

END

SCHOOL HOLIDAY FINES

TRUSTING PARENTS TO ACT IN THE INTERESTS OF THEIR CHILDREN



INTRODUCTION

At Restore Britain we believe the family is the most important social unit. The bond between parent and child is irreplaceable.

Parents bring their children into this world. Parents clothe them, feed them, love them, raise them, and educate them. Parents are—and should remain—the ultimate authority in their own homes and over their own children's lives. Schools, then, should exist to support parents, not to replace them.

Somewhere along the way this has been forgotten. Our education system increasingly leans towards treating the *state* as the ultimate authority, not the parent. Right now in Britain, parents are being threatened and fined simply for taking their children out of school for a handful of days to spend meaningful time together as a family.

But we at Restore Britain believe that every family should have the right to a small number of authorised term-time absence days each year, at the family's discretion. Often it is the only opportunity many families ever get for such an experience because the travel industry hikes prices to astronomical levels outside of term time.

In an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, families everywhere are feeling the squeeze, and none more so than families with the least. When facing ever-rising energy costs, taxes, and inflationary pressures, the very least such families should be given is the opportunity to spend more quality time together without the threat of punishment by the state.

Childhood is short, and parents should not need permission from the state to raise their own children. A short, term-time family holiday is not an act of neglect; it is a meaningful part of family life.

Parents know what is best for their children. The state needs to realise that parents are not the enemy.

Let's put families back at the top of the agenda where they used to be.

CURRENT RULES ON TERM-TIME ABSENCES

The Department for Education is the government department that develops, publishes, and oversees guidance on school attendance and absence.¹ As it currently stands, a child is generally only able to miss a school day either if they are too ill to attend or if they have permission from the school in advance to take absence for exceptional circumstances.

A term-time holiday is *not* considered an exceptional circumstance, and parents can be fined or face legal action for taking their child on holiday during term time. Taking children out of school to celebrate at religious festivals, however, is permitted.²

Local councils and schools can use various legal powers to punish the parent if a child is missing school without a valid reason:

- **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.
- **Education Supervision Order:** These can be imposed if your local council thinks you need support getting your child to go to school but you're not co-operating. A supervisor is appointed to help get your child into education.
- **School Attendance Order:** These can be imposed if your local council thinks your child is not getting an education. If you do not provide evidence that your child is either registered at a school or is being homeschooled, within 15 days, you could be prosecuted or given a fine.
- **Fine:** Your local council can give each parent a fine of £80, rising to £160 if not paid within 21 days. From the 2024 to 2025 school year, each parent will only get up to 2 fines for the same child in a 3-year period. If you get a second fine in 3 years it will be £160. If you do not pay the fine in 28 days you may be taken to court for keeping your child out of school.³ Parents have no right of appeal against a fine issued by the council.⁴

As it stands, parents face threats, fines, and even legal prosecution for failing to

¹ [School attendance and absence: Overview - GOV.UK](#)

² [Working together to improve school attendance: July 2026](#)

³ [School attendance and absence: Legal action to enforce school attendance - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ [Holidays during school term-time in England - House of Commons Library](#)

secure the regular school attendance of their children. Prosecution in the Magistrates' Court is a last resort if all other voluntary and formal support or legal intervention has failed.

EXEMPTIONS FOR EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

However, there are specific cases in which parents are able to take their children out of school without the threat of punishment:

1. MEDICAL GROUNDS

A child is able to miss a school day for medical reasons, whether because they are ill or attending a medical appointment.

However, research shows that around half of children attending either a morning or an afternoon medical appointment then go on to miss the rest of the school day.⁵ This could be due to difficulties in parents arranging transport for the child to and from the school in the middle of the day.

Future policy could look at providing family-specific afternoon medical appointment priority at GPs and medical centres. This could, in part, reduce the number of school days missed by children who otherwise would have to attend during school hours.

2. PRACTICAL OR LOGISTICAL REASONS

A child is able to miss a school day for several practical or logistical reasons, such as if widespread travel disruption prevents them from attending, or if the school or local authority has failed to provide sufficient logistical support to ensure the child can attend; for instance, if it can be proved that the local authority was under a duty to provide transport to the school and have failed to do so, or if the school is not in walking distance of the pupil's home and the local authority have not made suitable arrangements for the child to either

⁵ [School attendance: annual and one-off events driving short-term absences - GOV.UK](#)

board at the school or be admitted to a state-funded school closer to home.

3. BEREAVEMENT AND EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

A child is able to miss a school day due to the death of a close relative, to attend a funeral, or for other exceptional family crises. However, this is not a distinct category contained within Department for Education guidance.

4. OTHER EDUCATIONAL OR WORK-RELATED GROUNDS

As well as the above leaves of absence, all schools can also allow pupils to be absent from the school site for certain educational activities or to attend other schools or settings. This includes—but is not limited to—such activities as attending an offsite approved educational activity, attending another school at which the pupil is registered, participating in an approved sporting activity, attending an interview for entry into another educational institution, or attending work experience.

5. RELIGIOUS GROUNDS

A child is able to miss a school day if they are attending a day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which their parent or carer belongs.

Research from the Department for Education shows that over 94% of absences on religious grounds are awarded to pupils with Muslim parents to celebrate the two days of Eid (Eid al-Fitr, the festival at the end of Ramadan; and Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice).⁶

We at Restore Britain believe that children studying in the British school system should not receive special religious exemptions outside of traditional Christian holidays. A day of school missed during term time incurs the same cost, regardless of the reason for absence. If the state accepts that children may be absent from school to observe a religious festival, then it has already accepted that attendance is not an absolute principle.

⁶ [School attendance: annual and one-off events driving short-term absences - GOV.UK](#)

ADDRESSING OVERSIGHTS

The focus on attendance rates by central government and local authorities is understandable. It is a simple, measurable indicator, and regular school attendance undoubtedly plays an important role in educational achievement. Restore Britain fully recognises this. But the overreliance on attendance as a one-size-fits-all metric overlooks many of the complexities of family life and other factors that parents understand instinctively:

1. NOT ALL SCHOOL DAYS ARE THE SAME

The assumption that every missed school day carries the same educational cost is fundamentally flawed, yet it is baked into all government policy. Attendance is reduced to a crude numerical target, with little regard for the fact that the quality and impact of learning can vary dramatically between regions, schools, teachers, and even from one day to the next.

Teaching quality and school performance vary massively across the country, a fact recognised by successive governments and inspection frameworks. Speaking in broad terms about absences as if there is no meaningful difference between children, teachers, and schools fails to appreciate that not every single school day missed is of equivalent weight.

The Government itself fully recognises that the *quality of teaching* is the single most important in-school factor in improving outcomes for all children, and it says so explicitly.⁷ A predominant focus on attendance is not only narrow and limited, but it is also inconsistent in its application when it tolerates days off for certain non-essential activities like religious holidays and teacher strikes.

Simply put, if missing school days were the catastrophe they're claimed to be, neither religious holidays nor teachers' strikes would be tolerated, and yet they are.

⁷ [Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

2. PARENTS OFTEN HAVE ADDITIONAL WORK CONSTRAINTS

A parent testimony provided in an October 2025 Parliamentary e-petition debate on holidays during school term time said the following:

“For many of us, especially those of us who are working in the NHS and other key sectors, aligning leave with school holidays is often impossible. Families are left with that heartbreaking choice—miss out on precious time together or face financial penalties.”⁸

For many parents under increasing financial strain, who have had to take second or third jobs, or who must work more overtime just to maintain their standard of living, the idea of simply aligning holiday leave with school holidays is both unrealistic and out of touch.

Restore Britain understands that, until the economy is in a much healthier state, with many of the crushing financial constraints alleviated, those parents that have been forced to make difficult alternative work arrangements also require more flexibility in their childcare and holiday timetabling.

3. CHILDREN WITH SEND AND OTHER DISABILITIES HAVE SPECIFIC NEEDS

In the same debate, another testimony was provided of a foster parent of disabled children, who noted that finding suitable holiday accommodation for their disabled children during school holidays was particularly difficult.

After years of decrying the importance of inclusivity and accessibility, governments now find themselves enforcing attendance requirements that often sit uncomfortably with the realities faced by pupils with SEND and other disabilities. As highlighted elsewhere:

“For some SEND families, off-peak holidays are not a matter of money or convenience; they are a wellbeing requirement for their child. Why should a child struggling with SEND be denied the same access to a holiday as a non-SEND classmate by the threat of

⁸ [Holidays During School Term Time - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

finer being issued to their parent?"

Again, a rigid attendance policy risks marginalising the very pupils who require the greatest flexibility and support.

COST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TERM TIME AND NON-TERM TIME HOLIDAYS

It is well understood that costs of holidays rise sharply during the school holidays. Visit any holiday booking website and experiment with dates. For instance, at a well-known UK activity holiday resort, a family of four (two adults, two children) staying in a woodland lodge for four nights could expect to pay £1,699 in late August, yet only £679 for that same lodge in mid-September; an over £1,000 saving for the same holiday taken just three weeks later.

Results from a June 2025 YouGov survey show that around 45% of parents say they have taken their children out of school during term time for a holiday, with lower travel prices, lower accommodation prices, better availability, and fewer crowds given as the most popular reasons for doing so. Around half of parents said they would take their child out of school during term time despite the risk of receiving a fine, with the same proportion saying that doing so has become more socially acceptable.⁹

For many families, it has become much cheaper to pay the fines for taking their children out of school during term time than it is for booking a getaway during the school holidays. It is one of the reasons the ineffectiveness of the fine system itself has been the subject of Parliamentary scrutiny in recent years.

For many families, such astronomical price differentials are clearly too much to ignore. It is therefore little surprise that many parents now consider term-time holidays socially acceptable—because soaring cost-of-living pressures now mean they simply have no other option.

⁹ [Are Britons considering term-time holidays as living costs rise?](#)

WHAT A RESTORE BRITAIN GOVERNMENT WILL DO

Restore Britain understands the irreplaceable bond between parent and child. We believe that parents know their children best. The state education system, therefore, should be designed to support parents, not to replace them.

We also recognise the compounding strains that most families continue to face, financially as well as logistically. For many families, finding affordable holidays during peak holiday seasons is now completely out of the question. In deciding to give their children the type of quality time that defines childhood, parents are too often made to feel like criminals when they're simply trying to be good parents.

The state's solution to most problems is usually to exert greater control over our lives for longer.

We at Restore Britain reject this. Under a Restore Britain government, not only would **five days of term-time school absences be made available for each student each academic year**, but they would be actively encouraged, if the child is otherwise attending and progressing well, as vital respite from increasingly restrictive classroom frameworks and the suffocating financial pressures of everyday life.

And when this term-time school absence is permitted, it will no longer be for the state to decide that a day off to celebrate the end of Ramadan is more justified than taking children on a day trip to the city or to a local agricultural show.

Trust should be placed back where it belongs, with parents.

We say: let parents decide, and let children enjoy their childhoods while they can.