

Exceptional Circumstances for Leave During Term Time



Advice from Wirral Local Authority Children and Young People's Department

The Department of Education has not issued guidance to Head Teachers on what constitutes "exceptional circumstances" in relation to requests from parents for family holidays taken in term time. Each case should be viewed on its own merits. The National Association of Head Teachers describes exceptional circumstances as "**rare, significant, unavoidable and short**", with unavoidable meaning an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. You should think very carefully about whether your reason for taking your child out of school is unavoidable.

Wirral Head Teachers have indicated they may view the following circumstances as exceptional:

- Where parents' conditions of employment preclude them from taking holidays during school holiday time or prescribe holidays must be taken in school time, for example, serving members of the armed forces or where there is a factory shutdown. In most cases, in order for head teachers to consider this as exceptional, any request for leave of absence must be accompanied by a letter from the parent's employer stating that the period requested is the only time in the whole year that the parent can have time off.
- Cases involving a terminally ill child. Head Teachers may also wish to consider carefully issues in relation to family members with a terminal illness.
- Whilst a family member having a disability does not always mean that a request will be considered exceptional, taking in to account the NAHT guidance above, Head Teachers will take this into consideration.
- Holidays funded by charities.
- Absences in relation to recognised religious festivals.

Advice in relation to families from ethnic minorities can be provided by Minority Ethnic Achievement Service (MEAS). Wirral Attendance Service can also be contacted for further discussion.

Where a Head Teacher decides that the circumstances are exceptional and to authorise the leave of absence, the agreement locally is that, in most cases, this will be for a maximum of 5 school days.