

Dear Sir or Madam

Re School Attendance

We are a charity that supports children with the lifelong medical condition Neurofibromatosis Type 1 (NF1) and whilst we cannot go into personal details regarding a particular child, we are writing in support of those whose attendance falls due to this complex condition.

Whilst we are aware that attendance at school is important, there are those that through no fault of their own are unable to attend school every day.

Most children with NF1 or any other medical condition spend much of their lives in and out of hospitals, with appointments, scans and surgery, and in-between are sometimes just too ill to go to school. In some schools this counts as an absence. Many of our parents explain how this makes their children feel isolated and reinforces that they have an illness, and this particularly discriminates against them. Why should they feel they need to choose between an MRI or school? Also encouraging classmates to attend when they are ill puts these vulnerable children at risk of infections especially those undergoing active treatment. Attendance is not an achievement it is merely a statement of fact.

These following statements are all taken from the Department of Education:

*Schools should always consider the individual needs of pupils and their families who have specific barriers to attendance, **which I am sure you agree having a complex life-long condition is a barrier..***

Schools must record absences as authorised where pupils cannot attend due to illness (both physical and mental health related)

*Schools should encourage parents to make appointments out of school hours. **(unfortunately, it's often a lottery win to get an appointment, let alone chose when to have one)** Where this is not possible, they should get the school's agreement in advance and the pupil should only be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary for the appointment. **Unless the hospital is next to the school, this is almost impossible, and as NF1 is a complex condition, travel to hospitals further afield is often the only option to see someone with expertise in the condition, In fact the two specialists centres are in Manchester and London, which makes it almost impossible for most with this condition to return to school after an appointment.***

If a pupil is present at registration but has a medical appointment during the session in question, no absence needs be recorded for that session. ***This clearly discriminates against children who are unable to have medical care locally.***

Childhood Tumour Trust requested a written letter from Carolyn Harris MP to the Department of Education regarding 100% Attendance Certificates, which again are unfair, and this is their response dated 7 July 2017.

The Department does not have a national policy on how schools in England use reward systems to incentivise good attendance. It is for schools to decide whether they choose to use schemes such as school attendance awards. Schools in Wales are a devolved matter for the Welsh government.

Schools have duties under the Equality Act 2010, to have due regard to the need to eliminate conduct that is prohibited by the Act, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Those duties on schools apply to any schemes relating to incentivising attendance.

Answered by

Mr Robert Goodwill
(Conservative- Scarborough and Whitby)

It is clear that schools should not discriminate due to ill health or long-term medical conditions and in these cases any absences relating to this should be excluded.

We would be grateful if you could take all the above into consideration when discussing Charlie's attendance.

As we also understand it a leave of absence is granted entirely at the head teacher's discretion.

As I have previously mentioned I cannot go into a particular child's medical history, but if I can help any further, please do not hesitate to contact me

With Best Wishes

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