

29th April 2009



Children and Young People

West Berkshire District Council
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Dear Parent/Carer

HOLIDAYS IN TERM TIME

There is national concern about the amount of education lost through absence from school. Research shows that holidays in term time have a particularly serious negative effect on a pupil's progress and can be damaging to their learning and achievement. It is clear that every effort should be made to avoid pupils being absent from school due to holidays being taken in term time. In West Berkshire the number of days lost in this way is considerable.

Analysis of school attendance carried out nationally shows that, as absence increases, pupils' achievement decreases. We have carried out a study on our own West Berkshire schools, analysing the Key Stage 2 results of about 1,700 pupils. This shows that the more days holiday absence pupils have, the less likely they are to achieve Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 in both English and Maths. Results fall for children at both ends of the spectrum, including the more able. This is why we put such emphasis on children attending school consistently, and not being absent for extended periods more than is absolutely necessary.

This letter confirms the agreement between West Berkshire Schools and West Berkshire Council regarding pupils taken out of school for family holidays.

It is understood there are occasions when a family has no choice about when to take holidays, such as when the whole workplace closes down and all employees take their holiday at that time, or other situations which are outside family control.

Government guidance, states that only Headteachers are able to authorise absence from school but this should only be in **exceptional circumstances**.

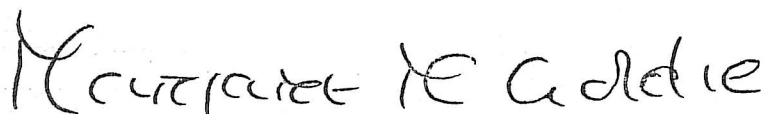
Holidays in term time are not a right and should not automatically be granted. Approval will not be given for:

- Holidays during SATs week. Parents should check for information on such dates.
- Long weekends and 'odd' days off.
- Holidays which are taken due to availability of cheap holidays or desired accommodation.
- Poor weather experienced in school holiday periods.
- Overlap with the beginning or end of term.
- Holidays for pupils whose attendance is giving cause for concern.

When a holiday is taken and the Headteacher has not authorised the absence, it will be marked in the register as an "unauthorised absence". Such unauthorised holiday absence may result in a Fixed Penalty Fine which, if not paid, could result in a prosecution in the Magistrates' Court for failing to ensure your child's regular attendance at school. Fixed Penalty Fines are issued per parent per child. More information about the Penalty Notice process can be found on the West Berkshire website. www.westberks.gov.uk

Our children and young people deserve to achieve their educational potential. Schools and West Berkshire Council would be failing in their duty to help them achieve this if we did not recognise the negative impact of absence from school. I would ask you to work with schools and West Berkshire Council so that we can reduce unnecessary absence from school.

Yours sincerely



Margaret Goldie
Corporate Director (Children & Young People)