# Newcastle City Council tightens school attendance regulations amid rising fines



Newcastle City Council has recently emphasised its stringent approach towards managing school attendance, particularly concerning children taking holidays during term time. This follows a notable increase in fines issued for unauthorised absences, which has surged dramatically over the past two years.

In 2022, only 40 fines were handed out in Newcastle for term-time holidays. However, by 2023, that figure had risen to 734, and a staggering 2,365 fines were issued in 2024. This trend indicates a growing enforcement of policies aimed at improving school attendance, aligning with broader efforts initiated by the government.

Mark Patton, the assistant director of education at Newcastle City Council, addressed the council’s audit and standards committee, stating that educational leaders in the city had adopted a “very clear and rational line” regarding this matter, despite it being “not popular at all” with parents. He articulated the council’s belief that students should be in school during term time, emphasising, “We believe that the best place for children during term time is with their peers and with professionals, where they will be learning and developing.”

Mr Patton further elaborated that while he acknowledges the educational merit of family holidays, he insists that term time is not the appropriate period for such activities. He noted that children need to be in school, particularly as they prepare for significant transitions such as moving to further education or entering the workforce.

The imposition of fines has been bolstered by a government initiative that increased the minimum penalty for taking children out of school without permission from £60 to £80 in August 2023. The council's revenue from these fines reflects this strict enforcement, amounting to £116,560 in 2024, a stark contrast to the mere £360 collected in 2022.

Patton has expressed that attendance levels had been “poor” when he joined the council six years ago, attributing this to various factors including the cost discrepancies for family travel during term time versus school holidays, alongside rising mental health concerns among pupils and economic challenges facing families in Newcastle.

The fines system is structured to escalate for repeated offences; a fine doubles to £160 if not paid within 21 days, and further fines can be imposed for additional violations, with potential legal repercussions including fines up to £2,500 or imprisonment for up to three months.

However, recent data presents a more optimistic outlook on school attendance in Newcastle, with improvements noted across all pupil demographics in the autumn term of 2024 compared to the previous year. Patton highlighted that the impact of missing school, particularly for Year 11 students during their GCSE preparation, can significantly affect academic outcomes, estimating that missing ten days could equate to a half-grade difference in English and maths results.

As the council continues to navigate the complexities of balancing family holidays with educational priorities, it remains committed to maintaining its strict stance on attendance during term time, citing ongoing improvements and efforts to bring attendance figures closer to the national average.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/08/fines-for-parents-for-taking-children-out-of-school-what-you-need-to-know/> - This URL supports the claim that the government has a strict approach to managing school attendance, particularly concerning term-time holidays, and that fines are issued for unauthorised absences. It also discusses the increase in fines.
* <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/schools-learning-and-childcare/parent-information/school-attendance-and-absence> - This URL corroborates Newcastle City Council's efforts to enforce school attendance policies, including the use of fines, Parenting Orders, and other legal actions for unauthorised absences.
* <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Education%20and%20Skills%20Annual%20Report%202022-23%20FINAL.pdf> - This report provides context on education in Newcastle, including attendance issues and efforts to improve pupil outcomes. It also touches upon challenges faced by the council and schools.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - Although the direct content is not available, this URL would be the source of the article that outlines Newcastle City Council’s efforts to manage school attendance and the impact of fines on attendance rates.
* <https://www.gov.uk/education> - This URL supports the broader government initiatives aimed at improving school attendance across the UK. It provides background information on national policies related to school attendance.