

Life in all its fullness.



## Ambleside Church of England Primary School

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Headteacher: Mrs Alison Broom

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2026

Dear Parents,

The local authority attendance officer visited school last week to discuss and review our attendance data. She also clarified the law around school attendance again with me which I wanted to pass on to you all as there are still many misconceptions around school attendance and the fines which are issued for unauthorised absence. I have tried to summarise these points as clearly as possible in this letter. Please have a read through them so that you are fully informed before making a decision to take your child out of school during term time.

### What is an attendance officer?

Attendance Officers work for the Local Authority and it is their job to ensure that the laws on school attendance are properly followed. It is the law that children should attend school. All of the schools in Westmorland and Furness have termly visits from an Attendance Officer. The Officer will discuss the school's attendance record, see which children are 'persistently absent' and check to see whether the school is taking appropriate steps to ensure good school attendance and that the law is being properly followed.

### What does 'persistently absent' mean?

Any child with an attendance score of below 90% is persistently absent from school and is a cause for concern.

### When are fines issued?

Usually, this will be for an unauthorised absence of 5 days (10 sessions) within a 10-week period. The 10-week period is important to be aware of. Multiple unauthorised absences of 1, 2, 3 or 4 days are likely to incur a fine as they will begin to add up.

***There is a common misconception that unauthorised absences below 5 days will not incur a fine.***

Where a child's attendance is persistently absent (below 90%), a fine may be issued by the Local Authority for unauthorised absences below 5 days (10 sessions).

Understandably, I see requests for absences below the 5 days and I have been asked to ensure that response letters which I write to parents make this clear. Please do not assume that if the planned absence is below 5 days that you will not be fined.



## What is an unauthorised absence?

The most common reason for an unauthorised absence is a family holiday in term time. Weddings, funerals and other 'family' reasons may also fall into the category of 'unauthorised' as there are criteria around these. For this reason, it is very important that parents communicate properly with the school about any planned absences by talking to your child's class teacher or the headteacher to explain the circumstances of the absence. You should also complete a 'Leave of Absence Request' form at least two weeks before the absence which you are requesting. Headteachers have some authority to try to authorise 'exceptional circumstances' but this will not be possible without clear and transparent communication with us.

### **“We have had a short holiday and then my child was ill” or “My child was ill before our holiday”.**

Where illness coincides with a planned absence, these will not be authorised and will be marked as unauthorised absences in the register. It is the parents' responsibility to prove that they were not on holiday during the illness. Parents are advised to keep copies of all travel and booking information as attendance officers investigating school attendance, or contested fines, will ask to see your travel documentation (including any flight/train times etc). If you are travelling abroad for other reasons, you will also be asked to provide evidence.

## What happens when I get a fine?

For a first offence, a fine will be issued in the post. This will be £160 per parent, per child (with the option for it to be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days).

For a second offence, a fine will be issued in the post. This will be £160 per parent, per child with no option to reduce it.

A third offence (within a 3-year period) will always proceed to prosecution.

## Prosecution

Many parents with children in schools around Cumbria have now been prosecuted. Once a case goes to prosecution, there are several options open to the parents at this point involving appearing in court or settling out of court. The fine issued will vary depending on the route chosen by the parent but will involve a fine between £1000-£2500 per parent, per child and a criminal conviction.

All parents at the prosecution stage will have a criminal conviction along with their fine. The criminal conviction will be for “*an offence against a child*”. If you work in any industry where a DBS check is needed, this conviction will appear on any criminal record checks. Please bear this in mind as I believe that it has caught out parents in Cumbria.

### **Do step-parents get fined?**

Yes. Anyone who lives in the household with a child is classed as a 'caregiver' and will be given the fine.

### **My child has a good attendance record and we only ever take them out for one family holiday each year. Will I get fined?**

Yes. The fine levels set out above still apply. Please keep this in mind – a third family holiday in term time within a three-year period will result in prosecution.

### **Do the school know when fines are issued?**

No. The school are not informed when parents are fined for absences during term-time although we are aware that a fine is likely to be issued because of the information on our school registers.

I hope you find this information useful and, if you ever have any questions about school attendance, please do not hesitate to speak to me. There is also detailed information about school attendance on the government website should you need any further clarification.

We will continue to send out termly attendance reports to keep you updated on your child's overall school attendance for the academic year for your own records. I will also save this letter on our school website (under 'Attendance') for future reference.

Best wishes,

*Mrs Broom*

Headteacher