

Attendance Advice and Guidance for **Parents and Pupils**







A Parents' Guide*

Parents are the most important influence in children's lives and learning, and are vital in shaping the mind set and behaviour of children. The attitudes and behaviours of parents can have a huge impact on the way that pupils view the importance of attendance, and in turn on the actual number of absences pupils have.

Why is attendance at school so important?

If a child of compulsory school age is registered at school it is essential that they attend school regularly and on time. This pattern of good attendance is something which should be established early in their school career, and should be maintained throughout their time in education.

Evidence tells us that good attendance in school is fundamental in allowing pupils to access a wide of range of opportunities in order that they reach their full potential,

* In this booklet, we will use the word parent to mean both parent and carer

and become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. It is parents who have the responsibility of making sure that their children are educated.

If pupils miss school on a regular basis, they are missing out on the chance to:

- Gain a wealth of knowledge
- Make new friends
- Build positive relationships
- Experience new things
- Develop awareness of other cultures, religion, ethnicity and gender differences
- Learn new skills
- Gain qualifications
- Build confidence and self-esteem
- Have fun!
- Have the best possible start in life

We know that young people who regularly miss school without good reason are more likely to become isolated from their friends; to underachieve in examinations and/or become involved in anti-social behaviour.

What the Law Says:

All children and young people enrolled at local authority schools should attend regularly, and should not be absent without a reasonable excuse. Professionals working with children and young people on a day to day basis, for example Pastoral Care staff, Primary School staff and Area Inclusion Workers, contact the family of any

pupil not attending on a regular basis, to help resolve any problems and remove any potential barriers to school attendance.

If your child continues to be regularly absent from school, the law says that you may be guilty of an offence. The local authority may choose to do any of the following:

- refer you and your child to the Children's Reporter
- make an attendance order
- as a last resort, take you to court, where you could be given a significant fine

However, North Ayrshire Council promotes partnership working with parents/ carers and other agencies to support children and families experiencing challenges with non-attendance.

Remember – education is not simply an option – it is compulsory!

Is it ever alright for my child to be absent from school?

As an authority, North Ayrshire Council recognises that there may be times when a child or young person requires to be absent from school. These may include:

- Illness
- Attending a medical appointment
- Someone close to your child has died
- Attending a meeting about/ going to a Children's Hearing
- Attending a religious ceremony or the wedding of someone very close to them
- A crisis or serious difficulty at home or in your family

As long as you have informed the school of the reason for the absence, and the school is satisfied that this is a valid reason, these would be recorded as authorised absences. It is essential that you inform the school as soon as possible if your child is off school for any reason.

When is it not acceptable for my child to be absent from school?

As a parent, you have the responsibility of ensuring that your child attends schools every day, in order to ensure that they gain the best possible education. You can demonstrate your commitment to your child's education by:

- Not taking holidays during term time. In each academic year, there are a maximum of 190 statutory school days – this leaves another 175 days a year to take holidays. Any young person who is absent during term time because of a family holiday will be missing out on important learning and will fall behind with their work. Holidays taken during term time will be recorded as unauthorised absence.
- Not condoning your child's absence from school because it is their birthday. Your child is at school for a maximum of seven hours a day – leaving plenty of time to celebrate out with school hours.
- Not condoning an absence to go shopping
- Not condoning an absence to play the newest video game or use a new piece of technology
- Not taking time off school to attend an event such as a football match or concert
- Ensuring that your child attends school until the school closes on the last day of every term

Latecoming

In addition, parents must be aware of the impact that poor timekeeping can have on their child's education. Even five minutes late can make a huge difference to the start your child has to their day, and all those minutes add up over the year.

MINUTES LATE / MINUTES MISSED	IMPACT ON ATTENDANCE IN A YEAR
5 minutes a day =	3.4 days absent = 98.4% attendance
10 minutes a day =	6.9 days absent = 97.6% attendance
15 minutes a day =	10.3 days absent = 94.6% attendance
20 minutes a day =	13.8 days absent = 92.9% attendance
30 minutes a day =	20.7 days absent = 89.2% attendance

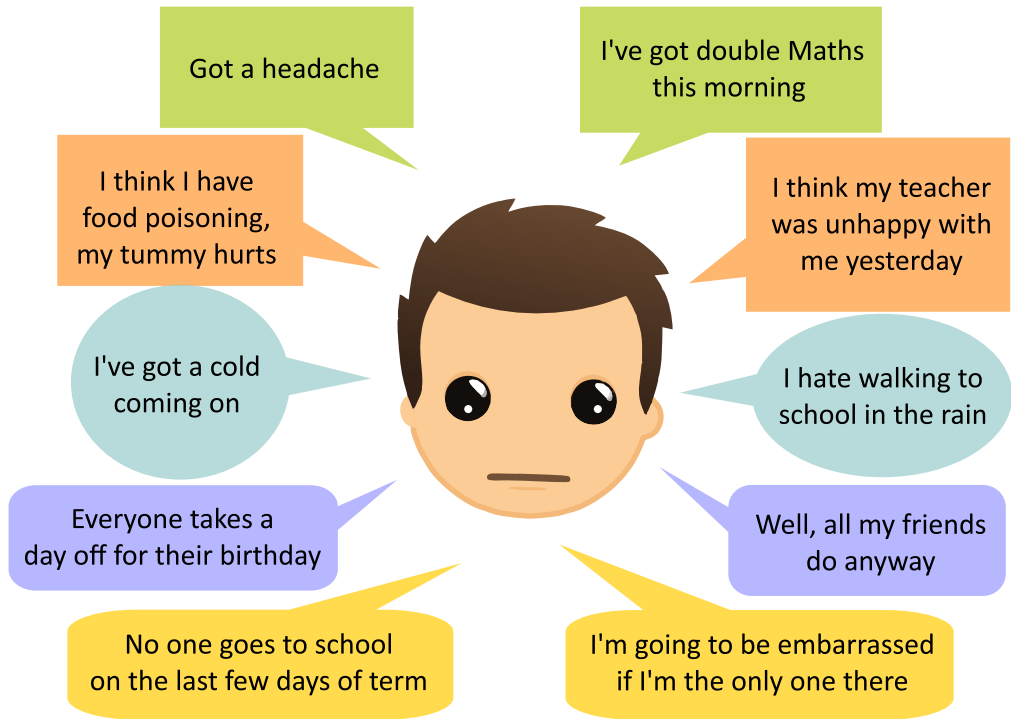
So how can parents help?

There are many simple steps which parents can take to ensure your child has good attendance at school. These include:

- Establishing a good night time routine – bag packed; clean clothes laid out; electronic devices removed from bedrooms at an appropriate time. Accessing electronic devices such as phones, tablets or games consoles late at night is proven to have a detrimental effect on sleep patterns and concentration levels. Excessive use of electronic devices can also have a serious impact on a child or young person's mental health.
- Establishing a good routine in the mornings so that your child is prepared for the school day ahead, including a healthy breakfast
- Developing good habits when it comes to nutrition and healthy eating.

- Where possible, children should avoid sugary and high energy drinks, and should be encouraged to eat a healthy balanced diet for their overall wellbeing
- Ensuring your child attends school regularly – and on time
- Arranging medical and dental appointments out with school time wherever possible
- Informing the school promptly if your child is going to be absent for any reason
- Taking family holidays out with term time to maximise learning opportunities
- Taking an interest in school – talk to your child about their day; support them with homework and attend parents' evening and school events
- Praising and rewarding achievements at school to show the value your family places on education
- Discussing any problems or difficulties with the school – ensuring good attendance is a partnership and school staff will be happy to help and support you when needed
- Not condoning an absence for a very minor ailment
- Sending your child to school even if they are late – there is no need to miss a whole day

Children and young people have great imaginations...as a parent you have to be prepared for the possibility that your child may not always want to go school, and may present you with a variety of 'reasons' why they should not attend. While some of these may be valid, we have all tried our luck with our parents and offered half-truths and exaggeration to be allowed to stay off school.



What parents in North Ayrshire should expect

The Head Teacher/ Senior Leadership Team within the school will monitor attendance. If your child's attendance falls below 90% in a four week period you will receive a letter inviting you into the school to discuss the reasons for your child's non-attendance. The discussion will address the following:

- How can we help?
- What can we do to support you and your child?
- What are the risks for him/her by not coming to school?

Key actions for everyone will be agreed at this meeting, which will be chaired by a Principal Teacher or Depute.

If these interventions do not lead to improvement in your child's attendance, and their attendance is still below 90% over an eight week period, you will receive a further letter, once again inviting you into the school to discuss the matter.

The focus of the discussion will be:

- What are the barriers for your child?
- How can we help?
- Despite our best efforts, why did the previous agreed actions not work?
- What are the ongoing risks to your child?
- Who can we ask to help us? (e.g. Social Work, Area Inclusion Officer, Police Scotland)
- What else might your child need?

Where a child's attendance **continues to fall below 90% over twelve weeks**, the school will initiate a 'Team Around the Child' meeting to which you will be invited. At this meeting you, with a number of key professionals, will discuss the issue which by now is putting your child at significant risk of not achieving in school and is potentially indicating a pattern of non-attendance and disrupted learning.

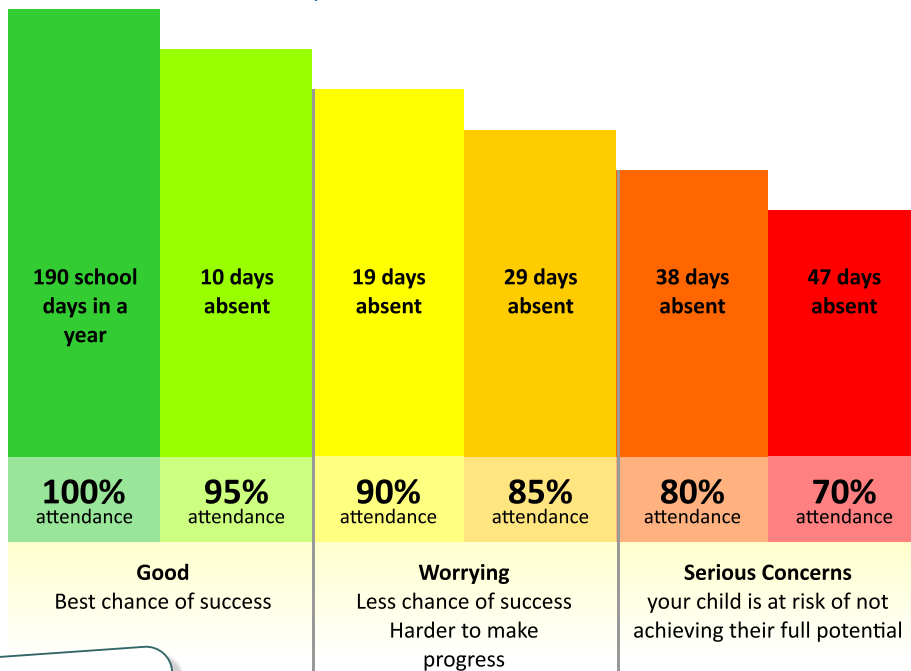
If your child's attendance **continues to fall below 90% over a sixteen week period**, you will be invited to a further meeting to discuss this with the school, who may consider a referral to the Children's Reporter.

However, this is a situation which everyone wishes to avoid, and all North Ayrshire Educational establishments will work in partnership with parents to make sure that **every school day matters, and every school day counts.**

Remember...

Trigger	Action	Possible Outcome
Under 90% over 4 weeks	Meeting with PT/ Depute	Actions identified to support improvement
Under 90% over 8 weeks	Meeting with Depute/ Head Teacher	Review of previous actions; need for further support explored
Under 90% over 12 weeks	School Team Around the Child meeting	Possible involvement of other agencies
Under 90% over 16 weeks	External Team Around the Child meeting	Possible referral to Children's Reporter

Why Attendance Matters



Did you know?..

... there are 175 non school days a year!
ideal days for holidays, visits, shopping,
appointments and household jobs

CountMEin

Every school day matters; every lesson counts...





A Pupils' Guide

Your Education is very important. It is the key to your future... to achieving your potential, and being successful. Schools already work hard with you, your parents and the wider community to make sure you are able to maximise the time you attend school. However, the number of children and young people not attending 100% of the time is increasing and this guidance is designed to help you to recognise if you are someone who is missing out on education, and offer some key ideas to help you come to school every day.



There are 190 school days in a year. That means you have 175 other days in the year to enjoy long lies, celebrations, attend concerts and football matches or go shopping. It's a surprise isn't it? The days in school and the days out of school are very similar. So, why would you waste a precious day of education, the excitement of new learning experiences, and seeing all your friends at school for something you could do on another day?

Missing school is missing out!!

Pupils and parents give many acceptable and reasonable reasons for children not coming to school. These reasons include:

- Illness
- Attending a family celebration such as a wedding
- Attending an appointment at a doctor or hospital
- Attending a Children's Hearing

These are perfectly acceptable reasons to be absent from school if they are genuine. However, a slight tummy ache or headache are normal aspects of life and you should take some pain relief under parental supervision and come to school. You know how important it is!

Where you have been ill for a long time, or for some other reason have missed out on some of your valuable education, you should not keep avoiding it. Go with your parent/carer to the school and work with them to draw up a plan for you to return. Teachers and other staff will help you get back into a routine and help you to catch up.

However, more recently, pupils have told us that they are taking days off for more frivolous reasons:

1. "It's my birthday"
2. "There's a new game out"
3. "I need a new dress for the party"
4. "My team are playing away from home"

These are reasons which are not reasonable and you will be marked as an "unauthorised absence" as though you were truanting from school.

As a local authority, North Ayrshire Council Education and Youth Employment recommends that parents do not take children and young people out of school for family holidays. As their child, we would encourage you to talk to your parents about these matters when holidays are being organised and talked about, and highlight the importance of your time in school.

Think about this.....If you got 80% in an assessment or exam. You would probably be quite pleased. That sounds like a great result. But being in school 80% of the time is the equivalent of taking ONE DAY A WEEK OFF! Thinking about your future in the world of work...an employer would simply not accept this and remember...these employers may also ask for reference when you are applying for a post and your attendance would be part of the information they would need. So what can you do to make sure you get to school every day?



1. Plan and prepare

- Ensure you have completed any homework for the next day, or have at least attempted it and noted what help you need from the teacher the next day.
- Leave out the clothes for the next day and pack your bag
- Sort out issues that might cause problems in the morning... like dinner money or forms signed

2. Get up! Get out!

Set an alarm and leave plenty of time for having a breakfast and for travelling to school

3. Get plenty of rest

You should get to bed at a reasonable time. Staying awake till the early hours will not prepare you well for school. You should aim to get 8-10 hours' sleep per night to make sure you are alert and ready for the school day ahead. Your body and brain need a rest!

4. Technology

Research has proven the link between poor achievement at school and too much time focussed on using technology. At mealtimes and at bedtime, you should put the phone and the tablets/laptops away. Leave them in another room or, in some cases, families have “technology baskets” where all the family leave their devices to ensure everyone in the house gets a proper rest and is not disturbed or tempted to message/email.

5. Food

Ensure that you eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and veg and make sure you eat your dinner. Foods to avoid include fatty foods which can upset your stomach and foods high in SUGAR and CAFFEINE. High energy drinks are not suitable for children and young people and can cause feelings of anxiousness and nervousness or excitement. This impacts directly on your concentration at school and your sleep pattern.

6. Take responsibility

Even if no one else in your house is getting up, you should stick to your routine and get out to school. As you develop and grow into adulthood, you should be taking more responsibility and develop your independent self.

The law requires you to attend school and if your attendance falls below a certain level, your parents will have to attend meetings at the school, other agencies such as social work and health may become involved and they could get into some very hot water.

Going to school is great! You get out of it what you put in, so make sure what you put in is hard work, consistent attendance and a positive attitude and you will succeed.



Primary school Pupil Information

Going to school every day is really important. It will help you to be the best you can be, and give you the best possible chance of a successful future. Taking a day off school is a BIG DEAL as no one wants to miss out on all the great things that school has to offer.

Pupils told us that there are lots of things they like about school

I like lots of subjects like
PE, Science, Art
and Maths

I see my friends
and play with them

I love
school trips

I like
playtime

School dinners
are lovely

It's a bright,
lovely place to be

I like the teacher

I am cared for by all the
adults around me in
school and they
look out for me

Going to school every day is important for lots of other reasons too...



“To learn how to read, write and count”

-To be as good as I can be in all my subjects. even the ones where I have to try really hard to do well”

“To get a good job in the future”

“It’s the law!”

“It makes me feel part of something special”

“I sleep better because I am busy”

We know that sometimes pupils need to stay off, but the reasons have to be REAL and IMPORTANT.

You might need to take time off if:

- You are not well or people who live at home with you are not well. School can help you to keep in touch with your family at home during the day, so that you know they are okay. This will help you.
- Hospital appointments
- If someone close to you has passed away and you need to go to a funeral or are too upset to come to school

In all our schools in North Ayrshire, we all work together to make sure you are safe, comfortable and confident. We want school to be a great experience for you.

You can help too

- Try to get a good night's sleep. You should not be looking at screens or devices after 7pm or even earlier. Ask the adults at home to put them in a safe place until the next day.
- Eat well. When you have access to fresh fruit and vegetables, try to choose those rather than chocolate or crisps. This will help to keep you healthy and well.
- Spend some time outside every day. Fresh air helps us all to stay healthy and mentally well.
- If things are troubling you or causing you to worry, speak to those at home who love you and know best how to help you with those feelings. There may be someone you trust at school who you can speak to- your teacher or a classroom assistant for example.
- If you do take time off for a serious reason, then your teacher will give you the time and support you need to catch up.

You attend school for 190 days every year- that leaves 175 other days for fun activities with your family, participating in sports or other hobbies or just relaxing at home.



Missing school = Missing out

Our Pupils say...

CountMEin'
Every school day matters; every lesson counts...

Our Parents say...

Count on Us'
Every school day matters; every lesson counts...



North Ayrshire Council
Education and Youth Employment