



Attendance Exceptional Circumstances
Updated: September 2026
Annual Review

Policy

Please ensure you have read our attendance policy alongside this list of exceptional circumstances (found on the school website). In particular:

*'Parents must return a [Pupil Term Time Leave Request](#) form. The request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated. Wherever possible, this should be **at least four weeks** before the absence. Leave of absences cannot be approved retrospectively. You have to get permission from the attendance lead / Headteacher if you want to take your child out of school during term time.'*

Leave of absence in exceptional circumstances

Exceptional circumstances are rare, unavoidable and significant events that justify an absence. Headteachers, alongside the Attendance Lead, may only grant a leave of absence for exceptional circumstances. Before deciding whether to authorise leave of absence Headteachers will consider:

- The impact of any absence on the pupil's academic progress
- The pupil's attendance over the academic year
- Whether the leave falls within any key stage national tests or exams

Holidays in term time

Headteachers have the discretion to grant leave, but they should only do so in exceptional circumstances. If a headteacher grants a leave request, it will be for them to determine the length of time that the child can be away from school. However, leave will not be granted for the purposes of a family holiday. Decisions around leave are made in conjunction with the guidance of Bristol City Council.

If a parent/carer decides to take their child on holiday during time without prior consent (or if a child has more than 10 unauthorised sessions absent in a 10 week period), the school may refer for an Education Penalty Notice. These are issued per child, per parents and vary depending on the number of penalty notices the family have received.

- In the first instance of a penalty notice being issued, the penalty is £80 (per parent, per child) payable within 21 days. This rises to £160 if paid between 22 and 28 days.
- If a second penalty notice is given within a rolling 3-year period the penalty is £160 per parent, per child if paid within 28 days.
- The third time an offence is committed for a term-time leave of absence or irregular attendance by the same parent for the same child, a penalty notice will not be issued. Instead, the case will be referred to the Bristol City Council Education Welfare service for prosecution. This may result in fines of up to £2,500.

More information can be found [here](#) and more a guidance leaflet found [here](#).

Exceptional circumstances

The following are examples of agreed exceptional circumstances to guide headteachers when

considering leave of absence requests. Meeting one of these criteria does not guarantee the absence being agreed but would be considered alongside the other factors mentioned above.

Exceptional circumstances include:

- When a family needs to spend time together because of an immediate family members bereavement, crisis or serious illness
- Funeral of an immediate family member (parent, grandparent or sibling)
- Transport was not provided by the Local Authority when it should have been
- Children of service personnel about to go on deployment (permission would be considered as long as the request is accompanied by a letter from the Commanding Officer)
- One day of absence could be authorised for a wedding of an immediate family member and the invitation has been provided as evidence (and as long as this wedding is not abroad - see below)
- One off sporting events/performing arts competitions, if the child is participating and is at county standard or above and a letter has been provided from the performing arts/sports regional governing body as evidence
- One day of absence could be authorised for an immediate family members graduation ceremony/passing out parade
- Medical appointments (parents/carers should arrange non-urgent medical appointments outside of school hours when possible. If the medical appointment is during the school day, evidence must be provided. Schools should not authorise a whole days absence for a medical appointment that occurs in the morning – the child would be expected to return to school in the afternoon, and vice versa)
- Sudden loss of housing through eviction or domestic violence
- Serious illness of a close relative – only if Headteacher is satisfied that the circumstances are truly exceptional
- Out of school programmes such as music, arts or sport operating at a high standard of achievement and agreed by the Local Authority
- Time-off relating to Child Entertainment Performances, subject to a licence being issued by Education Social Work Service
- Religious observance – The Education Act 1996 S444(3) (c), states “on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his/her parent belongs”. This would include the Islamic Eids, as well as religious observance days of the orthodox Christian, Jewish and other religions. Headteachers may specify that only one day will be authorised at a time (most of the families who request leave on religious grounds are Muslim and the request is for the two Eids).

Absence will not be authorised for reasons such as the following:

- To care for other family members
- Birthdays
- To interpret for other family members
- No school uniform/shoes
- Bullying
- Friendship problems
- Head lice
- Learning difficulties
- Family holiday
- Holidays taken in term time due to lower cost/parental work commitments/shift patterns/types of job
- Weddings abroad – regardless of whether it is for immediate family members
- Family Anniversaries
- Death of a pet
- Travel problems

- School refusal
- Pilgrimages by parents (eg. Hajj). They are not regarded as exceptional as children themselves do not perform Hajj, but tend to travel with their parents when they go
- Holidays abroad for the purpose of visiting a sick relative, excepting where that person is seriously ill. Medical evidence may be requested.

The immediate family is a defined group of relations, used in rules or laws to determine which members of a person's family are affected by those rules. It normally includes a person's parents, spouses, siblings and children. It can contain others connected by birth, adoption, marriage, civil partnership, or cohabitation, such as grandparents, grandchildren, siblings-in-law, half-siblings, adopted children and step-parents/step-children, and cohabiting partner.

