

**Press release**

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**4 November 2024**

# **Education charity reports on impact of whole family support model, confirming financial and housing challenges as key barriers to school attendance**

## **Highlights:**

- Latest pupil absence statistics for Autumn and Spring terms 2023/24 reveal a concerning rise in severe absence in schools across England.
- Education charity School-Home Support reports financial hardship and poor housing continue to be major barriers to school attendance for the families it supports.
- 1 in 5 children and young people (22%) identified where they live as one of the biggest challenges they face.
- More than a third of parents/carers (35%) identified 'home and money' as among the biggest challenges they face.
- The whole family support model implemented by School-Home Support demonstrated significant results, with 7 in 10 children in its intensive support cohort improving their attendance after support. Persistently absent improved by an average of 11%, equivalent to 22 extra days in school. Severely absent children improved by an average of 23%, equivalent to 46 extra days in school.
- The whole family support model delivers a range of positive outcomes including 88% of children improving their behaviour and 89% of children improving their wellbeing.

School-Home Support, a national education charity working in partnership with schools across England to address the root causes of school absence through whole family support, has presented its latest annual impact report. It revealed the extent to which families continue to face complex and overlapping barriers to good attendance and engagement with school.

## **School-Home Support**

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In the academic year 2023/2024, the greatest areas of need for families were around financial hardship, poor housing and mental health, with the demand for support in these areas increasing on the previous year.

Pupil absence statistics published by the Department for Education<sup>1</sup> last month revealed that school absence rates remain at a significant and worrying level.

In the autumn and spring term 2023/24, 19.2% of children in England were persistently absent (1.42 million children). Despite persistent absence levels showing a slight improvement on the previous year, levels of severe absence have increased. 2.1% of children are severely absent (158,00 children), up from 1.9% in autumn and spring term 2022/23.

### **John, a Dad who received helped from the charity said:**

*“The flat we live in was in a horrendous state. Every room was covered in mould, including the bedrooms where my children sleep, making them sick and missing lots of days of school. I felt like a failure because our home was in such a terrible state and I wasn’t able to make things better for my family.*

*My family were introduced to Jodie, a School-Home Support practitioner. She helped me to liaise with the landlord to explain the urgency of the situation. Eventually, every room in the house was treated until it was mould free and much safer for my children.*

*I feel as though a life has been saved by getting the support from Jodie when we did. With our housing problems resolved, I can now focus on my children’s education again.”*

### **Money and housing are major barriers to good school attendance**

The charity’s data reveals the impact of financial worries and poor housing on children, as well as parents/carers:

- More than 1 in 5 children and young people (22%) identify where they live as one of the biggest challenges they face.
- More than a third of parents/carers (35%) identify ‘home and money’ and nearly half (43%) identify ‘work’ as among the biggest challenges they face.
- A 140% increase in safeguarding alerts relating to housing indicates the severity of this need for some families.

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<sup>1</sup> [Department for Education - Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn and spring term 2023/24](#)

- The need for support with purchasing essential items increased significantly, with applications to School-Home Support's Welfare Fund<sup>2</sup> increasing by 57% in the last academic year.

## **The impact of a whole family support model**

Looking beyond the school gate, School-Home Support practitioners work directly with families to understand and overcome the root causes of absence by building trust, resilience and skills across the whole family.

Through its whole family support approach, School-Home Support seeks to strengthen the bridge between home and school to deliver a lasting impact for children, young people and their families.

### **Lee, School-Home Support practitioner said:**

*"It's so much more than attendance. I support a lot of families with housing issues, and signpost families to other services. I issue foodbank vouchers to ensure families have enough food, and apply for grants from external providers. And of course, I communicate regularly with schools, especially with their attendance leads, to explain the challenges that families are going through."*

In the 2023/2024 academic year School-Home Support practitioners provided crucial support directly to 5937 individual children and family members, an increase of 13% on the previous year.

Of the children who received intensive support from a School-Home Support practitioner, 7 in 10 improved their attendance. Those who were persistently absent improved by an average of 11%, equivalent to 22 extra days in school across the year.

Notably, School-Home Support's whole family support approach had the greatest impact for severely absent children, whose attendance improved by an average of 23%, equivalent to 46 extra days in school.

The whole family support model delivers a range of positive outcomes that are important milestones on the journey towards improved attendance.

Through measuring journeys of change for both children and parents/carers, School-Home Support reports on the significant progress made outside of extra days in school:

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<sup>2</sup> The Welfare Fund is a financial resource established to provide urgent and practical assistance to children and families supported by School-Home Support.

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- 80% of parents/carers improved their engagement with school and learning as a result of practitioner support.
- For children and young people, 88% recorded improvements in their behaviour, and 89% recorded improvements in their wellbeing.

### **An ambitious ‘moonshot’ goal to address the school attendance crisis**

The charity set out a [route map](#) for the new Government to address the attendance crisis as part of its mission to break down barriers to opportunity.

The route map called for the Government to commit to a ‘moonshot’ goal of every child in school and ready to learn by 2050, achieved through investment in a support-led family-family centric approach to tackling absence, that fills the gaps in support for families in and around schools.

A key recommendation for the Government is to include attendance in strategies to tackle child poverty and housing, which are the most significant barriers to attending school for the families we support.

### **Jaine Stannard, School-Home Support CEO said:**

“All schools should be able to access early intervention whole family support services to help tackle the barriers to attendance so no child misses out on school. The Government should invest in a whole family support practitioner for every school, as the next vital step towards achieving their Opportunity Mission.

The school attendance problem is both significant and complex and will take time and investment but there isn’t a moment to lose - every day a child misses their education is a day too many.

We welcome the Government’s strong commitment to addressing the school attendance crisis, particularly its ambition to build a support first, family centred approach to tackling absence which focuses on the root causes.

Breakfast clubs, child mental health professionals in every secondary school and the recent £15 million for attendance mentors are important first steps. But to deliver lasting change, attendance policy must focus on the family, not just the child.”

**ENDS**

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## Attachment

### [Impact Report 2023/2024](#)

## 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 an appropriately 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.

We look beyond the classroom to tackle the underlying causes of school absence such as poverty, domestic violence or mental health challenges, using bespoke support strategies to overcome barriers to learning and ensure children can achieve their potential.

### **For more information contact:**

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