

July 2024

Every child in school and ready to learn by 2050

A support-led
route map to
tackle the
attendance crisis



School-Home Support



Executive Summary

Every child deserves an education that helps them flourish, but too many children are unable to access an education that serves them. There is a monumental barrier to opportunity for many children which we must break down.

Devastatingly, too many children are missing school too often. Almost one in five children in the UK are still persistently absent from school, meaning they are missing ten percent of their education, equivalent to four school weeks. If children aren't in school and ready to learn, their wellbeing, development and future life chances risk being damaged.

Children are missing school because appropriate and timely support is not available for many families to address the underlying causes of high absence. School budgets are stretched thin and local authority services haven't been funded to keep pace with demand. In short, there are huge gaps in family support in and around schools which we must urgently fill.

To break down the barriers to opportunity, all children need access to a world class and inclusive education. We need to tackle the attendance crisis by implementing a support-first, family-centric approach with necessary investment.

The Government must lead the way by committing to an overarching “moonshot” goal to see every child in school and ready to learn by 2050, a goal which will only be

achieved by implementing a support-first, family-centric approach to attendance.

We welcome the commitment the new Government has made to breaking down barriers to opportunity for every child. There is a need to look for more effective ways to tackle the crisis and new ways to invigorate our collective action on a topic which is so central to the social and economic success of our country.

We recognise the fiscal constraints which the Government inherits, but these cannot limit our ambition. This paper sets out a route map for the new Government which will accelerate progress in tackling the school attendance crisis. Implementing it requires upfront investment, but the returns on investment, for young people, communities and the taxpayer are huge.

We need to see:

Families, supported and engaged. This means a system where there is time and resources to work with the whole family to identify and support the underlying causes of absence. Child poverty and insecure housing needs to be tackled, so that every child grows up in a safe house, without worrying when their next meal will be. The relationship between school and home needs to be strengthened, working together to co-create the best opportunities for each child.

Schools, supportive and supported. This means training staff responsible for attendance to embed a family-centric approach to attendance.

School level accountability needs to be reformed to recognise and encourage schools who invest in support and whole family engagement, with attendance inspected as part of an annual safeguarding inspection.

Local services, collaborative and preventative.

This means local services integrate plans to support improved attendance into their wider strategy so the whole community is responsible for attendance and funded to give schools and families the support they need.

Our vision



Families

supported & engaged



Schools

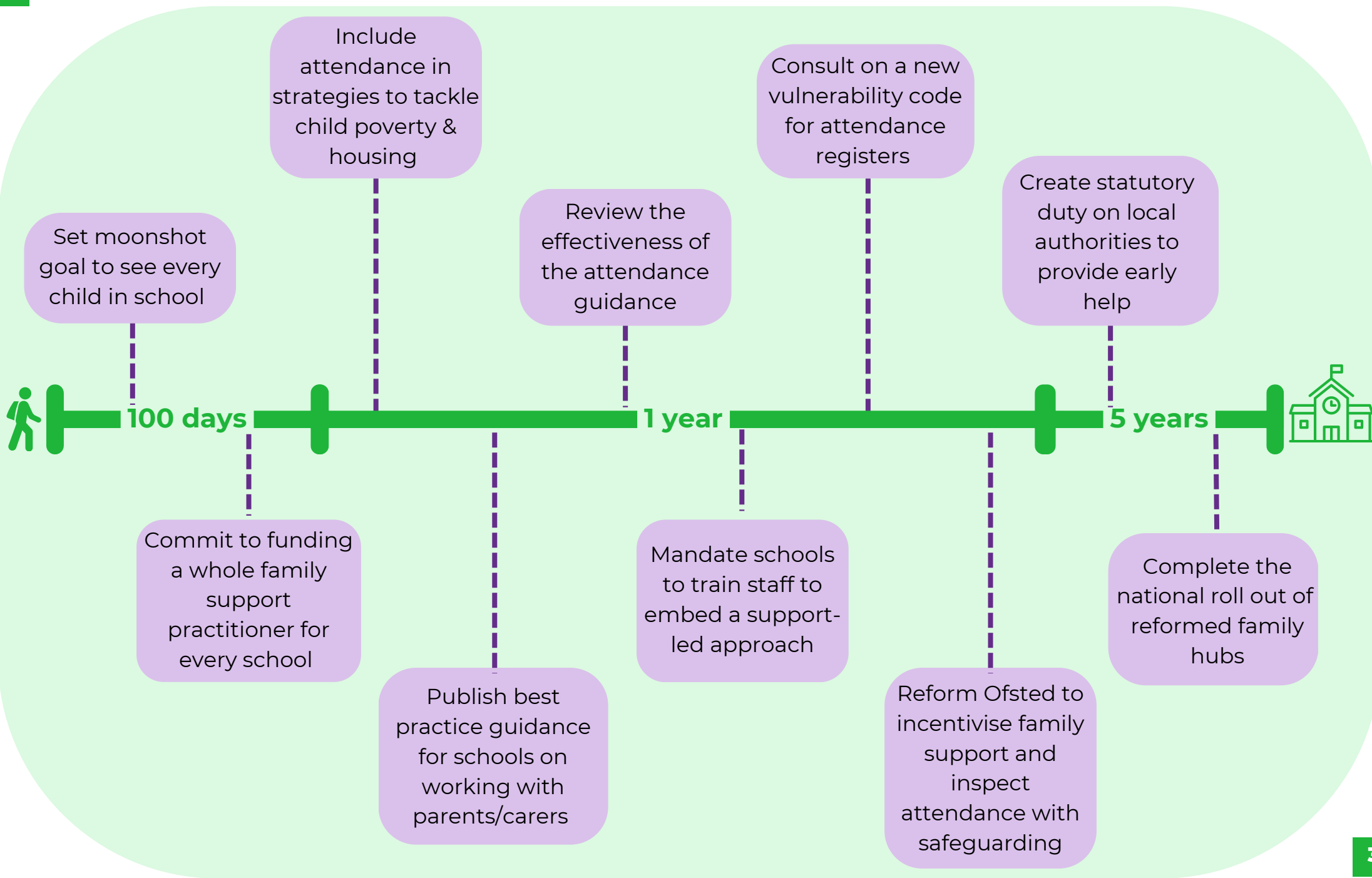
supportive & supported



Local services

collaborative & preventative

Our Route Map for Government



Foreword

This year marks 40 years of School-Home Support (SHS) helping children, young people and families to tackle barriers to good school attendance and engagement. Over these four decades, we have developed an in-depth understanding of the often complex and overlapping causes of low attendance, and witnessed first-hand the myriad benefits an education can provide for thousands of children and young people.

The urgency of our mission has never been more apparent. The number of children missing 10% of their education, equivalent to four school weeks, has nearly doubled since pre-pandemic levels. This alarming trend highlights the challenges many families are facing, and underscores the need for a collaborative approach to tackling the underlying barriers to school attendance.

When children miss out on school they miss out on the wider benefits it offers: protection from negative influences like crime and anti-social behaviour, a chance to develop skills, and a place to make friends. Despite the hard work of schools, local services, charities, and families,

school absence levels remain high, and presents a major barrier to opportunity for many children.

The attendance issue is symptomatic of the multiple crises our country faces. More and more families are facing poverty, unable to put food on the table. More complex education needs are left undiagnosed and unsupported. The social contract between school and parents/carers has broken down following the pandemic.

Schools cannot tackle these challenges on their own. Schools are struggling with inadequate funding to address the multifaceted issues they face, and crucial services that surround schools have not been sufficiently funded to meet the rising demand. This means that many children, young people and their families are not receiving the necessary support to ensure regular school attendance.

At School-Home Support, we have found that families need more intensive support than ever to achieve the same attendance outcomes, highlighting the severity of our current crisis. So far this academic year our practitioners have reported a 49% increase in

intensive casework support. Despite the increased challenge of getting children back to school and ready to learn, our whole family support model delivers an extra 19 days for most children, equivalent to almost four school weeks.

The attendance crisis needs a solution built on collaboration and support, guided by an ambitious goal. We need to go further and faster to tackle the attendance crisis and urgently implement a support-first, family-centric approach that

recognises the underlying causes of low attendance, and focuses on better parental engagement and support for schools.

That is why we are calling on the new Government to **set a moonshot goal to see every child in school and ready to learn by 2050**, and to use this goal as a North Star to build an education system that is ambitious, inclusive, and spreads opportunity to all parts of the country.



J. Stannard

Jaine Stannard
School-Home Support CEO

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First 100 days

Recommendation 1

Set an overarching “moonshot” goal to see every child in school and ready to learn by 2050 which will only be achieved by implementing a support-first, family-centric approach to attendance.

The school attendance crisis continues to persist even four years after the pandemic. Every year, children are missing out on their education. To address the most pressing issue our education system faces, the Government needs to commit to an overarching

moonshot goal to get every child in school and ready to learn by 2050 with time bound milestones to galvanise the collective efforts of all partners. This can only be achieved through a support-led, family-centric approach.

Recommendation 2

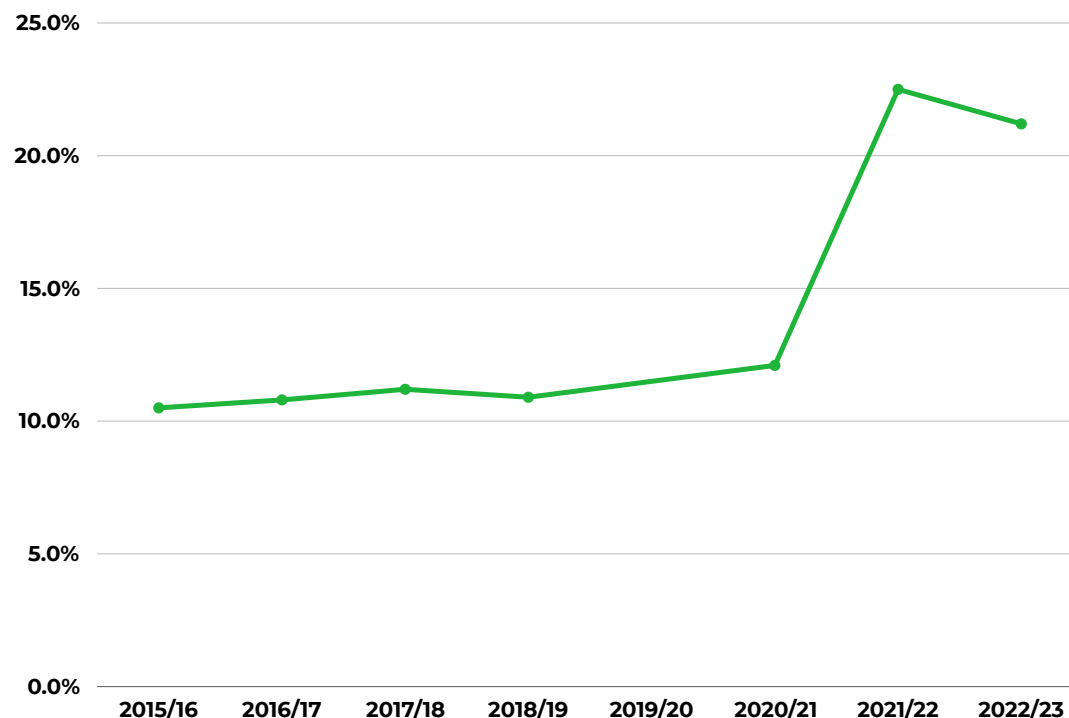
Commit to funding a whole family support practitioner for every school.

The impact of Covid-19 has been detrimental to children's attendance. Since the pandemic, the number of persistently absent pupils (missing 10% of their education) has doubled, skyrocketing to 22.5% in 2021/22 and sustaining at 21.2% last academic year, as shown in figure 1. [1]

Children can be absent from school due to a range of complex and overlapping reasons that their families may be facing, including poverty, insecure housing, unsupported or undiagnosed special and educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and mental health challenges. Difficulties at



Figure 1: rate of persistent absence 2015/16 to 2022/23



Source: UK Gov, 2024, 'Academic year 2022/23 Pupil absence in schools in England'

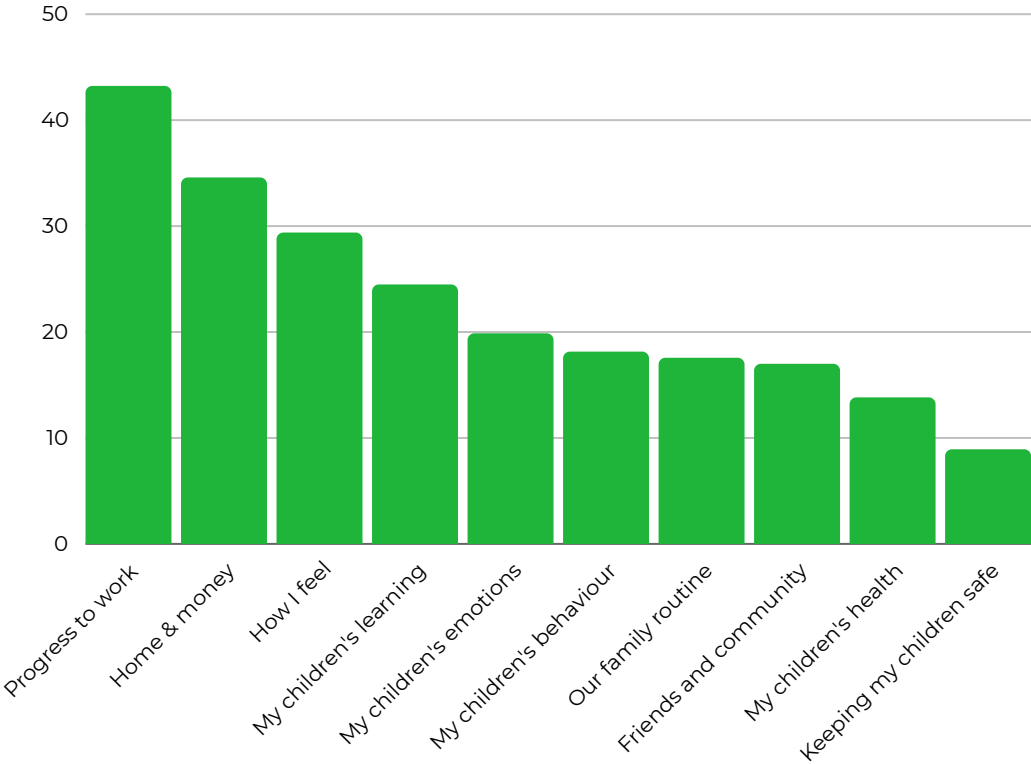
home can often translate into poor attendance. No child or family is the same. Bespoke whole family support helps to identify root causes of absence and allows for 'co-creation' of solutions to tackle barriers to attendance – building confidence, skills and a better relationship with school.

Reports from School-Home Support whole family support practitioners reveal that two thirds (67%) of individuals we work with have at least two presenting issues. The

graph below shows the range of intensive support that practitioners provided parents and carers due to the issues presenting as barriers to their child's school attendance. Work, home and money, and wellbeing are the most common issues.[2]

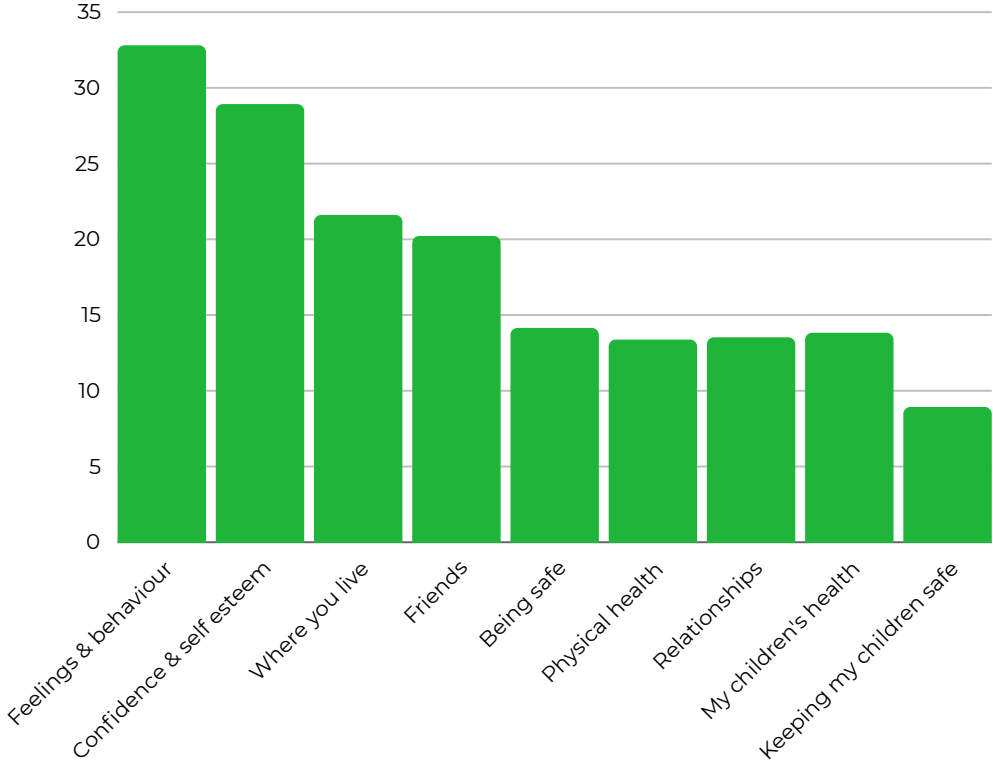
For children that our whole family support practitioners work with, issues related to confidence and self esteem, feelings and behaviour, and relationships require more and more intensive support. 'Feelings and behaviour' is the second largest

Figure 2: Percentage of adults who needed intensive support for...



Source: School-Home Support, 2024, 'Termly Insights - Autumn and Spring terms 2023-24'

Figure 3: Percentage of children and young people who needed support with...



Source: School-Home Support, 2024, 'Termly Insights - Autumn and Spring terms 2023-24'

area of need, and has increased by 19.7% between autumn/spring term in 2022/23 and 2023/24.[3] Sometimes, children and young people need additional support for their mental health and wellbeing to make sustained change. Underlying issues, such as having a secure home and enough food to eat, need to be addressed to help build up their wellbeing.

Schools working with a dedicated School-Home Support family support practitioner who is trained

and professionally supervised adds capacity and expertise to the whole school approach to attendance. Bespoke support allows for a more targeted approach to support that addresses challenges precisely and signposts families to specialist support as required. This targeted support and signposting relieves pressure on local services and makes best use of limited resources for families who would benefit most.

Our whole family support model

First 100 days

can be replicated and delivers a strong impact. Most children who received intensive support saw an increase in their attendance of 9.7%, equivalent to an additional 19 days in school, or just under four school weeks. Our approach also delivers broader positive outcomes, such as better home and school engagement, enhanced skills and resilience in vulnerable families, as well as improved wellbeing. Notably, nearly two thirds (64.4%) of children and young people who initially needed support with 'Feelings and behaviour' no longer viewed it as a primary concern due to support from School-Home Support practitioners. Similarly, more than one third (34.8%) of parents/carers who identified 'Progress to work' as a need at the start of their engagement with School-Home Support no longer saw it as a major issue.

These improvements, facilitated by School-Home Support whole family support practitioners, highlight the wide-ranging impact of our whole family support model.[4]

Our model is scalable and was highlighted to the Government by the Education Select Committee (ESC) as a blueprint for the national rollout and refocusing of the Attendance Mentors pilot programme.[5] The Government responded by committing £15 million to expand and improve the pilot, recognising the need for a family-centred approach to tackling high absence, but it is unclear how far the Government has reformed the existing Attendance Mentors Pilot to reflect the ESC's recommendation for a family-centric approach.[6]



First year

Recommendation 3

Ensure national strategies tackling child poverty and housing address the attendance crisis, including a review into the negative impact of poor housing on school attendance.

Poverty and poor housing are the key driving forces behind the attendance crisis. More and more children are facing poverty and living in unsuitable houses, which are presenting barriers to good attendance.

As shown in figure 2 on page 6, money worries were the biggest concern for parents/carers that School-Home Support whole family support practitioners worked with and was the top area that required support. The top three areas of need for parents/carers since 2020/21 have consistently included 'Progress to work' and 'Home & money'.^[7]

Children eligible for free school meals (FSMs), usually meaning the household income is less than £7,400 a year, are more than three times more likely to be severely absent than children not eligible for the 2022/23 academic year.^[8] This

indicates that poverty is often a barrier to good school attendance.

For children our practitioners work with, poor housing is now one of the top three presenting issues. Of the children and young people our practitioners supported in 2022/23, one in five identified 'Where you live' as a major barrier to school attendance. This is a 73% increase in young people identifying insecure or unsuitable housing as a concern from the previous academic year.^[9]

This is symptomatic of the wider national crisis. There are 8.5 million people in England who can't access the housing they need, including one in every five children living in overcrowded, unaffordable, or unsuitable homes. This can have a negative impact on their education, with overcrowded homes not providing a space for homework, and insecure tenancies meaning



children may have to travel a long distance to get to school.^[10]

School-Home Support practitioners help families with insecure housing by assisting them to secure appropriate accommodation, writing to housing officers, and signposting other specialist services. They also resource families by making applications to the Welfare Fund to buy essential items like a mattress, desk, or washing machine.

Noah's story on the next page shows how housing can have a severe impact on a child's ability to attend school. Living far away from school

can also make attending school more difficult if a family is unable to afford transport to get their child to school.

Families need vital resources to create a safe and secure environment for children in order to overcome the key drivers of the attendance crisis. This means lifting children out of poverty and ensuring every child has a suitable place to live and are able to travel to school. Strategies tackling child poverty and housing must address the attendance crisis, including a review into the impact of poor housing on school attendance.

Noah's story

11 year old Noah was referred to School-Home Support when his attendance was 81%, meaning he was missing one in five school days.

Noah and his Mum were living in a women's refuge, 12 miles away from Noah's school, after leaving their home following a domestic violence incident that left Mum with broken arms and slipped discs. Getting to school from the refuge meant taking three buses, which Mum struggled to pay for.

School-Home Support practitioner Esther listened to the family's concerns and understood the issues they were facing. She encouraged Mum to look at the property pool daily to find council housing. She also used School-Home Support's Welfare Fund

for bus passes. She applied to Buttle UK for funding for furnishings, laptops for school, and a bike for Noah to get to school. Mum was referred to the Big Help Project for emotional wellbeing support.

One month later, the family were awarded council housing, which gave much-needed stability. After only two months of support, Noah's attendance improved to 84%, and he had signed up to homework clubs to help him catch up with missed lessons.

"You [Esther] are 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." – Noah's Mum.

Recommendation 4

Publish guidance on parental engagement and review impact of sanctions on attendance and relationship with parents/carers.

The impact of the pandemic has resulted in a profound change in the parental attitudes to school attendance and this is having an impact on the relationship between schools and parents/carers. Over a quarter of parents/carers (28%) now believe that it is not necessary for children to attend school everyday. [11]

A good relationship between parents/carers and schools is vital to ensure good attendance across all students. Evidence shows that, on average, parental engagement can result in an additional four months of progress,[12] and can lead to better behaviour, more confidence, higher attendance, and lower risk of exclusion.[13]

Some families are issued fines if their child misses school too many times. The previous Government recently increased the fine to £80, which can be unaffordable for many families who often face deeper difficulties affecting their child's attendance.

Punitive measures such as fines do little to solve absence and may

instead further damage the relationship. A report by Public First, School-Home Support, Impetus and Khuilisa found that fines fail to change parent behaviour and are instead seen as antagonistic.[14]

Robbie's story on the next page gives an insight into how a poor relationship with school can negatively impact a child's attendance, and issuing fines is rarely the answer. Building a bridge between home and school and ensuring parents/carers feel supported is vital to improving children's attendance.

Schools need to be supported to allow them the time to engage positively with parents/carers and where necessary, develop skills in parental engagement so parents/carers' voices are heard, and provide nuanced support where appropriate. Basic teacher training does not currently include modules on parental engagement so skills gaps may exist. The Department for Education needs to publish national guidance for schools to re-engage parents/carers following the



pandemic, which needs to be supportive and inclusive and include publishing a parental engagement policy. The impact of sanctions on attendance and parent relationships

also needs to be reviewed, particularly for vulnerable families for whom fines can create more financial burden.

Robbie's story

Six year old Robbie's attendance had fallen to just 76.5% when he was referred to School-Home Support.

His Mum, Claire, was struggling. A single mum to five children, she was trying to survive on Universal Credit and reduced child benefit. The financial strain of juggling a small income was taking its toll on her mental health, and her debts were mounting. There was a lack of proper sleeping arrangements, so she had to sleep on the couch with her youngest son. Getting her children to school was difficult and exhausting, and Robbie's attendance was dropping.

Teachers at Robbie's school had tried to get in touch about Robbie's attendance, but Claire felt judged and attacked. More than once she

was issued fines for Robbie's absences, which put further strain on her finances and the relationship between home and school.

School-Home Support practitioner, Amanda, worked with the family to understand and tackle the barriers to school attendance. She helped her with her finances, switched to direct debit energy bills, and got her into a position where she can access free debt support. Amanda also got a bed funded by the School-Home Supports Welfare Fund, which has improved Mum's sleep routines.

Amanda hopes that the better situation at home will lay the foundations for good attendance for Robbie, and improve the relationship with school.

Recommendation 5

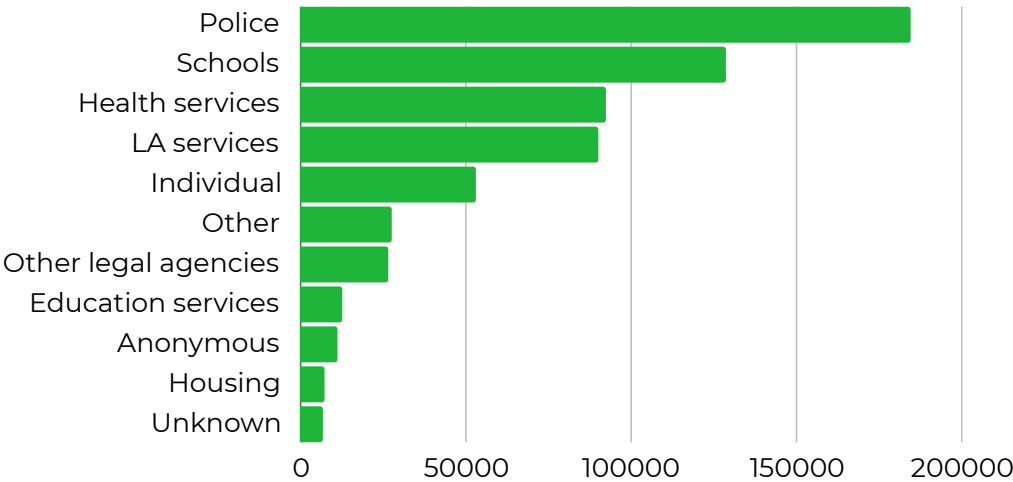
Review the effectiveness of the 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance in Autumn 2025, including the Targeting Support Meetings.

Schools interact with children and families more than any other institution, so school staff are often one of the first to identify if there is a problem at home – perhaps the child is consistently late or missing school, is seeming more withdrawn than normal, or is arriving at school without lunch or in an unclean uniform. Many children develop trust with school staff and may confide in them when they are facing difficulties.

It is not a surprise that schools are the second most common referral for a family to social services, accounting for 20.1% of total referrals.[15]

However, a recent Ofsted report found that school leaders reported that they often worked in isolation to keep children safe, and communications they had with children's social care and other services were inconsistent.[16]

Figure 4: Source of referrals to children's social services 2014-2023



Source: Gov.UK, 2023, 'Reporting year 2023 Children in need'



The Government's guidance, 'Working together to improve school attendance', statutory from August 2024, sets us on the right course for a support-first, family-centric approach to tackling absence. It will require schools to publish an attendance policy, have a Senior Attendance Champion, and encourage a support-led approach for persistently or severely absent pupils. It also requires local authorities to host Targeting Support Meetings where schools' attendance leads come together to agree on multi-agency responses for persistently and severely absent pupils. While we support the guidance, we are concerned that there isn't enough money in the system to deliver on its ambitions.

The guidance reminds us that, both in school and out, tackling school absences is everybody's business. It's only by working together to support families that we will get children back into school and ready to learn.

As schools need to be better supported in order to provide support for children and their families, it is welcome that the guidance sets a requirement on local authorities to deliver Targeting Support Meetings to facilitate joint actions for severely absent pupils and persistently absent pupils who need support.

Targeting Support Meetings could be vital to support families – not just to identify families falling through the cracks, but also to bring a family together by focusing on a child's attendance and attainment.

However, Targeting Support Meetings will only be effective if the surrounding public services are working well with adequate funding. If a Targeting Support Meeting identifies that a child needs SEND support, for example, this support must be well resourced so that it can be easily accessed in a timely way. Until public services are effective and well funded, Targeting Support Meetings will likely fail to help children and their families who need support.

Resourced Targeting Support Meetings will ensure no child is missed and encourage schools and other agencies to recognise their shared responsibility in ensuring a safe and happy childhood and learning environment.

School-Home Support was part of an extremely effective Team Around the Family project in Blackpool which had the largest Pupil Referral Unit (per capita) in the country, with over 400 children using the service in one calendar year. Through the Team Around the Family approach, the figure dropped to 110. [17]

Schools need access to effective and consistent support through multi-agency meetings that work in partnership to address the issues that a child and their family may be facing. These Targeting Support Meetings should include schools, children's services, family hubs, SEND services, CAMHS, voluntary services, housing, youth services, school nursing, youth offending teams, and police.

To ensure that the guidance continues to be effective and is implemented well, the guidance should be reviewed regularly, starting from Autumn 2025. The effectiveness of Targeting Support Meetings should also be evaluated as part of this review, which should include the effectiveness of public services.



Recommendation 6

Mandate schools to train staff to embed a support-led, family-centric approach to addressing low attendance.

From the next academic year (2024/25) the Government's guidance, 'Working together to improve school attendance' will become statutory, requiring schools and local authorities to adopt a support-led, family-centric approach to tackling absence which recognises that barriers to attendance that often exist beyond the school gates. It stipulates that attendance is the responsibility of staff, schools, and local authorities. [18] Schools are required to appoint a Senior Attendance Champion with responsibility for developing a clear vision and strategy for a good attendance strategy which it must publish on its website.

School-Home Support welcomes the new legislation, but we are concerned schools do not currently have the capacity, skills or funding to deliver an effective support-led, family-centric approach to tackling absence.

To effectively support children and young people and their families, the Government should fund a whole family support practitioner for every

school who is trained and supervised to work effectively with families in attendance, as laid out on page 5. This is important both to the families receiving support and to the safeguarding of staff carrying out the role. Without adequate funding, the effectiveness of the role might be compromised and staff may be put at risk.

Where this is not possible, schools should be resourced to ensure staff working with families on attendance are properly trained, supervised and supported by the Senior Attendance Champion to carry the role.

As part of our commitment to helping schools embed best practice, School-Home Support's Attendance Support and Development Programme provides training, supervision and professional networks to school staff who are working with families.

At the school level, attendance, like safeguarding, should be everyone's

responsibility. The training approach for attendance should mirror the current arrangements for safeguarding. This should include training for Senior Attendance Champions for in-depth attendance strategy, and

a dedicated attendance practitioner who is highly trained and supervised to deliver whole family support. All staff should receive regular refresher training on attendance and family support.

Recommendation 7

Consult on a new vulnerability code for attendance registers that indicates when a child is absent but receiving support.

Improving attendance can be a gradual process, particularly when addressing complex and overlapping underlying issues. During the first two terms of 2023/24, a third of individuals supported by School-Home Support continued to see their attendance drop due to challenges they continued to face.[19] There are rarely quick fixes to tackling underlying causes of poor attendance and improving relationships with school. Securing and implementing specialist support can take time, as can establishing trust and understanding between home and school.

A new vulnerability code that indicates when a child is absent from school but receiving help

would give the support enough time to be implemented and be effective. It also enables better understanding among staff of the wider context and interventions.

Use of the code will indicate to Ofsted during inspections that children are actively being identified and supported by the school when their attendance is low. Good understanding of the code and its implications should be seen as a strong indicator that there is a strong whole school approach to attendance which is support-led and family-centric.

Recommendation 8

Reform Ofsted to incentivise whole family support and inspect attendance with safeguarding.

Ofsted's formal school inspection is divided into four themes: quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development, and leadership and management. Attendance falls under the 'behaviour and attitudes' judgement. Following the pandemic, Ofsted stated that schools that are demonstrating that they are doing all they can to improve attendance will be judged favourably, in light of the absence crisis following the pandemic.[20]

As outlined in the previous sections, whole family support is an effective approach to deliver sustained attendance improvements. While Ofsted encourages schools to understand the causes of attendance, it does not do enough to promote a whole family support approach to tackling absences, which has led to many school leaders reporting that investing in family support was not recognised by inspectors.[21] Ofsted inspections need to explicitly assess the school's response to children with low attendance and access to whole family support to reward schools

that are following best practice.

As part of this, attendance needs to be seen as a safeguarding issue, not a behavioural issue. In the 'Keeping children safe in education' guidance, poor attendance is identified as a risk factor.[22] Put simply, if it is unknown where a child is, then it is unknown whether they are safe. Keeping children in supportive schools is essential to keeping children safe.

The number of safeguarding alerts issued by School-Home Support whole family support practitioners has increased by 263% between 2022/23 and the first two terms of 2023/24. While some of the increase can be attributed to a higher number of practitioners and recent training on safeguarding last year, it nonetheless indicates the close link between low attendance and safeguarding. In only the first two terms of the academic year 2023/24, 265 safeguarding alerts were made by our practitioners. [23]

Ella's story shows how an attendance issue can be a symptom

of safeguarding concerns in the family that need to be addressed.

Safeguarding is currently inspected under 'leadership and management' theme. Recent proposals have suggested inspecting safeguarding annually, separately from the regular Ofsted inspections in schools. The rationale is to reduce the burden on schools during the regular Ofsted

inspections, while also maintaining the vital importance of safeguarding. Should this change occur, attendance should be inspected as part of the annual safeguarding inspection. Schools should be expected to treat poor attendance as a potential flag for children's safety, and if appropriate provide whole family support, to those children and families.

Ella's story

While Ella's attendance was 99%, she was missing half an hour of learning everyday as her Mum collected her early. Over a school year, missing 30 minutes each day would add up to about 16 days' of learning lost.

School-Home Support practitioner Jane visited the family to understand why Ella was picked up early from school everyday. Ella's Mum broke down and explained that she was experiencing both physical and mental abuse from her neighbours for the last few years, and as some of those neighbours had children at Ella's school, she would collect her children early to avoid them.

Jane regularly called the family's social housing landlord and submitted a support letter to get the family's banding changed. Unfortunately, Mum was still not able to secure suitable housing, and as the abuse continued, she moved into a one-bedroom flat with her partner and her children. Ella's sister Mia was

not coping well with the situation, so the family split and she lived with her biological dad instead.

Jane contacted the family's local MP, who wrote a letter in support of an assisted move for the family. This led to a meeting with Mum's housing officer, who agreed that an assisted move was necessary. The process is still in the early stages but Mum finally feels that things are moving forward to get her family back together and into a home where they can feel safe.

As a result of Jane's support, Mum is now building trust not only with School-Home Support but also with the school and other services.

Ella's attendance was 99% when Jane started working with her family, but she was still missing a significant amount of her schooling due to being collected early each day. Now, she is attending the full day of school each day.

First 5 years

Recommendation 9

Create a statutory duty on local authorities to provide early help with adequate funding to meet that duty, and publish guidance on effective delivery of early help, including appropriate thresholds that match schools' thresholds.

Children who face difficulties growing up are more likely to face challenges in their adulthood. For example, 85% of children that had been cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence had been persistently absent, and 20% of all children ever suspended went on to be cautioned or sentenced for any offence.[24]

Intervening early when problems first arise can protect children from harm and reduce risk factors that may negatively impact a child's life. Early help includes a range of support to families and children who are identified as at risk but do not meet the threshold for statutory services. Evidence shows that early intervention can improve outcomes for children and families.[25]

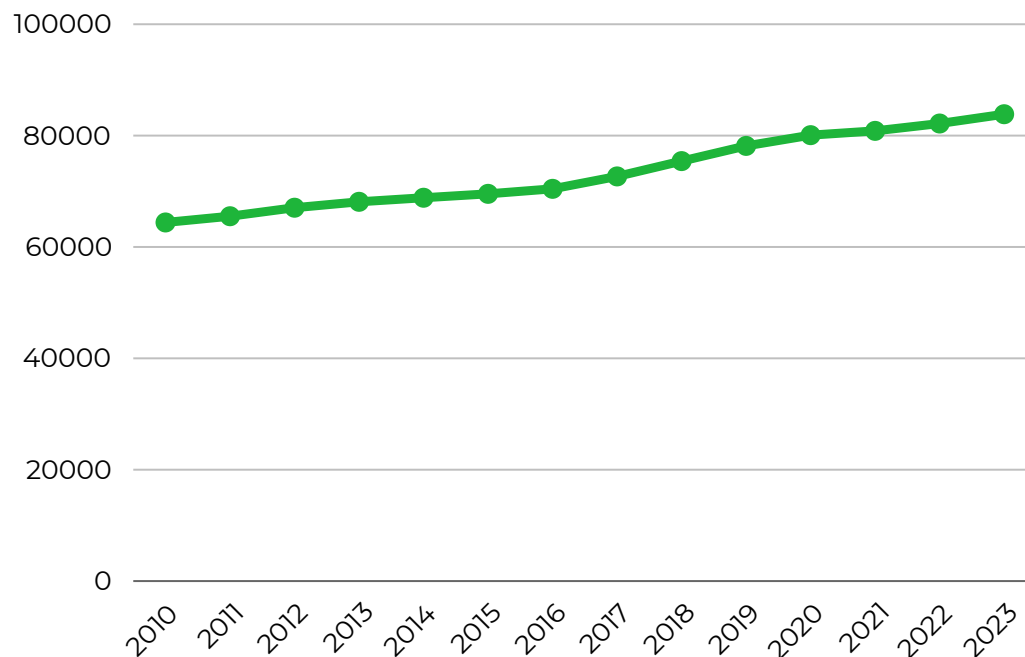
Early help is often seen as preventative, as it can reduce the

amount of support that an individual needs later in life, which reduces pressure on public services.[26] Pressure on children's services has greatly increased over recent years: for example, in 2023, 83,840 children were looked after, an increase of 23% since 2013, and 7% since pre-pandemic in 2019, as in figure 5.[27]

While early help can reduce the pressure on other services, it is not a statutory requirement. Due to resource constraints, many local authorities are unable to deliver it well or fully, with some local authorities only providing early help to some geographical areas.[28] The extent to which local authorities provide early help varies greatly from 0.6% to 15.7%. Nationally, there is a lack of consistency in the definition of early help and the support it includes.[29]



Figure 5: Number of children looked after 2010-2023



Source: Department for Education, 2023, 'Statistics: looked-after children'.

School-Home Support research found that almost a quarter of early help referrals submitted by schools are returned without action, revealing that schools are left unsupported when they identify families who need extra support.[30] Anecdotally, we also hear that early help cases can be closed when a child is still persistently absent.

Despite the vital importance of providing timely early support to a family, early help is often unable to deliver support to children who need it. The thresholds for receiving early help are inconsistent and potentially inappropriate, and the services that are delivered are

equally inconsistent across the country.

To protect early help from budget cuts and ensure that it is always delivered consistently, early help must be made a statutory requirement of local authorities with appropriate ring-fenced funding.

New statutory guidance should also be published on the effective delivery of early help, with thresholds that match schools' thresholds, and encourage multi-agency working with schools, identifying poor attendance as a clear signifier that a family may need early help.

indicating that the initiative was successful in delivering positive outcomes for children.[31]

At its peak, there were almost 3,500 Sure Start centres across the country at a cost of £2.5 billion per year. Following the closure of at least 1,300 centres, the previous Government announced a roll out of Family Hubs in 2021 to 75 local authorities. Family Hubs also provide a one-stop shop for a range of family services, but are instead for families with children aged zero to 19, or 25 for those with SEND. As such, Family Hubs have a wider, or perhaps less clearly defined, set of services offered, and do not always exist as a physical hub. The budget is also much smaller at £300 million funding over 2022-25 for the 75 Family Hubs.[32]

Families with children of all ages who are in need of support may not know support is available or how to

access it. Rolling out and investing in Family Hubs or extended Sure Start centres that provide one-stop shops for family services would enable families with children of all ages to access support they may need. These centres should also integrate outreach to target vulnerable families who may be in need of support, and help overcome barriers some families may face in accessing services.

Family Hubs can help build parental engagement with local schools. Positioning them within the community can help reduce barriers to engagement that families may encounter if the hub was situated in the school. However, it is important to establish strong partnerships between Family Hubs and schools. For example, school staff participating in play sessions can foster stronger bonds with children and parents/carers.

Recommendation 10

Complete the national roll out of reformed Family Hubs.

Outside of schools, access to family support and early childhood intervention can be a vital helpline for vulnerable families. In 1999, Labour introduced Sure Start centres, which were one-stop shops for services for local families with children aged zero to five. Sure Start centres involved multidisciplinary teams providing drop-in support including health, housing and parenting advice. Parents/carers who attended

sessions were encouraged to access others, such as a family seeking housing advice also being signposted to a child development check.

Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that disadvantaged children living near a Sure Start centre increased their GCSE results by three grades compared to similar children without access to Sure Start,



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.

Now, School-Home Support operates across the country in London, Kent & Medway, Eastbourne, Liverpool, Manchester, Blackpool and Bradford.

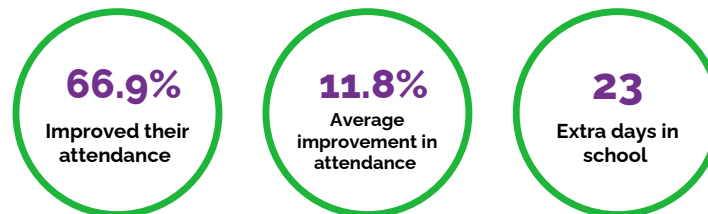


Our impact

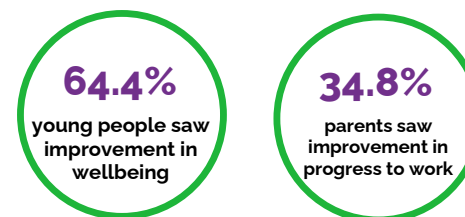
During the Autumn and Spring terms 2023/24, we have supported **3,861 individual** family members.

Overall improvement for children and young people supported this year was a 3% increase in their attendance, equivalent to 6 extra days

Support provided to persistently absent children



Other positive outcomes



Our return on investment

It costs School-Home Support approximately £1,000 to fund one tailored plan, per child per year, compared to the £2,166 annual cost per child missing at least 5 weeks of school (those below the persistent absence threshold).[33]



What we are seeing on the ground



*partly due to higher practitioner count and training delivery to raise awareness of safeguarding.

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