

More than 23,000 pupils a day playing truant from primaries: Parents face bigger fines in new bid to clamp down on absences

- Parents taking children on term-time holidays account for a fifth of 'unauthorised absences'**
- Headteachers will be able to issue £60 on-the-spot fines from next month**

By [Laura Clark](#), Education Correspondent

Rising numbers of primary school pupils are playing truant, with more than 23,000 skipping lessons each day of the spring term this year.

Parents who took their children on term-time holidays without permission were responsible for a fifth of 'unauthorised absences' recorded by primary schools.

A further 10 per cent of truancy was attributed to lateness while the rest was down to pupils failing to turn up without an excuse.

Truancy: More than 23,000 primary school pupils skipped lessons each day of the spring term this year. (Library picture)

Primary truancy rates were slightly up on the same point the year before, with 0.7 per cent of school registration sessions missed between January and April – up from 0.6 per cent.

The figures have prompted ministers to launch a fresh crackdown.

From next month, heads will be able to issue parents with a £60 spot fine if they allow children to miss too much school – up from the £50 penalty introduced by the last government.

Ministers are considering a proposal to dock fines from child benefit if parents fail to pay them.

The Government also plans to toughen up the rules on term-time holidays so that schools are permitted to allow them only in 'exceptional circumstances'.

Heads have discretion to grant up to ten days' term-time holiday a year but ministers are concerned the powers are being abused.

Many parents are tempted to avoid taking breaks during school holidays because prices are often higher.

Determined: Schools Minister Nick Gibb said the Government was trying to tackle school absence

However, if they fail to gain the head's consent for term-time absence, the holiday is classed as 'unauthorised' and may attract a spot fine.

'The latest figures show that agreed term-time holidays are reducing, which is encouraging, but term-time holidays still remain a significant reason for absence,' a Department for Education official said.

'If children are taken away for a two-week holiday every year and have an average number of days off for sickness and appointments, then by the time they leave at 16 they will have missed an entire year of schooling.'

Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister, said: 'Children who attend school regularly are four times more likely to achieve five or more good GCSEs, including English and maths, than those who are persistently absent.

'We are determined to tackle absence before it causes long-term disadvantage.'

Yesterday's figures show that while truancy rose at primary level, it stayed the same in secondaries, with pupils missing 1.4 per cent of registration sessions – about 39,500 pupils a day dodging lessons.

Overall absence rates in secondary schools – both truancy and 'authorised' absence – dropped, from 6.3 per cent to

6.0 per cent.

But it rose in primaries, from 4.6 per cent to 4.7 per cent.

Charlie Taylor, the Government's behaviour tsar, called on schools to instil good habits early on.

He said: 'The earlier schools address the poor attendance of a pupil, the less likely it is to become a long-term issue throughout their school life.'

Addressing the issue: The Government's behaviour tsar, Charlie Taylor called on schools to instil good habits and deal with poor attendance as early as possible