

Supporting your child's school attendance

Good school attendance habits are best started early. Children learn from those around them and you as parents/carers set the standards and expectations for your child. Showing your child the importance of attending school every day not only helps your child to settle quickly when starting school but helps them to keep and maintain friendships and enjoy the school environment.

Be organised, have a plan, be consistent and involve your child.

You should:

- create good routines for mornings at home so that your child can arrive punctually and they are properly equipped; this will also mean your mornings can start calmly too
- make time to encourage and show interest. Chat to them about the things they have learnt, what friends they have made and even what they had for lunch! Remember children can be tired when coming out of school, so a short chat over a snack or later that evening may produce a better result than a long list of questions
- read all school communications. A home/school diary can help with communication only when all parties use it as intended
- attend school open evenings and functions
- check your child understands the homework and that it has been completed. Support them in completing homework by creating a calm space for them to work in and set specific times during the week when homework should be done
- avoid absence from school wherever possible - try to make doctors and dental appointments out of school hours. Absence means your child will miss out on the academic studies and will also learn that education is not the main priority within the family. This can have a lifelong effect

There tend to be good reasons why children become reluctant to attend school. Take the time to listen to your child, share any concerns you or your child may have with the appropriate member of school staff and seek support at the very earliest opportunity.

Your responsibilities as a parent

By law, all children of compulsory school age (normally five to 16) must receive a suitable full-time education. As a parent, you have a legal responsibility to make sure this happens - either by registering your child at a school or by making other arrangements to give them a suitable, full-time education. Once your child is registered at a school, you are legally responsible for making sure they attend regularly. This means your child should not have sessions of unauthorised absence.

Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 defines parent as:

- all natural parents, whether they are married or not
- any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person
- any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person

Having care of a child or young person means that a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child, is considered to be a parent in education law.

Recording your child's attendance

Schools must take an attendance register twice a day, which is a legal document that is kept for five years. Any absences will be recorded with a specific code depending on the type of absence.

Absences fall into two main categories:

- **authorised** - those which schools can give you permission for
- **unauthorised** - those which they will not

Examples of absences which the school is unlikely to authorise can include:

- sickness of a parent, or other family member
- inadequate clothing for school
- child being used as a carer
- problems with transport
- non-urgent medical treatment
- school refusal or truancy
- days off for birthdays, shopping trips
- family holiday since new regulations came in September 2013

If your child needs a leave of absence you must ask for permission in advance. The headteacher can only approve the absence if he/she views them to be exceptional reasons. The headteacher also decides on the number of days to authorise or unauthorise. You can request a leave of absence form from your school.

What do I do if my child is unwell?

Most schools will have an attendance policy which is aligned to the expectations and guidance of Hampshire local authority, including the specific procedures a parent/carer should follow in the event of their child needing to be absent from school. Parents/carers are advised to refer to the school's own procedures alongside this guidance.

As a parent/carer you should notify the school on the first day your child is unable to attend due to illness. Generally this is done by telephone and many schools now have an answerphone facility specifically for this purpose. Schools should authorise absences, unless in very rare cases when they have cause for concern about the genuineness of an illness. If this is in doubt, schools can request that medical evidence is provided, such as a prescription or an appointment card; a note from a doctor may not be necessary. Schools can record the absence as unauthorised if they are not satisfied that the illness is genuine but should advise parents/carers if they intend to do so.

You should let the school know:

- the nature of the illness (although you may wish to talk confidentially about this)
- whether your child has seen their GP, or whether an appointment has been made for some other specialist service
- how long you expect your child to be absent from school
- the prognosis for the child's recovery

For absences that are expected to last up to 15 school days and that are not part of a pattern of a recurring illness, the parents/carers should discuss with the school whether they are willing to organise for work and homework to be set as soon as the child is able to cope with it. The school should also agree with you how completed work will be collected, marked and returned.

Longer absence through illness, injury or medical condition

If absence is long-term or repeated, schools may request proof that your child is genuinely unwell and unable to attend school as this is a key part of their safeguarding duties. Keep copies of any appointment letters or medical reports.

If your child:

- has a long term or chronic condition, and is expected to be absent from school for a longer period
- has intermittent attendance due to an illness (such as epilepsy or sickle cell anaemia)
- is going to be absent from school for a period of therapy or surgery

The school may want to draw up a support plan with you, and consider whether to refer your child to our specialist services.

Education for pupils who are unable to attend school because of medical needs can be provided for in the following ways:

- children who are in-patients of most hospitals will be taught through the in hospital teaching service
- children who are not in-patients, may receive home tutoring organised via the Education Inclusion Support Service and a local education centre

Children who are admitted to NHS hospitals (including psychiatric units) in other areas will receive education through local hospitals, schools or an education centre.

Why is high attendance important to my child's education?

As a parent/carer you want the best for your children. Having a good education is an important factor in opening up more opportunities in adult life. Did you know that:

- a child who is absent a day of school per week misses an equivalent of two years of their school life
- 90% of young people with absence rates below 85% fail to achieve five or more good grades of GCSE and around one third achieve no GCSEs at all
- poor examination results limit young people's options and poor attendance suggests to colleges and employers that these students are unreliable
- poor school attendance is also closely associated with crime a quarter of school age offenders have truanted repeatedly
- at least 1 million children take at least one half day off a year without permission
- 7.5 million school days are missed each year through unauthorised absence

GCSEs may seem a long way off for you and your child but all absence at any stage leads to gaps in your child's learning. This in turn can:

- mean that they fall behind in work
- affect their motivation
- affect their enjoyment of learning
- lead to poor behaviour
- affect their desire to attend school regularly affect their confidence in school
- mean they miss out on the social life of school and extra curricular opportunities and experiences
- affect their ability to have or keep friendships

Family holidays and school holidays

Children have 13 weeks annual holiday from school and school holiday dates are published well in advance online. As such, all parents/carers are expected wherever possible to plan and take their family holidays at this time so as not to disrupt their children's education. Education law states that parents **do not** have a right to take their child out of school for a holiday during term time. Only in exceptional circumstances may a headteacher grant permission for leave; and it is the headteachers decision on whether the absence is exceptional and how many days to approve.

Parents/carers who take their child out of school without the absence being agreed and authorised by written permission from the school can be issued with a penalty fine.

Possible penalties for non-attendance

Once you have registered your child at a school it is your responsibility to make sure your child attends regularly and punctually. If you fail to do so the Local Authority has a statutory duty to consider legal action to enforce school attendance.

There are a number of legal measures that the Local Authority can pursue, these include:
an Attendance contract

- being included in the fast track system which means you will be expected to improve your child's attendance within a given period of time
- receiving a penalty notice. A First Penalty Notice is £80 if paid within 21 days or £160 if paid within 22-28 days. A second Penalty Notice may be issued if a Penalty Notice has previously been issued in the preceding three-year period in respect of the same child. A second Penalty Notice is £160 if paid within 28 days with no option for this second offence to be discharged at the lower rate of £80
- being prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court. This means you could receive a community order, a fine of up to £2,500 per parent/carer, a custodial sentence or an Education Supervision Order

Penalty Notices (fines) for non-attendance at school

A Penalty Notice is a fine which may be issued as an alternative to prosecution. If it is paid it does not require a court appearance and does not result in a criminal conviction.

Section 444A of the Act gives powers to the local authority, and headteachers to issue Penalty Notices in circumstances where it is believed that a person has committed an offence under Section 444(1); that is, where a child fails to attend regularly at their registered school.

If a child is seen in a public place in the first five days of a fixed term or permanent exclusion, a Penalty Notice may be issued and is £60 if paid within 21 days or £120 if paid between 22-28 days.

Who can be issued with a Penalty Notice

Where absence warrants the issuing of a Penalty Notice, anyone with Parental Responsibility, or having day to day care of the child can be issued with one Penalty Notice for each of the children with unauthorised absence. If two parents have two children this may result in four Penalty Notices, 2 Penalty Notices per parent.

Further unauthorised absence from school

If you receive two Penalty Notices in a rolling three-year period and your child has further unauthorised absences, legal action may be taken such as prosecution or an Education Supervision Order.

Circumstances when a Penalty Notice are issued

As set down by the Department for Education, Penalty Notices can be issued for unauthorised absence. In Hampshire, Penalty Notices are issued when a pupil has had 10 or more half-day sessions (equivalent to five school days) of unauthorised absence, in the last 10 school week period or where a parent/carer is deliberately avoiding the national threshold.

Unauthorised absence is absence not approved by the school and will be coded on your child's attendance record as one of the following:

O: unauthorised absence

U: late after close of registration

G: non-approved leave of absence (holiday)

How a Penalty Notice is issued and amount of the fine

Penalty Notices are either posted to your home or delivered to you by hand. A First Penalty Notice is £80 if paid within 21 days or £160 if paid within 22-28 days. A second Penalty Notice may be issued if a Penalty Notice has previously been issued in the preceding three-year period in respect of the same child. A second Penalty Notice is £160 if paid within 28 days with no option for this second offence to be discharged at the lower rate of £80.

If your child has an ongoing pattern of unauthorised absence then you will normally receive a written warning of the possibility of a Penalty Notice being issued or a Notice to Improve letter. This warning or Notice to Improve letter will advise you about the extent of your child's absence and warn you that if your child's attendance does not show a significant improvement and if this improvement is not maintained thereafter, a Penalty Notice may be issued without further warning.

Further support, advice and guidance is available from the Department for Education.

There is no statutory right of appeal. Once a Penalty Notice has been issued, it can only be withdrawn if it can be shown that it ought not to have been issued or was issued in error.

For further information, please read the Attendance Policy which can be found on our school website.