head teacher in ‘exceptional circumstances’. The guidance is clear that term-time holidays will not be authorised.
5. **Working with the Local Authority and Department for Education:** Schools now have to work more closely with the local authority and seek support to ensure high attendance. Schools must now report attendance daily to the DfE. Schools must let the local authority know when a child fails to attend school regularly; has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence within a school year; or when a child misses school due to illness for 15 days or more over the course of the school year.



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6. **Penalty Notices (fines):** Any unauthorised absence will now be met with earlier intervention and, where necessary, fines or legal consequences.

#### **New Attendance Codes:**

To help schools categorize reasons for absence accurately, new attendance codes have been introduced including:

- **C:** Authorised absence, such as illness or medical appointments.
- **O:** Unauthorised absence without a valid reason.
- **I:** Illness (not covered by medical appointment).
- **U:** Late arrival after 9.15, which is classified as an unauthorised absence.

Children who arrive after register closes at 8.55 am will be marked late. **If your child arrives after 9.15 am, we must now report this as a whole session of unauthorised absence, even though your child is present in school.**

- **M:** Medical or dental appointments. These codes are critical in providing a clear picture of your child’s attendance record and help the school decide when interventions are necessary. School may ask for medical evidence of appointments.

**‘Schools should encourage parents to make appointments out of school hours. Where this is not possible, they should get the school’s agreement in advance and the pupil should only be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary for the appointment.’**

- **The code H for Holiday has now been removed.** Schools have been advised that a holiday during term-time does not count as an ‘exceptional circumstance’.

#### **New Framework for Penalty Notices:**

The updated guidance also introduces a clearer framework for issuing **penalty notices** to parents for unauthorised absences. Schools must report to the local authority when a child reaches the threshold of unauthorised absences allowed, and the local authority may issue a fine or take legal action:

- **Trigger for a Penalty Notice:** A penalty notice can now be issued if a child has unauthorised absences that amount to five or more days within a 10-week period. This ensures that action is taken before persistent absenteeism becomes a pattern.
- **Amount of the Fine:** The fine is set at £60 per parent, per child, if paid within 21 days. If not paid within this time, the fine increases to £120, and if not settled within 28 days, legal proceedings may be initiated.
- **Legal Consequences:** Continued unauthorised absence without justifiable reasons may result in a referral to the local authority for legal action, which could lead to court appearances and more significant fines.

We understand that these changes may raise questions, and we are here to support you. Our goal is to work collaboratively to ensure every child attends school regularly, as this is crucial for their learning and development.



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Should you have any questions or require assistance, please don't hesitate to contact the school office.  
Thank you for your continued support in improving school attendance.

Kind regards,

Head of School

Documents to support you and provide more detailed information are available on our school website:  
<https://www.ssas.herts.sch.uk/school-information/attendance/>

- Draft attendance policy updated for September 2024 with any changes to our previous policy highlighted in yellow
- Summary of changes for parents
- Local authority form for requesting a leave of absence
- Local authority information about penalty notices.