

27 March 2023

## Unauthorised School Absence

Dear families

Please find below information from Bradford council in regards to a change to the Unauthorised Leave of Absence timescales and penalty notice procedures.

Absence due to unauthorised leave taken during term time is a significant issue for all Bradford schools. Children in Bradford are twice as likely to be absent due to unauthorised leave during term time than the average child in England, with absence due to unauthorised leave during term time representing the third highest reason for absence behind illness and general unauthorised absence. In the 2021-2022 academic year, Bradford children missed almost 150,000 days of school due to unauthorised leave taken during term time.

Absence due to unauthorised leave during term time covers a variety of reasons for absence, including holidays during term time and travel to other countries to visit family and attend celebrations and events. Currently schools can request a penalty notice from Bradford Council for each child, and each parent, where unauthorised leave takes place. Despite this, absence due to unauthorised leave during term time continues to take place, with a significant number of families taking more than one period of absence during an academic year, or taking a period of leave of four weeks or more.

A decision has been made by Bradford Council to change their approach to situations where families take two or more periods of unauthorised leave in a 12-month period, or when a period of four or more weeks of leave is taken. In these instances, Bradford Council will utilise the option to start **legal proceedings via the magistrates' court**, instead of issuing a penalty notice. This means that parents may be liable to receive a significantly higher fine (**up to £2,500 per child, per parent**) if found guilty, as well as receive a criminal record, which may be reportable to employers (for example, via a DBS Check). In rare circumstances, magistrates can consider a custodial sentence for up to 3 months. **This change will come into force from 1 April 2023.**

I have no wish to deprive families of an extended period of leave away from our school, but my first concern has to be the educational development of your child. Requests for leave during term time are never taken lightly and we will always consider the social, emotional and cultural reasons for the leave, whether the leave is exceptional, as well as your child's overall level of attendance, academic attainment and the impact any leave may have on your child's learning during their time away.

However, continued absence from school will have a detrimental impact on a child's academic attainment, therefore I wish to make you aware that for this reason we support the decision of Bradford Council, and it is important that you are aware of this change so that you can take this information into consideration when deciding whether or not to take a period of unauthorised leave during term time.

Yours faithfully



**Emma Steele**  
Principal



**John Leese**  
Education Safeguarding Service Manager  
Attendance, Prosecutions and Child  
Licensing  
**City of Bradford Metropolitan District  
Council**

