

Kids can't catch up if they don't show up

Driving school attendance through the National Tutoring Programme

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Statistics:

- In Autumn 2020, over 30,000 additional pupils were absent more often than they were present (severely absent).¹
- In total, during the first term back after the pandemic, 93,514 pupils (more than 1 in 80 pupils) were severely absent. This compares with 60,244 pupils who were severely absent in the same term in 2019.² This is a 54.7% increase in the cohort of pupils who are severely absent and equates to an additional 33,270 pupils.³
- In secondary schools, around 1 in 60 pupils were severely absent in Autumn 2020. A total of 53,171 pupils were absent more often than they were present. This figure has grown by 34.4% since Autumn term 2019.⁴
- Over the last year, the rate of pupils who were severely absent in primary schools has more than doubled. In Autumn 2020, 0.89% of pupils in primary school were severely absent compared with 0.42% the year before. This equates to 34,405 primary school pupils who were absent more often than they were present.⁵
- In special schools, the rate of severe absence is much higher, around 1 in 20 pupils are absent more often than they are present. This figure has grown by 16.9% over the course of the pandemic.⁶
- The Timpson Review into School Exclusion found every extra percentage point of school sessions missed due to unauthorised absence was associated with a one percentage point increase in the likelihood of permanent exclusion⁷.
- Persistent absence (missing 10% or more of possible sessions) has stayed at a dangerously high level throughout the pandemic. 916,131 pupils were persistently absent this term, which equates to 13.0% of all pupils.⁸
- The overall absence rate has similarly remained at a worrying 4.7% this year. This represents 22 million days of learning lost. On top of this, a further 7.0% of school lessons have been lost due to Covid circumstances, this represents 33 million days of lost learning.⁹

1 CSJ analysis of <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataBlock-bef435db-6ac3-4761-ed56-08d919136455-tables>

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

8 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataBlock-bef435db-6ac3-4761-ed56-08d919136455-tables>

9 Ibid.

One page overview:

The problem...

- In Autumn 2020, over 30,000 additional pupils were absent more often than they were present (severely absent).¹⁰
- In total, during the first term back after the pandemic, 93,514 pupils (more than 1 in 80 pupils) were severely absent. This compares with 60,244 pupils who were severely absent in the same term in 2019.¹¹ This is a 54.7% increase in the cohort of pupils who are severely absent and equates to an additional 33,270 pupils.¹²
- The Timpson Review into School Exclusion found **every extra percentage point of school sessions missed due to unauthorised absence was associated with a one percentage point increase in the likelihood of permanent exclusion**¹³.
- During successive lockdowns across 2020-21, charities and organisations working with young people have warned that children who have been missing from formal education settings have become vulnerable to local gangs or dangerous home environments.
- We need to act now to help them catch up with missed education: kids can't catch up if they don't show up.

The solution...

- The Department for Education has committed approximately £3billion in 'catch up' funding for children who have missed out on education with a focus on lost learning. This includes approximately £1billion¹⁴ over three years for a National Tutoring Programme (NTP) to provide small-class tutoring for children from disadvantage backgrounds.
- A positive, ready-made announcement: The department could amend the existing NTP programme to address absence. We believe there is a gap in provision for young people most likely to dis-engage from education. *This small scale tutoring won't help children who are regularly missing from the classroom.*
- There is a strong existing evidence base for key workers engaging with families who need the most support, and this should be replicated to reduce the absence rate following the pandemic.
- School-Home Support (SHS) has adopted the key worker model directly to improve school attendance. SHS employs 'practitioners' to work with families on addressing the underlying causes of poor school attendance. Demand for its services increased four-fold in 2020.¹⁵
- 71% of pupils in mainstream schools improving their attendance (equivalent to 14 extra days in school) and 89% in alternative educational settings seeing improved attendance (equivalent to 18 extra days in school).
- The government should appoint 2,000 school attendance mentors to work with children who are persistently absent from school and alternative provision. At a unit cost of £40,000 plus infrastructure costs, it is likely to require funding of almost £100m per year for a period of three years.

10 CSJ analysis of <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataBlock-bef435db-6ac3-4761-ed56-08d919136455-tables>

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

14 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-expansion-of-tutoring-in-next-step-of-education-recovery>

15 <https://www.schoolhomesupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SHS-Report-and-Financial-statements-Year-ended-31-Aug-2020-Final.pdf>

Introduction

By Andy Cook, Chief Executive of the Centre for Social Justice

When a child disappears from our school system, their future often disappears with them.

Research conducted for this report shows that over 90,000 pupils are more often absent than they are present. This means 1 in 80 pupils are missing more than half of their education. The latest data for Autumn 2020 shows that, following the pandemic, the number of severely absent pupils has grown at an alarming rate of 55%. As a result, an additional 33,270 pupils are severely absent.¹⁶

Following successive lockdowns and the closure of schools, it is more important than ever that we ensure young people attend school. As one contributor to this report said: *'kids can't catch up if they don't show up'*.

Regularly missing school makes exclusion much more likely. This, in turn, acts as a conveyor belt into the youth justice system and on into the adult prison estate. 59% of prisoners report that they regularly truanted in school while 63% experienced a fixed-term exclusion and 42% were permanently excluded.¹⁷ This is mirrored in the youth justice system where 73% of boys in custody report truanting at some time and 86% say they had been excluded from school before they came to detention.¹⁸

The most likely outcome for many of these children is a grim concoction of economic insecurity, disengagement, and personal turmoil and yet absence and exclusions, official and unofficial, are rising at an alarming rate.

And this costs us all. Each excluded pupil costs the state approximately £370,000 in additional education, benefits, healthcare and criminal justice costs across a lifetime, with an annual £2.1 billion cost to the Treasury.¹⁹

In the last 12 months, the pandemic has made the picture worse for our most vulnerable pupils.

It could potentially be years before we see the impact on our support services and prisons, but the headline figures we do have make for grim reading and should embolden us to urgent and immediate action.

School absence rates have been understandably high over the last year and remain higher than normal. Individual children have had to isolate and quarantine depending on their circumstances while schools have had to close bubbles, year groups and close entirely at different times. This has led to a Covid-specific absence rate of 7.0% across all schools.

This year, both overall absence and persistent absence have remained at worrying high levels. More than one in eight pupils are persistently absent (miss 10% or more of their classes). However, hidden beneath these figures, there's a growing cohort of pupils who are severely absent, these pupils are missing more than half of their education. Over 90,000 pupils were absent more often than they were present in Autumn 2020. Compared to the previous year, this cohort of pupils has increased by 55%: that means that there's an additional 30,000 pupils who are missing more than half of their education.²⁰

Returning from the pandemic, the attendance of pupils in alternative provision has remained stark. In Autumn 2020, the absence rate for pupils in AP stood at 31.0%. Attendance in these schools has always been lower than in the mainstream, but when APs are only operating at two thirds attendance you are storing up serious problems.²¹

16 CSJ analysis of <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataBlock-bef435db-6ac3-4761-ed56-08d919136455-tables>

17 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278837/prisoners-childhood-family-backgrounds.pdf

18 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629719/hmip-annual-report-2016-17.pdf

19 <https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-report-october-2017.pdf>

20 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataDownloads-1>

21 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataDownloads-1>

For example, they have long been a recruiting ground for gangs. Children in alternative provision are six times more likely to be in a gang²² and there were already 27,000 children in gangs prior to lockdown²³. It would be little more than naïve hope to think that the absences we are seeing will not make the picture even more bleak.

But, sadly, the situation gets worse - it is estimated that there are now a further 20,000 children who have disappeared off school registers altogether during lockdown²⁴. Home schooling has been a contentious area for some time. Some parents may want to home school their children due to a specific need, or a philosophical or theological difference with the mainstream system. But there has long been concerns that it is also used to 'off-roll' a significant number of difficult students. These children are anonymous. Neither the Department for Education, nor local authorities track who or where these children are, but the best estimates say there are now 75,000 of them, up a staggering 38% in the last year²⁵.

The Government has now earmarked considerable sums of money for a 'catchup' programme for children who have missed out on education over the last year. They won't benefit from tutoring programmes at schools they don't attend, and they won't turn up to extra-curricular classes when they don't turn up to the mandated classes.

These children are essentially invisible. It's time to make them visible again with the support of 2,000 School Attendance Mentors.

We need to extend existing support offered by the National Tutoring Programme with a focus on attendance. The Government needs to match its ambition for academic catch up with getting children missing from school or alternative provision back into education. We need to recruit 2,000 attendance mentors to work intensively with young people most at risk and most likely to have disengaged from education over the last year: for them, school can be as much as a place of safety as a place of learning.

The Government is in the process of appointing 'academic mentors' to help children catch up with missed learning. As one contributor to this report said, "there is no catch up without kids in class". The concept of attendance mentors follows the model of a number of highly successful charities including School Home Support (SHS) who have seen 89% of pupils increase attendance in alternative educational settings over an 18-month period²⁶. The cost would be around £300million over three years.

22 https://www.integrated.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/IntegratED_V0.1.14-Proof-DIGITAL.pdf

23 Ibid.

24 https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_EHE_Survey_2020_FINALweb.pdf

25 Ibid.

26 <https://www.schoolhomesupport.org.uk/impact/>

1. The Problem - School Attendance

During the first lockdown, the Children's Commissioner for England raised concerns that too many absent young people had become "invisible" to local support networks²⁷.

A poll conducted by the Centre for Social Justice at the end of 2020 found that approximately 30% of teachers said they had experienced more persistent absences that weren't to do with illness or shielding and only 6% were experiencing fewer persistent absences. Teachers were also more likely to report a rise in persistent absence in deprived schools.²⁸

Worryingly, one in ten teachers reported that they were experiencing new persistently absent pupils.²⁹

New data published by the Department for Education confirms that the pandemic has triggered mass disengagement and led to a further 30,000 pupils becoming severely absent. In 2020, 93,514 pupils were more often absent from school than present.

Absence rates

The latest data (27 May 2021) from the Department for Education (DfE) confirms that absence rates for the Autumn term 2020 have remained at 4.7% this year.³⁰ This has COVID-19 related absence removed to ensure pandemic related illness is removed from official data. This was similar to the last recorded Autumn Term (4.9%) and has remained stable across all school types except primary schools which saw a decrease from 4.3% to 3.7%.³¹

This data shows that persistent absence (defined as missing 10% or more of all possible sessions) has remained a worryingly high level of 13.0% (the previous year it was 13.1%). This means that more than 1 in 8 pupils are persistently absent. In total, 916,131 pupils missed 10% or more of their education in the 2020 Autumn term.³²

While primary schools and special schools have had a decrease in the proportion of persistently absent pupils, there has been an increase in the number of persistently absent pupils in secondary settings. In 2019/20, 15.0% of pupils (454,167) in secondary schools were persistently absent. Following the pandemic, persistent absence has grown to 16.3% (501,642) pupils. Around 50,000 additional pupils are now persistently absent at secondary school.³³

There has also been a substantial growth in the number of pupils who are severely absent (missing 50% or more of their possible sessions). In Autumn 2020, 93,514 pupils were absent more often than they were present. This represents 1.33% of all pupils, up from 2019 where 0.86% of pupils (60,244) in total, were similarly absent more often than they were present.³⁴

In secondary schools, 53,171 pupils (more than 1 in 80) were severely absent in Autumn 2020. That's up 14,218 from the previous year where 38,953 pupils were severely absent.³⁵

27 <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2020/07/07/coronavirus-crisis-could-see-a-lost-generation-of-vulnerable-teenagers-falling-through-gaps-in-the-school-and-social-care-systems/?fbclid=IwAR35RE0t7vRdNLd1NgSsIYOUZ0DCpxLQRhdscAx9TVsVwvCpyZv-yFGc9gg>

28 CSJ commissioned Teacher Tapp polling, 2020.

29 Ibid.

30 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term>

31 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term>

32 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term>

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34 CSJ analysis of <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataBlock-bef435db-6ac3-4761-ed56-08d919136455-tables>

35 CSJ analysis of <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataBlock-bef435db-6ac3-4761-ed56-08d919136455-tables>

In primary schools, the rate of severe absence is lower but is growing at an alarming speed. Last year the rate of severely absent pupils in primary schools doubled. In Autumn 2020, 34,405 primary school pupils (0.89%) were absent more often than they were present. In 2019, that figure stood at 16,471 (0.42%).³⁶

Table Showing Regional Spread of School Absences in Autumn Term 2020 ³⁷

REGION	PERCENTAGE OF ABSENCES	DIFFERENCE FROM NATIONAL ABSENCE RATE
Inner London	5.0%	0.3%
Yorkshire and the Humber	4.9%	0.3%
North East	4.9%	0.2%
West Midlands	4.9%	0.2%
National	4.7%	0.0%
North West	4.6%	0.0%
East of England	4.6%	-0.1%
South West	4.6%	-0.1%
South East	4.6%	-0.1%
Outer London	4.5%	-0.1%
East Midlands	4.4%	-0.2%

Table Showing Local Authorities with Lowest Absence Rates in Autumn Term 2020³⁸

LOCAL AUTHORITY	PERCENTAGE OF ABSENCES
City of London	3.1%
Rutland	3.1%
Trafford	3.6%
Richmond upon Thames	3.8%
Wokingham	3.8%
Bracknell Forest	3.9%
York	3.9%
Tameside	4.0%
Bolton	4.0%
North Tyneside	4.0%

36 Ibid.

37 CSJ analysis of <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataBlock-bef435db-6ac3-4761-ed56-08d919136455-tables>

38 CSJ analysis of <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataBlock-bef435db-6ac3-4761-ed56-08d919136455-tables>

Table Showing Local Authorities with Highest Absence Rates in Autumn Term 2020³⁹

LOCAL AUTHORITY	PERCENTAGE OF ABSENCES
Bradford	6.2%
Knowsley	6.1%
Newcastle upon Tyne	6.0%
Kingston upon Hull City of	5.7%
Middlesbrough	5.7%
Liverpool	5.6%
Nottingham	5.6%
Birmingham	5.5%
Enfield	5.5%
Newham	5.4%

The pupils absent from school are more likely to be vulnerable

The latest data on attendance at schools in Autumn 2020 does not provide a breakdown by pupil characteristics, but it is likely that the pupils who have become the most disengaged throughout the pandemic were already the most vulnerable. In Teacher Tapp polling commissioned by CSJ, teachers in disadvantaged areas were more likely to report an increase in persistent absence following lockdowns compared to teachers in more affluent areas.⁴⁰

Also, in historic absence data, pupils eligible for free school meals were twice as likely to be persistently absent when compared to their peers. Similarly, pupils with an EHCP had an absence rate of 8.6% compared to 4.1% for pupils not on the SEND register, they were also more than twice as likely to be persistently absent.⁴¹

Alternative Provision:

Addressing the needs of children already excluded from mainstream schooling in alternative provision (AP) settings is a major concern.

Returning from the pandemic, the attendance of pupils in alternative provision has remained stark. In Autumn 2020, the absence rate for pupils in AP stood at 31.0%. Over the same period, 68.0% of pupils in AP were persistently absent.⁴²

While there is no breakdown of the distribution of attendance patterns in AP in the latest release of data for Autumn term 2020, there is some evidence to suggest that a greater proportion of pupils in AP are severely absent relative to their mainstream peers. Evidence obtained for this report through a Freedom of Information Request shows that 29.9% of pupils in AP were severely absent in the academic year 2018/19. Over the same period, 1.3% of pupils in secondary mainstream schools were severely absent.⁴³

39 CSJ analysis of <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term#dataBlock-bef435db-6ac3-4761-ed56-08d919136455-tables>

40 CSJ commissioned Teacher Tapp polling, 2020.

41 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/837687/Pupil_absence_autumn_18_to_spring_19_text.pdf

42 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term>

43 CSJ analysis of a Freedom of Information Request to the Department for Education.

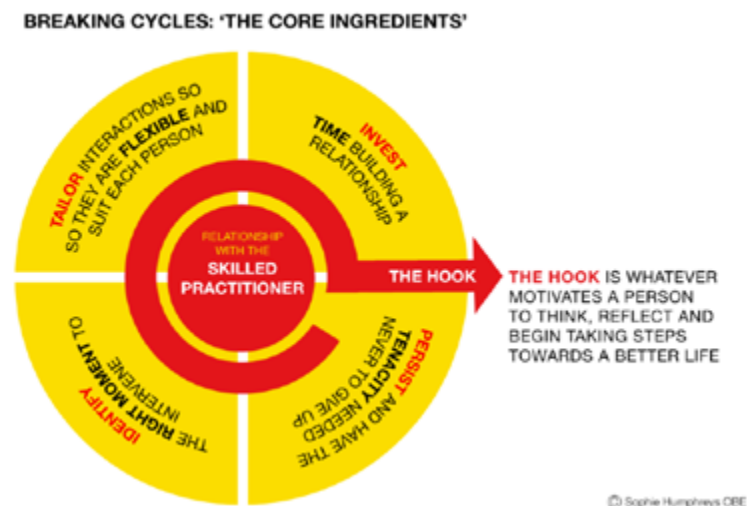
How to do it: breaking the cycle:

Addressing issues related to regular and consistent school absence will need a long term solution, a 'quick fix' solution is unlikely to be successful. The 'breaking the cycle' model provides a template for effective intervention. This approach focuses on addressing destructive patterns of behaviour guided by a trusted professional.

The 'Breaking Cycles -The Core Ingredients' approach was developed by Sophie Humphreys OBE. The principles behind this approach were successfully applied by the charity 'Pause' to reduce the number of women having multiple children taken into care. A new organisation, SHiFT is now applying the model to reduce rates of criminal reoffending by children and young people.

The approach is based on working intensively with an individual to understand the 'hook' that can be used to change repeated and harmful behaviour to them and others. The Hook is described as "whatever motivates a person to think, reflect and begin taking steps towards a better life. It will be different for everyone, will almost certainly change over time and can appear in the most unexpected ways or places."

A 'skilled practitioner' is encouraged to spend time understanding the individual they are working with to identify this 'hook' to motivate changes in behaviour. This process is built on a foundation of trust with a skilled practitioner *investing time* in building a relationship and overcoming mistrust often associated with 'officialdom.' This is achieved by an individual demonstrating "genuine care, compassion and interest in their lives."



The approach requires the practitioner with the skills to achieve change through taking a *bespoke approach* to an individual, understanding the emotional underpinning to apparent destructive behaviours. This will require judgment to assess when the moment is right to make connections and encourage reflection and change behaviour. Developing the trusted relationship which is fundamental to this model will take determination and patience. Individuals with frequent interaction with the state will become used to officials taking a superficial interest in their welfare to 'tick boxes', to effect change key workers will need to demonstrate an authentic interest in their wellbeing and success.

This model moves away from the short-termism of much existing provision for young people by being a constant presence in their lives, offering a stable point of focus for expert support. The high intensity of this model alongside consistency around the skilled practitioner through a long-term programme is fundamental to building a relationship as a pre-requisite for change.

2. The Consequences - Increased Risks to Young People

During successive lockdowns across 2020-21, charities and organisations working with young people have warned that children who would otherwise come to the attention of schools have been missing from formal education settings and, as a consequence, have become vulnerable to local gangs or dangerous home environments.

The Children's Commissioner has warned that gangs have used lockdowns for 'recruitment drives', taking advantage of young people's increased vulnerability and time spent online.⁴⁴

Correlation between truancy and engagement with the criminal justice system

Studies conducted by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and DfE have found that there is a correlation between time out of school in the form of truancy, suspension or exclusion and the likelihood of an individual becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

A 2016 study considered young offenders sentenced in 2014 that were recorded as being 16 or 17 years old on their sentence date. It found that around 90% of those sentenced to custody had a previous record of being persistently absent from school.⁴⁵ Similarly, the figure for those given Youth Rehabilitation Orders was also around 90%, while for those with Referral Orders and Cautions, between 80% and 90% had a previous record of being persistently absent from school.⁴⁶

Indeed, for all youth justice disposal types, the majority of the cohort aged 16 and 17 were recorded as having a record of being persistently absent from school (ranging from 78% for cautions up to 94% for those sentenced to less than 12 months in custody).^{47, 48}

We see similar patterns emerge when we consider the backgrounds of the prison population as a whole. Research conducted by the MoJ into the childhood and family backgrounds of 1,435 newly sentenced prisoners found that 59% of prisoners stated that they had regularly truanted from school, 63% had been suspended or temporarily excluded and 42% of prisoners were expelled or permanently excluded from school.⁴⁹

Furthermore, prisoners with histories of truancy, suspension and temporary or permanent exclusion from school were more likely to be reconvicted on release than those without.⁵⁰

Analysis conducted by the MoJ and DfE considered young offenders convicted of knife possession offences, and found they were less likely than comparison groups to have reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2.⁵¹

Of those convicted of knife possession offences who offended prior to the end of KS4, approximately 85% have had at least one fixed-period exclusion from school at some point. Approximately 71% of the fixed-period exclusions started prior to the first knife possession offence, with the remainder starting on or after the offence.⁵²

44 <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2021/02/06/children-will-keep-dying-on-our-streets-until-there-is-a-joined-up-public-health-response-to-gangs/>

45 A young offender is classified as being persistently absent from school when they have taken absences (both unauthorised and authorised) during the school year that account for more than 10% of the total number of school sessions available.

46 MoJ and DfE, 'Understanding the educational background of young offenders, Joint experimental statistical report from the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Education, 2016', p. 16.

47 It is important to note though, that there are many young people in the overall pupil population who are persistently absent from school that do not go on to offend.

48 MoJ and DfE, 'Understanding the educational background of young offenders, Joint experimental statistical report from the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Education, 2016', p. 16.

49 MoJ, 'Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds, Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal study of prisoners, 2012', p. ii.

50 MoJ, 'Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds, Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal study of prisoners, 2012', p. ii.

51 MoJ, 'Examining the educational background of young knife possession offenders, June 2018', p. 11.

52 Ibid.

For many children, home life has also become more dangerous over the last year. Helplines have received a major increase in appeals for help over the past year with Refuge experiencing a 60% increase in calls compared to the start of 2020.⁵³ Similarly, The National Association for Children of Alcoholics has received record number of calls since the pandemic hit the UK about children in homes where parents have an alcohol problem.⁵⁴

Despite these increased risks, the number of children coming to the attention of services has fallen as young people are out of view of schools, where many potential problems are picked up. Children's social care referrals fell by a fifth during the first lockdown.⁵⁵

What charities are telling us:

'The increased truancy/disengagement which we know has a strong correlation with exclusions. Increasingly we are becoming seen by our schools as key to engaging these very hard to reach pupils due to relationships with parents and creating a space within school that young people feel safe and have a sense of belonging.' - Football Beyond Borders, London

'Over 55% of the children in families we are supporting are not able to meet the home schooling demands. Parents are struggling with the impact of domestic abuse, their own mental health issues and technology poverty. Having two or more children of different ages is proving difficult to manage logistically. Parental mental health is spiralling, and we have had a large number of clients reporting suicidal ideation or attempting suicide. Children as young as 10 are self-harming. Children are reporting escalating aggression between parents and poor family relationships. Children are feeling less safe.' - Cheshire without Abuse, Crewe

'The gang recruitment drive has been especially strong for girls online. We have had to set up support groups to help these girls not be pulled into this and to look out for the signs of grooming.' - XLP, London

'We have noticed that the internal reporting of safeguarding issues has increased by 50% compared to last year. The proportion requiring the external support of agencies (Social Care/Health/police) has increased by 25-33%.' - Red Balloon, Cambridge

'Since the first lockdown began in March 2020 there have been more safeguarding concerns referred to Local Authorities concerning children and adults who are living in the same house as someone who is a substance misuser.' - DrugFAM/The Nicholas Mills Foundation, High Wycombe

53 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56491643>

54 <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/blog/2020/the-new-normal-for-children-affected-by-their-parents-drinking-whats-happening-and-how-can-we-help>

55 assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933532/Social_care_COVID-19_briefing_October_2020.pdf

3. What the Government Has Done so Far

The Department for Education has committed approximately £3 billion in 'catch up' funding for children who have missed out on education with a focus on lost learning. This includes a one-off £302 million 'Recovery Premium' provided to schools to support the most vulnerable young people during the academic year 2021-22 and approximately £1 billion⁵⁶ over three years for a National Tutoring Programme (NTP) to provide small-class tutoring for children from disadvantage backgrounds.

While this money is welcome, we believe there is a gap in provision for young people most likely to dis-engage from education. This small scale tutoring won't help children who are regularly missing from the classroom.

We are concerned that the extra support announced thus far potentially overlooks support required 'beyond the school gates' to help the most disadvantaged children re-engage with some form of educational provision.

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP)

The NTP is a government-led tutoring programme for disadvantaged pupils in England. Its purpose is to help participants recover lost academic learning during the pandemic. The government has allocated approximately {£1 billion} to the programme over a three year period⁵⁷ The programme has two core components:

- a. **Tuition partners:** Following a tender process, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) selected 33 tutoring organisations (including charities like Action Tutoring and Tutor Trust) to be approved providers. Schools can commission these organisations to provide heavily subsidised tuition.
- b. **Academic mentors:** Schools in disadvantaged areas employ in-house academic mentors to provide tailored catch-up support. Teach First is running this.

Good-quality tuition has a strong evidence base. For instance, one-to-one tuition confers an additional five months' progress on average, and the best results are associated with short, regular sessions (about 30 minutes, three to five times a week) over a set period of time (six to 12 weeks). Small group tuition confers four months' additional progress on average (impact is greater in smaller groups).⁵⁸

However, the NTP only focuses on academic catch-up and many disadvantaged pupils need much more than this to recover lost learning.

The NTP was never meant to resolve all the problems that flowed from school closures; it was set up explicitly to help pupils catch up with lost academic learning.⁵⁹ For some disadvantaged pupils, an offer of small-group tuition may be all they need for the time being. Although, for the NTP to reach its full potential, government must urgently address two problems:

1. There are regional disparities in take-up (according to a Schools Week report in March 2021, the NTP only reached 58.8% of target schools in the North East, compared to 100% in the South West),⁶⁰ and
2. Not all provision appears to flow to disadvantaged learners: of the 41,100 children who had started to receive tuition by February 2021, only 44% were eligible for pupil premium (although the NTP has responded that 'some pupils may be disadvantaged as a result of recent circumstances' such as 'experiencing difficulty with remote learning during school closures and learning from home, for example.')

56 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-expansion-of-tutoring-in-next-step-of-education-recovery>

57 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-expansion-of-tutoring-in-next-step-of-education-recovery>

58 <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/small-group-tuition/>

59 <https://nationaltutoring.org.uk/faqs>

60 <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/data-reveals-scale-of-national-tutoring-programmes-northern-challenge/>

61 <https://nationaltutoring.org.uk/news/learning-from-feedback-what-schools-think-about-the-ntp>

However, even a fully functioning NTP will only get us so far when it comes to catch-up. For many disadvantaged pupils, the root causes of lost learning run much deeper. It is not simply that lockdown compromised their access to good-quality teaching time; for these children, the pandemic further entrenched pre-existing personal challenges that fundamentally compromised their engagement with education in the first place.

Academic tutoring should be part of the overall mix of initiatives we offer disadvantaged children - but it cannot be the *sole* answer to catch-up. We could devise the most geographically comprehensive, best staffed NTP imaginable and still not engage many disadvantaged children. There is, after all, little point in offering tutoring to pupils if they do not turn up in the first place because their lives are in turmoil.

Our catch-up programme always needed two strands: one academic and the other non-academic. Government should, therefore, replicate the tender exercise it undertook to build the NTP, but this time with an exclusive focus on non-academic catch-up. More specifically, it would seek to draw the services of the country's most effective organisations when it comes to:

- a. Improving school attendance and engagement in education
- b. Addressing the root causes of their disengagement - with a particular emphasis on the problems pupils and their families face at home

4. Developing a New 'Key Worker' Model to Help Young People Back into School

As part of the government's plans to support young people to catch up with lost learning, the DfE announced that it would support the recruitment of up to 2,000 'academic mentors' to provide one-to-one or small-class support in academic subjects⁶². This report recommends extending the concept to supporting children who are largely absent from school to return to education. There is a strong existing evidence base for key workers engaging with families who need the most support, and this should be replicated to reduce the absence rate following the pandemic.

There is a strong evidence base for the impact of individual 'keyworkers', working intensively and consistently with young people in a pastoral context. This model has been successfully adopted by charities working with young people and the government's Supporting Families Programme where external assessment of the model has demonstrated its success.

The Troubled Families (now 'Supporting Families') Programme adopts a 'key worker' model to provide support to families with the most acute needs. This model has been embedded within the programme from its inception in 2011.

Evaluations of the Troubled Families Programme 2015-20 conclude that '*The single keyworker approach was important to successful interactions among participating families*⁶³'

- More than 8 in 10 keyworkers felt 'confident that the model was effective in achieving whole family working (84%)⁶⁴ with just under 8 in 10 agreeing that their role was successful in achieving long-term change in families' circumstances (79%).⁶⁵
- The relatively low caseload (approximately 13 for a typical keyworker versus a much higher typical caseload for a social worker) helps to provide more consistent and intensive support. Surveys conducted as part of the programme evaluation found strong support from families with 83% of families saying their keyworker was helpful, including 61% who said they were very helpful.⁶⁶
- Evaluation of the key worker role found that the development of trust was fundamental to the success of the role and that the model itself helped to support this: '*The foundation of a successful relationship between family members and keyworkers was the development of trust*'.⁶⁷ Keyworkers felt that building trust with families (89%), active listening (85%) and empathy (84%)⁶⁸ were the characteristics of successful delivery, which reflects the views of families in how they are helped through the keyworker model.
- The role of the Troubled Families keyworker is particularly important in the context of high-needs families who were likely to have had extensive experience of officials and interventions, typically feeling that these interventions were 'done to' them rather than with them. The success of a keyworker lies with them being seen as a consistent and trusted partner who almost became a coach and a mentor rather than another 'official'.

In relation to school attendance and working with children, the evidence around key workers found they had a '*crucial role in improving relationships with schools*'⁶⁹ often acting as a conciliatory figure between school and family. They are crucial in looking beyond the specific problem of absenteeism and at the wider issues facing the family or child. Further evidence of this is provided by the model adopted by School Home Support and others (below).

62 <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfes-covid-catch-up-scheme-set-for-expansion/>

63 assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665368/Service_transformation_Case_studies_research_Part_2.pdf

64 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974073/Troubled_Families_Annual_Report_2021.pdf

65 Ibid.

66 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 'National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015-2020: Findings (Mach 2019)'.

67 assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665368/Service_transformation_Case_studies_research_Part_2.pdf p. 69.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

Examples of the key worker model

The key worker model is also successfully adopted in the charitable sector to provide intensive one-to-one support.

MCR Pathways

The Scottish based charity MCR Pathways delivers relationship-based mentoring programmes for vulnerable young people in Scotland and has found that consistent, regular engagement with a trusted adult, who was seen to be independent, was found to have a particularly important impact on school attendance. A review of the MCR Pathways model conducted by ScotCen (the Scottish social research agency) found that: *'the support provided by mentors to address some of the underlying reasons for young people's non-attendance at school, and young people's interest and motivation to attend regular meetings with their mentors, helped improve the attendance of young people who had poor attendance prior to taking part in MCR Pathways.'*⁷⁰ Analysis of the MCR Pathways model shows it increases school attendance (among other metrics) by more than 20% and a 28% increase in engagement with school and learning through its intensive one-to-one mentoring model.⁷¹

SHiFT:

SHiFT is an organisation focused on breaking the destructive cycle of children and young people committing crimes. It uses the use of the Breaking cycle ingredients described above (page x) to reduce the number of young people engaged with the criminal justice system.

In contrast with the £76,000 spent on keeping someone in a Young Offenders' Institute each year or the annual £210,000 bill for each place in a Secure Children's Home, participation in SHiFT will cost just £16,000 a year.

SHiFT will use the Breaking Cycles Model inspired by the success of Pause, a charity where intensive therapeutic relationships with vulnerable women at risk of having multiple children taken into care, not only changed lives for the better but also saved local authorities millions of pounds. This model prevented an estimated 215 children being taken into care across five local authorities saving £26.7million in public expenditure over a four year period. The estimated benefit to cost ratios (savings per £1 of cost) are calculated at £4.50 over four years for every £1 spent on the Pause programme⁷².

SHiFTs places a 'Guide' alongside young people to work intensively with all aspects of their lives over an 18-month period. SHiFT Guides work with only 4-5 young people at any one time and support them for a significant amount of time, approximately 18 months. Participants will typically spend about 18 months with SHiFT during which time they are also expected to achieve significant educational goals, including improved literacy, numeracy and most importantly to have developed aspiration and a belief in themselves. SHiFT Guides provide an intense, consistent and flexible programme of support, tailored to individual needs, enabling the child or young person to tackle destructive cycles of behaviour, develop new skills and avoid further trauma and offending.

70 <https://mcrpathways.org/scotcen-independent-impact-evaluation-of-mcr-summary/>

71 Ibid.

72 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/932816/Pause_-_Sussex.pdf

Guides will not define the children or young people with whom they work by the criminal offences they have committed but treat each as an individual. To develop the relationship, a Guide will have to be persistent and determined in seeking a “hook” that grabs their attention and begins to open up the chance of leading a more fulfilling life. SHiFT Guides will ‘do whatever it takes’ to change each child or young person’s life so that, one day, they will no longer be needed.

A SHiFT team consists of 5 SHiFT Guides and a Team Co-ordinator. SHiFT Guides come from a range of professional backgrounds, including social work, youth offending, education, the probation service & healthcare. This dedicated team will support between 20 to 25 children. They will work alongside and across the statutory system, ensuring duplication is avoided and scarce resources are directed and purposeful. From the outset and long after children finish the programme, SHiFT will result in significant savings to public finances.

West London Zone

Other charities supported by social finance funding have also used the key worker model to successfully change outcomes for young people. West London Zone (WLZ) is a charity that has developed a ‘trusted adult’ approach to provide one-to-one support for young people with a high-risk profile, indicated by measures including poor school attendance. The trusted adult provides intensive and consistent support to the young person and their family to improve educational outcomes. West London Zone measure their impact across a range of academic and social indicators. Their data show demonstrable improvements across all measures after a two-year intervention. Independent analysis of the financial benefits found total savings or wider societal benefits worth £31.6m in 2020/21 in outcomes achieved with the first 740 children through the WLZ programme, equating to £43,000 per child.⁷³

School-Home Support

School-Home Support (SHS) has adopted the key worker model directly to improve school attendance. SHS employs ‘practitioners’ to work with families on addressing the underlying causes of poor school attendance. Demand for its services increased four-fold in 2020.⁷⁴ Attendance specialists support schools and families rather than being school-based. They develop relationships with children and families with the focus of returning a child to a school or alternative provision setting. Practitioners are often the one consistent, reliable source of support for families. Through their model, they have achieved significant impact with⁷⁵:

- 71% of pupils in mainstream schools improving their attendance (equivalent to 14 extra days in school) and 89% in alternative educational settings seeing improved attendance (equivalent to 18 extra days in school).
- One year of support achieves an average of 12 extra days in school per pupil per year; in year two, this rises to an extra 42 days per year. These young people were 12% more likely to achieve grades four and above at KS2 and 54% more likely to achieve five A*-C grades.
- They also significantly improved parental engagement in their children’s education for children in both mainstream and alternative provision settings (68% of parents of children in mainstream schools became more engaged and 93% of parents of children in alternative provision settings).

Independent analysis conducted for School Home Support, a charity focused on improving school attendance through a key-worker model, found for every £1 there is a net saving of £1.24 or a potential annual saving of £127m (adjusted for inflation to 2020 prices).⁷⁶

73 <https://www.westlondonzone.org/impact-report-2016-20>

74 <https://www.schoolhomesupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SHS-Report-and-Financial-statements-Year-ended-31-Aug-2020-Final.pdf>

75 <https://www.schoolhomesupport.org.uk/impact/>

76 <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/misspent-youth/>

The economic case for reducing school absence:

A 2012 report from *New Philanthropy Capital*: 'Misspent youth: The costs of truancy and exclusion' estimated the total cost of regular school absence to the economy was **£800m per year or £8.8bn for the 11 years a child is typically in school.**⁷⁷ This analysis found that the average unit cost of a young person who is regularly absent from school is **£44,468 (over the working lifetime of the child).**⁷⁸ Analysis of the impact of persistent school absence on individual areas of public policy finds that the lifetime extra cost of crime committed by a truanting child is £6,776 and £33,694 in lost earnings⁷⁹.

An aggregate saving of **£3.8bn** (adjusted for 2020 prices) would be made if all preventable persistent school absence was addressed, the equivalent of **£354m per annum** (adjusted for 2020 prices).⁸⁰

A return on investment analysis for returning a persistently absent young person to school and improving attendance found that every **£1 spent produced £11.60 in savings over** the working lifetime of the child. Half of these saving accrue to the individual and half to the taxpayer. The report notes this represents a potential annual saving of **£250m per annum.**⁸¹

77 <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/misspent-youth/>

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

5. School Attendance - The Third Pillar of the National Tutoring Programme

A positive, ready-made announcement:

The department could amend the existing NTP programme to address absence. We believe there is a gap in provision for young people most likely to dis-engage from education. This small scale tutoring won't help children who are regularly missing from the classroom. The government should announce a new phase of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) with a focus on getting young people most likely to be absent from school or alternative provision back into an educational setting. It should create a new catch-up stream, designed specifically to resolve the deep-seated and complex problems that drive school disengagement.

The NTP provides an existing framework for delivery with 'academic mentors' as one of the two pillars of the programme (described above). We would recommend that a third pillar is added with a focus on the most disadvantaged young people unlikely to be attending school or an alternative provision setting. There is a strong evidence base for using key workers to support young people to return to education.

This new phase of the NTP would mirror the appointment of 'academic mentors' focused on 'catch up', with attendance mentors focused on getting the most vulnerable young people back into an educational setting. As we have seen, there is a strong evidence base for adopting a key-worker model to work intensively with families.

Our recommendation is that this fund is best placed within the infrastructure of the NTP rather than other initiatives such as the Supporting Families Programme to ensure a focus on school attendance for young people most at risk of missing school (or attending alternative provision).

Why not the Supporting Families Programme?

Our recommendation is that this fund is best placed within the infrastructure of the NTP rather than other initiatives such as the Supporting Families Programme (formerly Troubled Families) to ensure a focus on school attendance for young people most at risk of missing school (or attending alternative provision). *In recent evaluations of the Troubled Families Programme, improving school attendance was only the fifth most common action reported by key workers working with families.*⁸²

We believe there is an urgent requirement, following successive lockdowns and school closures, to focus on school attendance as a policy priority. School absence is one of six eligibility criteria for the Supporting Families Programme and identifying families requiring intervention. This creates the risk that a new fund within the Supporting Families Programme would likely miss young people with very poor attendance who live in families otherwise not engaged within the Supporting Families Programme. Evidence submitted by School Home Support confirms that mentors appointed through an alternative government programme are unlikely to conflict with Supporting Families key workers.

The 'academic mentor' stream of the NTP has been delivered through appointing Teach First as a delivery partner to recruit and train mentors. We would suggest that a similar model is used for key workers focused on school attendance with a lead organisation appointed to train and recruit attendance mentors.

Evidence taken from charities above suggests that key workers are typically recruited from existing professionals working with children and families who feel overstretched or graduates looking for entry into a 'caring profession' working with young people. The 'academic mentor' stream led by Teach First has focused its

82 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973101/3_Staff_Survey_-_Keyworkers.pdf p. 32.

recruitment on existing professionals and recent graduates looking to enter the teaching profession.

Evidence for the effectiveness of keyworkers suggests that a consistent multi-year approach is needed to ensure effective change. We would recommend the fund should support a three year programme of work.

Delivery of a third pillar for the National Tutoring Programme:

To deliver these additional key workers, we recommend that charities are helped to scale up their work through a 'third pillar' delivered by a trusted delivery partner based on the NTP model. The government could consider approaching an existing charity or group of organisations to act as a delivery partner by recruiting and training new staff members and potentially offering professionals who are training in other allied fields the opportunity to apply for key-worker roles, matching individuals to charities.

Qualities required in a skilled practitioner:

In recruiting key workers, the government and appointed outside bodies will need to recruit individuals who recognise the challenging nature and intensity of relational trauma-informed work.

Evidence provided by School Home Support for this report suggests that existing professionals are often "inspired" to apply for roles because of the typically small case loads associated with a key worker under their model. These professionals come from different 'caring professions' including social care, teaching and youth work. The skills often associated with these workers are often around personal attributes such as being "compassionate, empathetic, caring, non-judgemental, passionate, understanding" according to contributors to this report.

Not another person with a clip-board?

Evidence from the 'breaking the cycle model' and from charities like School Home Support emphasises that this is not about adding an additional individual to the 'scaffolding' already around these young people but identifying a single individual who builds a relationship based on trust to effect behaviour change. Evidence provided by School Home Support in preparing this report suggests that the very small caseloads associated with key workers are important to 'cutting through' bureaucracy and being seen as 'on the side' of the young person themselves. This helps them to and be seen as a helpful ally rather than someone from 'official-dom' in the employment of the local authority or school.

Delivery:

Replicating the delivery of the NTP, a new fund should invite charities to submit applications to deliver support and employ attendance mentors at a local level across England (education is a devolved responsibility across the home nations). The evidence for key-workers points to perceived independence being an important part of their role. To mirror the process of the NTP, this will require individual schools to commission support but individual mentors should be employed by local charities to ensure their independence and more effective support for young people and their families.

- **Step 1:** The DfE announces a three-year funding package to deliver 2,000 attendance mentors to schools across England.
- **Step 2:** The department appoints a single organisation or group of organisations to lead on recruitment and training of attendance mentors, mirroring the remit of Teach First in delivering the National Tutoring Programme. This organisation or group of organisations would be expected to establish standards for mentors.
- In May 2021⁸³ the government announced that Randstad, a major recruitment company, would work alongside TeachFirst to recruit and deliver additional school based staff. Randstad's remit could be extended to include the recruitment of attendance mentors.

83 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-expansion-of-tutoring-in-next-step-of-education-recovery>

- Attendance mentors are likely to be recent graduates in social work or youth work who are looking for a meaningful role with young people where they can make a difference. The role is also likely to be attractive to people working in education (such as teaching assistants).
- **Step 3:** The department announces a tendering process for charities and frontline organisations, including providers of alternative provision to apply to become approved delivery partners for this part of the NTP. This replicates existing processes where the department has approved 33 delivery partners to deliver tutoring based 'catch up.' Approved organisations are likely to be existing children's charities or providers of alternative provision.
- **Step 4:** The department commissions a 'quick-fire' children's census to understand where the need for attendance support is most acute and the placement of attendance mentors will make the most impact.
- **Step 5:** Schools in the most disadvantaged areas will be supported to commission attendance mentors (who will be employed by approved providers to ensure their independence) to support improved attendance for those most likely to be missing from school. These mentors will be placed by the organisation or organisations appointed by the department to recruit and train mentors to ensure they have maximum impact.

Recommendation - a positive, ready-made announcement:

The department could amend the existing NTP programme to address absence. We believe there is a gap in provision for young people most likely to dis-engage from education. *This small scale tutoring won't help children who are regularly missing from the classroom.*

The government should appoint 2,000 school attendance mentors to work with children who are persistently absent from school and alternative provision.

The programme should be modelled on the existing and successful local charities outlined in this paper and be delivered through similar local partners, separate from the school, wherever possible.

At a unit cost of £40,000 plus infrastructure costs, it is likely to require funding of almost £100m per year for a period of three years.

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