

A guide for parents about school attendance



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A guide for parents about school attendance

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Attending and taking part in learning – wherever learning takes place – is fundamental to making sure that our young people become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Scotland's children and young people need to be included, engaged and involved throughout their education. This booklet helps you, as parents and carers, understand how you can help to achieve this.

The Scottish Government wants all children and young people to feel happy, safe and secure at school. We want to make sure children and young people receive day to day or additional support to attend school and engage in their learning.

Parents and carers are by far the most important influence on children's lives and learning and it is parents and carers who are responsible for making sure their child is educated.

This booklet is for parents or carers of children and young people who go to a school provided by the local authority and it explains your responsibilities as a parent when it comes to your child's attendance at school.

All those who work with children and young people in learning environments have a role to play in making sure all children and young people feel safe, secure, included, listened to and supported; and should be able to discuss and respond to issues which might affect attendance at school.

This booklet describes the support you and your child are entitled to if school attendance is a problem. If for any reason your child is worried about attending school, or if you are worried about your child's attendance at school, you will find this booklet helpful in getting support from the school or other organisations that can help.

I hope this booklet will guide you in helping your child achieve their best at school.

KEITH BROWN MSP
Minister for Schools and Skills



A guide for parents about school attendance

Parents are by far the most important influence in children's lives and learning. In this booklet we will use the word 'parent' to mean both parent and carer.

This booklet explains your responsibilities as a parent when it comes to your child's attendance at school. It's important to remember that once you enrol your child at a local education authority school the law says the child must attend school unless the parent has permission from the education authority to withdraw the child from school.

Parents are legally responsible for making sure that their child is educated. Most parents choose to send their child to school, though some do educate their child at home. This is a booklet for parents of children who go to a school provided by their local education authority. This booklet also explains what responsibilities your child's school and local education authority have in making sure your child is happy, safe and doing their best at school.

This booklet describes important aspects of the support your child is entitled to if school attendance is a problem. If your child is anxious or worried about attending school please do ask for support and help. As well as speaking to your child's school if you have questions or concerns there are a number of helping agencies listed in this booklet.

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Part 1: Attending school

What is attendance?

Attendance means that your child is taking part in a programme of educational activities arranged and agreed by your child's school. Of course this means going to the school, but it can also include:

- > Going to college or to another unit outside the school.
- > Visits to outdoor centres; this could be for the day or for residential.
- > Interviews and visits to do with college or careers events.
- > Sports, musical or drama activities organised by the school in school hours.
- > Study leave during the National Exam timetable.
- > Going outside the school for support with learning or behaviour if it is arranged or agreed by the school.
- > Getting tuition if your child is in hospital or tuition at home if this has been agreed.
- > Being on work experience.

Is it ever alright for my child to be off school?

Your child can be off school if:

- > They are ill.
- > They are attending a doctor or hospital appointment.
- > They are going to a meeting about a Children's Hearing or court, or if they are going to a Children's Hearing, care review or court.
- > If they are involved in an activity and the school agrees in advance.
- > Someone close to your child has died.
- > There is a crisis or serious difficulty at home or in your family.
- > They are going to a religious ceremony or a wedding of someone very close to them.
- > You are a Gypsy/Traveller family and while you go travelling you keep in touch with your child's teacher.
- > Your family is returning to a country of origin for cultural reasons or to care for a relative.

As long as you have informed the school of the reason why your child is off, and the school is satisfied that this is a valid reason, these would be called **authorised absences**.

If you know that your child will be off school, for example if they have an appointment or important meeting to attend, it is important for you to inform the school in advance.

What happens if my child is ill and can't go to school?

You need to inform the school by phone or by a letter/note as early as possible on the first day your child is off school. The school may ask you if you know when your child will be back at school.

When your child returns to school you should write a letter to the school that explains the reason for your child being off school.

If your child is off school because of a long term illness or condition your education authority must make arrangements for your child so they can keep learning. This might include sending work home so your child doesn't miss too much. If your child is to be off in the longer term other arrangements can be made. You should discuss this with your child's school as soon as you can.

What does the school do if my child is off school?

Unless you have already contacted them to explain the absence your child's school will try to find out why your child is off school.

Some schools will telephone you if your child does not arrive at morning registration. Because schools might do different things you can ask what your child's school normally does if your child is off school.

You need to keep your child's school up to date with your contact details.

Can I find out how many absences my child has had?

You have the right to know the number of absences that your child has had.

Schools take a register in the morning and after lunch. In secondary schools there is often a note taken of the pupils present in each lesson.



What about family holidays during term-time?

Schools will not normally give a family permission to take pupils out of school for holidays during term-time. This means that if your child is off school because you are away on holiday the school will record this as an **unauthorised absence**. It is up to education authorities to decide what sanctions they will use if there is an unauthorised absence.

There are some circumstances where permission might be given for a holiday during term-time. This would include when:

- > A family needs time together to recover from distress.
- > A family holiday is restricted to term-time because of the parent's job (for example a parent is in the armed services or emergency services).
- > There are other circumstances considered to be exceptional.

For more information about other reasons for your child being off school during term-time see the earlier section called: **Is it ever alright for my child to be off school?**

What is truancy?

If your child stays off school without permission and without good reason this is called **truancy**. Truancy can happen when a pupil doesn't attend for just a part of the day, or for the whole day.

Sometimes truancy happens because the pupil is unhappy at school. Maybe the pupil is being bullied, or struggling with their learning, or there is conflict with teachers or other pupils.

Parents must remember that they should not ignore or agree with or condone their child's truancy.

Schools must do what they can to find out why a pupil is truanting, they must listen to you and your child's concerns. When they find out what the pupil is struggling with or worrying about they must take action.

There may be reasons for truancy that are not to do with what's happening in school. Some pupils can have difficulties at home or in the community. This is when schools need to work closely with pupils and their families, and with other helping professionals, to make sure that everything is done to help the pupil stay engaged with learning and with school.

What should I do if my child is anxious or worried about going to school?

Your child has a right to an education and to be safe and happy at school. But sometimes children and young people can be anxious or worried about going to school. This can happen for lots of reasons but can happen when they have a worry about something like homework, or a class test, or if they are being bullied or if they have fallen out with other children or a teacher.

Sometimes parents let their child stay off school because they think the school isn't handling these kinds of things well enough. Unfortunately this will not help find a solution. It's important to talk to the school if this kind of problem happens.

If you feel confident enough you should contact a member of staff at the school with any worry your child has which is affecting them getting to school. If you would prefer to have some help or support to approach the school you can ask for help from another professional person you know. If you would like to talk to someone about your child's worries or concerns there is more information about agencies you can phone for help and advice at the end of this booklet.



Part 2: Support in school

All children have the right to an education that meets their needs and supports them to achieve their potential. To be able to take part in learning every child needs to be safe and happy at school.

Every child is entitled to the *personal* or *additional* support they need to make sure they are engaged in learning.

This section of the booklet gives information about what your child is entitled to and what schools should do to help if there is anything which means your child is not getting the most from school.

If you have worries or concerns about your child's experience of school you should speak with the school directly. If you do not feel able to do this, or are unhappy with how your child's school is supporting your child, there are other agencies that can help. Please see the end of this booklet for more information on sources of information, support and help.

What personal support can my child expect in school?

Every member of staff in a school should be committed to ensuring children are taking part in learning and the life of the school. Sometimes a school will have a named teacher or teachers who have a special responsibility for what a school might call **guidance** or **pastoral care** or **personal support**. In secondary schools the school might have a team of teachers who look after personal support. In a primary school it might be your child's class teacher or a Deputy Head or Headteacher. If you want to know who is responsible in your child's school for personal support ask the school.

Teachers with responsibility for personal support should:

- > Be available so that you or your child can talk to them and get information or support.
- > Build good relationships with you and your child.
- > Be aware of problems that might lead to your child being off school and find out from you why your child is off school.
- > Be part of any plan that is made with other agencies to support your child with learning or attendance at school.
- > Support your child get back into school if they have been off for some time.

What can I do if I feel my child is not getting the support they need to attend school?

If your child is struggling with school attendance, or is getting support with learning or behaviour, all the professional people that support you and your child should work well together. They should keep in touch with you about the support your child needs or is being given.

If you are not getting any support or you have worries or questions about what is available for you and your child the first step in talking about your concerns is to contact your child's school. Ask to speak to someone who has responsibility for personal support or for managing the additional support for learning that is provided.

You might be a bit nervous or worried about doing this. If you are in contact with another worker from another agency they might help and support you to do this. You can take another person to meetings in school to support and advise you.

At the end of this booklet there are contact details for helping agencies who can give information and advice.

Why are pupils excluded?

Exclusion from school should be considered a last resort and exclusion should only be used to maintain safety and order for other pupils or for staff. Schools can provide a range of activities and placements to address reasons for non-attendance; these should be interesting and help your child to relate to school work and feel involved in the life of the school. A school should not exclude a pupil as a punishment for non-attendance.

The Scottish Government has issued guidance about how and when exclusion can be used. Schools are encouraged to work with other services in the Council and with voluntary sector agencies to support children to help avoid the use of exclusion or to help put in place the support a child needs to get them back in to school.

If your child is excluded the school has a responsibility to support the child to continue their learning while off school and to help them catch up on their return to school. Exclusion is a serious matter and if you are worried about the risk of your child being excluded, or want to know more about what support your child is entitled to if they are excluded, you can contact one of the helping agencies listed at the back of this booklet.



What is mediation?

The job of a mediator is to be independent and to help you, your child and your school to find a solution to any problem when your efforts to work together have broken down.

You may be able to use a mediation service to help sort out problems about personal support your child needs, or additional support for learning needs, or why your child was excluded from school.

If, in addition to your local conciliation or mediation service, you need help with mediation about additional support for learning you can contact RESOLVE : ASL. They are an independent mediation service available in Scotland which has been set up to help resolve conflict about additional support needs in education. Contact details are at the back of this booklet.

Part 3: Using the law when children do not attend school

This booklet stresses the need to help children get to school regularly; and that when there are difficulties that these are best solved when parents, children, schools and other agencies work together.

If your child has problems with attending school, and you feel that your child's school is not doing enough, or if you feel anxious or confused about what you can do, it may be helpful to talk to one of the helping agencies listed at the end of this booklet.

It is important to remember that:

- > Your child's school has a responsibility to provide your child with as much support as they can to help them get to school and to ensure that when they are there they are happy, safe and learning.
- > As a parent you are legally responsible for making sure that your child is educated. Once you enrol your child at school the law says the child must attend school unless you, the parent, have permission from the education authority to withdraw your child.
- > If you find that you have made every effort to resolve things with your school but that you have been unsuccessful at agreeing a way forward, you can contact the Director of Education at your Local Authority who will be best placed to respond.

If communication breaks down between you and your child's school or education authority, and the problem of non-attendance remains, then an education authority can decide that they have done enough to support a child but a parent is not doing what they can. In these circumstances the education authority can use the law to insist that a parent does more to get their child to school. The things that we describe in the next page are called **measures for compulsory compliance**. It is rare for these things to be used but it is important to realise that they can be used.



Information about measures for compulsory compliance

Please remember this booklet does **not** provide detailed legal advice. **If any of the following procedures are being discussed with you, or are happening to your family you must get proper legal advice.** There are contact details for helping agencies at the back of the booklet.

If any of the measures described below are to be used children and young people should be kept involved and informed about what is happening. Children, especially if they have enough understanding of what is happening, can attend meetings.

Attendance order: If your child is off school it is your responsibility as parent to give a reason why. If the education authority decides that your child does not have a reasonable reason for being off school, and if in discussion with you it seems that the problem of non attendance can't be solved, then the education authority can make an attendance order. This order is taken against you, the parent. If you are served with an attendance order you as parent are under a duty to get your child to school regularly.

Anti-social behaviour order: Not going to school isn't necessarily considered to be anti-social behaviour but if your child isn't attending school they might be involved in anti-social behaviour in the community. A local council can apply for an anti-social behaviour order under the Anti-social Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004. They do this if they think your child is at risk of being involved in persistent anti-social behaviour. A condition of the order might be that your son or daughter must improve their school attendance.

Parenting order: If a child or young person is involved in persistent anti-social behaviour or criminal conduct, or action is needed to improve his or her welfare, a court may make a parenting order requiring a parent to comply with any requirements specified in the order. The parent must also attend counselling or guidance sessions as directed by the local council responsible for supervising the order. A parenting order will only be applied for when all attempts at persuading or supporting you to act voluntarily in support of your child have failed. If a parenting order is given the local council will name a worker to work with you in a programme designed to improve your parenting.

Acceptable behaviour contract: This is an agreement between a person who has been involved in anti-social behaviour and an agency (like a school, or a housing agency, or the Police) whose job it is to prevent more anti-social behaviour. These contracts are informal and used to explain clearly what the agency and the person will do to improve behaviour. They can be used with parents or carers if an agency wants them to make a difference to the behaviour of their child; including in relation to a child's attendance at school.

Can my child be referred to the Children's Reporter if there are problems with school attendance?

If a school feels that it cannot successfully work with you to improve your child's attendance at school it might involve other services like Social Work or Children's Services in the Council or a voluntary sector agency who it works with to support families.

Then, if the school feels that there is still not enough cooperation and progress – and it has other worries about your child on top of not attending school – it might decide to make a referral to the Children's Reporter.

The Reporter is the person who will decide if a child needs to be referred to a Children's Hearing. Children's Hearings are a way of addressing all kinds of situations where a child or young person is in need of care and protection or if they have committed an offence. Anyone who is concerned about a child or young person can tell the Children's Reporter about their worries.

When the Reporter gets a referral, she/he must make an initial investigation before deciding what action, if any, is necessary in the child's interests. The Reporter decides on the next step. She or he might decide:

- > That no further action is required. The Reporter will write to the child/young person and usually the parent to tell them of this decision.
- > To refer the child or young person to the local authority so that advice, guidance and assistance can be given on an informal and voluntary basis. This usually involves support from a social worker.
- > Arrange a Children's Hearing because she/he considers that compulsory measures of supervision are necessary for the child.

If the Reporter decides a Hearing is necessary, decisions about the child's needs are made by a Children's Hearing which is made up of three members of the public who have received training. The Reporter gets information about the child to help them make a decision – they might speak to a social worker if the child has one, or their teacher.

There is more information about Children's Hearings at: www.childrens-hearings.co.uk



Part 4: Support, information and advice

ParentLine Scotland

At some time all parents find that parenting can be difficult or stressful. ParentLine Scotland is the free, confidential, telephone helpline for anyone caring for a child in Scotland. You can call about any problem, however big or small.

Phone: 0808 800 2222

On line at: <http://www.children1st.org.uk/parentline>

Parentzone

Parentzone provides information for parents and carers about how you can support your child's education.

On line at: <http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk>

ChildLine

Children and young people can get confidential help about any question, concern or worry.

Phone: 080011111

On line at: <http://www.childline.org.uk>

Scottish Child Law Centre

The Centre helps children and young people, their families and carers, and professionals working for and with children by providing advice and information through their advice line, email and text services.

Freephone for under 18s: Phone: 0800 328 8970

Phone: 0131 667 6333

Text: text 'SCLC' and your question to 80800

E-mail: enquiries@sclc.org.uk

Govan Law Centre

The centre has a national specialist Law Unit on Education. It provides legal representation in appropriate education law cases to parents or pupils. The Education Law Helpline is available to anyone who has an enquiry about any aspect of education law in Scotland.

You can make an enquiry by phone: 0141 445 1955

Or Email advice@edlaw.org.uk.

The Centre aims to respond to all enquiries by the following working day.

On line at: <http://www.edlaw.org.uk/>

The Scottish Legal Aid Board

The Board provides a list of lawyers and information about whether you might qualify for legal aid. Legal Aid allows people who would not otherwise be able to afford it to get help for their legal problems.

Legal Aid Helpline Phone: 0845 122 8686

On line at: <http://www.slab.org.uk>

Citizen Advice Bureau

Your local CAB can provide information and support about rights and responsibilities when it comes to schools and education.

Information and advice on lots of areas at: <http://www.adviceguide.org.uk> where you can also find your local CAB.

There is information about a range of education issues in Scotland on line at:

http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/scotland/family_parent/education_scotland.htm

Enquire

Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. It operates a helpline for parents, carers and practitioners. Publications include 'A Parents' Guide to Additional Support for Learning'. An interpreter can be arranged upon request.

Telephone helpline Phone: 0845 123 2303

E-mail: info@enquire.org.uk

On line at: <http://www.enquire.org.uk>

A Guide For Parents: The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004

This is a leaflet which provides information about the new Act. There is more information about **co-ordinated support plans**. This link also contains web links to the leaflet in community languages.

On line at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/06/19549/39372>

RESOLVE : ASL

RESOLVE : ASL is an independent mediation service available in Scotland as an option to resolve conflict throughout additional support needs issues in education.

More information and contact details at:

http://www.childrenscotland.org.uk/html/serv_res.htm

Home educated children

There is guidance on this here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/17133313/0>



Choosing a school: a guide for parents

This booklet is for parents who are choosing a local authority school for their child. It explains the placing request system.

On line at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/10/27093417/0>

Making the Difference

This is a series of leaflets that are about how parents can and do make a difference to their child's learning. Copies are available in English, Gaelic, Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Hindi, Mandarin, Punjabi, Polish and Urdu.

Available on line at: www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk

Phone: 0131 244 0956

There are leaflets about:

- > **Homework**
- > **Getting involved in your child's school**
- > **Parents' evenings**
- > **School holidays**
- > **Out of school learning**
- > **Starting a new school year**
- > **Sharing information**
- > **Healthy choices**
- > **New technology in learning**
- > **Enterprise in education**
- > **Personal learning planning**
- > **A new law to support parents**

Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP)

STEP mainly works with educators of Traveller children and young people in Scotland. STEP helps support developments in education with and for Traveller families.

Phone: 0131 651 6444

Email: step@ed.ac.uk

Online at: <http://www.scottishtravellered.net>



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