

What every parent has to know

St Finbar's Primary school is determined to do everything it can to have excellent school attendance. As a parent or carer, you have an important part to play. Your children have a right to a good education and you have a legal responsibility to ensure that they go to school on time, all the time.

The information in this guide will give you help and advice on how to ensure that your child(ren) go to school regularly and details of the penalties for those parents whose children don't.

Parental responsibilities

Parents and carers have a duty to ensure their child has an appropriate education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Parental support is crucial in ensuring that children do well with their studies. Those who give encouragement and make sure that their children regularly attend school will help to avoid all the problems associated with truancy.

What the law says

Parents have a legal responsibility for ensuring that children of compulsory school age receive a full-time education "suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special education needs which they may have either by regular attendance at school or otherwise" (Section 7 – Education Act 1996).

Parents whose children are on a school register and fail to ensure the regular and punctual attendance of their child(ren), may be guilty of an offence under Section 444 or 444 (1A) of the Education Act 1996 and the Local Authority may issue a Penalty Notice or take enforcement action through the Courts to secure regular attendance.

Taking family holidays during term-time

Parents do not have a right in law to take their children on holiday during school term-time. Only in exceptional circumstances can the school grant leave of absence for a holiday to be authorised.

Taking a child on holiday in term-time interrupts their learning and that of other pupils in the class, as teachers have to constantly repeat work that has been missed.

The authorisation of any absence is the sole responsibility of the Headteacher.

Even if an absence is authorised it **still counts as an absence** and is recorded as an absence. Authorisation simply means a fixed penalty will not be issued.

Authorised absence

Only the Headteacher at the school can authorise a child's absence following guidelines set out by the Local Authority and the Department for Education. There are very few reasons why absence may be authorised and they include:

- Sickness that requires the child to stay off
- Exceptional family circumstances e.g. bereavement
- Medical appointment (but only for the duration of the child's appointment)

Even if authorised, these will still count as absence.

Unauthorised absence

This is when a pupil is absent from school without the authority of the school. It's also called truancy. It may be that a child is having difficulties at school or at home. Either way, the school needs to know, because continuing non-attendance will only make the situation worse.

Parents must collaborate with the school in such instances.

Below is a list of reasons that are considered unacceptable as an excuse for non-attendance. It's not a definitive list and schools will consider each request for absence very carefully and on an individual basis.

- Time off for a minor ailment
- Holiday in term-time
- Birthday treat or day trip out
- Oversleeping or being tired
- Waiting in for workmen or minding the house
- Shopping or a visit to the hairdresser
- Taking a “long weekend”
- Looking after a brother or sister
- Translating for a family member or friend
- Taking the rest of the day off before or after a medical appointment
- Staying off because a brother or sister is off sick

Frequently asked questions

Is school 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 may have.

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

When do children have to be educated?

Children must receive an education 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 say that my child’s attendance is 90 percent, which I think is very good. Should I be concerned?

Yes you should be concerned. Ninety percent is not good attendance and indicates 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 four weeks and the missed work will not all be caught up.

The school were 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 as well as all the other educational opportunities available, depending on how the school organises its lessons. Work missed while on holiday is not all caught up and leaves gaps in the pupil's knowledge.

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, depending on the length of the holiday. If your child's absence is already a cause for concern, you may be prosecuted with the holiday absence as part of the Local 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 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?

Unacceptable reasons for absence are unauthorised. Pupils should not be absent because of shopping, having a haircut, birthday or Christmas treats, looking after brothers or sister at home, waiting for a workman or delivery, working or 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, depending on the number or pattern of absences.

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 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 your child is never late for school; sometimes tummy aches and headaches can be the result of a child worrying about being late for school. Your child should only be off school if they are too ill to attend.

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.