

Draft Press Release**Strict Embargo 12 noon, Tuesday, 4th February 2025**

Today signals the final day of the school year for 158,000 'severely absent' pupils in England.

- School Attendance Gap Day is a new national awareness day led by school attendance charity School-Home Support.
- The **School Attendance Gap** represents 'lost learning'¹ as a result of absence from school.
- 4th February 2025 is **School Attendance Gap Day**, which signals the final school day of the year for 'severely absent' pupils - those who miss 50% of school.² Click here to use the campaign's [School Attendance Gap Calculator](#) which we've created to help schools talk about lost learning through absence.
- The problem of severe absence is getting worse rather than better. In 2025, **School Attendance Gap Day is the final school day for 158,000 pupils** in England. Severe absence levels have increased by 149% from before the pandemic (2018/2019).
- School-Home Support is calling for the Government to update its assessment of the cost of pupil absence to the economy. The last [assessment](#) was conducted by New Philanthropy Capital in 2012.
- By shining a light on the 'lost learning' as a result of severe absence School Attendance Gap Day aims to **promote positive collaboration to build an inclusive education system to end the attendance crisis.**

Today, 4th February 2025, is the halfway point in the school year for state-funded schools in England, and so signals the final day of school for the 158,000 pupils who are severely absent.³ By the Government's definition, these children are missing at least 50% of school, meaning they are out of school as often as they are in and losing half of their learning.

The number of children missing this much of school is 149% higher than pre-pandemic (2018/2019).⁴ This means that collectively we are still failing huge numbers of children, and the problem of school absence is getting worse not better.

There is still a school attendance crisis.

Almost 1 in 5 children are missing enough school to damage their life chances. Absence continues to disproportionately impact vulnerable children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to [data](#) collected by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), Children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) were 3.56 times more likely to be severely absent than children who were not eligible. Data from School-Home Support's practitioners [indicates](#)

¹ The concept of 'lost Learning' was coined in a [report by IPPR and The Difference](#) in relation

² 'Severe absence' is the government's definition of children who miss 50% of school or more.

³ According to the latest official Government statistics: ['Pupil absence in schools' Autumn and spring term 2023/24.](#)

⁴ Comparing official Government statistics from [2018/19](#) and [2022/23.](#)

that issues relating to home, money, and employment are the most pressing problems for families receiving support for their children's attendance.

We need a laser-like focus on tackling school attendance.

The school attendance crisis is complex and systemic. It has always been 'a symptom rather than a cause, a manifestation of complex issues in the education system and beyond'⁵ To tackle it we need a laser-like focus and the power of collective endeavour. School Attendance Gap Day will fall on approximately the same day each year - half way through the academic year - but the number of children who have their final day on this date will change. By marking this day each year we can measure our collective progress in tackling absenteeism.

Mind the Gap: The long term consequences of low school attendance.

The school attendance gap represents the learning lost by children who miss school. It relates to learning of all kinds - including academic, social and practical. The consequences of lost learning are significant, contributing to cycles of deprivation, missed opportunities and lost potential.

- **Lower Attainment.** There is a proven correlation between school absence and school attainment. [Data](#) from the Children's Commissioner report 'Missing school, missing grades' reveals that 78% of pupils who were rarely absent in both years passed at least 5 GCSEs, including English and maths, in 2022. By comparison, just one in twenty pupils who were severely absent met the same standards.
- **Reduced Social Mobility.** The Social Mobility Commission views NEET (not in education, employment or training) as a key indicator for social mobility. [Research](#) has found that persistently absent children and young people (missing 10% or more of education) are **3.9 times more likely to be NEET in education** and 6.3 times more likely of being persistently NEET, with greater absences increasing the risk of being NEET.
- **Poorer Mental Health.** [Data](#) from NHS England shows that children with a mental health issue were seven times more likely to have missed 15 days of school compared to those who didn't have a mental health issue.
- **Risk of School Exclusion.** The Who is Losing Learning Coalition has found that children who are severely absent from school are also [five times more likely](#) to be permanently excluded than the national rate, suggesting that severe absence may correlate with behavioural problems that schools do not have the capacity to address.
- **Exposure to Harmful Influences.** School provides a strong protective effect from harmful influences. [Analysis](#) from the CSJ in 2023 indicated that the rising rates of

⁵ Burtonshaw and Dorrell, '[Listening to and Learning from parents in the attendance crisis](#)'

school absences could create an extra 9,000 extra young offenders by 2027 if left unresolved.

A cost to the economy.

An assessment of the cost of pupil absence to the UK economy was last undertaken by New Philanthropy Capital in its 2012 [report](#). It found that the failure to address truancy from school is £800m per year or £8.8bn across 11 years of education. This covered the cost to the education system, health service and social services and the cost of lower earnings and of higher crime. There is a clear opportunity for the Government to provide an up to date, formal analysis of the cost of absence to the economy.

Why do we need this campaign?

The purpose of School Attendance Gap Day is to **raise public awareness** about the worryingly low levels of school attendance and **promote positive collaboration** to build an inclusive education system so we can end the attendance crisis. The system is failing far too many children who urgently need support to be in school.

By showing support for School Attendance Gap Day, we want to inspire collective action to:

- Go further and faster to close the school attendance gap
- Support families whose children are losing learning by missing school;
- See an inclusive education system which recognises that each child is different;
- See absence tackled through more support and fewer fines.

Sam's story

6 year old Sam was absent from school for long periods of time due to illness. This resulted in his attendance dropping to 51%, at the threshold for severe absence. Sam was missing out on half of his education, which meant he was finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with his learning and stay connected to his peers.

Sam's mum explained to School-Home Support practitioner Helena that Sam had a weak immune system, and that she was struggling to cope with his health needs. When Helena made a visit to the family's house, Sam's mum mentioned that the housing association were meant to be coming to look at the damp upstairs but that they hadn't shown up. Previously unaware of any damp issues, Helena took a look and discovered severe mould around Sam's bedroom. As the housing needs were likely to be a cause of Sam's frequent illness, Helena followed up with the housing association and ensured the urgency of the situation was understood. It was established that the property's roof needed to be replaced and all of the upstairs walls treated for mould. With the work completed and the family home much safer, Helena worked on building better routines at home and implementing additional support for Sam at school. With support in place, Sam's attendance has since increased to 82% and his health and wellbeing is much improved.

Baroness Anne Longfield, Executive Chair of the Centre for Young Lives said:

"The number of children absent from school for half or more of the academic year, and who have their effective final school day today, is shocking. The reasons why children miss school are often complex and overlapping, and can have negative implications for their life chances. We need to build an education system that is inclusive, where every child feels a strong sense of belonging and children are supported so they don't miss out on learning."

Jaine Stannard, School-Home Support CEO said:

"It's so important that children enjoy school and feel like they belong. The aim of School Attendance Gap Day is to highlight the importance of collective action to improve school attendance. The school attendance crisis isn't going away, despite huge efforts by schools. We need to go further and faster to help families get the support they need so their children don't miss out. As a charity, we know our holistic, whole family approach to tackling absence works with those we reach, but there are so many more families who need support with attendance. We are working with schools to share best techniques in supporting families with absence but we need radical collaboration across society to close the School Attendance Gap."



Notes to editors

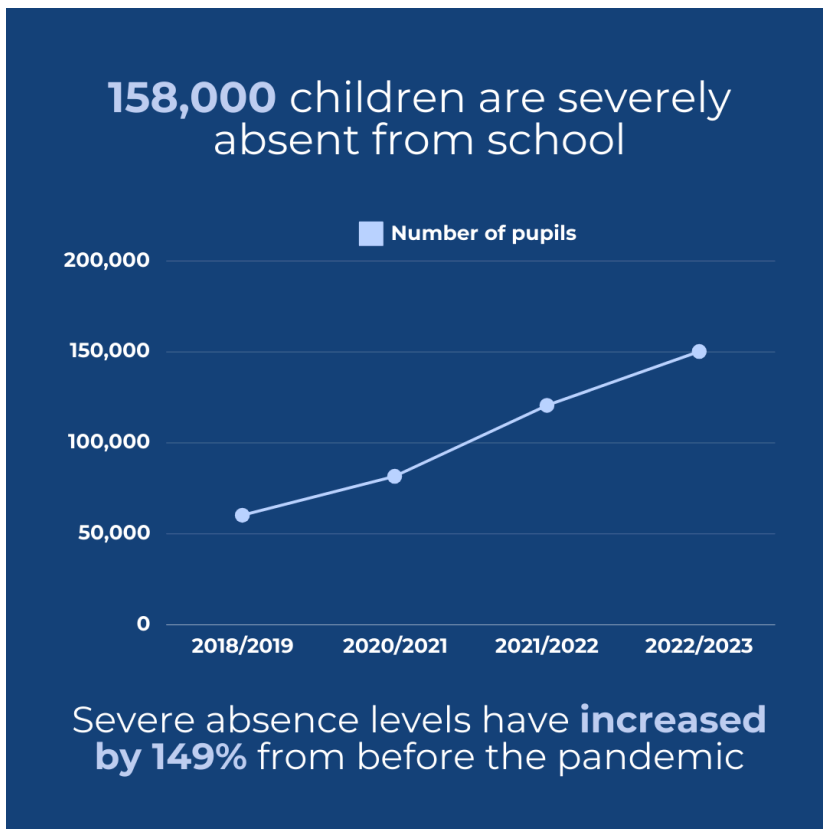
Please see the [Explainer document](#) for more information, including details of calculations.

[View the campaign](#) on School-Home Support’s website.

School Attendance Gap Calculator

School-Home Support have developed a tool to calculate an effective final day of school based on attendance percentage. We have used this calculator to determine the final school day for severely absent children with 50% attendance. It can be used to calculate the effective final school day for any attendance percentage and so personalised for individual children. We will be testing this with schools and families to determine whether it helps facilitate conversations around the impacts of school absence. [View the School Attendance Gap Calculator here.](#)

Figure 1: Increase in the number of severely absent children in England since 2018/2019:



About School-Home Support

- School-Home Support is a national charity which supports families whose children are severely and persistently absent by addressing the root causes of high absence through whole family support. We are campaigning for a properly funded, reliable family support network around schools to support the growing number of vulnerable families who need help.
- Since 1984, we have used early intervention and a whole family support approach to break intergenerational cycles of deprivation and low aspiration. Partnering with schools, local authorities and communities, our expert practitioners work one-to-one with families to establish long-term trusting relationships that build a bridge between home and school.

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