

Exceptional leave

Absence requests from school



Exceptional leave is the term Hillingdon Council uses for absence requests from school, whether it be for holidays, to attend a wedding/funeral, visit a sick relative or seek medical treatment from abroad.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no entitlement to 10 days' absence from school per academic year.

The 1996 Education Act section 444 states that parents are responsible for ensuring their child(ren) attend school regularly and punctually.

Each school has to have a School Attendance Policy, reviewed annually.



In an academic year, the terms are usually planned so there are 190 teaching days in total. This leaves 13 weeks (Monday to Friday) and 52 weekends (Saturday to Sunday) where leave can be taken with no interruption to the teaching and learning for a pupil.

Exceptional leave that was not requested by the parent or authorised by the head teacher is recorded in the register as unauthorised absence. Each day will record two sessions of absence.

Schools keep strict records of requests for exceptional leave in term time across all year groups and log the dates and reasons for each request. Patterns of absence from previous years are carefully scrutinised. Requests for exceptional leave are kept in the pupil's school file and passed from school to school, whether it is primary school, secondary school or academy.

Hillingdon Council advises head teachers not to authorise exceptional leave requests in school time.

Each request for exceptional leave may trigger a meeting with the head teacher to discuss the importance of good attendance habits, the links between attendance and attainment, and the reason behind the request.

The parent/carer who requested the exceptional leave will be notified in writing of the head teacher's decision and of the implications if the leave is taken without authorisation, such as missed topics for learning by the pupil, fractured social relationships and the possibility of the parent/carer being issued with a Penalty Notice by the Attendance Support team.

The details of the child and parent/carer who take unauthorised exceptional leave are referred to the Attendance Support team who may issue a Penalty Notice of £160 (reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days) per child per parent/carer. A formal attendance meeting may also be convened.

Two penalty notices can be issued per parent, per child within a three year period. A second penalty notice will incur a fine of £160 to be paid within 28 days.

If previous unauthorised exceptional leave has been taken, a panel meeting will not be held; a Penalty Notice or summons to the Magistrates Court may be issued.

For more information

✉ Attendance Support team,
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