

KENT MESSENGER

School Absences

05.02.09

In the autumn, a local primary school got in touch with me to express concerns about children taking term-time family holidays. While family holidays can introduce children to a variety of experiences, environments and cultures - the key question is how to encourage these to take place during school holidays to minimise the disruption to all of the children in class.

Government ministers pointed out that while they do not want to interfere with market forces, they encourage tour operators to offer free child places and early booking discounts; indeed they claim that early booking discounts may be better than last-minute deals, which I had not realised. It was also pointed out to me that unauthorised absences from school (including taking holidays without permission) can lead to fines as per the 1996 Education Act, so we have been warned!

Talking of fines and truancy, whether truancy is with or without parents' knowledge, it disrupts the whole class and seriously affects children's chances to get the best start in life. Although truancy sweeps can be reassuring, I was shocked to find out that there are only two per year. I have been invited on an extra mini-sweep during this coming term to learn more - so be warned! I look forward to sharing some truancy facts and figures after the sweep.

