

Whitehaven Cluster – Attendance Cluster Agreement

Guidance on authorised term-time pupil absence

The Education (pupil registration) (England) (amendment) Regulations 2013 [aka, the Regulations] which came into force on 1 September 2013, made it clear that head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless 'exceptional circumstances' prevail.

The regulations also state that head teachers should determine the number of school days a pupil can be away from school if they grant a leave request because of 'exceptional circumstances'.

Whitehaven Cluster Primary Headteachers have worked together to agree some guiding principles for headteachers to consider when families request absence during term-time.

The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional circumstances' are that they are 'rare, significant, unavoidable and short'.

Guiding principles

1. Term times are for education. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. Head teachers will rightly prioritise attendance. The default school policy should be that absences will not be granted during term time apart from in 'exceptional circumstances'.
2. The decision to authorise a pupil's absence is wholly at the head teacher's discretion based on their assessment and merits of each request.
3. If an event can be reasonably scheduled outside of term time, then it would not be normal to authorise absence for such an event – holidays are, therefore, not considered 'exceptional circumstances'.
4. Absences to visit seriously-ill relatives or for bereavement of a close family member are usually considered to amount to 'exceptional circumstances', but for the funeral service and minimal travelling time only, not for extended leave.
5. Absences for important religious observances are often considered, but only for the ceremony and travelling time, not for extended leave. This is intended for one-off situations rather than regular or recurring events
6. Schools may wish to take the needs of the families of service personnel into account if they are returning from long operational tours that prevent contact during scheduled holiday time.
7. Whilst as a school we must make reasonable adjustments for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities in school time. Regarding attendance, we work closely with our colleagues from our local special schools. In line with their guidance, we would not consider requests that are based on holidays during quieter times.
8. Families may need time together to recover from a trauma or crisis.
9. It is acceptable to take a pupil's record of attendance into account when making absence-related decisions
10. It is important to note that head teachers can determine the length of the authorised absence as well as whether an absence is authorised.
11. Leave may only be granted where proper procedures have been followed and the permission given.
12. Tickets and/or other travel arrangements should not be booked prior to discussion with and agreement of the school.
13. Parents should not confuse telling the school with having permission.
14. Whether alternative care arrangements have been considered by the parent to limit the time away from school.
15. The impact on any interventions, assessments or referrals being undertaken with the child or family, for example, family support, social care assessments, CAMHS, SEN.
16. The potential impact that the absence will have on the child.