



Headteacher: Heidi Danniells B. Ed, NPQH
Tresco Way, Wickford, SS12 9GJ
Telephone: 01268 571018 Fax: 01268 571027
Email: admin@abacus.essex.sch.uk
Website: www.abacus.ik.org

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Dear Parents/Carers.

I am writing on behalf of the Governing Body, to inform you of recent changes to Education Regulations regarding leave of absence for pupils.

In the past, a school Headteacher was permitted to grant leave of absence for a pupil (also known as authorised absence) for the purpose of a family holiday during term time, if the absence was less than 10 school days in an academic year. Last year, in collaboration with Miss Danniells and her Staff, the Governing Body of Abacus decided to reduce the permitted period of absence from a maximum of 10 days, to one block of up to 5 days.

However, as of the 1st September this year, the Education Regulations were amended by the Department for Education, to now state that **a Headteacher may not grant any leave of absence during term time**, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

As a fellow parent, I know all too well that holiday companies set their prices to coincide with school holidays, and that the cost of a holiday increases year upon year. I am also aware that changing the date of a holiday to leave a week early before the school break-up in July, to come back a week later when school recommences in September, or even to go completely out of season, can dramatically cut the cost and save hundreds of pounds.

However, can a price be placed on our children's education?

Removing a pupil from school will undoubtedly have a negative impact on their attainment and progress. For example, 10 days absence from school roughly equates to a loss of 50 hours of education. In that time, a child could miss out a vital chunk of a particular subject, leading to gaps in their knowledge of the syllabus. They could also miss out friendships being formed in the first few weeks of term, school productions at Christmas or Easter or even vital exams at the end of term.

Essex County Council has set a target for each child to have at least 96% attendance in an academic year. A pupil who has 10 days absence will only achieve an attendance level of 94.7%, and will therefore not achieve this target.

As Essex County Council has a duty to ensure that parents carry out their legal responsibility of making sure their child attends school, they also set a lower threshold for attendance. If a pupil's attendance falls below this threshold, a Local Authority Education Welfare Officer will investigate the issue around lack of attendance, which may include a visit to the pupil's home.

To further promote attendance in school, and to help deter unauthorised absence, it is also possible for the Local Authority to issue a Penalty Notice of £120 to each parent for each child taken out of school. As reported in the national press, the cases of Penalty Notices being issued are now increasing in frequency.

I hope you now feel informed on the school's position with regard to the new regulations.

If you have any questions, please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely,

Stewart Cassidy

Chair of Governors