

Schools will stress to parents the likely educational impact upon their child if extended leave is taken during term-time. Schools will also seek to explain what work the child will miss at school, how this may be addressed on return and how the parents can help the child. Schools may also consider giving the child work to do while he or she is away.

Avoiding term-time holidays

Schools recognise that parents' circumstances (financial circumstances, working commitments, etc) vary enormously, but schools are nonetheless required to ensure that children only miss school if it is absolutely unavoidable. Schools will wish to reduce the amount of time lost to term-time holidays in order to achieve their attendance targets (targets which they are legally required to set). Regardless of targets, however, schools will wish to reduce the amount of time lost to learning because they believe that a child's absence during term-time can seriously disrupt his or her continuity of learning. When a child is absent from school he or she misses not only the teaching provided on the days when he or she is away, but is also less prepared for the lessons building on that after his or her return. There is a consequent risk of underachievement which schools and parents will both wish to avoid.

Further information on term-time holidays and other issues relating to school attendance or Education Welfare can be obtained from your local school/college.

FAMILY HOLIDAYS DURING TERM-TIME AND EXTENDED VISITS OVERSEAS

Information for Parents/Carers

January 2008

If you would like a copy of this leaflet on audio cassette or in Braille, large print or other languages please contact your local Education Welfare Officer.

Introduction

Children of school-age who are registered at a school must, by law, attend that school regularly. Regular attendance is important, not just because the law requires it but because it is the best way of ensuring that a child makes the most of the educational opportunities which are available to him or her. There may be occasions when a child has to miss school - for example, if he or she is unwell. Any other absences should be kept to an absolute minimum. In particular, parents should avoid taking their children out of school during term-time in order to go on holiday.

What the law says

The regulations make it clear that parents do not have any right or entitlement to take a child out of school for the purposes of a term-time holiday. The regulations do state that headteachers may, in certain circumstances, grant up to 10 school-days leave in a school year for the purposes of an annual family holiday but parents should not expect such leave to be granted as of right. Indeed, it is likely that in most cases headteachers will refuse to authorise leave.

The Government's own guidance on the issue of term-time holidays states: 'Parents should not normally take pupils on holiday in term'.

Parents should be aware that if leave is granted it will be for the purposes of an annual family holiday – that is, a single period of absence which occurs once in the school year. An annual family holiday is not a series of long weekends nor several two or three day breaks.

How schools deal with requests for term-time holidays

All schools should have a policy about term-time holidays. This policy, stated either in the school brochure or in the school's attendance policy, will discourage parents from arranging family holidays during term-time and will, as a rule, state that leave for term time holidays will not be granted unless there are exceptional circumstances which might justify it.

What are "exceptional circumstances"?

It is the decision of the headteacher as to what might constitute exceptional circumstances and each request for term-time leave will be considered on an individual basis. A headteacher will not generally accept as an exceptional circumstance the fact that a holiday is cheaper during term-time. An exceptional circumstance is much more likely to be a one-off, unique situation eg a parent, grandparent or other close relative is seriously ill and the holiday proposed is likely to be the last such holiday; or there may have been a significant trauma in the family recently and the headteacher might consider that an immediate holiday might enable the child concerned to better deal with the situation; or the holiday might be a unique, one-off never-to-be-repeated occasion which can only take place at the time requested.

The headteacher will also look very carefully at the child's previous attendance record and should he or she have any concerns, for example should the child's average attendance be below 95%, it

is highly unlikely that the headteacher will agree to authorise any further absence.

Issues parents need to be aware of

Should a school not agree to grant leave and the parents take their child on holiday regardless then this will be counted as unauthorised absence - this is the same as 'truancy'. (Schools are now legally required to record as a specific category all absences which accrue as a consequence of family holidays which have been taken without authorisation.) Should leave be granted but the child remain absent for longer than agreed then this extra time will be recorded as unauthorised absence. Should a child fail to return to school within 10 school days of the agreed return date and there is no contact from the parents the school may remove the child's name from the school roll. The school may also inform its Education Welfare Officer. In these circumstances the parents would be responsible for ensuring that their child was registered at and attended another school. (In such circumstances parents would not be entitled to receive any assistance with regard to transport.)

Extended visits overseas

Occasionally holidays of more than 10 days to visit family overseas may be unavoidable. In such circumstances schools will recognise the importance and significance such visits often have and will wish to ensure that a positive discussion with the parents takes place beforehand.