

SOCIAL POLICY

Targeting Persistent Absence to Reduce Attainment Gaps Across Key Educational Sectors

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Abstract

With persistent absence rates rising from 10.53% pre-pandemic to 17.63% in 2024/25, England's education system faces a systematic post-pandemic crisis. While existing policy relies on punitive Fixed Penalty Notices, these measures fail to acknowledge that absence operates both as a consequence of structural disadvantage and a primary driver of educational scarring. Using school-level DfE data for Leeds, we apply regression analysis to quantify the relationship between absence and attainment. Regressing persistent absence and total absence against Attainment 8 scores creates a statistically significant model at the 0.5% confidence level. R-squared values of 78-80%, suggesting that a substantial share of variation in average Attainment 8 scores among secondary schools in Leeds is associated with both the proportion of pupils persistently absent and the total proportion of pupils absent. Distribution analysis further demonstrates that absence patterns differ significantly across primary, secondary, and special schools . A key finding concerns data visibility: 35.4% of pupils with unclassified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and 21.1% of those with Free School Meal (FSM) status had less than 50% attendance, suggesting the most at-risk families remain underrepresented in official statistics. A school-level case study grounds these findings in a concrete Leeds context and explores what additional factors predict absence beyond attainment outcomes alone.Drawing on these findings, we discuss the limitations of current binary attendance thresholds and consider how a more graduated, needs-based policy response could better address the structural drivers of persistent absence.

Table of Abbreviations

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	EYFSP – Early Years Foundation Stage Profil
CRESP – Centre for Research in Education and Social Policy	FSM – Free School Meals
CSV – Comma-separated values	FPN – Fixed Penalty Notice
DfE – Department for Education	GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education
EAL – English as an Additional Language	IMD – Index of Multiple Deprivation
EBSA – Emotionally Based School Avoidance	KS2 – Key Stage 2
ECDA – Early Childhood Development Agency	KS4 – Key Stage 4
EEF – Education Endowment Foundation	LCC – Leeds City Council
EHC – Education, Health and Care	LEAP – Learner Engagement and Attendance Program
EHCNA – Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment	ONS – Office for National Statistics
EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan	PVI – Private, Voluntary and Independent
EI – Early Intervention	SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
EIPIC – Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children	SENDIF+ – SEND Inclusion Fund Plus
	SES – Socioeconomic status
	SIUA – Strongly Increasing Unauthorised Absence

Targeting Persistent Absence to Reduce Attainment Gaps Across Key Educational Sectors

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Policy Recommendations:

- SEND Resourcing and Staffing Standard** Leeds City Council should establish a minimum SEND staffing standard for all secondary schools, linked to administrative simplification, systematic pupil monitoring, and financial incentives to attract experienced SEND practitioners to high-absence schools. Portugal's "Plan + Classes + Success" (Eurydice, 2024) demonstrates that targeted teacher recruitment and support in high-absence schools can meaningfully reduce prolonged non-attendance, offering a replicable model for Leeds.
- Early Attendance Support Pathway:** Pilot a tiered Early Attendance Support Pathway from birth to age 16, with individualised specialist support for children with additional needs to ensure school readiness at primary entry. The EHCNA application process should be revised to be more accessible to families with limited time and resources and introduce dedicated transition key workers assigned to vulnerable pupils moving from primary to secondary school. This is based on Singapore's EIPIC model, which targets children from birth to age 6 with developmental needs, contributing to a national persistent absence rate of just 2% (Perera, 2022).
- Family Engagement Programme:** Introduce a structured Home Visitation Programme in Leeds, delivered by trained Family Liaison Officers, to engage families of chronically absent pupils with personalised, needs-based support. Family Liaison Officer roles should be expanded in high-deprivation areas and funded separately to avoid placing additional strain on existing teaching staff. This is based on Connecticut's LEAP programme which found home visits raised attendance by approximately 4 percentage points after the first visit, rising to approximately 7 points by six months post-treatment (Centre for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration, 2022)
- Graduated Reintegration Programme:** Replace punitive Fixed Penalty Notices with a phased, relational reintegration framework for chronically absent pupils. Schools should establish safe in-school reintegration spaces where absent students can re-enter at a pace suited to their wellbeing, supported by specialist staff. EBSA should be embedded in whole-staff awareness training across Leeds secondary schools with Halligan and Cryer (2022) recording 95% attendance in a specialist EBSA setting using staged re-entry.



Introduction

Persistent absence from school represents one of the most significant yet overlooked barriers to educational equity in contemporary England. In Leeds, where attainment continues to fall below national averages, persistent absence has become a critical mechanism through which inequality is reproduced (CRESP, 2018).

This report examines the cumulative impact of sustained non-attendance on academic attainment from Key Stage 2 (KS2, ages 8-11) through Key Stage 4 (KS4, ages 15-16], with particular attention paid to how absence patterns intersect with existing disadvantage gaps. In doing so, it seeks to quantify these relationships and identify how attendance policy should be redesigned to narrow entrenched attainment gaps.

Persistent absence – defined as missing 10% or more of possible school sessions by the Department for Education (DfE) – creates compounding learning deficits that broaden significantly across the educational stages (DfE, 2025b). National evidence shows the attainment gap begins to widen at KS2 and accelerates throughout secondary schooling, particularly for pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) (Farquharson et al., 2024).

This report will identify a critical threshold effect, whereby absence rates beyond certain levels correlate with dramatically reduced probability of achieving baseline qualifications.

Yet, existing policy responses remain limited in scope and effectiveness because they prioritise punitive measures and reactive enforcement, despite growing evidence that such strategies address symptoms rather than causes (Kearney et al., 2019). These approaches inadequately differentiate between structurally driven absence – stemming from health issues, unstable housing, caring responsibilities, or unmet mental health needs – and discretionary non-attendance. As a result, disciplinary interventions risk exacerbating vulnerability, disengagement, and mistrust, particularly among disadvantaged families.

Against this backdrop, this report examines attainment and absence trends in Leeds between 2018-2019 and 2024-25, situating local patterns with national trajectories of post-pandemic educational recovery. In doing so, it highlights how persistent absence interacts with regional deprivation, demographic complexity and weakened community infrastructures to reinforce longstanding inequalities. The analysis ultimately argues that reducing persistent absence requires a shift towards community-based, relational approaches that are integrated early through educational outreach and intervention programmes, with targeted support for disadvantaged pupils.

Drawing on evidence from effective interventions across the UK, the report offers policy recommendations for Leeds that reconceptualise attendance as a shared, systemic responsibility that deploys early, proportionate measures to reduce absence and narrow achievement gaps.

Literature Review

In the post-pandemic era, rising levels of persistent absence has become one of the most acute challenges facing the English education system. This review explores the relationship between attendance and attainment across educational stages, asking whether non-attendance directly depresses achievement or whether both are manifestations of deeper structural inequalities.

Working from national evidence, through wider equity concerns, to the specific case of persistent absence in Leeds, it shows that it operates simultaneously as consequence and cause: rooted in structural disadvantage yet exerting an independent, detrimental effect on educational outcomes.

On this basis, this review argues that policy must move beyond punitive, attendance-focused measures towards holistic, equity-oriented interventions that address the underlying drivers of absence.

The Causal Relationship: Absence and Attainment

Emerging evidence increasingly supports a causal relationship between attendance and attainment. The DfE's 2025 longitudinal analysis, controlling for prior attainment and pupil characteristics, demonstrates that attendance independently predicts educational outcomes (DfE, 2025b, p.30). Missing just 10 days in Year 11 halved the likelihood of achieving a grade 5 in English and maths (DfE, 2025b, p.6], whilst Year 6 pupils attending 95-100% of sessions were 1.8 times more likely to reach expected standards than those attending 85-90% (DfE, 2025b, p.6]. This dose-response relationship, where each attendance band improvement correlates with better outcomes even after controlling for confounders, strengthens causal inference beyond simple correlation.

Cross-stage consistency reinforces causality: at KS2, persistently absent pupils achieved expected standards at 40.2% versus 83.9% for full attenders, mirroring KS4 patterns of 35.6% versus 83.7% for grades 9-4 in English and maths (DfE, 2022).

The Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) synthesis corroborates that attendance improvements yield 'meaningful academic gains' (EEF, 2022, p.6], suggesting mechanistic pathways like curriculum continuity, teacher-pupil relationships and peer learning genuinely matter. However, establishing that absence causes lower attainment exposes the more urgent question: what causes persistent absence itself? One of the explanations on the relationship between absence and attainment lies in Faucet Theory, which provides a useful explanatory mechanism in exemplifying that pupils develop skills through frequent exposure to schooling, thus, time away from school reduces learning opportunities and slows cumulative development [Alexander et al., 2001).

Drager, Klein and Sosu show that pupils with higher absence rates at younger ages tend to remain highly absent by KS4 and experience the largest attainment penalties. Notably, pupils with a 10% unauthorised absence rate in Year 11 and being on a 'Strongly Increasing Unauthorised Absence' (SIUA) trajectory saw the probability of obtaining GCSEs reduced by 33 percent (2023). This has clear implications for place-based inequalities: pupils in Yorkshire and the Humber consistently perform below national averages, and further below pupils in London (Drager, Klein & Sosu, 2023), making trajectory evidence particularly relevant for explaining why wards in Leeds underperform relative to London boroughs.

Inequalities in Absence Patterns

Current data reveals stark inequalities. Persistent absence has surged from 10.53% pre-pandemic to 17.63% in 2024/25, with severe absence reaching 2.26% (DfE, 2025a). These rates disproportionately affect pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (35.5% persistently absent versus 16.8% with no identified SEND), those eligible for free school meals (34.8% versus 14.1% for those not eligible), and specific ethnic groups, with Irish Traveller pupils experiencing rates of 70.2% compared to 5.5% for Chinese pupils (The Health Foundation, 2025).

Systematic reviews confirm that disadvantaged students face compounded absence risk (Sosu et al., 2021; Gee, 2018), with UK data showing that disadvantaged pupils are twice as likely to experience persistent absence (van Poortvliet, 2025).

Risk factors include long commutes, inadequate sleep, school emerges as a critical driver: depression correlates with poor attendance (Finning et al., 2019), whilst students experiencing stress, anxiety and depression report higher absence rates (Hancock et al., 2018; Panayiotou et al., 2023). Bullying exacerbates this, with longitudinal evidence linking both victimisation and perpetration to increased truancy [Alanko et al., 2025).

Crucially, the type of absence matters: Klein et al. (2022) found that truancy and sickness-related absences strongly predict lower achievement, whilst family holidays show weaker effects. Moreover, sickness-related absences disproportionately harm students with lower socioeconomic status (SES) (Klein and Sosu, 2023), suggesting absence both reflects and amplifies existing inequalities.

Policy Responses: From Punishment to Prevention

Current policy relies heavily on punitive measures. Since 2013, when the DfE implemented stricter policies discouraging term-time absences, fines have increased six-fold, with local councils collecting over £5 million between 2018-2019 (Yu & Leni, 2021). However, independent reviews by the Universities of Coventry and Roehampton found that fines disproportionately impact disadvantaged families without addressing root causes including poverty, poor health and family relationships (Epstein, Brown and O'Flynn, 2019).

The Education Committee (2023) noted pre-pandemic fines showed partial effectiveness, but post-pandemic the link between fines and improved attendance remains unclear. While Wang et al. .2025. found smaller, frequent fines more effective than severe penalties in a 220-pupil sample, the overall evidence base continues to question punitive approaches. Enderle (2023) argues for refocusing toward supportive, early interventions based on family engagement that address barriers to attendance.

This aligns with research emphasising absence as symptomatic of structural inequalities like poverty, caring responsibilities, exclusion practices and gaps in mental health provision, all of which require systemic rather than individual-level responses.

The Leeds Picture

Leeds, a large, ethnically diverse city in West Yorkshire with a population of around 809,000, making it the third largest authority in England (Office for National Statistics, 2021). According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, 24% of all local areas within the local authority are ranked in the most deprived 10% nationally, with this being concentrated across the east and south of the city (LCC, 2019). Areas across the city ranked in the most deprived 10% include Harehills, Burmantofts, Beeston and Seacroft, with Harehills south district recording the highest rates of poverty, with 74.2% of households in the district being in poverty (LCC, 2019).

In contrast to the most deprived regions, outer city suburbs including Horsforth and Wetherby have significantly lower levels of deprivation, with school's educational attainment highlighting a drastic inequality. The Equality Annual Report revealed that across Leeds, one in five children are living in poverty, highlighting a persistent link between poverty and deprivation with poor educational attainment (LCC, 2025).

Leeds provides a particularly instructive case study for understanding post-pandemic absence dynamics and their relationship to persistent deprivation. The city's distinctive characteristics amplify national trends: with an overall absence rate of 7.2% in 2023/24, Leeds marginally exceeds the national average of 7.1% [Allott, 2024; DfE, 2024). National patterns demonstrate that FSM-eligible pupils experience absence rates nearly double those of non-eligible peers (11.0% versus 5.8%), with persistent absence rates of 34.8% compared to 14.1% (DfE, 2024). Given that 8,435 eligible pupils in Leeds failed to claim their free school meal entitlement in January 2024 alone (Leeds for Learning, 2025), understanding the extent of absence among disadvantaged pupils in Leeds thus demands further analysis of how local causes of deprivation systematically shape attendance patterns.

Systematic reviews confirm that disadvantaged

Leeds post-Covid recovery remains incomplete, mirroring national patterns. School absence rose by 57% nationally between 2015/16 and 2023/24 (University of Leeds, 2024b), and Leeds mirrors broader Northern England patterns where unauthorised absence rates run 34% higher than those in the South (University of Leeds, 2024b). Community infrastructure damage provides a partial explanation for the persistent elevation in absence rates.

Young people themselves identify systemic gaps: when consulted by Leeds City Council (LCC), pupils explicitly requested that 'access to The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) be made easier' and advocated for more school staff trained in mental health first aid (LCC Local Offer, 2023). School leaders report that 'strategies used prior to the pandemic to tackle school absence are no longer as effective as they were before 2020' (University of Leeds, 2024b), signalling a fundamental shift in the support landscape. The loss of community bonds, such as youth clubs, informal neighbourhood support networks and accessible mental health provision, has created a missing layer of preventative support that schools cannot replace alone.

Equally significant are children's changed socialisation patterns following prolonged isolation. Research from the University of Leeds demonstrates that children deemed 'not school ready' were over twice as likely to become persistently absent (Wood, 2024), with clear implications for pupils who experienced critical developmental periods in isolation during the pandemic.

For those now in Years 7-9 who navigated primary-secondary transition during disruption (between September 2020 and July 2022), school may represent an unfamiliar and anxiety-inducing environment rather than a familiar social space, contributing to persistent absence patterns that reflect socialisation difficulties and emotional dysregulation, rather than traditional disengagement.

In a city as ethnically diverse as Leeds – with 79.0% White, 9.7% Asian, 5.6% Black and representation from over 140 ethnic groups (ONS, 2023; World Population Review, 2025) – attendance policy must account for the differing barriers faced by some communities. While 90.7% of Leeds residents speak English as their main language, a significant 9.3% speak English as an additional language or not at all (Varbes, 2024).

This intersects with linguistic isolation, where families with English as an additional language may struggle to navigate attendance procedures or communicate absence reasons effectively, risking punitive responses that further alienate vulnerable families. LCC targeted work with Roma families included one parental engagement session attended by 47 participants in autumn 2024 (LCC, 2024), demonstrating recognition of these problems.

The pathway forward for Leeds requires localised intervention that moves decisively beyond disciplinary measures. The continued deployment of penalty notices – fines of £80 rising to £160 (LCC, 2024) – may undermine family engagement, particularly among disadvantaged households already struggling with structural barriers to attendance.

Critically, Leeds must map absence data onto specific deprivation indicators, mental health provisions and transport accessibility to identify geographic 'hotspots' requiring intensive, place-based family support. Schools in high-deprivation wards need embedded mental health practitioners, family support workers and community liaison roles instead of attendance officers that issue fines and further extract resources from already-strained households, whilst failing to address the root causes of chronic absence.

Methodology

This analysis uses quantitative data to examine the relationship between pupil absence and attainment gaps, drawing on two core datasets from the 2023/24 academic year, the most recent full-year data available for state-funded KS4 pupils.

The first dataset, Pupil Absence in Schools in England 2023/24, is published three times annually by the DfE. The second, Individual School and College Performance Data for 2022/23 and 2023/24, is an openly accessible dataset updated each academic year. These sources were selected for their public availability, breadth of coverage, and capacity to support both national-level comparison and detailed Leeds-level analysis, including ward-level variation.

A quantitative approach is appropriate given that both absence and attainment are systematically recorded and can be measured consistently across schools and demographic groups. Focusing on these datasets enables clear, comparable insights into which groups experience the highest levels of absence, how patterns vary across Leeds, and where targeted policy intervention is most needed. The datasets were downloaded in CSV format and analysed through a combination of Excel and 'R' to explore how absences relate to educational outcomes, particularly in Leeds.

The Pupil Absence in Schools dataset is derived from statutory school census returns. All maintained schools must record two possible attendance sessions per day, and since 2024/25, all schools have been required to submit these session-level data to the DfE (2022). Absence is reported through two key measures: the overall absence rate, calculated as (total absence sessions ÷ total possible sessions) x 100, and persistent absence, defined as an overall absence rate of 10% or higher (DfE, 2025a). Data is available at national and local authority level (including Leeds), but not for individual schools. To understand the drivers of absence in Leeds, the analysis focuses specifically on KS4 pupils, examining absence patterns by pupil characteristics such as ethnicity, their EAL position or FSM eligibility. This enables the identification of student groups most vulnerable to persistent absence and supports comparison between Leeds and national trends over time.

The Individual School and College Performance Data set provides complementary attainment measures, including Progress 8, Attainment 8 and grade 4+ outcomes in English and maths, as well as broader statistics on absences, student enrolment and the demographic profiles of each school (DfE, 2025c). Progress 8 is a value-added measure comparing a pupil's performance with that of peers nationally who had similar KS2 prior attainment, while Attainment 8 captures average grades across eight subjects, with English and maths double-weighted. These datasets are compiled using matched KS2 prior attainment records, school census data, qualification entries and assessment results (DfE, 2025c). Together, they enable an integrated analysis linking patterns of absence to attainment outcomes across Leeds using techniques such as regression and spatial analysis.

Absences and Education in Leeds Compared to England-wide

Given the breadth and depth of existing research on absences and their impact on attainment at a national scale, the primary focus of the research in this paper is understanding the unique situation in Leeds. Whilst Leeds is not the lowest-performing local authority in England, it consistently underperforms relative to national and London benchmarks for both absences and attainment. In 2024, KS4 attainment in Leeds was 3 percentage points below the England average and 9 percentage points below London (Dellar, 2025). Yorkshire and the Humber recorded an overall absence rate of 7.6%, making it the third-worst performing region nationally, behind only the North East and South West. More specifically, the absence rate for state-funded secondary schools in Leeds during the 2023/24 academic year stood at 9.5%, compared with a national average of 8.9%. However there remains considerable variation in school performance across Leeds. Markedly, three of the highest secondary school absence rates in Leeds – 16.0%, 15.6%, and 15.2% – were recorded in the East of Leeds, Killingbeck and Seacroft, and Temple Newsam, all located within the top 10% most deprived areas of the city (LCC, 2019).



In the 2023/24 academic year, 64.9% of pupils in Leeds achieved grade 4 or above in English and maths GCSEs, compared with 65.4% nationally, and 72.0% in London (DfE, 2025c). At ward level, the disparities become more pronounced Burmantofts, the most deprived ward in Leeds, recorded a deprivation rate of 41.7% in 2021 (ONS, 2022) and an average Attainment 8 score of 39.1, indicating very low average attainment (LCC, 2023).

Both attendance and attainment in Leeds fall below national averages, with the most deprived wards experiencing the greatest concentration of disadvantage. These patterns provide a critical empirical foundation for the subsequent analysis of pupil-level and school-level absence across Leeds.

Student Groups in Leeds Most Affected by Absence and Persistent Absence

Turning to demographic variation, Leeds recorded an overall absence rate of 7.6% in 2023/24, with 21.7% of pupils persistently absent (>10% of sessions missed) and 2.6% missing over 50% of sessions (DfE 2025a).

Absence varies substantially across pupil characteristics, including ethnicity, gender, FSM eligibility, EAL and SEND status. A particularly striking and consistent pattern is the concentration of severe absence among pupils recorded as “unclassified”. For example, 35.4% of pupils unclassified for SEND and 21.1% unclassified for FSM had less than 50% attendance. These figures far exceed even the most affected classified groups, including pupils with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan (8.3%) and FSM-eligible pupils (5.8%), although these groups still experience absence rates approximately double and triple the Leeds average respectively (DfE, 2025a).

Other patterns are also significant, for example, pupils with English as an additional language were less likely to be absent than pupils with English as a first language, with an overall absence rate of 6.57% compared with 7.67%. Pupils from White, Mixed ethnic backgrounds and unclassified backgrounds recorded the highest absence rates, while pupils from Black backgrounds were well below both the Leeds and national averages, with just 3.78% of sessions missed in Leeds. Boys were marginally more likely to be absent than girls, diverging from national trends where girls typically record higher absence rates (DfE 2025a).

These findings are in line with research presented in the literature review, showing that local-level analysis parallels these strong associations. Regression analysis found adjusted R-squared values of 78-80%, suggesting that a substantial share of variation in average Attainment 8 scores among secondary schools in Leeds is associated with both the proportion of pupils persistently absent and the total proportion of pupils absent. Total absence and persistent absence were themselves highly correlated (0.946), indicating that schools with higher overall absence also tend to have higher levels of persistent absence. Within the variables available in the government dataset, absence appears to be among the strongest factors associated with attainment, alongside SEND, FSM and EAL composition (DfE, 2025c).

Overall, these findings reinforce evidence that, in post-industrial areas of the North, white working-class pupils – particularly boys – are increasingly disengaged from the education system, with attendance and attainment deteriorating as a result. The concentration of absence among disadvantaged and administratively “invisible” pupils further highlights the need for targeted, diagnostic interventions rather than uniform enforcement-based approaches within schools themselves.

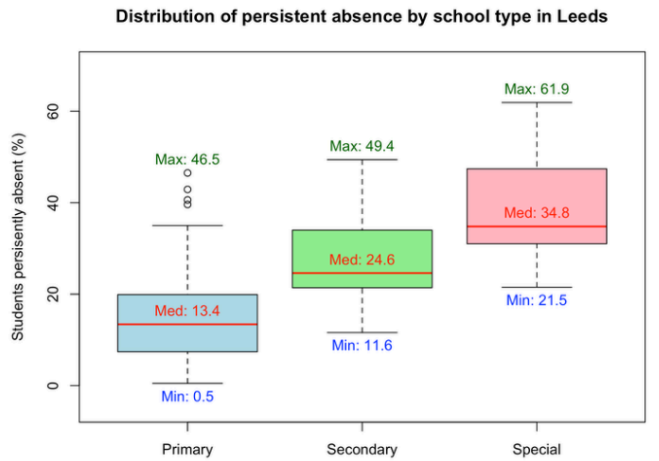
Areas and Schools in Leeds Most Affected By Absence and Persistent Absence

Additionally, to understand the picture of absences in Leeds, it is useful to analyse the distribution of absences across Leeds both spatially and for different types of schools. This needs to be analysed on a school level, as individual student data is too sensitive. Furthermore, the rate of absences in schools vary wildly and may help to indicate broader patterns of educational engagement in the area.

The first point to note is that among the 279 state-funded educational institutions recorded in Leeds, there is substantial variation, with persistent absence rates ranging from 0.5% in the least affected schools to over 60% in the most affected (DfE, 2025c). This variation is also extremely dependent on the educational stage, with rates in primary schools markedly lower than in secondary schools, while specialist schools for SEND pupils exhibit the highest rates overall. (No comparable data were available for independent schools).

However, Figure 1 illustrates that while median levels of persistent absence are relatively low in primary schools, several extreme outliers remain, with 40-50% of pupils persistently absent. Given the importance of early education for development, the presence of such severe absence at primary level is particularly concerning.

Figure 1: Boxplot of the percentage of students persistently absent (>10% sessions missed) in Leeds by school type (DfE, 2025c).

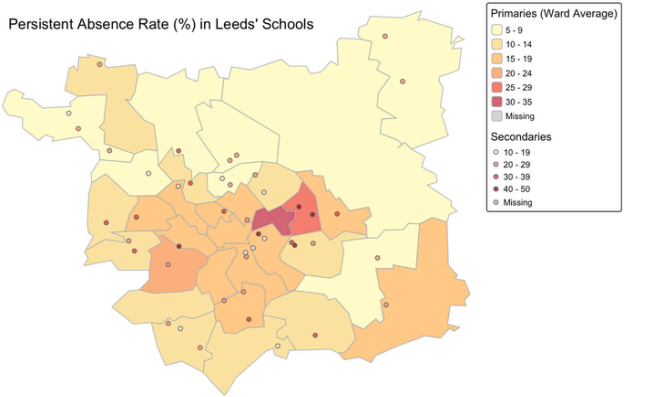


Also note that while the data being analysed in this section is specifically centred on persistent absence, there is a 0.942 correlation between a school's persistent absence rate and total absence rate, meaning they can be used and considered somewhat interchangeably (DfE, 2025).

Given the wide variation within each school type in Figure 1, it is logical to additionally examine the geographical distributions of absence across Leeds, considering both primary and secondary schools but separately. Figure 2 presents the average attendance of primary schools aggregated by ward, with data for individual secondary schools overlaid on top.

The maps show that the highest levels of persistent absence in primary schools are concentrated in inner-city areas, particularly in the Gipton and Harehills ward. In contrast, in the more affluent suburban areas in the north, absence is much less prevalent. This pattern is reflected less strongly in secondary school absence rates, with the five secondary schools with the highest absence rate clustered closely in and around the three wards with the highest absences.

Figure 2: Spatial distribution of persistent absence across Leeds in both state-funded primary schools and secondary schools, coloured by % of students persistently absent in each school. Primary schools are aggregated to averages by wards (DfE, 2025c).



However, in general, spatial clustering is much weaker among secondary schools, where absence appears more school-specific than area-based. For example, Co-op Academy Leeds and Trinity Academy Leeds are located less than half a mile apart, yet their persistent absence rates differ sharply with 49.4% at Co-op Academy compared with 17.6% at Trinity Academy, which is comparatively low for a secondary school. This comparison is especially interesting and useful for case study analysis further in this report as the demographics of the student body are very similar, and the catchment areas heavily overlap. Table 1 shows the similarity of key statistics, and the only significantly different factor is the proportion of SEND pupils, where Trinity has a rate lower than the Leeds average of 14.1% (DfE, 2025). This is important as factors such as EAL and SEND can pose key challenges for educators, but the two schools face broadly similar challenges.

Table 1: Comparing the demographics of students at Trinity Academy Leeds and Co-op Academy Leeds (DfE, 2025c).

School / % Students	Free School Meals (FSM)	EAL or Unclassified	EHC Plan	SEND Support
Co-op Academy Leeds	58.40%	71.70%	0.90%	20.30%
Trinity Academy Leeds	57.30%	69.20%	0.60%	12.60%

Alongside its subpar absence records, Co-op Academy Leeds is the second-worst-performing secondary school in Leeds, with just 18.0% of students gaining grades of 5+ in their GCSEs in 2024/25, even lower than 2023/24, where 22.4% of students passed this benchmark (DfE, 2025c). Unfortunately, Trinity Academy is a new school, with its first students due to sit their GCSEs in 2026, so a direct comparison cannot be made yet. Although, it has been rated “Outstanding” by Ofsted and students are on track to achieve highly (Ofsted, 2024).

Nevertheless, the Co-op Academy performance is significantly below averages for both Leeds (46.5%) and nationally (45.4%) in 2024/25 (DfE, 2026] and represents an important opportunity to study how individual school policy and culture may shape student attitudes.

A Case Study of Leeds Schools: Trinity Academy Leeds in comparison with Co-op Academy Leeds

When considering poverty rates across Leeds, school attendance mirrors these patterns. School absence rates across Leeds throughout the academic year 2023/24 were 7.2%, mirroring the national picture, however, this remains above pre-pandemic absence rates of 5% (DfE, 2024).

Figures across Leeds are not evenly distributed; LCC .2024. highlighted that schools located in inner-city regions that serve areas with the highest levels of poverty face disproportionate attendance challenges. These schools also had high concentrations of pupils with SEND, EAL and children in need (LCC, 2024).

The case studies examined throughout this paper demonstrate clear challenges across the inner city. In Harehills and Burmantofts (inner-east district) the majority of households experience multiple deprivation dimensions and school demographics are primarily from South Asian backgrounds (Leeds Observatory, 2024).

On the other hand, when considering more affluent areas across the city, including Horsforth and Roundhay, school absence rates are well below the national average at 5.04%, with these schools serving predominantly white British cohorts (LCC, 2024).

Woods’ .2024. research confirms the link between high levels of deprivation and poor school attendance, with the most deprived areas experiencing the highest recorded school absence rates, which subsequently contribute to poor educational attainment.

Both Trinity Academy and Co-op Academy emphasise the importance of strong attendance as a foundation for academic success. Trinity Academy has policies which aim for students to maintain 100% attendance, with parental meetings being initiated if attendance falls below 98% (Trinity Academy Leeds, 2026).

The school also works alongside the local authority to address the attendance of students who are persistently absent. Parents of children who attend Trinity Academy are expected to report absence due to sickness by 8 a.m., as well as provide medical evidence for appointments that are scheduled during school hours (Leeds Trinity, 2026).

In contrast, Co-op Academy presents a less formalised threshold system, focusing more on educating parents and guardians on the distinction between authorised and unauthorised absences, as well as explaining the potential for penalty notices for unauthorised absences. Compared to the initiation of parental meetings if attendance falls below 98% at Trinity, Co-op Academy will refer pupils to the attendance team if attendance falls below 90% (Co-op Academy, n.d.).

This initiation of parental meetings at 98% highlights the highly preventative approach that Trinity Academy takes to attendance (Trinity Academy Leeds, 2026]. Trinity Academy therefore intervenes with a pupil's attendance early, long before a pupil reaches the national definition of persistently absence of 90% attendance (Trinity Academy Leeds, 2026]. In contrast, Co-op Academy will only become formally involved once pupils meet the national threshold for persistent absence (Co-op Academy, n.d).

Whilst this aligns with national guidance, it means that interventions occur later in the decline of a pupil's attendance pattern.



The proactive stance of Trinity Academy appears well-placed to support consistently higher attendance across the student population. Given the widely recognised link between attendance and academic outcomes (see literature review), earlier intervention of this kind may help minimise lost learning time and give pupils a stronger foundation for achieving better GCSE results. In contrast, a more reactive approach, such as that seen at Co-op Academy Leeds, where intervention tends to follow more significant absence, could mean that some of the impact on learning is harder to recover.

A Comparison Between SEND Policies Between Trinity Academy Leeds and Co-op Academy Leeds

A comparison between the SEND policies between Trinity Academy and Co-op Academy highlights how each school supports SEND students and engages with families. Both schools operate within the framework of the SEND Code of Practice (2015), yet their approaches appear significantly different. Trinity Academy adopts a whole-school, highly structured model, in which its SEND provision is embedded into its school culture (Trinity Academy Leeds, 2025).

Trinity Leeds has an emphasis on early identification, consistent classroom adaptations and a proactive collaboration between teachers, pastoral teams and specialist staff (Trinity Academy Leeds, 2025).

This preventative model reflects the school's wider culture of being proactive rather than reactive, in which the school aims to minimise barriers to learning before they escalate. In contrast, Co-op Academy Leeds (2025) outlines a SEND framework that appears reactive and intervention-based, offering targeted support only once specific needs have been formally identified.

Despite Co-op Academy providing a clear process for assessment for special educational needs and external support, as well as strong parental engagement, its greater emphasis on responding to established difficulties rather than integrating SEND support as is consistently done at Trinity Academy. The stark differences between SEND attainment at Trinity Academy in comparison to Co-op Academy, suggest that the embedded and anticipatory model of Trinity supports stronger academic engagement.

Current Policy Evaluation

LCC’s attendance policy operates within a statutory framework that effectively mandates 100% attendance unless pupils are unwell, with attendance below 90% designated as concerning (2024a). Embedded as a strategic priority within the Council’s 2024-26 “3A’s Plan” (Leeds for Learning, 2024b), the current policy architecture nonetheless exhibits fundamental structural limitations that render it inadequate for addressing the complex drivers of chronic absenteeism.

Leeds’s primary strategy centres on punitive enforcement through Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs): £80 per child per parent (rising to £160 if unpaid within 21 days), with prosecution following non-payment (LCC, 2024). From August 2024, updated statutory guidance set a threshold of 10 unauthorised sessions across a rolling 10-week period for issuing an FPN. Alongside enforcement, Leeds operates 22 cluster-based partnerships integrating schools, health services and social work to coordinate early intervention support (Leeds for Learning, 2024a).

However, the policy framework suffers from several critical deficiencies that undermine its efficacy in tackling persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable cohorts.

First, the over-reliance on punitive mechanisms sits uneasily with established evidence on attendance interventions: the National Association of Head Teachers has described such measures as ‘too blunt a tool and largely ineffective at improving persistence absence’ (Tremlett, 2024). National data further show that 36.5% of FSM-eligible pupils are persistently absent compared with 15.6% of non-eligible pupils (Long & Roberts, 2024, p.17). This highlights a key limitation in Leeds’s fine-based system because it disproportionately penalises economically vulnerable families already navigating cost-of-living pressures, risking the punishment of poverty-related attendance barriers.

In addition, the framework’s lack of diagnostic precision and differentiated intervention pathways is stark. Illness alone accounts for 6.88% of all pupils being persistently absent (DfE, 2025a), yet policy applies a largely uniform enforcement mechanism that does not adequately distinguish between medical, psychosocial and structural drivers of absence. As a result, support is poorly aligned with need, and the system remains ill-suited to addressing the underlying causes of chronic non-attendance.

Policy Recommendations

The preceding analysis demonstrates that persistent absence in Leeds is not primarily a behavioural problem requiring enforcement, but a wellbeing problem requiring structural response. Across the data, the pupils most affected by chronic non-attendance are disproportionately those experiencing unmet SEND needs, rising mental health difficulties, family disengagement and the residual disruption of pandemic-era socialisation gaps (The Health Foundation, 2025; Hamilton, 2024; Parentkind, 2023; Wood, 2024).

These are interconnected expressions of the same underlying condition: schools and support systems that are not currently designed to meet the needs of their most vulnerable pupils. The following recommendations therefore take pupil and family wellbeing as their organising principle, arguing that sustainable improvement in Leeds attendance outcomes requires institutional redesign rather than intensified enforcement. Each recommendation addresses a different dimension of that redesign, resourcing, policy culture and early identification, but all four rest on the same foundation: that a child who does not feel safe or supported at school will not attend it.

Recommendation 1: SEND Resourcing and Staffing Standards in Leeds Secondary Schools

The disparity in persistent absence rates between Co-op Academy Leeds (49.4%) and Trinity Academy Leeds (17.6%), two schools located less than half a mile apart and serving comparable populations, cannot be adequately explained by deprivation or geography alone (Gov.UK, 2023a; 2023b.). A critical institutional difference between the two schools is the scale of SEND provision: Co-op Academy operates with a single-person SEN team, whilst Trinity maintains a team of five. This difference in resourcing capacity is particularly significant given that pupils with SEND nationally experience persistent absence at a rate of 35.5%, compared with 16.8% for pupils with no identified SEND (The Health Foundation, 2025), suggesting that SEND identification and support infrastructure is not a peripheral concern but a central determinant of attendance outcomes.

This institutional gap mirrors the structural logic underlying Portugal’s “Plan + Classes + Success”, introduced by the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation in June 2024, which identified teacher support, through administrative simplification, overtime pay, and targeted recruitment incentives for high-absence schools, as the primary mechanism for reducing prolonged student absence (Eurydice, 2024). The implication is that attendance outcomes are substantially determined by institutional resourcing decisions rather than individual pupil behaviour, a conclusion consistent with the disparate outcomes observed between Co-op Academy and Trinity Academy despite their shared geographic and demographic context.

The scale of unmet need makes adequate SEND resourcing increasingly non-negotiable. Hamilton (2024) reports that the incidence of probable mental health disorders among 7- to 16-year-olds rose from 12.1% in 2017 to 18% in 2022, with older adolescents aged 17 to 19 seeing an increase from 10.1% to 25.7% over the same period. Whilst mental health needs and SEND classifications are not synonymous, the significant overlap between the two populations and the post-pandemic widening of absence gaps specifically for SEND pupils (Educational Policy Institute, 2025), suggests that rising mental health need is increasingly manifesting as a SEND identification and support challenge within schools.

Critically, children of secondary school age with a probable mental health condition were less likely than their peers to report feeling safe at school, to enjoy learning, or to have a support network of friends (Hamilton, 2024). A single-person SEND team cannot meaningfully identify, monitor and support pupils at this scale of need. The lesson from Portugal is that adding capacity is insufficient without also restructuring the conditions, administrative, managerial and financial, within which that capacity operates (Eurydice, 2024). Leeds cannot address its SEND attendance gap by asking individual schools to do more with the same resources.

In response to this, LCC should establish a minimum SEND staffing standard for schools, tied to a structured support framework that mirrors Portugal's three-pronged approach: reducing administrative burden on SEND staff, providing schools with management tools to monitor vulnerable pupils systematically, and creating financial incentives to attract experienced SEND practitioners to high-absence schools. This would help ensure that the conditions associated with stronger outcomes at Trinity Academy – adequate staffing, early identification infrastructure and relational capacity – become a citywide baseline rather than an institutional anomaly.

Recommendation 2: Early-Years Intervention Pathways as a Barrier to Absence Entrenchment

By secondary school, without students being supported and uplifted in their learning environment, absence can already have become entrenched, with the transition from primary to secondary being a major point of risk. There is a lack of support in place for children from a very early age to stop habits of absence becoming prevalent.

Children in the United Kingdom are assessed by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) – a statutory assessment to consider whether a child is considered 'school ready' at school entry point (Reception), with a recent study showing that a child who was not deemed 'school ready' when entering reception is twice as likely to become a persistent absentee in secondary years (University of Leeds, 2024a).

This is an ode to the lack of support provided in early years and its potential long-term effects on education; whilst the EYFSP assesses a child's school readiness, it does not provide any clear guidance on how children who are not at this level are supported as they move into school. Dräger, Klein and Sosu, (2023) highlight the pattern between absence at an early age and how this becomes entrenched and remains with students into their secondary years.

One of the crucial differences between countries without severe attendance disparities and the United Kingdom is this early years intervention and support.

In Leeds, additional early years funding is available through SENDIF+ which is allocated as part of the Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA). EHCNA assessments provide EHCP's and are very difficult to apply for without your child having an EYFSP or similar assessment and therefore being with a nursery or childminder (LCC, 2025), ideally a competent one who can provide detailed assessment of a child's behaviours and needs.

In Leeds in 2024, only around 69% of EHCP applications made it through to assessment (DfE, 2025f). This shows how the United Kingdom, Leeds in particular, is often unable to help support young people at early stages; additional support requires individual additional funding, lengthy application processes, willing assistance from education workers and children who are in pre-school education; a combination which can often be difficult to come across. This isolates children who are most in need of support from being able to access it.

33% of all children starting reception in the 2022/23 academic year were considered not school ready, the number rising to 45% of children receiving free school meals (University of Leeds, 2024c), with these children being 2.5 times as likely to be persistently absent from school (Child of The North, 2024). School readiness is not made accessible by local or national governments; it requires a prerequisite of willing and engaged parents and a pre-school learning environment which is effective at recognising and responding to children with additional needs. Singapore's Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIIC) supports children requiring medium to high levels of Early Intervention (EI) support (Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), n.d).

EI professionals collaborate with Health Professionals to support children depending on individual needs, working to: design Individualised Educational Plan goals, deliver the intervention and provide support for caregivers (ECDA, 2026]. This scheme helps children from birth to six years old who are assessed by a paediatrician to be at risk of a developmental, intellectual, sensory or physical disability or a combination of disabilities; it requires the child's regular paediatrician to refer them for assessment. EIPIIC requires a less lengthy application process and provides more specialised intervention than the EYFSP and EHCP plans.

This scheme helps Singapore to retain its 2% persistent absence rate (defined as missing 10% of school days) within secondary school (Perera, 2022).

Northern children in the 2023/24 academic year with additional needs were twice as likely to be persistently absent as those without (University of Leeds, 2024b); it is clear that pupils with additional needs require greater support and this support must come at an earlier stage. It should not just be the responsibility of families to ensure their children are 'school ready' for they cannot provide the same in-depth, professional support that the likes of Singapore's EIPIIC plans can.

The EYFSP assesses but does not provide support in the ways which the likes of Singapore clearly underline as necessary. Having a support system which is easier to access, supports individual needs and can ensure that all children reach school readiness by the point of entry into primary school is essential to supporting stable schooling environments and promoting regular attendance.

In response to this, there should be the establishment of a tiered Early Attendance Support Pathway in Leeds, where students from birth all the way to sixteen have their attendance not just monitored but are supported by wellbeing and attendance staff throughout their schooling. To mirror the system in Singapore, Leeds should pilot early years support for children up to age 5 with additional needs, low engagement in education and/or poor attendance rates to do additional, individualised work with specialists to ensure that students are all joining primary school at a 'school ready' level. The application process should be re-assessed to become more accessible for parents with limited time and resources.

In order to help with the rocky transition between primary and secondary school, children who are vulnerable or particularly prone to becoming absent should have more in-depth transition support with pupils assigned a key worker from the school they are transitioning into to become a familiar point of contact before they are enrolled at the school. To improve these systems, attendance data should be linked to children's SEND, mental health and early help datasets to ensure that staff are well informed when considering reasons for absences and creating support plans.

Recommendation 3: Family Engagement and Home Visitation as a Route to School Reconnection

Distrust or a lack of communication between families and schools is another key barrier to providing support and encouragement for students who are absent. Parental isolation from a child's school means that some families become cut off from both support and information. On a scale of 0-10, where 10 is "Extremely involved" and 0 is "Not at all involved", a 2023 survey of parents took the mean average score for involvement as 6.96 (Parentkind, 2023). This statistic rises to 7.71 for families with an income of over £100,000 and falls down to 6.75 for incomes between £20,000-£34,999 (Parentkind, 2023); families who may be more in need are less supported and may therefore become less involved in their child's education.

The National Lottery Community Fund's 'A Better Start Programme' is aimed at helping young children and their parents be engaged in learning and becoming ready for school, improving both school readiness and early parent engagement with education. The Talking Transitions programme in Southend aimed to support both children and families on the transition into primary schools, forming partnerships between schools and early age settings to share expertise and provide continuity of support (National Children's Bureau, 2025). This structure helps to ensure that families are supported throughout the entirety of their children's primary schooling, encouraging parental engagement with a child's learning itself and their learning environment from a very young age.

There is a clear post-pandemic issue in Leeds with absence becoming chronic in some students; many having become less engaged in learning. Trinity Academy shows much greater dedication to supporting parental engagement and regularly updates their Home-Academy Agreement (Trinity Academy Leeds, 2025). Co-op Academy on the other hand has a brief Home-Academy agreement which does not contain the same specifics such as ensuring that parents are not booking appointments during school hours or ensuring that their child attends on time every day etcetera.



Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin pictured with London Mayor, Sadiq Khan (Wikimedia Commons)

Their review date was marked as September 2024, yet this review has still not yet come (Co-op Academy Leeds, 2023); the agreement is brief and not exemplary of a dedication to creating a network between the academy and its parents. Relationships between parents and a child's education, plus their learning environment, are essential to building positive habits and encouraging attendance.

The Learner Engagement and Attendance Programme (LEAP) in Connecticut is a research-based home visiting programme that works to improve student attendance and family engagement since the pandemic (LEAP, 2026). LEAP intervention supports staff members making home visits, communicating with parents and children and specialised support systems for students who are chronically absent.

Home visits, mostly conducted by school staff members, proved highly effective, increasing attendance rates by approximately four percent in the month immediately following the first LEAP visit and continuing to rise to an approximate seven percentage points higher and nearly fifteen percentage points in the 6 months or more following treatment (Centre for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration, 2022).

Currently, activities such as home visitations require strain on individual school resources and staff members who are willing to put themselves into potentially dangerous situations; without the appropriate procedures in place there is no way that local authorities can expect staff members to carry out regular home visits to absent pupils.

To tackle the issue of family engagement in children's learning, Leeds should introduce new systems to support and uplift families to have a positive impact on their child's education.

Leeds should put in place a Home Visitation Programme, where trained staff members/family liaison workers visit the houses of children with chronic/persistent absence to encourage them to return to school through providing personalised, dynamic support which is dependent on individual family needs.

Of course, this is not possible without the expansion of resources to allow for extra time for staff members to conduct these visitations without expecting additional hours.

To tackle this, more funding should be distributed to allow for an expansion of Family Liaison Officer roles, particularly in high-deprivation areas where family engagement tends to be lower. These roles can be taken on alongside teaching roles, similar to that of a head of year or safeguarding lead, providing more incentives and time to those willing to perform the role.

Recommendation 4: Graduated Reintegration as an Alternative to Enforcement

The fourth recommendation concerns the culture and process of reintegration for pupils experiencing prolonged absence.

Whilst Recommendation 1 addresses the resourcing conditions that enable early identification and Recommendation 2 concerns the family and community infrastructure that catches pupils before absence becomes entrenched, this recommendation addresses what happens when a pupil has already been absent for a significant period, and how schools are designed to bring them back.

Current policy in Leeds, as evidenced by Co-op Academy's enforcement-led attendance framework, operates on the implicit assumption that non-attendance is a behavioural choice that sufficiently applied consequences can reverse.

However, the evidence does not support this premise. Halligan and Cryer (2022), in their evaluation of a specialist setting for pupils experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), argue that the first stage of effective intervention is not enforcement but reframing, recognising that non-attendance reflects avoidance underpinned by emotional needs and anxiety about the school system rather than defiant behaviour. This matters in practice, not just in principle, how a school understands the cause of absence shapes the response it designs, and the wrong response makes return harder for the pupils already least able to manage it.

For these pupils, the barrier to return is anxiety rather than unwillingness, meaning that a policy built around sanctions actively compounds that barrier. Halligan and Cryer (2022) recommend that reintegration follow a gradual, staged process, moving through increasingly manageable steps such as visiting school when it is closed, progressing to entering the reception area, before building toward fuller participation over time.

This staged approach was evaluated in a specialist setting involving twelve Year 11 pupils with medically identified mental health difficulties, all experiencing EBSA, and produced attendance of 95% (Halligan and Cryer, 2022). Analysis of student responses identified two overarching themes that explained the outcomes: interconnectivity and psychological safety (Halligan and Cryer, 2022).

Critically, the study concluded that although learning supports should be put in place for pupils experiencing EBSA, without sufficient supportive adult-student and student-student relationships, these structures are unlikely to create full engagement; the relational conditions were not supplementary to the intervention, but in fact were the intervention.

Realising these conditions at scale requires a structural approach to school design that embeds staged reintegration not as an individual intervention but as an institutional one. This approach is exemplified by Japan's model of designated re-entry spaces within mainstream schools. Since the 2020 academic year, the city of Okazaki in Japan has steadily introduced in-school education support centres at five elementary and twenty junior high schools (Ueda and Writers, 2025). Students can come and go to these centres as they please and are free to choose what they study with highly trusted teachers serving as homeroom teachers alongside support staff.

As well as this, in Hikari, mental health experts and former teachers visit homes of children who find attending school difficult once or twice a week. The Japanese government is not focusing on punitive punishment as a means to improve attendance; rather, they are focusing on what the statistics are telling them. Their focus on student wellbeing and promoting a phased return into schooling helps children feel comfortable and happy in their school environments once again; it does not push them into a stage of no return due to repeated punishment.

To better support students with chronic and persistent absence, Leeds should mirror parts of the Japanese 'return to school' system, creating a phased reintegration process which supports students rather than punishing them. EBSA should be highlighted within school environments, to all staff members, so that they are aware and considering the wider causes of school absence.

From this it must be recognised that to tackle this issue, methods of punitive punishment are not effective. Following the Japanese model, schools should introduce safe reintegration spaces, where chronically absent students are encouraged to come and just be in school; this lays the foundation for a return to schooling.

Once students are back in reintegration spaces, they can be supported by specialist wellbeing teams as they begin to restart their education, ensuring that students who are absent do not fall as far behind. Following Halligan and Cryer's recommendations, supporting students to begin re-entry from where they feel comfortable is essential.

Students should be encouraged to return at whatever stage makes them comfortable, whether that starts at entering when school is closed and beginning a phased return from there or whether it is going straight into the reintegration space and doing a phased return into classroom learning and students should be supported at whatever stage they need to be in order to encourage attendance.

By moving away from punishing students who are chronically absent and instead supporting them to return to school, Leeds could promote not only attendance but a school environment where students feel supported and who genuinely want to be there.

Conclusion

Persistent absence in Leeds cannot be understood as a narrow issue of attendance compliance. Across the evidence presented in this report, absence emerges as both an outcome of structural disadvantage and a mechanism through which educational inequalities are intensified over time.

The relationship identified between absence and attainment is not incidental: regression analysis demonstrated that absence explains a substantial proportion of variation in school-level attainment outcomes, whilst demographic analysis showed that pupils already experiencing disadvantage are disproportionately represented among those most frequently absent. SEND pupils, pupils eligible for FSM, and those categorised as administratively "unclassified" repeatedly appear at the centre of the attendance crisis, suggesting that existing systems struggle to identify and support the pupils with the greatest need.

The findings also demonstrate that current policy responses are insufficient for the post-pandemic context. Whilst enforcement measures such as Fixed Penalty Notices remain embedded within attendance policy, the evidence reviewed throughout this report suggests that punitive approaches fail to address the underlying causes of absence and may deepen disengagement among already vulnerable families.

Case study comparisons within Leeds further illustrate that institutional culture, early intervention and support infrastructure matter significantly; schools serving similar populations can produce markedly different attendance outcomes depending on how support is designed and delivered.

This report therefore argues that attendance policy must move beyond binary thresholds and enforcement-led models towards a more preventative and relational framework.

Improving attendance requires recognising absence as a wider indicator of unmet educational, developmental and social need rather than a behavioural failure. The recommendations proposed, including strengthened SEND provision, earlier intervention pathways, deeper family engagement and graduated reintegration models, offer a practical route towards this shift.

Reducing persistent absence will not, on its own, eliminate educational inequality in Leeds. However, without addressing absence as a systemic issue, efforts to close attainment gaps are likely to remain limited. Attendance must therefore be treated not simply as a measure of participation, but as a foundation for educational equity.

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