POMS Cluster Attendance Agreement 2026 - 2027

Guidance on authorised term-time pupil absence

The Education Regulations 2013 [aka, the Regulations] which came into force on 1 September 2013, made it clear that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless "exceptional circumstances" prevail.

The regulations also state that headteachers should determine the number of school days a pupil can be away from school if they grant a leave request because of "exceptional circumstances".

The fundamental principles for defining "exceptional circumstances" are that they are 'rare, significant, unavoidable and short'.

POMS cluster Headteachers have worked together to agree some guiding principles for headteachers to consider when families request absence during term-time. This will ensure consistency across the cluster and ensure all schools are sending the same message surrounding the importance of attendance at school.

Guiding Principles

1. Term times are for education. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. Headteachers will rightly prioritise attendance. The default school policy should be that absences will not be granted during term time apart from in "exceptional circumstances".

2. The decision to authorise a pupil's absence is wholly at the headteacher's discretion based on their assessment of and circumstances of each individual request. POMS Headteachers have worked collaboratively to agree a shared approach. Schools in the POMS cluster will follow these agreed principles.

3. If an event can be reasonably scheduled outside of term time, then it will not be authorised. Holidays are, therefore, not considered exceptional circumstances.

4. Absence from school to visit seriously-ill relatives or for bereavement of a close family member are usually considered to amount to 'exceptional circumstances', but for the funeral service not for extended leave.

5. Absences for important religious observances are often considered, but only for the ceremony and not for extended leave. This is intended for one-off situations rather than regular or recurring events

6. Schools may wish to take the needs of the families of service personnel into account if they are returning from long operational tours that prevent contact during scheduled holiday time.

7. Whilst as school settings we must make reasonable adjustments for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities in school time. Regarding attendance, we work closely with our colleagues from our local special schools. In line with their guidance, we would not consider requests that are based on holidays during quieter times.

8. Families may need time together to recover from a trauma or crisis.

9. POMS schools will consider a pupil's historical record of attendance when making absence-related decisions

10. It is important to note that headteachers can determine the length of the authorised absence as well as whether an absence is authorised.

11. Absence will only be authorised where proper request procedures have been followed and the permission given.

12. Tickets and/or other travel arrangements should not be booked prior to discussion with and agreement of the school.

13. Parents and Carers should not confuse telling the school about an absence with having permission.

14. Whether alternative care arrangements have been considered by the parent to limit the time away from school.

15. The impact on any interventions, assessments or referrals being undertaken with the child or family, for example, family support, social care assessments, CAMHS, SEN.

16. The potential impact that the absence will have on the child.

This guidance has been agreed by all schools in the POMS (Partnership of Millom Schools) cluster;

Parkview Nursery School

Millom Infant School

Black Combe Junior School

Haverigg Primary School

St James' Catholic Primary School

Thwaites Nursery & Primary School

Captain Shaw Nursey & Primary School