

21 April 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

### **Unauthorised leave during term time**

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 an 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 1st April 2023.

I wish to make it very clear that this is a decision that has been made by Bradford Council as a response to the very high rates of unauthorised absences across the city with almost 150,000 school days lost to unauthorised absence in 2021/22. 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. By supporting the decision of the council, it is important you are made 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.

Kind Regards.

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