



Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School

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Dear Parents/Guardians

RE: Attendance Update

I am writing to set out for all stakeholders the changes that will take place from September 2022 with regards to how we deal with absences from school.

Good attendance at school is an imperative for students to thrive. There is much research to show the impact that poor attendance has on academic outcomes, and a growing body of evidence to show the long-term detrimental impact it has on wellbeing and welfare. We have always been a school where attendance is above both national and local averages, and we continue to take steps to ensure that students are in school. Our Attendance Officer, Mrs Hancock, works proactively to monitor and track attendance patterns and trends for both the school and individuals and, in conjunction with our Pastoral Managers and the SEND department, supports students to attend where barriers are in place. First and foremost, we want to support students and their families to ensure that attendance and punctuality is good, and work alongside a number of agencies to provide support when unauthorised absence or late attendance becomes an issue. This will continue to be our first line of approach, and, as now, in most cases such intervention will result in improvements.

Schools have specific legal parameters for the authorisation of a student's absence. For most students, absence is the result of short-term illness, authorised in the vast majority of cases on the basis of parental declaration. This will continue to be the case. Legally, the only acceptable reasons for absence are:

- with leave (the school has given permission)
- due to sickness or any unavoidable cause (the sickness or unavoidable cause must relate to the child, not the parent)
- religious observance
- failure by the Local Authority to provide transport

A headteacher's ability to issue a Leave of Absence was removed in 2013, since which time more consistency has come into the national system, although considerable regional and local variation remains. To unify the approach of schools across England, new Department for Education guidance ([HERE](#)) was released in May and legislation of this guidance is expected in the coming months. In particular, this guidance raises expectations on school for the enforcement of rules around unauthorised absence and the requesting of penalty notices. Recent meetings and recommendations from our Local Authority Liaison Officer have reinforced this. As a result, from September, we will be making changes to the way that we deal with all unauthorised absences.

From the start of the September term, any unauthorised absence that reaches the threshold set out in the Kent County Council Penalty Notice Code of Conduct ([HERE](#)) will result in a referral to the Inclusion and Attendance service and a Penalty Notice may be issued. This will cover both poor attendance (including term time holidays) and persistent lateness. Where exceptional circumstances for absence are requested, these will be considered, along with a record of previous attendance and any previous absence requests. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. 'Unavoidable' also implies that an event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. For example, where an event such as a close family wedding is part of a longer holiday, it is likely that not all the absence would be authorised. Likewise, where the reason for an absence is given as illness, but it is likely that this is not the case, authorisation will not be given unless further evidence is received, with the final decision of whether to authorise absence sitting with the school.

If required, please contact the school for guidance on whether an absence is likely to be authorised or not, and as with any absence, please make any request for an 'exceptional circumstances' absence via attendance@langton.kent.sch.uk.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Pollard', written in a cursive style.

Paul Pollard

Headteacher