

Guidance on attendance patterns for children who are not of compulsory school age

Compulsory school age is the beginning of the term after a child's fifth birthday. Prior to this, parents can make choices about their child's attendance and should be supported to do this. Details of the choices available to parents are outlined at the end of this document.

What is the correct procedure to follow if a child does not attend the sessions at a school or setting which they have committed to?

Once parents have selected which pattern of attendance they prefer for their children and informed the school or setting of this, then they have expressed a commitment for their child to attend these sessions.

It is good practice, at an induction session, to explain to parents the procedures that should be followed if their child is absent. This would normally be notifying the school or setting in advance if the absence is pre planned. This may be because of a planned holiday or a medical appointment for example.

Parents should also notify the school or setting as soon as possible of any unplanned absences. These may be due to sickness for example. It should be made clear to parents that schools and settings need this information to ensure that they are confident that the child is safe.

If a school or setting has any concerns about the safety or wellbeing of children, they should follow the safeguarding procedures outlined in their safeguarding policy which will have been shared with parents.

Do schools or settings have to report absences of children who are not of compulsory school age?

The simple answer is 'No'.

The law under Section 8 of the Education Act 1996 is clear that children of non compulsory school age are not required to be in receipt of education.

For statistical recording purposes, children below compulsory school age are not included in returns to the Local Authority or the DfE

However, good practice would suggest that children and their parents need to be to be advised of the expectations of the school or setting in reporting and recording absences and encouraged to follow these.

If a school or setting has any concerns about the safety or wellbeing of children they should follow the safeguarding procedures outlined in their safeguarding policy which will have been shared with parents.

If a child is a Child in Care (CiC) then the social worker **must** be informed of any absence which concerns you.

Contact Customer First by calling 0808 800 4005 if you are unsure of how to contact the social worker involved.

Why is regular attendance at a school or setting important before a child is of compulsory school age?

The link between non attendance at school and attainment has been established and research is clearly showing that for many children attendance at school impacts upon their attainment and levels of learning. Absence before compulsory school age equally impacts upon the child's learning, the development of their social skills and interaction with their peers in making friendships.

It is important that parents are supported to ensure children attend the sessions they have committed to from the beginning of their children's experiences in Early Years settings. It is to be hoped that positive patterns of attendance can be established at this stage in a child's life which will then continue. It is also known that children's attendance at high quality providers of Early Years and Childcare provision impacts on their attainment later in their school careers.

Where parents are having difficulty in ensuring their children attend sessions they have committed to, it would be good practice to discuss the reasons for this with them and explore how support may be offered.

If a child has special educational needs or a disability, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) may be able to offer parents appropriate support. Families can call: 01473 265210.

What are the early education choices available for parents prior to their children reaching compulsory school age?

Children normally attend school full-time in the Reception Year in the September following their fourth birthday. All primary schools must offer a child a full-time place at the start of the Autumn term in September. However, legally a child does not have to start full-time education until the term after their fifth birthday.

If a parent does not wish for their child to take up a full-time school place in the September following their child's fourth birthday, they have some alternative choices. The school their child has been offered a place at will send a form to the parent so they can indicate their decision. The choices are:

- Decide which term the parent would like their child to start full-time or part-time in the Reception Year class at school.
- The part-time option is only available until the child reaches Compulsory School Age (CSA), which is the beginning of the term after the child's fifth birthday. At this stage the child must take up a full-time school place.
- Once their child has started to attend a Reception Year class at a state school, funded early education is no longer available in the private, voluntary, and/or independent sector. They can access either full or part-time education in the school they are attending.

Please note that if the parent decides that their child takes up a school place part-time any entitlement to school travel will change and they may be responsible for travel costs and arrangements to and from the school. For more information regarding this please contact the Passenger Transport Team on 0345 606 6173.

- Parents can take up or continue to access a place in the private, voluntary, and/or independent sector and can arrange this by talking to the chosen provider of funded early education or to the Suffolk Families Information Service (FIS) who will help them find local provision to suit their needs.
- FIS can be contacted by email: Childcare.Planning@suffolk.gov.uk or call: 0345 60 800 33.

Summer born children

If a child's fifth birthday is between 01 April and 31 August, they could delay entry into school until the following September as this is when the child reaches compulsory school age. If this is the parents' choice it is important for them to understand that:

- Their child would begin school in Year 1 in September rather than joining the Reception Year class.
- The initial offer of a Reception Year place at the school will be withdrawn and they must apply for a Year 1 place using the relevant application form (CAF2 or ADM1) for Year 1. For further information on which form to complete please visit our website www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions.
- There is no guarantee that a place in Year 1 will be offered to their child in their preferred school. When they apply for a place in Year 1 the year group might already be full, meaning that their application for a place is unsuccessful.

For more information regarding the options for summer born children including how to request a delayed admission to the Reception Year to start in September when the child reaches compulsory school age, please contact School Admissions by email: admissions@suffolk.gov.uk or call: 0345 600 0981.