



London Borough of
Merton

School Attendance A Guide for Parents

What is my responsibility to educate my child?

The right of children and young people to an education is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child and in UK law.

Parents and carers are legally responsible for making sure that their child gets a full time education. Usually, that means going into school from the age of 5 to 16. In Merton we offer provision in nursery from the age of 3, reception from the age of 4, 16-19 provision in 6th forms and colleges as well as up to 25 years for those with an Education and Health care Plan (EHCP).

You may choose to educate your child in the state system, which is free, privately for which fees are payable or electively home educate your child where you take full responsibility for your child's education. You can find links in the resources section to assist you.

Once your child starts at school, they must attend every day that the school is open. Schools must take an attendance register twice a day, which is a legal document. Any absences will be recorded with a specific code depending on the type of absence. Absences fall into two categories authorised and unauthorised.

Authorised, those which schools can give you permission and there are only a small number of circumstances where missing a school day is permitted.

- Your child is too ill to attend.
- You have asked in advance and been given permission by the school for your child to be absent on a specific day due to exceptional circumstances.
- Your child cannot go to school on a specific day because they are observing a religious event (as defined by the DfE (Department for Education)).
- Your local authority is responsible for arranging your child's transport to school and it is not available or has not been provided yet.
- Your child does not have a permanent address and you are required to travel for work. This exception only applies if your child attends their usual school or another school where you are staying as often as possible. There are restrictions on the number of times this can be applied.

These are the only circumstances where schools can permit your child to be absent and the headteacher can decide if they authorise the absence or not. You should follow the school's procedure which can be found on their website regarding notifying the school when your child will be absent.

Unauthorised absence are those absences which the school will not authorise and may include family holiday, days off for trips, non-urgent medical treatment, truancy, not wanting to attend, parental or sibling illness, late arrival (more than 30 minutes after the school day has started).

Illness

Parents and carers should send their children to school with mild respiratory illnesses. This would include general cold symptoms: a minor cough, runny nose or sore throat. However, children should not be sent to school if they have a temperature of 38°C or above. Please refer to the link under resources (Is my child too ill for school?).

Does having days off school matter?

Being in school is important to your child's achievement, wellbeing, and wider development. Pupils with higher attainment at KS2 and KS4 had lower levels of absence over the key stage compared to those with lower attainment. Children who are absent may find it more difficult to maintain friendships, are more likely to become involved in crime (as victim or perpetrator) and may miss out on opportunities in further education and the world of work.

Data from 2019 shows that 84% of Key Stage 2 pupils, those at the end of year 6 in primary school aged 10 and 11 who had 100% attendance achieved the expected standard, compared to 40% of pupils who were persistently absent across the key stage. If you are persistently absent you are missing 19 days of school or more which is approximately 4 school weeks.

Pupils who did not achieve grade 9 to 4 in English and maths GCSEs in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 8.8% over the key stage, compared with 5.2% among pupils who achieved a grade 4 and 3.7% among pupils who achieved grade 9 to 5 in both English and maths.

A score of 90% in a test would be a good result but 90% attendance means that a child will have missed around 100 lessons and nearly 4 weeks of education over a school year. If you are 5 minutes late every day, it means around 3 ½ days of education are missed over a school year.

Attendance during one school year	Number of days absent	Approximately this many weeks absent	Number of lessons missed
100%	0	0	0 lessons
95%	9 ½ days	2 weeks	50 lessons
90%	19 days	4 weeks	100 lessons
85%	28 ½ days	6 weeks	150 lessons
80%	38 days	8 weeks	200 lessons
70%	57 days	11 ½ weeks	300 lessons
50%	95 days	19 weeks	475 lessons

What is good attendance?

A child should attend school every day and attendance over 96% is considered to be good attendance. If attendance drops to 90% or lower the government classify the child as having persistent absence (PA) and if attendance is 50% or less the child is classified as severely absence (SA).

What can you do as a parent?

- Ensure your child has had enough sleep and set an alarm clock to ensure that you are up in good time in the morning.
- Create good routines for mornings at home so everyone's mornings can start calmly.
- Ensure your child has the right uniform, equipment, PE kit and has had breakfast to get them off to the best start for the day.
- Arrive at school on time, being late disrupts your child's learning and that of the rest of the class.
- Make medical, dental, optical, and other appointments outside of school time where possible.
- If you have an appointment in school time, attend school before and after the appointment (for example, if you have an appointment at 12 noon, your child can attend school before the appointment and for the afternoon session)
- If your child is not able to attend school that day, telephone the school first thing in the morning to explain why they are unable to attend
- Talk to your child about their school day and support with the completion of homework.
- Read all communication from the school and attend parents' afternoons/evenings and other events at the school to be part of the community and school family.
- Do not take your child on holiday, shopping, on day trips, birthday treats or family occasions in term time, as you have 13 weeks school holidays and weekends for these things.

What should I do if my child is reluctant to go to school?

Your child has a right to an education and to be safe and happy at school. If your child is anxious or worried about going to school, for any reason, please do speak to the school in the first instance and ask the school for help. Work together with the school and agree a plan to support your child in school. You can find links in the resources section to assist you.

What will happen if my child does not attend school regularly?

The school and LA (Local Authority) have a responsibility to ensure attendance of children in school and to promote good attendance. This includes working with children and families where attendance is falling.

The school will work with you to improve your child's attendance offering support and advice. They may ask you to provide evidence that your child cannot attend school which may include asking for medical evidence of illness. The school will explain to you what evidence is needed for the Headteacher to be satisfied that your child is too ill to attend that day. Schools may also make referrals to other agencies including Early Help, The Education Welfare Service or suggestions of support services that you can contact yourself.

If your child's attendance does not improve, the school may ask you to enter into a voluntary parenting contract which is where a written agreement is made between

the parents, school, pupil and other agencies to try and improve the attendance of your child.

If you fail to ensure your child attends school regularly, the Local Authority has a statutory duty to consider legal action to enforce school attendance under the 1996 Education Act section 444(1) where a parent fails to secure the child's regular attendance; and section 444(1A) where a parent knows that the child is failing to attend school regularly and fails to ensure the child does so.

This could include:

Receiving a Penalty Notice Warning where you will be given a minimum of 60 sessions (approximately six weeks) to improve your child's attendance.

Receiving a Penalty Notice. This is a fine of £120 per parent/carer for periods of unauthorised absence. Where absence warrants the issuing of a Penalty Notice, anyone with Parental Responsibility, or having day to day care of the child can be issued with one Penalty Notice for each of the children with unauthorised absence. If two parents have two children this may result in four Penalty Notices, 2 Penalty Notices per parent.

Being prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court. This means you could receive a community order, a fine of up to £2,500 per parent/carer or a custodial sentence. Your child being the subject of an Education Supervision Order. This is an order where the child and parent(s) attend court and certain measures are put in place regarding attendance at school.

What will happen if I take my child on holiday in term time and the school has not agreed the absence?

Children have 13 week's annual holiday from school and school holiday dates are published well in advance online on the school's website as such, all parents/carers are expected wherever possible to plan and take their family holidays at this time so as not to disrupt their children's education. Education law states that parents do not have a right to take their child out of school for a holiday during term time. Only in exceptional circumstances may a headteacher grant permission for leave; and it is the headteacher's decision on whether the absence is exceptional and how many days to approve.

You are likely to be issued with a Penalty Notice. This is a fine of £120 per parent/carer for periods of unauthorised absence because you have taken a leave of absence in term time that was not agreed and authorised by the school. Anyone with Parental Responsibility or having day to day care of the child can be issued with one Penalty Notice for each of the children with unauthorised absence. If two parents have two children this may result in four Penalty Notices, 2 Penalty Notices per parent.

Resources

To Apply for a school or nursery place in Merton

[Apply for a school or nursery place | Merton Council](#)

DfE Guidance on attendance can be found in Working together to improve school attendance and there is a specific information for parents on their rights and responsibilities regarding attendance. [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Advice on when children should attend school with mild illnesses.

[Is my child too ill for school? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

London Borough of Merton information on school attendance, Elective Home Education and legal measures

[School attendance, welfare and support: Overview | Merton Council](#)

Information about education, health, wellbeing, parenting, support, community groups and activities in Merton

[Family Services Directory | Merton directories](#)

Information about services and support for children and young people in Merton with special educational needs and disabilities

[Local Offer | Merton directories](#)

Central London Community Healthcare for support around physical and mental health.

[Merton:: Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust \(clch.nhs.uk\)](#)

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

[Resources \(swlstg.nhs.uk\)](#)

Emotional Wellbeing Support Services for Children and Young People

[Emotional Wellbeing Support Services for Children and Young People - NHS South West London Integrated Care Board \(icb.nhs.uk\)](#)