

HOLIDAYS IN TERM TIME

I quote from 'The Head's Legal Guide to Attendance and Absence, 1998',

"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".

Since David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, hardened up the 1995 Education Regulations, successive Secretaries of State have sought to reduce what is regarded as an unacceptable situation in the nation's schools. All such regulations which refer to pupil registration are mandatory in all sectors of education, including the independent sector. I am advised by the DfES that any absence for longer than 10 days in term time must be notified to the local Education Welfare officer.

I have no wish to become a 'killjoy' on this issue and it is clear from our current 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:

- 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.
- 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.
- Leave of absence will not usually be given to pupils in Year 11. In addition, where pupils are engaged in subjects which are predominantly coursework or project based, parents should consider carefully whether absence in Years 10, 12 or 13 can be caught up on. No holiday leave of absence will be given during the weeks of Public examination, such as Key Stage Tests (SATS), GCSE or A level. Module examinations exist currently in all Years from Year 10 upwards, and occur not just in May/June, but also in November, January and March.
- Requests for leave of absence are recommended to be for no more than 1 week of duration.
- Leave of absence is unlikely to be approved for a pupil who already has had a significant amount of time 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. In addition, it is a mandatory requirement of the school to contact the Local Education Welfare officer should they have concerns with regard to matters of attendance.

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

James Wilding
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