

THE MISSING LINK

Restoring the bond between schools and families

January 2024



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About the Centre for Social Justice

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

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

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

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

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2024 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Foreword

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) first identified the post-COVID spike in school absence more than two years ago. Since then, we have seen tentative progress, but government is yet to grasp the nettle. While persistent absence remains eye-wateringly high, it appears at least to have turned a corner. But the latest data for severe absence reveals that it has returned to the record highs seen in Summer 2022, with 140,000 so-called ‘ghost children’ missing at least 50 per cent of their school time. Every day of school matters and the consequences of failing to return children to the classroom will be felt for decades to come.

The Department for Education’s current attendance mentor pilot will reach just 1 per cent of severely absent pupils at most, and attendance guidance remains advisory only. Accelerating the national roll out of attendance mentors and putting attendance guidance on a statutory footing would begin to ensure families have the support they need.

But there is more fundamental work to be done in rebuilding the contract between families and schools. New polling commissioned by the CSJ reveals that while many children were able to resume something like normal life soon after the pandemic ended, there is a significant minority for whom the bonds of trust between families and schools were broken. The polling shows that almost three in ten parents believe the pandemic has shown it is not essential for children to attend school every day – a view that successive teacher strikes will have done little to rectify. A cumulative total of 25 million school days were lost to industrial action during the 2022/23 school year.

The attendance mentor programme is an important emergency response to a desperate situation, but for sustainable change we need to rebuild trust between schools, parents, and the children they cherish. This requires a more fundamental shift in approach to the partnership between schools and families – and the role of government in supporting parents - where all work together in the interest of children.

This is not a one-way street. Parents have legitimate expectations of schools which government must help them to deliver, but as parents, we need to take responsibility for getting our kids ready for school, at school, and for keeping them engaged in school. Restoring the bond between parents and schools – supported by small charities and community organisations – will help us to do this. The CSJ has long championed the potential of parental engagement to enable children to fulfil their potential. Higher levels of parental engagement are associated with better outcomes for children – including school attendance – and disadvantaged children are likely to benefit most.

Simultaneously, we urgently need to refresh what schools are offering. Why is the school day so short? Why do we starve so many state school pupils of the benefits of greater sport and enrichment? Engaging and inspiring children beyond the academic will encourage far greater appeal to go to school.

In this report the CSJ sets out a seven-point plan to turn the tide, employing a wide range of tools to turbocharge school attendance and give more children an education that opens doors. At the centre of this is a focus on parental engagement and whole family support. We recommend the national roll out of attendance mentors – an army of 2,000 dedicated key workers charged with tackling the underlying causes of absence. Alongside this, we call for the creation of a National Parental

Participation Strategy, helping schools and parents to work together more effectively. And with previous CSJ research having demonstrated the power of sport to increase school engagement, we also call for a new Right to Sport for all secondary school pupils. Providing five hours of extracurricular activity for every secondary school pupil in England would not only close the 'activity gap' between state school pupils and their independently educated peers but also boost engagement and drive-up attendance.

The crisis levels of school absence are symptomatic of a serious breakdown in trust between schools and many parents. Failure to address this will be catastrophic for the future of our people, communities and state. All of us – government, schools and parents - need to get our kids back to school.

Andy Cook

CEO, Centre for Social Justice

Executive Summary

The Centre for Social Justice first revealed the crisis in school absence in 2021 and has since led the charge in understanding and offering solutions to getting children back to school. Sadly, but unsurprisingly, disadvantaged children have found themselves at the sharp end of the attendance crisis, with children in receipt of Free School Meals three times more likely to be severely absent than their more affluent classmates. Given the strong link between attendance and attainment, the absence crisis is compounding disadvantage. It is incumbent upon schools, government and parents to act.

In Spring Term 2023, the absence rate across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in England was 7.0 per cent. One in five children were persistently absent, meaning 20.6 per cent children missed 10 per cent or more of their school time, and 140,706 children were severely absent, meaning they missed 50 per cent or more of their schooling.¹

To date, we have largely considered how schools and children can be supported to help combat this problem and called for the immediate nationwide rollout of attendance mentors to encourage children back into the classroom. We continue to believe that attendance mentors are a critical part of the government's emergency response to crisis levels of absence. In parallel, however, government policy must grapple more directly with the changing relationship between families and schools, alongside asking challenging questions about the school offer.

Higher levels of parental engagement are associated with better outcomes for children – including school attendance – and disadvantaged children are likely to benefit the most.^{2,3} For some parents, however, the Covid lockdowns appear to have broken the contract of trust between schools and families and it will be very hard to encourage children back to school unless parents are fully bought into their education. A succession of post-pandemic strikes will have done little to rectify perceptions of school as optional, with a cumulative total of 25 million school days lost to industrial action in the 2022/2023 school year.

To better understand what is going on, the Centre for Social Justice commissioned a poll of 1,206 parents of children who are aged between 5-16 and enrolled in primary or secondary school. Fieldwork took place between 15-19th December 2023. The overall sample was weighted to be nationally representative of the target UK population and filtered down to the target audience.

1 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

2 Education Endowment Foundation, 2019. Parental Engagement: Evidence from Research and Practice

3 Centre for Social Justice, 2023, Cracks in our Foundations

We discovered that:

School is still seen as important, but lockdown has impacted the perceived 'necessity' of school attendance

- The majority of parents (88 per cent) agree that every single day of school matters and it is vital children attend school as much as possible.
- However, it is clear that lockdown has had some impact on parents' attitudes towards school attendance. Almost three in ten parents (28 per cent) agree that the pandemic has shown it is not essential for children to attend school every day.

Most parents feel they have the foundations of a good relationship with school, but a large minority, particularly in secondary schools, do not

- The majority of parents feel that their relationship with their children's school has remained the same (56 per cent) or got better (27 per cent) since the pandemic. A total of 16 per cent, however, felt that it had gotten worse.
- Only 26 per cent say the school communicates with them 'very well' about their child's educational progress. However, a significant minority (38 per cent) say the school does not communicate with them well enough.
- The majority of parents (77 per cent), say they trust their children's school to provide a quality education. However, this drops to 70 per cent among low-income households and in relation to secondary schools specifically.

Some parents feel that they need more support from schools

- Over a third of parents (35 per cent) said that they are worried about their child's performance and would like more support from their child's school. A further 18 per cent said they were worried about their child's attendance and would like more support.
- Seven in ten parents (70 per cent) are confident that their child's school is meeting their child's needs, however almost one in five (18 per cent) do not feel confident their child's needs are being met. Amongst those with a child in secondary school, confidence amongst parents drops to 61 per cent.

On the back of these findings we recommend seven areas in which government should consider reforms (see full recommendations on page 14):

1. Create a National Parental Participation Strategy which includes best practice guidance to help schools and parents to engage more meaningfully with each other.
2. Roll out attendance mentors nationwide in the immediate term.
3. Make Department for Education guidance on attendance statutory.
4. Improve school attendance data metrics.
5. Recognise the value of relational work through youth clubs and services.
6. Introduce a Right to Sport in our schools.
7. Conduct a review into the effectiveness of fines and attendance prosecution.

Introduction

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

Our report, 'Kids Can't Catch Up if They Don't Show Up', revealed that nearly 100,000 children were severely absent in Autumn 2020. Severely absent children are absent for 50 per cent or more of possible school sessions. They are absent more often than they are present.

This report was followed by 'Lost but Not Forgotten', which examined the characteristics of pupils who were most likely to be absent from school. In March 2023 we published 'Lost and Not Found', setting out the conclusions of our inquiry into the drivers behind school absence, which include anxiety and poor mental health, unmet special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), poverty/disadvantage, and changing parental attitudes towards education following the pandemic.

In May 2023 and October 2023, we published our 'School Absence Tracker', monitoring government figures on absence levels for Autumn 2022 and Spring 2023 respectively, while tracking steps taken by government to tackle school absence.

More detail on school absence can be found in Appendix A, but in Spring Term 2023, the absence rate across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in England was 7.0 per cent. The authorised absence rate was 4.7 per cent and the unauthorised absence rate was 2.3 per cent. One in five children were persistently absent, meaning a pupil who misses 10 per cent or more of their school time, and 140,706 children were severely absent, meaning they missed 50 per cent or more of their schooling.⁴

Throughout the CSJ's research, and research conducted by others across the sector on the school absence crisis, the importance of parental engagement and insights into changing parental attitudes to school attendance following successive COVID lockdowns has been raised.

To delve further into this and better understand parental attitudes towards attendance and parental perceptions of school, the CSJ commissioned a poll of 1,206 parents of children who are aged between 5-16 and enrolled in primary or secondary school. Fieldwork took place between 15-19th December 2023. The overall sample was weighted to be nationally representative of the target UK population and filtered down to the target audience. Where quotes are included in the report, they are verbatim responses to an open-ended question asked of all parents surveyed.

The polling was conducted by YouGov.

4 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

Chapter 1:

Parental attitudes to school attendance

We asked parents about how they viewed the importance of school and discovered that while it is still seen as a key part of a child's development, lockdown has impacted the perceived 'necessity' of school attendance.

Chart 1: Overall attitudes towards school attendance

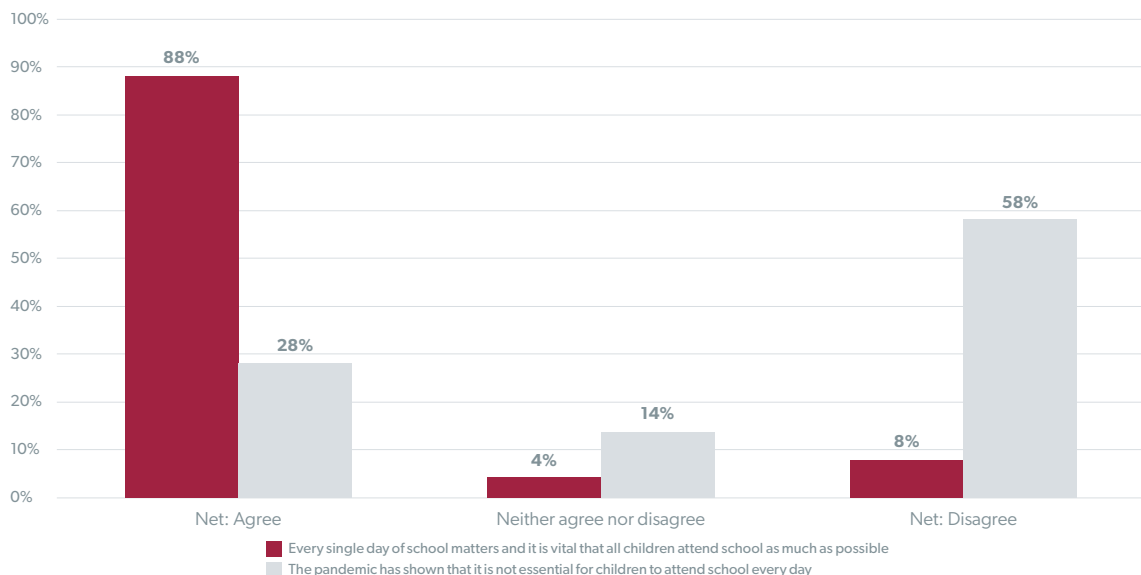


Chart 1 shows that the clear majority of parents (88 per cent) agree that every single day of school matters and it is vital children attend school as much as possible. While a positive result, it is striking that 8 per cent of parents disagreed. Given there are around 10 million school children in the UK, the absolute numbers this may represent are not insignificant.

It is also clear that lockdown has had an impact on attitudes towards school attendance among a significant minority of parents. While the majority may agree that every day of school matters, chart 1 also shows that almost three in ten parents (28 per cent) agreed that the pandemic has shown it is not essential for children to attend school every day.

The results show that while most parents agree every school day matters, some of that support has become quite soft.

In Appendix B we explore some of the reasons given for children who had actually missed school in the past 12 months. The vast majority are for medical reasons but 8 per cent of parents said their child had missed school due to mental health reasons, while the same proportion (8 per cent) said their child missed school due to anxiety. 5 per cent said their child had missed school due to bullying or threat of violence. Low-income households (those earning less than £30,000 per annum) were significantly more likely than average to say their child had missed school due to a mental health reason or anxiety (12 per cent), as were those not in work (12 per cent).

"My child gets bullied and school only get in touch when he has been pushed so far that he reacts. They approach me as though he is in the wrong. School acknowledges he is bullied but do not sanction the perpetrators."

"We have no contact unless [my daughter] is unable to attend a lesson due to anxiety and goes to welfare hub. They don't believe her and say she's truanting."

Chapter 2:

Parental perceptions of school engagement

Most parents feel they have the foundations of a good relationship with school. Verbatim comments provided by survey respondents indicate that the majority of schools are reasonably communicative, with emails, texts, and various education apps all in regular use. Below is a fairly standard indicative survey response:

"Both schools send emails to keep us up to date with how our child is doing, school activities and performances, etc. It's comprehensive enough that we don't have to go hunting for information very often."

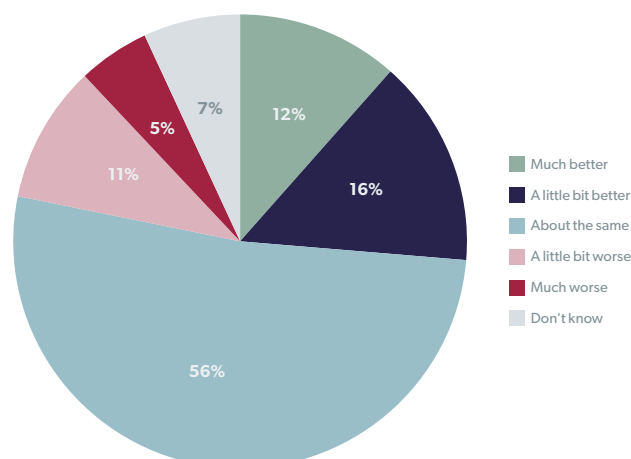
The word cloud below highlights the words parents most frequently used in association with school communication, with email being the dominant medium.



But for a large minority, particularly among parents of children at secondary school, there is a feeling that schools do not do enough to communicate with parents.

"They only seem to communicate with me on occasions that are not relevant/important, but when I communicate with them for an important reason, they rarely reciprocate with a suitable and timely response."

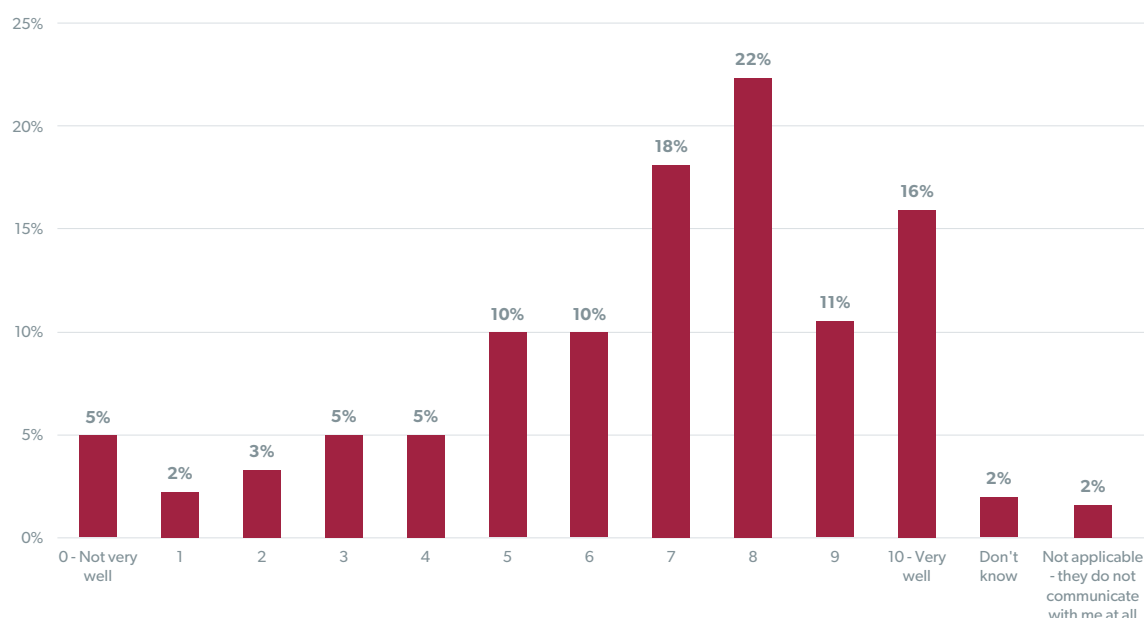
Chart 2: Since the pandemic, do you feel that your relationship with your child(ren)'s school(s) has got better or worse, or do you think it has remained about the same?



The majority of parents feel that their relationship with their children's school has remained the same (56 per cent) or got better (27 per cent) since the pandemic. A total of 16 per cent however felt that it had gotten worse.

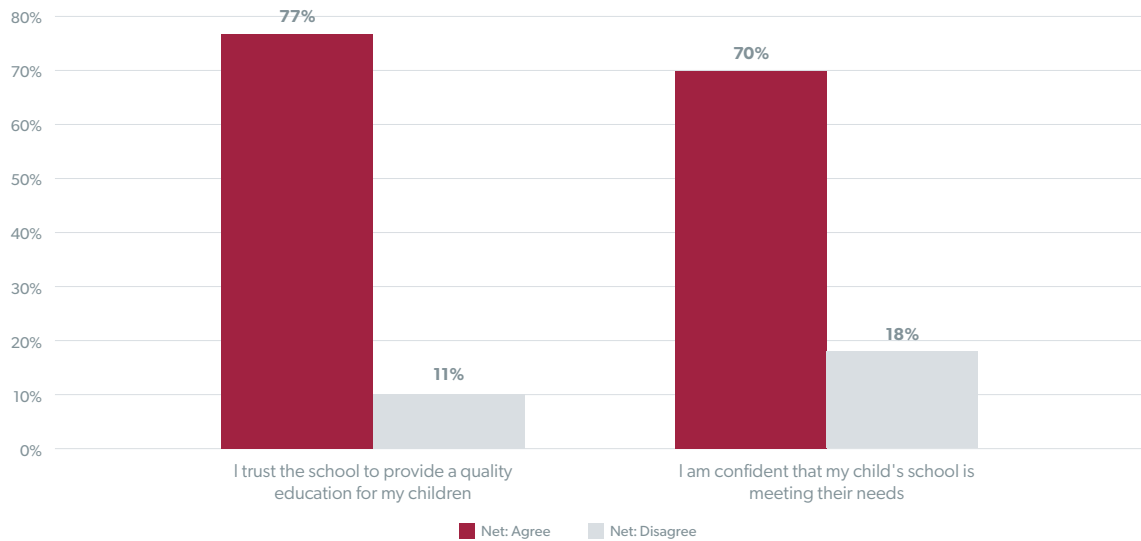
In addition, only 26 per cent say the school communicates with them 'very well' about their child's educational progress and a significant minority (38 per cent) say the school does not communicate with them well enough.

Chart 3: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not very well at all' and 10 is 'very well', how well do you feel your child(ren)'s school(s) communicates with you about your child(ren)'s educational progress?



The majority of parents (77 per cent), say they trust their children's school to provide a quality education, however this drops to 70 per cent for low-income households. It also drops to 70 per cent in relation to secondary schools specifically, showing a significant trust-gap between schools and parents of older children.

Chart 4: Parent's trust and confidence in school to deliver a quality education and meet their child's needs



One specific issue repeatedly raised by respondents was poor communication when parents were no longer living together, particularly communication with fathers. Below is a sample of responses, in respondents own words:

"I feel as a father, separated from the mother, I am communicated less with than the mother."

"They only contact my ex-wife, not me."

"They do not engage with me at all. Even though I have joint custody and shared parental rights everything is communicated through my ex-wife."

Previous studies suggest that by age 14, nearly half of first born children live apart from either their mother or father.⁵ Given the importance of paternal engagement in education outcomes this feels like a significant gap that could be easily addressed when the majority of communication is electronic – emails, apps, texts.

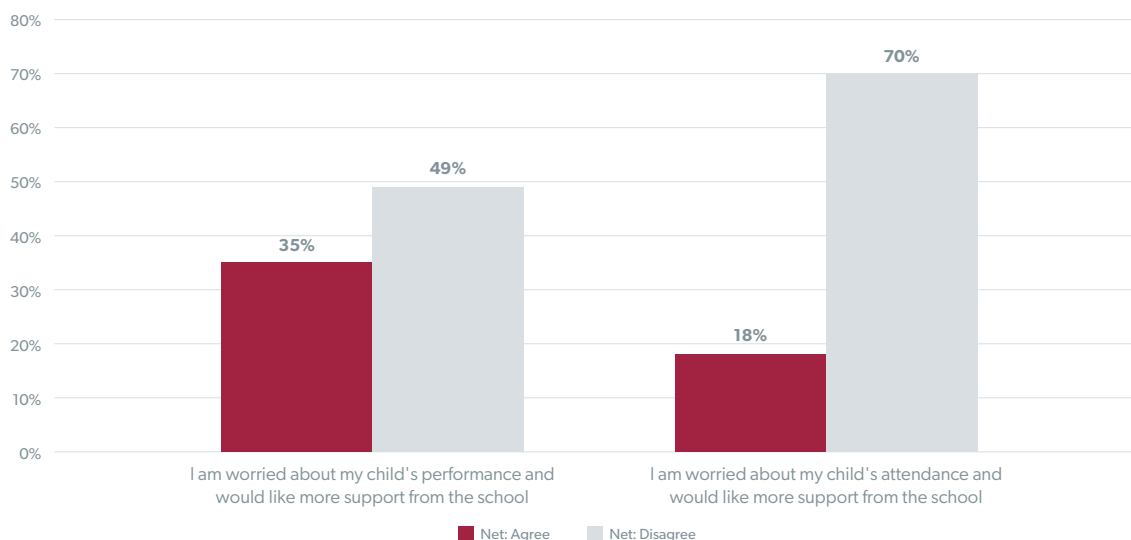
5 Marriage Foundation, 2023, Source of Family Breakdown

Chapter 3:

Parental attitudes to school support

A significant proportion of parents reported concerns about their children's performance at school and felt that they needed more support from schools.

Chart 5: Parent's concerns about their child and need for further support from school



Over a third of parents (35 per cent) said that they are worried about their child's performance and would like more support from school, rising to 42 per cent among low-income households. A further 18 per cent said they were worried about their child's attendance and would like more support, rising to 24 per cent among low-income households.

When asked about communication with the school, some parents expressed the need for more support from the school:

"There is little to no engagement from the school via any means. We have been requesting support for both my children since September and have yet to receive any from any member of staff, including the school SENCO."

However, as highlighted in chart 4, there is some good news, too. Seven in ten parents (70 per cent) are confident that their child's school is meeting their child's needs, compared to almost one in five (18 per cent) who do not feel confident their child's needs are being met.

But again, as with perceptions of school engagement, among those with a child in secondary school, confidence amongst parents drops to 61 per cent. This could potentially represent hundreds of thousands of pupils whose parents do not have confidence in their child's school.

"[I receive] far too many pointless messages about events in the school, not nearly enough about my child directly."

Recommendations

The number of severely absent children remains at crisis levels term after term and our polling has highlighted some significant gaps in both parents' trust in school and how well they feel communicated with.

The Government must both accelerate and broaden its response urgently to get this cohort of children back into the classroom and to support the rebuilding of trust and engagement between parents and schools.

The CSJ has a seven-point plan to turn the tide, at the centre of which is a focus on parental engagement and whole family support – something the CSJ's severe absence inquiry and our polling has highlighted as critically important in tackling the absence crisis. We recommend employing a diverse range of tools that bring together schools, parents and charities, turbocharging attendance and giving more children an education that opens doors.

The Department for Education should create a National Parental Participation Strategy. This should include best practice guidance for schools and parents to engage more meaningfully with each other.

Recommendation: The Department for Education should create a National Parental Participation Strategy, which should create a new duty for schools and multi-academy trusts (MATs) to focus on parental participation and publish parental participation plans. Trusts and schools should design these plans in consultation with parents and guardians to reflect the needs of local families. As part of a broader Parental Participation Strategy, the Government should release additional guidance on the best practice for engaging parents of children who are severely absent. This should include specific guidance on communicating with parents who no longer live together.

Recommendation: Family Hubs should be integrated with existing school services and colocated within schools.

Roll out attendance mentors in the immediate term – a proven intervention to boost attendance.

Recommendation: The Department for Education should roll out a national programme of 2,000 attendance mentors. These mentors would work with families to understand and remove the underlying barriers to school attendance. A national programme would cost an estimated £80 million per year. However, this must not become a longer-term replacement for proper family engagement at school level.

Ensure families can access the right support.

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

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

Improve school attendance data.

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

Recognise the value of relational work through youth clubs and services.

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

Introduce a Right to Sport in our schools.

Recommendation: The Government should introduce a new Right to Sport for all secondary school pupils to unlock five hours of extracurricular activity for every pupil in secondary school in England. The Right to Sport would see all pupils participate in a minimum of two hours of extracurricular sport per week, on top of PE time already scheduled on the curriculum, closing the 'activity gap' between state school pupils and their independently educated peers.

Ensure fines are working.

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

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

Appendix A:

School Absence

Overall absence rates

In Spring Term 2023, the absence rate across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in England was 7.0 per cent.⁶ The authorised absence rate was 4.7 per cent and the unauthorised absence rate was 2.3 per cent.⁷

Persistent absence

A pupil who is persistently absent misses 10 per cent or more of their school time, the equivalent to half a day per week or more.

In Spring Term 2023, 1,476,165 children were persistently absent. This is equivalent to 20.58 per cent of all children in state-funded mainstream or special schools (one in five children).⁸

The number of persistently absent children has decreased by 266,557 since the previous term, Autumn 2022, a decrease of 15.3 per cent. Persistent absence has grown by 60.0 per cent relative to pre-pandemic (Autumn Term 2019).⁹

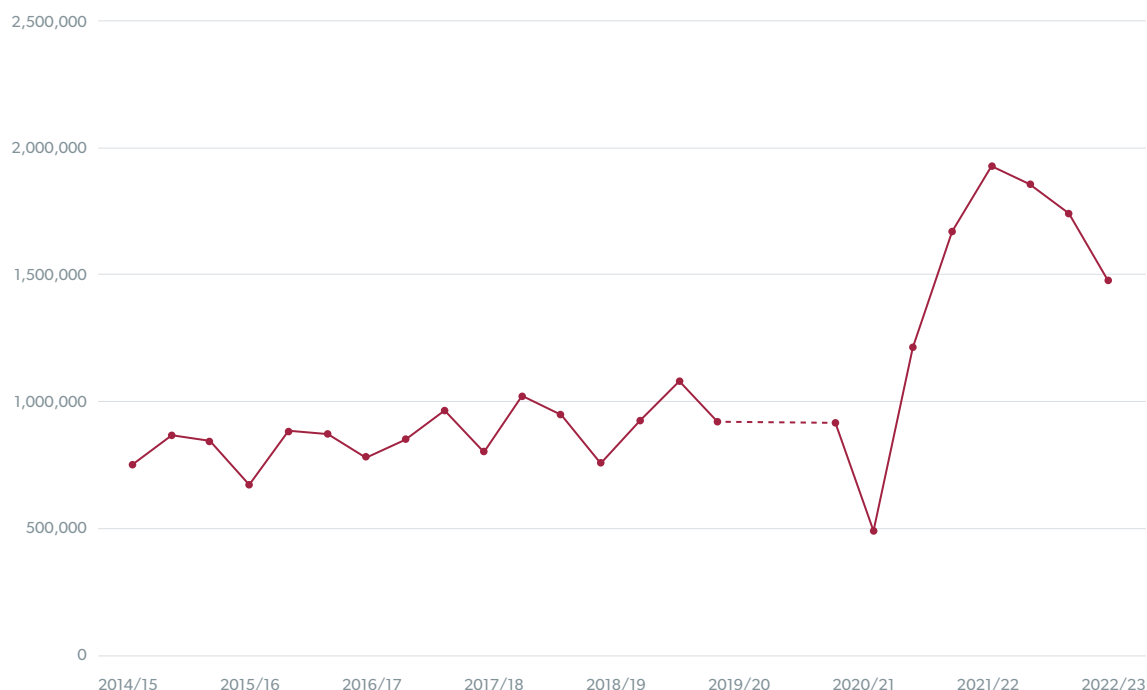
6 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

7 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

8 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

9 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

Figure 1: Persistent absence over time



Severe absence

A pupil who is severely absent missed 50 per cent or more of their school time, the equivalent to every afternoon in a week. These are children who are absent more than they are present.

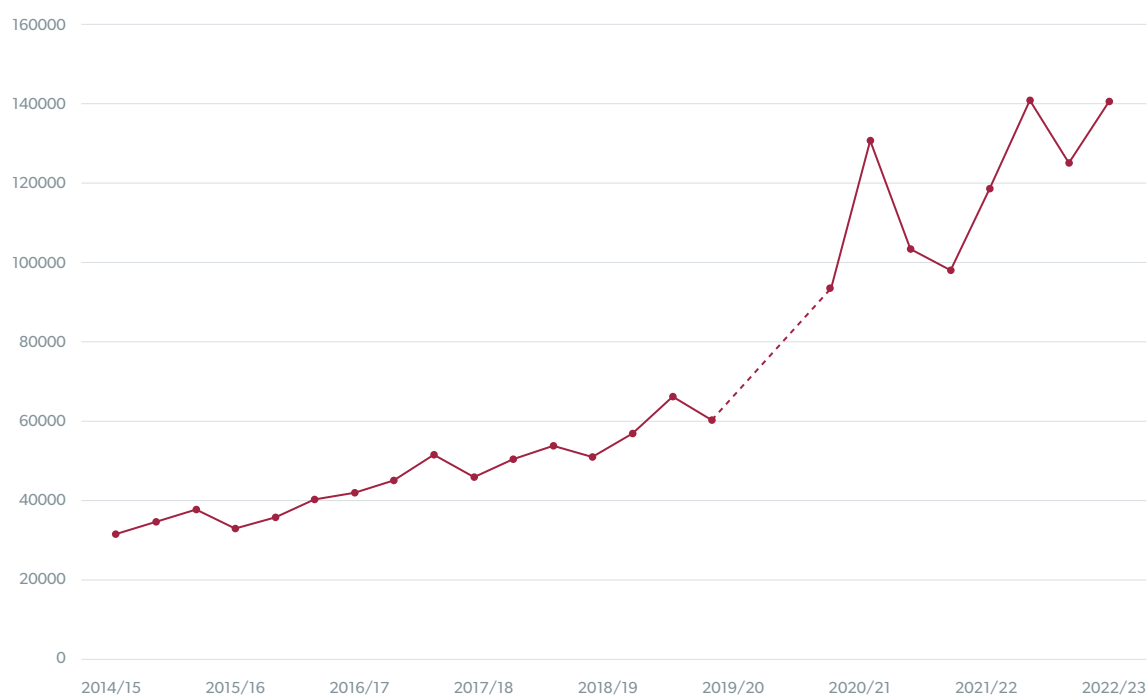
In Spring Term 2023, 140,706 children were severely absent. This is equivalent to 1.96 per cent of all children in state-funded mainstream or special schools.¹⁰

The number of severely absent children has increased by 15,484 since the previous term, Autumn 2022, an increase of 12.4 per cent. Severe absence has grown by 133.6 per cent relative to pre-pandemic (Autumn Term 2019)¹¹

¹⁰ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

¹¹ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

Figure 2: Severe absence over time



Absence by school type

Primary school

17.1 per cent of children in state-funded primary schools were persistently absent in Spring Term 2023, equating to 656,650 children.¹²

Primary school pupils account for 18.5 per cent of all severely absent children. 0.7 per cent of children in primary schools were severely absent in Spring Term 2023.¹³

Secondary school

In Spring Term 2023, 24.1 per cent of all children in state-funded secondary school were persistently absent. 772,883 children in total were persistently absent in state-funded secondary schools.¹⁴

In Spring Term 2023, 3.3 per cent of all secondary school children were severely absent, accounting for 75.6 per cent of all severely absent children. This is equivalent to 1 in every 30 secondary school children.¹⁵

¹² Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

¹³ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

¹⁴ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

¹⁵ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

Special school

The rate of persistent absence is higher in special schools. In Spring Term 2023, 46,632 children educated in special schools were persistently absent. This represents 36.3 per cent of all children educated in special schools.¹⁶

In Spring Term 2023, 8,252 children educated in special schools were severely absent. This represents 6.4 per cent of all children educated in special schools.¹⁷

Alternative Provision

Across Autumn Term 2022 and Spring Term 2023, 81.2 per cent of children educated in AP (28,221 in total) were persistently absent.¹⁸

Across Autumn Term 2022 and Spring Term 2023, 37.5 per cent of children in Pupil Referral Units (13,012 in total) were severely absent.¹⁹

AP figures only reflect pupil enrolments in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and, due to the transience of the AP population, the absence figures are counted separately and not included in the total absence figures.

Absence by pupil characteristics

Absence by Free School Meal eligibility

Children on Free School Meals (FSM) are more likely to be persistently and severely absent than their peers.

In Spring Term 2023, the rate of persistent absence for children eligible for FSM was 33.0 per cent, compared to 15.9 per cent for children not eligible for FSM.²⁰

In Autumn Term 2022, the rate of severe absence for children eligible for FSM was 3.2 per cent, compared to 0.9 per cent for children not eligible for FSM.²¹

¹⁶ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

¹⁷ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

¹⁸ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

¹⁹ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

²⁰ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

²¹ Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2022

Absence by special educational needs/disabilities

Children with special educational needs (SEN) support and children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) are more likely to be persistently and severely absent than their peers.

In Spring Term 2023, the rate of persistent absence was 28.8 per cent for children with SEN Support, 33.2 per cent for children with a SEN provision statement or an EHCP and 18.2 per cent for children with no identified SEN.²²

In Autumn Term 2022, the rate of severe absence was 3.2 per cent for children with SEN Support, 5.4 per cent for children with a SEN statement or EHCP, and 0.98 per cent for children with no identified SEN.²³

Absence by gender

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

In Spring Term 2023, 20.4 per cent of females and 19.9 per cent of males were persistently absent. In Autumn Term 2022, 1.8 per cent of females and 1.7 per cent of males were severely absent.²⁴

Absence by ethnicity

Absence rates vary by ethnicity. Children who are Gypsy/Roma or Traveller of Irish heritage have the highest persistent absence rates. In Spring Term 2023, 58.4 per cent of Traveller of Irish heritage and 51.3 per cent of Gypsy/Roma children were persistently absent. For comparison, 20.3 per cent of White British pupils were absent over this period.²⁵

13.3 per cent of Traveller of Irish heritage and 7.9 per cent of Gypsy/Roma children were severely absent last year. For comparison, the rate of severe absence for White British pupils was 1.9 per cent.²⁶

Absence by pupil residency

For pupil residency, the latest data available is from the 2021/22 academic year. 30.0 per cent of children living in the most disadvantaged areas were persistently absent over the course of 2021/22. For comparison, 14.3 per cent of children living in the most affluent areas were persistently absent over the same period.²⁷

22 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

23 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2022

24 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

25 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

26 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2022/23

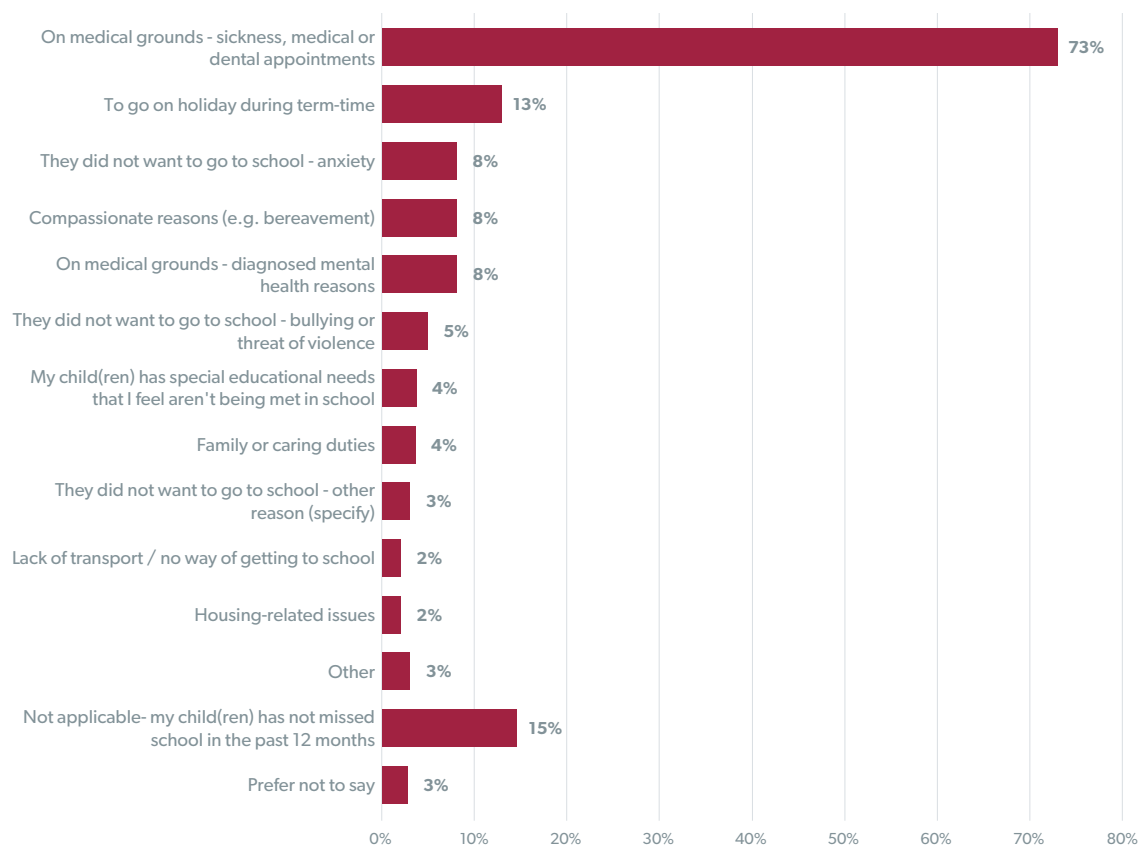
27 Department for Education, 2023. Pupil absence in schools in England: Academic year 2021/22

Appendix B:

CSJ Polling on School Absence

Reasons for missing school

Chart 6: Reasons due to which children missed the school



- A total of 83 per cent of parents said their child had missed at least one day of school in the past year.
- The overwhelming majority of absences were on medical grounds, accounting for 73 per cent of stated reasons for their child missing a day of school. 8 per cent said their child had missed school due to mental health reasons, while the same proportion (8 per cent) said their child missed school due to anxiety. Low-income households were significantly more likely than average to say their child had missed school due to a mental health reason (12 per cent), as were those not in work (12 per cent).
- 13 per cent of parents had taken children out of school for a holiday during term-time.
- 5 per cent said their child has missed school due to bullying or threats of violence.



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