

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

Thank you for considering our petition once again as part of your meeting. We have read with interest the letters from the WLGA, the Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, and the Children's Commissioner, Keith Towler.

We would like to firstly draw your attention to a number of points:

1. We recognise the need for good attendance, however a blanket ban does not allow for any compassion for individual circumstances.
2. We would like to work with the head teachers on a case-by-case basis, so that each request will be considered fairly and on its own merit.
3. Quality family time is extremely important as recognised by all the respondents, and many families cannot get that time during the school holidays for a number of reason, including financial constraints and work commitments.
4. The blanket ban issued by the councils also means that children are no longer able to request authorised absence for important events, such as a funeral or a family wedding.
5. We have also heard a number of heart-wrenching stories, which I cannot make public, but could discuss privately, where clearly the child's overall mental health and well-being were at stake. The council ban doesn't give any provision for this type of situation.
6. Issuing a blanket ban on term time holidays is also likely to have a knock-on effect for our tourism industry, something which tourism businesses are already noticing due to the legislation in England.
7. This issue has strong feeling across Wales. We currently have nearly 15,000 signatures and more than 3,500 Facebook likes, many of whom are angry with the guidelines and engaging with the page to tell their story or vent their frustrations.

We would also like to pick up a point made by the WLGA:

“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. ”

This almost precisely mirrors what we as a campaign group are hoping to achieve. We would like to work with the school to ensure good attendance and attainment for children across Wales, but have the flexibility to request term time absence as and when a need arises. The school would then of course retain the right to deny absence having made a fair judgement on that individual request.

We also feel strongly that schools should be free to exercise their statutory powers under regulation 7 of The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 without interference from bodies such as regional educational consortia and local authorities and without threat of penalisation through school inspection, performance judgement and banding processes.

We feel that the current government guidelines, giving head teachers the authority to grant up to 10 days absence per year, and more in exceptional circumstances, are fair and if implemented by councils across Wales, that would lead to much more consistency throughout.

We would also like to make you aware that we have submitted a request for petition with the European Parliament, which is currently being considered.

Yours sincerely,

Bethany Walpole-Wroe and Helen Weedon