

# Holidays during term time

## ☑ What Counts as an “Exceptional Circumstance”?

According to the DfE statutory guidance (updated August 2024), **holidays are *not* generally considered exceptional circumstances**. Schools may only grant term-time leave in truly unavoidable, one-off situation

Local authorities and school policies clarify that exceptional circumstances are **rare, unavoidable, and significant events that cannot reasonably occur outside term time**.

Below are examples commonly accepted across UK schools:

### ✓ Examples of Acceptable Exceptional Circumstances

#### 1. Bereavement or serious family crisis

- Death of an immediate family member
  - Attendance at a funeral
- These are explicitly listed in school attendance guidance as one-off, unavoidable events.

#### 2. Serious or acute family emergencies

- A housing crisis preventing attendance (e.g., eviction, emergency relocation)

#### 3. Religious observance (on days recognised by a UK-registered religious body)

This must be a day formally set aside by the religious body, not chosen by parents.

#### 4. Immediate family wedding

- Usually only **the day of the ceremony**
- Schools may request an invitation as evidence

#### 5. Participation in a one-off life-opportunity event

Examples may include:

- Representing the country or region in an elite sporting event
- Taking part in a significant performance (e.g., theatre, music)

Schools will judge whether the event is truly unique and cannot be rescheduled.

#### 6. Medical situations

- Surgery requiring recovery time that cannot be scheduled for school holidays

(Note: medical appointments are usually authorised anyway, but extended medical absences fall within exceptional grounds.)

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## ✘ What does NOT Count as Exceptional Circumstances

DfE guidance is very clear:

### Holidays for leisure or recreation are not exceptional circumstances

Other common refusals include:

- Cheaper travel during term time
- Visiting family abroad for routine reasons
- Parent work rota availability
- Annual family events that could occur in holidays



## How Schools Make the Decision

Schools must:

- Consider all requests individually
- Review the child's attendance record
- Require evidence to support the claim

Even if the reason is exceptional, **the headteacher alone decides** whether to authorise it and for how long.



## Summary

Exceptional circumstances must be:

- **Rare**
- **Unavoidable**
- **One-off events**
- **Impossible to schedule outside term time**
- **Supported with evidence**

**Holidays almost never meet the threshold**, except in very rare and unusual situations with compelling evidence.