

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

ANTI- SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ACT 2003

PENALTY NOTICE

CODE OF CONDUCT

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Appendix 1 – Information leaflet for Parents/Carers

Version **12**

Amended: **July 2023**

1. Legal Basis

- 1.1. The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, Section 23 empowers designated Local Authority (LA) Officers, Head Teachers (and Deputy and Assistant Head Teachers authorised by them) and the Police to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school.
- 1.2. The Act places specific responsibility on the LA for developing a Code of Conduct, within which all parties will operate.
- 1.3. The issuing of Penalty Notices must conform to the Code of Conduct and with all requirements of Human Rights and Equal Opportunities legislation. The scheme must therefore operate consistently across the Authority.
- 1.4. The government made the decision in March 2020 to suspend section 444 of the Education Act 1996. Suffolk County Council, therefore, suspended all Penalty Notice action and prosecution for Failing to ensure regular school attendance from this date.
- 1.5. Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 was reinstated at the beginning of the Autumn Term 2020.

2. Purpose of the Penalty Notice Scheme

- 2.1. **Regular school attendance is vital in ensuring that children maximise the educational opportunities available to them. It is also an important element in safeguarding them from harm.**
- 2.2. Parents have a legal responsibility (Education Act 1996, Section 7) for ensuring their children receive a full-time and efficient education, and LAs have a duty to enforce this where necessary.
- 2.3. 'Parent' is defined as someone who has parental responsibility for a child **or** who has the care of that child. (Education Act 1996, Section 576).
- 2.4. The Penalty Notice code of conduct is intended to supplement, not replace, the existing powers of enforcement under the Education Act 1996. Penalty Notices are intended to be early deterrents to unauthorised absence. Their most effective use is likely to be for parents who are able but unwilling to ensure their children's regular attendance at school.

3. Circumstances where a Penalty Notice may be issued

3.1. The criteria for issuing Penalty Notices will be –

- Where a child of statutory school age has been identified as having unauthorised absence;

- In the company of a parent, has been stopped under Section 16 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (i.e. during a 'truancy sweep' conducted by Police and Education Welfare Officers) and the parent has failed to give a satisfactory explanation for the child's absence which the school has confirmed is unauthorised.

3.2. Parents who meet the criteria will be issued with a Penalty Notice.

3.3. Penalty Notices will not be used in the case of 'Unauthorised' absence' for children looked after by the LA (LAC). A referral needs to be made to the Education Welfare Officer and discussions with all concerned as to addressing the issues.

4. Procedure for issuing Penalty Notices

4.1. Penalty Notices issued under this scheme will be issued on behalf of the LA by Officers of the Education Attendance Service. These Officers will not issue a Penalty Notice unless:

- All terms of the Code of Conduct are applied;
- All relevant information required is supplied to them by Head Teachers (or Member of staff delegated / authorised by them);
- Other strategies are not in place or being enforced at the same time.

4.2. Senior Attendance Officer or Fixed Penalty Notice Officer will be aware of all proceedings contemplated or commenced under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 (the offence of failing to secure the regular attendance at school of a registered pupil).

4.3. Head Teachers (or Member of staff delegated / authorised by them) will notify the Senior Attendance Officer or Fixed Penalty Notice Officer of any child whose parent(s) they believe meet the criteria for the Penalty Notice Code of Conduct. These children may also be identified by Education Welfare Officers.

The Education Attendance Service will issue a Penalty Notice to the parent(s) if satisfied that the criteria are met. Head Teachers will need to demonstrate clearly that leave from school has not been granted.

4.4. The Police may refer to the Education Attendance Service any child whose parent(s) they wish to be considered for a Penalty Notice. The Education Attendance Service will examine those cases and issue Penalty Notices where the criteria are met.

4.5. Neighbouring LAs where Suffolk children might be registered at school or stopped on truancy sweeps will be asked to refer to Suffolk Education Attendance Service if it considered meet the criteria for a Penalty Notice.

4.6. Each Parent/Carer will not receive more than one Penalty Notice per child in any academic year. [See below for action to be taken if further unauthorised absences 5.7]

5. Operation of the Code of Conduct

- 5.1. The issuing of Penalty Notices must conform to all requirements of Human Rights and Equal Opportunities legislation. The scheme must therefore operate consistently and equitably across Suffolk and therefore Penalty Notices will only be issued in accordance with Suffolk County Council's Code of Conduct.
- 5.2. Penalty Notices will only be issued for cases of unauthorised absence. In all cases, it is important to ensure that schools have not authorised the absence, and do not so retrospectively (if this occurs the Notice is to be withdrawn).
- 5.3. Penalty Notices will only be sent once the school has completed the online submission form. The Referrer remains responsible for the details provided on the submission form.
- 5.4. Once received through the online portal, Ipswich Officers appointed to do so will decide that the referral meets the criteria and accept for processing.
- 5.5. Schools are required to submit referrals to Suffolk County Council within an appropriate time of the last unauthorised absence with the expectation it is 15 schools days of the unauthorised absence, this may be extended in exceptional circumstances. The LA will aim to process the penalty notice in 7 School days of submission of the referral.
- 5.6. All correspondence and outcomes will be recorded on a central database. The submission form and electronic copies of the penalty notice will be held securely on the portal
- 5.7. Parents will not receive more than one Penalty Notice per child in an academic year. Where there is more than one person liable for the penalty notice, a separate notice will be issued to each person.

Further unauthorised absences of that pupil should be discussed with the **Attendance Service for further appropriate action in line with the Suffolk County Council Attendance Enforcement Policy.**

- 5.8. Penalty Notices will be issued by post to parents' home by first class post. Penalty Notices will be considered to have been served on the Parent on the second working day after the date of posting.

- 5.9. Each Penalty Notice issued will be given a unique identifier code to ensure against the issue of duplication.
- 5.10. If the penalty is not paid in full after 28 days (it is not permissible to be paid by instalments), Officer's authorised in this regard of Suffolk County Council must either institute court proceedings for non-attendance against the parent or mark the notice withdrawn under criteria 'D' (LA does not intend to prosecute and reason stated in the comments).
- 5.11. Prosecution following non-payment of a penalty notice will follow the Suffolk County Council Attendance Enforcement Policy.

6. Withdrawal of Penalty Notices

- 6.1. A Penalty Notice will be withdrawn only in the following circumstances;
- the Notice was issued outside the terms of the schools' attendance policy;
 - or
 - the Notice was issued to the wrong person.

If the Notice is to be withdrawn Officers of Suffolk County Council must write to the parent giving notice of the withdrawal and arrangements must be made to repay any monies paid.

- 6.2. There is no statutory right of appeal against the issuing of a Penalty Notice.

7. Payment of Penalty Notices

- 7.1. The penalty is payable to Suffolk County Council (details for payment will be contained in the Notice). The amount of the penalty is –
- £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt of the Notice;
 - £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days of receipt of the Notice.
- 7.2. Payment of a Penalty Notice cannot be made by instalments.
- 7.3. Payment of a Penalty Notice discharges the parent's liability for the period to which the Notice relates.
- 7.4. Non-payment of a Penalty Notice is likely to result in the parent being prosecuted for the child's unauthorised absence.
- 7.5. Penalties will be payable to Suffolk County Council. The Local Authority will retain the revenue collected to cover the cost of issuing Penalty Notices and of Prosecuting parents who fail to pay the penalties.

8. Guidance for Educational Establishments

- 8.1. The Suffolk County Council Code of Conduct may be accessed by all Schools,
- 8.2. Academies and Free Schools within the county of Suffolk.

- 8.3. Penalty Notice Referrals need to be submitted using the FPN Portal:
<https://connect.suffolk.gov.uk/restricted/fpn>
- 8.4. Penalty Notice Referrals must be completed fully including all relevant data on the known parents and pupil.
- 8.5. Schools need to set and publish their own attendance policy including their own criteria for making referrals for a Penalty Notice.
- 8.6. Schools should consider the following in setting their criteria:
- Number of unauthorised absences.
 - Relevant factors impacting upon the absences.

Review of the Penalty Notice Scheme

The Penalty Notice Scheme will be reviewed at regular intervals (at least every 2 years) with amendments made as applicable at the review.

Penalty Notice Information for Parents and Carers

Suffolk County Council is committed to providing all children with an efficient and suitable full time education.

Addressing Non-Attendance at School

It is well known that missing school for any reason can cause a child to fall behind in their learning. Missing school not only damages a pupils learning and grades, but can disrupt routines and can make children vulnerable to crime

Sometimes children also find it difficult to settle back into school after a break

In the longer term, evidence shows that reduced levels of attendance are likely to affect the progress of any child, whatever their needs or ability and can result in lower levels of qualifications being achieved.

By ensuring your child attends school regularly, this will help develop crucial life skills, resilience, and a strong work ethic that will benefit throughout their lives.

What can I do to help my child attend school regularly?

- Good school attendance starts with good home routines, ensure your child gets to bed at the right time and is not in front of an electronic screen an hour before they should be going to sleep.
- Always contact school staff for help at the earliest opportunity.
- Never cover for your child's absence this only empowers a child to do what they want to do and prevents you from controlling the situation, tell the school exactly why the child is not coming into school.
- If you are unable to get a medical appointment outside of school time you should send your child into school wherever possible either side of the appointment.
- Be positive about the school to your child even if you have concerns. Concerns need to be raised and addressed with school staff but never run a school down in front of your child.
- Listen to your child, spend time with them to give them space to talk about what is concerning them and reassure them that there is no problem too big or too small that they can't talk about, we have to work harder at this with teenagers than younger children and it is often best to engage a teenager in an activity to create the space for them to open up.
- If you feel your child is anxious contact your GP and/or school nurse to discuss this.

What is a Penalty Notice?

The law says that parents/carers, whose children are of compulsory school age and absent from school without good reason are committing an offence and the parents/carers maybe prosecuted in the Magistrates Court.

Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced additional powers under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 authorising Local Authorities to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school as an alternative to prosecution.

Schools decide whether they will adopt Suffolk County Council's Penalty Notice Code of Conduct. If the protocol is adopted by the school they can then refer any unauthorised pupil absence to the Senior Attendance Officer at Suffolk County Council. If the referral is appropriate, the Senior Attendance Officer will process the referral and issue a Penalty Notice.

When will a Penalty Notice be issued?

The Education Attendance Service aim to support schools/ Academies and parents/carers to improve pupil attendance but Suffolk County Council will issue a Penalty Notice once a referral from a school has been received when:

A school penalty notice may be issued to any parent of a child for

- Unauthorised leave of absence including holidays in term time
- Parentally condoned absence where the parent is deemed capable but unwilling to address attendance problems (for example, a failure to engage with support measures)
- A parent continually failing to provide an explanation for a pupils absence in accordance with the schools procedures
- The pupil having a record of unauthorised absences which appear to have been avoidable
- A pattern of poor attendance that develops during a pupils final year of compulsory education
- Persistent late arrival after the school register has closed

This is not an exhaustive list and each case will be considered individually

Suffolk County Council will issue each parent/carer with a Penalty Notice fine for each child who has unauthorised absence.

There is No Statutory Right of Appeal once a notice has been issued.

There are limited circumstances in which the fine may be withdrawn.

How do I pay and what happens if I do not pay?

Details of payment arrangements will be included on the Penalty Notice.

- The penalty is £60 per parent per child if paid within 21 days, increasing to £120 between 21 and 28 days. The penalty must be paid in full and not by instalments.
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- If a penalty notice remains unpaid the local authority must either proceed to prosecute for the offence to which the penalty notice relates which may lead to a fine of up to £1000 or withdraw the penalty notice.
- After payment of a penalty notice has been made parents and carers will no longer be liable for their child's absence from school during the period to which the notice relates.
- If your child has further periods of unauthorised absence from school, the local authority may decide to take further action.
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For further information about the Penalty Notice Code of Conduct or your child's attendance please contact your child's school in the first instance.

If you require an interpreting service for this leaflet, Suffolk County Council can support this, please contact us on the following number: