

Terms and conditions

That's it – the buckets and spades have been packed away, the sun-block is back in the cupboard and the new school year is well under way.

But not every Royal Navy or Royal Marines family can fit their lives into the time frame dictated by the dates of the three school terms.

The Ministry of Defence's Directorate for Children and Young People offers advice to head teachers on term-time absence for Service children, setting the context and conditions when such absences might be authorised.

As this is principally an issue in England, guidance is aimed at Department for Education school head teachers.

Since September 2013, by law, head teachers can only grant requests for term-time leave in "exceptional" circumstances – research has shown that even a brief period of term-time absence can damage a child's progress.

And while the MOD recognises that the operational needs of the Naval Service might prevent a Service family from taking a holiday out of term time, the department also acknowledges that the educational needs of children will always be the critical factor in determining whether term-time leave can be permitted.

If Service commitments have prevented a family from taking leave during school holidays, Service personnel can apply in advance, in writing to the head teacher of the school, for permission to allow their child or children leave of absence during term time.

Firm travel arrangements should not be made until approval is given – an expensive holiday paid for up front is not regarded as a legitimate factor in seeking permission for such leave.

The letter or email should give details of why term-time absence is, in the family's view, unavoidable.

Head teachers alone can grant such absences, and they will do so based on an assessment of the

situation, taking into consideration the educational needs and wellbeing of the children and possibly such factors as previous leave requests, general attendance and punctuality.

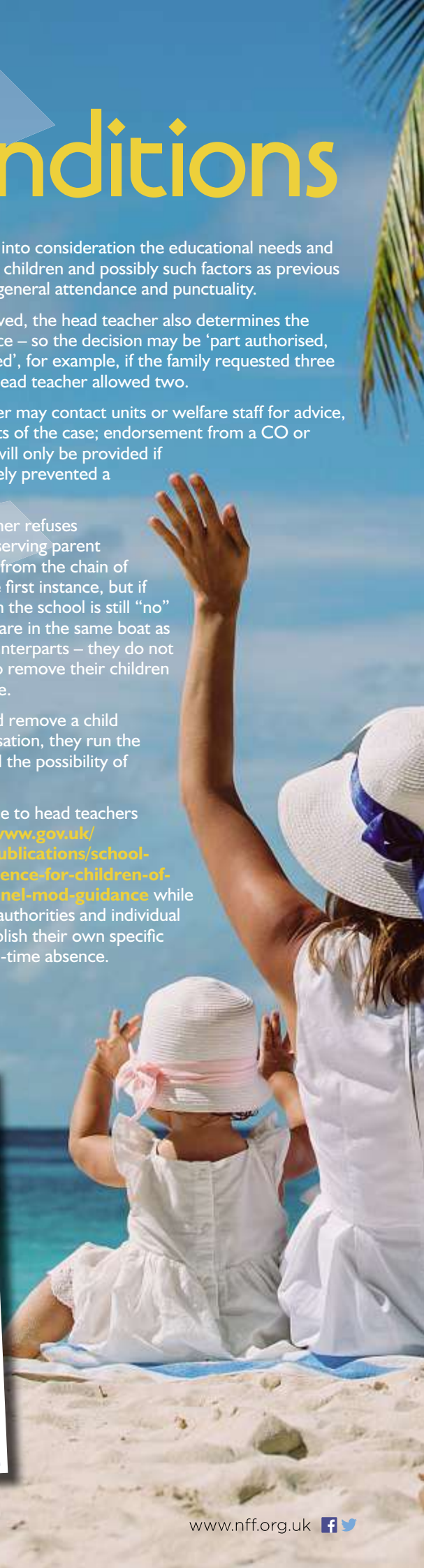
If leave is approved, the head teacher also determines the period of absence – so the decision may be 'part authorised, part unauthorised', for example, if the family requested three weeks but the head teacher allowed two.

The head teacher may contact units or welfare staff for advice, to verify the facts of the case; endorsement from a CO or welfare officer will only be provided if duty has genuinely prevented a family holiday.

If the head teacher refuses permission the serving parent can seek advice from the chain of command in the first instance, but if the answer from the school is still "no" Service parents are in the same boat as their civilian counterparts – they do not have the right to remove their children during term time.

If a family should remove a child without authorisation, they run the risk of a fine and the possibility of prosecution.

The MOD advice to head teachers is on gov.uk at www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-term-time-absence-for-children-of-service-personnel-mod-guidance while local education authorities and individual schools may publish their own specific policies on term-time absence.





The cost of Taking Off

190

minimum number of days a year a pupil must attend school



175

maximum number of days a year a pupil is not in school (holidays and weekends)



4.1 million

school days lost in England in 2014-15 through authorised and unauthorised absences



£60

fine for unauthorised absence, rising to £120 if not paid within 21 days