



Every
minute
counts



Education Welfare Service

School Attendance and leave of absence

Every day of school helps your child enjoy
and achieve.

Good attendance provides better chances
and more choices.

People Directorate - Education Division

Why is school attendance important for my child?

- Most parents want their children to be happy and achieve.
- It is more important than ever for children to have a good education, to have choices and opportunities in adult life.
- Children only get one chance at school, and your child's chances of a successful future may be affected if they are not attending school regularly.
- Research shows that some young people who regularly miss school can be drawn into anti-social behaviour or crime.
- Chances (probability) of achieving good grades based on your child's school attendance level:

Attendance	Chance of achieving SAT/GCSE
93.5%	Very good
92.5%	Good
91.5%	Fairly good
90%	Less than 50% *
88%	Less than 35%
87%	Less than 20%

*A 90% attendance means your child is absent from school for the equivalent of half a day per week, missing up to 3 hours of lessons a week, which equals approximately 100 hours of learning per year.

The law

- All children who are aged between 5 and 16 years are entitled to an appropriate, full time education (from the term after their 5th birthday – last Friday in June of the year in which they become 16 years old.



- Parents/carers are responsible for making sure that their children regularly attend the school at which they are registered. The Local Authority has to make sure that parents/carers fulfil their responsibilities.

Why is it my responsibility to ensure my child attends school?

- As a parent/carer you are committing an offence if you fail to ensure your child attends school regularly.
- Failure to secure your child's regular school attendance can result in your prosecution.
- Prosecution can be through the Magistrates Court under Section 444(1/1A) of the Education Act 1996 or by the issue of a Penalty Notice under Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003. There is no statutory right of appeal against the issuing of a penalty notice and penalty notices are issued to each parent/carer of each child and any person identified as having responsibility for ensuring the child attends regularly.

Authorised and unauthorised absences

- The school is obliged by law to differentiate between authorised and unauthorised absence. A letter or telephone message from a parent/carer does not in itself authorise an absence. Only if the school is satisfied as to the validity of the explanation offered by the letter/message will the absence be authorised.
- Where a number of absences have developed into a pattern of concern, a parent/carer may be required to provide evidence to support such absences, or where there is a possibility that the absence is due to unauthorised leave of absence.
- There may be times when your child has to miss school because they are ill, in which case you should contact the school on the first day of absence before 9.30am to inform the school of the reason for your child's absence and give an expected return to school date.
- Children may have to attend medical or dental appointments in school time, (always ask if appointments can be made after school) but routine appointments should always be made out of school hours. Most medical/dental appointments do not require a full day of absence from school.

What difference does it make if my child arrives late to school?

Lateness = lost learning – minutes amount to days!

It is a legal requirement that your child is registered at both registrations – morning and afternoon.

If your child misses a registration the absence will remain unauthorised.

Taking your child to school and escorting them onto school premises is the easiest way to guarantee your child is arriving on time.

Minutes lost each day	Days per school year
5 mins	3 days
10 mins	6.5 days
15 mins	10 days
20 mins	13 days
30 mins	19 days

If I send my child to school, isn't it the school's responsibility to make sure they stay in school?

Actually, it is still your responsibility! Schools are places of learning. Schools have a duty of care but have no authority to restrain your child to prevent them from walking off school premises.

Who can I talk to for help in making changes and improving my child's school attendance?

- All schools have a variety of different people who can help you and your child sort out issues that are affecting school attendance.
- Contact the school and ask to speak to someone as soon as you suspect your child may be unhappy or missing school. He/she may be struggling with personal and/or school issues. Lots of different people are employed directly by schools, such as Learning Mentors, Inclusion Officers or Attendance Officers to help you and your child.

Alternatively:

- The school's nursing service, family support workers and of course, the Education Welfare Officer can also offer help.

What if my child doesn't attend school regularly?

- Your child's school is responsible for reporting irregular/poor school attendance to the Local Authority.
- Both the school and the Education Welfare Service can give you advice to address your child's school attendance issues and help you to meet your legal responsibilities as a parent/carer.
- Responsibility for ensuring the regular school attendance of a child remains with the parents/carers.
- Where support and guidance has been offered to a family and school attendance does not improve, legal proceedings may be initiated against the parents/carers.
- The Local Authority, through the Education Welfare Service, will enforce regular school attendance if there is no improvement. Repeated failure to attend meetings will not prevent legal intervention. Fines can be imposed up to £2,500, may include a parenting order, with a compulsory parenting course, other community order and/or imprisonment.

Don't let this happen – we are here to help!

Avoid leave of absence in term time

Children are in school for 190 days per calendar year.

Children have 175 days where they are not required to attend school in a year

From September 2013, headteachers can only grant leave of absence in exceptional circumstances.

- Leave for the purpose of a family holiday is not considered exceptional.
- Applications must be made in advance by a parent/carer with whom the child normally resides. Retrospective consent will not be granted.
- A leave of absence application form can be obtained from the school. Evidence must be provided at the time of application to support the request.
- Parents/carers will be issued with a penalty notice or other legal sanctions when a leave of absence remains unauthorised.
- The timescale for payment of a penalty notice is £60 per parent/carer if paid within 21 days and £120 per parent/carer if paid within 22-28 days. Failure to pay the correct amount within 28 days will result in legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court.

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