

Appendix to Great Wood School's Attendance Policy – Absence recorded as Exceptional

Since 2003 schools have been encouraged by the Department for Education to use fixed penalty notices to manage attendance. The current headteacher, receiving requests for absence and realising that decisions to authorise or not could lead to a financial consequence for parents, asked school governors to develop rules to enable decisions to be predictable and impartial.

In 2006 Great Wood Governors concluded that it was reasonable that a family take a term time holiday, as long as it didn't happen frequently. They determined that over a two-year period, one absence of up to 5 school days for a family holiday was acceptable. Rules were developed so that parents would be able to confidently predict whether a request for absence would be authorised; the frequency of the absence (which could be objectively quantified) was the focus rather than the reason (which could lead to a subjective decision.) The clear rules enabled decisions by the headteacher to be consistent – and when there was a financial consequence, it was predictable.

In 2024, due to national concerns about school attendance, post pandemic, the DfE made changes to national attendance policies, removing the attendance code 'absent due to authorised term time holiday,' and instructing schools not to authorise absence for family holidays. Great Wood's Governors once again discussed the school's response: to maintain its rules or to follow the DfE's zero-tolerance approach. Governors considered that a hard-line approach could lead to greater dishonesty about term time holidays, creating challenging conflict – and as the school's rules were well-established, fundamentally promoted good attendance and had resulted in better than the national average attendance, over many years, governors determined to keep the rules.

A term time absence for a family event will be authorised as 'exceptional' when:

- a child's records show that there has not been an absence for a family event during the current school year or the previous school year, ONE absence of up to 5 days will be authorised.
- The reason for the absence being in term time is not considered (work schedule restraints, challenging family circumstances, wedding etc)

The authorisation of absence is not a 'right'. An absence will not be authorised:

- during statutory assessment days
- during September when children are settling into a new year group.
- when there is an attendance concern.

Parents receive an attendance record print out with the Annual Report and should be aware of absences in the current year so should be able to work out whether or not a planned absence will be authorised when submitting an absence request form. Separated parents are expected to coordinate and communicate about requests for absence.

The conditions for a fixed penalty notice (or a fine) are laid out comprehensively in the Attendance Policy: fundamentally, if a child has 10 unauthorised absence marks (2 marks per day) over a rolling ten-week period, both parents will be issued a fixed penalty notice.

- Arriving after 9:15am is a U mark which equates as unauthorised absence.
- School does not receive any money – the fines go towards the court's administration costs.

Example 1.

Mr Smith requests John has 3 days authorised absence in December 2026. The school office checks records and no absence for family event took place in school year 25/26 or so far in 26/27. The head authorises the absence.

Example 2

Mrs Friend requests Freddie has 5 days authorised absence in June 2027. The school office checks records and sees Freddie was absent on the last day of term in December 2025 to go to Lapland – evidence of request. The absence is not authorised. Mr and Mrs Friend are both advised that if Freddie is absent for 5 days in June 2027 both will receive a fixed penalty notice for his absence.

Example 3

Mrs Happy requests Holly has 3 days authorised absence in June 2027. The school office checks records and sees Holly was absent on the last day of term in December 2025 to go to Lapland (with Freddie)- evidence of request. The absence is not authorised. No action is taken by the school.

Example 4

Mrs Content requests Charlie has 5 days authorised absence in June 2027. The school office checks records and sees that Charlie was absent on the last day of term in December 2025. There was no request and Mrs Content had left a message on school answer phone that Charlie was sick. As Freddie talked in class about his trip to Lapland and what Charlie had said to Santa and a staff member recalled seeing a photo of Charlie with Santa on social media, School had asked Mrs Content if she had made an error. She replied that they did go to Lapland but it was in the holiday. School asked for flight details to evidence the trip was during the school holiday but there was no reply. School changed the absence record for the last day of December 2025 from illness to unauthorised absence. The absence for the 5 days in June 27 is not authorised and Mr and Mrs Content are advised that if Charlie is absent for 5 days, both will receive a fixed penalty notice.

Example 5

Mr Right requests Robyn and Rodney have 3 days authorised absence in January 2027. The school office checks records and sees that both children were absent for a 5-day holiday requested by Mrs Right in June 26, which was authorised. Mr and Mrs Right are separated. Mr Right had received the attendance record with the annual report. The absence of 3 days in January 27 is not authorised. No action is taken.

Example 6

Mr Green requests Gail and Gordon have 5 days authorised absence in January 2027. The school office checks records and sees that both children were absent for a 3-day holiday in June 26, requested by Mrs Green which was authorised. Mr and Mrs Green are separated. The absence of 5 days in January 27 is not authorised and school informs both Mr and Mrs Green that if the children are absent for 5 days in January 27 that each will receive a fixed penalty notice for both children.

Great Wood School prefers that pupils attend school during term time and family holidays are taken during the 12 weeks of school holidays.