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Date/Dyddiad:

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1st October 2014

Steve Thomas

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WLGA • CLILC

Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear William Powell,

Petition – P-04-576 Allow Children in Wales to Have a Family Holiday During Term Time

The WLGA is pleased to be able to respond to the recent petition received by the Petitions Committee on allowing children in Wales to have a family holiday during term time.

The WLGA believes that regular attendance at school or education setting promotes opportunity for every child or young person to reach their full potential and learn and develop skills for life. Local authorities in Wales believe that all children and young people should benefit from high quality education and considerable work is underway in all local authorities to ensure that schools improve performance. There is a close connection between pupil attendance and performance, so schools and local authorities have put a significant amount of work and resource into ensuring that pupils have a good learning experience in order to promote excellent attendance.

The work of local authorities has been supported by Welsh Government who have made an attendance grant available for local authorities through the regional school improvement services. Attendance figures in Wales have risen over recent years, with overall attendance in secondary schools in Wales rising from 91.4% in 2010/11 to 93.6% in 2013/14. Overall attendance in primary schools has also risen from 93.3% in 2010/11 to 93.7% in 2013/14.

Attendance figures, used by Welsh Government and local authorities, are an important measure of the success of a school, not only to ensure children and young people achieve to their highest potential but also in order to promote wider well-being. The more time a child or young person spends at school the more opportunity they have to make friends, feel included and boost social skills, confidence and self-esteem. Time away from school, for any reason, can lead to the child or young person falling behind and missing out on vital

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opportunities.

The WLGA and local authorities in Wales have been explicit in their support for the Welsh Governments aim to improve literacy and numeracy skills and to improve the performance of children and young people from more socio-economically deprived backgrounds. Regular and consistent attendance at school plays a vital role in reaching the standards set within the Literacy and Numeracy Framework and throughout the educational journey. In order to support pupils from more socio-economically deprived backgrounds to achieve high attendance head teachers and local authority Education Welfare Services work together to ensure that communities, families and children and young people are engaged with the school or education setting. In this work local authorities are guided by the Welsh Government's Behaviour and Action Plan and the All Wales Attendance Framework.

Local authorities have also recently been given powers to issue fixed penalty notices to parents of pupils who are not attending school. All local authorities in Wales are in the process of implementing guidance for the appropriate use of fixed penalty notices as part of the overall strategy for tackling poor attendance in order to promote high achievement.

The WLGA does recognise the importance of families spending time together and enjoying holidays. The benefits of such time cannot be understated in terms of new experiences and developing skills for the whole family. However, it is important that schools and families work together to promote full attendance at school during term time and ensure that school is seen as important and fulfilling to the child or young person.

The WLGA also understands the argument that many families from socio-economically deprived backgrounds can only afford to go on holiday during term time. There is a broader concern that holidays are far more expensive and out of reach of some families out of school term time. This is definitely an issue of equality of opportunity and one that the WLGA recognises. This issue should not, however, be addressed by removing children or young people from schools or education settings. Breaking the cycle of poverty that many children and young people find themselves in, is dependent on those children achieving their full educational potential; attendance at school is essential to achieving this.

The focus should therefore be on school attendance and improving performance so we can ensure that children and young people have the best possible start in their educational and professional lives.

The WLGA would be happy to provide further information should this be required.

Yours Sincerely

Steve Thomas
Chief Executive