

Protocol for applications for children to be absent from school in term time

Oxfordshire is a committed corporate parent, working to raise the educational achievement of children in care.

- Good attendance is a crucial factor in children achieving their potential
- Increasing attendance and reducing persistent absence is a high priority for the county council

There are thirteen weeks in the year when children have school holiday. Learning loss over the school holidays can be a significant factor in underachievement. No holiday can be taken in term time. In very rare cases, when holiday is thought necessary, an application should be made by a social care manager to the Corporate Parenting Manager and the Virtual School for Looked After Children and Care Leavers Lead. Schools should not be approached directly by carers or social workers with such a request.

If there is a safety or well-being need for a child to be away from school, the social worker will explore alternatives to on-site education with the designated teacher for looked after children. Management of such a programme is the responsibility of the school. It must include 25 hours of learning with work set and marked by a qualified teacher. The Virtual School should be approached for advice in such a case. Wherever possible, medical appointments should be arranged to take place out of school time.

Carers

- If a carer believes that there is a need for a child to be absent from school they should discuss it with the child's social worker and their own supervising social worker.
- Carers and social workers should not apply for holiday in term time.
- The need should be identified as being important for the well-being of the child, not the carers' need for holiday.

Social Workers

- Following discussion with the supervising social worker, the child's social worker should explore alternatives to absence from school (such as respite care so that the carers can take holiday) with their manager.
- If the social care manager judges that it is in the interest of the child to have this absence from school they should submit a written request to the corporate parenting manager and the Lead of The Virtual School.

Approaching the school

Discussion between the Corporate Parenting Manager and the lead of The Virtual School will explore alternatives to absence bearing in mind the needs of the student. The young person's Independent Reviewing Officer will be consulted.

Alternatives may include:

- Respite care whilst carers take a holiday
- Further emotional or health support
- Work set for the student throughout the absence and marked by a qualified teacher.
- Home tutoring including e-learning
- Tutoring in an early intervention hub
- Temporary movement to another school

In the unlikely event that in the interest of a child's safety and well-being, holiday needs to be taken in term time work will be set and marked by the school. A written request signed by the corporate parenting manager or the Virtual School Lead will be sent to the Headteacher of the child's school.

Headteachers

Headteachers are requested not to authorise holiday in term time and to refer any such request to the Virtual School Headteacher.

Contact:

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October 2019