

ST. WILLIAM OF YORK CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL



ST WILLIAM ROAD THORNTON CROSBY L23 9XH

Tel: 0151 924 7280 Fax: 0151 931 4558

E-mail: head.stwilliamofyork@schools.sefton.gov.uk

www.stwilliamofyork.co.uk

Headteacher: Mr M Murphy

School Business Manager: Mrs S Middlehurst

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Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to update you on our school attendance expectations and to share important information regarding term-time holidays, unexplained absences, and penalty notice enforcement.

First, I want to express our heartfelt thanks to all our families who support their children to attend school every day. Last academic year, our whole-school attendance was **93.8%**, which remains below national attendance benchmarks. While this represents strong commitment from many families, if we remove the days missed due to term-time holidays alone, our overall attendance rate would have reached **95.2%**. This difference highlights just how significantly term-time absences impact our attendance figures and, most importantly, your children's educational progress.

Government Regulations and Ofsted Expectations

Under the Ofsted Inspection Framework, schools are held to rigorous standards regarding attendance. Ofsted inspectors look closely at every aspect of absence including persistent absence and term-time leave to ensure schools are proactively implementing government guidance and taking required actions.

We are required to align our procedures strictly with the Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance set out in Working Together to Improve School Attendance. It is important to emphasise that these statutory expectations are not determined by our school staff. We are following mandatory national directives set out by the DfE and our Local Authority.

DfE Guidance & Term-Time Leave

The DfE guidance explicitly states:

'Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances'.

The government clarifies that holidays, family leisure trips, or lower off-season prices **do not** constitute exceptional circumstances. We fully understand the financial pressures families face and the higher costs associated with booking holidays during official school breaks. However, as the DfE points out, schools are closed to pupils for approximately **13 weeks across the academic year**, providing substantial opportunity to plan family trips outside of term time.

All leave of absence must be requested in writing at least 7 days in advance. Forms are available from the school office. If you believe a request for leave involves truly exceptional circumstances, this must be included on the form & submitted with supporting evidence. Leave cannot be authorised retrospectively.

Sibling Liaison & Consistency across Schools

Where pupils have older sibling/s attending secondary school, we liaise directly with those settings regarding term-time leave requests and unauthorised absences. This joint approach aims to ensure



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fairness, transparency, and consistency across families, ensuring all schools in our community handle term-time absences and potential fine referrals in a synchronised manner.

Absence Patterns & Medical Verification

Under DfE statutory guidelines, schools are required to monitor all attendance patterns closely. To ensure transparency, please note the following:

- **Short Absences & Medical Evidence:** We naturally understand that children fall ill. However, where a child is absent for several consecutive days and illness is reported particularly where an absence reaches or approaches 5 consecutive school days (10 sessions)—the school may request medical evidence (such as a doctor's note, appointment record, or prescription card) to officially code the absence as medical.
- **Unauthorised Holidays Reported as Illness:** Where a child is reported as absent due to illness immediately before, after, or during period patterns typical of term-time travel, or where circumstantial evidence indicates an unapproved holiday has occurred, the school has a legal duty under DfE guidelines to record the absence as unauthorised leave unless suitable medical documentation is provided.
- **Medical appointments:** Routine Doctors or Dental appointment should be made outside of school time. For all other appointments, evidence of the appointment must be provided. Children should attend school before or after the appointment if they are well enough to do so. For example for a 10.30am appointment, we expect children to attend school as normal & be collected to be taken to the appointment & return afterwards. We understand this may not be possible for some hospital appointments.

Unexplained Absences, Home Visits, and Reporting

When a child is absent and we do not receive a reason from parents or carers, our staff and Education Welfare Officer (EWO) must take action as part of our duty of care:

- **Contact & Home Visits:** If your child is off school and we are unable to establish contact, our EWO or school staff will visit your home to check on your child's safety and well-being.
- **Calling Cards:** If no one is home, a contact card will be left through your door asking you to get in touch with the EWO or school office immediately.
- **Assumed Term-Time Leave:** If we do not receive a response following a visit, or if a child is absent for a prolonged period without official evidence, we will have no choice but to assume the absence is an unauthorised term-time holiday, and statutory procedures will follow.

Safeguarding & Children Missing Education (CME)

Beyond attendance monitoring, schools have a statutory safeguarding duty under DfE guidance to prevent children from becoming Children Missing Education; (CME).

If a child is absent for consecutive school days without contact, or if we cannot establish their whereabouts despite reasonable enquiries, we have a legal obligation to notify the Local Authority CME team. Clear, daily communication with us ensures we know your child is safe and avoids unnecessary referrals to local authority agencies.

Penalty Notices, Non-Payment, and Court Enforcement

Under the DfE National Framework for Penalty Notices, a fine must be considered when a pupil accumulates 10 or more unauthorised sessions (equivalent to 5 school days) within a 10-school-week rolling period. There are 2 sessions per day, morning & afternoon.

Please note these vital details regarding penalty notices:



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- Fines do not come to the school: Schools do not receive, manage, or benefit from any funds generated from penalty notices. Fines are issued directly by the Local Authority, and funds are used solely by them to cover administrative and statutory enforcement costs.
- The risk of court proceedings: A penalty notice is an out-of-court settlement issued by the Local Authority to discharge liability for the offence of non-attendance. If a fine is issued and remains unpaid within the statutory timeframe, the Local Authority will proceed to prosecute the case in the Magistrates' Court.
- Out of school hands: Once a penalty notice or court prosecution has been initiated by the Local Authority, it is entirely out of the school's hands. The school has no legal power to withdraw fines, extend payment deadlines, or stop court proceedings once the Local Authority legal team takes over.

In recent times, instances have occurred locally where unpaid fines have escalated directly to court appearances, resulting in significantly higher court-imposed fines. We strongly encourage any family who receives communication regarding a penalty notice to respond and engage with the Local Authority immediately to avoid matters reaching this point.

We care deeply about our school community and want to work alongside our families constructively. Our priority is to keep every child safe, supported, and learning in the classroom every day.

Thank you for your ongoing understanding, cooperation, and support in prioritising your child's education.

Yours sincerely

M Murphy

Mr M Murphy
Headteacher



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