

Winlaton West Lane Community Primary School

Good Practice Guidance: Holidays in Term Time

*If children are taken away for a two week holiday every year and have an average number of days off for sickness and appointments, then by the time they leave at sixteen they will have missed a year of school
(Charlie Taylor, 2012:2-3)*

The rules on Holidays in Term Time have changed. Prior to September 2013 regulations allowed Head Teachers to grant leave of absence for the purpose of a family holiday during term time in 'special circumstances' of up to ten school days leave per year.

Amendments to the 2006 pupil registration regulations, which came into effect on the 1st of September 2013, have removed references to family holiday and extended leave, as well as to the statutory threshold of ten school days (authorised at the discretion of the Head Teacher). The amendment reads...

Head Teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Head Teachers should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted.

While leave of absence may be granted during term time, it is entirely at the Head Teacher's discretion and it is not a parental right.

Exceptional Circumstances

The government and schools realise that is more expensive to go on holiday during the school holiday period than at other times of the year. However, it is the view of the DfE that a child(ren) should be in school for the 39 weeks of the academic year and that holidays in term time in whatever form are not considered to be 'exceptional' circumstances. Cheap holidays are not a good enough reason for taking a child or young person out of school for two weeks or more.

Absence from school under exceptional circumstances is slightly different from taking a holiday in term time. In deciding whether or not to grant a leave of absence for 'exceptional circumstances' Head Teachers may want to consider the following:

- What is the normal pattern of attendance for the child(ren) who is asking for a leave of absence?
- What is 'exceptional' for one family might be the norm for another family.
- Examples of 'exceptional circumstances' might include:
 - A special one-off family event (30th wedding anniversary of grandparents; parents wedding) - but one that doesn't happen on an annual basis
 - A funeral which requires the family to travel some distance etc
 - The receipt of a special award which means the family need to travel some distance and stay overnight.
 - A parent who has the potential for a new job and wants to take their family with them to see if they like the area.
 - A parent who is in the Armed Forces might be considered under 'exceptional' circumstances however parents who have set holidays due to their work patterns are not considered to be 'exceptional' circumstances.

If the request for a leave of absence is refused by the Head Teacher but the parent takes their child away, the absence will be marked as **unauthorised and the Head Teacher may refer the matter on to the local authority. The parent is then at risk of receiving a warning (in the first instance) or a £60.00 fixed penalty notice.**

Academic attainment and potential

There is a clear link between poor attendance at school and lower academic achievement. Of pupils that have 95% attendance, 73% achieve five or more GCSE's at grades A* to C, while those who miss more than 50% of school only 3% manage to achieve five or more GCSE's at A* to C including English and Maths.

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Evidence shows that children with poor attendance are less likely to achieve academically and they are more likely to become NEET (not in education, employment or training) after leaving school.

Previous attendance and patterns of attendance

Charlie Taylor's review has identified that patterns of attendance are established much earlier in their school career. According to Charlie Taylor these children are more likely to come from families who do not value education and where parents often missed school themselves. Evidence shows that children who miss significant amounts of their education in primary school are more likely to truant later on.

As children go through the education system the number of children who are persistently absent grows and by the time they reach their mid-teens it becomes more difficult for parents and schools to get young people to attend. The majority of children whose parents are taken to court for poor attendance are in Years 10 and 11, but by this time it is often too late for prosecution to solve attendance problems.

It is the local authority's recommendation (in line with Charlie Taylor's report) and current government guidelines that holiday's in term time should not be granted and that any leave of absence from school should be the exception rather than the rule.

However, the local authority recognises that ultimately it is the Head Teacher's decision as to whether or not they choose to authorise leave of absence. If they chose to authorise an absence they may want to consider the following information about each individual child or young person:

- Academic attainment
- Academic potential
- Previous attendance
- Patterns of attendance
- Previous holidays already taken

The following practical guidelines are also suggested for considering applications for leave of absence during term time:

- The school should invite parents in to discuss the reasons for the leave of absence application, especially when the reasons are unclear.
- The school should reply to all applications in writing stating whether or not the absence has been agreed.
- If leave is not granted the reason for not authorising a request must be clearly stated.
- If leave is granted, the length of authorised absence must be clearly stated; including the date the child is expected back in school and the possible consequences if the child fails to return on that date.

Authorised vs. unauthorised absence

As with any authorised absence, in choosing to authorise the leave of absence in term time, the school are in effect agreeing to the absence. This means that the local authority is unable to initiate formal non-attendance procedures if the child or young person's attendance continues to deteriorate.

By not authorising the holiday or leave of absence, the school can work with the local authority towards issuing a penalty notice to the parent (s) for taking their child on a holiday during term time.

Penalty Notice for Holidays in Term Time: Referral to EWS/Non Attendance Panel

The Non-Attendance Panel will consider any requests from a school to issue a Penalty Notice to parents when a Head Teacher has refused to authorise the absence and the parent willfully removes a child from school for a holiday.

It is vital that schools ensure parents are fully aware of the possibility of a Penalty Notice being issued and that failure to pay could lead to prosecution in Magistrates Court. This information should be included in school literature, such as school prospectus, home school agreements, holiday request forms, newsletters, attendance and behaviour policies and web site.

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The decision whether to authorise a holiday or not should be justifiable and any reasons for rejection recorded and conveyed to the parents in writing. A letter refusing a request should explain the reasons the request is not deemed to be a special circumstance and that a Penalty Notice may be issued if the holiday is taken without permission.

A referral for a Penalty Notice can be made when the following conditions have been met:-

- Where a family has taken leave without permission and the school is satisfied that the parent knew the procedures
- Where a leave of absence has been agreed and the pupil returns to school after the agreed time without explanation
- Where no application for leave has been made

This procedure will be reviewed at least every two years.

Signed: *Angela H. Exley*
Head Teacher

Date: September 2014

