Understanding school attendance, education, and labour market outcomes

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Post-pandemic absences

Source: Department for Education, Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term, own illustration. Note: “Persistent absentee rate” defined as missing 10 per cent or more of possible sessions.
More Pandemic Fallout: The Chronically Absent Student
At some middle schools, more than 40 percent of the students have been chronically absent this year. Districts are going to great lengths — offering gift cards, night classes — to re-engage them.

Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils
Inquiry
The Education Committee has launched an inquiry into persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils.

Covid-19: Unprecedented levels of chronic absence in schools
Covid-19 has led to unprecedented levels of chronic absence in schools, with schools and teachers struggling to keep up with the demand for support.

Government to tackle post pandemic absence rates with new support
Successful attendance programmes expanded by Government to get more children into school.
1. Long-term effects
Impact of pupil absences on educational attainment and labour market outcomes in mid-adulthood

2. Absence Dynamics
Role of absence dynamics for attainment
a) Timing
b) Trajectory
c) Reason – authorised vs unauthorised

3. Psychosocial factors
Role of psychosocial factors in explaining the link between absences and attainment (e.g. problem behaviours, educational motivation)

4. Impact heterogeneity
Does the impact of absences on attainment vary across sociodemographic groups (e.g., family SES, SEND)?
Data

- British Cohort Study 1970 (BCS70)
- Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) + linked National Pupil Database for England (via UK Data Service)
- MCS + Welsh administrative school data (via SAIL Databank)
Long-term effects

• Absences disrupt skill formation process: “skills beget skills”

→ Lack of skills needed to succeed in education and the labour market long-term
Absences and educational attainment

Key Finding:
Missing five days of school at age 10 is associated with a 0.66 percentage point increased likelihood of having no qualifications at age 42

Source: British Cohort Study 1970. Note: N=8,535. Multiple imputed and weighted to correct for attrition. Vertical lines indicate the 95 per cent intervals. AMEs derived after multinomial logistic regression.
Absences and employment

Key Finding:
Missing five days of school at age 10 is associated with a 0.6 percentage point increase in the likelihood of being predominantly out of the labour force between the ages of 30 and 42.

Source: British Cohort Study 1970. Note N=9,012. Multiple imputed and weighted to correct for attrition. Vertical lines indicate the 95 per cent intervals. AMEs derived after multinomial logistic regression.
Absence dynamics

• Early absences more harmful?
  ➢ Missing out on foundational learning

• Later absences more harmful?
  ➢ Missing out on recent exposure to examined content

• Absences more harmful during school transition
  ➢ Changes in friendships, teachers, pedagogical approaches, curriculum, etc

• Trajectories also account for cumulative impact of absences

• Dynamics intertwined with absence reason ➔ unauthorised absences more common over time
Timing of absences and attainment

Key Finding:
School absences are harmful to achievement in all years but are most detrimental in years 6-10.

Source: Linked MCS-NPD data. N=8,139. Multiple Imputed and weighted. Note: Effects shown for 10 percentage point increases in absences and adjusted by confounders. Black dots: effects of total absences, blue dots: effects of authorized absences, red dots: effects of unauthorized absences
Typical absence trajectories

Source: Linked MCS-NPD data, N=7,218, weighted. CLA=Consistently Low Absence, CMAA=Consistently Moderate Authorised Absences, MIUA=Moderately Increasing Unauthorised Absences, SIAA=Strongly Increasing Authorised Absences, SIUA=Strongly Increasing Unauthorised Absences. Mean absences above 40% are truncated.
Absence trajectories and attainment

Key Finding:
Increasing absence trajectories hugely detrimental, but consistently moderate absences also harm achievement

Source: Linked MCS-NPD data, N=7,218, multiply imputed and weighted.
Reference category: Consistently Low Absence (CLA), CMAA=Consistently Moderate Authorised Absences, MIUA=Moderately Increasing Unauthorised Absences, SIAA=Strongly Increasing Authorised Absences, SIUA=Strongly Increasing Unauthorised Absences. Thick vertical lines indicate the 84%-Confidence Interval, and thin vertical lines the 95%-Confidence Interval.
Psychosocial factors

• Learning loss is assumed to be the main reason for a negative impact of absences on attainment

• Absences may adversely impact children’s psychosocial development
  • Increase in externalizing and risky behaviour
  • Decline in educational motivation, self-esteem and pro-social behaviour

• These psychosocial factors in turn affect children’s attainment
Psychosocial factors

Key Finding: Absences harm achievement not only through learning loss but also through increasing problem behaviour and reduced educational motivation.


*** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05. Solid lines indicate p < .05; dashed lines indicate p > .05.
Impact heterogeneity

• Are absences more or less harmful based on children’s characteristics and family circumstances (socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, SEND)?

• Key Findings

➢ Absences are detrimental to attainment among all sociodemographic groups

➢ No evidence for a double disadvantage: groups that are more likely to be absent are not more affected by absences in their attainment.
Opportunities for lifelong learning so that chronically absent pupils develop the skills needed to succeed in the labour market.

1. Need for targeted attendance interventions that address underlying causes to reduce future inequalities

2. School policies that prioritise helping pupils recover lost learning when they miss school

3. Opportunities for lifelong learning so that chronically absent pupils develop the skills needed to succeed in the labour market.
Interventions to reduce absences are relevant at all stages, but particularly during the transition period from primary to secondary school.

Early identification of students at greater risk of absences to allow for timely intervention and support → requires data literacy and support systems in schools.

Policies and interventions should address all forms and levels of absence, not just pupils with persistent or unauthorised absences.

Implications: Absence dynamics

1. Policies and interventions should address **all forms and levels of absence**, not just pupils with persistent or unauthorised absences.

2. Early identification of students at greater risk of absences to allow for timely intervention and support → requires data literacy and support systems in schools.

3. Interventions to reduce absences are relevant at all stages, but particularly during the **transition period** from primary to secondary school.
Given the pervasive negative impact of absences among all groups, it is essential to address school absenteeism and mitigate its effects on a national scale.

Interventions aimed at addressing problem and risky behaviour have the potential to reduce the negative impact of school absences.

Interventions should help pupils to engage with missed content and experience success after students return to school → maintain pupil motivation.

Implications: psychosocial/heterogeneity
Thank you for your attention!

- Special thanks to members of our research advisory group

More information about our project on https://schoolattendance.org/
Publications

Academic articles:


• Dräger, J., Klein, M., & Sosu, E. (2024). Does the impact of pupil absences on achievement depend on their timing? https://doi.org/10.35542/osf.io/nwzqh


Policy brief:


Forthcoming: Main Public Output in early September