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**Part-time timetables**

**Factsheet Number 9 August 2025**

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All hyperlinks contained in this factsheet were correct as of August 2025

**This information is about part time timetables and your child’s rights to a full-time education.**

**‘All pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to full-time education.’**

When parents choose to register their child at a school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends the school regularly and they receive suitable “full-time” education:

This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, with the exception of a limited number of circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being granted permission for an absence **in advance** by the school.

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| **Section 7 Education Act 1996.**  “Duty of parents to secure education of children of compulsory school age,  The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient full-time education suitable-   1. To his/her age, ability, and aptitude and 2. To any special educational needs, he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.” |

The Local Authority (LA) have a duty under Section19 of The Education Act 1996 to educate pupils who cannot attend school due to illness, exclusion, or other reason.

Read also <https://www.iasmanchester.org/factsheets> number 19 “Section 19 duty to provide education for children of compulsory school age not in school”.

Education must be “full-time” unless the LA considers that: “for reasons which relate to the physical or mental health of the child, it would not be in the child’s best interest for full-time education to be provided for the child” **s.19 (3AA) Education Act 1996**

**Section 19 of the Education Act 1996**

Places a duty on local authorities to arrange suitable education for children of compulsory school age, who cannot attend school due to reasons such as illness or exclusion. Specifically, Section 19(1) states that local authorities are responsible for ensuring that these children receive appropriate education.

**Guidance on part time timetables**

A timetable is considered reduced when it consists of something less than that which is provided to the majority of the pupil’s peers in the same setting.

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to be provided with efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have.

In very exceptional rare circumstances, where it is in a pupil’s best interests, a need for a temporary part-time timetable may be necessary to meet their individual needs. For example, when a medical condition prevents a pupil from attending full-time education and a part-time timetable is considered as part of a re-integration package.

**When might a reduced timetable be used?**This is not an exhaustive list, but it is likely that a pupil being considered for a reduced timetable would fall within one of the following three categories:

**1) Part of an in-school support package**

In collaboration with the school parent carers and other professionals a short term (no more than six weeks) reduced timetable to support a pupil who has become disaffected and as at risk of academic decline. This information would be closely monitored to address and manage the pupil’s significantly challenging behavioural, emotional or social needs.

**2) Medical reasons**

A Pupil has a serious medical condition where recovery is the priority outcome. These arrangements would be part of a “medical plan” agreed between the school and health professionals. Please see [Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-for-children-with-health-needs-who-cannot-attend-school) before offering a reduced timetable for this reason.

**3) Reintegration**  
A reduced timetable is proposed as part of a planned reintegration into school (no longer than 6 weeks) following an extended period of absence, such as an exclusion, non-attendance, school refusal.

**When considering placing a pupil on a reduced timetable, the school must -**

Have a clear and evidenced rationale for considering a reduced timetable as an appropriate intervention aimed at supporting the needs of the pupil. A detailed assessment through an Early Help Plan should be in place to establish if there are wider needs and identify what support is required from external agencies.

School must not pursue a reduced timetable without obtaining parental permission. This could be perceived as an unofficial exclusion, which is unlawful. If the parent has not consented, the school could be regarded as preventing the pupil from accessing the curriculum.

School must have obtained a signed parental consent, which should be evidenced in the pupils file prior to the commencement of a time limited reduced timetable. If the parent does not agree, the reduced timetable arrangements cannot be implemented. In such circumstances, the school will have to consider alternative interventions.

**A part-time timetable should not be used to manage a pupil’s behaviour**.

A part-time timetable must only be in place for the shortest time necessary and not be treated as a long-term solution. Any pastoral support programme or other agreement should stipulate a time limit by which point the pupil is expected to attend full-time, either at school or alternative provision.

There should also be formal arrangements in place for regularly reviewing the timetable with the pupil and their parent/carers. In agreeing to a part time timetable, a school has acknowledged that a pupil will be absent from school for part of the week or day and therefore must treat absence as authorised.

If you believe your child’s school has placed them on a part-time timetable due to their behaviour you should approach the school to address your concerns.

**What if school suggest a part time timetable?**

If your child’s school suggests a part-time timetable, it would be important to consider their reasons and importantly, the school’s evidence for doing so. If the reasons are related to meeting your child’s special educational needs and/or disability, it may be inappropriate and the school should explore alternative options such as providing additional support or possibly requesting an Educational, Health and Care (‘EHC’) needs assessment (see [here](https://www.ipsea.org.uk/ehc-needs-assessments) for further information and a model letter you can use to request the assessment).

If behaviours are deemed ‘challenging,’ then this can often be an indication of an unmet need. In line with the **SEND Code of Practice** the school should assess needs, including involving other professionals, put in place appropriate intervention and support.

The statutory guidance (published by the DfE (Department for Education) form 19 August 2024) makes the above clear (see paragraphs 66-67). [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

**Safeguarding considerations for pupils**

When a child is Looked After or subject to Early Help or a social care plan, a reduced timetable should only be used in the most exceptional circumstances after other interventions have been tried, as it may place these children at greater risk.

Schools have safeguarding responsibility for all pupils on roll at the school and must be aware that even with parent/carer agreement to any reduced timetable arrangement school remain responsible for the safeguarding and welfare of all pupils on roll, who are off-site during school hours. If evidence suggests that the child will be at significant risk if not in school, a reduced timetable should not be a considered option.

**The school has informed me that my child is not yet of compulsory school age, and they are not entitled to full-time education – is this right?**

The majority of 3 and 4-year-old children are entitled to 570 hours of free childcare per year, which is usually offered as 15 hours per week over 38 weeks. This part time offer is available until children begin attending a reception class at school or reach compulsory school age, whichever comes first. If a child has been identified as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) a nursery or school may suggest part time attendance initially to aid transition**.**

Many nurseries and reception classes may start the child’s transition into their setting for a few hours each day and build up to a full-time place. This approach allows the child time to settle in and for the staff to become familiar with the child and assess their needs. This is acceptable and parents want the start of their child’s time in the setting to be successful. Children will vary in the time it may take them to settle into new surroundings, and some settle much quicker than others, but settings should always keep parent/carers informed about this process.

If you disagree with this you can argue, under the **Equality Act 2010**, that your child has been denied an opportunity offered to their peers for a reason related to his/her disability.

Children are legally not required to attend school until the term following their 5th birthday. However, this is parental decision and is different to a school insisting your child cannot attend full-time if they are offering full-time education to all the other children under compulsory school age. It would be important to ask for their reasons why your child is unable to attend full-time. If they insist your child cannot attend school full-time, then this may amount to an ‘informal suspension.’ and the possibility of disability discrimination.It is illegal for schools to discriminate against pupils based on their SEN or disability For more information please refer to [Disability discrimination in schools](https://www.ipsea.org.uk/disability-discrimination).**.**

**What can Parents/carers do:**

* Refuse a part-time timetable.
* Accept a time-limited part-time timetable dependent on the child’s needs with a view to progressing as quickly as possible back into full time education.
* Make school aware that it would be unlawful to not provide their child with a full-time education.
* Contact your child’s EHCP coordinator at the local authority to inform them about the school’s decision to place your child on a part time timetable.
* If the child is new to the school and has special needs parents/carers should request that the school apply for emergency funding unless the child already has an EHC plan.
* Discuss with the school/setting a request for an education, health, and care needs assessment. Parents themselves can also put this request forward to the local authority.
* If your child has an EHC Plan parent/carer should consider requesting an early or emergency review of the EHC Plan.
* Do not feel pressured into changing schools as there may be the same issues and a move could result in a delay in assessing needs. If the current school is unable to provide suitable full-time education, then the school can look at getting help from a specialist school outreach service and contacting the local authority directly.
* Complete a formal complaint following the school/settings complaint procedure if the school continues to use a part-time timetable.

**What should the LA do?**

If the LA becomes aware that a child has been placed on a part-time timetable in circumstances, which are not ‘exceptional,’ the LA should raise the point with school that the use of part time timetable for a child with a disability is unlawful. If the school continues to unlawfully deny a child full-time education, the LA may consider arranging a meeting or/and looking at providing alternative education for the child.

The above guidance comes from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (‘LGSCO’) in a focus report [‘Out of school… out of mind?’](https://www.lgo.org.uk/assets/attach/1778/Focus-report-Out-of-school-Sept-2011-amended-Jan-2016.pdf). Although the LGSCO does not investigate the actions of schools, it can look at the actions and decision making of LAs. This can be seen in practice in the following case from the LGSCO decision database:

**Case Law**

* R v East Sussex County Council, Ex p Tandy/in re T (A Minor) [1998] 2 WLR 884: The LA is under an absolute duty to provide suitable education for children, who are out of school due to illness, exclusion or otherwise. An LA may not take its own financial constraints into account when assessing what is appropriate education.
* F-T v The Governors of Hampton Dene Primary School (SEN) [2016] UKUT 0468 (ACC): A school was found to have discriminated against a disabled child by putting her on a part-time table without providing any support for the time she was out of school**.**

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| **Contact Details for SENDIASS Manchester**  Helpline Telephone number: 0161 209 8356. Please clearly leave your name, contact number and a brief message on the answerphone and a member of the team will contact you within 24 hours or the next working day.  **Or**  Email your query to us: [**sendiass@manchester.gov.uk**](mailto:sendiass@manchester.gov.uk) leaving your name, child’s name and their date of birth.  You can complete our website contact form: [**Contact Us (iasmanchester.org)**](https://www.iasmanchester.org/contact)  Visit Manchester SENDIASS website [**About SENDIASS Manchester (iasmanchester.org)**](https://www.iasmanchester.org/)  Manchester SENDIASS Podcasts [**Listen to our SEND Talk podcasts**](https://www.iasmanchester.org/podcasts)  Manchester SENDIASS YouTube channel [**https://www.youtube.com/@SENDIASSManchester**](https://www.youtube.com/@SENDIASSManchester)    **QR code for the website QR code for Facebook page** |

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