



**YOU BELONG HERE!**

**SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MATTERS**

## Dear parent/carer,

As we start back at the start of the September term, I wanted to reach out to all parents to talk about school attendance. Did you know that, across our schools in the last school year, there were 525,000 days of education missed by children in Plymouth?

Missing a few days of school here and there may not seem a big deal but research shows that it can have a significant impact on your child's learning. It is a fact that children who miss school fall behind their peers and struggle to catch up. Most of the work they miss is never made up, which can not only lead to big gaps in their learning but also have a big impact on their future options and opportunities.

Poor attendance often starts at primary school and children who fall into this pattern are likely to underachieve at secondary school. Pupils who miss between 10 and 20 per cent of school (that's 19 to 38 days per year) stand only a 35 per cent chance of achieving five or more good GCSEs, compared to 73 per cent of those who miss fewer than five per cent of school days.

We also know that friendships can be affected by persistent absence: it can be hard for a child who misses lots of school to form relationships with their classmates.

As a parent myself, and a former teacher, I know that there are many reasons that children and young people miss school. We want to help you make the best possible decisions for your child. We have prepared this guide to help you understand what absences are acceptable and what support is available to help you.



**Councillor Sally Cresswell**  
Cabinet Member for Education,  
Skills and Apprenticeships  
Plymouth City Council



# WE KNOW THAT EVERY DAY COUNTS...

## BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

|                 |   |                      |  |
|-----------------|---|----------------------|--|
| 100% attendance | No days missed.   | Excellent            | Gives your child the best chance of success and gets them off to a flying start. |
| 95% attendance  | Nine days of absence. 1 week and 4 days of learning missed.                             | Satisfactory         |  |
| 90% attendance  | 19 days of absence. 3 weeks and 4 days of learning missed.                              | Concerning           | Less chance of success. Makes it harder to progress.                             |
| 85% attendance  | 28 days of absence. 5 weeks and 3 days of learning missed. Almost half a term missed.   | Very concerning      | Serious implications on learning and progress.                                   |
| 80% attendance  | 38 days of absence. 7 weeks and 3 days of learning missed. Half a term missed.          | Extremely concerning |  |
| 75% attendance  | 47 days of absence 9 weeks and 2 days of learning missed. Almost one whole term missed. | Extremely concerning |  |

**If your child has 90% attendance they will have the equivalent of:**

- half a day off per week
- 19 days off per year
- 247 days off over their school career of 13 academic years, equivalent to over one year of lost education.

**CONSIDER WHAT THIS MEANS FOR 80% OR EVEN 75% ATTENDANCE**

## WHEN CAN MY CHILD MISS SCHOOL?

The Department for Education states that you can only allow your child to miss school if they are ill or if you have advance permission from the headteacher:

Your child can be off school if:

- They are ill
- They are attending a doctor or hospital appointment
- 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
- 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.

## WHAT ABSENCES ARE NOT AUTHORISED?

Certain types of absence will be marked as unauthorised. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, agreed by the headteacher, **time off for holidays is always unauthorised.**

Absences where the parents haven't given the school a reason are also recorded as unauthorised. If your child is late to school and the registers have closed, this will be marked as an unauthorised absence, even if they turn up later in the day.

### AVOID TAKING FAMILY HOLIDAYS DURING THE SCHOOL TERM

You can demonstrate your commitment to your child's education by not taking holidays during term time.

A day of school missed is a missed opportunity for important learning and personal development.

Holidays taken during term time will be categorised as an unauthorised absence.

There are over 175 days a year available for holidays to be arranged outside term time!

## WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CHILD MISSES TOO MUCH SCHOOL?

If your child is persistently absent, you will be contacted by their school. The school will discuss your child's attendance with you and help you come up with a plan to make sure they get to school.

**The emphasis should be on providing support to help you improve your child's attendance.**

If absences continue, you may be asked to sign a parenting contract: a voluntary written agreement stating that you will work with your school to improve your child's attendance.

Ultimately, if your child continues to miss school, legal action can be taken. Consequences include a parenting order compelling you to do what the court says to improve your child's attendance; a fine of £60, rising to £120 if you don't pay within 21 days; and prosecution, which could lead to a community service order; a fine of up to £2,500, or a custodial sentence of up to three months.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

Be aware of the impact of regular absences – missing school is missing out.

Take family holidays during school holidays.

Try to arrange non-urgent dental and medical appointments outside school hours and if an appointment must be made within school hours, try to ensure your child is back at school as soon as possible.

Establish a good routine in the mornings and evenings so your child is prepared for the school day ahead; build-up good habits of punctuality and attendance.

Be involved with your child's education and school; ask questions.

Inform the school if your child is absent due to illness or other reasons.

**Most importantly, please discuss any problems or difficulties with the school: staff are there to help and will be supportive.**

## OTHER HELP AND SUPPORT

We know that some people are really struggling with the cost of living crisis and we wouldn't want any child to miss school as a result.

There is lots of help and support available – please look at our Cost of Living online hub at: [www.plymouth.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/costofliving)

### FREE SCHOOL MEALS

If you receive certain benefits, such as Universal Credit, then your child may be entitled to a free lunch at school. Schools receive extra funding for children entitled to free school meals which means it's important to apply if you can, even if your child is in reception, year 1 or year 2 and so already receives a free lunch.

It's easy to apply. Just complete the form on our website and we can check your eligibility online. You'll then receive an email confirming the outcome of your application, which is also sent directly to your child's school.

We have a five-day turnaround for all free school meals applications and will advise your child's school of the date the free school meals start. Find out more at [www.plymouth.gov.uk/free-school-meals](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/free-school-meals).

### UNIFORM STORE PLYMOUTH

Uniform Store Plymouth is a free service helping families kit out children of all ages with the uniform they need for school. This service is available to anyone who needs it, with no referral required. Find out more at [www.uniformstoreplymouth.co.uk](http://www.uniformstoreplymouth.co.uk)

### FREE FOOD OR MEALS VIA HEALTHY START

If you're more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four, you may be entitled to get help to buy healthy food and milk. If you're eligible, you'll be sent a Healthy Start card with money on it that you can use in some UK shops. The benefit will be added onto your card every four weeks. Find out more at [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk).

### FREE CHILDCARE

The Government offers support for childcare costs, including up to 30 hours of free childcare to eligible families and tax-free childcare for working families. Find out more at [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk).

Plymouth has a wide range of childcare providers that can help to look after children and young people. Find out more at [www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/childrenandfamilies](http://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/childrenandfamilies).

Cost of living

Help  IN  
Plymouth



