
How to improve your child's school attendance and where to get support

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For the majority of pupils, the best environment to learn in is school, where being surrounded by teachers and friends helps keep them safe.

It's important for your child's academic achievement, as well as their wellbeing, wider development and mental health.

There is also [evidence](#) that the students with the highest attendance throughout their time in school gain the best GCSE and A level results.

For example, data from 2019 shows that 84 percent of Key Stage 2 pupils who had 100% attendance achieved the expected standard, compared to 40 percent of pupils who were persistently absent across the key stage.

Higher attendance at school may also lead to better career progression with higher earnings post-16.

What if my child is too ill to go to school?

It's usually safe for parents and carers to send their children to school with mild illnesses, like a minor cough, runny nose or sore throat.

However, children should stay at home if they have a high temperature of 38C or above.

The NHS has published [guidance](#) to help parents and carers decide whether their child is well enough to attend school, including information on a range of common childhood illnesses and conditions, such as coughs, colds, chickenpox and headlice.

The Chief Medical Officer has also [written to schools](#) to explain how to tell whether a pupil is well enough to be in school.

What if my child is too anxious to go to school?

Children can sometimes feel a little bit worried about going to school. Mostly, this is a very normal emotion.

It's important to recognise that going into school can help children to feel less worried than letting them stay at home.

If your child is anxious over several weeks, talk to their school about how they can support you.

We have put together some useful links on the [Education Hub](#) of mental health support which you may find helpful.

What does it mean if a child is persistently or severely absent?

Children who are registered at a school but regularly fail to turn up are officially referred to as being 'persistently' or 'severely' absent.

The school day is split into two sessions – one session counts as a morning or afternoon spent in school.

Pupils who have missed more than 10 percent of school sessions are considered persistently absent, while children who have missed more than 50 percent of school sessions are referred to as severely absent.

When can my child be absent from school?

When you register your child at school, you have a legal duty to ensure your child attends that school regularly.

This means that your child must attend every day that the school is open, unless:

- Your child is too ill to attend that day.
- You have asked in advance and been given permission by the school for your child to be absent on that day due to exceptional circumstances.

- Your child cannot attend school on that day because it is a day you are taking part in religious observance.
- Your local authority is responsible for arranging your child's transport to school and it is not available on that day or has not been provided yet; or
- You are a gypsy/traveller family with no fixed abode, and you are required to travel for work that day meaning your child cannot attend their usual school.

In most circumstances, however, your child is required to attend another school temporarily during such absences.

These are the only circumstances where schools can permit your child to be absent.

Parents who take their child out of school without permission may face [paying a fine](#).

What should I do if my child needs to be absent from school?

You should contact their school as early as possible to explain why your child needs to be absent, for instance if they are too ill to attend school.

If not, your child's school will contact you on the first morning of their absence to find out why.

All parents can request a 'leave of absence' for their child which gives them permission to be absent from school.

These must be agreed with the school in advance and will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

Your child's headteacher has the final say over whether to approve the request and how long your child can be absent.

What else is being done to improve school attendance?

We're supporting schools to boost attendance through a range of initiatives and have published [guidance](#) on how we, parents, schools, Trusts, governing bodies and local authorities can work together to make sure pupils go to school.

We've put together a [short guide](#) which helps parents understand the guidance. It explains how you can work with your school and local authority to support your children to attend.

Other initiatives include:

- Introducing a new daily data tool which now makes it easier for school leaders and teachers to analyse attendance.
- Establishing the attendance hubs programme, which supports schools across the country to share practical solutions on breaking down barriers to school attendance.
- Forming an Attendance Action Alliance of national education and sector leaders who are working together to target the reasons behind poor attendance.
- Funding and expanding our Attendance Mentors scheme. Delivered by children's charity Barnardo's, the programme targets areas of the country with the highest levels of pupil absence. Trained mentors work directly with persistently and severely absent children and their families, to identify barriers to attendance and help get children back into school.
- Collecting evidence to inform future policy on children who are not registered at school or receiving suitable home education, to help us

identify best practice to make sure all children are receiving an appropriate education.

- Publishing a toolkit for schools, which provides tips and templates for communicating with parents and carers about attendance.

Together, these measures aim to improve attendance, leading to better attainment and mental wellbeing amongst school children.

Where can parents get support and advice?

Children may struggle to attend school for a wide range of reasons.

If your child is struggling to attend school, both their school and your local authority also have responsibilities to help you to support your child's attendance.

In most cases, if your child's attendance level is falling, their school will contact you to explore the reasons and discuss what help can be put in place to help you overcome the barriers they are facing.

If your child is struggling to attend school, you can expect the school to meet with you, and your child if they are old enough.

The school will want to understand the reasons for their absence and what support you or they need to overcome the barriers to attendance they are experiencing.

Reasons that relate to being in school

If the barriers to your child's attendance are in school – such as they are having friendship problems – the school is responsible for working with you to help overcome the issues.

Information on who in school you can contact for help, including the school's senior leader responsible for attendance, can be found in the school's attendance policy on its website or available in hard copy from the school itself.

Reasons that relate to issues outside of school

If the barriers to attendance you or your child are facing go beyond the remit of the school – such as a transport or a mental health issue – both the school and local authority have a responsibility to help you.

This includes helping you to access the wider support you might need, for example from the school nurse or from local housing or transport teams.

Making a plan

As part of the conversation you have with your child's school you will agree a set of joint actions you will all take to help overcome any barriers to attendance.

This agreement will often include a commitment to refer or help you to access support services in exchange for an agreement from you to engage and take part in the support offered.

They will also arrange mutual convenient times for you to come together to review these commitments and your child's progress.

It may take the form of an informal action plan, an early help plan, or a parenting contract – depending on the complexity of the reasons for your child's absence.

You may also be interested in:

- [Why is school attendance so important and what are the risks of missing a day?](#)
- [Fines for parents for taking children out of school: What you need to know](#)
- [How we're helping look after the mental health of children and young people](#)

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