



## **ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL**

**The information in this leaflet has been taken from support for parents on attendance at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)**

Regular school attendance is an important part of giving your child the best possible start in life. Talking to your child and their teachers could help to solve any difficulties you have in getting your child to go to school - and there are other forms of support available if you still have problems.

### **THERE ARE 190 SCHOOL DAYS AND 175 FAMILY DAYS PER YEAR**

#### **Regular School Attendance - Why It Is So Important**

Going to school regularly is important to your child's future. For example, children who miss school frequently can fall behind with their work and do less well in exams. After a period of absence, children find it difficult to catch up with learning whilst completing the usual amounts of work. Some children may also find it difficult when returning after a period of absence to fit back into social groups, especially if their friendship groups have re-structured whilst the child has been absent.

#### **Preventing Your Child From Missing School: What You Can Do**

You can help prevent your child missing school by:

- Making sure they understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality
- Taking an interest in their education - ask about school work and encourage them to get involved in school activities
- Discussing any problems they may have at school - inform their teacher in the first instance or headteacher about anything serious
- Not letting them take time off school for minor ailments - particularly those which would not prevent you from going to work

Arranging appointments and outings after school hours, at weekends or during school holidays will help to prevent disruption to your child's education and to the school.

#### **Support On School Attendance**

There are many different issues which can affect school attendance on top of illness and holidays. Examples include problems with:

- Bullying

- Housing or care arrangements
- Transport to and from school
- Work and money

If your child starts not wanting to go to school, there may be a problem you are not aware of. Ask your child first, then approach their teacher or form tutor.

### **Support From The School**

Your child's school is the first place to go to discuss any attendance problems. The school should try to agree a plan with you to improve your child's attendance (eg the fast-track to attendance programme). If you do not follow the plan and attendance does not improve, the school will take further action. 1,200 schools are currently using Parent Support Advisers (PSAs) to work with parents to improve children's behaviour and attendance. The government is expanding the availability of PSAs to allow them to reach ten to fifteen schools in each local authority.

### **Support From Your Local Authority**

Your local authority can also help if you are struggling to ensure that your child goes to school. Potential forms of support include:

- Home tuition for children with long term and recurring illnesses, so they do not fall too far behind
- Support to help reduce the burden on children where families are in difficulty (for example, if a child is spending a lot of time caring for someone)
- Working with families and schools to overcome bullying and other serious problems

### **Parenting Contracts**

If your child is missing school without good reason, one option the school or local authority might suggest is a parenting contract. A parenting contract is a voluntary written agreement between you and either the local authority or the school's governing body. Parenting contracts aren't a punishment – they are used to help you and the school or local authority work together to improve your child's attendance, and get you access to practical support. Under the contract you agree to do certain things - for example, ensure that your child arrives at school punctually every day.

If your child is not attending school regularly, however, and you refuse to agree to a contract or do not keep to its terms, this can be used as evidence if the local authority decides to prosecute you.

### **School Attendance And Absence: The Law**

The law requires parents to make sure their children receive a full-time education suitable to their needs. For most children this means attending school regularly. As a last resort, schools and local authorities have legal powers to deal with poor attendance.

## **Your Responsibilities As A Parent**

By law, all children of compulsory school age (5 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. If they do not, you will be contacted by your child's school or the local authority. Local authorities have a duty to step in if they believe a child is not getting the education required by law, either at home or at school.

If your child is missing school, you may be visited by a member of the Education Welfare Service. They will talk to you about your child's attendance problems. The Lincolnshire County Council's EWS is available on 01522 552222.

A child becomes of compulsory school age when they reach the age of five and, where a parent has elected to register their child at school, they must start school in the term following their fifth birthday. A child continues to be of compulsory school age until the last Friday in June in the school year that they reach the age of sixteen.

A child registered at a school can legally miss school only in very limited circumstances. These include:

- When the child is too ill to attend
- When the school has authorised the absence beforehand

If a child is missing school without good reason, schools and local authorities have a number of legal powers that they can use.

### **School Attendance Order (SAO)**

A School Attendance Order is issued if your child is not on roll at any school and the local authority is worried that you have not made arrangements to provide an alternative, suitable, full-time education. SAOs are used to direct you to send your child to a specified school.

Before serving an SAO, Children's Services Officers should make every effort to discuss the situation with you. If it is not possible to persuade you to make suitable arrangements for your child's education, then you will be served with a notice stating that you are failing in your duty to provide your child with an education. The notice must inform you that you need to satisfy the local authority that you are providing an education at school or otherwise within a specified time period (but not less than 15 days beginning with the day the notice was served).

Local authorities are responsible for prosecuting parents if they breach an SAO and also have the option of seeking an Education Supervision Order.

## **Education Supervision Order (ESO)**

As well as or instead of prosecuting you the local authority may apply to a court for an ESO. This order means that a supervisor will be appointed to you to give you help and advice on getting your child back into education.

## **Penalty Notices**

As an alternative to prosecution, authorised local authority staff, police officers and headteachers can issue penalty notices to parents of children who are not attending school regularly. The penalty is £50, rising to £100 if not paid within 28 days. If you fail to pay a penalty fine, you will be prosecuted.

## **Taking You To Court**

The local authority may prosecute you (they don't have to issue a penalty notice first) and this could result in a more severe penalty. You could get a fine of up to £2,500, a community order or, in extreme cases, a jail sentence of up to three months. If the court thinks it will help to stop your child missing school, it may also impose a Parenting Order.

## **Parenting Order**

A Parenting Order is a court order which requires you to attend parenting education or support classes. You will also have to do whatever the court says is necessary to improve your child's behaviour and attendance at school.

## **Further Information**

Please contact us for further information, or go to [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) . Alternatively contact the local education authority on 01522 225555.

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