



MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL

# Guidance for parents

Frequently asked questions about school attendance

## Is schooling compulsory?

Schooling is not compulsory but education is. Parents have a legal duty to make sure that their children are properly educated according to their age, ability, aptitude and any special needs they have.

If your child is a registered pupil at a school, it is your responsibility to ensure that they attend school regularly and arrive on time.

## When do children have to be educated?

Children must be educated when they are of compulsory school age. A child becomes compulsory school age from the start of the school term following their fifth birthday and ceases to be on the last Friday in June of the school year in which they are 16 years old.

## The school says that my child's attendance is 90%, which I think is very good. Should I be concerned?

Yes you should be concerned, as 90% is not good attendance and indicates that there may be issues that have to be addressed. It means that every two weeks your child has missed a day's education. Over a full school year they will be absent for almost four weeks and the missed work will not all be caught up.

## The school was concerned when I asked for my child to have time off for a family holiday. My child rarely has any other time off school.

If your child has a week off, they will miss several lessons of English and mathematics, in addition to all the other educational opportunities available depending on how the school organises its lessons.

You should not expect your child's school to grant leave of absence for a family holiday during term-time. Schools will not generally authorise absence for family holidays taken during term-time unless there are exceptional circumstances. The fact that a holiday is cheaper during term-time will not be considered an exceptional circumstance.

## If I take my child out of school for a family holiday without authorisation, what will happen?

The absence will be recorded as unauthorised and you may be issued with a penalty notice. If your child's absence is already a cause for concern, you may be prosecuted, with the holiday absence part of the authority's evidence.

## What should I do if my child is going to be absent from school?

You should contact your child's school on the first morning of any absence – either by telephone or in person. You should tell the school the reason for your child's absence and indicate when you think he/she is likely to return. When your child does return to school you should ensure that you send in a dated note confirming the reason for the absence. You should also do this if your child is going to be late.

## Can I authorise my child's absence from school?

No. Only schools can authorise absence. Parents are required to provide an explanation for any absence. It is for the school to decide whether the reason for the absence is acceptable. If it thinks the reason is acceptable, it will authorise the absence. If it doesn't think the reason is acceptable, it will record the absence as unauthorised.

## What is unauthorised absence from school?

Unauthorised absence is absence not deemed to be acceptable by the school. This includes absence because of shopping, having a haircut, birthday or Christmas treats, looking after brothers or sisters at home, waiting for a workman or delivery, working, oversleeping, holidays not agreed in advance by the school, and truanting.

If you allow your child to be absent from school without good reason, the school will not authorise the absence, you will be committing an offence and you could be issued with a penalty notice or prosecuted.

## **I do not live with my child, whose attendance is not good. It is not my responsibility to ensure their regular attendance, is it?**

If you are the natural parent of the child, you still have responsibility for ensuring your child's regular attendance at school. You should maintain contact with them and support their educational progress, including their attendance at school.

## **I am not the parent of the child who is absent from school. Do I have any legal responsibility?**

Yes. You have a duty in law for ensuring the education of any children living with you whether you are the biological parent or not. A person having care of a child or young person, irrespective of what their relationship is to the child, is considered to be a parent in education law.

## **Why is regular attendance important?**

Children who have poor school attendance records are much more likely to underachieve and leave school with no, or few, relevant qualifications. Pupils who are absent from school are also more likely to become involved in criminal or antisocial behaviour, or become victims of it.

## **How can I help minimise the time my child has off school?**

Make all appointments for the doctor, dentist, optician etc after school hours or during school holidays.

Do not arrange holidays during school time. Ensure that they are during school holiday periods.

Make sure that your child is never late for school; sometimes children experience tummy aches and headaches if they worry about being late for school.

## **What can I do to help?**

Take an active interest in your child's education. Listen to them read, help them with their homework, visit the school often and enquire how your child is doing. Set them a target to improve their attendance over the previous term and reward them for very good attendance.

## **How do schools work out my child's attendance?**

Schools count each day as two sessions – morning and afternoon. Your child has to attend every session to achieve 100% attendance for that week.

If your child has a half-day absence, they would have a 90% attendance for that week; if they had a whole day off school, their attendance would be 80%. If your child is absent for the whole week, they would be given 0% attendance.

## **Support for parents and pupils**

If you need help to support your child's attendance, you should contact the school as soon as possible to discuss your concerns and any problems you are having. They will assist you in trying to resolve any issues affecting your child's attendance at school; they may also be able to get some help from a support service or other agency that can assist you with your difficulties.

**For information in your language call 0161 234 5001**

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