

# School attendance

This factsheet explains:

- the law on school attendance
- reasons your child might find it difficult to attend school
- what you can do if your child is having problems at school
- what the law says about part-time education
- what happens if your child does not attend school
- what you should know if you want to keep your child off school.

## What does the law say about school attendance?

The law<sup>1</sup> says that you must provide your child with an 'efficient' education that is suited to their age, ability and aptitude while they are 'school age' – from five years old until they turn 16.

You can do this by:

- sending them to a school run by a local authority
- arranging for them to attend an independent school
- educating them at home.

If your child is enrolled in a school run by a local authority (or they have a place at another type of school which the local authority arranged and paid for), you must make sure that your child attends regularly. Your child must not be absent from school without a 'reasonable excuse'.

The local authority is responsible for providing your child with an education along with any additional support they need to fully benefit from it. This includes any support they need to be able to attend school.

<sup>1</sup>Education (Scotland) Act 1980

## Attendance at nursery

You can find information about attendance at nursery in our factsheet on [Additional support for learning in the early years](#). You can also contact our helpline for advice.

## Why might my child find it difficult to attend school?

There are many reasons why a child might find it difficult to attend school, for example:

- ill-health
- problems at school
- looking after another family member who is ill or needs help
- other things going on at home that prevent them attending school.

Often there is more than one reason, or one reason may lead to another. For example, if your child is feeling anxious about school, this may lead them to feel too unwell to attend.

## What should I do if my child is finding it difficult to attend school?

### Ill health

If your child is not well enough to attend school due to ill health, they still have a right to an education. If they are off for a long period or have lots of regular absences, alternative arrangements must be made so that they can continue learning while they are off school. The school must also identify and provide the support they need to return to school.

Find out more in our factsheet on [When your child is too unwell to go to school](#).

### Problems at school

Your child may not feel safe or happy at school for various reasons, for example if:

- they are being bullied
- the school environment makes them anxious
- they are worried about their progress
- they are not getting the support they need
- teachers or other pupils do not understand their needs.

If your child struggles to get into school for any reason, it is important to inform the school as early as possible of any absences and explain why your child is finding it difficult to attend. The school should work with you and your child to try and identify the reasons why your child feels unable to attend. The school should then take action to reduce or remove the problems that are preventing your child from attending school.

Your child has a right to receive the support they need to be able to benefit from school. This includes support to help them to be able to attend school.

If you are concerned that the school is not providing the support that your child needs, ask for a meeting to talk through your concerns and to review their support. You can also write to the head teacher of the school if you are not happy with the outcome of the meeting. Find out more about the steps you can take in our factsheet on [Avoiding and solving problems](#).

If your child is feeling very anxious or unhappy about school, you or your child could also speak to your child's GP to discuss whether they should be referred to other services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The GP may also be able to provide a note you can give to the school to explain your child's absences. You can also ask school whether they have a counselling service that your child could access.

## Home circumstances

If circumstances at home are making it difficult for your child to attend school, it is important that you explain to the school how the situation might be affecting your child. Your child still has a right to an education and they should be able to access help to continue learning at home when they cannot physically attend school.

The school can also arrange support for your child when they are at school and tell you and your child about other services they might be able to access. For example, if your child is helping to look after another family member at home, the school may be able to refer them to the local young carer's service.

## Part-time education

School staff or other professionals might suggest that a pupil moves on to a part-time timetable in some circumstances. This can include where a pupil is returning to school after a period of illness or exclusion, or where some time is needed to put in place the additional support that a pupil needs.

Any period of part-time education should be short-term. Your child should only be on a part-time timetable if you agree to it. Any plans for part-time education for a pupil should be based on what is in their best interests, with their wellbeing at the centre of the decision.

Part-time education should not be used on a long-term basis or as a way of managing your child's support needs. Your child's school should have a plan for helping them return to full-time education as soon as they can.

While your child is on a part-time timetable, they continue to have the same right to an education as the other pupils in their school. Professionals working with your child should explore ways for them to continue learning when they are not physically attending school.

If your child has been on a part-time timetable for some time or you are unhappy with the arrangement, contact the school to discuss how they can help your child back to full-time education. If you are not satisfied with their response, there are further steps you can take. Find out more in our factsheet on [Avoiding and solving problems](#).

## What if the school is concerned about my child's absences?

### Unauthorised absence

If your child is absent from school without a 'reasonable excuse', the school will mark the absence as 'unauthorised' on their recording system. When a pupil has a lot of 'unauthorised absences' the system will automatically flag up a problem to the school or the local authority.

### Dealing with unauthorised absence

If your child is regularly marked as having 'unauthorised absences', the local authority could take action against you. As you have a legal duty to make sure your child attends school regularly, you may be guilty of an offence if this does not happen.

Before taking any formal steps against you, the school and local authority should work with you to try and identify the reasons why your child has not been at school and to provide any support that is needed to help them attend.

The school or local authority may involve someone such as an attendance officer or home-school link worker. This person's role would be to work with you to try and resolve any problems with the school and come up with a plan for helping your child back into school.

If your child continues to have regular unauthorised absences, the local authority could do any of the following:

- make an attendance order
- refer you and your child to the Children's Reporter
- as a last resort, take you to court, where you could be fined or imprisoned.

It is rare for these steps to be taken, but it is important to know that it is possible.

## Can I keep my child at home if the school is not keeping them safe?

All schools have a duty to take reasonable care for the safety of pupils<sup>2</sup>.

If you are concerned that your child will not be safe at school, speak to the head teacher of the school as soon as possible. You can ask what steps will be taken to make sure your child will be supported and kept safe. If you are not satisfied with the response from the head teacher, get in touch with the contact for additional support for learning at the local authority: [www.enquire.org.uk/local-authorities](http://www.enquire.org.uk/local-authorities).

You have a legal duty to make sure your child attends school regularly. If the school does not agree that there is a 'reasonable excuse' for your child not attending, they may take action against you (see '**Unauthorised absences**' on page 4). For this reason, try and work with the school and local authority to find a resolution as quickly as possible so that your child can continue attending.

If you decide not to send your child to school, write to the head teacher and the local authority to explain the reasons why and ask for their support in resolving the situation. If communication has broken down, you can request mediation to help agree the best way forward for your child. Find out more in our factsheets on [Avoiding and solving problems](#) and [Mediation](#).

<sup>2</sup>The Schools (Safety and Supervision of Pupils) (Scotland) Regulations 1990

## Where can I find out more?

**Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: A Positive Approach to the Promotion and Management of Attendance in Scottish Schools (2019)**

[www.gov.scot/publications/included-engaged-involved-part-1-positive-approach-promotion-management-attendance-scottish-schools](http://www.gov.scot/publications/included-engaged-involved-part-1-positive-approach-promotion-management-attendance-scottish-schools)

This is the Scottish Government's guidance for local authorities and schools on promoting and managing school attendance.

**School attendance: a guide for parents (2009)**

[www.gov.scot/publications/guide-parents-school-attendance](http://www.gov.scot/publications/guide-parents-school-attendance)

This guidance from the Scottish Government explains your responsibilities for your child's attendance at school, and the support available when there are issues with attendance.



# How Enquire can help

Enquire can help you understand your child's rights to additional support for learning and how to work in partnership with their school or nursery to make sure your child gets the support they need.

Enquire can:

- explain your child's rights to additional support for learning
- listen to any questions and concerns
- advise you on the way forward
- help you find local education and support services.

You can contact our helpline on **0345 123 2303** or [info@enquire.org.uk](mailto:info@enquire.org.uk)  
Access to interpreters is available.

You can also find lots more information about additional support for learning, including our full range of publications, at [www.enquire.org.uk](http://www.enquire.org.uk)

The information on our website is available in over 100 languages and with a range of accessibility tools, such as text-to-speech.

Reach, as part of Enquire, provides advice and information for children, parents, carers and professionals about children's rights to additional support for learning: [www.reach.scot](http://www.reach.scot)

Enquire is also a partner in the My Rights, My Say service. My Rights, My Say supports children aged 12-15 with additional support needs to exercise their rights to be involved in decisions about their support in school:  
[www.myrightsmysay.scot](http://www.myrightsmysay.scot)

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