



# Thomas Russell Infants' School

*'Our children blossom through nurture & challenge'*

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6 March 2015

Dear parents and carers

## **IMPORTANT UPDATE ON UNAUTHORISED TERM-TIME ABSENCE**

As you will be aware, the Department for Education made changes to the law regarding parents taking their children out of school during term time back in September 2013. These stated that headteachers no longer had the authority to authorise absences unless for exceptional circumstances.

Since that time, we have followed Staffordshire's guidelines on these regulations, but as of 23 February 2015 the local authority has tightened its rules and has issued new guidance for headteachers. Briefly, the main changes are:

- Removing the requirement for attendance to be below 87% before a Penalty Notice can be issued
- Clarifying that a parent can now receive more than one Penalty Notice per academic year
- Confirming that ten sessions (equivalent of five full school days) of unauthorised absence do not have to be consecutive
- Confirming that the period for calculating the ten sessions will be based on the previous three school terms.

The County Council's stance is that the last year has been a 'period of grace', giving families a chance to get used to the new regulations. However, all parents should now be fully aware that absence during term time is not permitted unless for an approved reason (see our Attendance Policy, available through the 'Policy' section of the school website) and that they risk a fine if they go ahead without permission.

**The main difference is that we are now being clearly directed to instigate Penalty Notices consistently and whenever appropriate.** A Penalty Notice can be requested by school after ten unauthorised sessions – ie five days. As stated above, the sessions don't have to be consecutive and can have occurred at any time over the previous three terms.

**Therefore, with immediate effect, if any pupil accrues more than ten sessions (equivalent of five days) of unauthorised absence, we will be able to request a Penalty Notice, which carries a fine of £60 per child per parent (ie if two siblings are absent, each parent will be fined £120).**

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We have always wanted to be as clear and fair as possible about the enforcement of these regulations. Requests for absence from school should still be applied for in the same way – by asking for a form from the school office, completing and returning it – and we will continue to assess each request on a case-by-case basis. Permission for absence during term time will be denied unless we consider the circumstances to be exceptional, as indicated by County guidelines.

The aim of these rules is to emphasise the importance of consistent, regular school attendance and the potential harm done by taking children out school, even if it is “only for a few days”.

Both Thomas Russell Infants and Thomas Russell Juniors will be taking the same approach to the new amendments and will carry on liaising to ensure consistent decisions are reached.

For greater detail on authorised and unauthorised absence and Penalty Notices, please see our Attendance Policy, which is in the Policy section of our website. If you have any specific questions, please speak to one of the Co-Heads.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Farmer & Mrs Burton  
Co-Head teachers

