

ATTENDANCE · GUIDE 1

School attendance: the basics



SHORT ANSWER

Full-time education is compulsory from age 5 to 16, and every young person must stay in education or training until 18. If attendance drops, the school must offer support first — but parents can be fined or prosecuted if absence continues without permission.

What the law says — six things to know

- 1 **Full-time education is compulsory** from age 5 until the last Friday in June of the school year your child turns 16. Parents must make sure this happens — at school or through suitable home education.
- 2 **Aged 16–17, young people must stay in education or training:** full-time education (e.g. college), an apprenticeship or traineeship, or 20+ hours a week of work or volunteering alongside part-time study.
- 3 **Term-time absence needs the head teacher's permission.** Leave can only be granted in exceptional circumstances — holidays are not exceptional — and it cannot be approved after the event.
- 4 **Missing one day a week adds up to 80% attendance** — a whole term lost over a year. Government calls a child “persistently absent” when attendance falls to 90% or below, and most schools aim for 95% or higher.
- 5 **Support must come first.** Since 19 August 2024, statutory guidance (*Working together to improve school attendance*) requires schools to work with you to remove barriers before legal action — expect a meeting, an attendance contract or a notice to improve first.
- 6 **Travelling for work?** Ask the school to record a T code (see Guide 3) so the absence is authorised, and ask about dual registration with a school near where you stay.

If your family travels

Your child can register at a local school in the area where you are staying while keeping their place at their home school. Tell the school your plans in writing, agree a return date, and keep copies of everything.

Need advice?

Call The Traveller Movement on **020 7607 2002** or email us at info@travellermovement.org.uk