



Is your child missing out?

School Attendance: Information for Parents

Why is it important for children not to miss school?

Most parents want their children to get on well in life. Nowadays, it is more important than ever to have a good education behind you if you want opportunities in adult life. Children only get one chance at school, and your child's chances of a successful future may be affected by not attending school regularly.

If children do not attend school regularly, they may not be able to keep up with school work. In a busy school day it is difficult for schools to find the extra time to help a child catch up.

And it's not only the academic work: missing out on the social side of school life – especially at primary school – can affect children's ability to make and keep friendships, a vital part of growing up.

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

Being on time is also vital. Arriving late at school can be very disruptive for your child, the teacher, and the other children in the class.

Some parents may be trying but finding it hard to get their children to attend school.

Research has shown that children who are not in school are most vulnerable and are easily drawn into crime. Those children who play truant are more likely to offend than those that do not. Research also shows that less than 40% of pupils in secondary schools with an average of 15 days or more absence get 5 good GCSEs (grades A* to C). Many parents are surprised how quickly their children accumulate 15 days absence.

What does the law say?

By law, all children of compulsory school age (between 5 and 16) must get a suitable, full-time education. As a parent, you are responsible for making sure this happens, either by registering your child at a school or by making other arrangements which provide a suitable education.

Once your child is registered at a school you are responsible for making sure he or she attends regularly. If your child fails to attend regularly – even if they miss school without you knowing – the Local Authority (LA) may take legal action against you (see overleaf).

The LA is responsible for making sure that parents fulfil their responsibilities. Parents are responsible for making sure that their registered children attend school regularly.

What about authorised absences?

Of course there may be times when your child has to miss school because she or he is ill. This is to be expected and for the odd day off sick you should follow the school's procedures for notifying illness.

Children may also have to attend a medical or dental appointment in school time. However, you should try to make routine appointments such as dental check-ups during the school holidays or after school hours.

Any absence must be requested as far in advance as possible. Absences can only be authorised by the school.

If you think you might need to take your child out of school, discuss the reasons with the school as soon as possible. Reasons such as family bereavement or taking part in a religious event would be acceptable for short absences. Unacceptable reasons for missing school include shopping and birthdays.

What about holidays in term time?

You should not expect your child's school to agree to an absence for a holiday in term time. Taking a holiday during term time means that children miss important school time – both educationally and for other school activities. It will be difficult for them to catch up on work later on.

Parents do not have a legal right to take children out of school on holiday. The law says that schools have the discretion to grant up to ten days authorised absence in a school year. Each application is considered individually by the school, taking into account factors like the reason for the holiday, its timing and the child's attendance record. Schools will only consider requests for more than 10 days leave a year in exceptional circumstances. If you need to take your child out of school during term time:

- you should request the time off for your child as soon as possible;
- never ask for time off during exam or test periods unless for exceptional circumstances;

- do not book travel for holidays in term time, until you have sought the school's permission; and
- remember that the school might not agree to authorise the time off.

What happens if my child does not attend school regularly?

Your child's school is responsible by law for reporting poor attendance to the LA. Most LAs employ Education Welfare Officers (also called Education Social Workers) to monitor school attendance and to help parents meet their responsibility.

If your child is not attending school regularly, an Education Welfare Officer may visit or write to you. Education Welfare Officers work with parents to address their child's attendance difficulties. You may be offered a parenting contract by your child's school or LA. This is a formal agreement in which the school and/or LA agree to provide you with support and you agree to do certain things to help improve your child's attendance. In some areas other workers such as Learning Mentors or Connexions Personal Advisers based in the school may also be working with children on their attendance.

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 prosecuted.

The decision to issue a penalty notice or prosecute a parent is taken by the LA, in most cases after extensive work with the child and their family.

Parents can be fined up to £2,500 or imprisoned for failing to ensure that their child attends school regularly.

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

A penalty notice of £50 may be issued as an alternative to prosecution. This rises to £100 if unpaid after 28 days. Failure to pay will normally lead to prosecution.

The LA may apply for an Education Supervision Order (ESO) instead of or as well as prosecuting parents. This would be heard in the Family Proceedings Court. An ESO is made in respect of a child and makes the LA responsible for advising, supporting and giving directions to a child and his or her parents in order to make sure that the child attends school regularly. There are sanctions against parents who fail to cooperate. Magistrates may also direct the LA to consider applying for an ESO following a prosecution.

At what age can children 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 until 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.

What can I do to help?

- If you suspect that your child may be missing school or is unhappy at school, you should contact the school or the LA Education Welfare Service as soon as possible so that you can work with them to resolve any difficulties.
- Make sure your child understands that you do not approve of them missing school, but be on the alert for any particular reasons for non-attendance, such as bullying or problems with school work and discuss these with the school.
- If your child is ill or absent for any other reason, contact the school on the first day of absence.
- Follow the school's procedures for notifying absence, and always let the school know of any days that your child is unable to attend.
- Make sure your child arrives at school on time for both the morning and afternoon sessions.
- Take an interest in your child's education. Ask them about their day, and praise and encourage their achievements at school.
- Co-operate with any support, such as a parenting contract offered by the school or LA.

Where can I get more information?

Start with your school, or the LA Education Welfare Service.

Other useful sources of information are listed below.

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

Independent, practical and legal advice on schooling issues.

General helpline:

0808 8005793 (2 - 5 pm weekdays)

Exclusions information: 0808 8000327 (24 hrs)

Website includes advice booklets that can be downloaded, including on bullying and special educational needs:

ChildLine

A free confidential helpline for children.

Tel: 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

Parentline Plus

A free 24-hour confidential helpline for parents.

Tel: 0808 800 2222

A free text phone for people with a speech or hearing impairment: 0800 783 6783

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Information leaflets

Courses and workshops

www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolattendance

Information on all aspects of school attendance including links to relevant legislation.

www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying

Information and advice on tackling bullying.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk

Information and support for parents on how to help with your child's learning.

You can download this publication or order copies online at:
www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications

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Copies of this publication can also be obtained from:

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