

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Persistent Absence and the Education Welfare Service

*A guide for parents and carers of children
attending Wandsworth schools*



SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Attendance at school

Legal responsibilities of parents and carers

Parents and carers have a legal duty to make sure that their children receive appropriate full time education. In addition to the legal requirements, school attendance is a crucial factor in a child's educational and social development.

By truanting or by being absent from school without good reason your child not only misses out on valuable education but could also run other risks such as becoming the victim of crime, or getting involved in crime.

Poor attendance affects attainment which can have an impact on future career prospects. By not attending school regularly and punctually children also get into habits of poor reliability and timekeeping and, as a result, risk long-term unemployment when school days are over.

Children who work during school hours risk exploitation, and prosecution for the employer and parents. The Education Welfare Service offers advice on the hours which children may work, and issues work permits. You can contact the service on (020) 8871 8306.

Parents and carers who fail to make sure that their children attend school regularly and punctually, or who condone their children's absence from school without good reason, run the risk of criminal proceedings being taken against them in Magistrates' Court, and a possible fine if they are found guilty. Additionally, you could be issued with a penalty notice which imposes a fine of £60, rising to £120 if not paid within the required period of 21 days.

Absence from school

Are you sure your child is at school when they should be? If your child is absent from school with your agreement, is the absence for a valid and acceptable reason?

If your child has to be absent from school for a valid reason (e.g. for medical or dental treatment or illness) you should let the school know as soon as possible, by telephoning or writing, giving the reason for absence and the length of time your child is likely to be absent. You may be required to provide medical evidence of your child's illness.

Persistent absence

Any pupil with less than 90 per cent attendance is considered to be persistently absent.

Schools have to record whether an absence is authorised or unauthorised in attendance registers, and have to include your child's attendance record in their annual school report.

If you do not let the school know the reason for your child's absence then the absence will be recorded in the attendance register as unauthorised and the school will discuss the absence with you and may involve the Education Welfare Service.

Some reasons for absence are unacceptable and will be recorded as unauthorised by the school (for example, shopping during school hours, birthdays, looking after younger siblings). If you require advice on authorised absence please contact your child's school or the Education Welfare Service on (020) 8871 8306.

Lateness

Parents should ensure that their children arrive at school on time to prevent disruption to their own learning and that of others. Pupil lateness will be followed up by the school with the parent or carer. Serious lateness will be recorded as unauthorised absence and will be investigated by the Education Welfare Officer, unless there is an acceptable reason. Frequent lateness may lead to prosecution of parent or carer for failing to ensure regular attendance.

Truancy

Children sometimes skip school without the knowledge of their parents. Some truant for whole days, others register and then truant from lessons. For a few it can develop into a habit but with prompt action, understanding and care it can be prevented or resolved.

The reasons

There are various reasons why children find it difficult to attend school:

- Problems with school work
- Term-time holidays
- Boredom
- Problems outside of school
- Pressure from friends
- Teenage rebellion
- Bullying
- Family issues (e.g. Young Carers)

The signs

- Child stops getting homework
- Attempts to keep you away from school events
- An interest in when you will be in or out of the house during the day
- A noticeable lack of interest in school
- A keenness to get to the post before you do to intercept letters from school
- A detailed knowledge of daytime TV
- Friends who are known truants or much older and not at work
- Reluctance to get up in the morning
- Anxieties expressed about school generally or about specific lessons

The solution

When parents and schools work together the risks of unauthorised absences occurring are much lower.

- Talk to your child about school and what goes on there
- Take a positive interest in your child's work
- Keep in touch with school staff. Let them know when and why your child needs to be absent for valid reasons
- Support the school all you can and take the opportunity to attend parents' evening and other school events
- Be aware of signs that your child may be missing school without your knowledge
- Help your child to be ready to go to school on time
- Do not keep your child at home because they do not feel like going to school, or for other unacceptable reasons
- Ask the school or the Education Welfare Service for help if you are having difficulty in getting your child to go to school.

Help for parents from the Education Welfare Service

The Education Welfare Service provides a support service to children, schools and to you, the parent or carer. The job of our service is to promote full school attendance by working in partnership with you, your child/ren, the schools, and other support services.

Sometimes it is difficult, even with close co-operation between parents and school, to solve individual attendance problems and this is where the Education Welfare Service may be able to help.

Your school can put you in touch with an Education Welfare Officer who will work with you, your child and the school to help solve the problem.

Alternatively, you can contact the Education Welfare Service direct on:

(020) 8871 8306

It is very important to ask the school or Education Welfare Service for help with attendance problems at an early stage so that they do not develop into long-term absence from school and damage your child's education.

175 non-school days a year

175 days to spend on family time, visits, holidays, shopping, household jobs and other appointments

