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School attendance

When are pupils allowed to miss school?

Pupils of compulsory school age (between the school term after their 5th birthday to the last Friday in June in the school year they turn 16) can be legally absent when they're mentally or physically unwell, or when the school has given permission in advance.

A limited number of other types of absence are also counted as authorised.

Headteachers are responsible for giving permission for absence but should only give it in “exceptional circumstances”.

It’s up to the headteacher to decide what counts as an exceptional circumstance and how many days' absence is authorised. They should consider each request individually, considering the specific facts and circumstances.

Penalties for missing school

* Schools are expected to exhaust all other options before using penalties as a last resort
* If pupils miss school illegally, each of their parents can be fined £160
  + If the fine is paid within 21 days, it will be reduced to £80 for each parent
* After 28 days, the parents can be prosecuted if they haven't paid the fine
* A second penalty notice regarding the same child has a flat rate of £160
* Parents can't be issued with a third penalty notice regarding the same child within 3 years
* If a parent doesn’t make sure their child regularly attends school, and there's no evidence that the child is being educated at home, the parent may be fined up to £2,500, given a community order or a jail sentence of up to 3 months

Attendance records

Schools must:

* Have admission and attendance registers that **all**pupils are placed on (although boarding schools don't need an attendance register)
* Keep registers open for a “reasonable length of time” every day. This should be either less than 30 minutes, or the length of the lesson where registration takes place
* Record pupils’ attendance every day using specific codes, such as (L) for late
* Keep records of every entry in both registers for 6 years after the date the entry was made
* Only delete pupils from the admission register in circumstances set out by law

The role of governors and trustees

Section 3 of the DfE's [statutory guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance) sets out the expectations for boards to:

* Recognise the importance of school attendance and promote it through ethos and policies
* Make sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
* Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus improvement efforts on pupils who need it most
* Make sure staff receive adequate training on attendance

The DfE also expects boards of multi-academy trusts (MATs) and federations to provide regular opportunities to bring staff together from different schools to learn from each other’s expertise and share effective interventions.