

Is your child in school?

How Hertfordshire's Attendance Teams can help

Introduction

A good education will help to give your child the best possible start in life. Children need to go to school regularly and punctually to make the most of their educational opportunities and you, as parents or carers, have a vital role to play in making that happen.

What does the law say?

All parents of children aged 5 – 16 who are on a school roll must, by law, make sure that their child goes to school both regularly and punctually. That means you have a duty to make sure that your child is in school when they should be and that they arrive at school in time for both morning and afternoon sessions.

If you do not do this, and there are no legitimate reasons such as illness, then an Attendance Improvement Officer may become involved.

What is an Attendance Improvement Officer?

Attendance Improvement Officers (AIOs) are part of Hertfordshire County Council's Children's services department. The AIO has a responsibility to make sure parents are fulfilling their legal duty in getting their child to school regularly and punctually.

AIOs visit schools regularly and talk with teachers and school staff about children who are not at school when they should be, or who are late.

Working with parents

If there are concerns schools will try to solve these problems first but if they can't, then the AIO attached to that school may write to the parents or carers. The AIO may invite the parents or carers to a meeting at the school, at a local Hertfordshire County Council office, or they may visit them at home.

The AIO will always try to help parents and carers and work with them to resolve any difficulties that are preventing a child's regular school attendance. However, the law is

Hertfordshire County Council
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quite clear that parents are responsible for making sure their child goes to school regularly and on time.

There may be good reasons for the attendance problems, such as illness. However, if it becomes clear that this is not the case, and despite every best effort to work out a solution, the child's attendance does not improve, the AIO may issue a Penalty Notice or begin legal proceedings on behalf of the County Council.

Advice on working with Attendance Improvement Officers

If an AIO visits you, or invites you to a meeting at school or elsewhere, you should:

- Ask to see the AIO's formal identification
- Make sure you understand why the visit or meeting is taking place
- Ask to have anything that you do not understand explained to you

If you ignore letters from an AIO or fail to keep appointments for meetings, the AIO may well assume that you are deliberately refusing to co-operate.

If this happens, the AIO will begin legal proceedings against you on the grounds that no other course of action has proved possible.

Legal Action

You should be aware that records (both paper and electronic) of meetings, copies of letters and details of telephone calls with the AIO will be kept and may be used as evidence in court if legal proceedings are taken. What usually happens in such cases is that parents are required (summonsed) to appear at the local Magistrates' Court. If you are convicted of failing to ensure regular or punctual school attendance, they may be fined up to £2,500 each and /or sent to prison for up to 3 months.

The best for your child

Hertfordshire County Council wants to support all parents and carers in making sure their child gets the best possible education. The law is strict to reflect the crucial importance of regular and punctual school attendance. The AIO will always try to work as closely as possible with parents and carers to resolve any difficulties, but will take legal proceedings if there are no exceptional circumstances for the absences and attendance has not improved.

Visit www.hertsdirect.org or telephone 0300 123 4043 for information on the following:

- Admissions and transport
- Children with additional needs and disabilities
- Comment, compliment and complain
- Educating your child at home
- Help with the cost of education
- Making a subject access request (How to see your records)

This information can be made available on request in other formats, including large print, Braille, audio and other languages.