



'We can and we will'

GLEBE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Dear Parents,

Term Time Holidays

As I am sure many of you will have seen, the High Court last week ruled that a parent who had taken his daughter on holiday during term time, had not broken the law and therefore should not have been fined. The media have widely reported it as a victory for parents' rights.

I thought that it may be useful to clarify the school's position on this matter. As a school we expect all of the children at Glebe to have good attendance. Good attendance in school is normally defined as being 96% or above. This equates to missing no more than 8 days per school year. The girl at the centre of the controversy had attendance of about 90%. In the eyes of the law she was deemed to be attending school 'on a regular basis' so, in the opinion of the judge, meeting a minimum requirement of attendance.

My concern with this ruling is that a small minority of people may take this to mean that a 90% attendance rate is acceptable including absences for holidays. An attendance rate of 90% equates to 19 days absence from school each year. Over the period of time children are at primary school (Reception to Year 6) an attendance rate of 90% would mean the children would miss 133 days of school or 70% of one school year. If continued in to secondary school it would mean that, by the end of Year 11, they had missed 228 days of school – well over a year of lost learning (a school year is 190 days in total).

I would urge you, irrespective of this ruling, to avoid taking your children out of school during term time. The evidence linking poor school attendance and lower achievement is irrefutable. Just one week off school for a holiday (5 school days) will mean that there is little leeway in the rest of the year to achieve 96%+ attendance. Absence from school is both disruptive for the pupil themselves but also for the others in the class as teachers often have to spend additional time helping them with the learning they have missed (to the detriment of others).

Fortunately term time holidays are relatively few in number and I really appreciate this. I suspect that this ruling will swiftly see a change in the law, which I suspect will clarify matters and lead to a different definition of what constitutes acceptable attendance levels in school. In the meantime, I would advise you to resist any temptation of cheaper holidays or beaches not crowded with kids (I imagine there was a collective groan amongst retired people or those without children when this announcement was made).

For me, this matter has little to do with issuing fines to parents. I think it has far more to do with the importance of children having the best attendance they can possibly achieve. Being in school every day and getting a good education is so important and will give all of our children the best chance of a successful life.

Yours sincerely

NJ Alford

Mr Alford
Head Teacher

