



## Frequently Asked Questions About Absences From School March 2015

We gathered the questions from our interactions on Facebook and Twitter with parents and the answers were provided by SMBCs Interim Chief Education Welfare Officer.

### **1. Do the fines only apply to holiday unauthorised absences or any absences deemed unauthorised by the school?**

- The Code of Conduct and any fines issued in accordance with it applies to all unauthorised absence not solely unauthorised absence for holidays in term time.

### **2. Are the 14 permitted authorised absences for a whole school year?**

- There are no permitted unauthorised absences from school. The revised trigger in the Code of Conduct for the issue of penalty notices is that a warning letter will be issued after 10 unauthorised absences and a fine issued if a further 5 unauthorised absences are accumulated.

### **3. The new code starts at the beginning of the summer term 2015. Do unauthorised absences taken earlier in the year not count towards the total unauthorised absences permitted for the whole year?**

- Any action taken under the revised Code of Conduct could only relate to unauthorised absences accrued from the start of the Summer Term. Any Penalty notice warning letters or notices issued relating to unauthorised absences prior to the start of the summer term would have to be issued in line with the Triggers contained in the previous Code of Conduct.

### **4. What counts as an exceptional circumstance? We haven't heard of any circumstance being described as such, even though some seem worthy of the description using common sense.**

- The only example of an exceptional circumstance given by the DFE was when all police leave in the summer school holidays was cancelled due to the London Olympics 2012
- The statutory Guidance states that a Family Holiday is not an exceptional circumstance.
- The National Association for Head teachers issued the following guidance. If an event can be scheduled outside of term time then it would not be normal to authorise absence. Absence during term time for holidays/vacations is therefore not considered an exceptional circumstance” and that “The Fundamental principles for defining exceptional are rare, significant, unavoidable, and short”

### **5. Are there any absences that have been given approval as exceptional?**

- I am aware of leave of absences that have been authorised due to exceptional circumstances.

### **6. Why are parents of school nursery children being told to go through the application process for holiday absences, then being denied permission and being investigated by the Council for having unauthorised absences, only to be told there is no case to answer as their child is not 'school age'? Surely a waste of everyone's time?**

- The School Policy and Procedure for school attendance will apply to all children on their school roll. It is best practice to have a consistent policy across the school including nursery children. This sets out clearly the schools expectations regarding school attendance from day one. However compulsory school attendance does not start until after a child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday and the Local Authority cannot enforce attendance prior to this including the issue of penalty notices. A Nursery pupil would not be referred to the Education Welfare Service for the consideration of an issue of a penalty notice or any other legal intervention. The Education Welfare Service does support schools in promoting regular attendance from Nursery

#### **7. Does the code of conduct apply to 6th Form College and FE college students?**

- The Code of Conduct only applies to children of statutory schools age. Children in 6<sup>th</sup> Form College and FE College are not statutory school age. However those establishments will have their own attendance policies and procedures.