



Attendance Policy

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| Date approved: | 2 July 2025 |
| Review cycle: | Annual |
| Party responsible: | Headteacher, subject to approval from the Student Committee for any significant changes to policy principles |
| Related policies: | Behaviour & Exclusions Policy, Preventing & Tackling Bullying Policy, Child Protection (Safeguarding) Policy |

The Swanage School is committed to providing a full and efficient education to all pupils and embraces the concept of equal opportunities for all.

We will always strive to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome.

For a child to reach their full educational potential we expect all pupils to have above **97%** attendance. Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents or carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

School attendance is subject to various education laws and this school attendance policy is written to reflect these laws and the guidance produced by the Department for Education. Each year the school will set whole attendance targets in line with national statistics.

The school will review its systems and processes for improving attendance at regular intervals to ensure that it is achieving its set goals.

This policy will contain within it the procedures that the school will use to meet its attendance targets.

Promoting attendance

The DfE guidance "[Working together to improve school attendance \(2024\)](#)" forms the basis of this policy and we will work towards the recommendations and suggested strategies within.

"Attendance is everyone's business" and the foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child.

We will ensure that our pupils are made aware of the importance of good attendance and how this will benefit them. This message will be promoted through crew time, assemblies and the reward system.

Registers

Morning registration will take place at the start of school at 08.30 and will remain open until 0900.

Any pupil arriving after this time will be marked as having an unauthorised absence (late after registration has closed) unless there is an acceptable explanation e.g. school transport was delayed. In cases, for example, where the absence at registration was for attending an early morning medical appointment, the appropriate authorised absence code will be entered.

The afternoon registers will open at 1200.

Pupils arriving after the start of school but before the end of the registration period will be coded as late before registers close.

School Procedures

Any child who is absent from school for the morning or afternoon registration period must have their absence recorded as being authorised, unauthorised or as an approved educational activity (attendance out of school). Only the headteacher or a member of staff acting on their behalf can authorise absence. If there is no known reason for the absence at registration, then the absence will be recorded in the first instance as unauthorised and N coded.

The coding for any absences will be in accordance with the guidance provided by the Department of Education, including [“Working together to improve school attendance \(2024\)”](#)

First Day Absence

Parents and carers are responsible for contacting the school by phone if their child is not going to attend school. Alternatively, a parent can email the school on office@theswanageschool.co.uk

If a child is absent from school and parent/carers has not contacted the school, school staff will contact the parent/carers by phone that morning to confirm that the child is in their care and for an explanation for the child's absence from school.

Records of these conversations are recorded in Arbor, the school management information system.

In some instances, if the school has not received communication from a parent on the first day of absence and the school is unable to contact the parent a welfare call to the police or other involved agency (such as Children's Services) will be made.

Five Days Unauthorised Absence (or 10 half days in a 12 school-week period)

The school may request that Dorset Children's Services issue a penalty notice in accordance with their current code of conduct. Appendix A.

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/children-s-services-code-of-conduct-for-the-issue-of-fixed-penalty-notices>

Ten Days Absence

Any pupil who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive days will be notified to the Local Authority, by submitting a referral to the Children's Services School Attendance Team. The school will include details of the actions they have taken.

Absence notes

Notes received from parents explaining absence will be recorded on the school's management information system.

Frequent Absence

Within the school it is the responsibility of the child's crew leader to be aware of and bring attention to, any emerging attendance concerns. In cases where a pupil begins to develop a pattern of absences, the school will try to resolve the problem as soon as possible.

If there is a medical reason for a child's poor attendance and medical professionals are already involved then the child's attendance will be monitored, but further letters and formal attendance meetings are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Children Missing from Education

We are aware that children going missing from education, particularly repeatedly, can act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding possibilities. The School will adhere to guidance from The Department for Education documents "[Children Missing Education 2024](#)" and "[Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024](#)" when identifying and responding to children who are missing education. " when identifying and responding to children who are missing education.

Children Missing Out of Education

Children who are categorized as missing out on education (such as by having a reduced timetable) will be referred/reported to Dorset Council as required using Dorset Council's CMOOE reporting service

How do we monitor attendance?

Although we do not expect any parent/carer to bring their child to school unwell, we have a duty of care to monitor attendance. We seek full support to ensure that children attend school on time, every day. Regular attendance is not just a legal requirement but it is vital for students to maximise their learning and achieve their full potential.

How do we categorise attendance?

Group 1: No Concern – Green Group The child attends for 97% – 100% of the time.

Group 2: Concern – Yellow Group The child attends for 95% – 96.9% of the time.

Group 3: Serious Risk of Underachievement – Amber Group The child attends for 90% – 94.9% of the time.

Group 4: Severe Risk of Underachievement –The child attends for 80% – 90% of the time.

Group 5: Extreme Risk of Underachievement – Red Group The child attends for 0% – 80% of the time.

If a child's attendance drops below 90% this is categorized as persistent absence.

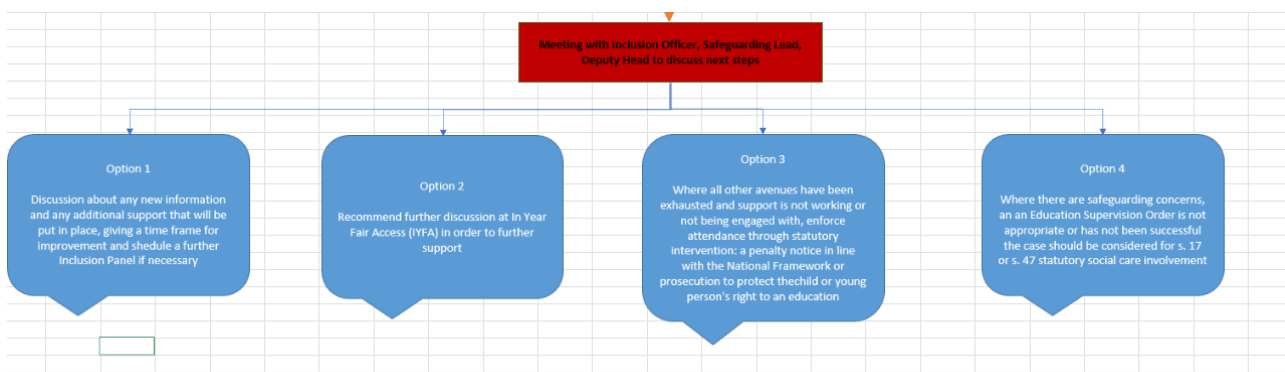
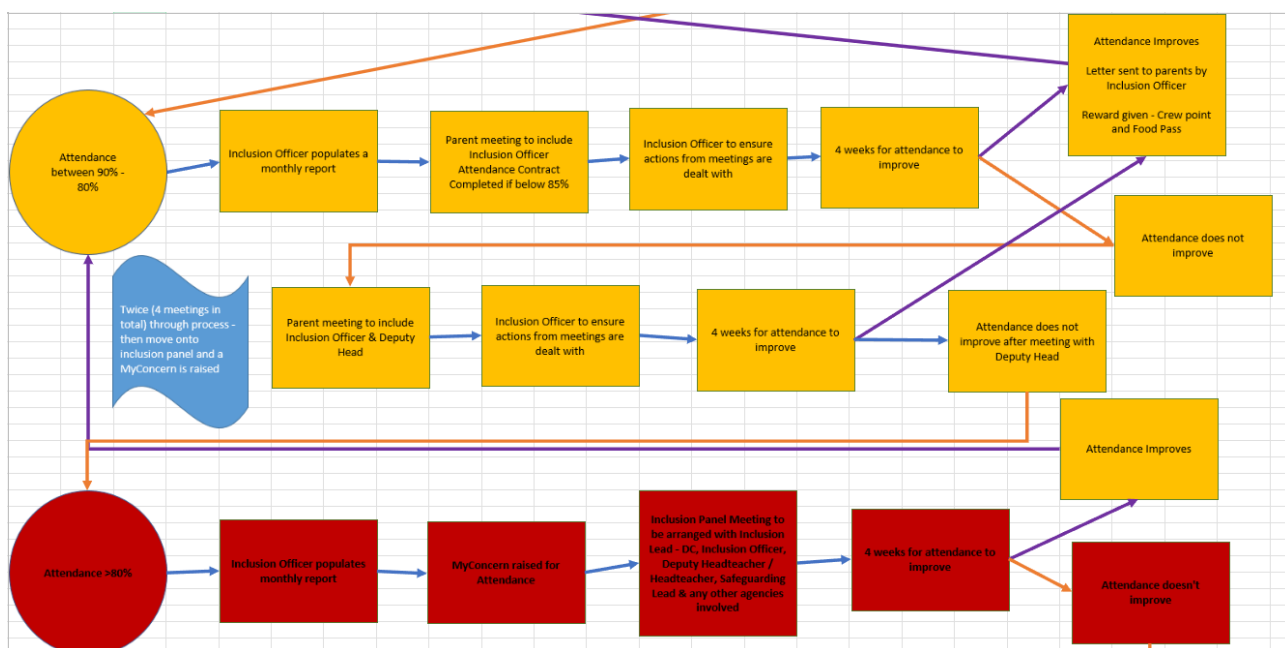
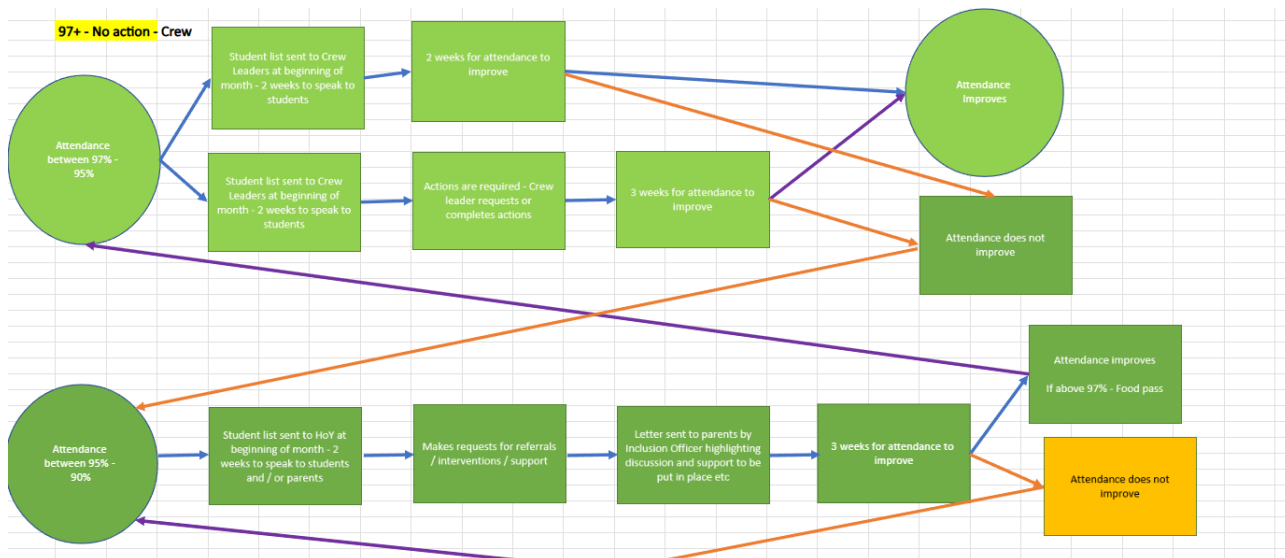
A letter will be sent if a child's attendance is below 95% to advise parents that we will be closely monitoring the situation.

Further communications will follow if attendance doesn't improve, as we will arrange an attendance meeting with the Pastoral Lead to see how we can support improvement

If attendance drops below 90% a referral is made to the Dorset Council Inclusion team (East & Purbeck Locality). From this point, further actions could include home visits by the Purbeck Support Officer, involvement with the Dorset Council Inclusions Officer, referrals to Safeguarding and Children's Services, Penalty Notices being issued and eventual prosecution.

Attendance Action Plan

All pupils whose attendance level falls below 95% will be subject to an attendance action plan to support their return to full attendance. The action plans are outlined in the flow chart below and will include engagement with all parties who can support the pupil's attendance.



If the child's attendance does not improve by stage 3 of the action plan, then an attendance panel meeting will be arranged.

An attendance panel hearing is attended by the Headteacher or a leadership team representative and the Local Authority (LA) Officer responsible for attendance in schools. During the panel hearing a decision will be made as to whether the child's attendance will be monitored by the LA.

If it is decided at the attendance panel hearing for the LA to monitor the child's attendance, then this would take place, usually over a three-week period. If a child's attendance does not improve the LA will then decide whether to issue a fixed penalty notice or pursue the case in court.

Leave of absence in term time

Leave of absence during term time is strongly discouraged. Parents will be reminded of the effect that absence can have on a pupil's potential achievement. The school will consider any application for leave of absence and will only agree to authorise the absence in exceptional circumstances; parents must apply in advance for permission for their child to have leave of absence.

Dorset's Penalty Notice Protocol, a shorter guide for schools and guidance on Exceptional Circumstances is at Appendix A.

Attendance Awards

The school's system for rewarding pupils who have good or improving attendance includes:

- Specific 100% Attendance Recognition & Rewards
- "Attendance Cup" for best crew team
- Attendance postcards home
- Rewards for improved attendance – 'Fast Pass' and 'Snack Vouchers' and 'non uniform days'
- Attendance certificates issued each half-term

Categorisation of Absence

Any pupil who is on roll but not present in the school must be recorded within one of these categories.

1. Unauthorised Absence
2. Authorised Absence
3. Approved Educational Activity
4. Medical Appointment

1. Unauthorised absence

This is for those pupils where no reason has been provided, or whose absence is deemed to be without valid reason.

2. Authorised absence

This is for those pupils who are away from school for a reason that is deemed to be valid under the Education Act 1996.

3. Approved Educational Activity

This covers types of supervised educational activity undertaken off site but with the approval of the school.

Note: Pupils recorded in this category are deemed to be present for attendance returns purposes.

This would include:

- Work experience placements
- Field trips and educational visits
- Sporting activities
- Link courses or approved education off site

If a pupil is receiving education off site or is attending at a school where they are dual registered, the school will liaise with the other education provider to check on attendance.

Further guidance is available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>

Appendix A

Dorset Council Children's Services Penalty Notice Protocol 2025 Version:

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/children-s-services-code-of-conduct-for-the-issue-of-fixed-penalty-notice>

1. Legal Basis:

Sections 444A and 444B of the Education Act 1996 empower designated Local Authority (LA) Officers, Head Teachers (& Deputy and Assistant Head teachers authorised by them) and the Police to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school. The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 require the Local Authority, in consultation with all of the above, to develop a code of conduct which must be followed when issuing Penalty Notices.

The issuing of Penalty Notices must conform with all requirements of the Human Rights Act 1988 and all Equal Opportunities legislation. These provisions apply to all persons who fall within the definition of a 'parent' as set out in section 576 of the Education Act 1996. By virtue of this section 'parent' includes: all natural parents, whether they are married or not; any person or body who has parental responsibility for a child (as defined by the Children Act 1989); any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child. Having care of a child means that a person with whom a child lives and who looks after a child, irrespective of what their relationship is with that child, is considered to be a parent in Education Law.

2. Rationale for Issuing Penalty Notices:

Regular and punctual attendance at school is both a legal requirement and essential for pupils to maximise their educational opportunities.

Children's Services will continue to investigate cases of non-attendance from school and, following appropriate casework, instigate legal action if applicable.

In law, an offence occurs if a parent/carer fails to secure a child's attendance at the school at which they are a registered pupil and that absence is not authorised by the school. Penalty Notices supplement the existing sanctions currently available under section 444 Education Act 1996 or section 36 Children Act 1989 to enforce attendance at school where appropriate.

Children's Services delivers this LA responsibility.

3. Circumstances where a Penalty Notice may be used:

Penalty Notices can only be issued in cases where a pupil of compulsory school age has been absent and the absence has not been authorised by the school or where the pupil has persistently arrived late after the register has closed.

The level of absence that is necessary before a Penalty Notice can be issued is 10 or more half days of unauthorised absence within a 12-school week period.

The key consideration in deciding whether to issue a Penalty Notice will be whether it can be effective in helping to get the pupil who is missing education back into school.

A Penalty Notice is a suitable intervention in circumstances of parentally condoned truancy; where the parent is considered capable of securing their child's regular attendance but is not willing to take responsibility for doing so.

To ensure consistent and fair delivery of Penalty Notices, the following criteria for their use shall apply:

- No one parent will receive more than three separate Penalty Notices resulting from the unauthorised absence of an individual child in any twelve-month period.
- However, where families contain more than one poorly attending pupil, multiple issues may occur.

4. Procedure for issuing Penalty Notices:

Children's Services will issue Penalty Notices for all Dorset Schools. Penalty Notices will only be issued by first class post and never as an on-the-spot action; this is to satisfy that all evidential requirements are in place and to meet health and safety requirements.

Children's Services will receive requests from schools, Dorset Police and neighbouring Local Authorities. Requests from Schools will be sent to the School Attendance Team following discussion with a member of the Team. A Penalty Notice may be issued providing it does not conflict with other intervention strategies in place or other enforcement sanctions already being processed. Children's Services will respond to all requests within 10 school days of receipt and where all criteria are met, will:

In cases of unauthorised absence

- Issue a formal warning to the parent/carer of the possibility of a Penalty Notice being issued.
- In the same letter set a period of 15 school days within which the pupil must have no unauthorised absence.
- Issue a Penalty Notice through the post at the end of the 15-day period if the required level of improvement has not been achieved.

Unauthorised Leave during Term time

In accordance with The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, as amended, a Penalty Notice can be issued in certain circumstances, for example where a parent takes a child on holiday during term time without the school authorising the absence. In such circumstances, although a minimum of 10 half day sessions of unauthorised absence will still apply before a Penalty Notice may be issued; the authorised person may issue a Penalty Notice without first issuing a formal warning to the parent as would otherwise be required. However, s/he should still be satisfied that the parent was informed beforehand that, in some circumstances e.g. term time holiday, unauthorised absence could lead to a Penalty Notice being issued without further warning.

Who can receive a Penalty Notice?

Any Penalty Notice issued must be addressed to one parent but a Penalty Notice may be issued to each parent liable for the offence or offences.

An authorised person has discretion when deciding whether to issue one or more parents of a child with a Penalty Notice. This is to enable account to be taken of the specific circumstances in individual cases.

5. Roles and Responsibilities of the Local Authority

Local Authorities (LAs) may, in the absence of any other agreement, only issue Penalty Notices in respect of pupils registered at a school in that LA area or, in the case of an unregistered pupil, who resides in their area or for whom that LA has arranged alternative provision. LAs may only issue Penalty Notices in respect of

pupils registered at a school in another LA area or, in the case of an unregistered pupil, for which another LA has arranged alternative provision if they have an agreement to that effect with the other LA.

6. Procedure for withdrawing Penalty Notices:

Once issued, a Penalty Notice will only be withdrawn in the following circumstances:

- Proof has been established that the Penalty Notice was issued to the wrong person.
- The use of the Penalty Notice did not conform to the terms of this Protocol.
- The Penalty Notice contains a material error.
- The Local Authority (LA) must withdraw the Penalty Notice if it is not paid in full and the LA has not, and does not intend to, instigate legal proceedings.

7. Payment of Penalty Notices:

Arrangements for payment will be detailed in the Penalty Notice.

- Payment of Penalty Notice discharges the parent/carer liability for the period in question and they cannot subsequently be prosecuted under other enforcement powers for the period covered in the Penalty Notice.
- Payment of a Penalty Notice within 21 days is £60 and payment after this time but within 28 days is £120.

8. Non-payment of Penalty Notices:

Non-payment of a Penalty Notice will trigger the prosecution process.

- Prosecution is for the offence to which the notice relates rather than for non-payment of the notice.
- In the case of unauthorised absence, if there is a prosecution, it will follow the usual procedure of a prosecution for irregular attendance (including considering an Education Supervision Order as an alternative, or in addition, to prosecution) under the provisions of section 444(1) or 444(1a) The Education Act 1996.

9. Penalty Notices and Excluded Pupils

- Section 103 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 places a duty on parents in relation to an excluded pupil. A parent has to ensure that their child is not present in a public place during school hours without reasonable justification during the first 5 days of each and every fixed period or permanent exclusion.
- Section 105 allows for a Penalty Notice to be given to a parent guilty of an offence under Section 103. The Penalty Notice allows a parent to pay a penalty as a way of discharging any liability for the offence of failing to ensure that their child is not present in a public place on the days specified in a notice given to them. The parent must have been notified by the school at the time of the exclusion of their duty and the days to which it relates.

10. Procedure for Issuing of Penalty Notices in Cases of Exclusion

- When a child is excluded from school – either for a fixed period or permanently – and the child is found in a public place during normal school hours on a specified day of exclusion, a Penalty Notice will be issued.
- In order for the parent to incur a Penalty Notice the school must give them notice informing them of the duty to ensure their child is not found in a public place; the days when this duty will apply and, as appropriate, of the arrangements for alternative provision.

- If the child has been provided with alternative provision and is not attending this provision then the parent will be liable under the unauthorised absence regulations.

11. Non-Payment of Penalty Notices – Exclusions

- In the case of a prosecution of a parent who has failed to ensure their child is not found in a public place during a specified day of exclusion, the procedures, such as preparing and serving a summons, will be similar to those for unauthorised absence.

Penalty Notices – A Guide for Schools

Penalty Notices were introduced as a quicker route to prosecution of parents when a pupil has unauthorised absence. They can be used in two ways.

Unauthorised Absence

1. If a pupil has 10 or more unauthorised absences (half day sessions) within a 12-school week period then a Penalty Notice can be considered.
2. A school can request a Penalty Notice by completing the attached form and sending it to the School Attendance Team. Please include a record of the pupil's attendance.
3. The School Attendance Team will send a warning letter to the parent(s) stating that the pupil must have no unauthorised absence in the next 15 school days. If there is any unauthorised absence, a Penalty Notice will be issued. (Please note: In some cases if the warning letter has effected a major improvement in the pupil's attendance, we may consider issuing an additional 15 school day warning letter to see if the improvement can be maintained. We will discuss this with the school before issuing the second warning letter.)

Holidays in Term Time

A Penalty Notice can be issued when a parent takes a child on holiday during term time without the school authorising the absence.

1. A minimum of 10 half day sessions of unauthorised absence will still apply before the Penalty Notice can be issued, however a warning letter will not be sent.
2. If there is a longer unauthorised holiday period or 10 unauthorised holiday absences and additional unauthorised absences on the pupil's record then a Penalty Notice will be issued.
3. A school can request a Penalty Notice for unauthorised holiday absence on the attached form.

A Penalty Notice must be addressed to one parent but may be issued to each parent liable for the offence.

Holidays in Term Time

Amendments to the Pupil Registration (England) 2006 Regulations state that:

"Head teachers may not grant any approved leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Head teachers should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted". Before any request for leave of absence is approved, a head teacher must be satisfied that there are "exceptional circumstances" justifying the request for leave of absence.

Defining exceptional circumstances

Many head teachers and school pyramids wish to define for their parents/carers what would constitute an exceptional circumstance, so that schools can be consistent in their response to any leave of absence requests received.

However, the Department for Education has not defined exceptional circumstances, except to explain that: *"Schools should consider each request individually taking into account the circumstances, such as: the nature of the event for which leave is sought; the frequency of the request; whether the parent/carer gave advance notice; and the pupil's attainment, attendance and ability to catch up on missed schooling"*. Guidance from the NAHT defines exceptional as rare, significant and unavoidable.

In relation to the practice of developing cluster or local school partnership letters (a blanket policy), schools need to ensure they remain lawful - in that head teachers have a discretionary power, and should consider each individual leave of absence request based on the circumstances of that family and the impact that absence will have on the child. Schools should not issue blanket policies where they state that they will only approve requests for leave of absence up to a certain duration, or where a pupil has a certain percentage attendance. Similarly, a refusal to authorise any leave of absence requests, or to automatically refuse certain categories of request, could be unlawful.

Dorset Council advises that:

- where schools do operate a cluster or partnership response to requests for absence it remains acceptable and lawful to communicate with parents/carers examples of what you all would consider to be exceptional circumstances, as long as it is very clear that these are examples and every request will be considered individually
- the nature of the words *exceptional circumstances* is such that they indicate unusual events or an abnormal occurrence. It is therefore not possible to define in advance when a request will or will not be exceptional.

How do I decide if it is exceptional, whether to authorise and how many days?

Although the decision is the head teacher's, to support your decision-making we would ask you to consider the following:

Could this request for leave take place during the normal school holidays? If the answer is yes then it is not an exceptional circumstance. The Department for Education is clear that there is no parental/carer right for a family holiday and that cost, experiences for the child or overlapping with school holidays are not factors on which the decision should be made.

Dorset Council's current advice is as follows:

If it is an exceptional circumstance, you still have to decide whether to approve the absence or not. This decision should be made by considering primarily the pupil's attainment, attendance and ability to catch up on missed schooling; followed by the frequency of the requests; the nature of the event for which leave is sought and whether the parent/carer gave advance notice. You do not have to approve leave of absence even if the reason given is exceptional.

Schools and head teachers should ensure that they are not discriminatory in their decision to approve leave in exceptional circumstances for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children who may request this in addition to the extended leave covered by the T code. (If schools are using the T code correctly this would only be used for the time when a child is absent from school as the family are travelling for employment.) The decision to approve the leave should be made without consideration for leave taken for employment, but schools should take into account the child's overall attendance rate, which may include other absences.

If you do approve leave of absence you need to make it clear the days you are authorising and from what time that approval takes place. For example, you may approve the absence for the immediate family wedding that takes place on the Wednesday, but may feel that due to the location of the wedding the child does not need to be absent for the entire week or for the two whole days of travel either side of the event.

Authorised approved leave of absence

Dorset Council anticipates that it will be extremely rare for leave of absence for a holiday in term time to be authorised. Where it is approved the school should use the appropriate authorised absence code. If leave is not approved the absence should be coded as a G.

If a parent/carer takes a child on holiday during term time without obtaining the head teacher's consent beforehand, the pupil's absence must be recorded as unauthorised G.

The parent/carer is then committing an offence and may be issued with a penalty notice or prosecuted under the Education Act 1996, Section 444(1).

Authorised officers have the discretion to issue a penalty notice without warning where the parent/carer has chosen to take the child on leave during term time without authorisation.

Relevant legislation and guidance

- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.
- Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013, which came into force on 1 September 2013.