

Sawston Village College

Attendance Policy: term time holidays

Introduction

Absence during term-time as a result of term-time holidays interrupts continuity of teaching and learning, disrupts the educational progress of individual children and creates disruption in schools. Sawston Village College aims to minimise the amount of time lost to term-time holidays through a policy that discourages parents from arranging family holidays during term time and allows authorisation of absence for such holidays only in exceptional circumstances.

Legal and National Context

Under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 parents of a child of compulsory school age are under a legal duty to ensure the regular attendance of that child at the school where he/she is a registered pupil.

Regulation 8 of the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 gives schools discretionary power to grant leave – up to 10 days - for the purpose of an annual holiday during term time. This is not an entitlement, however, and parents cannot expect leave of absence for the purpose of a holiday to be granted as of right.

Nationally, Government policy is to encourage schools to minimise the amount of teaching and learning time lost as a result of term-time holidays; schools are now expected to adopt a much more challenging response to requests for leave for such holidays. Schools are also legally required to set targets to reduce overall absence – term-time holiday absence is a particular category of absence on which schools are now expected to focus.

Implementation

The college will:

- ensure that school policy with regard to term-time holidays is clearly stated in the school brochure and is regularly communicated to parents;
- remind parents of the importance of ensuring their children's regular, uninterrupted school attendance;
- actively discourage parents from arranging holidays during term-time;
- unequivocally remind parents that they do not have any right or entitlement to expect term-time leave to be granted and that all leave is granted at the discretion of the Principal (or those authorised to exercise discretion);
- state that leave for the purpose of a family holiday will only be granted in exceptional circumstances*;

- advise parents that if leave is taken without authorisation it will be recorded in the school attendance register as unauthorised absence, that is, as truancy, and that the matter may be referred to the school's Education Welfare Officer.

Guidance relating to 'exceptional circumstances'

Whilst the College will be required to make individual judgements as to what constitute "exceptional circumstances", such circumstances might include the following:

- a parent, grandparent or other close relative is seriously/terminally ill and the holiday proposed is likely to be the last such holiday;
- there has recently been a death or significant other trauma in the family and it is felt that an immediate holiday might help the child concerned better deal with the situation;
- the holiday is a unique, one-off, never-to-be-repeated occasion which can only take place at the time requested.

As a rule, the financial factor – when a parent claims that he/she is unable to afford to book a holiday during the school holidays when prices may be significantly higher than in term-time – should not be taken as constituting an "exceptional circumstance".

Similarly, the nature of the proposed holiday – whether, for example, it is a fortnight visiting Rome or a fortnight in a caravan at the seaside – should not be taken as constituting an "exceptional circumstance". However, pastoral leaders may wish to consult the Principal in particular circumstances.

Authorised leave will not be granted:

- if a child's attendance record over the previous 20 week period is less than 95% - even if any previous absence was due to unavoidable causes such as illness; or
- if the period of leave coincides with the start of term, or is near to, or coincides with, tests, SATs, exams or other significant events in the school calendar.

If leave is granted it should be for only one holiday in any one school year.

If a child's parents are separated and it is envisaged that each parent may make a separate request for term-time leave the school may wish to decline both requests in order to counter any potential suggestion of unequal/unfair treatment.

JCU/JCA
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