



Guiding Principles for Authorising **Term-Time Absence**

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PDET's Guiding Principles for Authorising Term-Time Absence

PDET believes it is valuable to have some guiding principles to back schools in their decisions to grant term-time pupil absences and to provide some consistency across our schools. These guiding principles have no statutory authority. Nevertheless, PDET schools have agreed to take these guiding principles into consideration as part of their overall approach to granting pupil term-time absence.

Background to Term-Time Pupil Absences

On matters relating to term-time pupil absences, the Education (pupil registration) (England) (amendment) Regulations 2013, which came into force on 1 September 2013, removed all references to 'family holidays' and 'extended leave' as well as the 'notional threshold of ten school days'.

The 2013 amendments made it clear that head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term-time unless 'exceptional circumstances' prevail. The regulations also state that head teachers should determine the number of school days a pupil can be away from school in the event that leave is granted for 'exceptional circumstances'. We believe the guidelines in this document are compatible with the amendments and help to clarify the meaning of 'exceptional circumstances'; they do not change it. It is generally held that head teachers can authorise a pupil's absence during term time but the merits of such a request are now required to be exceptional.

PDET's Approach to Managing Term-Time Pupil Absence Requests:

There continues to be some debate about what 'exceptional circumstances' mean when deciding whether to grant absence for pupils during term-time.

The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional circumstances' are that they are 'rare, significant, unavoidable and short'.

Guiding Principles for Term Time Absence:

- Term times are for education. This is the priority. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. Head teachers will rightly prioritise attendance. The default school policy should be that absences will not be granted during term-time and will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.
- The decision to authorise a pupil's absence is wholly at the head teacher's discretion based on their assessment and merits of each request.
- If an event can be reasonably scheduled outside of term-time then it would not be normal to authorise absence for such an event – holidays are therefore not considered 'exceptional circumstances'.

- **Absences to visit seriously-ill relatives or for a bereavement** of a close family member are usually considered to amount to 'exceptional circumstances', but for the funeral service only, not for extended leave. If distance warrants travelling time, one day either side of the funeral can be authorised.
- **Absences for a family wedding** for close family members are considered to amount to 'exceptional circumstances'. If distance warrants travelling time, one day either side of the wedding can be authorised. If the absence incorporates a family holiday the remaining days will not be authorised ie a maximum of three days will be authorised: the wedding day and travelling time either side of the wedding. Our definition of close family members is parents, grandparents, siblings and step-siblings.
- **Absences for important religious observances** are often taken into account but only for the ceremony (this may include travelling time), not for extended leave. This is intended for one-off situations rather than regular or recurring events.
- PDET schools can take the needs of the families of service personnel into account if they are returning from long operational tours that prevent contact during scheduled holiday time.
- PDET schools can take the needs of financial circumstances for the most disadvantaged families into account if financial circumstances prevent any form of scheduled holiday outside term time. (A pupil's record of attendance, however, must be taken into account in this circumstance.)
- PDET schools have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Families may need time together to recover from a trauma or a crisis.

It is acceptable to take a pupil's record of attendance into account when making absence-related decisions. It is important to note that head teachers can determine the length of the authorised absence as well as whether a particular absence is authorised.

Written with reference to 'NAHT Guidance on Authorised Term-Time Pupil Absence' 052017