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Education Committee

Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils

Seventh Report of Session 2022–23

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Education Committee

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Summary

Pupil absence

Government statistics have shown that covid-19 and its aftermath has had a damaging effect on school attendance, which has lasted longer than originally anticipated, so we decided to investigate the causes and possible solutions to the growing issue of children's absence from school. We launched our inquiry into Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils in January 2023.

The rate of absence in schools in England has increased significantly since the pandemic. The most recent full-year statistics (which cover the 2021/22 academic year) showed an overall absence rate of 7.6%, up from around 4–5% pre-pandemic. Within this, 5.5% of missed sessions were authorised absences and 2.1% were unauthorised. Authorised illness was the main driver, at 4.4%, (whilst unauthorised holiday absences sat at 0.4%). 22.5% of pupils were persistently absent, which is around double the pre-pandemic rate, and 1.7% of all pupils were severely absent compared to less than 1% pre-pandemic.

Prior to the impact of the pandemic, absence and persistent absence had been gradually declining since 2010, but there is no sign of a return to this trajectory. Given the time that was lost to education during the pandemic, it is of great concern that absence rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels, and there has been no significant improvement in the speed and scale of rate reduction which is needed to prevent long-term harm to pupils.

How the Department monitors absence and expectations for attendance

The Department has recently established a data pilot via an interactive dashboard, known as the Pupil Attendance Dashboard. We welcome the daily attendance data pilot, and note the Department's intention to mandate schools' participation and to replace the School Census. Given that around 80% of schools have been successfully using the dashboard over the last academic year, for consistency, we recommend the Department make use of the dashboard mandatory as soon as possible, subject to a successful evaluation of the pilot and addressing any concerns.

Further monitoring is needed to identify and support those children not receiving a formal education. This Committee has repeatedly called for a register of children not in school. The Secretary of State, the Minister for Schools and the Prime Minister have committed to bringing forward a register, but timescales are yet to be announced. We urge the Government to deliver on its commitment to introduce a register of children not in school to be fully operational for the 2024/25 academic year.

We heard mixed reactions to the guidance, *Working together to improve school attendance*. Whilst witnesses agreed statutory guidance is needed to improve attendance, the guidance in its current form may require revisions before implementation on a statutory footing, which the Department had planned to do. We recommend that the Department should implement statutory guidance to be applicable from September

2024, having consulted the relevant stakeholders on revisions. We also examined local authority support for school attendance, and we heard that levels of support can vary significantly. We recommended that the Department should conduct an audit of local authority support, including an assessment on funding Education Welfare Officers.

Interventions to improve attendance

There is evidence that prior to the pandemic, fines played a role in reducing unauthorised absence. However, it is less clear if they are an effective deterrent for families who are facing some of the current barriers to attendance we have outlined. We heard that fines do not address the barriers that low-income families face and can be counterproductive by adding to difficult financial circumstances. Families are struggling with high school costs, and in some cases, fining is not an appropriate, compassionate, or helpful response. Also, the Department does not monitor or regulate the use of fines and prosecution and what methods of support have been offered before they are applied, and we heard that they are used inconsistently due to local authority discretion. We are disappointed by the lack of action in the Department's response to its consultation on setting national thresholds for legal intervention. We recommend the Department should instruct schools and local authorities to explore methods of support for pupils and families before the use of fines or prosecution, ensuring legal intervention is a last resort only, and introduce a national framework for fines and prosecution as part of revisions to the guidance *Working together to improve school attendance*.

The Department has introduced a number of interventions to improve attendance, such as attendance mentors and attendance hubs, and we welcome the expansion of these in recent months. But we heard that the expansion does not go far enough, and we are persuaded that measures need to be rolled out nationally to support persistent and severely absent pupils effectively. Given the success of the pilots of the Attendance Mentors Programme, the Department should start by implementing a national roll out of attendance mentors, with whole-family support at the forefront of the programme for effectual support.

Given a major driver of low attendance is low income, it follows that measures to tackle child poverty should be considered in the Department's approach to improving attendance. The Department should make an assessment of the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals and adjust if necessary, ensuring all children in poverty are in receipt. We heard that the Government are also supporting other initiatives through food and enrichment, which have helped to improve school attendance. Breakfast clubs and the Holiday Activities and Food programme are measures that can be used further to improve school attendance, but there is a lack of evidence as the Department does not require schools or local authorities to measure return rates in school attendance, following attendance at breakfast or holiday clubs. We recommend the Department require local authorities to report on school attendance levels for pupils who have attended a breakfast club or holiday club.

We heard selected, but compelling evidence from third sector organisations who were providing sports-based interventions in localised areas to improve attendance. But the

position of these interventions is often unsecure and unsustainable due to the lack of direct support from the Government. We recommend the Department commission research to test the link between sports-based interventions and improved attendance.

We also heard concerns about a decline in enrichment activities with £1 billion less spent on youth services in the last decade, but that measures such as arts, drama and music could too be used to improve school attendance. We recommend the Department should implement an enrichment guarantee for pupils in school, looking to the youth sector for best practice. This guarantee should have KPIs focusing on improving school attendance, and the Department should provide options for schools to incorporate this via an extended school day, should they wish to implement one.

Barriers to attendance for pupils with health difficulties

There are specific barriers to attendance for pupils with health difficulties. Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have significantly higher rates of absence than their peers, and the rate of absence in special schools is also higher than mainstream schools. Witnesses told us that pupils who have unmet SEND needs face issues with attendance, due to the lack of resource available in mainstream schools. We also heard that some pupils with SEND are being placed in alternative provision without a proper understanding or assessment of their needs. We urge the Department to prioritise resource for the inclusion and assessment of SEND pupils in mainstream schools, and recommend that alternative provision should only be used as a time-limited intervention with clear structures to ensure each pupil's needs are being effectively supported.

We also heard that most absences for pupils with SEND tend to be authorised absences, particularly in special schools. We understand pupils with SEND have higher absences for legitimate and unavoidable reasons, thus distorting comparisons with other cohorts. We recommend the Department take greater care when reporting these statistics to avoid unhelpful comparisons. We also recommend the Department should use attendance and engagement as key metrics of educational outcomes for SEND pupils, whilst taking the specific barriers they face into account.

More pupils have experienced mental health challenges since the pandemic, and this has had a negative impact on their school attendance. The Department should lead a cross-government assessment of the scale of mental-health difficulties. Pupils are struggling to access support for mental health, via the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), due to extremely long waiting lists. The current capacity of mental health services to support pupils is clearly grossly inadequate, and the Department must review the current provision of support available. The Department should as a minimum, resource any required funding needed to ensure it reaches its aim of providing senior mental health lead training for every 11+ educational setting in England, by 2025. The Department should work with the Department for Health and Social Care to report the findings of its review on the scale of mental health challenges and the support available, by summer 2024.

Whilst the Department has issued non-statutory guidance on mental health in schools, it needs to do more to improve its offer for these pupils. We heard that the Department

does not separately record absences for pupils with mental health difficulties, and therefore mental health-related absences are not commonly authorised by schools due to requirement to provide medical evidence, which can often lead to fines or prosecution for families. We recommend the introduction of an authorised mental health absence code with clear thresholds for its use, which could eliminate the need for medical evidence in cases of known mental health difficulties and reduce the need for intervention via prosecution.

Illness was the primary reason for pupil absence before covid-19 and remains so. But parental attitudes to illness and attendance have shifted and we have heard some evidence that Government messaging has been inconsistent. As a result, the illness absence rate is considerably higher now than it was pre-pandemic. We recommend the Department should launch a targeted public information campaign to guide parents on when and when not children who are unwell should attend school.

Barriers to attendance for certain groups of pupils

Transport and uniform costs were identified as barriers to school attendance, especially with recent pressure on the cost of living. Although the Department provides extra support to low-income families, such as help with transport costs, it is clear from our evidence that families are not widely taking up these programmes, and therefore, they are not acting as a solution to these barriers. We recommend the Department review its framework for supporting low-income families in meeting the costs of school attendance. We also recommend that the Department should implement better signposting to ensure local authorities, schools and families are aware of these measures.

We heard evidence that pupils with English as an additional language, or migrant pupils, face some specific barriers to attendance. Although we asked if pupils from other ethnic minority groups faced barriers to attendance, we found little research or evidence on the topic. There is clear evidence to suggest pupils from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community face significant barriers to attendance. Whilst the Department is aware of this, not enough is being done to support this pupil cohort, and community interventions appear to be filling the gap in localised areas. We recommend the Department continue to work with stakeholders from the GRT community and using examples of best practice, roll out measures on a national scale to support this pupil cohort.

1 Introduction

Our inquiry

1. Government statistics have shown that covid-19 has had a damaging effect on school attendance, lasting well behind the period of restrictions relating to the pandemic, so we decided to investigate the causes and possible solutions to the growing issue of children's absence from school. We launched our inquiry into Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils in January 2023.¹

2. We received more than 200 written submissions, and held four oral evidence sessions, taking evidence from a wide range of witnesses including local authority representatives, the Children's Commissioner for England and third sector organisations. In our final oral evidence session, we examined the Minister for Schools, the Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, and Graham Archer, the Interim Director General for Families at the Department for Education. We also held an informal engagement roundtable, where frontline service practitioners and education representatives shared their experiences. We also heard directly from young people. We are grateful to all those who contributed to our inquiry: their views have informed our thinking.

What is pupil absence?

3. Local authority-maintained schools must meet for at least 380 sessions or 190 days (approximately 39 weeks) during any school year to educate their pupils, whilst academy and free school funding agreements state that the duration of the school day and sessions are the responsibility of the academy trust.² Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day—once at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session.³ In their register, schools are required to record whether pupils are:

- absent,
- attending an approved educational activity,
- present, or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.⁴

Where a pupil of compulsory school age is absent, schools have a responsibility to:

- ascertain the reason,
- ensure the proper safeguarding action is taken,
- indicate in their register whether the absence is authorised by the school or unauthorised, and

1 UK Parliament, [Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils](#), accessed 06 September 2023

2 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023

3 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023

4 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023

- identify the correct code (See Chapter 3) to use before entering it on to the school's electronic register, or management information system which is then used to download data to the school census.⁵

The Department for Education (hereafter the Department or DfE) monitors pupil absence levels using two key measures—overall absence and persistent absence.⁶

Box 1: Absence definitions

- **Overall absence** is the aggregated total of all authorised and unauthorised absences.
- **Authorised absence** is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised school representative - including absences where a satisfactory explanation has been provided.
- **Unauthorised absence** is absence without permission from the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences and arrivals after registration has closed.
- **Persistent absence** is when a pupil enrolment's overall absence equates to 10% or more of their possible sessions.
- **Severe absence** is when a pupil enrolment's overall absence equates to 50% or more of their possible sessions.

Source: Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023

The rate of absence

4. The most recent full-year statistics on pupil attendance, published in March 2023, cover the 2021/22 academic year.⁷ They showed:

- An overall absence rate of 7.6%, up from around 4–5% pre-pandemic.
- 5.5% of missed sessions were authorised absences and 2.1% were unauthorised.
- Authorised illness was the main driver at 4.4%, whilst the unauthorised holiday rate was 0.4%.
- 22.5% of pupils were persistently absent, around double the pre-pandemic rate (see Figure 1).
- 1.7% of all pupils were severely absent compared to fewer than 1% pre-pandemic).⁸

5 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023. See Chapter 2 for further details regarding the School Census.

6 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023. These key measures are calculated for pupils who are of compulsory school age - i.e. aged between 5 and 15 as at the start of the academic year (31 August)

7 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023. The Department publishes pupil attendance data in periodic National Statistical Releases and via the Pupil Attendance Dashboard (see also Chapter 2)

8 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

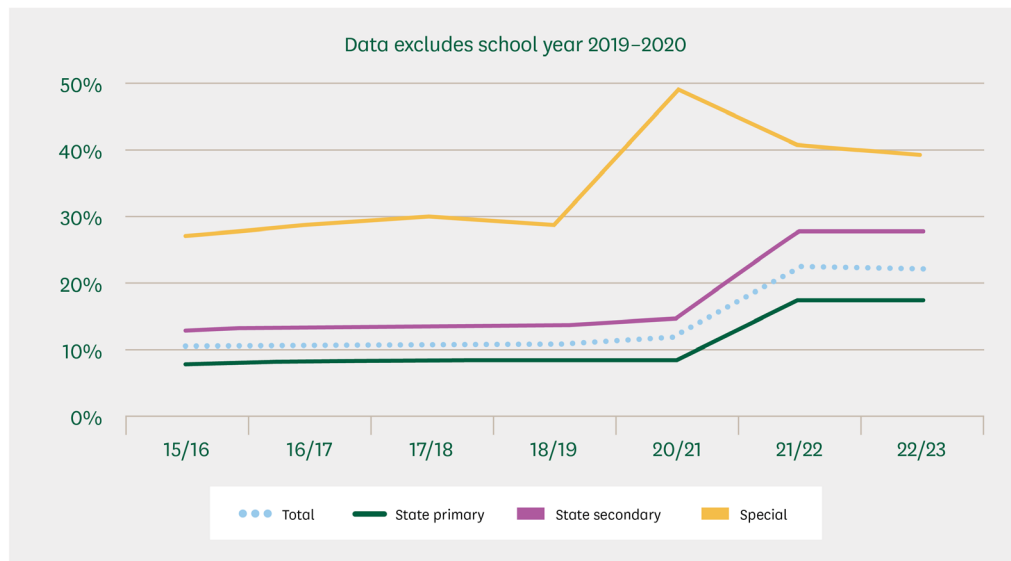
5. The most recent National Statistical release available relates to the Autumn term 2022/23.⁹ The overall absence rates and splits between authorised and non-authorised were very similar to 2021/22—7.5% overall—but the persistent absence rate was slightly higher, at 24.2% of pupils.¹⁰

6. Experimental attendance statistics from the pupil attendance dashboard for the academic year 2022/23 were published on 10 August 2023 (see Chapter 2).¹¹ These figures are derived from regular data automatically submitted to the Department by participating schools. They show that the overall absence rate for the 2022/23 academic year remained steady at 7.5%, with an authorised absence rate of 5.0% and an unauthorised absence rate of 2.5%.¹² The persistent absence rate was 22.3%, showing a small decrease since the Autumn term.¹³

7. Persistent absence rates vary between different types of schools (see Figure 1). The rates are significantly higher in special schools (we discuss the causes of this in Chapter 6). With the increased demand for statistics and data to measure the impact of covid-19, the Department changed its data gathering and release practices, focussing efforts on priority analysis and statistics.¹⁴ Therefore, the full-year 2019/20 releases were cancelled.¹⁵

Figure 1: Persistent absence rate by school type, 2015/16 to 2022/23 ¹⁶

Persistent absence rates by school type in England, 2015–2023



Source: Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023, and Department for Education, [Pupil attendance in schools](#), accessed 06 September 2023

9 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 2022/23](#), accessed 06 September 2023
 10 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 2022/23](#), accessed 06 September 2023
 11 Department for Education, [Pupil attendance in schools](#), accessed 06 September 2023
 12 Department for Education, [Pupil attendance in schools](#), accessed 06 September 2023
 13 Department for Education, [Pupil attendance in schools](#), accessed 06 September 2023
 14 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023
 15 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023
 16 Please note that data for the 2022/23 academic year is derived from the pupil attendance dashboard which is experimental data, whereas 2015/16 to 2021/22 is from the school census and badged as National Statistics. The 2019/20 data releases were cancelled due to the covid-19 pandemic

Concerns around school attendance

8. Any absence leads to lost learning for pupils. Given the time that was lost to education during the pandemic, it is of great concern that absence rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. As highlighted by the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts inquiry into *Education Recovery in Schools*, “the disruption to schooling was one of the most serious consequences of the pandemic, leading to lost learning for many pupils”.¹⁷

9. Prior to the impact of the pandemic, absence and persistent absence had been gradually declining since 2010. Since then, the persistent absence rate has doubled with no sign of a return to this trajectory.¹⁸ The Department told us:

Attending school is critically important for children’s life chances, including their attainment, wellbeing, safety and wider development. School attendance had improved since 2010, but the pandemic and its aftermath significantly damaged attendance levels. The pandemic caused higher levels of sickness absence, and exacerbated existing problems with persistent absence, with vulnerable children particularly affected.¹⁹

10. The Children’s Commissioner’s Office (CCO) has had a focus on attendance, recently through its *Attendance Audit*.²⁰ This research involved surveying local authorities, interviewing stakeholders and discussions with children themselves.²¹ The CCO sought “to speak to children missing from and struggling to engage with education and find out what they need to get back into school”.²² Dame Rachel De Souza, Children’s Commissioner for England, said:

The audit has investigated all levels of the education system and has prioritised children’s voices and experiences throughout. I have seen clearly that children aren’t absent from school because they don’t want to learn. On the contrary, they are desperate to learn but everyday thousands of children find themselves without the support that they need to engage in education and attend school.²³

11. The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a think-tank researching social justice issues, has produced a number of publications on absence since 2021, including its *School Absence Tracker*, a termly analysis of official data relating to absence from schools.²⁴ The first iteration of the tracker reported that:

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

17 Committee of Public Accounts, Fifty-fifth Report of Session 2022–23, [Education recovery in schools in England](#), HC 998

18 Source: Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

19 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

20 The Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England, [Voices of England’s Missing Children: The findings of the Children’s Commissioner’s Attendance Audit](#), June 2022

21 The Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England, [Voices of England’s Missing Children: The findings of the Children’s Commissioner’s Attendance Audit](#), June 2022

22 Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England ([PA0148](#))

23 Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England ([PA0148](#))

24 Centre for Social Justice, [School Absence Tracker](#), accessed 06 September 2023

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.²⁵

12. The Schools Minister said that absence jumped because of the pandemic.²⁶ He added that absence was now declining but was “still unacceptably high” and that the Department was “taking a range of measures to bring it back down to pre-pandemic levels”.²⁷ At Education Questions on 17 July 2023, Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education, said:

Termly persistent absence fell by a fifth from summer last year to spring this year, with 350,000 fewer persistently absent pupils, but we know we still have more to do, and it is a top priority for me.²⁸

However, using the more accurate School Census data to compare absence rates from Autumn 2021/22 and Autumn 2022/23, shows the persistent absence rate had in fact risen over the period, from 22.5% to 24.2% across all schools in England.²⁹ While the spring figures from the dashboard may indicate a welcome reduction, it is not yet clear whether this will be reflected in the full year school census data, or will be sustained into the future.

13. The rate of absence in schools in England has increased significantly since the pandemic. It is of great concern that absence rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. The Department recognises the problem, which is encouraging, but there has been no significant improvement in the speed and scale of the rate of reduction which is needed to prevent long-term harm to pupils.

25 Centre for Social Justice, [School Absence Tracker](#), May 2023, p3

26 [Q187](#)

27 [Q187](#)

28 HC Deb, 17 July 2023, [col 603](#) [Commons Chamber]

29 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England for the academic year 2021/22](#) accessed 06 September 2023; Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 2022/23](#), accessed 06 September 2023

2 The Department's outlook

How the Department monitors attendance data

14. Historically the Department publishes termly and annual pupil attendance data and statistics via three National Statistics releases each year.³⁰ The data used to publish absence statistics is collected via the School Census.³¹ Alongside attendance statistics, the School Census is also used to gather wider information such as pupil background, special educational needs, free school meals eligibility, and educational history.³² All schools must complete the School Census. The Department describes this data collection as a “lifetime school record”.³³

15. More recently, the Department established a data pilot via an interactive dashboard, known as the Pupil Attendance Dashboard.³⁴ The Department said this will enable them to “establish a better, more timely flow of pupil level attendance data”.³⁵ On 21 July 2023, approximately 78% of schools used the pupil attendance dashboard to share attendance data.³⁶

16. Alice Wilcock, Head of Education at the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), welcomed the introduction of the dashboard and its widespread usage by schools.³⁷ But she noted “that does leave about 20% of schools that are not, and they are the schools that local authorities are most concerned that they cannot get their eyes on”.³⁸ She argued for “a big push to make that statutory”.³⁹

17. However, the Information Commissioner's Office raised concerns about the dashboard.⁴⁰ It said the Department had initially failed to meet its legal obligation to provide a Data Protection Impact Assessment before it began storing information.⁴¹ A Freedom of Information request shows the Department was also asked to pause the collection and carry out a risk assessment, but the Department declined to do so.⁴²

18. Citing the Department's failure to provide a Data Impact Protection Assessment for the dashboard to the Information Commissioner's Office in a timely manner.⁴³

30 Autumn term data and statistics – published in May, Autumn and spring terms data and statistics – published in October, Full year data and statistics – published in March. Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023

31 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023

32 Department for Education, [The School Census – what you need to know](#), accessed 06 September 2023

33 Department for Education, [The School Census – what you need to know](#), accessed 06 September 2023

34 Department for Education, [Pupil attendance in schools](#), accessed 06 September 2023

35 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

36 Department for Education, [DfE pupil attendance and absence in schools in England: data dashboard](#), accessed 06 September 2023

37 [Q23 \(evidence taken March 2023\)](#)

38 [Q23](#)

39 [Q23](#)

40 Defend Digital Me, [Challenging the Department for Education on excessive pupil data collection](#), accessed 06 September 2023

41 Defend Digital Me, [Challenging the Department for Education on excessive pupil data collection](#), accessed 06 September 2023

42 Defend Digital Me, [Challenging the Department for Education on excessive pupil data collection](#), accessed 06 September 2023

43 No to Schools Bill Campaign ([PA0211](#))

19. The Department said that its intention was “for the data pilot to be made mandatory in due course, and longer-term, for this new method of data sharing to replace existing statutory attendance data returns, including eventually the school census”.⁴⁴ When we questioned the Minister about the dashboard, he said:

It has been very successful on a voluntary basis. Such a high proportion of schools voluntarily supply their data. I think we will ultimately move to mandation. We do not have a timescale for that. It is a very successful project. It does not place any undue administrative burden on the schools. We scrape the data—I think that is the technical phrase—and that is incredibly useful in spotting trends and things that we did not know about in the past.⁴⁵

The Director General explained that before mandation, the Department want “to make progress with the 19% first so that we are clear that this is a process that is owned and understood by the whole sector”.⁴⁶ When we asked about the Department’s intention to replace the School Census with data collected via the dashboard, he said the Department was currently testing the two against each other, and it intended to conduct more testing once it had “more established census data”.⁴⁷ He also said, “I think the dashboard will be the more effective [method]”, and “because of its frequency, granularity and the way you can draw it straight into the Department’s systems, the daily data programme is the future”.⁴⁸

20. We welcome the daily attendance data pilot, the Department’s intention to mandate schools’ participation, and to replace the School Census. *Given that around 80% of schools have been successfully using the dashboard over the last academic year, for consistency, we recommend the Department make use of the dashboard mandatory as soon as possible, subject to a successful evaluation of the pilot and addressing any remaining concerns about data management, in conversation with the Information Communications Office.*

A register of children not in school

21. We recently considered a statutory register for children in elective home education during our inquiry into Home Education, which concluded in July 2021. We heard “there was no single definitive figure for the number of children and young people being educated at home”.⁴⁹ We concluded a statutory register to identify children outside of school was necessary.⁵⁰ This was accepted by the Government.⁵¹

22. Subsequently the Schools Bill, published 12 May 2022, included proposals for a local authority-administered register for children not in school.⁵² However, during the accountability session with the Secretary of State on 7 December 2022, Gillian Keegan

44 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

45 [Q191](#)

46 [Q193](#)

47 [Q194](#)

48 [Q194](#)

49 Education Committee, Third Report of Session 2021–22, [Strengthening Home Education](#), HC84, para 29–43

50 Education Committee, Third Report of Session 2021–22, [Strengthening Home Education](#), HC84, para 39

51 Education Committee, First Special Report of Session, 2021–22, [Strengthening Home Education: Government Response to the Committee’s Third Report](#), HC823, para 9

52 Department for Education, [Everything you need to know about the Schools Bill](#), accessed 06 September 2023

MP confirmed that the Schools Bill would not progress.⁵³ When asked specifically about the register, she said, “I know that has been something the Committee has been pushing. Let us just say, we have heard your concerns and it is definitely a priority”.⁵⁴

23. Whilst recorded absences refer to pupils who are on a school roll, several stakeholders responding to this inquiry called on the Government to legislate for a register of children who are not in school.⁵⁵ The Local Government Association (LGA) said councils were unable to fulfil their duty of ensuring every child is receiving education as many remain invisible.⁵⁶ It said:

The introduction of the register would help improve data and the visibility of all children who are out of school within a local area, allowing councils to share information with specified agencies in relation to safeguarding concerns.⁵⁷

The LGA was “disappointed the Department has taken the decision to abandon the [Schools] Bill”, adding that it is “vital that the Government implements the register through other legislative means”.⁵⁸ The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) also supported the creation of a register of children not in school and welcomed “the commitment from the Secretary of State that the introduction of a register remains a priority”.⁵⁹

24. Some stakeholders voiced privacy-related concerns about a register. The No to Schools Bill Campaign said that in combination with daily attendance data, the register would give “Whitehall an unprecedented and unwarranted level of surveillance over all children of school age in England”.⁶⁰

25. Mrs Flick Drummond, MP for Meon Valley and member of this Committee, presented a Private Members’ Bill under the Ten Minute Rule on 16 May 2023 on this subject with cross-party support.⁶¹ The next stage for the Bill, Second reading, is scheduled to take place on 24 November 2023, but as the House is not expected to sit on this day and the current session is likely to expire before then, unless the Government were to adopt it, the current Bill is not likely to progress.⁶²

26. On 18 May 2023, the Department launched a call for evidence on ways to “improve the way children missing education are identified and supported”.⁶³ It said:

The Government is committed to ensuring that all children, especially the most vulnerable in our society, are safe and have access to an excellent education [...] there is currently variation in how the sector identifies

53 [Oral evidence taken on 7 December 2022](#), HC58, Q237

54 [Oral evidence taken on 7 December 2022](#), HC58, Q237

55 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023

56 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#))

57 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#))

58 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#))

59 Equality and Human Rights Commission ([PA0167](#))

60 No to Schools Bill Campaign ([PA0211](#))

61 [Children not in school \(register\) Bill](#). Ten-Minute Rule Bills are unlikely to become law, but are a way of drawing attention to an issue that requires a change in the law and speaking about it in the Chamber.

62 [Children not in school \(register\) Bill](#). Bills that have not completed all stages fall at the end of a parliamentary session. The same Bill may be reintroduced in a new session.

63 Department for Education, [Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support](#), accessed 06 September 2023

and supports CME [children missing education], and we want to ensure that everybody has the information, skills and tools they need to do this effectively.⁶⁴

27. When asked, the Minister told us introducing a register remained a priority. He said, “we do not have a legislative vehicle to introduce it, but we are still committed to doing so.”⁶⁵ The Prime Minister reiterated the commitment when examined by the Liaison Committee. He said:

We remain committed to introducing a statutory local authority register for children, as well as a duty for local authorities to provide support to home-educating families. We will look to legislate at a suitable opportunity, again, without pre-empting fourth session legislation.⁶⁶

28. The Department monitoring daily school attendance is a welcome step, but further monitoring is needed to identify and support those children not receiving a formal education. We have repeatedly called for a register of children not in school and were glad to see it in the Schools Bill. Although the Bill has been dropped, the Secretary of State, the Minister for Schools and the Prime Minister have committed to bringing forward a register, with timescales yet to be announced.

29. We urge the Government to deliver on its commitment to introduce a register of children not in school to be fully operational for the 2024/25 academic year. We therefore expect the Government to include a suitable legislative vehicle in the next King’s Speech, if it has not already availed itself of the opportunity to adopt a Private Members Bill already before the House.

64 Department for Education, [Improving support for children missing education - call for evidence May to July 2023](#), May 2023, p6

65 [Q201](#)

66 Oral evidence taken 4 July 2023, HC (2022–23) 1602, [Q104](#) [The Prime Minister]

3 Expectations for attendance

Guidance on attendance

30. Following a consultation, in May 2022 the Government published *Working together to improve school attendance*.⁶⁷ This is non-statutory guidance intended to “help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance”.⁶⁸ It applied to schools from September 2022. Although the Schools Bill was subsequently dropped, the Department said that:

Following public consultation earlier this year, and subject to Parliament, the Secretary of State has committed to this guidance becoming statutory when parliamentary time allows (this will be no sooner than September 2023).⁶⁹

The Department had said the guidance would also be updated and reissued ahead of academic year 2023–2024.⁷⁰ However, when schools returned for the 2023/24 academic year, the Department did not reissue the guidance.

Is the guidance adequate?

31. We heard mixed reactions to the guidance. School-Home Support, a national charity that advocates for whole-family support, welcomed the guidance, and “in particular, the improved language around, and focus on, early intervention and whole family support to tackle the root causes of absence both within and beyond the school gate”.⁷¹ It added that “where it is followed, it will help to encourage best practice on the best way to tackle attendance issues”.⁷² Catch 22, a national charity that delivers public services, said its schools followed the guidance “to the letter” noting a positive impact on attendance.⁷³ YoungMinds, a charity focussed on children and young people’s mental health, also welcomed the guidance.⁷⁴ It was:

Pleased to see the section on building strong relationships with families [...] It was also encouraging to see the guidance recognise the need to remove the in-school barriers that pupils with SEND and pupils with mental health conditions face, such as by considering support or reasonable adjustments.⁷⁵

32. Others were less positive. Ambitious about Autism, a national charity advocating for autistic children and young people, said the guidance was a move in the right direction,

67 Department for Education, [School attendance consultation response](#), accessed 06 September 2023; Department for Education, [Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities](#), May 2022

68 Department for Education, [Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities](#), May 2022, p5

69 Department for Education, [Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities](#), May 2022, p5

70 Department for Education, [Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities](#), May 2022, p5

71 School- Home Support ([PA0089](#))

72 School- Home Support ([PA0089](#))

73 Catch22 (29178) ([PA0097](#))

74 YoungMinds ([PA0104](#))

75 YoungMinds ([PA0104](#))

but did not “go far enough towards recognising and addressing the barriers autistic pupils face”.⁷⁶ It recommended referencing the SEND Code of Practice.⁷⁷ When discussing multi-agency work, the NASUWT, a trade union representing teachers and headteachers, said it felt the Department had not done enough to “clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of parents, schools, academy trusts, governing bodies and local authorities”.⁷⁸ Square Peg, a community interest company focussing on school attendance difficulties, reported that its partner organisation Not Fine in School, which supports parents with pupils who are absent, had seen a 70% increase in membership since schools started implementing the guidance.⁷⁹ Ellie Costello, Director at Square Peg maintained it had “grave concerns about the impact of the non-statutory guidance”.⁸⁰

33. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), a charity focussing on children in poverty, made several recommendations regarding the guidance, including that “it should be informed by evidence-based strategies to tackle absenteeism amongst disadvantaged pupils”.⁸¹ The Anti-Bullying Alliance, a coalition with over 50 members and part of the National Children’s Bureau, argued the guidance should focus more on bullying, including expectations for supporting school staff to have a good understanding of a school’s approach to bullying.⁸² Contact, a charity representing the families of disabled children, said the guidance should be updated to mandate compliance with, rather than just consideration of, the Equality Act 2010.⁸³

Attendance codes

34. Attendance codes are used by schools to record and monitor attendance and absence in a consistent way. The Department said the codes help to gain “a greater understanding of the level of, and the reason for, absence and the delivery of education”.⁸⁴ However, we heard of inconsistent usage and shortcomings in regulation.⁸⁵ The LGA said that “the current accountability framework, and particularly the focus of current measures of school performance” is creating pressures within schools, and to manage this, some schools have used “practices to influence which students are admitted or practices designed to manage children out of the school, such as the inappropriate use of attendance codes”.⁸⁶ The Children’s Commissioner told us about her concerns with the use of the B Code:

The B code is meant to be used when pupils are present but at an off-site educational activity that has been approved by the school. This code is not

76 Ambitious about Autism ([PA0179](#))

77 The SEND code of practice is statutory on the Special education needs and disability (SEND) for children and young people aged 0 to 25. The code explains the duties of local authorities, health bodies, schools and colleges to provide for those with special educational needs under part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014. See [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#) for further details, accessed 06 September 2023; Ambitious about Autism ([PA0179](#))

78 NASUWT - The Teachers’ Union ([PA0098](#))

79 Square Peg ([PA0218](#))

80 [Q74](#)

81 Child Poverty Action Group ([PA0113](#))

82 Anti-Bullying Alliance (National Children’s Bureau) ([PA0125](#))

83 Contact for families with disabled children ([PA0149](#))

84 Department for Education, [Working together to improve school attendance](#), May 2022, p55.

85 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#)), Association of School and College Leaders ([PA0201](#)), Contact for families with disabled children ([PA0149](#))

86 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#))

meant to be used for kids who are at home working. It is meant to be used if they are in alternative provision but still on the school roll. I am seeing great inconsistency in use of the B code.⁸⁷

Alice Wilcock added:

We have heard of some settings using that to send children home to work from home, saying they have been B-coded but they are not. They are not in an educational setting; they are just at home. We have also heard of B coding ... for minor misdemeanours. Schools that are now scared about being caught for minor misdemeanours are saying they will B code rather than put it down as a job registration.⁸⁸

35. Some witnesses called for an attendance code of practice.⁸⁹ Ellie Costello said “we are calling for an attendance code of practice, an important piece of work that would offer some assurance and reassurance in the same way that the SEND code of practice does.”⁹⁰ We raised this with the Minister and Director General.⁹¹ The Director General said “working to drive clarity is obviously a good and sensible thing to do”.⁹²

Should the guidance be statutory?

36. At the engagement event we held for this inquiry, participants from the Northern Education Trust said guidance should be statutory.⁹³ Essex County Council told us that “this guidance needs to be placed onto a statutory footing, as soon as possible, to ensure that all LAs [local authorities]/agencies and schools prioritise attendance”.⁹⁴ The PLACE Network, a network that works to support parents and carers in their involvement with children’s and young people’s mental health, said the guidance was helpful and supportive, but “the main problem parents experience is that schools are not yet following this guidance”.⁹⁵ It recommended a “rigorous promotion of this guidance”.⁹⁶ The CSJ argued “the guidance is not being picked up by all the relevant agencies because it’s not statutory”, and recommended that it should be made so.⁹⁷

37. Dr Daniel Stavrou, Vice Policy Chair at the Special Educational Consortium (SEC), a membership organisation advocating for the rights of disabled children, said:

We believe there should be some statutory guidance in the form of a code of practice on attendance. However, to be clear, we do not think that the May 2022 guidance should be it. We think there needs to be a form of accountability that is much more geared towards and focused on inclusive practice.⁹⁸

87 [Q13](#)

88 [Q14](#)

89 Special Educational Consortium ([PA0168](#))

90 [Q80](#)

91 [Q200](#)

92 [Q200](#)

93 Education Select Committee ([PA0235](#))

94 Essex County Council ([PA0171](#))

95 Place Network, Charlie Waller Trust ([PA0110](#))

96 Place Network, Charlie Waller Trust ([PA0110](#))

97 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))

98 [Q80](#)

We heard that providing evidence to authorise mental health-related absences can be challenging.⁹⁹ Mind, a mental health charity, argued that any statutory guidance should recognise the barriers that young people face in providing medical evidence.¹⁰⁰ Vicki Nash, Associate Director of External Relations at Mind, added that any statutory guidance would need a cross-government approach.¹⁰¹

38. We asked the Minister whether the Government still intended to make the guidance statutory. He said it did but, as with the register of children not in education, there was no immediate legislative vehicle to do that.¹⁰² He undertook, however, to consider our recommendations seriously.¹⁰³

Funding implications of statutory guidance and consistency of support provided by local authorities

39. Alongside the guidance, the Department also published advice to local authorities via a new burdens assessment, outlining “the minimum attendance support offer local authorities are expected to provide pupils and families in their area”, to improve the consistency of support.¹⁰⁴ The advice states that local authorities should rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance, have a school attendance support team available to all schools free of charge, and monitor the attendance of children with a social worker, through their virtual school head.¹⁰⁵

40. The LGA told us that while it supported of the new advice, “the proposals will mean a significant increase in workload for councils”.¹⁰⁶ It said:

School attendance teams are already stretched to capacity, and we are concerned that the new burdens assessment does not accurately capture the level of resource that will be required to deliver the reforms effectively.¹⁰⁷

The LGA said the burdens assessment gathered evidence from only four councils, and all four of those councils already provide core attendance functions from their existing budget.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the LGA concluded:

This sample, therefore, does not accurately reflect the level of service that councils are able to provide within their existing budgets and therefore does not capture how challenging it will be for councils to provide a significantly expanded offer within their existing budgets.¹⁰⁹

99 Mind ([PA0216](#)), Contact for families with disabled children ([PA0149](#))

100 Mind ([PA0216](#))

101 [Q80](#)

102 [Q195](#)

103 [Q196](#)

104 Department for Education, [School attendance, improving the consistency of support: new burdens assessment](#), accessed 06 September 2023

105 A Virtual School Head is a role within the local authority, they are in charge of promoting the educational achievement of all the children looked after by the local authority they work for. Department for Education, [Working together to improve school attendance](#), May 2022, pp25–31

106 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#))

107 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#))

108 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#))

109 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#))

Essex County Council also welcomed the advice, and said if the reforms were fully implemented, they should have a significant impact on improving attendance.¹¹⁰ But, it also told us that without ring-fenced funding, it was unclear how it will be able to meet the expectations set out within the advice.¹¹¹ Essex County Council provided a worked example on the resources shortfall to meet the Department's expectations:

The burdens assessment paper relating to these reforms, produced by the DfE, states there should be one LA attendance officer for each 5,800 pupils. In Essex we currently have eight attendance officers and, if this burdens assessment is to be adhered to, we will need to increase this team to at least forty officers to be able to provide the comprehensive, effective service which meets the expectations set out within the DfE's updated guidance. We will not be able to achieve this level of staffing without additional ring-fenced funding.¹¹²

41. To identify the gaps in support, participants who gave evidence at the engagement event recommended that the Department should conduct an audit of local authority services.¹¹³ One participant said:

So if we start with LA 'A' down to LA 'Z', fill out an audit of, what does your local offer for vulnerable children look like around attendance? Coordinate that back to the Working Together guidance. That'll give us a holistic picture of perhaps where gaps are and whether these teams are big enough.¹¹⁴

Education welfare officers

42. As part of discussions surrounding consistency of support provided by local authorities, we also heard the availability of Education Welfare Officers has reduced.¹¹⁵ The CSJ told us that:

Previously, all LAs had Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) who would conduct attendance home visits but since the money has been devolved to schools this resource has diminished. Schools now must pay for EWOs, where they exist, as a traded good.¹¹⁶

We also heard that some local authorities were charging schools for support from Education Welfare Officers.¹¹⁷ The Office of the Bedfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner told us its pilot to reduce persistent absenteeism helped to "plug gaps [...] given the direct costs and shortage of Education Welfare Officers".¹¹⁸ At our engagement event, one participant told us "the ability for local authorities to charge schools for the services of an Education Welfare Officer or EWO or an equivalent, for me, needs to be stopped, and these services funded centrally".¹¹⁹

110 Essex County Council ([PA0171](#))

111 Essex County Council ([PA0171](#))

112 Essex County Council ([PA0171](#))

113 Education Select Committee ([PA0235](#))

114 Education Select Committee ([PA0235](#))

115 Education Select Committee ([PA0235](#))

116 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))

117 Education Select Committee ([PA0235](#))

118 Bedfordshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner ([PA0152](#))

119 Education Select Committee ([PA0235](#))

43. We raised concerns with the Minister over the reduction of Education Welfare Officers.¹²⁰ The Minister said there are other roles supporting pupils such as virtual school heads and attendance advisers.¹²¹ The Minister also said:

There could be a nomenclature issue with whether a local authority calls the role “education welfare officer” or something else. Local authorities have duties that transcend the autonomy of schools and those duties have not been changed.¹²²

The Director General added:

The approach is very much to work with local partnerships within the existing legislative framework, which gives local authorities both responsibilities and flexibility in how they work. What works in Kent may be a bit different from what works in Wokingham. We want to be a bit careful about that.¹²³

44. We heard mixed reactions to the guidance working together to improve school attendance. Whilst witnesses agreed guidance on a statutory footing is needed to improve attendance, we heard from a number of witnesses that the guidance in its current form may require revisions. The Department initially planned to revise the guidance ahead of the 2023/24 academic year and said it would place the guidance on a statutory footing when parliamentary time allows, but neither has been completed.

45. The Department should implement statutory guidance to be applicable from September 2024. When revising the guidance, we recommend the Department should consult carefully with stakeholders, particularly those representing SEND pupils and their families, and pupils suffering from poor mental health. It should also ensure greater clarity regarding the use of attendance codes. Following a new burdens assessment, the Department should allocate ring-fenced funding for local authorities to meet the expectations of the statutory guidance.

46. We heard that support offered by local authorities can vary significantly. For example, since the funding for Education Welfare Officers has been devolved to schools, it has become a “traded good” for most schools, and a postcode lottery for pupils. We understand the Department has recently conducted a new burdens assessment to improve the consistency of support offered by local authorities, but not all local authorities have the resource to effectively provide the required level of support. Ultimately, the Department must ensure that all schools across the country can access good support in tackling persistent absence.

47. The Department should conduct an audit of support provided by local authorities to tackle persistent absence. As part of this, the Department should make an assessment of the impact of providing funding for Education Welfare Officers through schools, compared to centrally funding such roles.

120 [Q206](#)

121 [Q207](#)

122 [Q222](#)

123 [Q222](#)

4 Government interventions

Legal interventions

48. The Department can use a range of legal interventions if support measures fail to improve attendance. Some witnesses told us, however, that legal interventions can be ineffective, overly-punitive and inappropriate.¹²⁴ When a child is regularly not attending school without ‘good reason’, i.e. an unauthorised absence, parents may be subjected to measures used by schools or local authorities, including:

- Parenting Orders,
- Education Supervision Orders,
- School Attendance Orders,
- Fines, or
- Prosecution.¹²⁵

49. The Department explained the circumstances in which legal intervention might be used:

In most complex cases, local agencies working together is the right approach to tackle attendance problems. There are also some cases where support is not appropriate, such as a term time holiday without permission, or where an intervention hasn’t worked. In these circumstances, there is a role for the use of legal intervention to secure a pupil’s regular attendance.¹²⁶

The Department also outlined that according to internal research, for areas with higher-than-average rates of absence for the levels of disadvantage in their area, local authorities make “appropriate use of the full range of legal powers, including education supervision orders and parenting contracts as well as fixed penalty notices and prosecutions”.¹²⁷

50. We heard there is an issue around consistency with the use of legal interventions. We raised concerns about fines being used as a first resort in Rotherham Council.¹²⁸ A review of its Education Welfare Service found that “requests for enforcement were being submitted without clear evidence that all strategies to support attendance and wider social and emotional wellbeing had been exhausted”.¹²⁹ The Minister said:

124 The National Autistic Society ([PA0075](#)), See also NASS (National Association for Independent Special Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools) ([PA0050](#)); Centre for Self Managed Learning ([PA0072](#)); The National Autistic Society ([PA0075](#)); Dr Geraldine Brown (Assistant Professor at Coventry University); Rona Epstein (Honorary Fellow at Coventry University); Dr Sarah O’Flynn (Principal Lecturer at Roehampton University) ([PA0084](#)); Child Poverty Action Group ([PA0113](#)); The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition ([PA0130](#)); Association of School and College Leaders ([PA0201](#)); No to Schools Bill Campaign ([PA0211](#)); Parentkind ([PA0213](#));

125 HM Government, [School attendance and absence](#), accessed 06 September 2023. See for full details

126 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

127 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

128 [Q212](#)

129 HM Government, [Rotherham Local Authority “School Attendance Matters Pathway” - Supporting Families Programme](#), accessed 06 September 2023

There was inconsistency between authorities in the approach to issuing fixed penalty notices. You will recall from the Schools Bill that we sought to have some consistency across local authorities in how they use the regulatory approach to get children into school.¹³⁰

We asked how the Department plans to do this in the absence of Schools Bill. The Minister said it would be done “through guidance and spreading best practice of local authorities”.¹³¹

51. Following public consultation in February 2022, the Secretary of State committed to introduce a new national framework for the use of fixed penalty notices for absence.¹³² From June-July 2022, the Government ran a consultation on *Modernising school attendance and admission registers and setting national thresholds for legal intervention*.¹³³ The consultation sought views on:

The thresholds for the national framework for the use of fixed penalty notices for absence and excluded pupils being in public places during the first 5 days of an exclusion that the government, intends to introduce, subject to Parliament.¹³⁴

52. The Department published its response to this consultation on 29 August 2023.¹³⁵ The Department said it “remains committed to improving the consistency of local approaches to enforcement” and that “comments will help inform work as it develops, including any future legislative changes”.¹³⁶

53. The CSJ found that according to local authorities, fines are used “as there is no other support available, so some areas over rely on fines to improve attendance”.¹³⁷ It recommended the Department “conduct a review into the effectiveness of fines and attendance prosecution, to examine the conditions under which these formal mechanisms can improve attendance.”¹³⁸ The Traveller Movement, an organisation aiming to bridge the gap between the GRT community and other stakeholders, questioned the effectiveness of fines and suggested that they should only be used as a last resort.¹³⁹ Its research revealed many schools are pushing for this sanction without having spoken to the families first.¹⁴⁰ CPAG told us:

Fining does not address the barriers that families face and adds to the difficult financial circumstances [...] Families have told us that they are

130 [Q212](#)

131 [Q213](#)

132 Department for Education, [Modernising school attendance and admission registers and setting national thresholds for legal intervention](#), June 2022, p3

133 Department for Education, [Modernising school attendance and admission registers and setting national thresholds for legal intervention](#), June 2022

134 Department for Education, [Modernising school attendance and admission registers and setting national thresholds for legal intervention](#), June 2022, p5

135 Department for Education, [School registers and national thresholds for legal intervention](#), accessed 06 September 2023

136 Department for Education, [School registers and national thresholds for legal intervention](#), p29

137 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))

138 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))

139 Traveller Movement ([PA0156](#))

140 Traveller Movement ([PA0156](#))

struggling more with school costs than previously—when families already face multiple hardships, fining is not an appropriate or compassionate response.¹⁴¹

54. The Minister explained that there is evidence that fines work, which can be seen from the reduction of absences from 2010 to just before the pandemic.¹⁴² He attributed this reduction to the increased level of fines introduced in 2012, as well as the change in the threshold for persistence absence.¹⁴³ He acknowledged that the barriers that pupils are currently facing have changed since the pandemic, and that the emphasis needs to be placed on helping families and children to overcome these barriers.¹⁴⁴ But he added “if families are not prepared to engage with that support, there is a case for using the regulatory route to make sure that children are attending school, because they all deserve an education”.¹⁴⁵

55. There is evidence that prior to the pandemic, fines played a role in reducing unauthorised absence. However, it is less clear if they are an effective deterrent for families who are facing some of the current barriers to attendance we have outlined. We heard that fines do not address the barriers that low-income families face and can be counterproductive by adding to difficult financial circumstances (as discussed in chapter 7). Families are struggling with high school costs, and in some cases, fining is not an appropriate, compassionate, or helpful response. It is clear fines and other legal measures have a use in some circumstances, but the Department does not monitor or regulate the use of fines and prosecution and what methods of support have been offered before they are applied. We also heard that they are used inconsistently due to local authority discretion. We understand the Department recognises this and consulted on the use of legal interventions in July 2022, but we are disappointed by the lack of urgency and action from the Department to effect change in its consultation response.

56. We recommend the Department instruct schools and local authorities to explore methods of support for pupils and families before the use of fines or prosecution, ensuring that legal intervention is a last resort only. The Department should be more explicit about this in its revisions to the guidance ‘Working together to improve school attendance’. These revisions should include a national framework for fines and prosecution, to ensure consistency between local authority use. We reiterate, the Department should legislate for this guidance to be made statutory.

141 Child Poverty Action Group ([PA0113](#))

142 [Q187](#)

143 The persistent absence measure was first introduced in 2005/06, where a pupil was identified as a persistent absentee if they missed around 20% or more of possible sessions. In 2010/11 this changed to 15% or more, and in 2015/16, this changed again to 10% or more of possible sessions. See [pupil absence methodology](#) for further details; [Q187](#)

144 [Q210](#)

145 [Q210](#)

The Attendance Action Alliance

57. The Attendance Action Alliance includes “national leaders from education, children’s social care, policing and allied services who have pledged to take steps to raise attendance and reduce persistent absence”.¹⁴⁶ The Minister told us what actions have been produced by the Alliance so far:

Dame Clare Gerada, president of the Royal College of GPs, has agreed principles for GPs regarding school attendance, so that GPs are giving priority to this when they are advising parents and children who come to see them. Commander Catherine Roper wrote to all chief police officers in England highlighting their role in safeguarding children and making sure that they are attending school. Isabelle Trowler, the chief social worker, ran a series of seminars to showcase best practice in local authority social care in making sure that children are back in school. There are some concrete outputs from those alliance meetings.¹⁴⁷

The Minister told us the pilot and consequential roll out of attendance hubs was also an output of the Alliance meetings.¹⁴⁸

Attendance hubs and attendance mentors

Attendance hubs

58. The first attendance hub was established by Rob Tarn, CEO of Northern Education Trust and member of the Attendance Action Alliance.¹⁴⁹ The Department described this as:

The first of a network of schools in different circumstances providing each other with peer support. The hub is based at the North Shore Academy in Stockton which has transformed its own attendance position from one of significant challenge to one of excellence. The hub brings together a network of nearly 60 school leaders in similar contexts to provide mutual advice, share effective practice and resources, and overcome common problems. This includes, for example, ensuring schools have well-established approaches, such as setting clear expectations of parents and pupils, meeting children at the gate, and following up unexplained absences on the first day. Participant schools within the hub are reporting improvements to their systems and processes.¹⁵⁰

59. On 18 May 2023, the Department announced an expansion to current attendance measures, including nine new attendance hubs from June 2023.¹⁵¹ The Department said new attendance hubs “will support up to 600 primary, secondary and alternative

146 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

147 [Q190](#)

148 [Q190](#)

149 Department for Education, [Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support](#), accessed 06 September 2023

150 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

151 Department for Education, [Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support](#), accessed 06 September 2023

provision schools in England to improve their attendance by sharing effective practice and practical resources”.¹⁵² The Department also said practice shared by hubs may include “rolling out automatic text messaging to parents where pupils do not attend school”, and that the findings from the expansion of the attendance hubs will determine whether the approach has the potential to be rolled out to other areas across the country.¹⁵³ Following the announcement, Rob Tarn said:

The increase in the number of attendance hubs and the number of schools involved in collaborative work will mean that many organisations need no longer feel alone and will have the ability to share their best practice whilst receiving ideas from others.¹⁵⁴

Julie McCulloch, Director of Policy at the Association of School and College Leaders, a trade union for education system leaders, said this “may be helpful, but this barely scratches the surface of this problem”.¹⁵⁵ She added:

We think that it [absence] is driven largely by a rising tide of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, which are exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. The government needs to provide solutions that address the root causes of absence. As ever, this is likely to take investment in terms of staffing and specialist mental health support.¹⁵⁶

The attendance mentors programme

60. The Department also announced on 18 May 2023 an expansion to the attendance mentoring programme.¹⁵⁷ During our accountability hearing with the Secretary of State, Gillian Keegan MP, on 7 December 2022, she mentioned that the Department had launched a £5 million attendance mentors pilot project:

Middlesbrough was the first area selected to take part. It is a scheme to combat those low school attendance rates, and then we will look to expand that to other areas of the country next year. What it does is provide one-to-one mentoring support to over 1,600 persistently and severely absent pupils over a three-year period. It tackles the factors behind non-attendance such as bullying or mental health issues, as well as that feeling of just being too far behind, and that is the actual tutoring aspect of it.¹⁵⁸

The expansion of the attendance mentors programme, delivered by children’s charity Barnardo’s, will see “trained mentors work directly with 1,665 persistently and severely absent children and their families across Knowsley, Doncaster, Stoke-on-Trent and

152 Department for Education, [Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support](#), accessed 06 September 2023

153 Department for Education, [Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support](#), accessed 06 September 2023

154 Department for Education, [Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support](#), accessed 06 September 2023

155 Association for School and College Leaders, [ASCL responds to government’s press release on new pupil attendance measures](#), accessed 06 September 2023

156 Association for School and College Leaders, [ASCL responds to government’s press release on new pupil attendance measures](#), accessed 06 September 2023

157 Department for Education, [Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support](#), accessed 06 September 2023

158 [Oral evidence taken on 7 December 2022](#) (2022–23), HC58, Q268

Salford to understand and overcome the barriers to attendance and support them back into school”.¹⁵⁹ Mentors will begin working with children and families in the new areas from September.¹⁶⁰

61. Before the announcement was made, the CSJ welcomed the attendance pilot in Middlesbrough, but recommended the Department should roll out a national programme of 2,000 attendance mentors, to meet the scale of need across England.¹⁶¹ School Home Support said this must include whole family support.¹⁶²

62. We asked the Minister whether the Department were looking to roll the programme out nationally. Although he did not confirm, he told us the pilot will run for three years and the Department chose Priority Education Investment Areas for this extended pilot.¹⁶³ We also asked whether whole-family support is part of the programme. The Director General explained that attendance mentors work specifically with children but also take family circumstances into account. Furthermore, he said attendance mentors will work with the family if their work exposes a wider set of issues.¹⁶⁴

63. We welcome the increase in attendance mentors and the expansion of attendance hubs. Geographical alignment with Education Priority Investment areas gives some insight into the Department’s priorities but we are persuaded that measures need to be rolled out nationally to support persistent and severely absent pupils effectively. *The Department should roll out attendance interventions nationally. Given the success of the Attendance Mentors Programme to date, the Department should start by implementing a national roll out of attendance mentors.*

64. Although we heard that attendance mentors do work with families in circumstances when their work with the child exposes a wider set of issues, it is imperative that they conduct this work for all pupils with whole-family support at the forefront, as highlighted by best practice by School-Home Support. *As part of the national roll out of attendance mentors, the Department should ensure whole-family support is at the forefront of the programme.*

159 Department for Education, [Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support](#), accessed 06 September 2023

160 Department for Education, [Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support](#), accessed 06 September 2023

161 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))

162 School- Home Support ([PA0089](#))

163 [Q220](#)

164 [Q221](#)

5 Food and enrichment-based interventions

Food based interventions

Breakfast clubs

65. We heard how breakfast clubs are being used to support disadvantaged pupils, and as an intervention to support attendance. One scheme that delivers this is the National School Breakfast Club Programme (NSBP), funded by the DfE and delivered by the charity Family Action, a charity providing frontline services to families. Schools in disadvantaged areas are eligible for the NSBP if they have 40% or more pupils in bands A-F of the *income deprivation affecting children index*.¹⁶⁵ The programme was initially funded until July 2023, but Family Action received additional funding in November 2022 of up to £12m from the Government to run the programme for an additional year.¹⁶⁶

66. CSJ's research suggested that breakfast clubs, when wrapped into a broader strategy for engagement and attendance, were helpful, particularly as a means of engaging children whose families are struggling to provide food at home.¹⁶⁷ The Children's Commissioner also advocated the use of breakfast clubs, saying they are good for mental health and a cost-effective use of buildings.¹⁶⁸

67. EdAct, a multi-academy trust, reported success with breakfast clubs, but it also reported that it had been unable to continue provision due to costs, specifically "the lack of funding to support the pay award and significant increase in energy costs".¹⁶⁹ It recommended the Government provide funding for schools on a pathfinder basis to introduce breakfast clubs targeted at disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.¹⁷⁰

Free school meals

68. In January 2023 there were around 2.0 million pupils known to be eligible for FSM, representing 23.8% of state-funded pupils.¹⁷¹ This eligibility rate has increased particularly sharply since 2018 and is the highest rate recorded since the current time series began in 2006.¹⁷² We heard anecdotal evidence from many stakeholders, such as the Association for

165 The [index](#) is calculated by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and measures in a local area the proportion of children under the age of 16 that live in low-income households.

166 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

167 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))

168 [Q7](#)

169 EdAct ([PA0029](#))

170 As above

171 Department for Education, [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#), accessed 06 September 2023

172 Department for Education, [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#), accessed 06 September 2023

Young People’s Health and Ofsted, that the provision of free-school meals could improve attendance.¹⁷³ But there is limited data to prove causation, and it has always been the case that those eligible for FSM have significantly lower rates of attendance.¹⁷⁴

69. Stakeholders also argued that there is a large cohort of pupils that should be eligible for FSM due to high levels of deprivation but are not. The National Youth Agency (NYA), the national body for youth work, said “there are barriers on accessing this entitlement which is why there are varying findings on how FSMs affects attendance figures”.¹⁷⁵ The NEU noted that 800,000 children living in poverty, and roughly a third of those living in poverty were not receiving FSM.¹⁷⁶ The NASUWT¹⁷⁷ and the Children’s Society¹⁷⁸ have called on the Government to provide FSM to all children from families receiving Universal Credit in England, whilst the NEU argued that expanding the FSM offer is preferable to a further roll out of breakfast clubs.¹⁷⁹ The Department told us:

Government has limited direct evidence of the specific effect of free school meals (FSM) on pupils’ attendance in school. There is anecdotal evidence that the availability of a free meal at lunchtime has a positive attendance effect, especially where it is targeted at those on the lowest incomes. While published data undoubtedly shows significantly higher absence and persistent absence amongst FSM pupils, the Government does not causally associate FSM with absence.¹⁸⁰

70. We asked why the eligibility criteria was different for the NSBP compared to that for free school meals. The Director General explained that the key difference is that breakfast clubs are place-based, and free school meals are individual pupil-based.¹⁸¹ We also asked whether the Department has considered rolling out universal free school meals to all children. The Minister said they keep the policy under review, but “at the moment, we think it [current policy] is the right approach”.¹⁸²

71. Given a major driver of low attendance is low income, it follows that measures to tackle child poverty should be considered in the Department’s approach to improving attendance. The Department should make an assessment of the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals and adjust if necessary, ensuring all children in poverty are in receipt.

The Holiday Activities and Food Programme

72. Holiday clubs can also support attendance of disadvantaged children. The Government-funded Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) has provided support

173 Association for Young People’s Health ([PA0150](#)); Ofsted ([PA0166](#))

174 For the academic year 2021/22, the overall absence rate for pupils who are eligible for free school meals was 10.8%, up from 7.8% in the previous year. This compares to 6.5% for those pupils who were not eligible for free school meals. 37.2% of pupils who were eligible for free school meals were persistently absent in 2021/22, compared to 17.5% of pupils who were not eligible. Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

175 The National Youth Agency ([PA0120](#))

176 National Education Union ([PA0114](#))

177 NASUWT - The Teachers’ Union ([PA0098](#))

178 Leeds Trinity University ([PA0022](#))

179 The National Youth Agency ([PA0120](#))

180 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

181 [Q266](#)

182 [Qq267-268](#)

to children in receipt of FSM¹⁸³ through holiday periods since 2018.¹⁸⁴ Local authorities also have discretion to use up to 15% of their funding to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for children who are not in receipt of benefits-related FSM. This can include children with SEND, children who are looked after, young carers, and other children who the local authority believe could benefit.¹⁸⁵

73. Alice Wilcock said HAF can be effective in helping sustain engagement and rebuild relationships for pupils in Alternative Provision (see Chapter 5).¹⁸⁶ Dr Sumner suggested that HAF should be rolled out nationwide, saying “if children continue to be engaged, active, structured and fed in the holidays, it cannot hurt”.¹⁸⁷

74. However, the Education Endowment Foundation, a charitable organisation that researches the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, conducted a rapid evidence assessment on strategies to improve school attendance, and found limited evidence that extracurricular activities increase pupil attendance. Additionally, the 2021 evaluation of HAF showed only 29% of all children eligible for FSM attending a programme.¹⁸⁸ The Children’s Society, a national children’s charity, have recommended HAF be extended to £449 million of annual funding, to effectively meet the demand for FSM during holiday periods, as recommended by the National Food Strategy.¹⁸⁹ The Children’s Society have also urged funding to “take account of families excluded from the data, such as migrant families with NRPF [no resource to public funds], and all families on Universal Credit”.¹⁹⁰

75. In December 2022, when asked if there was a link between attendance at the HAF programme and the September return to school, the Department’s Permanent Secretary Susan Acland-Hood, told us there was not yet a demonstrable link.¹⁹¹ Declan Baker, Holiday Activity Fund Manager at Nottingham City Council (NCC) told us that whilst NCC will be looking at measuring the link between attendance and HAF going forward, there is no requirement by the Department to collect this data.¹⁹²

76. When we asked the Minister about HAF, he reiterated that its purpose was to help children who were getting a free school meal in term-time to receive food during the holidays. He explained the benefit to improving attendance has been a ‘by-product’ of the programme.¹⁹³ Furthermore, when questioned about what data future evaluations will collect, he said “it will be evaluated on the basis of what it was set up to deliver. It will not necessarily be evaluated in terms of its impact on attendance”.¹⁹⁴

77. We welcome the offer of breakfast clubs and the Holiday Activities and Food Programme for pupils with higher levels of disadvantage. This measure can be used to

183 Although all children in reception, year 1 and year 2 in England’s state-funded schools receive a free meal under the universal infant free school meals policy, these pupils must also be eligible for benefits-related FSM to be able to access a place on the HAF programme.

184 Department for Education, [Holiday activities and food programme 2023](#), accessed 06 September 2023

185 Department for Education, [Evaluation of the 2021 holiday activities and food programme](#), March 2022, p22

186 [Q42](#)

187 [Qq113–114](#)

188 Education Endowment Foundation ([PA0111](#))

189 The Children’s Society ([PA0222](#))

190 The Children’s Society ([PA0222](#))

191 [Oral evidence taken on 7 December 2022](#), HC58, Q271

192 [Qq131–133](#)

193 [Q269](#)

194 [Qq269–272](#)

support attendance, and may already be doing so, but there is a lack of evidence as the Department does not require schools or local authorities to measure return rates in school attendance, following attendance at breakfast or holiday clubs.

78. *We recommend the Department require local authorities to report on school attendance levels for pupils who have attended a breakfast club or holiday club. If a significant impact can be demonstrated, the Government should consider this in future funding decisions.*

Sports-based interventions

79. We asked whether sports-based activities had an impact on attendance rates. Although we received a limited amount of evidence to support this, some localised organisations, such as the School of Hard Knocks, a charity providing empowerment programmes, and City in the Community, the charitable arm of Manchester City Football Club, told us that sports-based activities can have a significant impact.

Benefits of sports to pupil wellbeing and engagement

80. The Government's public health agency, formerly known as Public Health England, published a report in 2014 titled '*The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment*'.¹⁹⁵ It found a positive association between academic attainment and physical activity levels of pupils, and pupils with better health and wellbeing are likely to achieve more academically.¹⁹⁶ Nathan Persaud, Programmes Director for the School of Hard-Knocks, explained how sports-based interventions can help with pupil's engagement with education.¹⁹⁷ He said:

There are some physiological effects of sports-based intervention; you have that initial endorphin rush that we all know about. Sport makes you feel happy, so there is this immediate sense of fun and engagement for young people [...]

The other thing that we are really interested in is the concept of neuroplasticity. Essentially, after exercise, the brain is more malleable; it is more open to new ideas, new ways of thinking. If you have young people in a very fixed mindset and quite a negative place, exercise naturally helps them to think differently [...]

There are several emotional reasons why sports work so well. In the way good providers do it, it is completely novel a lot of the time. To young people, it feels different from school straight away. It feels like something exciting and different [...] The other emotional part is really, really key: it is in the relationships that sport allows the practitioner to form with the young person [...]

195 Public Health England was replaced by [UK Health Security Agency](#) and [Office for Health Improvement and Disparities](#). Public Health England, [The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment](#), November 2014

196 Public Health England, [The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment](#), November 2014

197 [Q162](#)

There are also a couple of social aspects to it. Every sport has a set of expected behaviours, cultures and values. You can use sports as a vehicle to teach young people new types of behaviours and explore new values.¹⁹⁸

Evidence that sports-based interventions improve school attendance

81. We heard of a paucity of research into the effects of sports-based interventions on school attendance. Anecdotally the National Association for Hospital Education told us “sports in particular can be a big support in engaging pupils with mental health difficulties and encouraging them back into the school environment”.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, in a poll taken at the National Governance Association’s (the body representing governors and trustees across England) recent leadership forums, 76% of chairs and vice chairs of governing boards said they thought school and holiday clubs, such as sports-based clubs, have a role in improving attendance and school engagement.²⁰⁰ The CSJ said enrichment activities such as sport, “can be used to develop soft skills outside the curriculum, including leadership, determination and understanding another person’s point of view”.²⁰¹

82. Jonathan Pauley, 11+ Education Manager for City in the Community, explained how their programme, City Inspires, works to improve school attendance:

They have a chance to succeed in whatever they look to do, and it is all indirectly working towards developing a relationship with a trusting adult who is able to work on skills that they need to re-engage in education. We are using sport for teamwork and confidence, to increase all those pro-social behaviours that they do not know they are indirectly working on. Sport is driving that to benefit them and their school.²⁰²

The School of Hard Knocks also told us about its programme to support school attendance.²⁰³ It said that a snapshot evaluation of its programme revealed a “huge impact” on attendance, with 20–25% of the pupils seen each week often only attending school because of the programme.²⁰⁴

83. We heard that improving school attendance is not always a predominant focus to those delivering sports-based activities, but often a “by-product of some other priorities”, such as pupil wellbeing and pupil behaviour.²⁰⁵ On the other hand, Jonathan Pauley said attendance became a high priority for them, as it has become a high priority for schools since the pandemic.²⁰⁶ Nathan Persaud explained that sports-based activities can be particularly beneficial in when used in a classroom setting:

When you initially talk about sport, you are thinking about going to the playing field, but actually you can integrate sports or sporting activities into the classroom—you can do activities with bean bags, or something like that. We have found that if we are teaching in a classroom intervention, pupils

198 [Q162](#)

199 National Association for Hospital Education ([PA0094](#))

200 National Governance Association ([PA0173](#))

201 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))

202 [Q165](#)

203 Nathan Persaud (England Programmes Director at School of Hard Knocks (SoHK)) ([PA0229](#))

204 Nathan Persaud (England Programmes Director at School of Hard Knocks (SoHK)) ([PA0229](#))

205 [Q172](#)

206 [Q174](#)

really cannot hold their attention for more than 20 minutes, so they need a physical energiser. That is something we have started to train teachers on: how to integrate sporting activity day to day. This sense of fun is something that pupils seem to be missing a lot in life in general, so if that classroom environment can have an element of fun that is still boundaried, that is really engaging for pupils.²⁰⁷

Funding for sports based interventions

84. We asked providers about the security of their funding models.²⁰⁸ Jonathan Pauley explained that City Inspires' funding partly comes from the Premier League, and partly from schools.²⁰⁹ He added:

No, it is not secure [...] Schools are governed by results, so if they are struggling with results and they have a change of leadership [...] what we offer is a big risk when there are other priorities and tight budgets in schools.²¹⁰

Nathan Persaud explained that the School of Hard-Knocks' funding model is like City Inspires', in that schools pay part of the costs.²¹¹ He said "if schools can no longer pay, that is a huge risk to us".²¹² He added, "we always charge schools. We found that when we initially did not charge or found funding elsewhere, we never had the same buy-in. The programme did not work in schools where we went in for free".²¹³

85. We asked what approach the Government should take to roll out sports-based attendance interventions more widely.²¹⁴ Nathan Persaud said:

There is this real untapped potential of community sports clubs not being used in the school day. A lot of the time they are only used at evenings and weekends—rugby clubs, football clubs, cricket clubs and so on. A lot of the ones I have come across really want to help the local schools, but cannot get in to work with them. There is a real opportunity for something that is low or zero-cost to bring more sport.²¹⁵

Jonathan Pauley added "it is about investment, getting behind programmes and organisations that are successful in this area and really championing what we are looking to achieve".²¹⁶

86. We asked the Minister what steps his Department was taking to further develop sports programmes in schools.²¹⁷ He said he takes sport in school very seriously, and

207 [Q186](#)

208 [Q179](#)

209 [Qq177–180](#)

210 [Qq179–180](#)

211 [Q181](#)

212 [Q181](#)

213 [Q181](#)

214 [Q185](#)

215 [Q185](#)

216 [Q185](#)

217 [Q274](#)

referenced the *School sport and activity action plan*, which was published in July 2023.²¹⁸ Within the plan, the Government recognises the importance of extra-curricular sport, and said:

By exposing pupils to competitive sport and physical activities through PE and extracurricular sport, schools can support them to learn about fairness, respect and develop their social skills and resilience when coping with winning and losing.²¹⁹

Whilst the plan says schools should connect with local and regional structures for competitive opportunities, it does not mention third sector and community organisations that deliver programmes.²²⁰

87. We heard limited evidence that schools were offering sports-based interventions to improve school attendance, despite the benefits of sport to pupil engagement. We did hear of localised interventions that are offering some provision, but the position of these interventions is often unsecure and unsustainable due to the lack of direct support from the Government. The Government certainly values sport and activity, and recognises the impact on pupil wellbeing through its update to the School Sport and Activity Action Plan. But there is a lack of recognition for third sector and community organisations providing valuable interventions.

88. We recommend the Department commission research to test the link between sports-based interventions and improved attendance. As part of this, the Department should look to the third sector for effective practice examples.

Youth services and enrichment activities

89. We heard that youth services can also improve school attendance. The NYA defines youth work as a holistic approach with young people using a voluntary relationship.²²¹ The NYA state that youth services are supportive lifelines for children and young people when they are out of school, and that the youth sector “offers a wide range of provision which may support engagement and attendance to meet the individual’s needs with provision co-planned with the youth worker and young person”.²²²

90. When asked what interventions provided by the youth sector have improved school attendance rates, Leigh Middleton, CEO of the National Youth Agency, said:

It is often about the professional approach that is taken. We have all experienced having teachers who are there to tell you what to do and educate you, whereas with a youth worker it is the other way around: they will start from your developmental interests and what is going on for you, and then build their support around you as a young person. Because you are volunteering and choosing to participate in that provision, your personal engagement as a young person is far higher. Having that liaison between school and community can be really, really effective [...]

218 [Q274](#); HM Government, [School sport and activity action plan](#), accessed 06 September 2023

219 HM Government, [School sport and activity action plan](#), July 2023, p13

220 HM Government, [School sport and activity action plan](#), July 2023, p13

221 National Youth Agency, [Youth Work](#), accessed 06 September 2023

222 The National Youth Agency ([PA0120](#))

We have also seen provision where there are detached youth workers [...] These are trained youth workers who are on our streets, walking around our parks, talking to young people, engaging them, finding out what is going on in their lives and working out how to support them. Often, they are putting them in groups because young people have the same challenges, the same needs, the same issues, and that enables them to support those young people in the most effective way possible.²²³

91. Youth services offer enrichment activities, and many organisations support the roll out of further enrichment activities. The CSJ’s research found that enrichment activities “can be used to develop soft skills outside the curriculum, including leadership, determination and understanding another person’s point of view” and that “a fully academic curriculum only develops one part of a child and discounts those whose skills and talents are more practical”.²²⁴ Alice Wilcock argued for an enrichment guarantee.²²⁵ She said “that is part of a package of broader support. That is great for persistently absent children who are starting to not attend because this can be a hub to get them to re-engage in education or reintegrate into school”.²²⁶ Councillor Nethsingha said:

If music is the one thing that you love, going in because you have an after-school orchestra might be the thing that gets you over the doorstep. It might be music, it might be drama, it might be football—whatever it is, anything that encourages children to be back in school in a place where they feel comfortable and happy and they can be successful is important.²²⁷

92. However, we heard that the provision of enrichment activities through the youth sector has declined in recent years. Leigh Middleton told us:

We have spent £1 billion of public money less on youth services this year than we did a decade ago. That has a massive impact: there are fewer youth centres, there are fewer youth workers, we have a less professionalised workforce and there is just less support for those young people.²²⁸

Similarly, we heard the availability of enrichment via school services has declined too. The Association for Education Welfare Management said, “engagement in art/music/sports/domestic science can have a significant impact on a child’s life and engagement in education yet these have been cut back or out of the national curriculum”.²²⁹ Mind recommended that the Department should “encourage schools to instil a wellbeing development policy and culture, as well as promote participation in extracurricular and wellbeing activities (e.g. sports, art, music therapy)”.²³⁰

93. We also asked whether enrichment activities can be used to support an extended school day.²³¹ Dr Sumner told us, “on extended schools, we support access to enrichment

223 [Q151](#)

224 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))

225 [Q7](#)

226 [Q7](#)

227 [Q38](#)

228 [Q141](#)

229 Association for Education Welfare Management ([PA0190](#))

230 Mind ([PA0216](#))

231 [Q111, Qq155–157](#)

activities, sports clubs, music clubs, craft clubs, at a cost-free or affordable level”.²³² Leigh Middleton also said he would support enrichment activities as part of an extended school day.²³³ When asked if an extended school day would help with attendance, he added:

Yes, if it is the right provision and you don’t have to stay until 6 o’clock on the school site. If you can go off and do activities—go on the river, go kayaking or whatever—then absolutely. But if you say, “You have to come in at 7 o’clock for breakfast and you can’t leave until 5 or 6 in the evening,” young people will just vote with their feet, because they do not want that. They want fun, adventure and opportunities to volunteer. They want to be able to go on residential, climb mountains and have all the great opportunities that this country can give them. It is about making sure they have that access.²³⁴

94. In an answer to a written question in May 2023, Stuart Andrew MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport gave the following overview of youth services:

In England the Government recognises the vital role that youth services and activities play in improving the life chances and wellbeing of young people. The government has committed to a National Youth Guarantee: that by 2025, every young person will have access to regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer. This is supported by a three-year investment of over £500 million in youth services, reflecting young people’s priorities and addressing the inconsistencies in national youth spending with a firm focus on levelling up.²³⁵

95. We asked the Minister whether he recognised the importance of the breadth of the curriculum when it comes to music and arts to support attendance.²³⁶ The Minister said he is “absolutely passionate about music in schools” and referenced the *National Plan for Music Education*.²³⁷ He added:

We need children reading proficiently and being good at maths and science and the humanities and a foreign language, but we also need children to have been introduced to our culture and to the world’s culture.²³⁸

96. We also asked the Minister about an extended school day. He said, “we expect schools to reach at least 32.5 hours a week” and gave an example of a school that provides activities during the last session of the day, including sport and music.²³⁹ When asked if this should be rolled out to all schools, he said, “yes, I agree with you. The challenge I have is that the Schools Minister does not have a lever to implement these things. We have 23,000 schools that are autonomous”.²⁴⁰

232 [Q111](#)

233 [Q155](#)

234 [Q157](#)

235 UIN 183475 [[Youth services](#)], 2 May 2023

236 [Q275](#)

237 [Q275](#)

238 [Q275](#)

239 [Q276](#)

240 [Q277](#)

97. The provision of enrichment activities available for pupils has declined in recent years, with £1 billion less spent on youth services than a decade ago. We heard sports-based activities provided by third sector organisations is just one example of enrichment that has been used as an intervention to improve school attendance. We welcome the £500 million pledged by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport towards a National Youth Guarantee, and the Minister for School's focus on music education. But more should be done to promote an overall enrichment guarantee for pupils in school, to then in turn, improve school attendance.

98. *As the Centre for Social Justice have recommend, the Department should implement an enrichment guarantee for pupils in school including the use of sport, music, drama and art, looking to the youth sector for best practice. This guarantee should have KPIs focusing on improving school attendance, and the Department should provide options for schools to incorporate this via an extended school day, should they wish to implement one.*

6 Barriers to attendance for pupils with health difficulties

Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities

99. A child or young person has Special Educational Needs (SEN)²⁴¹ if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision.²⁴² There are two broad levels of support in place for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND):

- SEN support is provided to children attending education settings to support their learning and development (this could include extra help from a teacher or teaching assistant).
- An Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is for children and young people aged up to 25 with more complex needs who need more support than is available through SEN support.²⁴³

Pupil absence rate for cohort

100. The rate of absence in special schools²⁴⁴ is significantly higher than other school types.²⁴⁵ For the 2021/22 academic year, the rate of persistent absence was 40.4% in special schools, compared to an overall absence rate of 22.5%.²⁴⁶ Absence rates for pupils with SEND are significantly higher than their peers, as shown in table 1.²⁴⁷

241 Special Education Needs and Disabilities is often referred to as SEND, but in some cases the term SEN is used, to differentiate where a child may have special educational needs but not a disability. Further information on types of support for children and young people with SEN, Alternative Provision (AP) and legislation and definitions in this area can be found in [the House of Commons Library briefing Special Educational Needs: support in England](#)

242 HM Government, [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#), January 2015, p15

243 House of Commons Library, [Special Educational Needs: support in England](#), May 2023. See for further details.

244 Special Schools are schools that provide education to pupils 11 and older and specialist in one of four areas of special educational needs: communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social emotional and mental health, and sensory and physical needs. See [here](#) for further details.

245 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

246 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

247 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

Table 1: Overall absence and persistent absence rate, by special educational needs²⁴⁸

		Overall absence rate			Persistent absence rate		
		2018/19	2020/21	2021/22	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22
SEN provision Statement or EHCP	Total	8.7%	13.1%	12.1%	24.6%	42.3%	36.9%
	Special	9.9%	15.1%	13.1%	28.1%	48.7%	39.9%
SEN provision SEN Support	Total	6.5%	6.5%	10.0%	17.9%	18.9%	32.0%
	Special	21.7%	25.9%	25.8%	55.1%	65.5%	67.9%
SEN provision No identified SEN	Total	4.3%	3.9%	6.9%	9.0%	9.3%	20.0%
	Special	30.8%	15.7%	22.9%	63.0%	59.6%	63.3%

Source: Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

Barriers to attendance

101. Many stakeholders, including NASUWT, Contact, and Ambitious about Autism, identified unmet special educational needs as the main barrier to attendance for pupils with SEND.²⁴⁹ Dr Stavrou told us:

Unmet need translates to internalising—for instance, an increase in anxiety and mental health challenges, externalising behaviours that challenge and the beginning of problems with attendance. That led to poor and at times traumatic experiences in the school environment, increased pressure on home and family life and, ultimately, to further deterioration in attendance, up to the point of non-attendance and placement breakdown.²⁵⁰

We heard that even in special schools, unmet need is often still an issue and stakeholders reported a lack of resource to support children with SEND. A survey conducted in 2018 by NASUWT revealed that three in ten SEN teachers (working in special schools and pupil referral units) rarely or never get the support they need to teach children with SEND effectively.²⁵¹ Just for Kids Law, an organisation focussing on the legal rights of children, also told us of a significant gap between the needs of children with SEND and appropriate funding, and that funding in recent years had not kept pace with the rise in demand for specialist provision.²⁵²

102. Dr Stavrou explained that those attending special schools had more complex need profiles, and their starting point for attendance is often poor by the time they get to special schools.²⁵³ Ellie Costello said “we have children who are struggling with very severe

248 Caution should be taken comparing data with special school absence rates with total absence rates, as their prevalence of SEND is much greater. As previous, 2019/20 data releases were cancelled due to the covid-19 pandemic.

249 NASUWT - The Teachers’ Union ([PA0098](#)); Contact for families with disabled children ([PA0149](#)); Ambitious about Autism ([PA0179](#))

250 [Q44](#)

251 NASUWT - The Teachers’ Union ([PA0098](#))

252 Just for Kids Law ([PA0223](#))

253 [Q50](#)

needs to feel safe in a setting and to access the support they need”.²⁵⁴ We also heard that pupils with SEND often have higher absence rates for legitimate reasons, such as being more prone to illness or a higher than average number of medical appointments. The Attachment Research Community, a membership organisation which aims to promote evidence-based approaches to attachment and trauma awareness, cited a quote from a parent around the issue of appointments:

Striving for 100% attendance is unequitable and discriminatory and not the answer. My other daughter has scoliosis as well as Autism and she often has hospital appointments - although these appointments are authorised, they impact her attendance data. This is discriminating against children who have disabilities, medical needs or general ill health.²⁵⁵

It is notable that a higher proportion of absences for pupils with SEND tend to be authorised absences, particularly in special schools.

Table 2: authorised and unauthorised absence rate for the academic year 2021/22, by special educational needs²⁵⁶

		Overall absence rate	Authorised absence rate	Unauthorised absence rate
SEN provision Statement or EHCP	Total	12.1%	9.1%	3.0%
	Special	13.1%	10.2%	2.8%
SEN provision SEN Support	Total	10.0%	6.8%	3.2%
	Special	25.8%	19.5%	6.4%
SEN provision No identified SEN	Total	6.9%	5.1%	1.8%
	Special	22.9%	19.4%	3.5%

Source: Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

103. Councillor Lucy Nethsingha, Deputy Chair of the Local Government Association’s Children and Young People Board, told us if pupils can be reintegrated back into mainstream provision, they are likely to end up with better outcomes.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, the CCO said that to achieve inclusive mainstream provision, “every school should be a school for children with SEND and every teacher should be considered a teacher of children with SEND”.²⁵⁸ But, the National Education Union (NEU), a trade union supporting workers in schools, did not agree that schools and class teachers can provide more SEND support work in addition to their teaching responsibilities.²⁵⁹ It said this is “impractical, and it will not provide appropriate or adequate support for SEND students: teachers cannot replace specialist professionals”.²⁶⁰

254 [Q45](#)

255 [The Attachment Research Community \(PA0129\)](#)

256 As previous, caution should be taken comparing data with special school absence rates with total absence rates, and 2019/20 data releases were cancelled due to the covid-19 pandemic.

257 [Q15](#)

258 [Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England \(PA0148\)](#)

259 [National Education Union \(PA0114\)](#)

260 [National Education Union \(PA0114\)](#)

104. We asked the Minister what the Department was doing to tackle unmet need amongst pupils with SEND.²⁶¹ The Minister said it is an important issue that “the Government are taking very seriously” and referred to the SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan.²⁶² In March 2023, the Government published its *SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time*.²⁶³ The plan aims to “establish a new national SEND and alternative provision system”, which will be overseen by a new National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board.²⁶⁴ Actions include:

- increasing the capacity of specialists, including by investing a further £21 million to train two more cohorts of educational psychologists in the academic years 2024 and 2025,
- working together to take a joint DfE and Department of Health and Social Care approach to SEND workforce planning, and
- developing a longer-term approach for teaching assistants to ensure consistent impact.²⁶⁵

The Government anticipates that the plan will produce a higher attendance rate among SEN children, and give it greater understanding of how well the current system is working.²⁶⁶

105. The Minister also spoke of funding constraints for this pupil cohort:

It is also an issue for local authorities. Their high-needs budgets are often in deficit because there are more children now with EHCP plans. Some of that is because of better medical care for young children; children who may not have survived in the past do survive, and some of them have quite severe needs. The high-needs budgets of local authorities have been put under pressure in recent years and we absolutely recognise that. It is why we have increased the high-needs budget by 50% over the last four years. That is a very significant increase. It is now about £10.1 billion, I think, the high-needs budget in schools. That does not mean to say that the issue has been resolved, but the improvement plan seeks to make sure that standards of SEN provision in mainstream schools are at the right level for those children so that, first, children are getting a better education in mainstream education and, secondly, parents can be reassured about the provision in mainstream education.²⁶⁷

106. Absence rates in special schools have always been significantly higher than in mainstream educational settings. We understand the SEND cohort have higher

261 [Q234](#)

262 [Q234](#)

263 Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), accessed 06 September 2023

264 Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), March 2023, p4

265 Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), March 2023, pp5–14

266 Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), March 2023, p19

267 [Q234](#)

absences for legitimate and unavoidable reasons, thus making comparisons with other cohorts difficult. *We recommend the Department take greater care when reporting these statistics to avoid unhelpful comparisons.*

107. *Attendance and engagement should be seen as key metrics of educational outcomes for SEND pupils in specialist settings. However, the Department should take specific barriers into account when developing these metrics and ensure that they are not expected to behave identically to peers in other settings.*

108. Whilst the SEND and AP improvement plan provides a useful framework for improving outcomes for this group of pupils, it is evident that unmet needs prevails as a very significant barrier to school attendance. Whilst we understand funding pressures, it is essential that pupils are provided with proper resource to improve their educational outcomes and therefore, school attendance.

109. *The Department should prioritise resource for inclusion and assessment in mainstream schools, to ensure they are adequately set up to support SEND pupils and address the current level of unmet need, and therefore improve their attendance rates.*

The use of alternative provision

110. We asked about pupils' experiences in Alternative Provision (AP), which provides education to pupils who are unable to attend mainstream schools. This is often, but not always, due to exclusion or special educational needs.²⁶⁸ Within the AP sector there are a variety of types of providers that cater for pupils with diverse needs, abilities and reasons for being in alternative provision.²⁶⁹

111. We heard that SEND pupils are overrepresented within AP settings.²⁷⁰ The Commission on Young Lives found four out of five in AP had identified SEND, as they are “managed out of mainstream education, formally or informally, as schools have failed to understand or support their behavioural and educational needs”.²⁷¹

112. In March 2023, the Government published its *SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time*.²⁷² For AP, the plan aims to:

Create a three-tier alternative provision system, focusing on targeted early support within mainstream school, time-limited intensive placements in an alternative provision setting, and longer-term placements to support return to mainstream or a sustainable post-16 destination.²⁷³

268 House of Commons Library, [Alternative Provision Education in England](#), March 2018

269 House of Commons Library, [Alternative Provision Education in England](#), March 2018. See for further details.

270 Commission on Young Lives, [All Together Now: Inclusion not exclusion, supporting all young people to success in school](#), April 2022

271 Commission on Young Lives, [All Together Now: Inclusion not exclusion, supporting all young people to success in school](#), April 2022

272 Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), accessed 06 September 2023

273 Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), accessed 3 August 2023, p11

Attendance interventions provided by alternative provision

113. We heard about using AP as an intervention to improve attendance rates. Dr Stavrou, pointed to “some good examples of forward-thinking practice that appear to be working well”.²⁷⁴ Ellie Costello added:

I think there is incredible practice that goes on within APs and I think it is a very varied marketplace [...] Then you have children who are much happier in an outdoor setting that is flexible, dynamic and agile. When we talk about AP, there is such a huge range going on, but there are some absolutely phenomenal practices that I would like to see learned from and incorporated within mainstream. There are lots of easy wins that happen in AP that can help more children to remain in a mainstream setting.²⁷⁵

114. We also heard of the use of part-time timetables. The SEC told us that part-time timetables can be used as a means towards re-integration.²⁷⁶ Catch 22 told us it offers a reduced and bespoke timetable to pupils in their provision during the first week, so that they are moved slowly into the provision.²⁷⁷ The NYA said that planning a schedule in partnership with pupils enables them to reach their goals through targeted support.²⁷⁸ The Association of School and College Leaders made its case for part-time timetables by using the example of a phased return from sickness for adult employment:

The binary approach to attendance—that attendance is always ‘good’, and non-attendance ‘bad’—is a worrying perception to promote. If a member of staff is off sick and not feeling confident to return a phased return would be seen as acceptable and as positive. But part-time timetables for pupils used in this way are seen as negative. There is a stigma to a phased approach that should be questioned.²⁷⁹

But many stakeholders, including SEC and Contact, raised concerns that schools may be using part-time timetables as a means of managing behaviour.²⁸⁰ Contact said:

While we agree that part-time timetables are appropriate and helpful in some cases where pupils have high anxiety, there is a disjuncture where school condoned absence as a means of behaviour management is acceptable but when a parent keeps their child out of school they are faced with prosecution.²⁸¹

115. We also heard about the use of flexi-schooling. The SEC described flexi-schooling as the approach where a pupil is enrolled in school and attend part of the time, and are home-educated for the remainder, providing a more manageable routine and timetable.²⁸² Contact and the SEC told us that the pandemic has highlighted the benefits of flexi-schooling for some pupils with medical needs and for others with anxieties about being

274 [Q68](#)

275 [Q68](#)

276 Special Educational Consortium ([PA0168](#))

277 Catch22 (29178) ([PA0097](#))

278 The National Youth Agency ([PA0120](#))

279 Association of School and College Leaders ([PA0201](#))

280 Special Educational Consortium ([PA0168](#)); Contact for families with disabled children ([PA0149](#))

281 Contact for families with disabled children ([PA0149](#))

282 Special Educational Consortium ([PA0168](#))

in school.²⁸³ Mind said that providing more opportunities for learning, such as flexi-schooling, could ensure there isn't lost learning, as well as ensuring attendance records are not jeopardised.²⁸⁴

116. On virtual education, NASUWT told us that since the pandemic, remote learning had proven to be a successful option for educating and improving attendance, especially for those with SEND.²⁸⁵ According to the NASUWT's 'The Big Question 2022' survey:

More than half (54%) of schools are continuing to provide remote education/ distance learning to some groups of pupils. When asked which groups of pupils, they include pupils who are school phobic (25%); pupils with mental health need such as anxiety (33%); and, pupils with SEND who struggle with the social aspects of school (19%). Another identified group was pupils with SEND whose needs are not being met by the school (9%).²⁸⁶

Supporting Achievement and Inclusion for Life, an organisation which uses psychology to support users of the education system, told us that as part of its reintegration programme for pupils that have fallen out of the education system, it had used online learning and virtual group learning to successfully reintegrate 100% of their young people back into education or full-time work.²⁸⁷ Rob Williams, Senior Policy Adviser at the National Association for Head Teachers told us:

I think one of the things to focus on is the ability to continue with education when you are not actually attending school to some extent. I know we have put quite a lot of resource during the pandemic into remote learning. Our NAHT is the secretariat for the APPG for SEND and it was interesting hearing from young people with special educational needs during that period about the way in which they continued and felt really positive about their learning even when they were not physically able to attend school.²⁸⁸

Problems with alternative provision

117. But there is some dissatisfaction with the use of AP. Although the Children's Commissioner agreed with the use of AP to ease pupils back into education and improve attendance, she told us:

AP should not be a long-term solution as most children attending it do not have access to a broad and balanced curriculum, with many APs only offering a severely reduced set of GCSEs focusing on core subjects. Alternative Provision placements should be short-term interventions, for example for a maximum of six weeks, with a clear structure in place where the goal of the placement is set at the start and a review of the progress and the needs of the student takes place before a decision to extend the placement or return to mainstream schooling.²⁸⁹

283 Contact for families with disabled children ([PA0149](#))

284 Mind ([PA0216](#))

285 NASUWT - The Teachers' Union ([PA0098](#))

286 NASUWT - The Teachers' Union ([PA0098](#))

287 Supporting Attainment and Inclusion for Life ([PA0128](#))

288 [Q12](#)

289 Office of the Children's Commissioner for England ([PA0148](#))

The NYA also told us that many children and young people with SEND are being transferred to alternative provision without having had a statutory assessment and without the stable funding or quality to meet individual needs.²⁹⁰

118. We heard that alternative provision settings are providing useful interventions for pupils with attendance issues, we accept that it can be used as a process for reintegration. But, it is clear that alternative provision should not be seen as a long-term solution, nor should it be used to manage behaviour concerns, due to the level of education provided in these settings. We also heard that some pupils with SEND are being placed in alternative provision without a proper understanding or assessment of their needs.

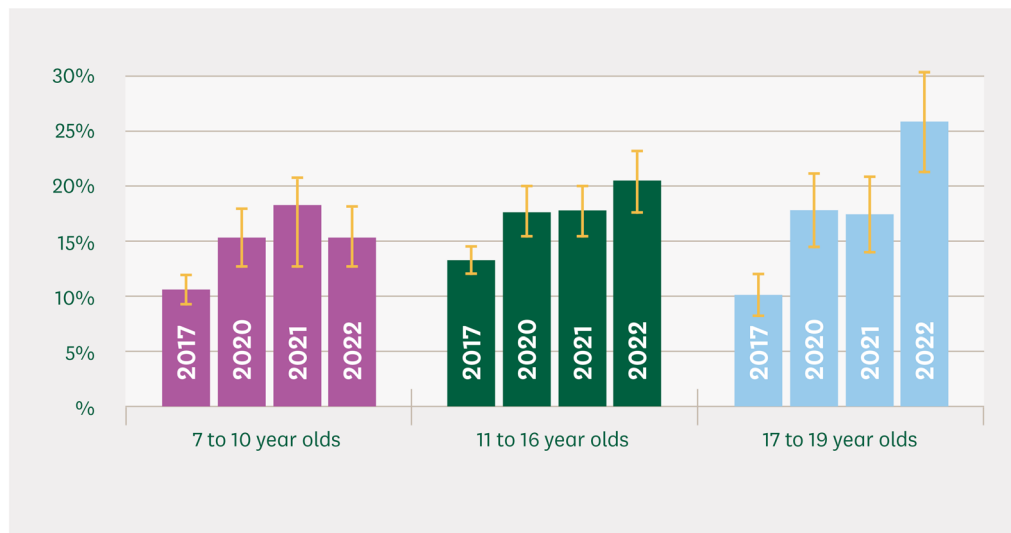
119. *It is clear that alternative provision should only be a time-limited intervention with clear structures to ensure each pupil's needs are being effectively supported. The Department should scrutinise its use and ensure they're being used as methods of support to improve attendance, and discourage its use as a means to manage behaviour.*

Pupils with mental health difficulties

120. More pupils have experienced mental health challenges since the pandemic, and this has had a negative impact on their school attendance. An NHS survey of children and young people's mental health in England, was first undertaken in 2017, and then followed up in 2020, 2021 and 2022.²⁹¹ It revealed 18% of children aged 7–16 had a probable mental disorder in 2022, up from 12.1% in 2017.²⁹²

Figure 2: The proportion of young people with a probable mental health condition, 2017–2022

The proportion of young people with a probable mental health condition, 2017–2022



Source: NHS Digital, [Children and Young People's Mental Health in England 2022](#), Figure 1.2

290 The National Youth Agency ([PA0120](#))

291 NHS, [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey](#), accessed 06 September 2023

292 NHS, [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey](#), accessed 06 September 2023

121. We heard a great deal of evidence that pupils are struggling to access support for mental health, via the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), due to extremely long waiting lists.²⁹³ The NASUWT said that waiting times are “excessive” and added “vulnerable children were waiting almost three years to access mental health care in some parts of the UK”.²⁹⁴ The Minister said there was a pilot for a four week waiting time for CAMHS services, but the NASUWT added the trial “is unlikely to deliver any meaningful change to the currently inadequate system”.²⁹⁵

Barriers to attendance

122. The Department does not separately record absences for pupils with mental health difficulties. The NHS survey measures the number of missed days of schooling by mental health of child, age and sex.²⁹⁶ It found that in the Autumn term 2021, “school absence rates were higher in children with a probable mental disorder; 12.6% missed more than 15 days of school compared with 3.9% of those unlikely to have a mental disorder”.²⁹⁷ Mind told us that its research found around seven in ten young people surveyed reported that they had been absent from school due to their mental health.²⁹⁸

123. In the guidance, *Working together to improve school attendance*, mental health conditions are acknowledged as an attendance barrier.²⁹⁹ It explains when working with parents to improve attendance, “schools should be mindful of the barriers these pupils face and place additional support where necessary to help them access full-time education”.³⁰⁰ Vicki Nash gave an account of the barriers to attendance from a snapshot survey of over 1000 young people:

It can be because they are simply just not well enough to go in. It can be because they are experiencing anxiety about going into school. The level of bullying has a real impact on people’s mental health, and there is also a kind of broad stigma and discrimination, not only from pupils but from teachers—a lack of understanding about what mental health is and isn’t.³⁰¹

Dr Stavrou spoke about the effects of mental health challenges on learning:

It is quite easy to understand and imagine that those who are struggling with mental health challenges, even if they are only temporary, are not going to be in what teachers would call the place of learning. Some of you might

293 The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition ([PA0130](#)), Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#)), Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England ([PA0148](#)), Wallingford School ([PA0165](#)), Association of School and College Leaders ([PA0201](#))

294 NASUWT - The Teachers’ Union ([PA0098](#))

295 NASUWT - The Teachers’ Union ([PA0098](#))

296 Mental health categorised as ‘Unlikely to have a disorder’, ‘Possible disorder’ or ‘Probable disorder’.

297 NHS, [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey](#), accessed 06 September 2023

298 Mind ([PA0216](#))

299 Department for Education, [Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities](#), May 2022, p17

300 Department for Education, [Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities](#), May 2022, p17

301 [Q52](#)

know the triangle of need. You cannot really vacate yourself for learning if you are being bullied at the same time, for instance, or if you have pressing mental health needs that are a result of your home and family life.³⁰²

124. Ellie Costello spoke about the intersection of mental health and other characteristics:

To understand the cohorts, if you live in poverty or are on free school meals, you are more likely to suffer with your mental health. If you are a young carer, if you are living in a refuge, if English is your second language, if you have multiple elements in your life going on, that impacts your mental health. If it disables you for a long period, it reduces your efficacy in independence and then you have Equality Act entitlements that follow.³⁰³

What support is available?

125. In November 2018, the Department published non-statutory advice on *Mental health and behaviour in schools*.³⁰⁴ It aims to “help schools to support pupils whose mental health problems manifest themselves in behaviour” and “sets out schools’ roles and responsibilities in relation to mental health and behaviour”.³⁰⁵ In February 2023, the Department published further non-statutory guidance on “how to support school attendance where there is a pupil experiencing social, emotional or mental health issues”.³⁰⁶ This comprises a summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance, and provides ‘examples of effective practice’.³⁰⁷ The latter includes using part-time timetables, providing extra academic support, and adjusting uniforms.³⁰⁸ The Department told us that this work is directly linked to the work of the Attendance Action Alliance (see Chapter 4).³⁰⁹

126. The consultation outcome for the Green Paper Transforming children and young people’s mental health provision, was published by the Department and the Department for Health and Social Care in 2017.³¹⁰ It included several proposals to improve support for mental health in schools, including to incentivise every school and college to identify and train a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health, with relevant training rolled out to all areas by 2025.³¹¹ Since the outcome was published, several funding announcements have followed, including £17 million in May 2021 and a further £7 million in May 2022 for training for designated mental health leads.³¹²

302 [Q63](#)

303 [Q64](#)

304 Department for Education, [Mental health and behaviour in schools](#), November 2018

305 Department for Education, [Mental health and behaviour in schools](#), November 2018

306 Department for Education, [Mental health issues affecting a pupil’s attendance: guidance for schools](#), accessed 06 September 2023

307 Department for Education, [Mental health issues affecting a pupil’s attendance: guidance for schools](#), accessed 06 September 2023

308 Department for Education, [Support for pupils where a mental health issue is affecting attendance: Effective practice examples](#), February 2023

309 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))

310 HM Government, [Transforming children and young people’s mental health provision: a green paper – Consultation outcome](#), accessed 06 September 2023

311 HM Government, [Transforming children and young people’s mental health provision: a green paper – Consultation outcome](#), accessed 06 September 2023

312 Department for Education, [Schools and colleges to benefit from boost in expert mental health support](#), accessed 06 September 2023; HM Government, [Increased mental health support for children and young people](#), accessed 06 September 2023

127. Mind’s research shows that mental health absences are not commonly authorised by schools. This is ascribed to difficulties in providing medical evidence for the absence, when young people cannot access mental health support in a timely way.³¹³ Mind said, “of the nine in ten parents (88%) who disclosed that their child had been absent from school because of their mental health, only one in four (28%) were successful in receiving authorisation from school”.³¹⁴ Ellie Costello told us:

I think more often than not parents are finding it very surprising, shocking and challenging when they are phoning up to record an absence, to report it, and their opinion is not being believed or they are told that they have to evidence it. We have this very incongruous situation where heads of schools are asking for evidence at a stage that they don’t need to. We need to get back to valuing parental opinion, because it has been completely undermined and parents are finding it extremely challenging.³¹⁵

The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition told us that unauthorised absences can lead to legal sanctions, such as fines or prosecution, against parents.³¹⁶

128. We asked the Minister whether there should be a separate attendance code for mental-health related absences.³¹⁷ He said “the danger is that it is difficult to assess whether it is solely mental health that has led to the absence or whether it is a combination of mental health and other issues”, but that he would listen to the Committee’s recommendations.³¹⁸

129. Some witnesses told us that Government departments were not working well together in respond to the increase in mental health challenges. Dr Stavrou raised the issue of capacity.³¹⁹ Vicki Nash highlighted the work of the early support hubs pilot, which are being used to:

Fill the gap between low-level support in schools, particularly for complex needs—the complexity of cases while you are on a waiting list—and CAMHS [Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service], whose thresholds are really high.³²⁰

130. On funding for mental health, the Minister said “a disproportionately high element of the increase in funding for the NHS has gone to mental health”.³²¹ He added that “it is an important issue. There is always room for more, but significant funding has gone into children’s mental health”.³²²

131. We have seen overwhelming evidence indicating a radical increase in mental health difficulties amongst school pupils since the covid-19 pandemic. With CAMHS waiting lists at all-time highs, and pupils on three-year waiting lists in some parts of

313 [Mind \(PA0216\)](#)

314 [Mind \(PA0216\)](#)

315 [Q55](#)

316 [The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition \(PA0130\)](#)

317 [Q246](#)

318 [Q246](#)

319 [Q64](#)

320 [Q66](#)

321 [Q244](#)

322 [Q244](#)

the country, it is evident that the current capacity of mental health services is grossly inadequate. Whilst the Department has issued non-statutory guidance on mental health in schools, it needs to do more to improve its offer of support for these pupils.

132. As a minimum, if required the Department should increase funding to ensure it reaches its aim of providing senior mental health lead training for every 11+ educational setting in England by 2025. The Department should also lead a cross-government assessment of the scale of mental health difficulties amongst pupils, and review the current provision of support available in schools and outside of them. The Government should conclude this review and report its findings by Summer 2024. There then needs to be significant joint working across the Government to ensure CAMHS provision is adequate to meet the needs of school age children, in line with the Department's previous commitment to a 4-week waiting time.

133. Mental health-related absences are not commonly authorised by schools, sometimes due to requirements to provide medical evidence which can often lead to fines or prosecution for families. The introduction of an authorised mental health absence code could eliminate the need for medical evidence in cases of known and established mental health difficulties and reduce the need for intervention via prosecution.

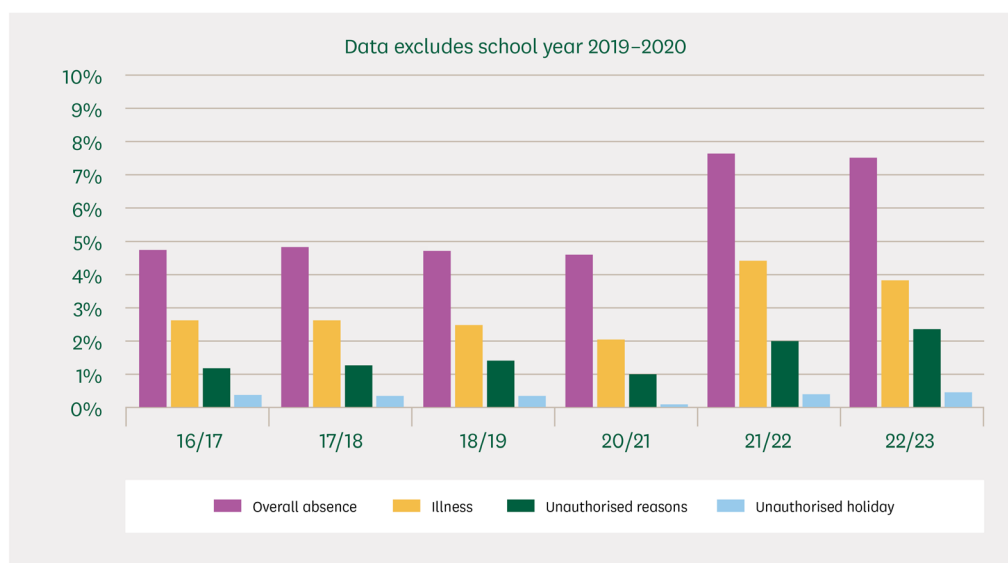
134. As part of reforms to the guidance on attendance, the Department should introduce a mental health absence code, and set clear thresholds for its use.

Pupils with physical health difficulties

135. The majority of absences are authorised, and most of these have historically been due to illnesses, as Figure 3 shows.

Figure 3: illness absence rate between 2016/17 to 2022/23³²³

Absence rates in England between 2016–2023



Source: Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England for the academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

136. For the Autumn term 2022/23, most absence continued to be due to illness, which accounted for 4.5% of possible sessions.³²⁴ The high level of illness absence in the Autumn term was in line with increases in rates of seasonal flu and other seasonal respiratory illnesses, as shown in UK Health Security Authority data.³²⁵ According to the Department, looking at the experimental statistics for the spring term 2022/23, illness absence has decreased following the Autumn term.³²⁶ However, illness absence remained higher than pre-pandemic levels, at 3.7% during Spring term compared with around 2.5% pre-pandemic.³²⁷

Barriers to attendance

137. We heard of a cultural shift in parental attitudes following the pandemic. The CSJ told us that “families are now more likely to withdraw their children from school due to minor illness or viruses to avoid contamination”.³²⁸ The Association of School and College Leaders reported:

Our members tell us that the changing advice to parents from government about how to handle illness in children over the last three years has led to a confused and sometimes acrimonious situation. Parents have had to shift from obeying strict instructions not to send children into school if they have

323 As mentioned before, experimental data is collected via the attendance data dashboard pilot, and the 2019/20 data releases were cancelled due to the covid-19 pandemic. See Chapter 2 for further details.

324 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 2022/23](#), accessed 06 September 2023

325 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 2022/23](#), accessed 06 September 2023

326 Department for Education, [Pupil attendance in schools](#), accessed 06 September 2023

327 Department for Education, [Pupil attendance in schools](#), accessed 06 September 2023

328 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))

any sign of illness, to what now feels like an expectation that children must be in school regardless of illness. There needs to be a scaffolded response that can regain the trust and the respect of parents.³²⁹

138. The Minister said “one of the reasons for the stubbornness of the decline in absence has been illness”.³³⁰ We asked the Minister whether the messaging for parents is consistent regarding illnesses.³³¹ He said:

Your question raises an issue; there is higher caution among parents about sending their child into school if they are showing symptoms of a cold or something. There is NHS guidance—it says that schools are encouraged to circulate it—and its key message is that you should not keep a child off for a cold or cough unless they also have a fever. If you take a child’s temperature and they have a fever combined with a cold and a cough, that is a reason not to, but there is that caution.³³²

Covid-related impacts

139. Covid-related impacts still remain a barrier to attendance, with the latest ONS survey (as of 5 March 2023) showing that 59,000 children have Long Covid with symptoms persisting for 12 weeks since the infection has passed.³³³ Preliminary evidence from a survey by Long Covid Kids shows 75.3% of respondents reported that their attendance has been greatly impacted by their illness, and 54.9% say that their progress with learning has been greatly impacted.³³⁴ Clinically Vulnerable Families said:

Our data indicates that 59% of children in Clinically Vulnerable Families are persistently absent from school in the academic year 2022–2023, with 23% classified as severely absent. This represents a stark increase compared to pre-pandemic levels, when only 20% were persistently absent, with a mere 2% falling under the severely absent category.³³⁵

The Raleigh Education Trust, a multi-academy trust that also acts as the Nottingham City Council Commissioner for Alternative Education, also told us that there is parental anxiety regarding risks to health needs to pupils with SEND or those that are clinically vulnerable to covid-19.³³⁶

140. We asked whether the Department provides any guidance on what support should be offered to pupils experiencing Covid related issues.³³⁷ The Director General, said:

We would want schools to treat that as any other longer-term illness: think about the needs of the pupil and make adaptations, whether they are formal legal disability adaptations or adaptations that help children with issues that

329 Association of School and College Leaders ([PA0201](#))

330 [Q188](#)

331 [Q252](#)

332 [Q252](#)

333 Long Covid Kids ([PA0230](#))

334 Long Covid Kids ([PA0230](#))

335 Clinically Vulnerable Families ([PA0206](#))

336 Raleigh Education Trust ([PA0142](#))

337 [Q253](#)

are below that threshold but would still help them to thrive in a school. We would absolutely want schools to do that. We would want them to follow sensible NHS advice in that space.³³⁸

141. Illness was the primary reason for pupil absence before covid-19 and remains so. But parental attitudes to illness and attendance have shifted and Government messaging has been inconsistent. As a result, the illness absence rate is considerably higher now than it was pre-pandemic.

142. We recommend the Department should launch a targeted public information campaign to guide parents on when and when not children who are unwell should attend school. Close working between the Department and the Department for Health and Social Care will be required to get this right, but it should aim to ensure that parents understand the types of illness, including coughs and colds, that should not require children in normal circumstances to miss school.

7 Barriers to attendance for certain pupil characteristics

Barriers for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds

Rate of absence for pupil cohort

143. The Department measures attendance data by pupil eligibility for free school meals (FSM), as a marker for disadvantage.³³⁹ Aside from the Universal Infant Free School Meals policy, pupils are eligible for free school meals if a parent is in receipt of certain benefits.³⁴⁰ For the academic year 2021/22, 22.5% of all pupils were eligible for free school meals. In that year, 37.2% of pupils eligible for free school meals were persistently absent, compared to 17.5% of ineligible pupils.³⁴¹ These pupils were already significantly more likely than average to be persistently absent prior to the pandemic, as table 3 shows.

Table 3: Absence rate for pupils eligible for free school meals for the academic year 2021/22

	Overall absence rate			Persistent absence rate		
	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22
FSM-Eligible	7.5%	7.8%	10.8%	22.8%	24.4%	37.2%
FSM-Not eligible	4.2%	3.7%	6.5%	8.3%	8.3%	17.5%

Source: Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 26 July 2023

Costs for school

144. We heard that the costs associated with school attendance are a major barrier affecting pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. At our engagement event we heard from a young person living in poverty.³⁴² The pupil explained that their school didn't understand why their attendance was poor or why financial circumstances inhibited attendance.³⁴³ CPAG shared the findings of their research project, *Cost of the School Day*.³⁴⁴ This was “a large-scale, three-year research project that ... gathered evidence from over 1,700 parents and carers and 630 members of school staff and held face-to-face interviews with over 10,000 school pupils in England and Wales”.³⁴⁵ CPAG identified four potential cost barriers leading to absenteeism. This is outlined in Box 2.

339 Department for Education, [Pupil absence statistics: methodology](#), accessed 06 September 2023

340 These include, but are not limited to: Income Support, support under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and Universal Credit. Department for Education, [Free school meals and other support for disadvantaged pupils – here's what you need to know](#), accessed 06 September 2023

341 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

342 Education Select Committee ([PA0235](#))

343 Education Select Committee ([PA0235](#))

344 Child Poverty Action Group ([PA0113](#))

345 Child Poverty Action Group ([PA0113](#))

Box 2: Cost-related barriers to attendance, identified by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)

- Uniform:** Non-attendance can be triggered if a pupil is unable to meet their school's uniform policy. When a school's uniform costs are high, parents may struggle to buy and replace school uniform for their children. Pupils from lower income families were more likely to report that there were occasions when they could not attend school because they only had one uniform which was in the wash or not dry. Commenting on the price of school uniform, one 14-year-old pupil told us, "You need it for every day and it costs a lot of money. There are some people who don't go to school because of uniform. It ruins your education". Another pupil, aged 15, told us, "You get in trouble for wearing the wrong colour hijab. This is why attendance and punctuality is so bad".
- Dressing up days:** In some schools, attendance dips on non-uniform days and dressing up days. These events typically involve a financial cost and put social pressures on children. While these days intend to be a source of enjoyment, in some cases they harm the education of pupils through increased absences. Pupils told us, "Some people in class ask why you don't have a Christmas jumper" (Pupil aged 9), another said "I would change all the non-uniform days, because people get asked if that's the only clothes they have. It makes them feel upset and disappointed" (Pupil aged 10). Staff told us, "Children will take the day off on days where costumes need to be worn or other days when uniform isn't required". Monitoring of attendance at some schools on non-uniform days identified an increase in the number of pupils who did not attend school on these days.
- Transport:** Children, young people and school staff told the Cost of the School Day project that transport costs can act as a barrier to getting to school in time for lessons. Pupils who struggled to arrive at school on time often lived further away or lived with different family members during the week. Transport costs can affect children and young people's attendance. Staff spoke about phone calls from parents saying that they don't have enough money to send their children to school and said that some children are late on days that social security benefits are paid, as they have to wait until bus fare money is available.
- Punctuality policies:** Some schools impose sanctions on pupils for being late without giving due considering for the reason the pupil is late. One pupil told us, "You get a detention if you get here just after the bell or if you get in really late ... It's really unfair because you can't help it if the bus doesn't come." Another pupil wanted schools to explore the reasons why a pupil arrives late, "If you're late you get a red dot. If you're on time you get a reward. If you get too many red dots you get sent to the Reception class. It's not fair cos some people have personal problems—one girl stays at home to look after her mum cos she keeps getting sick." (year 6 pupil)

Source: Child Poverty Action Group ([PA0113](#))

145. Low-income families can apply for free school transport via the extended rights programme from their local council if they live certain distances away.³⁴⁶ But the NYA raised concerns regarding the criteria and suggested the Department "offers schools and local authorities guidance on addressing transport poverty".³⁴⁷ Furthermore, our evidence

346 If they're aged 8 to 11 and go to their nearest school which is at least 2 miles away, aged 11 to 16 and go to a school 2 to 6 miles away and it's one of their 3 nearest suitable schools, and aged 11 to 16 and go to a school 2 to 15 miles away, if it's a school they have chosen because of their religion or belief. HM Government, [Free school transport](#), accessed 06 September 2023

347 The National Youth Agency ([PA0120](#))

suggests there is not a good understanding of the support available, or it is not sufficient, as other stakeholders such as the National Association of Headteachers, Wallingford School, and Outcomes First Group also identified transport costs as a barrier to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.³⁴⁸ Although the Department publishes funding allocations for local authorities for the extended rights programme, they do not publicise the take up of the programme.³⁴⁹

146. The Department published statutory guidance on the *Cost of School Uniforms* in November 2021.³⁵⁰ Its purpose is “to ensure the cost of school uniforms is reasonable and secures the best value for money”.³⁵¹ It also covers “other support with the cost of school uniforms [and] the information schools should provide to parents regarding their uniform requirements”.³⁵² Dr Claudia Sumner, Advocacy Manager at CPAG, said “there are recent changes to the rules around uniform, encouraging schools to have fewer branded items, be able to go to different school suppliers, which we endorse”.³⁵³ Whilst discussing recommendations to help low-income families, she said:

We are looking for ways to reduce very specific cost barriers. Also, it is very important for all parents to know who they can go to in the school if they are concerned about cost barriers to their child participating in any aspect of school—food, uniform, trips, curriculum. I think that it is very helpful to parents if they know that there is a point of contact that they can be in touch with and seek support without judgment.³⁵⁴

147. We asked the Minister whether his Department had plans for further measures for pupils missing school due to cost pressures.³⁵⁵ He said “children from disadvantaged backgrounds have extra rights to transport, so that they can have the same choice of school they go to as children who can afford transport”.³⁵⁶ The Director General added “on uniform, we have issued statutory guidance, which focuses very much on affordable/ reasonable so that families are not expected to spend an enormous amount on that. That is an important part of it”.³⁵⁷

148. Transport and uniform costs were identified as barriers to school attendance, especially with recent increases to the cost of living. Although the Department provides extra support to low-income families, such as help with transport costs, it is clear from our evidence that families are not widely taking up these programmes, and therefore, they are not acting as a solution to these barriers. *The Department should respond to this report with the take-up of support provided to low-income families for transport costs.*

149. Ultimately, pupils from low-socio economic backgrounds should not be prevented from receiving an education due their financial situation, and this should be considered a priority for the Department as the cost of living continues to rise. *We recommend*

348 NAHT ([PA0118](#)); Wallingford School ([PA0165](#)); Outcomes First Group ([PA0123](#))

349 HM Government, [Free school transport](#), accessed 06 September 2023

350 Department for Education, [Cost of school uniforms](#), accessed 06 September 2023

351 Department for Education, [Cost of school uniforms](#), accessed 06 September 2023

352 Department for Education, [Cost of school uniforms](#), accessed 06 September 2023

353 [Q100](#)

354 [Qq100-103](#)

355 [Q263](#)

356 [Q263](#)

357 [Q263](#)

the Department review its framework for supporting low-income families in meeting the costs of school attendance. As part of this review, the Department should conduct an impact assessment of its statutory guidance on school uniform, support available for pupils with additional costs such as school trips, and support with transport costs. Following this review, the Department should issue supplementary guidance highlighting best practice, so schools and local authorities can make informed decisions on how to best support low-income families.

150. *The Department should also implement better signposting to ensure local authorities, schools and families are aware of these measures. The Department should consider whether to require a single point of contact within each local authority that families can refer to for help with support.*

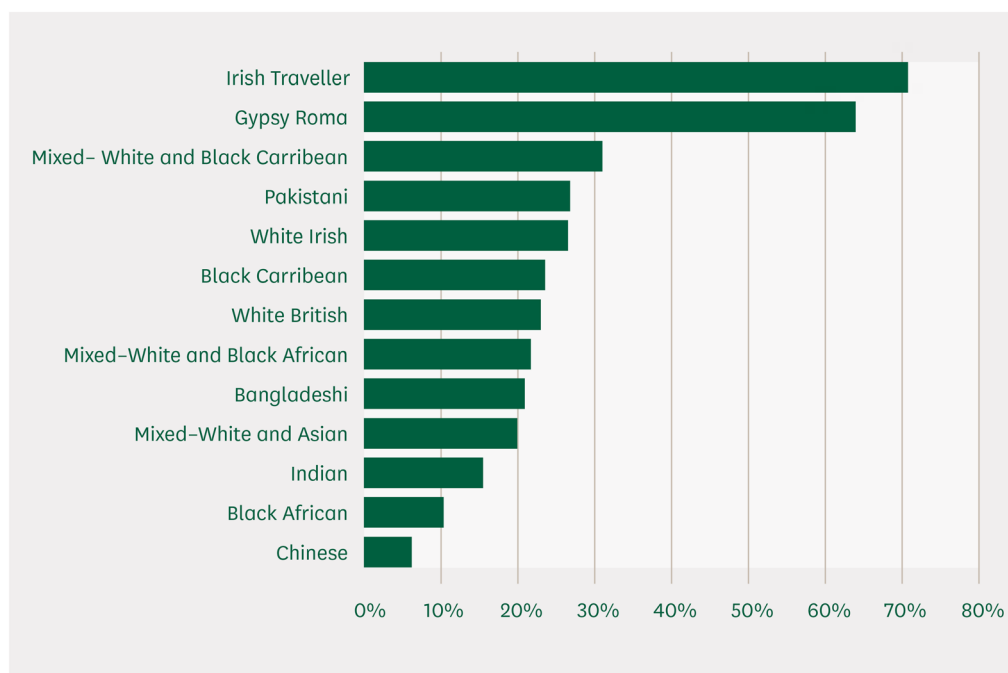
Barriers for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds

Rate of absence for pupil cohort

151. We asked whether pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds experienced specific barriers to attendance. The persistent absence rate shows that Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils consistently have the highest persistent absence rates, whilst Chinese and Black African pupils have the lowest persistent absence rates.³⁵⁸ Pakistani pupils, and pupils of mixed White and Black Caribbean ethnicity have above average rates. Figure 4 below shows the comparative absence rates for selected groups.

Figure 4: Persistent absence by ethnicity for the academic year 2021-22

Persistent absence rates by ethnicity, 2021-2022



Source: Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021-22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

358 Chart shows absence rate for selected groups, full statistics available at source: Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 27 July 2023

152. While figure 4 above shows variation between pupils from different groups, and there are some specific outliers, many ethnic minority groups have lower than average absence rates. We found there was limited research or evidence to suggest that those from other ethnic minority backgrounds are facing significant barriers to attendance, aside from ones that may intersect with health conditions or socio-economic background.³⁵⁹ However, Mind told us that from its research:

Young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds described how they faced racism at secondary school which damaged their mental health. As a result, some were unable to learn or take part at school.³⁶⁰

153. We asked the Department what barriers specific groups of pupils with higher-than-average absence face, such as Pakistani pupils and mixed White and Black Caribbean pupils.³⁶¹ The Director General indicated “a broad combination of issues” including poverty and cultural impacts”.³⁶² The Minister said:

The great advantage of all the data that we have and the analysis that we can provide back to schools is that schools can see which particular groups in their own school, rather than national generalisations of the data, are particularly prone to absence.³⁶³

Barriers to attendance for migrant pupils

154. The Bell Foundation, a charity which aims to overcome exclusion through language education, told us that resettled refugee and asylum support recipient children are estimated to have higher school attendance rates than non-migrant children, with 5% school absence rates compared to the 6.6% for non-migrant children.³⁶⁴ However, it also suggested that pupils arriving late may “be prevented from accessing the full curriculum through the use of in-school withdrawal, delays in securing a school place, and/or the use of Alternative Provision resulting in absence from school”.³⁶⁵ It added:

In-school withdrawal and the use of Alternative Provision and therefore non access to the mainstream curriculum is used to manage new arrivals who are not proficient in English, despite Department for Education policy guidance stating that integration in the mainstream is the preferred pedagogy.³⁶⁶

155. The WONDER Foundation is a charity focussed on girls and women’s experiences of education. Its recent report, *Invisible or ignored? The long road to education for migrant girls in England*, “investigates the barriers migrant girls face to accessing education when they

359 NAHT ([PA0118](#))

360 Mind ([PA0216](#))

361 [Q256](#)

362 [Q256](#)

363 [Q256](#)

364 The Bell Foundation ([PA0103](#))

365 The Bell Foundation ([PA0228](#)). Recently arrived or arrived late is the term commonly used to describe migrant pupils who have started school after the start of the academic year.

366 The Bell Foundation ([PA0228](#))

arrive in England”.³⁶⁷ The Foundation said that “many newly arrived migrant teenaged girls in England face myriad barriers, both to secure a school place in a timely manner and to thrive in education”.³⁶⁸

156. We asked the Department whether schools have been given any guidance, or what steps the Department has made to ensure schools have better knowledge and understanding for pupils arriving late.³⁶⁹ The Director General said:

Some schools do operate a really effective set of temporary, time-bound, focused streams of work, not just for refugee children but for children more generally, which helps to get them into mainstream education. If that is the issue, that is part of the way in which schools effectively manage learning.³⁷⁰

Barriers to attendance for those with English as an additional language (EAL)

157. According to data collected in the School Census for the academic year 2022/23, 20.2% of pupils were recorded as having a first language known or believed to be other than English (commonly referred to as EAL).³⁷¹ Primary school EAL pupils are slightly more likely to be persistently absent than other pupils (18.0% versus 17.6% in 2021/22).³⁷² The Bell Foundation said this had been the case since the beginning of the available dataset in 2012/13.³⁷³ In contrast, secondary school EAL pupils are less likely to be persistently absent (22.1% versus 28.9% in 2021/22).³⁷⁴ Catch 22 said EAL is a barrier to attendance:

Most commonly, the factor contributing to poor attendance from minority ethnic backgrounds is that of lacking English. Whilst most of our pupils speak English, several do have English as an additional language (EAL) [...] EAL can pose a huge barrier to a student’s motivation in attending school; anxiety, lack of self-confidence, low attainment to name a few [...] Further to this, whilst some students may have English as their first language, it is often the case that their parents speak little to no English at all. Of course, this makes school-home communication a challenge. If attendance drops, it’s difficult to understand why, and engage and support parents in driving school attendance. In addition, in areas where ethnic minorities are not the majority, there could be issues with language and cultural traditions that make things like homework, school events and communications difficult.

367 WONDER Foundation, [Invisible or ignored? The long road to education for migrant girls](#), accessed 06 September 2023

368 WONDER Foundation, [Invisible or Ignored? The long road to education for migrant girls in England: Executive Summary](#), July 2023, p4

369 [Qq260–261](#)

370 [Qq260–261](#)

371 Department for Education, [Schools, pupils and their characteristics for the 2022/23 academic year](#), accessed 06 September 2023. This varies per school type with 22.0% in state-funded primary schools and 18.1% in state-funded secondary schools.

372 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

373 The Bell Foundation ([PA0103](#))

374 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

We often see that this evokes a perception that they are being actively castigated by the school for not understanding how to participate in the school community which, again, can lead to disengagement.³⁷⁵

158. The Bell Foundation provided examples of interventions schools were offering to try increase attendance.³⁷⁶ It said:

We heard things such [...] as having buttons on websites to translate the school material into the home language are fairly cheap and very practical and the solutions to challenges are very much more about communication—coffee mornings, engaging parents, talking to parents and so on—than more punitive approaches.³⁷⁷

Barriers to attendance for those from the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Community (GRT)

159. Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils had the highest overall absence rates, and highest persistent absence rates for the academic year 2021/22 (71.7% and 64.9% respectively).³⁷⁸ Friends, Families, Travellers, a national charity working with the GRT community, said that GRT pupils often experience high levels of racism and bullying at school, which then translates to higher levels of absence.³⁷⁹ A survey it conducted in 2019 found 86% of GRT pupils “reported the biggest challenge at school as bullying, followed by racism at 73%”.³⁸⁰ Further research by the Anti-Bullying Alliance revealed the experiences of GRT pupils as including:

- Being negatively labelled, judged and having presumptions made about them being troublemakers or not willing to learn.
- Feeling they were treated differently from other pupils and could not access additional support when needed.
- Racist and offensive language about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and communities going unchallenged.
- Not being believed when they report bullying.
- Presumptions about them tending to bully others.
- Feeling they had to retaliate or hide that they are Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller.
- Learning to expect bullying because no action was being taken to prevent or respond to it.³⁸¹

375 Catch22 ([PA0097](#))

376 [Q83](#)

377 [Q83](#)

378 Department for Education, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2021/22](#), accessed 06 September 2023

379 Friends, Families and Travellers ([PA0174](#))

380 Friends, Families and Travellers ([PA0174](#))

381 Friends, Families and Travellers ([PA0174](#))

160. As a result of their case work, the Traveller Movement have described persistent absenteeism as “an early indication that something is not right”.³⁸² It told us that:

Whilst the reasons can be varied, in many cases we have found that a lack of attendance is due to a negative experience that child may be having in school. This can be the case even when the low attendance is linked to ill health, which can be used by the child or family to justify their position to the school.³⁸³

The Traveller Movement also cited bullying to be one of the main barriers, noting parents may feel their child is not safe at school.³⁸⁴

161. We asked the Minister what guidance is given to schools to help with bullying.³⁸⁵ The Minister said:

The guidance we have on behaviour is very clear about bullying. Any form of bullying—homophobic bullying, racist bullying—is unacceptable in schools. The guidance is very clear. I think that most schools work very hard to eliminate that kind of bullying.³⁸⁶

Interventions

162. We heard from the Traveller Movement that the T-Code is a specific code used to authorise certain school absences for Travelling families.³⁸⁷ If a family is travelling for work purposes, they must make sure they let the school know. This will then allow schools to put a ‘T’ in the register which records Gypsy and Traveller pupils’ agreed absences from school if their parents are travelling for work. But the Traveller Movement said that in practice, the T-code is not followed consistently across the sector, with some schools having either lower thresholds, or not checking absences are related to essential work travel.³⁸⁸

163. We heard examples of best practice initiatives that local authorities were delivering across the country. Families, Friends, Travellers said:

Education Welfare Officers, employed by local authorities, have the role of increasing attendance by liaising with Gypsy and Traveller families and working on dismantling barriers to attendance and helping with school applications, knowing which schools have vacant places and helping nomadic families link up with these schools to secure a place for their child, and other such liaison work. Local authority Traveller Education Services also provide extra support to Gypsy and Traveller pupils to help them catch up and attain at the level of other pupils.³⁸⁹

382 Traveller Movement ([PA0156](#))

383 Traveller Movement ([PA0156](#))

384 Traveller Movement ([PA0156](#))

385 [Q255](#)

386 [Q255](#)

387 Traveller Movement ([PA0156](#))

388 Traveller Movement ([PA0156](#))

389 Friends, Families and Travellers ([PA0174](#))

But Families, Friends and Travellers told us “these specialist services have been severely cut, with only a few remaining nationally”.³⁹⁰ It recommended the Government “reintroduce targeted ring-fenced funding for these roles”.³⁹¹

164. Pauline Anderson, Chair of Trustees at the Traveller Movement, also told us about the interventions the Traveller Movement provides to support the GRT community.³⁹² She said “if you look at Open Doors Education and Training as part of our website, you will see that that is having great success and turnaround stories: people who were out of education are now back in”.³⁹³ She also said “there is really good practice across the country”, and mentioned work in her local area.³⁹⁴ She said:

In my own city, in Derby, we have the new communities achievement team [...] We found that a large proportion of the Gypsy and Traveller community were without digital access. We were funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to set up digital learning.

165. We asked what the Department is doing to tackle the high rates of absence for pupils from the GRT community.³⁹⁵ The Minister said:

We are working with DLUHC. It has delivered a £1 million Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pilot education areas programme to test initiatives to improve educational attainment of GRT children. That is on top of the £400,000 funding provided in 2021 for catch-up tutoring for GRT children. We also have a GRT stakeholder group, which is a forum for policy teams to consult directly with the community so that they can express their views to the DfE on how we can tackle the challenges faced by GRT children.

166. We heard that pupils with English as an additional language, or migrant pupils face some specific barriers to attendance. Although we asked if pupils from other ethnic minority groups faced barriers to attendance, such as Pakistani pupils, and White and Black Caribbean pupils with above average rates, we found little research or evidence on the topic. *The Department should conduct further research on the barriers to attendance for migrant pupils, and those with above average rates of absence.*

167. There is clear evidence to suggest pupils from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community face significant barriers to attendance. Whilst the Department is aware of this, not enough is being done to support this pupil cohort, and community interventions are filling the gap in localised areas. Whilst the Department does not usually provide targeted interventions for specific ethnic minority groups, for this pupil cohort, it is evident that it is needed to improve their persistently poor outcomes on attendance.

168. *We recommend the Department continue to work with stakeholders from the GRT community and using examples of best practice, roll out measures on a national scale to support this pupil cohort.*

390 Friends, Families and Travellers ([PA0174](#))

391 Friends, Families and Travellers ([PA0174](#))

392 Traveller Movement ([PA0156](#))

393 [Q97](#)

394 [Qq96–97](#) (Pauline Anderson is the Director of learning, inclusion and skills for Derby City Council)

395 [Qq254–258](#)

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

1. The rate of absence in schools in England has increased significantly since the pandemic. It is of great concern that absence rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. The Department recognises the problem, which is encouraging, but there has been no significant improvement in the speed and scale of the rate of reduction which is needed to prevent long-term harm to pupils. (Paragraph 13)

The Department's outlook

2. We welcome the daily attendance data pilot, the Department's intention to mandate schools' participation, and to replace the School Census. *Given that around 80% of schools have been successfully using the dashboard over the last academic year, for consistency, we recommend the Department make use of the dashboard mandatory as soon as possible, subject to a successful evaluation of the pilot and addressing any remaining concerns about data management, in conversation with the Information Communications Office.* (Paragraph 20)
3. The Department monitoring daily school attendance is a welcome step, but further monitoring is needed to identify and support those children not receiving a formal education. We have repeatedly called for a register of children not in school and were glad to see it in the Schools Bill. Although the Bill has been dropped, the Secretary of State, the Minister for Schools and the Prime Minister have committed to bringing forward a register, with timescales yet to be announced. (Paragraph 28)
4. *We urge the Government to deliver on its commitment to introduce a register of children not in school to be fully operational for the 2024/25 academic year. We therefore expect the Government to include a suitable legislative vehicle in the next King's Speech, if it has not already availed itself of the opportunity to adopt a private members bill already before the house.* (Paragraph 29)

Expectations for attendance

5. We heard mixed reactions to the guidance working together to improve school attendance. Whilst witnesses agreed guidance on a statutory footing is needed to improve attendance, we heard from a number of witnesses that the guidance in its current form may require revisions. The Department initially planned to revise the guidance ahead of the 2023/24 academic year and said it would place the guidance on a statutory footing when parliamentary time allows, but neither has been completed. (Paragraph 44)
6. *The Department should implement statutory guidance to be applicable from September 2024. When revising the guidance, we recommend the Department should consult carefully with stakeholders, particularly those representing SEND pupils and their families, and pupils suffering from poor mental health. It should also ensure greater*

clarity regarding the use of attendance codes. Following a new burdens assessment, the Department should allocate ring-fenced funding for local authorities to meet the expectations of the statutory guidance. (Paragraph 45)

7. We heard that support offered by local authorities can vary significantly. For example, since the funding for Education Welfare Officers has been devolved to schools, it has become a “traded good” for most schools, and a postcode lottery for pupils. We understand the Department has recently conducted a new burdens assessment to improve the consistency of support offered by local authorities, but not all local authorities have the resource to effectively provide the required level of support. Ultimately, the Department must ensure that all schools across the country can access good support in tackling persistent absence. (Paragraph 46)
8. *The Department should conduct an audit of support provided by local authorities to tackle persistent absence. As part of this, the Department should make an assessment of the impact of providing funding for Education Welfare Officers through schools, compared to centrally funding such roles. (Paragraph 47)*

Government Interventions

9. There is evidence that prior to the pandemic, fines played a role in reducing unauthorised absence. However, it is less clear if they are an effective deterrent for families who are facing some of the current barriers to attendance we have outlined. We heard that fines do not address the barriers that low-income families face and can be counterproductive by adding to difficult financial circumstances (as discussed in chapter 7). Families are struggling with high school costs, and in some cases, fining is not an appropriate, compassionate, or helpful response. It is clear fines and other legal measures have a use in some circumstances, but the Department does not monitor or regulate the use of fines and prosecution and what methods of support have been offered before they are applied. We also heard that they are used inconsistently due to local authority discretion. We understand the Department recognises this and consulted on the use of legal interventions in July 2022, but we are disappointed by the lack of urgency and action from the Department to effect change in its consultation response. (Paragraph 55)
10. *We recommend the Department instruct schools and local authorities to explore methods of support for pupils and families before the use of fines or prosecution, ensuring that legal intervention is a last resort only. The Department should be more explicit about this in its revisions to the guidance ‘Working together to improve school attendance’. These revisions should include a national framework for fines and prosecution, to ensure consistency between local authority use. We reiterate, the Department should legislate for this guidance to be made statutory. (Paragraph 56)*
11. We welcome the increase in attendance mentors and the expansion of attendance hubs. Geographical alignment with Education Priority Investment areas gives some insight into the Department’s priorities but we are persuaded that measures need to be rolled out nationally to support persistent and severely absent pupils effectively. *The Department should roll out attendance interventions nationally. Given the success of the Attendance Mentors Programme to date, the Department should start by implementing a national roll out of attendance mentors. (Paragraph 63)*

12. Although we heard that attendance mentors do work with families in circumstances when their work with the child exposes a wider set of issues, it is imperative that they conduct this work for all pupils with whole-family support at the forefront, as highlighted by best practice by School-Home Support. *As part of the national roll out of attendance mentors, the Department should ensure whole-family support is at the forefront of the programme.* (Paragraph 64)

Food and enrichment-based interventions

13. Given a major driver of low attendance is low income, it follows that measures to tackle child poverty should be considered in the Department's approach to improving attendance. *The Department should make an assessment of the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals and adjust if necessary, ensuring all children in poverty are in receipt.* (Paragraph 71)
14. We welcome the offer of breakfast clubs and the Holiday Activities and Food Programme for pupils with higher levels of disadvantage. This measure can be used to support attendance, and may already be doing so, but there is a lack of evidence as the Department does not require schools or local authorities to measure return rates in school attendance, following attendance at breakfast or holiday clubs. (Paragraph 77)
15. *We recommend the Department require local authorities to report on school attendance levels for pupils who have attended a breakfast club or holiday club. If a significant impact can be demonstrated, the Government should consider this in future funding decisions.* (Paragraph 78)
16. We heard limited evidence that schools were offering sports-based interventions to improve school attendance, despite the benefits of sport to pupil engagement. We did hear of localised interventions that are offering some provision, but the position of these interventions is often unsecure and unsustainable due to the lack of direct support from the Government. The Government certainly values sport and activity, and recognises the impact on pupil wellbeing through its update to the School Sport and Activity Action Plan. But there is a lack of recognition for third sector and community organisations providing valuable interventions. (Paragraph 87)
17. *We recommend the Department commission research to test the link between sports-based interventions and improved attendance. As part of this, the Department should look to the third sector for effective practice examples.* (Paragraph 88)
18. The provision of enrichment activities available for pupils has declined in recent years, with £1 billion less spent on youth services than a decade ago. We heard sports-based activities provided by third sector organisations is just one example of enrichment that has been used as an intervention to improve school attendance. We welcome the £500 million pledged by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport towards a National Youth Guarantee, and the Minister for School's focus on music education. But more should be done to promote an overall enrichment guarantee for pupils in school, to then in turn, improve school attendance. (Paragraph 97)

19. *As the Centre for Social Justice have recommend, the Department should implement an enrichment guarantee for pupils in school including the use of sport, music, drama and art, looking to the youth sector for best practice. This guarantee should have KPIs focusing on improving school attendance, and the Department should provide options for schools to incorporate this via an extended school day, should they wish to implement one. (Paragraph 98)*

Barriers to attendance for pupils with health difficulties

20. *Absence rates in special schools have always been significantly higher than in mainstream educational settings. We understand the SEND cohort have higher absences for legitimate and unavoidable reasons, thus making comparisons with other cohorts difficult. We recommend the Department take greater care when reporting these statistics to avoid unhelpful comparisons. (Paragraph 106)*
21. *Attendance and engagement should be seen as key metrics of educational outcomes for SEND pupils in specialist settings. However, the Department should take specific barriers into account when developing these metrics and ensure that they are not expected to behave identically to peers in other settings. (Paragraph 107)*
22. *Whilst the SEND and AP improvement plan provides a useful framework for improving outcomes for this group of pupils, it is evident that unmet needs prevails as a very significant barrier to school attendance. Whilst we understand funding pressures, it is essential that pupils are provided with proper resource to improve their educational outcomes and therefore, school attendance. (Paragraph 108)*
23. *The Department should prioritise resource for inclusion and assessment in mainstream schools, to ensure they are adequately set up to support SEND pupils and address the current level of unmet need, and therefore improve their attendance rates. (Paragraph 109)*
24. *We heard that alternative provision settings are providing useful interventions for pupils with attendance issues, we accept that it can be used as a process for reintegration. But, it is clear that alternative provision should not be seen as a long-term solution, nor should it be used to manage behaviour concerns, due to the level of education provided in these settings. We also heard that some pupils with SEND are being placed in alternative provision without a proper understanding or assessment of their needs. (Paragraph 118)*
25. *It is clear that alternative provision should only be a time-limited intervention with clear structures to ensure each pupil's needs are being effectively supported. The Department should scrutinise its use and ensure they're being used as methods of support to improve attendance, and discourage its use as a means to manage behaviour. (Paragraph 119)*
26. *We have seen overwhelming evidence indicating a radical increase in mental health difficulties amongst school pupils since the covid-19 pandemic. With CAMHS waiting lists at all-time highs, and pupils on three-year waiting lists in some parts of the country, it is evident that the current capacity of mental health services is grossly*

inadequate. Whilst the Department has issued non-statutory guidance on mental health in schools, it needs to do more to improve its offer of support for these pupils. (Paragraph 131)

27. *The Department should also lead a cross-government assessment of the scale of mental health difficulties amongst pupils, and review the current provision of support available in schools and outside of them. The Government should conclude this review and report its findings by Summer 2024. There then needs to be significant joint working across the Government to ensure CAMHS provision is adequate to meet the needs of school age children, in line with the Department's previous commitment to a 4-week waiting time.* (Paragraph 132)
28. Mental health-related absences are not commonly authorised by schools, sometimes due to requirements to provide medical evidence which can often lead to fines or prosecution for families. The introduction of an authorised mental health absence code could eliminate the need for medical evidence in cases of known and established mental health difficulties and reduce the need for intervention via prosecution. (Paragraph 133)
29. *As part of reforms to the guidance on attendance, the Department should introduce a mental health absence code, and set clear thresholds for its use.* (Paragraph 134)
30. Illness was the primary reason for pupil absence before covid-19 and remains so. But parental attitudes to illness and attendance have shifted and Government messaging has been inconsistent. As a result, the illness absence rate is considerably higher now than it was pre-pandemic. (Paragraph 141)
31. *We recommend the Department should launch a targeted public information campaign to guide parents on when and when not children who are unwell should attend school. Close working between the Department and the Department for Health and Social Care will be required to get this right, but it should aim to ensure that parents understand the types of illness, including coughs and colds, that should not require children in normal circumstances to miss school.* (Paragraph 142)

Barriers to attendance for certain pupil characteristics

32. Transport and uniform costs were identified as barriers to school attendance, especially with recent increases to the cost of living. Although the Department provides extra support to low-income families, such as help with transport costs, it is clear from our evidence that families are not widely taking up these programmes, and therefore, they are not acting as a solution to these barriers. *The Department should respond to this report with the take-up of support provided to low-income families for transport costs.* (Paragraph 148)
33. Ultimately, pupils from low-socio economic backgrounds should not be prevented from receiving an education due their financial situation, and this should be considered a priority for the Department as the cost of living continues to rise. *We recommend the Department review its framework for supporting low-income families in meeting the costs of school attendance. As part of this review, the Department should conduct an impact assessment of its statutory guidance on school uniform,*

support available for pupils with additional costs such as school trips, and support with transport costs. Following this review, the Department should issue supplementary guidance highlighting best practice, so schools and local authorities can make informed decisions on how to best support low-income families. (Paragraph 149)

34. *The Department should also implement better signposting to ensure local authorities, schools and families are aware of these measures. The Department should consider whether to require a single point of contact within each local authority that families can refer to for help with support. (Paragraph 150)*
35. *We heard that pupils with English as an additional language, or migrant pupils face some specific barriers to attendance. Although we asked if pupils from other ethnic minority groups faced barriers to attendance, such as Pakistani pupils, and White and Black Caribbean pupils with above average rates, we found little research or evidence on the topic. The Department should conduct further research on the barriers to attendance for migrant pupils, and those with above average rates of absence. (Paragraph 166)*
36. *There is clear evidence to suggest pupils from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community face significant barriers to attendance. Whilst the Department is aware of this, not enough is being done to support this pupil cohort, and community interventions are filling the gap in localised areas. Whilst the Department does not usually provide targeted interventions for specific ethnic minority groups, for this pupil cohort, it is evident that it is needed to improve their persistently poor outcomes on attendance. (Paragraph 167)*
37. *We recommend the Department continue to work with stakeholders from the GRT community and using examples of best practice, roll out measures on a national scale to support this pupil cohort. (Paragraph 168)*

Formal minutes

Tuesday 12 September 2023

Members present

Robin Walker, in the Chair³⁹⁶

Flick Drummond

Nick Fletcher

Kim Johnson

Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils

Draft report (*Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 168 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjourned till Tuesday 19 September at 9.30 am.

³⁹⁶ Elected by the House (Standing Order No. 122B); see Votes and Proceedings [18 June 2015].

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 07 March 2023

Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner for England, Office of the Children's Commissioner for England; **Mr Rob Williams**, Senior Policy Adviser, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT); **Cllr Lucy Nethsingha**, Deputy Chair of the Local Government Association's Children and Young People's Board, Local Government Association, Councillor for Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire County Council; **Alice Wilcock**, Head of Education, Centre for Social Justice

[Q1–43](#)

Tuesday 16 May 2023

Ellie Costello, Director, Square Peg; **Vicki Nash**, Associate Director of External Relations, Mind; **Dr Daniel Stavrou**, Policy Vice Chair, Special Education Consortium

[Q44–115](#)

Pauline Anderson OBE, Chair of Trustees, Traveller Movement; **Dr Claudia Sumner**, London Advocacy Manager, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG); **Diana Sutton**, Director, Bell Foundation

[Q44–115](#)

Tuesday 06 June 2023

David Holmes, CEO, Family Action; **Leigh Middleton**, CEO, National Youth Agency; **Declan Barker**, HAF Manager, Nottingham City Council

[Q116–161](#)

Nathan Persaud, Programmes Director for England, School of Hard Knocks (SoHK); **Jonathan Pauley**, 11+ Education Manager, City Inspires

[Q162–186](#)

Tuesday 27 June 2023

Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools, Department for Education; **Graham Archer**, Interim Director General for Families Group, Department for Education

[Q187–283](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

xxxINQxxx numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Action Tutoring ([PA0105](#))
- 2 Adoption UK ([PA0140](#))
- 3 Agenda Alliance ([PA0147](#))
- 4 Ambitious about Autism ([PA0179](#))
- 5 Anonymised ([PA0052](#))
- 6 Anonymised ([PA0219](#))
- 7 Anonymised ([PA0209](#))
- 8 Anonymised ([PA0208](#))
- 9 Anonymised ([PA0204](#))
- 10 Anonymised ([PA0203](#))
- 11 Anonymised ([PA0202](#))
- 12 Anonymised ([PA0200](#))
- 13 Anonymised ([PA0199](#))
- 14 Anonymised ([PA0196](#))
- 15 Anonymised ([PA0193](#))
- 16 Anonymised ([PA0189](#))
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- 46 Anonymised ([PA0062](#))
- 47 Anonymised ([PA0061](#))
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- 67 Anonymised ([PA0013](#))
- 68 Anonymised ([PA0009](#))
- 69 Anonymised ([PA0007](#))
- 70 Anonymised ([PA0003](#))
- 71 Anonymised ([PA0002](#))

- 72 Anonymised ([PA0011](#))
- 73 Anti-Bullying Alliance (National Children's Bureau) ([PA0125](#))
- 74 Association for Education Welfare Management ([PA0190](#))
- 75 Association for Young People's Health ([PA0150](#))
- 76 Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) ([PA0139](#))
- 77 Association of Essex Headteachers (BBW) ([PA0040](#))
- 78 Association of School and College Leaders ([PA0201](#))
- 79 Barnardo's ([PA0155](#))
- 80 Bedfordshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner ([PA0152](#))
- 81 Birchanger C of E Primary School ([PA0055](#))
- 82 Birmingham SEMH Pathfinder ([PA0081](#))
- 83 Bite Back 2030 ([PA0024](#))
- 84 Bramall, Sue ([PA0038](#))
- 85 Brown , Dr Geraldine (Assistant Professor , Coventry University); Epstein , Rona (Honorary Fellow , Coventry University); and Flynn , Dr Sarah O' (Principal Lecturer, Roehampton University) ([PA0084](#))
- 86 Brown, Dr Ceri (Reader, Associate Professor, University of Bath); Douthwaite, Dr Alison (Research Associate, University of Bath); Savvides, Dr Nicola (Senior Lecturer, University of Bath); and Costas-Batlle, Dr Ioannis (Lecturer, University of Bath) ([PA0169](#))
- 87 Cardiff University ([PA0048](#))
- 88 Carers Trust ([PA0162](#))
- 89 Catch22 (29178) ([PA0097](#))
- 90 Centre for Self Managed Learning ([PA0072](#))
- 91 Centre for Social Justice ([PA0135](#))
- 92 Chance UK Ltd ([PA0195](#))
- 93 Child Poverty Action Group ([PA0113](#))
- 94 Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) ([PA0234](#))
- 95 Clinically Vulnerable Families ([PA0232](#))
- 96 Clinically Vulnerable Families ([PA0206](#))
- 97 Contact for families with disabled children ([PA0149](#))
- 98 Cook, Dr Will (Senior Lecturer in Economics, Manchester Metropolitan University) ([PA0210](#))
- 99 defend digital me ([PA0080](#))
- 100 Define Fine: Parent Peer Support for School Attendance Difficulties ([PA0176](#))
- 101 Department for Education ([PA0224](#))
- 102 Duke of Edinburgh's Award ([PA0154](#))
- 103 Dyck, Mrs P van (child psychotherapist, self-employed, formerly NHS Trust) ([PA0012](#))
- 104 EdAct ([PA0029](#))
- 105 Education Endowment Foundation ([PA0111](#))

- 106 Education Select Committee ([PA0235](#))
- 107 Education Support ([PA0137](#))
- 108 Education and Inclusion, Children and Young People's Services, Wakefield Council ([PA0207](#))
- 109 Edwards, Dr Simon (Senior Lecturer Youth Studies, University of Portsmouth) ([PA0151](#))
- 110 Elliot-Major, Professor Lee (Professor of Social Mobility , University of Exeter) ([PA0107](#))
- 111 Equality and Human Rights Commission ([PA0167](#))
- 112 Essex County Council ([PA0171](#))
- 113 Family Action ([PA0141](#))
- 114 Finlayson, Katie ([PA0096](#))
- 115 Forward South Partnership ([PA0227](#))
- 116 Friends, Families and Travellers ([PA0174](#))
- 117 Green, Heather (Senior Lecturer, University of Chichester); and Edwards, Becky (Senior Lecturer, University of Chichester) ([PA0178](#))
- 118 Guldberg, Professor Karen (Director of Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER), University of Birmingham) ([PA0082](#))
- 119 Harrison, Dr Neil (Associate Professor in Education and Social Justice, University of Exeter) ([PA0172](#))
- 120 Hendricks, ([PA0010](#))
- 121 Humber Outreach Programme - Uniconnect ([PA0163](#))
- 122 IPSEA ([PA0134](#))
- 123 Information, Advice and Support Services Network ([PA0143](#))
- 124 Inspiration Trust ([PA0221](#))
- 125 Just for Kids Law ([PA0223](#))
- 126 Leeds Trinity University ([PA0022](#))
- 127 Local Government Association ([PA0138](#))
- 128 Long Covid Kids ([PA0230](#))
- 129 Long Covid Kids ([PA0092](#))
- 130 MIND ([PA0231](#))
- 131 Martin, Mrs Marie (ParentCarer, Send Warrior Mum making a difference! (Twitter) Unpaid Carers Weekly Support group.); and Martin, ([PA0060](#))
- 132 Mind ([PA0216](#))
- 133 NAHT ([PA0118](#))
- 134 NASS (National Association for Independent Special Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools) ([PA0050](#))
- 135 NASUWT - The Teachers' Union ([PA0098](#))
- 136 National Association for Hospital Education ([PA0094](#))
- 137 National Education Union ([PA0114](#))
- 138 National Foundation for Educational Research ([PA0159](#))

- 139 National Governance Association ([PA0173](#))
- 140 National Network of Parent Carer Forums ([PA0126](#))
- 141 National Youth Agency ([PA0120](#))
- 142 Neaverson, Dr Aimee (Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Anglia Ruskin University); and Lake, Abbie ((PhD Candidate), Department of Criminology, Anglia Ruskin University) ([PA0030](#))
- 143 Nisai Virtual Academy ([PA0191](#))
- 144 No to Schools Bill Campaign ([PA0211](#))
- 145 Nottingham City Council ([PA0064](#))
- 146 Nuffield Foundation ([PA0153](#))
- 147 nurtureuk ([PA0086](#))
- 148 Office of the Children's Commissioner for England ([PA0148](#))
- 149 Ofsted ([PA0166](#))
- 150 Outcomes First Group ([PA0123](#))
- 151 Parentkind ([PA0213](#))
- 152 Persaud, Nathan (England Programmes Director, School of Hard Knocks (SoHK)) ([PA0229](#))
- 153 Pini, Dr Simon (NIHR Senior Research Fellow, University of Leeds) ([PA0160](#))
- 154 Place Network, Charlie Waller Trust ([PA0110](#))
- 155 Place2Be; and Department of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge ([PA0083](#))
- 156 Q3 Academy Langley ([PA0226](#))
- 157 Raleigh Education Trust ([PA0142](#))
- 158 Reconnect London ([PA0194](#))
- 159 Reed, Rebecca (Headteacher, Chantry Community Primary School) ([PA0197](#))
- 160 Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists ([PA0112](#))
- 161 Sauer, Mrs Alison (Chair, The Centre for Personalised Education); and Price, Mrs Nicola (Head of Department, East Lancashire Secondary School) ([PA0180](#))
- 162 School- Home Support ([PA0089](#))
- 163 Schools North East ([PA0161](#))
- 164 Sosu, Dr Edward (Reader, University of Strathclyde); and Klein, Dr Markus (Reader, University of Strathclyde) ([PA0100](#))
- 165 Special Educational Consortium ([PA0168](#))
- 166 Square Peg ([PA0218](#))
- 167 Supporting Attainment and Inclusion for Life ([PA0128](#))
- 168 THE CAVENDISH HIGH ACADEMY ([PA0158](#))
- 169 Tavistock Relationships ([PA0164](#))
- 170 The Attachment Research Community ([PA0129](#))
- 171 The Bell Foundation ([PA0233](#))
- 172 The Bell Foundation ([PA0228](#))
- 173 The Bell Foundation ([PA0103](#))

- 174 The COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities study ([PA0215](#))
- 175 The Canterbury Academy ([PA0220](#))
- 176 The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition ([PA0130](#))
- 177 The Children's Society ([PA0222](#))
- 178 The National Autistic Society ([PA0075](#))
- 179 The Tutor Trust ([PA0217](#))
- 180 Traveller Movement ([PA0156](#))
- 181 Tyerman, Dr Peter (Trustee, Autism Plus) ([PA0079](#))
- 182 UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities (CEPEO) ([PA0146](#))
- 183 University of Birmingham ([PA0115](#))
- 184 University of Portsmouth ([PA0049](#))
- 185 Wallingford School ([PA0165](#))
- 186 Waters, Mr Steve (CEO, Teach Well Toolkit Ltd) ([PA0015](#))
- 187 West London Zone ([PA0136](#))
- 188 West Northants SEND Action Group ([PA0170](#))
- 189 Willow Dene School ([PA0023](#))
- 190 Woodger, David (Senior Lecturer, Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS), Goldsmiths, University of London); and Frizell, Dr Caroline (Senior Lecturer, Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS), Goldsmiths, University of London) ([PA0144](#))
- 191 YoungMinds ([PA0104](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

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2nd Report	Educational poverty: how children in residential care have been let down and what to do about it	HC 57
3rd Report	The future of post-16 qualifications	HC 55
4th Report	Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance	HC 54
5th Report	Support for childcare and the early years	HC 969
6th Report	Appointment of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills	HC 1800
1st Special	Is the Catch-up Programme fit for purpose?: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 273
2nd Special	Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity: Government response to the Committee's First Report	HC 645
3rd Special	Educational poverty: how children in residential care have been let down and what to do about it: Government response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 854
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1st Report	The forgotten: how White working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it	HC 85
2nd Report	Appointment of the Chief Regulator of Ofqual	HC 512
3rd Report	Strengthening Home Education	HC 84
4th Report	Is the Catch-up Programme fit for purpose?	HC 940
1st Special Report	Strengthening Home Education: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 823

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Getting the grades they've earned: Covid-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades	HC 617
2nd Report	Appointment of the Children's Commissioner for England	HC 1030
3rd Report	A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution	HC 278
4th Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Office for Students	HC 1143
1st Special Report	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019	HC 668
2nd Special Report	Getting the grades they've earned: COVID-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades: Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 812
3rd Special Report	A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1310