



BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Pupil Leave of Absence - Managing 'exceptional circumstances'

Options for schools: circulated to all Headteacher Associations.

The DfE cites three examples of 'exceptional circumstances':

- ***Where a parent is a member of the armed forces and has restricted leave***
- ***Where a parent is a member of the Fire Service and has restricted shift patterns/leave.***
- ***When there has been a bereavement of a close family member.***

In reality there is of course an almost limitless array of scenarios in which parents will request leave of absence. The following examples cover many of the issues already raised by parents with schools both here and across Merseyside though it cannot be exhaustive. In each case I have passed a broad opinion on the decision that might be taken but must stress that schools have the direct knowledge of the pupil and their family circumstances that help them judge applications most appropriately and any final decision will always rest with the Head Teacher.

There are checks and balances that schools must also apply whenever any application for leave is received – these include :

- The age of the pupil
- The time of year / any assessment, exam or transition impact
- The nature and purpose of the trip
- The impact on the pupil's education
- The pupil's ability to catch up on work missed
- The pupil's educational needs
- The general welfare of the pupil
- The overall attendance pattern of the pupil
- History of previous trips taken in term time.

Set within this context examples of circumstances requiring decisions include –

- **Application to take pupil out of school for the purpose of a family holiday:**

Clearly this is not an exceptional circumstance and the application should be declined.

- **Application for leave of a pupil with parent (s) in the armed forces.**

This would be considered exceptional circumstances in line with the DfE example. Schools would still need to agree a timeframe and also have mind to the elements of the checklist above.

- **Application for leave of a pupil with a parent in the Fire Service:**

This may be considered as exceptional circumstances (in line with the DfE example) due to the Fire Service prescribing holidays annually to staff depending on their Watch. The school should however request evidence of shift / rota patterns that necessitate this specific period of leave.

- **When there has been a close family bereavement:**

This would be an exceptional circumstance in line with DfE guidance. The school would need to be sure of details and have a clear timeframe for the absence. In extreme examples, schools uncertain of a claimed bereavement have requested further proof.

- **To allow a pupil to return to their country of origin for family reasons:**

This could be exceptional circumstances. Pupils return periodically for many reasons both social and logistical, so the school would have to have sufficient evidence to support a request, be very clear on the timescales (and have set out possible consequences of failing to observe these) and previous leave patterns. Other related scenarios are cited below.

- ***To allow a pupil to return to their country of origin for religious or cultural reasons:***

This could be considered as an exceptional circumstance. Schools should check for dates of religious and cultural events and evidence may be requested such as a booking form or trip itinerary to support the request. This should be equally applied to a range of faiths and events based in the UK as well as abroad. Absences of this nature can be marked as 'R' which denotes an authorised absence rather than an agreed leave of absence.

Time needed to travel to, attend and return from such an event should be carefully agreed.

- **Application to take child out of school for the purpose of visiting a sick close relative abroad:**

This might be considered as exceptional circumstances but this would very much depend on the school knowledge of the family, the urgency of the situation and whether parents could provide supporting evidence if required.

- **Application to take child out of school for the purpose of a close relative's funeral abroad:**

Provided there is sufficient evidence this could be considered exceptional. The school would need to be sure of the family connection and also be very clear on the time needed to travel to, participate and return.

- **Unavoidable circumstances e.g. the parent/carer has inflexible leave allocation and this has been confirmed by the employer. This would be in addition to the Services/Fire Brigade options cited above.**

This is problematic but would not count as 'exceptional' as it falls outside the DfE parameters. Schools would have to take the checklist into account and also be sure parents were not exploiting complicit employers to secure leave. This could generally develop into the thin edge of a substantial wedge.

- **To take a pupil out of school for the purpose of a family holiday when family have undergone a difficult period/transition in recent months:**

This could be considered exceptional circumstances if the school knowledge of the family clearly supports this. Care would however have to be taken that school was not left open to allegations of inconsistency.

- **To take a pupil out of school in term time due to pupil's on-going health/medical needs or the need for specialist accommodation:**

This could be exceptional circumstances provided the school has sufficient knowledge of the circumstances or can gather such evidence.

- **Application by parent/carer to take a pupil looked after by a Local Authority out of school for the purpose of a family holiday:**

This would not be exceptional and any such application would be referred immediately to the allocated social worker.

- **Application to take a pupil out of school for the purpose of parent's wedding abroad**

This would not be exceptional. This can be an emotive issue, but such weddings rarely take place without extensive pre-planning and there is therefore ample opportunity to avoid term times.

- **To take a pupil out of school for the purpose of a close family member's wedding abroad**

This would not be exceptional circumstances (as above). This seems to be an increasing issue and often such events are linked to beach resorts making it hard to differentiate from an ordinary holiday request. Extended family links may also mean that numbers of pupils may want leave to attend.

- **Application to take a pupil out of school for the purpose of visiting a parent in custody**

This would constitute exceptional circumstances. The parent would need to provide the school with the usual evidence of a visiting schedule etc.

Liverpool School Improvement Education Welfare Service

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