

16 July 2025

Our Reference: CS/EI/LIS/AE/SW

Dear Parent

As you are aware it is very important that your child attends school every day, on time, if they are able to do so. Regular attendance helps children to get the most out of their school experience, including their achievement, wellbeing and wider life chances. There are only a few circumstances in which a child is able to miss school, such as illness or if permission has been given because of an exceptional circumstance.

If your child misses school without a good reason, the Local Authority can intervene, and you may be issued with a fine. Last year we wrote to you to explain that the Department for Education had introduced new legislation and a national framework for issuing fixed penalty notices meaning that the same rules apply to all schools and Local Authorities when considering whether to issue a fine.

We have received a number of questions and queries relating to the issuing of penalty notices throughout this year, so we have put together the attached FAQ document to offer further clarity regarding the process.

Please be aware the number of fines you can receive for each child is capped at two within a three year period from the date of the first fine. If this limit is reached, other action such as a parenting order or prosecution, will be considered. Fines are issued separately to each parent for each child.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Wright

SARAH WRIGHT

Access to Education Service Manager

Frequently Asked Questions – Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs)

Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act states that if a child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at school fails to attend regularly their parent is guilty of an offence.

Schools and the Local Authorities are required to follow government guidance in relation to absence from school. The DFE states 'Generally, a need or desire for a holiday for the purpose of leisure and recreation would not constitute an exceptional circumstance'. Guidance relating to the term 'exceptional' has expressed that it means the **'event is rare, unavoidable and short'** and by 'unavoidable' it could not reasonably be scheduled at any other time. Holidays taken during term time are unlikely to be authorised as generally speaking these are not exceptional as they can be scheduled at another time during a school holiday period.

What happens if I take my child out of school and the absence is not authorised?

Only a headteacher can authorise an absence from school. If your child is absent from school and the absence is not authorised the school is legally required to consider whether the national threshold for penalty notices is met. In many cases schools and the Local Authority will offer support to try to improve your child's attendance, however if the absence is for a holiday or events such as a family gathering or birthday there would be no support need and the school is required to notify the Local Authority.

What happens if my child is unwell and unable to attend school immediately before or following a leave of absence?

You should notify the school of your child's illness following the normal procedure. The school may request official booking details of the holiday in order to demonstrate the sickness was genuine and not a way of avoiding a penalty notice.

What is a FPN?

A FPN is issued as an alternative to prosecution in the Magistrates' Court. The FPN scheme does not allow for mitigation as the notice is a 'conditional offer' for the offence of failing to secure regular attendance and in all cases the proposal is a fine of £160. In some cases, you may be offered the opportunity to pay £80, if paid within 21 days. There is no flexibility in the disposal, so mitigation is not relevant.

Who can be issued with a FPN?

FPN's can be issued to any adult considered to be a parent as defined by the Education Act 1996, this includes:

- All natural (biological) parents, whether they are married or not.
- Any person who although not the natural parent has parental responsibility for the child or young person.
- Any person although not a natural parent has care of the child or young person. Having care of the child means a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child irrespective of what their relationship is with the child.

To make sure penalty notices are issued fairly and legally, all Local Authorities are required to have a local Code of Conduct which explains the circumstances in which FPNs will be issued. The Code of Conduct must include the national threshold, and also any circumstances falling outside the national threshold in which a FPN will be considered. The Westmorland and Furness Code of Conduct is published on the council website and is available here: [School attendance | Westmorland and Furness Council](#).

Can I appeal a Fixed Penalty Notice?

There is no right of appeal against a FPN. It is important you make the school aware of any circumstances or information regarding absence at the earliest opportunity. There is no requirement for information to be considered after the fact, however, if you have additional information which has not previously been shared you may wish to share this with the Attendance Team and should do so using the e-mail address provided on the FPN. The Attendance Support Team is only able to review a decision if **significant new information** is provided. Information already provided to the school will not initiate a review.

The penalty notice cannot be paused, should a review be requested with new information. The notice should still be paid within the timescales, and should it be agreed that the additional information constitutes exceptional circumstances, any payments received will then be refunded.

Will I receive a notice to improve before a FPN is issued?

A notice to improve is not issued in situations where support is not appropriate as in the case of an unauthorised leave of absence in term time.

My child has had several periods of unauthorised absence, but they fall outside the national threshold – could I still be fined?

Yes. The legislation requires schools and local authorities to consider individual situations and is clear that a FPN can be issued in some circumstances before the threshold is met, for example taking several term time holidays below threshold, or for repeated absence for birthdays or other family events. This is detailed in the Code of Conduct.

Can I pay my penalty notice by instalments?

Payment cannot be made in part or by instalments.

What happens if I don't pay my FPN?

If you don't pay within the 28 days, the offer of a FPN is withdrawn. The Local Authority will then consider instigating a prosecution in the Magistrates' Court for the offence of failing to secure regular school attendance. If a guilty finding is made this could result in a fine of up to £2,500 per parent per child and/or a parenting order or a community service order. In addition, the court may impose court costs. It is not possible to pay the FPN after the 28 days have passed.

How many penalty notices can I be issued?

You can be issued a maximum of two FPNs within a rolling three year period. The first time a FPN is issued, the amount of the fine will be £80 if paid within 21 days, increasing to £160 if paid between days 22 and 28. The second time a penalty notice is issued within a three year period, the amount is £160 payable within 28 days. If there is a third period of unauthorised absence within a three year period, a penalty notice will not be issued and the Local Authority must consider other available measures including prosecution in the Magistrates' Court. Penalty notices are issued per parent per child.

SARAH WRIGHT
Access to Education Service Manager

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