

The **Department for Education** states; every day at school counts enormously and so does every consecutive day attended by pupils. Pupils need to be able to absorb new facts and knowledge, acquire new skills and consolidate before building further and progressing. They simply cannot do so if their structured school terms are disrupted by too many preventable absences.

Absence during Term Time

Parents do not have a legal right to take children out of school. Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Requests for Leave of Absence

A request for a leave of absence must only be considered if;

- The parent the child normally lives with applies in advance for the absence; and
- There are exceptional circumstances for the absence

If the parent with whom the child normally lives does not apply for the absence this would be considered as an unauthorised absence and this parent would be liable to the issue of a Penalty Notice. Absence cannot be authorised if anybody else applies for the holiday.

Exceptional Circumstances

Dictionary definition of **exceptional**

Adjective

- unusual; not typical;
- forming an exception or rare instance; unusual; extraordinary.

What is unauthorised absence?

- A parent has made a request to a school for a absence in term time and this has not been agreed by the school;
- A parent has not applied for an absence in advance (the regulations do not allow retrospective approval),

In what circumstances could an absence be authorised?

Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are 'exceptional circumstances'.

Head teachers should examine each case on its merits before making a decision and should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted

A request for leave of absence could be considered exceptional in the following circumstance;

- For service personnel and other employees who are prevented from taking leave of absence outside term time at any point in the academic year;
- The terminal illness or bereavement of a parent or sibling if the absence is concurrent.

The overriding principle should be that the absence ought not to be authorised if it will have a detrimental effect on the child's education.

Penalty Notices for unauthorised absence

If the absence has not been authorised by the school and an absence occurs, where the child's total unauthorised absences amounts to 10 or more sessions (5 school days), continuous or aggregated within the previous six months within the current academic year (including the most recent unauthorised absence), schools are expected to notify the Education Welfare Service.

Who receives a Penalty Notice?

A Penalty Notice will be issued to each parent for each child named on the notification. In all cases this will be parent with whom the child lives. For absent parents, step-parents or partners it may be helpful to consider the following:

- With whom the child was with at the time of the absence?
- Was the absent parent aware of the absence?
- Has the school sent a letter of refusal to all concerned?
- Does the absent parent have regular contact or live nearby?

Any other absence?

There may be other circumstances when a parent may request an absence for their child, which may involve some time away from home. Examples of these include:

- The wedding of a family member
- Family bereavement
- Prison visits

Schools should consider each request individually taking the following into account:

- The nature of the event for which leave is sought;
- Its frequency (is it a one-off or likely to become a regular occurrence?);
- Whether the parent has given advance notice; and
- The pupil's overall attendance

Consideration should also be given to whether the family will need to travel during the absence.

In some cultures specific religious occasions are very important (for example a child's first communion) and the family may want to return to their country of origin to celebrate this with family. Again, consideration should be given as to whether or not the absence is authorised due to 'exceptional circumstances'.

Medical treatment abroad

Some families return to their country of origin for medical or dental treatment for a number of reasons. In most cases doctors will provide a letter stating that a child has an appointment or is undergoing medical treatment. Consideration should be given to how long it would be reasonable to allow for travel.

All Wiltshire Schools are expected to follow the Wiltshire Code of Conduct and send notification to the Penalty Notice Officer after a period of unauthorised leave of absence.

For further advice please contact the Penalty Notice Officer:
Tel: 01722 438123 Email: PNLO@wiltshire.gov.uk

LEAVE OF ABSENCE DURING TERM TIME

s444A and s444B Education Act 1996 & The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006

Guidance for Schools

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