

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref HL/05246/14

William Powell AM
Chair Petitions Committee

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

4 November 2014

Dear William

Thank you for your letter of 16 October, regarding a petition from Jane Douglas which is currently collecting signatures.

I am committed to ensuring that children attend school regularly. If a child misses school he or she can fall behind with their work and not reach their full potential. The Department of Education's 'A Profile of Pupil Absence', found a negative impact on attainment in cases of absence for family holidays at Key Stage 4, except when the absence was for a very short period. A child's education needs to be considered holistically, and we want schools to deliver consistent messages on the importance of school attendance throughout children and young people's time at school.

Parents do not have an automatic right to remove their children from school for a holiday during term-time. Schools and local authorities do, however, have discretionary powers to authorise up to 10 days absence per year for a family holiday during term time. There may well be circumstances that warrant a pupil taking time off in term time and this is why head teachers are best placed to make the decision. Parents may apply to the head teacher for permission in advance.

I expect schools, local authorities and consortia to have due regard to the Regulations. Upon receiving a request the school should consider the time of year of the proposed trip, length and purpose of the holiday, impact on continuity of learning, circumstances of the family and the wishes of parents as well as the overall attendance pattern of the child. Head teachers should treat each request fairly and on a case by case basis.

If a head teacher decides to refuse a parents request for holiday in term time this will be recorded as an 'unauthorised absence'. Penalty Notices are issued for failing to regularly attend school, in other words regular unauthorised absence.

Pupils' attendance is an area that all Estyn inspection teams consider. The lead inspector analyses the attendance data and makes a decision whether attendance should be a line of inquiry for the inspection team. The data is a starting point for the inspection team and inspectors judge each school on an individual basis, taking into account any contextual factors. However, if a school has been continuously in the lowest 50% of similar schools over the past few years and there is a weak trend of improvement, the team may come to the judgement that attendance is an area requiring significant improvement. If the team judges that attendance requires significant improvement, the overall judgement for wellbeing can be no higher than adequate. Estyn is an independent body and you may wish to take this up with Her Majesty's Chief Inspector directly.

Currently secondary school banding includes attendance measures. These are the total numbers of half day sessions missed due to absence (both authorised and unauthorised) compared to schools with similar levels of free school meals and a progress measure. The weighting of these items in the banding methodology is half of the other measures included within banding.

I announced in September that banding would be replaced by School Categorisation for both primary and secondary schools. The methodology for primary schools has been announced and it includes attendance data. The methodology for Secondary Categorisation has not yet been announced.

The Welsh Government included guidance for local authorities on the authorisation of absence during term time for school holidays in the All Wales Attendance Framework. I have provided a link to the relevant section, section 1 page 74, for ease of reference:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolhome/pupilsupport/framework/?lang=en>

Yours sincerely



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