

Gillingham Area School Partnership

Information for all parents and carers on the law and process

regarding school attendance

You may be aware that, over the past couple of years, the schools in the local area have been working together more closely as the Gillingham Area School Partnership. We are committed to ensuring the best for all our learners and we know that joint working will improve support to children and families.

There is a direct relationship between excellent school attendance and good progress and achievement at school. The attendance of children and young people at school is of vital importance. If children and young people do not attend school regularly their acquisition of skills and knowledge is interrupted and their educational achievements are potentially damaged. All children have a fundamental right to education in order to achieve their maximum potential. We all want the very best for the children in our care and we would appreciate your support in ensuring that your child misses as little learning time as possible.

There have been lots of stories in the media about what is or is not acceptable regarding absence from school and what might happen to parents in the event of poor attendance for their child/ren. This can be confusing, or even alarming, for parents and we want to provide you with clarity and consistency regarding the issues and processes.

All schools are working hard to promote good attendance, under the direction of Dorset County Council and within the legal frameworks. The Gillingham Area School Partnership has agreed a common system and policy on attendance with particular detail regarding how we will work with families when attendance drops below an acceptable level. The department for Education identifies attendance below 90% as 'persistent absenteeism'. Dorset County Council identify attendance of 95% and above as good attendance. The Gillingham Area School Partnership expect 100% attendance at school, with authorised absences only being granted in exceptional circumstances however Dorset County Council anticipates that it will be extremely rare for a leave of absence (a holiday) in term time to be authorised. If a parent/carer takes a child on holiday during term time or fails to ensure their child is receiving suitable full time education then they are committing an offence and may be issued with a Penalty Notice or prosecuted under the Education Act 1996, Section 444(1). 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.

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.

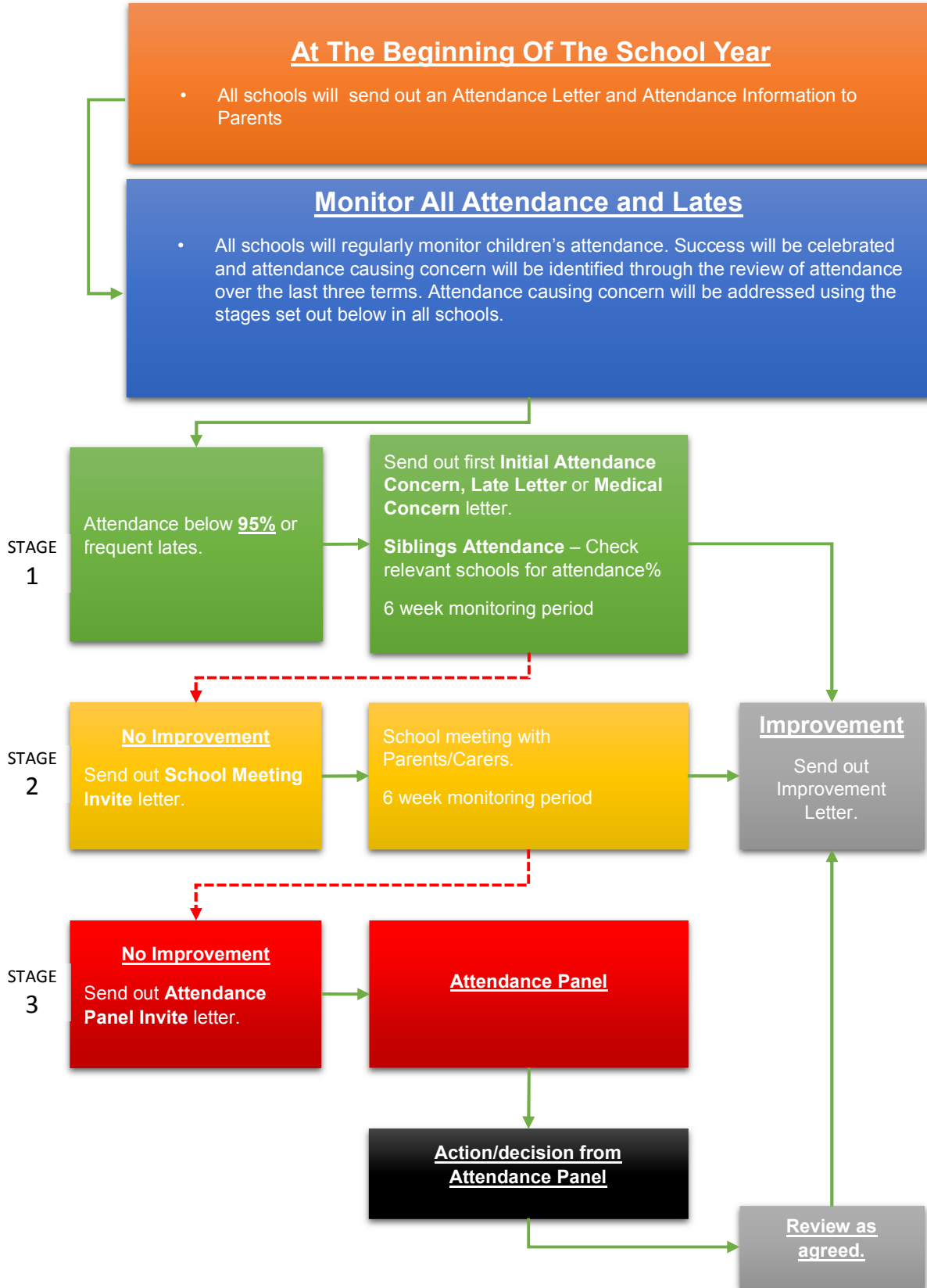
Please see the attached flowchart which explains the process all schools will follow as well as Appendix B from Dorset County Council's School Attendance Policy and Guidance September 2017 which details exactly the level of absence that would result in a Penalty Notice.

Kind regards,

Mrs Bullmore	Mrs Field	Mr Nicholson	Miss Palmer	Mrs Preston	Mr Salisbury	Mrs Trickey	Mrs Weaver
St Mary the Virgin Primary	St Gregory's	Gillingham School	Wyke Primary	Gillingham Primary	St George's	Milton Primary	Stower Provost Primary

Gillingham Area School Partnership Attendance Process

The Gillingham Area School Partnership are committed to ensuring the best for all our learners and are working together to support children and families. All schools are working hard to promote good attendance and have common systems in place to work with families when attendance drops below an acceptable level. The flow chart below details the agreed protocol for our group of schools.



Appendix B

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 (Unauthorised leave of absence)

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.