

SCHOOL ABSENCE TRACKER

A termly analysis of official data relating to absence from schools

125,222

The number of severely absent pupils has soared by 108 per cent since the pandemic. In Autumn 2022, 125,222 pupils were absent more often than they were present (severely absent), 1.7 per cent of the school population. This compares with 60,244 who were severely absent in the same term in 2019, equating to an additional 64,978 pupils.

1,742,722

Persistent absence has also remained at a concerning high level since the pandemic. 1,742,722 pupils were persistently absent this term, which equates to 24.2 per cent of all pupils. This compares to 922,566 pupils before the pandemic.

7.5%

The overall absence rate in Autumn 2022 was 7.5 per cent. This is an increase of 2.6 percentage points since before the pandemic.

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Headline statistics

The number of severely absent pupils has soared by 108 per cent since the pandemic.

In Autumn 2022, 125,222 pupils were absent more often than they were present (severely absent), 1.7 per cent of the school population. This compares with 60,244 who were severely absent in the same term in 2019, equating to an additional 64,978 pupils.¹

It is vulnerable children who are affected most. In the 2021/22 academic year, children who are in receipt of Free School Meals had a severe absence rate which was more than triple the rate for children who were not eligible for FSM. Children in receipt of SEN support are also more likely to be severely absent than their peers.²

Persistent absence has also remained at a concerning high level since the pandemic.

1,742,722 pupils were persistently absent this term, which equates to 24.2 per cent of all pupils.³ This compares to 922,566 pupils before the pandemic.

The overall absence rate in Autumn 2022 was 7.5 per cent. This is an increase of 2.6 percentage points since before the pandemic.⁴

1 Department for Education, 2023. "Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2022"
[accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2022]

2 Department for Education, 2023. "Pupil absence in schools in England: 2021 to 2022"
[Accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2021-to-2022]

3 Department for Education, 2023. "Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2022"
[accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2022]

4 Ibid.

About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five "pathways to poverty", first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report Breakthrough Britain. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report It Happens Here shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grass-roots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2023 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Foreword

The Government risks creating a lost generation if it doesn't act urgently to return so called 'ghost children' to the classroom. This would be a moral and social failure of epic proportions, creating a bow wave of problems for decades to come.

The latest school attendance data has shown that the number of children who are severely absent remains at crisis levels. These 'ghost children' are absent more than they are present, lost and not yet found.

The Centre for Social Justice first drew attention to surging rates of school absence in 2021, finding that the number of severely absent pupils spiked by 62 per cent to nearly 100,000 between Autumn 2019 and Autumn 2021. The latest figures show that crisis levels of absence risk becoming entrenched.

In Autumn 2022, over 125,000 children were severely absent, representing an increase of 108 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels.

It is a sad but unsurprising fact that among these children, the vulnerable are over represented. In the 2021/22 academic year, the rate of severe absence among children in receipt of Free School Meals was more than three times than among their higher income peers, while children in receipt of SEN support were three times more likely to be severely absent.

The CSJ's recent inquiry identified anxiety, poor mental health, disadvantage and SEN needs as key drivers of school absence – as well as changing parental attitudes to school since lockdown forced millions out of the classroom.

This attendance gap will serve only to exacerbate the 'attainment gap' between poorer and more affluent children, already at its widest level in a decade.

While some welcome action has been taken, existing measures fail to match the scale of the crisis. We already know what works, and every day that passes risks failing more children – not just today, but for years to come, as children emerge from their school years ill-educated and ill-equipped to navigate their adult lives successfully.

We must accelerate the roll out of attendance mentors, with urgency to ensure families can access the right support and put guidance on a statutory footing. Now is not the time for half measures.

The CSJ's attendance tracker will shed light on trends in severe and persistent absence, while tracking any progress made by government across the CSJ's 7-point plan to turn the tide. Absence at its current level cannot be normalised and must remain squarely on the Government's agenda.

This is fundamentally a matter of social justice. Every day of school missed reduces a child's future life chances. We owe it to these children to speak up for them and to campaign for change. Failure to change this now will result in a whole generation left behind.



Rt Hon Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP

Chairman of the Centre for Social Justice
and MP for Chingford and Woodford Green

Executive Summary

Since 2021, the Centre for Social Justice has been investigating the issue of school absence.

Our report, '[Kids can't catch up if they don't show Up](#)', first revealed that nearly 100,000 children had become severely absent in Autumn 2020. Severe absence is defined as when a child is absent for 50 per cent or more of possible sessions. They are absent more often than they are present in school.

This report was followed by '[Lost but not forgotten](#)', which examined the characteristics of pupils who were most likely to be absent from school. This report found that over 1,000 schools had an entire class worth of children who were severely absent. Children who were eligible for free school meals, had identified special educational needs/disabilities (SEND), and those in exam critical years were found to be more likely to be absent from school.

In March 2023 we released '[Lost and Not Found](#)', which revealed that, in Summer 2022, the number of children severely absent from school had risen by 134 per cent since before the pandemic. In total, 140,000 children were identified as being severely absent in this term. Our report also set out the conclusions of our inquiry into the drivers behind school absence, which include anxiety and poor mental health, unmet SEND, poverty/disadvantage, and changing parental attitudes towards education following the pandemic.

New government figures reveal that severe absence remained at crisis levels in Autumn 2022.⁵ Our analysis shows that, in the latest term we have data for, 125,222 children were severely absent, an increase of 108 per cent since before the pandemic.⁶

The Government has recognised the importance of attendance and taken several very welcome steps to tackle school absences. However, the actions taken so far do not go far enough, quickly enough.

The CSJ continues to call for urgent, nationwide action to tackle the scourge of school absences and to put an end to the postcode lottery of attendance support. We must act urgently to get the roll of so called 'ghost children' back to school.

The CSJ will therefore now be tracking and analysing termly data on absence, as well as tracking any progress made by the government on implementing recommendations to turn the tide of school absence.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

Absence data review

Since school shutdowns, attendance issues have become endemic across our school system. Persistent and severe absence have become entrenched across England and thousands of schools are struggling to reengage this lost generation.

This chapter explores the most recent pupil level data collected by the Department for Education on attendance in Autumn 2022.⁷

Attendance issues have not been resolved as schools returned this academic year (2022/23). Indicative fortnightly data released from the Department for Education's attendance survey⁸ shows that in the year to date, absence rates remain much higher than before the pandemic.

The most recent data shows that, as of the week commencing 1st May 2023, the overall absence rate for the year to date was 7.6 per cent. The authorised absence rate was 5.2 per cent and the unauthorised absence rate was 2.4 per cent.

Persistent Absence

Children who are persistently absent miss 10 per cent or more of possible sessions in school. This is equivalent to missing one afternoon every week.

In Autumn 2022, 1,742,722 children were persistently absent.⁹ This is equivalent to 24.2 per cent of all children (nearly a quarter of children in mainstream and special schools).¹⁰

The number of persistently absent children remains at levels much higher than pre-pandemic. In Autumn 2019, 922,566 pupils were persistently absent (13.1 per cent of all children in mainstream and special schools). Persistent absence therefore has grown by 84.1 per cent relative to pre-pandemic.

Persistent absence varies throughout the academic year. However, in every year for which we have termly data which is not affected by Covid, Autumn term has the lowest rates of persistent absence.

7 Department for Education, 2023. "Pupil absence in schools in England: 2021 to 2022"
[Accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2021-to-2022].

8 Department for Education, 2023. "Pupil attendance in schools"
[Accessed via: explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools]

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

Severe Absence

Children who are severely absent miss 50 per cent or more of possible sessions. This is equivalent to missing every morning at school. They are a subgroup of persistently absent children who are absent more often than they are present.

In Autumn 2022, 125,222 children were severely absent. This equates to 1.7 per cent of children in mainstream or special schools.¹¹

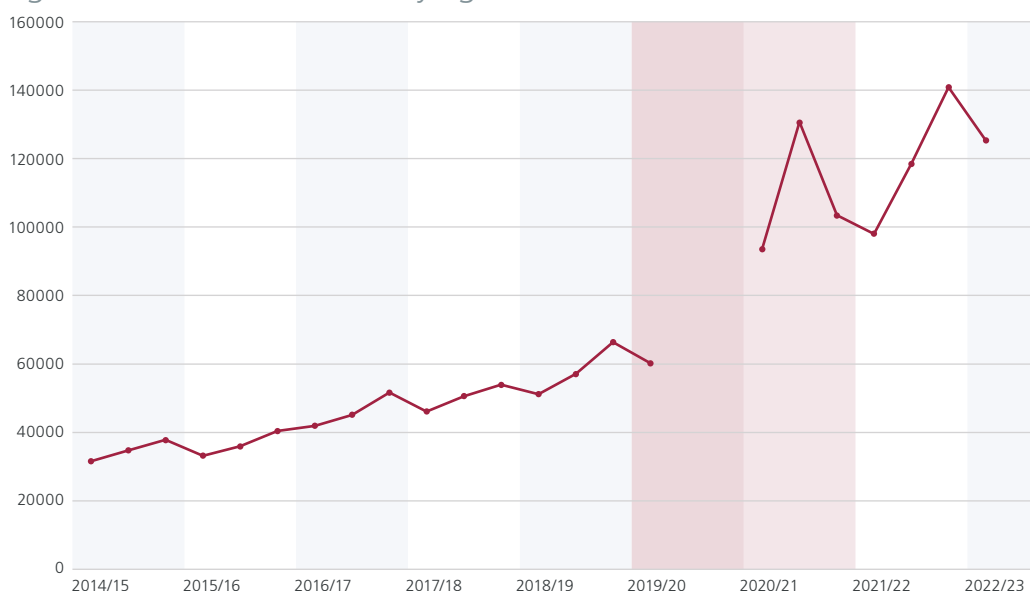
The number of severely absent children remains higher than pre-pandemic levels. In Autumn 2019, the last term before school shutdowns, 60,244 pupils were severely absent. Compared to pre-pandemic, the number of children who were severely absent in Autumn 2022 has increased by 108 per cent.

There is a degree of seasonal volatility in the termly severe absence figures. Most years for which we have data show that the number of severely absent children increases term on term, peaking in Summer. The following Autumn term, the number of severely absent children falls relative to the previous Summer term.

The figures for Autumn 2022 repeat this pattern. In Summer 2022, the number of severely absent children peaked at a record high of 140,848 pupils. This number has fallen by 15,621 children in Autumn 2022. This fall is consistent with termly patterns for severe absence.

Given the seasonal volatility, it is important to compare severe absence figures relative to the same term in the previous year. The figures show that in Autumn 2022, the number of severely absent children were the highest on record for any Autumn term.

Figure 1: Severe absence termly figures



Please note that the two terms highlighted in different colours were both affected by Covid.

11 Ibid.

Reasons for absence

In total, in Autumn 2022, 7.5 per cent of sessions were marked as absent. 5.4 per cent of sessions were marked as authorised absences and 2.1 per cent were marked as unauthorised absences.¹²

Illness absences make up the majority of overall absences and have done consistently throughout the period for which data has been collected. Illness rates for Autumn 2022 are 1.6 percentage points higher than pre-pandemic Autumn 2019.

Unauthorised other absence rates have grown considerably since the pandemic. These rates indicate where children are off school without permission and with no reason is known. In Autumn 2022, 1.4 per cent of all sessions were marked unauthorised other, in Autumn 2019 it stood at 0.8.¹³ In total, unauthorised other absences have increased by 0.6 percentage points.¹⁴

In Autumn 2022, 0.44 per cent of sessions were marked absent for unauthorised holidays.¹⁵ This was lower than Summer 2022 but higher compared to 0.36 per cent in Autumn 2019 (pre-pandemic).¹⁶

The rate of authorised holidays in Autumn 2022 was 0.05 per cent.¹⁷ This is the same as the rate of authorised holidays pre-pandemic, in Autumn 2019.¹⁸

12 Ibid.

13 Department for Education, 2020. "Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2019" [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2019>]

14 Department for Education, 2023. "Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2022" [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2022>]

15 Ibid.

16 Department for Education, 2020. "Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2019" [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2019>]

17 Department for Education, 2023. "Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2022" [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2022>]

18 Ibid.

Absence by school type

In Autumn 2022, 27.4 per cent of all children in secondary school were persistently absent. 886,589 children in total were persistently absent in state-secondary schools.¹⁹

20.9 per cent of children in state-funded primary schools were persistently absent in Autumn 2022. This equates to a further 803,666 children.²⁰

The rate of persistence absence is higher in special schools. In Autumn 2022, 52,467 children educated in special schools were persistently absent. This represents 40.9 per cent of all children educated in special schools.²¹

The rate is much higher in AP settings. In Autumn 2022, 80.5 per cent of children in AP (21,785 in total) were persistently absent.²² It is worth noting that, due to the transience of the AP population, the absence figures are counted separately and not included in the total absence figures (which only includes primary, secondary and special schools). This is to prevent double counting, where a child may have been counted as absent in their mainstream setting, before then moving into AP and being counted as absent there.

In Autumn 2022, 2.8 per cent of all secondary children were severely absent, accounting for 71.5 per cent of all severely absent children.²³ This is equivalent to 1 in every 36 children. This would also equate to having 87 secondary schools where all the children are absent for at least half of all possible sessions.²⁴

Primary school pupils account for 22.6 per cent of all severely absent children. 0.7 per cent of children in primary schools were severely absent in Autumn 2022.²⁵

As with persistent absence, the rate of severe absence is higher in special schools. In Autumn 2022, 7,449 children educated in special schools were severely absent. This represents 5.8 per cent of all children educated in special schools.²⁶

The rate is also much higher in AP settings. In Autumn 2022, 36.8 per cent of children in AP (9,957 in total) were severely absent.²⁷ As above, these figures are not counted as part of the total absence figures, to avoid double counting.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Absence by region

Patterns of absence vary across England.

Inner and Outer London tend to have lower absence rates whereas Yorkshire and the Humber, the South West and the North East have some of the highest.

The North East had the highest rate of persistent absence in Autumn 2022 (25.6 per cent – 84,764 children) followed by South West (25.2 per cent – 168,147 children).²⁸

Outer London had the lowest rate of persistent absence in Autumn 2022 (23.1 per cent – 166,284 children), followed by the East Midlands (23.3 per cent – 146,786 children).²⁹

Table 1: Local Authorities with highest rates of persistent absence

	Geographic Identifier	Region	Enrolments Persistently Absent	Percentage Persistently Absent
1	Isle of Wight	South East	4804	32.8%
2	Torbay	South West	5111	30.0%
3	Bradford	Yorkshire and The Humber	25326	29.8%
4	Knowsley	North West	5223	29.2%
5	Hartlepool	North East	3630	28.7%
6	Middlesbrough	North East	6119	28.6%
7	Plymouth	South West	9447	28.3%
8	Bristol, City of	South West	15056	27.9%
9	Blackpool	North West	4911	27.8%
10	Cornwall	South West	18231	27.6%

Yorkshire and The Humber had the highest rate of severe absence in Autumn 2022 (2.1 per cent – 14,972 children) followed by the South West (2.0 per cent – 13,123 children).³⁰

Outer London had the lowest rate of severe absence in Autumn 2022 (1.2 per cent – 8,841 children), followed by Inner London (1.4 per cent – 4,993 children).³¹

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

Table 2: Local Authorities with highest rates of severe absence

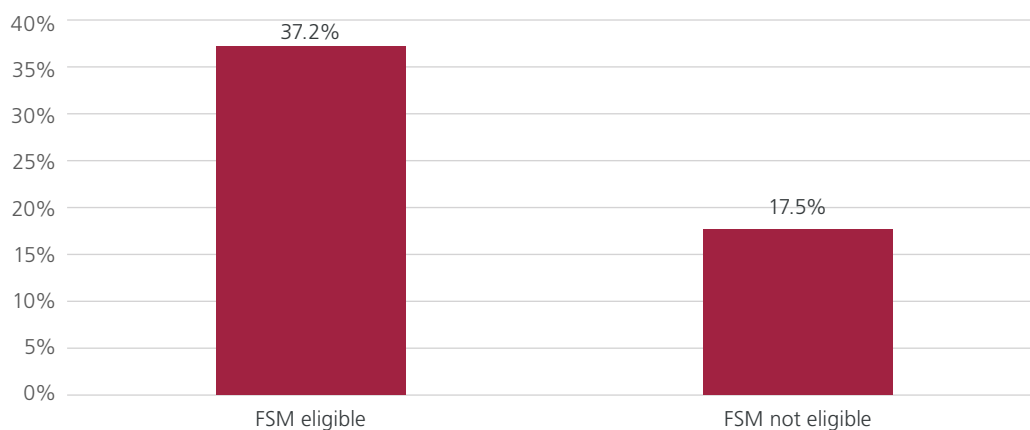
	Geographic Identifier	Region	Enrolments Severely Absent	Percentage Severely Absent
1	Newcastle upon Tyne	North East	1020	2.9%
2	Middlesbrough	North East	607	2.8%
3	Bradford	Yorkshire and The Humber	2377	2.8%
4	Bristol, City of	South West	1454	2.7%
5	Portsmouth	South East	641	2.5%
6	Sheffield	Yorkshire and The Humber	1814	2.5%
7	Torbay	South West	427	2.5%
8	East Sussex	South East	1453	2.4%
9	Somerset	South West	1475	2.3%
10	Devon	South West	1976	2.3%

Absence by free school meal eligibility

Children who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) or had been eligible in the past six years have consistently had higher rates of absence than their peers.

In the 2021/22 academic year, children eligible for FSM had a persistent absence rate which was more than double the rate for children who were not eligible for FSM. 37.2 per cent of all children eligible for FSM were severely absent, compared to 17.5 per cent of children not eligible.³²

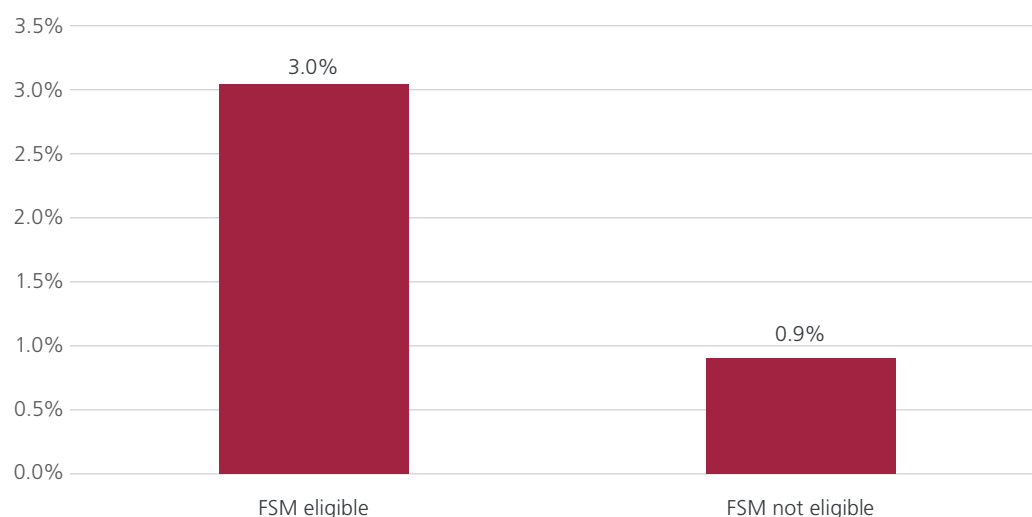
Figure 2: Persistent absence rates by free school meal eligibility



³² Department for Education, 2023. "Pupil absence in schools in England: 2021 to 2022"
[Accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2021-to-2022]

In the 2021/22 academic year, children eligible for FSM had a severe absence rate which was more than triple the rate for children who were not eligible for FSM. 3.0 per cent of all children eligible for FSM were severely absent, compared to 0.9 per cent of children not eligible.³³

Figure 3: Severe absence rates by free school meal eligibility



Absence by pupil residency

30.0 per cent of children living in the most disadvantaged areas³⁴ were persistently absent over the course of 2021/22. For comparison, 14.3 per cent of children living in the most affluent areas³⁵ were persistently absent over the same period.³⁶

Absence by special educational needs/disabilities

Children with SEN support and Education, Health, and Care Plans are more likely than their peers to be both persistently and severely absent.

Overall, throughout the 2021/22 academic year, children with profound and multiple learning difficulties, physical disabilities, and social, emotional and mental health SEN primary needs had the highest rates of absence.

In total, 408,961 children had some form of identified SEND and were persistently absent in the 2021/22 academic year. Children with some form of SEND made up 24.9 per cent of all persistently absent children in 2021/22.³⁷

303,164 persistently absent children had SEN Support and a further 105,797 persistently absent children had an EHCP.³⁸

33 Ibid.

34 Ranked in the 0-10% (most deprived) areas by IDACI scores.

35 Ranked in the 90-100% (least deprived) areas by IDACI scores

36 Department for Education, 2023. "Pupil absence in schools in England: 2021 to 2022" [Accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2021-to-2022]

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

The rate of persistent absence was 32.0 per cent for children with SEN Support, 37.0 per cent for children with an EHCP, and 20.0 per cent for children with no identified SEN.³⁹

Children with social, emotional, and mental health needs made up 5.7 per cent of all persistently absent children in 2021/22 (and 23.0 per cent of all children who were persistently absent with identified SEND).⁴⁰

Over the 2021/22 academic year, more than half (54.4 per cent) of all children with profound and multiple learning difficulties were persistently absent. Persistent absence rates were always higher than 1 in 4 for all children with SEND, regardless of their primary need type.⁴¹

Table 3: Persistent absence by SEN primary need

SEN primary need	Enrolments Persistently Absent	Percentage Persistently Absent
Profound and multiple learning difficulty	4,659	56.4%
Physical disability	13,059	41.8%
Social emotional and mental health	93,942	41.5%
Unclassified	17,632	37.1%
Severe learning difficulty	9,963	36.8%
Other difficulty/disability	16,062	35.2%
Moderate learning difficulty	70,505	33.4%
Multi-sensory impairment	1,147	33.0%
Autistic spectrum disorder	51,268	32.0%
Visual impairment	3,593	30.9%
No specialist assessment	11,640	29.7%
Specific learning difficulty	42,850	29.6%
Hearing impairment	5,270	26.8%
Speech language and communications needs	67,371	26.0%

In total, 43,151 children had some form of identified SEND and were severely absent in the 2021/22 academic year. Children with some form of SEND made up 35.8 per cent of all severely absent children in 2021/22.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

28,356 severely absent children had SEN Support and a further 14,806 persistently absent children had an EHCP.⁴³

The rate of severe absence was 3.0 per cent for children with SEN Support, 5.2 per cent for children with an EHCP, and 1.0 per cent for children with no identified SEN.⁴⁴

As with persistent absence, children with profound and multiple learning difficulties had the highest rates of severe absence, at 9.4 per cent.⁴⁵

13.4 per cent of all severely absent children had an identified social, emotional, or mental health need. Children with social, emotional, or mental health needs again make up the biggest cohort of children with SEND who are severely absent: 37.5 per cent of all children who were severely absent with SEND.⁴⁶

Table 4: Severe absence by SEN primary need

SEN primary need	Enrolments Severely Absent	Percentage Severely Absent
Profound and multiple learning difficulty	777	9.4%
Unclassified	4,074	8.6%
Social emotional and mental health	16,193	7.2%
Autistic spectrum disorder	6,218	3.9%
Multi-sensory impairment	124	3.6%
Physical disability	1,092	3.5%
Other difficulty/disability	1,545	3.4%
Severe learning difficulty	733	2.7%
Moderate learning difficulty	4,712	2.2%
Specific learning difficulty	3,195	2.2%
Visual impairment	238	2.0%
No specialist assessment	639	1.6%
Hearing impairment	258	1.3%
Speech language and communications needs	3,353	1.3%

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

Absence by gender

The rates of persistent and severe absence are similar across genders.

In 2021/22, 22.8 per cent of females and 22.2 per cent of males were persistently absent.⁴⁷

In 2021/22, 1.7 per cent of females and 1.6 per cent of males were severely absent.⁴⁸

Absence by ethnicity

Children who are Gypsy/Roma or Traveller of Irish heritage have some of the highest absence rates.

In 2021/22, 71.7 per cent of Traveller of Irish heritage and 64.9 per cent of Gypsy/Roma children were persistently absent. For comparison, 23.3 per cent of White British pupils were absent over this period.⁴⁹

13.6 per cent of Traveller of Irish heritage and 8.3 per cent of Gypsy/Roma children were severely absent last year. For comparison, the rate of severe absence for White British pupils was 1.8 per cent.⁵⁰

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

School absence action tracker

The number of severely absent children remains at crisis levels term after term. The Government must accelerate its response urgently to get this cohort of children back into the classroom.

The CSJ has outlined a seven-point plan for reform which would help to reengage persistently and severely absent children. This plan has been designed to tackle the underlying drivers of absence cost-effectively, focusing on providing support to the whole family.

So far, the Government has taken several welcome steps:

- New attendance guidance has been issued, setting out a multi-agency approach to attendance.
- Additional regular data published by the Government on absence has allowed us to build a more detailed understanding of absence than ever before.
- The Attendance Alliance has been established and has met regularly to discuss other actions that can be taken to improve attendance.
- The introduction of local pilots for Attendance Mentors, offering some support to councils with higher rates of absence. This was initially introduced in Middlesbrough. In May 2023, the Government confirmed the pilot will be rolled-out to four other areas, having previously announced this earlier in the pilot. Attendance mentors deliver targeted one-to-one support, working closely with the pupil and their family to address any underlying causes of their absence.
- The Government is also in the process of further rolling out attendance hubs, after a successful pilot in Stockton-on-Tees. These attendance hubs bring together schools to share best practice on attendance and offer additional support to pupils. The lead MATs on this will be selected later this year. It is expected up to 10 MATs will take part in this.

However, the approach so far is nowhere near ambitious enough to meet the scale of the challenge.

The current pilots for attendance mentors and attendance hubs are only reaching an extremely limited number of children – **around one per cent of the total number of severely absent pupils** at most, with no clear timeline for a national rollout.

This does not represent a serious response to this unfolding crisis in our education system.

Meanwhile, the new attendance guidance is non-statutory, leading to inconsistencies in how it is being applied and a postcode lottery of absence support.

Additionally, CSJ research has uncovered that persistent and severe absence are often symptoms of a combination of complex barriers. The root causes behind attendance issues need to be addressed to truly overturn the tide of absence.

The CSJ will therefore track progress made by the Government on implementing recommendations to turn the tide of school absence.

Our plan for reform

The CSJ has a seven-point plan to turn the tide on school absence. The plan was developed taking evidence from multiple alternative provisions, local authorities and charities that work with children disengaged with school as part of our attendance inquiry. Throughout the inquiry, we heard about the need to tackle the underlying drivers behind absence, including the need to engage parents in the process, the case extra-curricular enrichment activities, and the role of youth work.

1. Roll out attendance mentors – a proven intervention to boost attendance.

Recommendation

The Department for Education should roll out a national programme of 2,000 attendance mentors. These mentors would work with families to understand and remove the underlying barriers to school attendance. A national programme would cost an estimated £80 million per year. We suggest that this could be funded through the underspend on the National Tutoring Programme.

Progress update: limited action taken, limited further action planned.

The government is currently conducting a £2.45m pilot for attendance mentors in one local authority, Middlesbrough. In May 2023, the government confirmed this would be rolled out to four additional areas, having previously announced this earlier in the pilot. It is estimated that the support will reach 1,665 persistently and severely absent children over the course of the pilot. While an encouraging step, this leaves tens of thousands of children still without the important and individualised support that an attendance mentor can offer. The CSJ's recommendation of 2,000 mentors would support 60,000 children through nationwide coverage.

2. Ensure families can access the right support.

Recommendation

The current Department for Education guidance on attendance should be made statutory. This would provide clarity and consistency in absence support, ensuring all parents and children are able to access the appropriate support they need to both prevent and remediate absence.

Progress update: limited action taken, no further action currently planned.

New guidance has been issued, setting out a thorough multi-agency approach to attendance. However, this guidance remains non-statutory, leading to inconsistencies in how it is applied. Legislation would be required to make this statutory; however, no plans for such legislation have been announced.

3. Put more support in place in schools.

Recommendation

As part of a broader Parental Participation Strategy, the Government should release guidance on the best practice for engaging parents of children who are severely absent.

Progress update: limited action taken, no further action planned.

The updated guidance on absence advises schools to work with families to understand the barriers to attendance, but this guidance is non-statutory, meaning it is inconsistently followed. Additionally, despite advising schools to work with families, existing guidance provides little detail on how best to do this.

Recommendation

Family Hubs should be integrated with existing school services and collocated within schools.

Progress update: some action taken, no further action planned.

In February 2023, the government announced the launch of Family Hubs, with £82m to be invested across 75 areas up to 2025.

The guidance on Family Hubs incorporates the importance of working with schools, including outreach work from schools, but does not explicitly advise for the Hubs to be collocated in schools.

Recommendation

The government should fast track their commitment to roll out designated mental health leads for all schools. School should be supported to develop a whole-school approach to mental health.

Progress update: limited action taken, further action planned.

Following the 2017/18 green paper and consultation on young people's mental health, the government announced plans to establish Mental Health Support Teams in schools. This is being rolled out jointly with the NHS, with each MHST expected to cover around 7,000-8,000 pupils or between 10 to 20 educational settings. Government previously committed to deliver 400 MHSTs – covering 3 million young people - by April 2023. However, the government has now said that it is working to reach the 400 MHSTs by the end of the 2023 calendar year.

The Department for Education has also made available a £1,200 grant for eligible schools to use to train a senior mental-health lead. This training is part of the government's commitment to offer this training to all eligible schools by 2025. This training is not compulsory.

4. Improve school attendance data.

Recommendation

The Department for Education should develop new metrics to track school attendance. This data should examine attendance patterns at an individual and school level and should be incorporated into the attendance dashboard.

Progress update: limited action taken, no further action planned.

The Department for Education has started to publish fortnightly data on school absence, to help track and analyse patterns in school absence. However, the Department has not yet published the severe absence rates as part of this release. The figures also do not capture the progress made in improving individual school attendance rates.

5. Recognise the value of relational work.

Recommendation

The Government should build on its 2019 manifesto commitment to invest £500 million in new youth clubs and services, with a new match fund scheme designed to inspire major businesses, charities and third sector organisations to support a national mission of returning our young people to school.

Progress update: some action taken, more needed

In August 2022, the Government launched the Youth Investment Fund. In the March 2023 Budget, the Government announced a further £90 million of this fund would be allocated to deprived areas where existing youth provision is currently low. It is yet to commit to a match fund scheme partnering with businesses and charities to expand local youth provision.

6. Introduce an 'enrichment guarantee' in our schools.

Recommendation

The Government should introduce a new 'enrichment guarantee' in schools. When activities take place in the morning, breakfast clubs should be incorporated as part of the enrichment guarantee.

Progress update: plans for limited action are in progress

In March 2023, the Government announced up to £57 million funding for the opening school facilities programme for primary schools, to keep school sport facilities open outside school hours. This is expected to benefit up to 1,350 schools.

7. Ensure fines are working.

Recommendation

The Department for Education should conduct a review into the effectiveness of fines and attendance prosecution, to examine the conditions under which these formal mechanisms can improve attendance.

Progress update: no action taken.

The government ran a consultation in early 2022 on the consistency of attendance support, which included considering a new regulatory framework for fixed penalty notices for attendance. In the now dropped Schools Bill, there were plans to introduce national thresholds for fixed penalty notices. The government has said it will try and introduce aspects of the Schools Bill through other legislative frameworks, but it remains unknown if this will include action on fixed penalty notices.

Recommendation

The fines for School Attendance Orders (SAOs) and attendance prosecution should be made the same value to avoid creating perverse incentives which push children out of the education system.

Progress update: no action taken.



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