



Brownhill
LEARNING COMMUNITY

ATTENDANCE POLICY 2021-2022

The law requires the full attendance of students according to their individual program arrangements. We promote punctuality and discourage lateness. We coordinate our approach to non-attendance with the Education Welfare Service and other outside agencies as necessary. The management and staff at Brownhill Learning Community (BLC) work together with students and parents/carers to support student attendance targets.

Excellent attendance is the single most important factor enabling us to provide the best support for pupils in achieving their personal goals.

1. INTRODUCTION

The majority of pupils who attend BLC will have previously experienced difficulties at mainstream school and this may include attendance concerns. It is with this in mind, that we aim to promote good attendance by offering a positive, individual experience of education, that allows a return to school if appropriate, but meets needs and entitlement, if not. We aim to treat all our pupils as individuals, and try to remove any barriers that do not encourage good attendance.

Staff at Brownhill Learning Community believe that regular school attendance is the key to enabling students to maximise the educational opportunities available to them.

2. PRINCIPLES

- Good attendance is paramount to achieving full potential and being prepared for pupils next destination.
- Pupils are at risk when not attending.
- Regular attendance demonstrates positive commitment on the pupils and parents/carers part to achieve full potential.
- BLC and parents/carers working in partnership will ensure the best possible education for our pupils.
- Support must be given to achieve and sustain regular attendance and punctuality.
- An appropriate curriculum and caring learning environment will promote good attendance.

3. AIMS

- To collect information on previous attendance for all pupils and seek to improve it.
- To encourage all staff to promote good attendance via positive relationships. Including set procedures for attendance information.

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- Where appropriate, provide flexible support for parents/carers and pupils who experience attendance difficulties.
- To promote good communication between BLC, parents/carers, pupils and support agencies.
- To develop a flexible curriculum with a range of accreditation, allowing all pupils to achieve their full potential.
- To continue to develop a systematic approach for gathering and analysing data, using evidence collated to form school actions and individual targets.
- To improve the overall attendance of pupils at school and reduce both authorised and unauthorised absence.
- BLC to demonstrate a strong attendance ethos that improves the overall attendance of pupils and reduces the number of persistently absent pupils.
- Have access to attendance data and other information to improve school and pupil performance.
- Reward and celebrate good and improved attendance.
- Enable early intervention when an individual gives cause for concern.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

Governing Body

- Ensure there is a named senior manager to lead on attendance.
- Ensure the school has clear systems to report, record and monitor the attendance of all, including those who are educated off-site.
- Monitor the school's attendance and related issues through termly reports.
- Ensure there are procedures for collecting and analysing attendance data frequently to identify causes and patterns of behaviour.
- Agree attendance targets and link these to the school improvement plans.

Parents/Carers Responsibilities

Under the Education Act 1996, it is the responsibility of Parents and Carers, to ensure the child or young person for whom they are responsible for has full attendance and is punctual. Failure to do so is an offence and can lead to prosecution. (See additional information sheet – School Attendance & the Law).

BLC will use Individual attendance targets, Individual timetables, Behaviour Care plans (BCP'S) and Parent/Carer agreements to monitor school attendance. BLC aims to support parents/carers in meeting their statutory responsibilities. At BLC we aim for 30 sessions for all students.

Parents and Carers should:

- Actively support the work of the school by instilling the value of education.
- Encourage attendance and take a positive interest in their child's work and educational progress.

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- Try to avoid unnecessary absences; where possible make appointments outside of school hours.
- Ask the school for help as early as possible if their child is experiencing difficulties.
- Communicate as early as possible circumstances which may affect absence or require support.

Brownhill Learning Community

It is the responsibility of BLC to actively pursue the full attendance of each student through:

- All staff being aware of the Attendance Policy and procedures in place to support attendance and use them appropriately.
- The school improving attendance action plan including specific actions and targets for those students with poor attendance.
- Staff rigorously recording attendance & absence at BLC, including the use of SIMS, lesson monitoring systems and confidential discussion sheets (CDS).
- Building respectful relationships with pupils, families and other stakeholders in order to secure their trust and engagement. Make sure there is a welcoming and positive culture across the school.
- Ensuring BLC offers support to parents/carers and pupils to encourage and monitor achievement of attendance targets.
- Treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect.
- Taking into consideration the vulnerability of some pupils and the ways in which this may contribute to absence
- Understanding the importance of school as a place of safety where pupils can enjoy trusted relationships with staff and other pupils.

Leadership and Management

The senior leadership and management teams will:

- Offer a clear vision for attendance, underpinned by high expectations and core values. Which are communicated to and understood by staff, pupils and families.
- Make sure staff, pupils and families understand that absence from school is a potential safeguarding risk and understand their role in keeping children safe.
- Expect good attendance and punctuality from all pupils.
- Convey clear messages about how absence effects attainment, wellbeing and wider outcomes.
- Recognise attendance as an important area of school improvement.
- Support the designated school attendance lead
- Form positive relationships with pupils, parents/carers.
- Liaise with other agencies working with pupils and their families to support attendance.
- Actively promote the importance and values of good attendance to pupils and their parents/ carers
- Return school attendance data to the Local Authority
- Ensure the attendance data is collected and analysed frequently to identify causes and patterns of absence.
- Interpret the data to devise solutions and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions

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Education Welfare Service

It is the responsibility of the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and the Education Welfare Service to give a statutory service and an additional bought in service to Brownhill Learning Community. This will include:

- Participate in the monitoring of attendance patterns within each site
- Offer advice and consultation regarding school attendance/absence
- Implement Individual Attendance Support Plans when necessary
- Consider and pursue legal action for non-school attendance
- Work with the school in reviewing and implementing attendance action plans
- Work with parents/carers and pupils to promote attendance

The full Service Level Agreement can be seen on request of the Head teacher or Attendance Link

BLC named Enforcement Education Welfare Officer: **Katie Digiorgi**
Education Welfare Officer is **Nick Rowe**.

Pupil

It is the responsibility of each pupil to attend 100% of their attendance programme and to arrive on time at their site (or education provision). If they do not attend their education provision, then legal responsibility is with the Parent/Carer. (See Parents/Carers responsibility)
School day starts at 9am with late marks (L) commencing after 9.15am to accommodate particular access arrangements at venues. After 9.30am the student is deemed to be in centre, but unable to gain a full mark and will be marked as U, which will form part of the sessions accumulated towards persistent absenteeism.

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5. MONITORING & EVALUATION

All Staff at BLC are responsible for the monitoring & evaluating of school attendance.

Monitoring and evaluation of **children's school attendance is the responsibility of all staff**, however there are key people with responsibility:

Head Teacher	Kate Connolly
Saxon Hall Deputy Head	Laura Coe
Heights Lane Deputy Head	Catherine Holden
Darnhill Deputy Head	Krystian Liptrot
Business Manager - Senior Leadership Team	Sarah Jackson
BLC Learning Support lead – Senior leadership Team	Jayne Haigh
BLC attendance Lead	Nicola Sweet
Attendance Support Lead Saxon Hall	Laura Coe
Attendance Support Lead Heights Lane	Catherine Holden
Attendance Support Lead Darnhill	Krystian Liptrot
Welfare Lead – Senior Leadership Team	Wendy Nicholls
Education Welfare Officer	Nick Rowe
SIMS Manager	Jill Rhodes
Governors of BLC	All Governors

Regular monitoring will take place by Senior Leadership Team/Senior Management Team and the Attendance Link/Lead Team with the 'upkeep' of the '**Improving Attendance Action Plan**'. Governors will also monitor attendance through the termly Headteacher Report.

BLC will use **Attendance Panels** for identified pupils with attendance concerns, and may include Senior Management, Attendance Leads, EWO, teaching staff, School Health and other agencies/staff deemed necessary to improve school attendance.

Truancy

All staff at BLC believes in the importance of continuity in every child's learning. Staff are also concerned about each child's safety, welfare and happiness. If staff are suspicious that a child might be playing truant, action is taken immediately. It is a **parent's responsibility** to ensure their child attends school and stays there for their education provision.

If truancy is a concern, BLC will inform the Education Welfare Officer and Parents/Carers. Parents/Carers are contacted, by either telephone or a home visit. We encourage parents to bring their child back to school, so that the reasons for truancy can be discussed and, we hope, resolved.

Traveller Absence

It is expected that Traveller children attend school as regularly and as frequently as possible. To protect traveller parent/carers from unreasonable prosecution for non-attendance, the Education Act 1944, section 86, states that a Traveller parent is safe from prosecution if their child accrues 200 attendances in a year. This is only when the parents are engaged in trade or BLC Attendance Policy

Amended and Reviewed by J Haigh August 2021

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business that requires them to travel and when the child is attending school as regularly as possible as that trade permits.

There is an expectation that parents must advise of their forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen and inform school of the proposed return dates.

Brownhill Learning Community will authorise absence of Traveller children if we are satisfied that a family are travelling and intending to return.

Traveller students will be recorded as attending an approved educational activity when:

- The student is on roll and attending another visited school
- Undertaking supervised educational activity under the jurisdiction of another Local Authority's Traveller Education Service.
- The student is undertaking computer based distance learning that is evidenced.

Traveller Education Service Contact: Will MiKinlay.

Religious Observance

Brownhill Learning Community acknowledge the multi faith nature of British society and recognise that on some occasions, religious celebrations and festivals may fall outside school holiday periods.

Consideration will be made by school for authorised absences due to religious festivals.

Persistent Absentees (PA)

BLC & EWS monitor all students who are deemed Persistent Absentees (government guidelines are currently 95% or below) and challenge all absence including authorised absences e.g. illness, medicals, holidays etc.

BLC will monitor and challenge all pupils at risk of being persistent absentees by establishing robust escalation procedures. We will:

- Make daily absences calls
- Carry out regular home visits if a child has been absent for three or more days without reason for absence
- Send attendance letters to parents/ carers
- Hold panel meetings to address attendance
- Invite parents to meetings with the school attendance lead to address barriers
- Engage with local authority education welfare officer on a regular basis
- Use fixed penalty notices
- Engage with other professional involved with the family
- Consider backstories and any Behaviour Care plans already in place.
- Establish a range of evidence based interventions to address barriers to attendance

For students who are persistently absent we will:

- Work with local authority Education welfare
- Consider alternative provision
- Consider youth services

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- Liaise with external agencies, including school nurses, health professionals and social care.
- Work with parents/carers offering as much support as possible

Dual Registration

Pupils can hold status as:

- BLC roll
- Dual registration
- School roll

All excluded pupils will be on the BLC roll; medical pupils/school age mothers usually will have dual status whilst with BLC and those students who are being monitored or assessed will be on school roll.

Dual registered pupils are the responsibility of the holding school. The school will register pupils as 'D' for those sessions at the BLC. The responsibility is with the school to check on attendance of dual registered pupils. If the child is absent the school contact, BLC and the student is marked absent on SIMS.

Dual registered pupils can only be removed from school roll, if deemed appropriate, after a meeting involving the appropriate representatives.

Assisted Travel Provided under EHCP's

In accordance with the BLC Travel Policy implemented in September 2015, and reviewed in June 2017, students who are provided with transport to and from their place of education must maintain 95% attendance.

Failure to comply with the Policy could result in the withdrawal of transport support.

6. ACTIONS

BLC will use a range of resources, processes, data & reports for monitoring & evaluating the school attendance of all our pupils. BLC staff will follow key actions so that all staff are involved in school attendance.

BLC will ensure that pupils access appropriate individual education provisions, tailored to meet their individual need. All staff understand their responsibility to the Improving School Attendance Action Plan.

The Attendance Policy will become the foundation for a more individual, specific action plan that reflects the needs of the Learning Community and the individual pupil, incorporating the 'Children's Act 1989' the 'Education Act 1996' and the ethos of Brownhill Learning Community.

A very clear BLC Improving School Attendance Action Plan is in place. The plan involves staff engagement and the work of the Education Welfare Service, allowing BLC to create a multi-disciplined approach to support pupils and improve school attendance.

Understanding some of the Improving Attendance Actions at BLC

Confidential Discussion sheets (CDS)

All BLC students on roll are monitored daily on 'confidential discussion sheets' (CDS)
Senior staff monitor the CDS for change in pattern, update in individual circumstances, positives and concerns. The CDS also record all actions that staff have taken to address the pupil's attendance progress.
Senior staff and teaching staff complete a half-termly audit and includes relevant information on students CDS sheets.

Attendance Targets:

Each pupil will have an attendance target (BLC aim for **30 lessons** for all students) and earn points for achieving their targets.

In some circumstances, pupils will have **Individual Attendance Targets** that are maybe set as a result of negotiation with BLC. Parents/Carers could be invited to the discussion of planning & setting up of the individual targets.

For example, a pupil may be on 30 lessons target but earn **bonus** point's for achieving if there are previous attendance concerns or for added incentive for that pupil.

BLC will recommend pupils for rewards (e.g. certificates/vouchers – for good attendance and for meeting attendance targets).

Staff should be made aware of **Individual Attendance Targets** on the confidential discussion sheets (CDS).

Reviewing Attendance Targets:

Attendance targets are reviewed half termly as part of the attendance audit review.

Behaviour Care Plan (BCP)

Main Objective:

To offer support to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly and access the support offered to him/her in order to improve school attendance and access the education provision provided.

The purpose of an BCP is to support the young person with improving/sustaining school attendance.

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This is a very individual support plan that requires needs assessing to identify barriers that stop a pupil accessing their education provision offered. When need is identified only then can BLC/EWS support the student.

The objective to an BCP must always be to aim for a full education (30 lessons per week) for each pupil.

The outcome of an BCP:

- Attendance is improved with pupils achieving their full potential.
- Pupils are at a low risk when attending school
- Regular attendance demonstrates positive commitment on the pupils and parents/carers part to achieve full potential.
- BLC and parents/carers work in partnership to ensure the best possible education for pupils.
- Support is put into place to achieve and sustain regular attendance and punctuality.
- Pupils access an appropriate curriculum and caring learning environment that will promote good attendance.

How are they used?

- The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will need implement and sign the BCP and put on the 'O' drive for sharing. The plan will be reviewed every 2 weeks; maximum of 6-week plan can be put into place
- The school attendance lead is notified of all BCP in place for all pupils, these are monitored to ensure they are reviewed and have a positive impact on pupil's attendance.
- Pupils on a BCP will have their timetable and actions recorded on the CDS. This allows all staff to be aware of all actions to encourage achievement and targets.
- Senior Management are responsible for the upkeep and reviewing of the BCP
- The pupil and parent should be part of any agreement to the BCP & will need a parent/carer agreement signed. The parent/carer agreement must be explained and their responsibility to support the plan.
- If a parent/carer is in the legal process for non-school attendance of the child, they have care for then the Education Welfare Service (EWS) must be part of any agreement to the BCP & will need a parent/carer agreement signed. The parent/carer agreement must be explained and their responsibility to support the plan.
- The Head Teacher (Kate Connolly) and the EWO (Nick Rowe) will need to be informed of all BCP's that are in place for more than 6 weeks. The school attendance lead will need to be informed of the reasons why the BCP is in place. The school attendance lead and learning support lead will discuss any concerns in relation to the BCP with the head teacher and the SLT.

Pupils on an BCP should have this recorded on the CDS.

If a pupil is to have a **Part-time timetable (PTT)** and not on the standard 30 lessons per week then a BCP must be initiated by the senior team before the part-time time-table is started. Part time timetables should only be used for a short period of time (maximum 2 week) with the emphasis being on aiming for a full time-table.

Part time timetables should not be used for behaviour management of a student.

Any part time timetable will have the parent/carer agreement explained and must ensure that they understand their responsibility to supporting the BCP.

If a pupil/parent does not agree/keep to the part-time timetable, then this will be withdrawn and the pupil will be expected to come to school on the standard 30 lessons per week.

7. COMMUNICATION regarding absence.

Informing school, of absence & lateness.

Parents and Carers are asked to notify BLC on the first day of absence/lateness either by telephone or personally. (Preferably by the close of register – see below) Telephone number for BLC - **0300 303 8384**. If the pupil is having more than 1 days absence, then parent/carer must inform school every subsequent day unless told otherwise.

If a child is unable to attend school, parents must make sure the school is fully aware of the circumstances and the reason for absence. Schools are very limited in the type of absences that they can accept and that they are required to notify the Local Authority if a pupil misses school for an unacceptable reason. The Head teacher reserves the right to decide whether an absence is authorised or unauthorised.

BLC uses a computerised registration system. The register is completed in the morning and afternoon at 9.00 a.m. and 1.00pm. A pupil will receive a late mark (L) if they arrive after 9.15a.m. but before 9.30am. All pupils who are late must report to the office. Registers officially close at 9.30a.m and 1.30p.m. Pupils who arrive after this time will receive a late after registers close mark (U), which equates to an unauthorised absence.

If school receives no explanation by parents for the child's absence/lateness, then the child's absence is considered to be unauthorised. It is not acceptable for parents to pass messages regarding absences to school transport drivers or escorts. Brownhill LC will not accept this method of communication and your child will be marked unauthorised.

Holidays in term time

Holidays **will not** be authorised by the Head teacher, unless it is classed as an exceptional circumstance. 'Exceptional Circumstances' are deemed to be rare, significant, unavoidable and short, that could not reasonably be taken at another time. Holidays taken will be recorded as an unauthorised holiday (Code G). Any absence of 10 sessions (5 school days) or more will qualify for a fine. No warning will be issued, as parents will be aware of this through letters,

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verbal communication, a statement on the school website and a leaflet in our school admission procedure. Fines will be issued to each parent of £60 if paid within 21 days rising to £120 if paid within 28 days.

Appointments during the school day

Parents/carers are asked to make routine medical appointments before or after school. However, it is understood that sometimes this is not possible. Parents/carers must provide school with a copy of all appointment cards / letters when taking a child out of school. We ask that parents ensure their child returns to school after the appointment where necessary or attends school prior to the appointment. School will challenge parents where a child has missed a whole day of school due to a medical appointment. Please note that where appointments are made before the start of a school day and where children are not back in time for registration then a child will receive an authorised absence mark for that whole session (Code M).

School Attendance & the Law

Legal Implications - Failure to attend school regularly

Legal Proceedings can be taken against parents/carers for failure to ensure regular attendance at school for a child in their care.

Parents/carers can be summoned to appear before **Magistrates** who will also be able to force parents/carers to attend court.

Fines can be a maximum of **£2500** for each parent/carer and/or a possibility of **imprisonment for up to 3 months**. Magistrates can also consider other sentencing options such as Parenting Orders or Community Service.

(Education Act 1996 – Section 444 (1) to (7))

“If a child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his parent is guilty of an offence.”

Parenting Orders

(Crime & Disorder Act 1998)

Parenting Orders can be made in the **Family Court, Magistrates Court and all Criminal Courts (adult, youth and crown)**. The court may consider the desirability of issuing a Parenting Order in addition to any fine imposed.

Parenting Orders are made when a person has been convicted of an offence under Section 443 (failure to comply with a School Attendance Order) or Section 444 (failure to ensure regular attendance at school) of the Education Act 1996 (Section 8 (1) (d)).

Education Supervision Orders

(Education Act 1996 – Section 447 and Children Act 1989 – Section 36)

The Children Act empowers the Local Education Authority to apply to the Family Courts for an Education Supervision Order where there are concerns about school attendance. The LA must consult with the Social Services Department. The child’s welfare is the paramount consideration. The supervisor, usually an Education Welfare Officer, has a duty to advise, assist, befriend and give directions to the supervised child and the parents in such a way as will ensure that the child is properly educated.

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Education Supervision Orders can be sought in order to “advise, assist and befriend” children and young people to help them attend school. The Orders would be considered in the Family Court.

School Attendance Orders

(Education Act 1996 – Section 437 – 439)

“If it appears to a local education authority that a child of compulsory school age in their area is not receiving suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, they should serve a notice in writing on the parent, requiring him/her to satisfy them within the period specified in the notice that the child is receiving such education ... the Authority shall serve on the parent a School Attendance Order ... requiring him/her to cause the child to become a registered pupil at a school named in the order. If a parent on whom a School Attendance Order is served fails to comply with the requirements of the Order, they are guilty of an offence, unless they prove that they are causing the child to receive a suitable education otherwise, than at school”.

School Attendance Orders can be made specifying which school a child should attend.

Penalty Notices to Address Poor Attendance at School
Advice to Parents/carers and Carers
The anti-Social behaviour Act 2003

- **What is the Anti- Social Behaviour Act 2003?**

Section 23 of the Act gives powers to the Local Authority and other designated bodies to issue Penalty Notices where a parent/carer is considered capable of but unwilling to secure an improvement in their child's school attendance.

The powers came into force on the 27th February 2004.

- **Why has it been introduced?**

Reducing absence from school is a key priority nationally and locally because missing school damages a pupil's attainment levels, disrupts school routines and the learning of others and can leave a pupil vulnerable to anti-social behaviour and youth crime.

Above all, missing school seriously affects children's longer-term life opportunities.

- **What is a Penalty Notice?**

Under existing legislation, parents/carers commit an offence if a child fails to attend regularly and the absences are classed as unauthorised (those for which the school cannot or has not given permission). Depending on circumstances, such cases may result in prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

A Penalty Notice is an alternative to prosecution, which does not require an appearance in Court whilst still securing an improvement in a pupil's attendance.

Payment of a Penalty Notice enables parents to discharge potential liability for conviction.

- **What are the costs?**

From 1st September 2013, £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days.

- **How are they issued?**

By post to your home.

- **When are they used?**

Rochdale Local Authority considers that regular attendance at school is of such importance that Penalty Notices may be used in a range of situations where unauthorised absence occurs:

Overt truancy (including pupils found during truancy sweeps)

Inappropriate parentally condoned absence.

Excessive holidays in term time or excessive delayed return from an extended holiday without prior school permission.

Persistent late arrival at school (after the Register has closed).

In every case, a pupil will have had in excess of 20 school sessions (i.e. 10 school days) lost to unauthorised absence during the current term or within any 12-week period before a Penalty Notice is considered.

The Authority never takes such action lightly and would far rather work with parents/carers to improve attendance without having to resort to any enforcement actions. Attendance is of such importance to all of us however that the Authority will use the powers if this is the only way of securing a child's schooling.

- **Is a Warning Given?** Yes, you will receive a written warning of the possibility of a Notice being issued, which will tell you the extent of your child's absences and give you 15 school days in which to effect an improvement? In that time, your child must have no unauthorised absences from school.

There is no limit to the number of times formal warning of possible Penalty Notice issue may be made in any particular case.

- **Is there an appeal process?**

There is no statutory right of appeal once a notice has been issued, but on receipt of a warning you can make representation should you wish.

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- ***How do I pay?***

Details of payment arrangements will be included on the Penalty Notice.

You need to be aware that payment in part or by installment is not an option with Penalty Notices.

- ***What happens if I do not pay?***

You have up to 42 days from receipt to pay the Penalty Notice in full, after which the Authority is required under the Act to commence proceedings in the Magistrates court for the original offence of poor attendance by your child.

If proven, this can attract a range of fines up to £2,500 and/or a range of disposals such as Parenting Orders or Community Sentences depending upon circumstances.

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Absence from school

Children are required to attend school for 190 days each year.
The Local Authority target for attendance in schools is at least 95%.

Attendance during one school year	Equals days Absent-	Which is Approximately weeks absent	Which means this number of lessons missed
95%	9 days	2 weeks	58 lessons
90%	19 days	4 weeks	116 lessons
85%	29 days	6 weeks	174 lessons
80%	38 days	8 weeks	232 lessons
75%	48 days	10 weeks	290 lessons
70%	57 days	11.5 weeks	333 lessons
65%	67 days	13.5 weeks	391 lessons

**How does your child's attendance compare with this target?
Please remember, that children who miss a lot of school achieve less.**

Parental responsibility

What is parental responsibility?

Parental responsibility (PR) is where an adult is responsible for the care and well-being of their child and can make important decisions about the following points for example:

- Food
- Clothing
- Education
- Home
- Medical treatment

Who has parental responsibility?

Married couples who have children together both automatically have parental responsibility.

Parental responsibility continues after divorce. Mothers automatically have parental responsibility. Where the parents are not married, the unmarried father has parental responsibility if:

- His name is registered on the birth certificate – this is the case for births registered after 1 December 2003. Fathers can re-register if their names have not been placed on the birth certificate before this date.
- He later marries the mother
- Both parents have signed an authorised parental responsibility agreement.
- He obtains a parental responsibility order from the court.
- He obtains a residence order from the court
- He becomes the child's guardian

Why would someone want parental responsibility?

If you are living permanently with a child, in a parental role, you may feel that you want the authority, stability and recognition. This is especially so if the other parent has no contact, or is abroad, unknown or dead.

Without parental responsibility you cannot make the decisions about a child's life, such as choice of school or religion, surname or guardian on your death.

If you are a step-parent, you cannot automatically have the child live with you on the death of a resident parent unless you have parental responsibility and so the other parent (providing that he or she has parental responsibility) will take the child.

If someone new gets parental responsibility, do others automatically lose it?

No, several people can have parental responsibility at the same time. Adoption and care proceedings are different. Parental responsibility can be lost where:

- In the case of parents their child is adopted.
- In the case of a person having acquired parental responsibility through a court order, that order later being revoked by the court.
- In the case of a local authority with care order and the court later revoking the care order.

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- In the case of a guardian where the court appoints another guardian.

How long does it take and what does it cost?

If you have to go to court there is a duty to deal promptly with all matters concerning children and applications are treated as priority matters. The court fees are straightforward, but if you have to go to court you should obtain legal advice and discuss fees with your solicitor.