



School Attendance

Information for parents and carers

together for
children
SUNDERLAND

Introduction

Sunderland City Council is committed to providing all children with the best start in life and works hard to ensure that all children in Sunderland attend school regularly.

Compulsory school age

Your child is of “compulsory school age” on the 1 January, 1 April or 1 September following their 5th birthday. Children becoming five years old between 1 January and 31 March are of compulsory school age at the beginning of the term after 1 April.

Young people can leave school on the last Friday in June of the school year in which they are 16. (1 September to 31 August).

Why attendance at school is important

Every child or young person is entitled to an education. Attending school regularly and punctually is essential if children are to make the most of the opportunities available to them. Parents who do not ensure their children receive an appropriate education put their whole future at risk. Being absent from school means a lost learning opportunity.

Regular attendance at school is a legal requirement and essential for your child to maximise their educational opportunities.

The law and who is responsible?

Under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996, the parent/carer is responsible for making sure that their child (if compulsory school age) receives efficient full-time education that is suitable to their child’s age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs they may have. If a child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his/her parent(s)/carer(s) is/are guilty of an offence.

Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 defines ‘parent’ as:

- all natural parents, whether they are married or not
- any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person
- any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person (having care of a child or young person means that the child lives with and is looked after by that person, irrespective of what their relationship is).

The only person who can give permission for your child to be absent from school is the school's head teacher.

Types of absences

There are two types of absences from school:

Authorised absences

A child has a legitimate reason for being absent that is accepted by the school. Remember whilst you can give explanations for absence the only person who can give permission for your child to be absent is the school's head teacher.

Unauthorised absences

An absence is unexplained or the reason given is not accepted by the school. Unauthorised absences can lead to legal action being taken against parents or carers.

If your child is frequently absent from school due to sickness, the school can ask that you provide additional supporting evidence or they may have to stop authorising the absences. This does not mean that the school do not believe you or your child, but that they want to do the best for you by ensuring your child can attend school as much as possible, providing extra support such as accessing the school nursing team if needed.

What happens if my child's attendance is a cause for concern?

Schools work with and support parents to improve their child's attendance if there is no improvement a referral can be made to the Attendance Team. They will try to work with individual pupils and their families who are experiencing difficulties to improve attendance.

What you can do to help

Make sure your child arrives at school on time. This encourages habits of good timekeeping and lessens any possible classroom disruption. If your child arrives after the register has closed without a good reason, this will be recorded as an 'unauthorised' absence for that session.

If your child has to miss school it is vital that you let the school know why, preferably on the first morning of the absence (your child's school will have an attendance policy explaining how this should be done).

If you know or think that your child is having difficulties attending school or is unhappy at school you should contact the school. It is better to do this sooner rather than later, as most problems can be dealt with very quickly.

When necessary co-operate and work in partnership with the school and/or Attendance to improve your child's attendance

What will happen if my child's attendance does not improve?

If the attendance does not improve we may use the statutory options available to us. These include issuing Penalty Notices, prosecution through the Magistrates Court and/or by application to the Family Proceedings Court.

Magistrates' courts can issue fines of up to £2,500 and/or give a prison sentence of up to three months. Courts may at their discretion impose a parenting order or direct the local authority to apply for an Education Supervision Order. The order puts a child of compulsory school age, who is not being properly educated, under local authority supervision.

Leave of absence

In September 2013 the government changed the legislation and removed the discretion of head teachers to agree term time holiday requests. Parents do not have any right or entitlement to take their child out of school for a term-time holiday. Due to the disruptive effect on a child's education, you are strongly urged to avoid booking a family holiday during term-time. Leave of Absence in term time can only be granted in **exceptional circumstances**. Head teachers consider requests for absence on an individual basis and they can only grant such leave in exceptional circumstances.

Individual head teachers make the final decision on whether to authorise the leave of absence or not. Unauthorised leave of absence could result in the head teacher requesting the local authority to issue a penalty notice. This is £80 fine if paid within 21 days or £160 if paid within 28 days. Non-payment of this fine may result in prosecution in the Magistrates Courts, without further warning being issued.

Who should I contact if I want to discuss my child's attendance?

Your first point of contact should always be the staff at your child's school.