

William Powell AM
Chair- Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

12th January 2016

Your ref: P-04-576 and P-04-606

Dear William,

Thank you for forwarding the letter dated 15th December from Huw Lewis. We are reassured to hear that Mr Lewis has taken action to write to the Regional Consortia and Local Councils. However, we are concerned that those Consortia and Councils are still be clever with wording.

I received the attached correspondence from ERW concerning the situation in Carmarthenshire. This states that head teachers have the discretion, but generally will not be allowing any time out for family holidays or routine appointments. The part we don't have visibility on is the correspondence to head teachers applying pressure to ensure they are not allowing any absence, regardless of circumstances.

I would also be extremely keen to see the responses received by the Minister from the Regional Consortia and Local Councils. Also, the Minister mentioned he will be writing to the Head Teachers across Wales and I would be keen to know when this will happen and what the content of that letter will be.

Kind Regards,

Bethany Walpole-Wroe and Helen Weedon
Let Children in Wales Have a Family Holiday During Term Time

Gofynner am / Please ask for:

Gareth Morgans

Llinell Uniongyrchol / Direct Line:

01267 246450

E-bost Uniongyrchol / Direct E-mail:

EDGMorgans@sirgar.gov.uk

Dyddiad / Date:

4-11-15

Dear Parent/Carer,

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

I write to thank you for supporting our efforts to improve school attendance in Carmarthenshire and to ask for your cooperation in continuing to improve attendance in the interest of our children and young people.

School attendance is a priority for us in Carmarthenshire and the ERW region¹ and a common approach to improve school attendance is being used. However, you can be assured that any changes and decisions made are in the best interests of the child.

Having looked at school attendance in Carmarthenshire for 2014/15 we have seen significant improvement.

	2013/2014 Attendance	2014/2015 Attendance
Primary Schools	95%	95.2%
Secondary Schools	93.9%	94.2%

All of us continue to work hard to improve standards and outcomes for our children and young people and I know you're aware that there is a clear and direct relationship between regular school attendance and pupil achievement. We have seen improvements in standards across the region this year, from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4, and I know that some of this is due to improved school attendance.

Although there has been substantial progress this year we need to continue to address this issue in the interests of our children and young people. To ensure further improvement I would like to remind you of the following.

- *The Welsh Government and ERW expect all pupils to attend school at least 95% of the time.*
- *Missing school jeopardises the learner's chances of fulfilling his/her potential as regular attendance improves the chances of being successful at school.*

¹ ERW is the regional education consortium comprising Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Swansea.

- *It should be noted that, although headteachers have the discretion to grant leave of absence during term time, schools **will not normally authorise family holidays or routine appointments**² taken during term time.*
- ***If your child has unauthorised absence or your child is consistently late, your school may request that the local authority issues you with a penalty notice.***

Again I would like to thank you for your continued support to ensure that your child's attendance is the best it can be.

You can do this by making sure your child is in school on time and by not arranging family holidays or routine appointments during term times. However, if you are having difficulties with your child's attendance, please talk to your school who can arrange support for you.

I am confident that we can work together to further improve school attendance and ensure that Carmarthenshire pupils reach their full potential.

Yours sincerely,



Gareth Morgans, Chief Education Officer

² By routine appointments we refer to periodic assessments such as dental check-ups, occasional optical examinations, non-urgent doctor consultations, etc, where parents/ guardians are able to influence the timing of appointments.

Dear Helen Weedon,

I write to respond to your e-mail sent to ERW Admin on the 17th December, 2015.

Improving school attendance has been a priority in Carmarthenshire since our 2012 Inspection by ESTYN which cited it as a recommendation- ***R2 improve attendance in primary and secondary schools.***

Since 2012 we have worked with parents and schools to ensure that we reduce absences and increase attendance levels to enable our learners to have the best chance to succeed. This has included-

- Remodelling and extending our Education Welfare Service
- Introducing a Team Around the Family approach to support parents with improving school attendance
- Setting Local Authority and school level targets and requesting Action Plans from all schools.
- Issuing guidance in respect to improving attendance and authorising absences
- Working as a region on this agenda.

The improvements, through collaboration between schools, parents and Local Authority, have been significant-

Sector	Absence level 2011/12	Absence level 2014/15
PRIMARY	6.3%	4.8%
SECONDARY	8.9%	5.9%

Earlier this year I asked schools to circulate a letter to thank parents for their continued support with this key agenda and to reiterate the importance of good school attendance- I attach a copy.

There is clarity in respect to where the responsibility for agreeing to absences lie i.e. the school's Headteacher. The guidance issued by each LA/ERW did challenge schools on its processes and procedures in authorising absences and we have seen improved and more rigorous systems being developed when considering requests for absence. This is evidenced by the data included above.

All schools are engaged with improvement attendance as during ESTYN inspections school attendance is a key indicator which affects the school's performance. We have recently seen such comments as those noted below which have affected a school's overall performance-

- *Attendance levels over the last four years have been lower than the average for the family of schools. This has placed the school in the lower 50% of similar schools during this period and in the bottom 25% in three of the last four years.*
- *Pupils' attendance levels are lower than those at other schools. This has placed the*

pupils' attendance levels are lower than those at other schools. This has placed the school among the bottom 25% of similar schools over the last three years.

- However, pupils' attendance rate has been consistently lower than the median over the last three years in comparison with levels in similar schools.*

All schools therefore are considering school attendance and working towards further improvements and this will include sharing effective practice, celebrating improved attendance and challenging absences.

If you require any further information please contact Mrs Bethan T James, Service Manager (copied into this e-mail).

Yours sincerely,

Gareth Morgans, B.Ed., M.Sc.



**Prif Swyddog Addysg,
Adran Addysg a Phlant,**

Adeilad 2, Parc Dewi Sant, Heol Ffynnon Job, Caerfyrddin, Sir Gaerfyrddin, SA31 3HB

Chief Education Officer

Department for Education & Children,

Building 2, St David's Park, Jobs Well Road, Carmarthen, Carmarthenshire SA31 3HB

Hi Gareth,

Diolch am yr ateb. My children attend school in Carmarthenshire.

Kind Regards,

Helen

On 5 Jan 2016, at 12:09, Gareth Morgans
<EDGMorgans@carmarthenshire.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Helen Weedon,

Your e-mail below addressed to ERW has been forwarded for my attention as Chair of the Support for Learning Board which oversees the work of ERW's

Attendance Group.

I believe that the respective Local authority should reply to your e-mail- can you please advise me of the Local Authority where your child/children attend school?

Diolch,

Gareth Morgans, B.Ed., M.Sc.

**Prif Swyddog Addysg,
Adran Addysg a Phlant,**

Adeilad 2, Parc Dewi Sant, Heol Ffynnon Job, Caerfyrddin, Sir Gaerfyrddin, SA31 3HB

Chief Education Officer

Department for Education & Children,

Building 2, St David's Park, Jobs Well Road, Carmarthen, Carmarthenshire SA31 3HB

From: webmaster@carmarthenshire.gov.uk [<mailto:webmaster@carmarthenshire.gov.uk>]

Sent: 17 December 2015 13:37

To: ERW Admin

Subject: ERW website - contact form

Name: Helen Weedon

Email: [REDACTED]

Message:

Hi, Recently at an evidence session at the Welsh Assembly, the Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis said that only the head teachers have the discretion to allow or deny a request for absence from school. He also stated: "Local authorities that give the impression they can override that are wrong or that they can provide some sort of barrier between a head teacher who is reluctant to make a decision and the parent, in other words, take the buck, are also wrong." However, ERW has advised all councils within its jurisdiction not to allow any absence at all that clearly goes against the Minister's intentions. Please could you tell me whether this will be rectified and whether head teachers will indeed be allowed to authorise absence during term time if they deem it to be appropriate.

Many thanks, Helen Weedon

[REDACTED]

Mae'r e-bost hwn ac unrhyw atodiadau yn gyfrinachol ac wedi'u bwriadu at ddefnydd yr unigolyn y'u cyfeiriwyd ato/ati yn unig. Os derbyniwch y neges hon trwy gamgymeriad, rhowch wybod i'r sawl a'i hanfonodd ar unwaith, dilwch y neges o'ch cyfrifiadur a dinistriwch unrhyw gopïau papur ohoni. Ni ddylech ddangos yr e-bost i neb arall, na gweithredu ar sail y cynnwys. Eiddo'r awdur yw unrhyw farn neu safbwyntiau a fynegir, ac nid ydynt o reidrwydd yn cynrychioli safbwynt y Cyngor. Dylech wirio am firysau eich hunan cyn agor unrhyw atodiad. Nid ydym yn derbyn unrhyw atebolrwydd am golled neu niwed a all fod wedi'i achosi gan firysau meddalwedd neu drwy ryng-gipio'r neges hon neu ymyrryd hi.

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