



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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School attendance and religious festivals guidance 2016

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Audience

The entire teaching workforce and government and national partners, including regional education consortia, local authorities and governing bodies.

Action required

None – for information only.

Further information

Enquiries about this document should be directed to:

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Additional copies

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.gov.wales/educationandskills.



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Attendance guidance

This document provides overarching guidelines which head teachers may use in determining whether to grant an authorised absence for religious observance for pupils.

Parents are responsible for making sure that their children of compulsory school age receive a suitable full-time education. Only head teachers, and not parents, can authorise an absence. Schools must consider whether the reason for absence is reasonable before doing so.

In Wales, the pattern of the school year takes account of most of the western Christian festivals and holy days. Important days of religious observance in the calendars of other religious traditions and denominations, however, often fall in term time and specifically on school days.

The Welsh Government guidance on attendance, registration practices and codes can be found here:

http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/schools/339214-wag/inclusionpupilsupportguidance/section4/?lang=en

The following advice is provided for religious observance:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Brief Description | Religious observance |
| Statistical Meaning | Authorised absence |
| Physical Meaning | Out for whole session |
| Legal Meaning | Absent |
| Use | Absence to take part in any day set aside exclusively for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong, including religious festivals. Parents should be encouraged to give advance notice. |

This is interpreted to mean that if the parent's religious organisation sets the day as a religious festival then the school must authorise the absence.

If the religious body has not set the day apart there is no requirement for the school to approve the absence or grant a leave absence. Additional holidays and days off linked to the religious festival but not "exclusively set aside for religious observance" by the religious body are not marked using Code R.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010.

Days of religious observance 2016

The Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) of all 22 Local

| | Spring Term | Summer Term | Autumn Term |
|---------------------|--|--|--|
| Baha'i | Naw-Rúz (New Year): 20 March 2016 | Riḡvân: 1 st day, 20 April 2016; 9 th day, 28 th April 2016; Twelfth day 1 st May 2016. Declaration of Báb: 23 rd May 2016 Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh: 28 th May 2016 Martyrdom of the Báb: 9 th July 2016 | Birthdays of the Twin Manifestations: 1 st and 2 nd November 2016 |
| Buddhism | | Vesakha Puja / Buddha Day: 1 st June 2016 | |
| Christianity | Christmas Day: (Eastern Orthodox) 7 th January 2016 Holy Friday: (Orthodox) 29 th April 2016 | | |
| Hindusim | Makaar Sakranti: 14 th January 2016 Vasant Panchmi: 12 th February 2016 Maha Shivratri: 7 th March 2016 Holi: 22/23 rd March 2016 | Shree Ramnavmi 15 th April 2016 Shree Hunaman Jayanti 22 nd April 2016 Rath Yatra 6 th July 2016 | Shree Ganesh: Choṭh 5 th September 2016 Onam: 13 th September 2016 Start of Navratri: 1 st October 2016 Dashera: 11 th October 2016 Diwali: 30 th October 2016 |
| Islam | | Ramadan: 6 th June – Tuesday 5 th July Eid-ul-Fitr: 5 th July 2016 | Eid-ul-Adha: 11 th September 2016 Ashura: 11 th October 2016 |
| Jainism | Mahavir Jayanti: 19 April 2016 | | Parushan: 29 th August 2016 Savantsari: (Day of Forgiveness): 6 th September 2016 Mihavir Nirvan: (Diwali): 30 th October 2016 |

| | | | |
|----------------|---|---|--|
| Judaism | | Pesach: 29 th April 2016 Shavuot: (Feast of Weeks): 13 th June 2016 | Rosh Hashanah: 3 rd October – 4 th October 2016 Yom Kippur: (day of Atonement):12 th October 2016 Shemini Atzeret: 24 th October 2016 Simchat Torah: 25 th October 2016 |
| Sikhism | Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh: 5 th January 2016. | Vaisakhi: 14 th April 2016. | Freedom Day (Bandi Chhor Divas): 30 th October 2016 Guru Nanak Jayanti (Birthday of Guru Nanak): 14 th November 2016 |

Authorities in Wales are members of the Wales Association of SACREs (WASACRE).

WASACRE advises that:-

- Any application made by a parent for their child to receive an authorised absence for religious observance is treated with sensitivity and considered carefully and fairly
- Absence should only be authorised for a date '*exclusively set apart by the religious body*' as detailed above
- If a date has not been '*exclusively set apart*' by the relevant religious body, it is suggested that the head teacher enquires whether the pupil/s can fulfil their religious observance outside of school hours
- If a festival falls on a weekend or during a school holiday, absence taken on a school day for that festival would not be authorised
- Similarly, absence taken on a school day either side of a festival that has been '*exclusively set apart*' by the relevant religious body would not be authorised

It is important to note that within some religious traditions, observance varies between different denominations and communities. Whilst one festival might be considered relatively minor within a particular community, therefore not requiring absence from school, the same festival may be celebrated as a holy day of major significance within a different community from the same religious tradition and might

require, with authorisation, absence from school. Also, the level of observance will differ amongst families within the same religious tradition or community and some children, despite growing up within a particular faith community, might prefer to attend school on festival days, whilst others may not. Therefore, whilst head teachers must ensure that requests are genuine and reasonable, they are advised not to doubt a request on these grounds.

Best practice advice

WASACRE would consider it good practice for schools to:-

- Encourage parents to give the school as much notice as possible of a proposed absence and be willing to discuss with the teachers how their child/children will catch up on work missed.
- To make appropriate provision for the needs of religiously observant children who will be required to perform specific rituals on a regular basis throughout the year. For example, by allocating a prayer room, or a quiet place. There may also be need for some children to have access to a private washing facility, and having these facilities in school would enable children to remain on school site without the need of regular absence.
- Reach out to their local religious communities and to remain in regular contact and dialogue with them throughout the year. This will enable schools to develop mutually beneficial relationships with local faith communities that will promote and open up opportunities for good quality learning experiences for the children and support head teachers in determining whether to grant an authorised absence for religious observance for pupils in their school.
- Be aware of the religious communities represented in their locality and take reasonable steps to ensure, whenever possible, that events in the school diary do not clash with days of significant religious importance for their pupils and their families.

Useful Websites:

www.shap.org

www.when-is.com

BBC iWonder

– Religious Festivals and Holidays:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/zs3nsbk>

Interfaith Calendar

<http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/index.htm>