

# Brabourne Church of England Primary School

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## Unauthorised Absence

Dear Parents,

As most of you will know from friends and the media in general, most schools have chosen to fine parents who take their children out of school for holidays or for other unauthorised absences. As governors, we made a decision a few years ago not to fine. This was not because we support such absences but because we believed that most Brabourne parents respected the need for continuity through term time and the general attendance levels at Brabourne were excellent. We believed that introducing fines would actually make it more acceptable to pull children out of school during term time for holidays because parents would just factor that into the cost of a holiday – and it would still come out as a lot cheaper than going in peak time!

Unfortunately, we have noticed a gradual decline in attendance over the last few years – and in particular the level of unauthorised absence is increasing to the point where we can no longer be regarded as having a good level of attendance. From a level of 0.3% in 2012/2013, unauthorised absence has increased almost four fold to 1.1% in the last school year. Authorised absences (the vast majority due to illness) has also increased which has contributed to a total level of nearly 4% absence over the last year. 45 pupils in total have taken unauthorised absence at some point during the year – and these averaged four days each. So nearly half the school has been off for the best part of a week on average and on the worst day 10% of the school's pupils were away (not including any absence due to illness).

Individually you may look at your own child and be sure that they can make it up later and that the benefits of the holiday for them outweigh whatever they would be doing in school. Unfortunately, the impact on teachers is much higher because it's up to them to remember which child was off on which day, which material needs to be covered again – and while they're making sure that no child has been forgotten, they also have to make sure that the other children are not having to cover the same old ground again. Teachers have to do this anyway when children are sick but if you then add in holidays too, it becomes very disruptive for the class as a whole and is completely avoidable.

In addition, your child gets a message that saving money on a holiday is more important than their schooling. We know that there have also been cases when the school has been informed that a child is sick when they are, in fact, on holiday. This puts your child in a difficult position and is not fair on them because they're normally desperate to tell everybody about their trip (which they often do anyway!).

This has clearly resulted in discussions at governing board level. We have discussed, again, the option of introducing a fine system to try and deter term time absence. However, we would first like to appeal to you all as parents to try and plan your holidays differently. We know it's a very attractive option to take your child out of school at a cheaper time, at a time that fits other family members or at a time that fits your work patterns but we would urge you to try every other option first. Your child has three months of the year as planned holiday – this is enough to overlap holidays with work or other schools and to find some cheap holiday options. We would love to avoid introducing a fining system which is the only alternative we have to address this issue.

Many thanks for reading and even greater thanks for helping to improve attendance.

Kind Regards,

Hester Fenwick (Chair of Governors – for new parents, welcome, sorry this is the first you're heard from me but looking forward to saying hi)