



# TRUANCY

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**A GUIDE TO YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES  
AS A PARENT**



MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL

# HOW THE AUTHORITIES DEAL WITH TRUANCY

## Parenting Contracts

The authorities may consider a Parenting Contract with the parent of a persistent truant. This is a formal written agreement between both parties that aims to improve attendance by advising parents on how to improve their support.

## Legal intervention

Police officers or the school may use Penalty Notices (fines) as an alternative to prosecution under Section 444 to send a clear message about how important going to school is and reiterating parents' responsibilities. There is no right of appeal against the issuing of a Penalty Notice. If it is not paid after 42 days, the case may go to the Magistrates' Court under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996. Only in exceptional circumstances will a decision not to prosecute be made.

## The penalties for failing to ensure regular school attendance

If charged with this offence, parents could face a fine of up to £2,500, a community-based sentence, or up to three months in prison. They may also be made subject to a Parenting Order and have to pay court costs.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF REGULAR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

A good education plays a vital part in shaping a child's future. Those children who frequently miss school fall behind with school work and do less well in exams, which often affects their prospects as an adult. They are also more likely to become involved in, or even a victim of, crime and antisocial behaviour.

It's a sad fact that Manchester has one of the worst truancy figures in the country. Anyone missing 38 days or more is considered to be 'persistently absent'. Even 90% attendance amounts to four weeks of unauthorised absence. These figures are unacceptable, as all children should aim for 100% attendance.

## **Your legal responsibility**

Parents are legally responsible for ensuring that their children receive a full-time education. This means that parents whose children are on a school register and who fail to ensure the regular and punctual attendance of their child(ren) may be guilty of an offence under Section 444 or 444(1A) of the Education Act 1996. The authorities may issue a Penalty Notice or take enforcement action through the courts to secure regular attendance. Alternatively, the Local Authority may apply to the courts for an Education Supervision Order under Section 36 of the Children Act 1989.

## Authorised absence

Only schools can authorise a child's absence, following guidelines set out by the Local Authority and the Department for Children, Schools and Families. There are very few reasons why absence may be authorised. They include:

- ✓ Sickness that requires the child to stay off
- ✓ Days of religious observance
- ✓ Exceptional family circumstances, eg. bereavement
- ✓ Medical appointment  
(for the child and only for the duration of the appointment).

## Unauthorised absence

This is when a pupil is absent from school without the school's permission. It's also called truancy. It may be that a child is having difficulties at school or at home. Either way, the school needs to know because continuing non-attendance will only make the situation worse. Parental support is essential and none of the following reasons is an acceptable excuse for not going to school:

- ✗ Time off for a minor ailment  
(particularly one that wouldn't keep you off work)
- ✗ Holiday in term-time without authorisation
- ✗ Birthday treats or day trips out
- ✗ Oversleeping
- ✗ Waiting in for workmen or minding the house
- ✗ Shopping or a visit to the hairdresser
- ✗ Taking a 'long weekend'
- ✗ Looking after a brother or sister
- ✗ Translating for a family member or friend
- ✗ Taking the rest of the day off before or after a medical appointment.

## Holiday in term-time

Parents have no lawful right to take their children on holiday during school term-time. It interrupts the flow of learning for the child and also for other pupils in the class, as teachers have to repeat work that has been missed. The school will only allow it in exceptional circumstances. An application must be made at least four weeks prior to the proposed holiday; otherwise the school may issue a Penalty Notice.

## Tips for good attendance

You must make sure your child attends school on time every day. It's their right and your responsibility. The following advice will help:

- ✓ Good habits start early in life, so even before they start school, establish good routines, such as reading before bedtime and going to bed on time
- ✓ If your child is too ill to go to school, tell the school as soon as possible on the first day of absence. They will be concerned if they hear nothing
- ✓ If your child is off school, you must let the school know why and tell them when they can expect your child back at school
- ✓ Make all appointments for the doctor, dentist, optician etc after school hours or during the school holidays where possible
- ✓ If your child starts missing school, help the school to get your child back on track. Make sure your child knows you don't approve of them missing school
- ✓ If you do want your child to miss school for a special occasion, you must apply for the school's authorisation well in advance of the date
- ✓ Take an active interest in your child's school work and offer support with homework
- ✓ Make sure your child understands the benefits of regular attendance
- ✗ Do not let them stay off school for a minor ailment
- ✗ Don't book holidays in term-time and don't expect the school's authorisation if you do.

# CONTACTS

## Customer Contact Centre

Wenlock Way

Tel: 0161 234 5000

This brief guide has been put together by Manchester City Council to help parents understand their responsibilities and to help ensure that children don't miss out on their right to education.

More detailed information is available at:

[www.truancythefacts.com](http://www.truancythefacts.com)



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