

Oakfield Primary School Policy for Taking Holidays during Term Time

Introduction

Education is every child's right. To fail to ensure satisfactory or better attendance is a denial of a child's right to education, which is unacceptable. It is important that children attend school regularly if they are to benefit from the learning opportunities provided. When children are absent from school due to a holiday in term time, they miss out on important learning. Any absence from school will affect a child's continuity of education. They may miss crucial teaching of new concepts, skills or knowledge and therefore fall behind in their school work. It is difficult for these gaps in learning to be filled upon their return to school and the time that teachers have to help all the children in a class is reduced if they spend time helping a child to catch up after a holiday. Pupils who do not attend school regularly find it difficult to keep up with the work and have gaps in their learning. This could have a serious impact on opportunities later in life. Research proves that those children whose attendance is 95% or better at primary school achieve well at primary and later on at secondary school. Pupils who take 10 days' holiday during term time can achieve only a maximum attendance of 94.7%, even if there are no other absences through the year.

There are only 190 statutory school days in one year and 175 days (weekends and school holidays) available to use for holidays. Therefore every school day counts!

Legal Context

The Government is clear in its expectation that every child will attend school on a regular basis and its recommendation for all school pupils to achieve their potential is 95%+. The law states that it is the parent's responsibility to ensure their child attends school regularly. Under regulation 8 of the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995, it is only a **discretionary** power for leave to be granted by the headteacher for the purpose of an annual family holiday. This leave can only be authorised in **exceptional** circumstances. Guidance issued by the Department of Education 1994 clearly states: "No parents/carers can demand leave of absence for the purposes of a holiday as a right."

Requesting Leave of Absence to Take Holiday

The Governors of Oakfield Primary School expect that most family holidays will be taken during the advertised school holiday periods, except in **exceptional** circumstances. The Governors recognise and respect that the decision as to whether to authorise holiday or not will be solely at the headteacher's discretion and the Governors will support those decisions taken.

Where a parent feels their circumstances are exceptional, they should complete a holiday request form available from the office, and return at least 6 weeks before the holiday commences. Parents are strongly advised not to book any holiday until authorisation has been completed.

What may be classed as 'exceptional' circumstances?

These situations **may** be classed as exceptional:

- Where there is a significant, unpredictable event leading to the holiday having to be taken during term time
- Where a parent is restricted to specific holiday periods by their employer
- Where a family has experienced a significant event which necessitates time away together for a period of time
- A once in a lifetime opportunity

This list is not exhaustive or exclusive. The headteacher may ask parents to provide evidence or information in order to ascertain whether circumstances are exceptional or not. The following situations **will not** be deemed as exceptional:

- Cheaper flights or other holiday expenses
- Holiday at a time of the year 'because we've always gone in that week'
- Birthday celebrations or similar

Again, this list is not exhaustive.

How will a decision be made?

Each situation will be judged on its own merits. Parents should not assume that their holiday request will be granted simply because the request of someone they know has been granted. In deciding each situation, the headteacher will

- examine the holiday request form to determine whether the request is based on exceptional circumstances
- refer to the current and previous year's attendance – as a general rule, where either figure is below 95%, the request will be refused
- refer to the child's academic records – where there is concern about the academic progress, the holiday request will be refused
- consider whether holiday leave has already been taken within the current academic year
- consider whether the child is likely to miss significant school based events, such as KS2 Tests week (NB No holiday will be authorised during this week)
- consider any other significant evidence

The headteacher may also seek the advice from the Education Welfare Service.

Refusal to grant holiday leave

If holiday leave is refused, parents should not keep their child out of school. If parents do decide to continue with the holiday, the absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. Unauthorised absences are monitored carefully by the Education Welfare Service. The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 allows the Local Authority to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for poor school attendance. These notices require a penalty to be paid by parents/carers of pupils who have unauthorised absence from school. A Fixed Penalty Notice may be issued if parents take a family holiday during term time without the prior authorisation of the head teacher. Parents or carers who take their children on holiday in term time without school's permission or are late returning from an extended holiday, may receive a Penalty Notice fine of £50, which must be paid within 28 days. If payment is made after 28 days but within 42 days, the penalty is increased to £100. Where a fine remains unpaid after 42 days, the matter will be referred to the Borough Solicitor, who will consider instigating criminal proceedings.

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