**Clegheads 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.’

Cleator Moor and Egremont Area Heads (Clegheads) Cluster of 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 time is 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. Head Teacher’s Discretion** –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. **Attendance Record Consideration** – A child’s attendance history is a factor in absence decisions. Requests will not be approved if the student’s attendance is already below 90% or if the requested absence would cause it to fall below this threshold.

4. **Proper Procedures Must Be Followed** – Leave will only be granted if the correct request process has been completed and permission has been explicitly given. Tickets and/or other travel arrangements should not be booked prior to discussion with and agreement of the school. Parents should not confuse telling the school with having permission.

**5. Length of Absence** - It is important to note that head teachers can determine the length of the authorised absence as well as whether an absence is authorised.

**6.** **Holidays Are Not Exceptional Circumstances -** 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.’

**7.** **Bereavement and Serious Illness** – Absences to visit a seriously ill close relative or attend a funeral are generally considered **exceptional circumstances**, but approval is usually limited to the service and necessary travel time, not an extended period.

**8.**  **Religious Observances** – Absences for significant religious observances may be approved, but only for the ceremony itself and reasonable travel time. This applies to one-off events rather than recurring commitments.

**9**. **Families of Service Personnel** – Schools may consider the needs of military families returning from extended deployments that prevent contact during standard school holidays.

**10**. **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)** –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.

**11**. **Competitive Sport** – Absences for participation in recognised competitive sporting events within the school day may be approved with evidence from the relevant club. However, these absences should be kept to a minimum, and where possible, clubs should schedule fixtures outside of school hours.

**12**. **Alternative Care Considerations** - Whether alternative care arrangements have been considered by the parent to limit the time away from school.

**13.**  **Impact on Support Services** – The effect of an absence on any ongoing interventions, assessments, or referrals (such as family support, social care, CAMHS, or SEND support) will be considered.

**14.** **Well-being and Progress** - The potential impact that the absence will have on the child.