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[Department
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Guidance

Attendance: why it matters, key data and guidance

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Applies to England

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The importance of school attendance

School attendance is vital for children's learning, wellbeing and wider development, and is a strong protective factor for all children and young people, especially the most vulnerable. It supports their long-term educational outcomes [\[footnote 1\]](#) and helps safeguard them from harms such as exploitation [\[footnote 2\]](#) and radicalisation [\[footnote 3\]](#).

Missing school has a clear impact on attainment, affecting progress, confidence and readiness to learn. Children who miss 2 to 4 weeks of school in year 11 have half the odds of achieving a grade 5 in English and maths compared to similar pupils who attend regularly.

Being in school every day helps children stay connected to learning, peers and the wider life of the school. It promotes a sense of belonging, a stable routine and access to opportunities that support personal, social and academic development. When attendance declines, children are more likely to experience reduced progress, increased vulnerability and poorer long-term outcomes, including an increased risk of becoming NEET (that is, not in education, employment or training).

Children with a social worker face additional challenges. Pupils on a child protection plan miss, on average, almost 8 weeks of school a year, which is far higher than for the wider pupil population. This highlights the importance of strong collaboration between families, schools and local authority partners to identify barriers early and provide the right support.

Getting off to a good start

Early development also plays a role. The government's [Best Start in Life strategy](#) is strengthening children's early development by expanding high-quality early education and family support, helping more children start school ready to learn. Regular school attendance builds on these early foundations to support their future success.

Reducing risk

Education reduces wider risks. Evidence from the 2024 Youth Endowment Fund report [Education: Children and Violence](#) shows that being in education significantly reduces the likelihood of children becoming involved in violence by keeping them engaged in safe, structured environments with trusted adults. Schools also help develop self-regulation, empathy and conflict-resolution skills, which lower vulnerability to exploitation. They play an important early warning role by identifying emerging risks and acting before concerns escalate.

Some causes and effects of absence

Where children are not receiving education, either because they are persistently or

severely absent from school, or they are not registered at a school and not receiving a suitable education otherwise (known as children missing education), this could be a possible indicator of neglect, abuse or exploitation, or could in itself constitute neglect in severe and sustained cases.

Absence rates for pupils in all the key social care groups are significantly higher than that of the overall pupil population. Data for 2023 to 2024 shows very high levels of school missed by children in need and those on a child protection plan at any point, with lower rates for children looked after at any point.^[footnote 4]

Absence rates 2023 to 2024 by social care group

Type of absence	All pupils comparison	Child in need at any point	Child on a protection plan at any point	Child looked after at any point
Overall	7.3% (equivalent to 14 days missed over a year, on average)	15.9% (equivalent to 30 days missed over a year, on average)	19.8% (equivalent to 38 days missed over a year, on average)	10.8% (equivalent to 20 days missed over a year on average)
Persistent ^[footnote 5]	20.3%	43.5%	52.7%	26.4%
Severe ^[footnote 6]	2.5%	9.6%	13.0%	7.4%

Relevant guidance

[Working together to improve school attendance](#)

This statutory guidance for schools, trusts and local authorities makes it clear that ‘attendance is everybody’s business’. It requires local authorities, working alongside virtual school heads, to support the setting of ambitious expectations for attendance. It also expects local authority attendance teams to meet schools termly to agree

individual plans for pupils with complex barriers, creating an important opportunity for social worker involvement.

[Children's social care national framework](#)

This statutory guidance for leaders, senior practitioners and practitioners working in children's social care sets out the outcomes that local authorities should achieve for children, young people and families. It highlights the importance of building strong working relationships between schools, social workers and partners to address barriers to engaging with education and promote attendance.

[Working together to safeguard children](#)

This statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, support and protect children applies to all organisations and agencies that have functions relating to children and young people. It emphasises a child-centred approach within a whole-family context, aiming to build trusting relationships with families and ensure consistent, effective safeguarding practices. It seeks to strengthen accountability, improve outcomes for children, and embed national standards across all safeguarding activities. It highlights the importance of proactive, timely information-sharing, so emerging concerns are identified and addressed early.

[Keeping children safe in education](#)

This statutory guidance, to which all schools and colleges must have regard, sets out their duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and reinforces that every child or young person deserves a safe environment in which to learn. It highlights that persistent or repeated absence can be a vital warning sign of safeguarding issues and emphasises the need to recognise these attendance-related indicators and respond in ways that identify emerging concerns to protect pupils, including those already known to children's social care.

[Families first partnership programme](#)

This guidance sets expectations and provides support for safeguarding partners to implement reforms to family help and multi-agency child protection, and make greater use of family group decision-making to improve support for family networks. It specifies that, where pupils face out-of-school barriers and the family does not have a social worker, they should routinely be assessed for family help.

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1. [Link between attendance and attainment](#) ↩
 2. [Excluded or missing from education and child exploitation: literature review and stakeholder views on safeguarding practice](#) ↩
 3. [Protocol - Prevalence and risk and protective factors for radicalisation among](#)

[school-aged youth: A systematic review](#) ↵

4. [‘National - Absence’ from ‘Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England](#) ↵
5. A pupil is persistently absent when they miss more than 10% of school. ↵
6. A pupil is severely absent if they miss more than 50% of school. ↵

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