



## **Is Your Child Missing Out?**

### **School Attendance: Information for Parents**

#### **What does the law say?**

By law, all children of compulsory school age (between 5 and 16) must get a suitable, full-time education. As a parent, you are responsible for making sure this happens, either by registering your child at a school or by making other arrangements which provide a suitable full-time education. Once your child is registered at a school you are responsible for making sure he or she attends regularly. If your child fails to attend regularly – even if they miss school without you knowing – the Local Authority (LA) may take legal action against you.

#### **What about authorised absences?**

Of course there may be times when your child has to miss school because she or he is ill. This is to be expected and for the odd day off sick you should follow the school's procedures for notifying illness.

Children may also have to attend a medical or dental appointment in school time. However, you should try to make routine appointments such as dental check-ups during the school holidays or after school hours.

Any absence must be requested as far in advance as possible. Absences can only be authorised by the school. If you think you might need to take your child out of school, discuss the reasons with the school as soon as possible. Reasons such as family bereavement or taking part in an agreed religious observance would be acceptable for short absences. Unacceptable reasons for missing school include shopping and birthdays.

#### **What about holidays in term time?**

You should not expect your child's school to agree to an absence for a holiday in term time. Taking a holiday during term time means that children miss important school time – both educationally and for other school

activities. It will be difficult for them to catch up on work later on. Parents do not have a legal right to take children out of school on holiday. The law says that schools have the discretion to grant up to ten days authorised absence in a school year if:

- the parent the child normally lives with applies in advance of the holiday; and

- there are special reasons for the holiday.

Each application is considered individually by the school, taking into account factors like the timing of the holiday and the child's attendance record. Schools will only consider requests for more than 10 days leave a year in exceptional circumstances. If you need to take your child out of school during term time:

- you should request the time off for your child as soon as possible and always before the holiday;
- never ask for time off during exam or test periods unless for exceptional circumstances;
- do not book travel for holidays in term time, until you have sought the school's permission; and
- remember that the school might not agree to authorise the time off.

### **What happens if my child does not attend school regularly?**

Your child's school is responsible by law for reporting poor attendance to the LA. Most LAs employ Education Welfare Officers (also called Education Social Workers) to monitor school attendance and to help parents meet their responsibility. If your child is not attending school regularly, an Education Welfare Officer may visit or write to you. Education Welfare Officers work with parents to address their child's attendance

difficulties. You may be offered a parenting contract by your child's school or LA. This is a formal agreement in which the school and/or LA agree to provide you with support and you agree to do certain things to help

improve your child's attendance. In some areas other workers such as Learning Mentors or Connexions Personal Advisers based in the school may also be working with children on their attendance.

As a parent, you are committing an offence if you fail to make sure that your child attends school regularly, even if they are missing school without your knowledge. You run the risk of being issued with a penalty notice or being taken to court.