

TACKLING THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE CRISIS

Guide for Child Health Colleagues

The problem

- Persistent absence has become a growing issue, with a sharp rise since 2015 and over 150,000 children severely absent post-pandemic.
- Absence rates are particularly high for children with special educational needs (SEN(D)), from ethnic minority backgrounds, or growing up in the North of England.
- A lack of action across sectors fails to address the health and social barriers to attendance, particularly mental health and safeguarding concerns.

What you can do as a child health practitioner

- Advocate for the **identification and support of children with health-related absence risks using shared data** (e.g., SEN(D), mental health diagnoses, and chronic illness).
- **Collaborate with schools to provide health services onsite**, including paediatric outpatients, mental health support, developmental screening, and immunisations.
- **Support training for school staff on trauma-informed and relational approaches**, especially to support children with anxiety or emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA).
- **Participate in multi-agency attendance planning**, especially for high-risk groups like young carers, autistic children, and those involved in social care.
- **Support flexible reintegration strategies**, such as individual health-based plans.

Evidence-based insights

Children not 'school ready' are nearly **three times** as likely to become a persistent absentee compared to their 'school ready' peers.

In 2022, **4%** of 7-16-year-olds missed more than 15 days of school. This increased to **13%** for those with a probable mental health disorder.

Examples of good practice that you may wish to explore:

Bradford SAFE Taskforce

Leveraged schools' leadership, facilities, and local networks to deliver timely and effective support to children vulnerable to violence, leading to improved attendance for nearly half of participating pupils, and significantly reduced school suspensions.

North Birkenhead Cradle to Career Attendance Pilot

A response to low attendance and unmet need in the Wirral, piloting small panels to discuss key problems and to identify pupils with unmet needs within schools. Identified problems were met with small-scale interventions and solutions.

Wirral EBSA Strategy

A research-informed, multi-agency EBSA Strategy, to raise awareness, promote early intervention, and deliver tailored support to children, families, and professionals across the authority.

Act Locally: School absence and dental health

Local stakeholders help address poor dental access impacting school attendance through collaborative data collection, solution design, and engagement with NHS commissioners to improve dental services for children in deprived areas.

Check out the innovative approaches outlined in this briefing and **consider taking inspiration from these approaches to reflect on how you can help create positive change.**



Scan the QR Code for the report

Please share this guide and start a discussion with your colleagues about how we can all play our role in building a country that works for all children and young people.