

HOLIDAYS IN TERM TIME

“The amount of time off which children have for holidays in term time is a matter of considerable concern. In many schools it amounts to as many authorised absences as are accounted for by illness. There is a general assumption amongst many, school staff and parents that such requests must be allowed automatically. However this is not the case. It should be common practice in every school to spell out exactly on what grounds authorisation will be given or refused. All leave for holidays in term time is discretionary, not an automatic entitlement”.

The Head's Legal Guide to Attendance and Absence

All regulations which refer to pupil registration are mandatory in all sectors of education, including the independent sector. I am directed by the DCSF that any absence for longer than 10 days in term time **must be notified** to the local Education Welfare Officer of Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

It is clear from our registration information that the total amount of holiday leave granted is not causing undue concern at school. It is also obvious that some of the longer, far away trips of a lifetime can be of considerable educational advantage and help in the personal growth in confidence of an individual pupil.

However, there are specific problems arising at School and College because of holiday absence which I would like your help to address. The following bullet points highlight key areas of concern and set appropriate expectations for the future:

- Only schools can authorise absence. Parents do not have this legal authority.
- Requests for leave of absence are recommended to be for no more than 1 week of duration. When a child is absent from school s/he misses not only the teaching provided on the days when they are away, but are also less prepared for the lessons building on that after their return. There is a consequent risk of underachievement which schools and parents will both wish to avoid.
- Parents are expected to request for leave of absence in advance of any such holiday being booked. Heads are expected to respond promptly and within no longer than a week to any request for leave of absence. The head will 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 head will agree to authorise any further absence.
- Leave of absence will not normally be given for the first week or last week of any term. Much of our best academic and pastoral work involves gearing up our schools for the work of the term, setting clear expectations for our pupils and celebrating the success of their efforts in the company of their peers. In addition, many of our musical and dramatic productions take place at this time.
- The examination Years 10 to 13: almost all subjects now are examined by interim assessments in November, January, March or June, in addition to the Summer terminal examinations in Years 11, 12 & 13. Parents should consider carefully whether such absence can be caught up on, and discuss with the Head any holiday plans prior to booking. Absence is not normally allowed at all in Year 11.
- Leave of absence is unlikely to be approved for a pupil who already has had a significant amount of time (average attendance being below 95%) off school in the academic year for medical or other reasons. Under the age of 16, leave of absence may never be given to allow a pupil to work.
- Unauthorised absence is very rare here. However, such unauthorised absences are recorded formally and form part of the summative report and assessment of a pupil when they leave the School.

I hope that these expectations are helpful in framing our general views on the matter of holiday leave.

James Wilding
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