

## Requests for planned leave in exceptional circumstances

This guidance is to help schools manage requests from parents to take their child/ren out of school for a period of planned absence. It is also relevant for some instances of short notice day to day absences such as sudden bereavement.

The recent changes to pupil registration regulations have removed the discretionary 10 day period for headteachers to authorise a holiday in term time. They also state that **any** requests for leave during term-time can only be authorised in **exceptional circumstances**. In addition, the legislation is clear that requests for leave must be made to the school in advance of the leave being taken. It is also at the headteacher's discretion as to how long to authorise, if they decide to do so.

This guidance aims to help headteachers, governing bodies, and parents and carers understand what could be deemed as an exceptional circumstance, and ensure that, as far as possible, a clear and consistent approach to holidays in term-time is adopted in Leeds.

Many schools are already working collaboratively in existing partnerships – whether those be clusters, families of schools or areas – to agree their expectations and communicate those to parents.

Please find below some guidance which we hope will form the basis of your school's policy. You may have different views or feel that your own school's unique context has a dimension that isn't covered here – ultimately the headteacher and governing body are responsible for determining their own school's policy, so please adopt and/or adapt to suit.

The most important thing is to ensure fairness in the application of the policy. Our advice is to give the governing body, cluster or other partnership a moderation role in reviewing decisions that are challenged and ensuring that all parents and carers have received the same treatment. This is something that children's services need to have evidence of when applying sanctions such as issuing a penalty notice.

In considering any request for leave, the DfE advise that the following considerations are made to help inform decisions and policy. These should be communicated to parents and carers.

*Only exceptional circumstances warrant an authorised leave of absence. Schools should consider each request individually taking into account the circumstances, such as: the nature of the event for which leave is sought; the frequency of the request; whether the parent gave advance notice; and the pupil's attainment, attendance and ability to catch up on missed schooling.*

In Leeds, we also advise schools to consider the timing of the leave in the school calendar and that a planned request for leave during key transitions or exam periods should always be declined.

Other categories of absence that should **never** be considered exceptional are:

- Availability of cheaper holidays

- Birthdays
- Trips to see sporting or musical events
- Day trip
- Shopping or visit to hairdresser
- Over-sleeping
- Taking a long weekend
- Taking the rest of the day off before or after a dental or medical appointment
- Family celebration

It's important that schools can distinguish between parents who are only able to take holidays at fixed times and those that want to take advantage of a cheaper price.

### **Other considerations for exceptional leave**

Certain pupils/parents might make exceptional leave requests that would be authorised.

#### **Child entertainers**

We want to celebrate and showcase our talented children and young people, and many of them perform regularly on tv, film and stage. It is at school's discretion as to how much of this type of leave they are willing to authorise.

#### **Child athletes**

Many children in Leeds are also talented athletes, representing their city, region or country and we want those children to have the opportunity to compete at all levels. Schools should apply the usual considerations as specified above, but this could be deemed exceptional.

#### **Compassionate leave**

A bereavement, relationship breakdown or serious illness can be distressing to a young person and their family. The relationship that the school has with the family, and the child's level of attainment and attendance will help to determine how much time off headteachers would be prepared to authorise under these circumstances.

#### **Young carers**

Advice provided from Willow Young Carers states that one of their aims is that children do not miss school because of their caring responsibilities. Absences should only be authorised in a crisis such as when a parent is dying.

#### **Shift patterns**

Some industries and smaller businesses continue to utilise staggered, fixed leave periods for employees to avoid interfering with production etc. This is an issue for parents to raise with their employers, and for headteachers to consider on an individual basis.

#### **Armed forces children**

Consideration should be given to children whose parents are actively serving in the armed forces. We expect further guidance following an event later this term.