

A parent's guide to school attendance

If you are a parent of (or responsible for) a child aged between 5 and 16, this guide explains your responsibilities for making sure he or she attends school regularly. By law, all children of compulsory school age must get a proper full-time education. You are responsible for making sure this happens by registering your child at school or by making other arrangements which provide a suitable education.

What age must my child begin their education?

Children reach compulsory school age on the first of the following days, which is on or after their fifth birthday.

- 31st August
- 31st December
- 31st March

What can I do to help ensure regular school attendance?

There may be many reasons why your child is not or does not want to attend school, and in the first instance you should speak to your child to see if there are any underlying issues.

If you are unable to resolve these issues it is important you speak to your child's school for advice and support.

Here are some simple suggestions to encourage attendance:

- Be ready - Make sure that your child is ready and prepared for school with the uniform, books and equipment needed.
- Be careful about breakfast - Children of all ages need a nutritious breakfast. Snacks, sweets and drinks that are high in salt, sugar and additives are not a good start to the day.
- Be interested - Make sure you have time to talk to your child about school each day and find out what homework needs to be done. Your child is more likely to attend school if they feel supported and their anxieties listened to.
- Be positive - Problems in school may occur with other children or with the work. Reassure your child that you and the school will work together to provide help and support.
- Be firm - Unless your child is too ill to attend then he or she should be in school. Make sure your child understands that you do not approve of them missing school.
- Be clear with the school - If your child is too ill to attend school then contact the school on the first day of absence and keep the school informed.
- Be aware - You should not take your child out of school for a holiday during school term time.
- Be available - Let the school know how you can be contacted and provide emergency telephone numbers.
- Be supportive of the school - Make sure your child follows the school rules and you are clear about the school's expectations, policies and procedures. For example behaviour, uniform and attendance.

- Be informed – Keep a record of absences and match with the school record if you become concerned about your child’s attendance. (Schools will provide attendance records on request)
- Be involved – Speak regularly to your child’s teacher and attend parents' evenings.
- Be Knowledgeable – Keep a copy of your child’s timetable. This may help to avoid any issues. For example, have they got their PE kit?

Have you thought about walking your child to school each day to ensure they arrive?

Have you thought about contacting the school on a daily basis to ensure your child has received their registration mark?

Why is regular attendance important?

Having a good education will help to give your child the best possible start in life. If your child does not attend school regularly he or she will not be able to keep up with the work and may miss out on other aspects of school life.

They may find it difficult to form friendship groups and may miss out on social events. They may miss letters home or information which needs a response. This can affect their ability to feel part of the school community. Erratic appearances at after school clubs can also affect their feeling of belonging and, for some children, their ability to sustain friendships.

Every lesson in school matters and if children are often absent it will result in gaps in their learning. This may interrupt the continuity of their education and impede their progress.

Setting good attendance patterns from an early age will help your child later on in life. Employers want to recruit people who are reliable; therefore children who have poor attendance may have less chance of getting a good job.

Research has shown that children who are not in school are most vulnerable and are easily drawn into crime or anti social behaviour. Children who play truant are more likely to offend than those who do not.

Do you know how many absences your child has had and the potential impact these absences can have on your child's education?

1 day off per school year	= 99.5% attendance
10 days off per school year	= 94.7% attendance
20 days off per school year	= 90% attendance
90% attendance	= 4 whole weeks off school
90% attendance in year's 1 - 6	= Half a year off school

90% attendance for your child through Primary and Secondary School means they will have missed a whole year off school in their education.

Why is it important my child arrives at school on time?

- Arriving late at school may be embarrassing for your child.
- It may disrupt the class if your child arrives late.
- Your child may miss something important e.g. lesson plan or instructions on how to complete a piece of work.
- Social interaction with peers before school is important if your child is to form friendship groups.
- To instill good habits. Punctuality shows reliability. This is a valuable attribute for future working life.
- So your child gets their registration mark.

It is important to know what time the registers close at your child's school. (This will be outlined in the school's attendance policy) If your child arrives after this time it will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. Future employers, universities and colleges look for reliability. A good record of attendance and punctuality is a good indication of this and they may request to see your child's attendance record.

How can I reward good and improved school attendance and punctuality?

It is important to praise and reward good attendance and punctuality. Even small successes such as arriving on time when first lesson is their worst, can encourage your child.

Rewards do not have to cost money, for example:

- Allowing your child to have their favourite tea
- Allowing your child to choose what to watch on television that evening
- Set aside some quality time with your child
- Invite a friend round for tea
- Extra time for enjoyable activities e.g. games console or hobbies

What is an authorised absence?

Where the school has given approval in advance or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards.

By authorising a pupil's absence the school is condoning it and saying they agree it is a good reason for that child to be absent.

Only schools can authorise an absence.

A letter or telephone conversation does not automatically mean an absence will be authorised. Following contact the school will make the decision as to whether they will authorise the absence.

Acceptable reasons may include:

- Emergency medical/dental appointments
- Family bereavement
- Illness - If it is a prolonged illness or if it causes regular absences, some form of medical evidence may be required.
- Days of religious observance, to be agreed beforehand by the Headteacher.

What is an unauthorised absence?

By not authorising the absence, the school is saying that either a reason has not been provided, or the reason provided is not acceptable.

Absences that schools do not consider reasonable include:

- Visiting relatives
- Shopping
- Birthdays
- Looking after siblings
- Routine medical/dental appointments
- Holidays that have not been agreed by the school

Role of the school

Will inform parents/carers and pupils of term dates and non pupil days.

Register pupil's attendance twice a day. Once at the beginning of the morning session and again sometime during the afternoon

Distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absences in their registers

- Will make all necessary preliminary investigations as to pupil absence
- Will follow up unexplained or insufficiently explained absence directly with the parent/carer prior to referral
- Will respond to attendance concerns by communicating with parents/carers and pupil to offer support and guidance to address issues arising
- Publish details of absences
- Include a record of absences in annual reports to parents
- Notify parents and the Local Authority of absences from school
- Develop a clear written policy on attendance
- Some schools may run initiatives to encourage and support good and improved attendance
- May conduct regular spot checks and patrols to detect and deter lesson truancy

If your child is registered at a school you should have a written home school agreement. The home school agreement explains the aims and values of your child's school. It sets out the responsibilities of the school, parents and pupils.

Role of Local Authority Attendance Officers

Each Local Authority (LA) is responsible by law for ensuring parents/carers carry out their legal responsibility with regards to school attendance.

Attendance Officers are employed to ensure parents/carers meet these responsibilities. If your child is not attending school regularly an attendance officer may become involved.

Attendance Consultants will advise and support the school with regard to effective strategies for promoting attendance and addressing levels of absence.

Attendance Officers work closely with schools and families to resolve attendance issues. They may attend meetings in school and arrange home visits as necessary.

The Local Authority seeks your co-operation in working with the Attendance Officers to make sure your child overcomes their attendance problems and receives the education to which they are entitled.

Attendance Officers will carry out school attendance sweeps (formerly truancy sweeps) working alongside police, raising awareness of good attendance throughout the community.

It is vital that you share information with the attendance officer which is relevant to your child's non-attendance at school, so that every effort can be made to improve the situation.

What happens if my child doesn't attend regularly?

- You may receive a phone call from the school
- You may be invited into school to meet with a school representative.
- An attendance officer may come and visit you at home

If attendance remains a cause of concern:

The Local Authority may issue a £50 penalty notice to each parent for each child to be paid within 28 days. If the penalty notice is not paid within the time scale it will increase to £100. If the penalty notice is not paid the Local Authority will instigate legal proceedings against you in the magistrates' court under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 for failing to ensure your child attends school regularly.

Prosecution against parents/carers can be brought in a magistrates' court.

This could result in each parent/carer receiving a fine of up to £2,500 and/or imprisonment for failing to ensure their child attends school regularly.

Magistrates can also impose a Parenting Order, which means the parent has to attend a parenting guidance programme.

Alternatively you may be invited to a legal meeting to discuss the possibility of applying for an Education Supervision Order (ESO).

Application can be made to the family court for an ESO. If granted, a Local Authority Officer will work with you under the order to strengthen your responsibility and enable you to ensure your child attends school regularly. If you do not comply with directions given by the Local Authority you may be prosecuted. If your child does not comply with directions a referral may be made to Social Care who have a duty to investigate the circumstances.

If legal action is taken the school and the attendance officer would be required to provide information to the court. Any information or views given by you to the Local Authority officers may be used in evidence.

What does the law say?

Education Act 1996:

By law, all children of compulsory school age must receive an appropriate full-time education.

As a parent/carer you are legally responsible for making sure this happens, either by registering your child at a school or by making other arrangements which provide an effective education.

If your child is registered as a pupil at a particular school you are responsible for ensuring regular school attendance. The school must give permission for your child to be absent, or authorise unexpected absences such as illness.

As a parent you are committing an offence if you fail to make sure that your child attends school regularly, even if they are missing school without your knowledge. You run the risk of being issued with a penalty notice or being taken to court.

If your child does not go to the school at which he or she is registered and there is no acceptable reason, the relevant local authority can take legal action against you.

What age can my child leave school?

By law, compulsory education for all children in England ends on the last Friday in June in the school year in which the child reaches 16. Your child cannot leave school before that date. Even if they have received their National Insurance card before then, it is still against the law for them to leave school and begin full-time work.

In June 2007, it was announced that 16-19 funding would be delivered through local authorities from 2010/2011.

The 16-19 Transfer will give local authorities the responsibility for commissioning education and training provision for 16-19 year olds in their areas.

This means that pupils will continue to have an element of education in their career until they are 18.

School Effectiveness Service
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