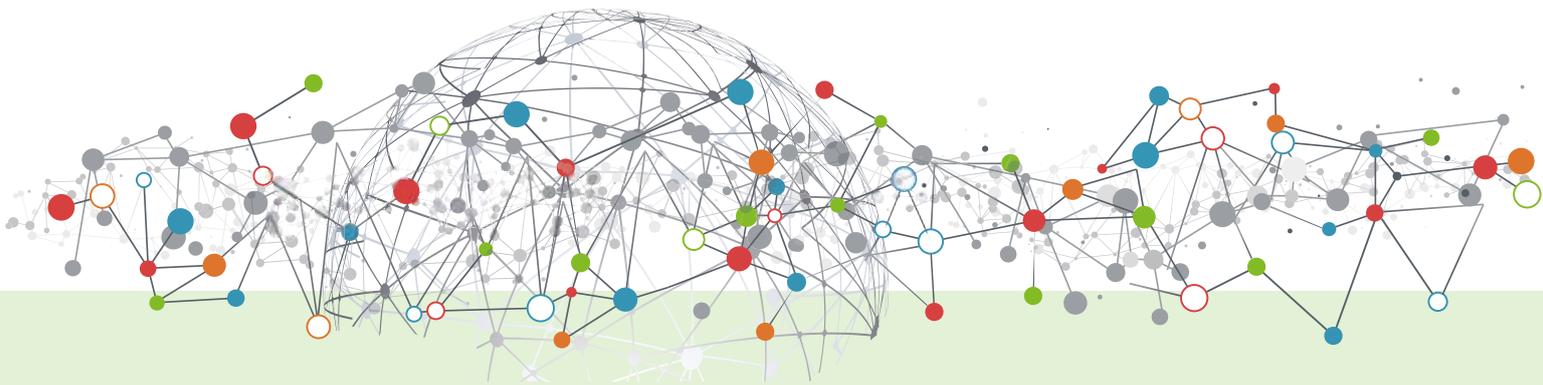


School Attendance

An information booklet for parents and carers

Based on the guidance:

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



PINS

PUPIL INCLUSION NETWORK SCOTLAND

An information booklet for parents and carers about **School Attendance**

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INTRODUCTION

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

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. The information provided here is for parents of children who go to a school provided by their local education authority.

The information provided here explains your responsibilities as a parent when it comes to your child's attendance at school. It is 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.

The information provided here 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. 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 on page 13 **Support, information and advice.**

The information you will find here is a summary of key points that you can find in the full guidance that is also available. It is called **Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: A Positive Approach to the Promotion and Management of Attendance in Scottish Schools**, available here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/included-engaged-involved-part-1-positive-approach-promotion-management-attendance-scottish-schools/>

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Scottish Government aims to promote good attendance at school. When a child is absent from school this disrupts learning.

These guiding principles are important to the guidance on school attendance.

- All children and young people have a right to education. Education authorities have a duty to provide this education.
- All children and young people have the right to get the support they need to benefit fully from their education and fulfil their potential. If school attendance is a concern, this should not be considered in isolation.
- All children and young people need to be included, engaged and involved in their learning.
- Schools should actively engage with parents, children and young people to try to ensure that any barriers to good attendance are removed. Children and young people should be given opportunities to fully engage and participate in the life of their school in order to encourage good attendance. Schools and parents should work in partnerships to encourage good attendance.
- The foundation for everyone should be a focus on positive relationships and an inclusive culture and ethos that promotes good attendance.

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.

Does poor attendance really matter?

The research tells us that poor attendance has a negative impact in several ways:

- It can impact on how well a child does at school (attainment).
- It affects the young person's employment opportunities.
- It can be linked to emotional and behavioural difficulties as children grow.
- It affects friendships and relationships with other children and young people.

What is an unauthorised absence?

In the new guidance schools are being asked **not** to use the term **truancy**. If your child stays off school without permission and without good reason this is called an **unauthorised absence**. This can happen when a child doesn't attend for just a part of the day, or for the whole day.

Sometimes an unauthorised absence happens because the child is unhappy at school. Maybe they are being bullied, or struggling with their learning, or there is conflict with teachers or other learners. There may be reasons that are not to do with what is happening in school. Some children and young people can have difficulties at home or in the community. This is when a school needs to work closely with the child and their family, and with other helping professionals, to make sure that everything is done to help them stay engaged with learning and with school.

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Parents must remember that they should not ignore or agree with their child's absence. Schools must do what they can to find out why a child is not attending, they must listen to you as a parent and your child's concerns. When they find out what the struggle or worry is about, they must take action.

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 (you should try to get appointments that are not in school time if you can).
- 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 or have a meeting with someone like a social worker
- 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.
- When there is a lack of transport, including when there is bad weather.

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

How do schools do registration and record lateness?

Recording of attendance should take place at least twice a day so that the school can note attendance and absence for each morning and afternoon session.

In most schools, a daily register of attendance is taken in the morning. Some secondary schools have opted for attendance monitoring to take place in every lesson. However this is done, in addition to noting attendance and absence, staff have the opportunity to get to know the children and young people and to become aware of any concerns regarding their health and wellbeing. If there are concerns, this information should be shared with other staff so that support can be provided.

Schools are advised to make the most of opportunities for staff to get to know pupils well. Persistent lateness, not being prepared for lessons and distress observed during the process of taking attendance and absence may be signs of difficulty that the school can then try to support.

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.

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

If your child is ill 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/note 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. Further guidance is available. Look at Part 4 of this document to find the link to *Guidance on education of children absent from school through ill-health*.

Does the school follow up on absences?

If you have been in touch with your child's school to explain an absence they will ask when you think your child will return. If the school needs to do anything to help with the return to school they can do this as soon as possible, including before the child returns.

If your child's absences from school are regular or have a pattern to them then the school will want to work with you to try to resolve any things that get in the way of your child going to school.

You have the right to know the number of absences that your child has had. You can arrange with the school that they keep in touch with you regularly to make sure everyone is clear about the number of absences there are. The school or other helping agencies may want to talk with you and work out together how best to help your child with their attendance.

What are the rules about young people age 16 and over?

Children or young people who choose to stay on at school beyond school leaving age, usually 16 years of age, and their parents, are expected to support the commitment to full attendance at school. Some schools develop a learning agreement outlining these expectations.

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Attendance must also be monitored if your child gets the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The EMA is a weekly payment, paid directly to young people who stay on at school and is designed to help overcome financial barriers which otherwise may prevent them from staying on. Parents and young people should make themselves aware of the rules about EMA.

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.

What's the connection between exclusion from school and attendance?

Exclusion from school is recorded as a category in attendance statistics so that the Scottish Government and education authorities can understand the number of days lost to exclusion in schools, and to monitor the extent of provision made for learning for excluded pupils. There is other guidance on this called **Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: A Positive Approach to Preventing and Managing School Exclusions**. Information for parents about this guidance can be found here: <http://pinscotland.org/pins-publications-and-reports.html> The full guidance on this topic is here: <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/included-engaged-involved-part-2-positive-approach-preventing-managing-school>

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

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 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. **Page 13** has more information on sources of information, support and help.

What is GIRFEC?

In discussing what support your child needs there might be mention made of the national approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. It is called GIRFEC which stands for **Getting it Right for Every Child**.

The GIRFEC approach means that schools and other agencies are interested in understanding every child's needs and rights and helping to prevent difficulties. When problems do occur children and families should be given support at the earliest time possible.

Children and young people often learn about GIRFEC in school, particularly the seven indicators which are used to understand their wellbeing. They say that every child should be **safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included**.

The Scottish Government, education authorities and schools are also emphasising the importance of children's rights in education and across the life of the child, all in accordance with the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC) The Children and Young People's Commissioner in Scotland has more information about the UNCRC here: <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/rights/uncrcarticles>

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/pastoral care should:

- Be aware of early signs or concerns which may cause absence, to allow support plans to be arranged and adaptations and plans to be drawn up as appropriate.
- Ensure absence does not become a pattern or habit following a specific issue.
- Develop positive and trusting relationships with pupils and parents to prevent difficulties arising and to ensure difficulties are discussed and resolved when they do take place.
- Respond quickly to absence, to ensure children and young people are safe and well.
- Follow up on absence, to enable the school and its partners to make an effective response.
- Support reintegration into learning on returning from absence.

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 on **Page 13**.

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.

Page 13 has contact details for helping agencies who can give information and advice.

What about Additional Support for Learning and attendance?

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 says that education authorities are required to provide additional support for pupils who need it in order to overcome barriers to their learning. Providing additional support may help children and young people to engage more fully with school and promote good attendance. Schools should recognise that poor attendance can often be related to, or be an indication of, an additional support need and they should ensure that any barriers to learning are identified and appropriate support is provided.

USING THE LAW WHEN CHILDREN DO NOT ATTEND SCHOOL

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 on **Page 13**.

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.

What are measures for compulsory compliance?

Please remember the information here is not legal advice. If any of the following things are being discussed with you, or are happening to your family you must get proper legal advice. There are contact details for helping agencies on **Page 13**.

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.

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. There is more here: Guidance on Parenting Orders: Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/04/22133503/35042>

Anti-social behaviour order: Not going to school is not necessarily considered to be antisocial 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.

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 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 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 as well as 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. The Reporter 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 for parents about Children's Hearings here: <http://www.chscotland.gov.uk/the-childrens-hearings-system/information-for-parents-and-carers/>

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 282233 You can also chat online and get more information: <https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/>

Enquire

Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. It operates a helpline for parents, carers and practitioners: call 0345 123 2303 <http://www.enquire.org.uk>

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 <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/our-work/services/resolve/>

Parentzone

Parentzone provides information for parents and carers about how you can support your child's education: <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone>

ChildLine

Children and young people can get confidential help about any question, concern or worry. Phone: 08001111 or chat on line: <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. There is a freephone for under 18s. <http://www.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 440 2503 <http://www.edlaw.org.uk/>

Citizen Advice Scotland

CAS can provide information and support about rights and responsibilities when it comes to schools and education. <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/>

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Other useful Guidance

Home educated children: <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/home-education-guidance/>

Guidance on education of children absent from school through ill-health: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/158331/0042883.pdf>

Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: A Positive Approach to Preventing and Managing Exclusions: <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/06/8877>