

# Extract from DfE Guidance for Fully Opening Schools

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools#attendance>

## Attendance expectations

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

Now the circumstances have changed, 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

## 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 was paused on 1 August 2020 which 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 were shielding - read the [current advice on shielding](#)
- if rates of the disease rise in local areas, children (or family members) from that area, and that area only, may be advised to shield during the period where rates remain high and, therefore, they may be temporarily unable to attend
- pupils no longer required to shield but who generally remain under the care of a specialist health professional are likely to discuss their care with their health professional at their next planned clinical appointment - you can find more advice from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health at [COVID-19 - 'shielding' guidance for children and young people](#)

Specialists in paediatric medicine have reviewed the latest evidence on the level of risk posed to children and young people from coronavirus (COVID-19). The latest evidence indicates that the risk of serious illness for most children and young people is low. In the future, we expect fewer children and young people will be included on the shielded patient list.

Patients can only be removed from the shielding patient list by their GP or specialist, following consultation with the child and their family, and other clinicians where appropriate. If a child or young person is removed from the shielded patient list in due course, they will no longer be advised to shield in the future if coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission increases. Discussion by a clinician with those previously

advised that they were a clinically vulnerable child or young person but can now be removed from the shielded patient list, and with their families are ongoing. Since shielding advice has paused nationally, except in a very few areas where the implementation of local restrictions is ongoing, all previously affected children should be able to return to school except where individual clinical advice not to do so has been provided.

Where a pupil is unable to attend school because they are complying with clinical or public health advice, we expect schools to be able to immediately offer them access to remote education. Schools should monitor engagement with this activity as set out in the [action for all schools and local authorities section](#).

Where children are not able to attend school as parents and carers are following clinical or public health advice, for example, self-isolation or family isolation, the absence will not be penalised.

### **Pupils and families who are anxious about 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).

## **Action for all schools and local authorities**

There's separate guidance on recording attendance at [addendum: recording attendance in relation to coronavirus \(COVID-19\) during the 2020 to 2021 academic year.](#)

We are asking schools to work with families to secure regular school attendance from the start of term as this will be essential to help pupils catch up on missed education, make progress and promote their wellbeing and wider development.

We are asking schools and local authorities to:

1. Communicate clear and consistent expectations around school attendance to families (and any other professionals who work with the family where appropriate) throughout the summer ahead of the new school year.
2. Identify pupils who are reluctant or anxious about returning or who are at risk of disengagement and develop plans for re-engaging them. This should include disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, especially those who were persistently absent prior to the pandemic or who have not engaged with the school regularly during the pandemic.
3. Use the additional catch-up funding schools will receive, as well as existing pastoral and support services, attendance staff and resources and schools' pupil premium funding to put measures in place for those families who will need additional support to secure pupils' regular attendance.
4. Work closely with other professionals as appropriate to support the return to school, including continuing to notify the child's social worker, if they have one, of non-attendance.