

Blackpool School attendance update for September 2020

In March when the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak was increasing, it was made clear that no parent would be penalised or sanctioned for their child's non-attendance at school.

Now the circumstances have changed and it is vital for all children to return to school to minimise as far as possible the longer-term impact of the pandemic on children's education, wellbeing and wider development.

Missing out on more time in the classroom risks pupils falling further behind. Those with higher overall absence tend to achieve less well in both primary and secondary school. School attendance will therefore be mandatory again from the beginning of the autumn term. This means from that point, the usual rules on school attendance will apply, including:

- parents' duty to secure that their child attends regularly at school where the child is a registered pupil at school and they are of compulsory school age;
- schools' responsibilities to record attendance and follow up absence
- the availability to issue sanctions, including fixed penalty notices in line with local authorities' codes of conduct

Help with getting your child to go to school

If you're having trouble getting your child to go to school, the school and Blackpool Council can help.

The school will discuss attendance problems with you and should agree a plan with you to improve your child's attendance.

Blackpool council have a Pupil Welfare team that help parents improve their child's attendance at school. The council will tell you if they're able to help. Forms of help could include:

- support to reduce the burden on children where families are in difficulty (for example if a child is spending a lot of time caring for someone)
- working with families and schools to overcome bullying and other serious problems
- a parenting contract

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Your school will be able to put you in contact with the Pupil Welfare Service officer who is linked to your school.

Pupils who are shielding or self-isolating

We now know much more about coronavirus (COVID-19) and so in future there will be far fewer children and young people advised to shield whenever community transmission rates are high. Therefore, the majority of pupils will be able to return to school. You should note however that:

- a small number of pupils will still be unable to attend in line with public health advice because they are self-isolating and have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves; or because they are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Shielding advice for all adults and children will pause on 1 August, subject to a continued decline in the rates of community transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). This means that even the small number of pupils who will remain on the shielded patient list can also return to school, as can those who have family members who are shielding.
- If rates of the disease rise in local areas, children (or family members) from that area, and that area only, will be advised to shield during the period where rates remain high and therefore they may be temporarily absent (see below).
- Some pupils no longer required to shield but who generally remain under the care of a specialist health professional may need to discuss their care with their health professional before returning to school (usually at their next planned clinical appointment).
- Where a pupil is unable to attend school because they are complying with clinical and/or public health advice, your school will be able to immediately offer them access to remote education. Schools should monitor engagement with this activity.

Where children are not able to attend school as parents are following clinical and/or public health advice, absence will not be penalised. However, evidence of this exemption must be provided to the school, in a written form, accompanied by the necessary evidence.



Pupils and families who are anxious about the return to school

All other pupils must attend school. Schools should bear in mind the potential concerns of pupils, parents and households who may be reluctant or anxious about returning and put the right support in place to address this. This may include pupils who have themselves been shielding previously but have been advised that this is no longer necessary, those living in households where someone is clinically vulnerable, or those concerned about the comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds or who have certain conditions such as obesity and diabetes.

If parents of pupils with significant risk factors are concerned, we recommend schools discuss their concerns and provide reassurance of the measures they are putting in place to reduce the risk in school. Schools should be clear with parents that pupils of compulsory school age must be in school unless a statutory reason applies (for example, the pupil has been granted a leave of absence, is unable to attend because of sickness, is absent for a necessary religious observance etc).

You can be prosecuted if you do not give your child an education. You'll normally get warnings and offers of help from the local council first.

Legal action to enforce school attendance

Blackpool council and schools can use various legal powers if your child is missing school without a good reason. They can give you:

- a Parenting Order
- an Education Supervision Order
- a School Attendance Order
- a fine (sometimes known as a 'penalty notice')

You can be given one or more of these but the council does not have to do this before prosecuting you.

Parenting Order

This means you have to go to parenting classes. You'll also have to do what the court says to improve your child's school attendance.

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Education Supervision Order

If the council thinks you need support getting your child to go to school but you're not co-operating, they can apply to a court for an Education Supervision Order.

A supervisor will be appointed to help you get your child into education. Blackpool Council can do this instead of prosecuting you, or as well.

School Attendance Order

You'll get a School Attendance Order if Blackpool council thinks your child is not getting an education.

You have 15 days to provide evidence that you've registered your child with the school listed in the order or that you're giving them home education. If you do not, you could be prosecuted or given a fine.

Fine

Blackpool council can give each parent a fine of £60, which rises to £120 each if you do not pay within 21 days. If you do not pay the fine after 28 days you may be prosecuted for your child's absence from school.

Prosecution

You could get a fine of up to £2,500, a community order or a jail sentence up to 3 months. The court also gives you a Parenting Order.

When your child can miss school

You can only allow your child to miss school if either:

- they're too ill to go in
- you've got advance permission from the school

There's extra support available if your child cannot go to school for long periods because of a health problem. Contact your school about this support.

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Holidays in term time

You have to get permission from the head teacher if you want to take your child out of school during term time.

You can only do this if:

- you make an application to the head teacher in advance (as a parent the child normally lives with)
- there are exceptional circumstances

It's up to the head teacher how many days your child can be away from school if leave is granted.

You can be fined for taking your child on holiday during term time without the school's permission.

