

Penalty Notices – Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

What is a Penalty Notice (PN)?

A Penalty Notice is a fine given to parents/carers who have taken their children out of school for too many days, without the head teacher's permission.

Who is responsible for the decision to issue a PN?

There are laws which govern the issue of PNs and each Local Authority must have a PN policy and procedures to make sure they are used fairly. Head teachers decide which parents to refer to the LA and a senior officer in the LA then checks all the details in the referrals received to make sure the PN is appropriate.

If a child's poor attendance has already been referred to Early help, can a referral also be made for a PN?

No. School staff should decide if they think a family need help and support to improve school attendance; if so they should refer to Early Help and it would not be appropriate to then refer for a PN.

Do PNs improve a child's school attendance?

Each case will be different but some research carried out by the LA team who issues PNs found that in *every* case of a random sample undertaken, the child's attendance had improved after the PN had been served. The analysis of the samples also showed that PN largely deterred repeat unauthorised leave in term time.

How many schools across the 3 boroughs use the initiative?

A total of 61 schools used the PN initiative during 2015/16 academic year.

Once a school completes a referral what follow up information will they receive?

The school can expect to receive notification of the decision made on their referral. If a PN was issued, they will be informed this is the case. If a Warning was issued, school would be sent a copy of the letter for attendance monitoring purposes.

Why are some families only issued with a warning?

In accordance with the Local Authority Code of Conduct and the information in the PN Handbook, where absence is sporadic rather than a 'chunk' of unauthorised leave, a Warning will normally be issued first and the pupil given a monitoring period to improve attendance drastically. Also, in order to ensure that the Local Authority is "able" to prosecute when necessary, a decision to issue a Warning rather than a PN may be arrived at even though it is obvious unauthorised leave had been taken.

What happens to the money raised from paid fines?

The Local Authority use the money to contribute to the cost of administering the process.

Can PN be paid in instalments?

No. PN can only be paid once.

What happens if parents do not pay a PN?

A PN is £60 if paid within 21 days but this goes up to £120 which must be paid within 7 days of the issue of the invoice. If this is not paid the LA can take legal action.

When does the payment period begin?

The PN payment period starts on the date on the invoice shown as Tax date. When a parent receives a PN letter, they are not able to make a payment until they have received the invoice which is sent separately. If a parent has not received a PN invoice 7 days after they received the PN letter, they should call the number on the letter to determine if their invoice has gone missing. If they fail to call and their invoice payment period expires, a full penalty charge will automatically be issued.

How do parents pay a PN?

There are different options to making a payment – pay by phone, at any bank, at a Post Office or online. The instruction for payment is provided on the back of the invoice

Where can I find more information about PNs?

You can access the ACE team web page using the link below where you will find the ACE Reference Manual

<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/children-and-education/schools/support/ace-team>