

**Press release**  
**For immediate release**

**15 May 2023**

# Poor housing is a major barrier to school attendance for young people in England

New data shows a 73% increase in children's concerns about where they live compared to last year

## Highlights:

- Housing has now entered the top three presenting issues for young people when referred for attendance support, for the first time in the last two years<sup>1</sup>
- Young people are currently seeing 'where they live' as one of the biggest barriers to school that they face with challenges including insecure and unsuitable housing
- Charity campaign says school attendance crisis won't improve without investment in family support

New data released this week by School-Home Support, an education charity, highlights the significant impact poor housing has on school attendance for young people. The organisation which works with families to improve school attendance, found that poor housing is now one of the top three presenting issues for both young people and their parents.

The data reveals a 73% increase in young people struggling with school attendance whose current housing situation is a major concern. One in five of the young people supported<sup>2</sup> said 'where they live' is a major barrier to school. The data sheds light on how issues beyond the school gate affect school attendance if families don't receive support to tackle the problems they face.

## Poor housing is a barrier to good school attendance

School-Home Support practitioners are helping more children and their families with housing issues so they can prioritise school. Practitioners are helping to secure appropriate accommodation, writing to housing officers, signposting other services and making applications to

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<sup>1</sup> Outcomes Star tool to measure presenting issues and journey of change outcomes was introduced at SHS in 2020

<sup>2</sup> This analysis doesn't include those we have supported with just one review this academic year. We expect many of them to also have flagged "where I live" as a major concern.

### School-Home Support

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School-Home Support

the School-Home Support Welfare Fund to buy essential items like a mattress, a desk or a washing machine

When Esther, School-Home Practitioner met Noah and his mum, her priority was to find out more about their situation. They were living in a refuge following a domestic-violence incident. The refuge was miles away from school and mum couldn't afford the bus fare everyday. This affected Noah's attendance at school and he was missing 1 in 5 classes per week. His attendance was just at 81% when the family was referred to School-Home Support.

Esther helped Noah's mum to look at the property pool, explained the bidding process and encouraged her to call the council for updates on her housing status regularly. Mum and Noah were overjoyed to be awarded council housing in the area where they had a support network, giving the family the stability they needed.

Noah's mum said: *"The support from SHS has really kept me going. Esther is the first person who has reached out to me and made me feel like somebody actually cares. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You honestly made me feel so much better and supported even after our first call. You're brilliant. I can't remember the last time I felt this happy, thank you"*

Esther also encouraged Noah to join the school homework club to catch up on the missed lessons and attendance progressively improved.

*"Being able to support and help them through that difficult time has been very humbling and rewarding for me."* School-Home Support practitioner Esther said.

### **The data to understand challenges families face**

This data is drawn from School- Home Support's Outcome Star tool used by its family support practitioners to understand the nature and level of challenge families face. 'Where you live' in the Outcome Star measures challenges around insecure and unsuitable housing and lack of space. Support areas explored by practitioners with the families of absentees are based on these questions:

- Do you worry about your family having to move house suddenly or having to move to a new place?
- Do you have your own space or some privacy for playing and studying, even if there are lots of people living in your house?
- Are there things that are broken and don't get mended?

Full year data ( 2021/22) showed the top three presenting issues for young people as feelings and behaviour, confidence and self esteem and friends as the top absentee children had when they were referred to us.

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Please see below the presenting issue data for young people (YP) supported by School- Home Support practitioners for two terms: Autumn2022/ Spring 2023.

Housing and where you live has now surpassed ' Friends' as the area of need for absentee YP this academic year to date.

See table below for all four presenting issues together:

Presenting Issue	No. of YPs with 'Where you live' as a presenting issue *	% of total	Total # YP *
Feelings & behaviour	105	27%	383
Confidence & self-esteem	94	25%	383
Where you live	72	19%	383

Friends	62	16%	383
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\* These numbers represent the number of YP who have completed at least two stars along their journey of support, therefore it excludes those who have only just started being supported.

### The persistent absence crisis

According to the most recent official statistics<sup>3</sup> persistent absenteeism has more than doubled, rising from 10.9 per cent in 2018-19 to 22.5 percent last year, equating to 1.6 million pupils.

As part of a campaign launched earlier this year, the charity is calling for urgent practical support for families struggling with school attendance.

[The Dig a Little Deeper Campaign](#) says that despite growing need for the service, family support is a postcode lottery and the system is failing schools and families. Freedom of Information research from the campaign found that nearly a quarter of referrals made by schools to councils for help with families they were concerned about were returned to schools without action.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2020-to-2021>



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The organisation urges the government to prioritise communities with high needs and long-standing structural issues around education and to ensure that funding is available for all aspects of catch up. It is concerned that the Government's Priority Education Investment Areas will be forced to choose between investing in teaching and learning and attendance when action is needed on both.

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

'Persistent absence is a red flag issue. By addressing underlying causes of poor attendance early on, we can prevent issues from escalating. The government's work on attendance shouldn't go unnoticed but schools need dedicated funding if they are going to provide pastoral as well as academic catch up'

'Our remit is to improve attendance, but when practitioners start to work with a family, the priority is to find out what is going on for that family and dig a little deeper into barriers to school. If you are living in temporary accommodation miles away from school or have spent the last night in a car that needs to be the priority conversation - there are no quick fixes. Conversations about attendance can come later on'

'where I live' is also a key factor for children when they are in school. We expect children to study at home too (homework, revision etc) yet where they live does not support that (overcrowding, multiple occupancy...),

'Our data shows that the housing crisis is feeding the education crisis. The attainment gap is widening and inadequate housing is accelerating it'

'There's an increasingly well documented crisis in education, high levels of absence are becoming the norm which is widening the attainment gap.'

'We are losing too many children and families from the education system, too many are already lost for good. That's a national crisis that needs urgent action. We need investment in housing and services to support families. Government action needs to go further and faster on both.'

"The missing piece in our education system is family support, we need to urgently invest in it or the school attendance crisis will get worse. A national service of whole family support practitioners in schools designed to improve the bridge between home and school can make a real difference to attendance and attainment outcomes"

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## 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.

## Note to editors

- This Information is released as part of School- Home Support's Dig a Little Deeper campaign which highlights the urgent need for more family support around schools to tackle the underlying causes of high school absence like poor housing.
- More information about Dig a little Deeper - a campaign to build a stronger bridge between home and school by funding more family support in and around schools can be found at our campaign website: <https://digalittledeeper.shs.org.uk/>
- Our primary method for assessing family needs and measuring impact is the Outcomes Star™ tool. Outcomes Star can be described as a set of evidence-based tools which support and measure change when working with people. Combining the individual star visualisation with school attendance percentages enables us to track the journey of change for the young person as a result of holistic family support provided by our Practitioners.
- While a practitioner's remit is to increase attendance at school, at referral the initial priority is to build an understanding of a family's support needs. A separate assessment of need is made for parents and children. Outcome Star allows practitioners to understand the level of challenge families face so poor attendance can be tackled in a sustainable way. Challenges are known as presenting issues for families on Outcome Star and are measured with a score of 1-4, as shown in the table below.

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Family Star Plus © – score meaning	
1 - 2	Stuck or big concerns
3 - 4	Accepting help or someone is helping
5 - 6	Trying or no big concerns
7 - 8	Finding what works or mostly OK
9 - 10	Resilient and Effective parenting

- According to School- Home Support's Outcome Star data for the Autumn/Spring 2022/23 term, almost 1 in 5 children (19%) have 'where you live' as a barrier to school attendance and engagement. This data is drawn from a total cohort of 383 young people (YP) with 72 YP being in severe need of support regarding this presenting issue (where you live) as at Autumn Spring 2022-23 reports. The cohort with support needs around housing is expected to be larger when year end reports are collated. The 1 in 5 statement ( 19%) currently represents those for whom practitioners have completed two progress reviews. YP with ' where you live' as a major support need who have yet to receive their second progress review are not included in this analysis.
- In contrast to 1 in 5 (19%) this academic year with housing concerns, 11% of YP had severe support needs for 'Where you live' in the same time period last year, representing an increase of 73% year on year.

**For more information and interview requests please contact:**

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