

School Absence Linked to Sharp Rise in Children's Mental Health Risks, Study Finds

Analysis of 1.1 million pupils highlights relationship between attendance, well-being, and emotional engagement in learning

CAMBRIDGE, EAST ENGLAND, UNITED KINGDOM, December 19, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Children who miss around 30% of school face nearly three times the risk of mental ill health compared with pupils who attend regularly, according to large-scale research analysing attendance and health data from more than 1.1 million pupils, as persistent absence continues to affect nearly one in five children across England.

The study, conducted by researchers at Loughborough University and published in September 2025,

identified a clear escalation in mental health risk associated with time missed from school. The probability of mental ill health increased from 1.82% among pupils with no recorded absence to 3.7% for those missing around 20% of sessions, rising further to 5.27% among children absent for approximately 30% of the school year.

These findings align with Department for Education figures for the 2024/25 academic year, which show absence rates of 5.2% in primary schools, 8.6% in secondary schools, and 12.9% in special schools. Overall, 18.7% of pupils are classified as persistently absent, defined as missing 10% or more of school sessions.

The research also found that children with existing mental health conditions missed substantially more school than those without, averaging 16% of sessions missed compared with 6% among their peers. This pattern reflects a reinforcing relationship between mental well-being and



attendance, where emotional difficulties are associated with increased absence, while extended absence is linked to a higher likelihood of mental health challenges.

The analysis drew on linked data from the 2021 Census, hospital records, school attendance information, and household circumstances. It also found that pupils receiving additional support from schools experienced a reduced association between mental ill health and absence.

As schools review attendance data at the end of the autumn term and prepare for pupils' return in the new year, the findings contribute to wider discussion about the emotional dimensions of engagement with learning. In Cambridge, [St John's College School](#) uses the [Emotions for Learning \(E4L\)](#) framework, which sets out how emotions such as confidence, anxiety, motivation and resilience relate to pupils' engagement and behaviour in learning contexts.

The Emotions for Learning framework describes how emotional responses can influence persistence, participation and response to challenge in the classroom, providing a structured way of understanding how pupils experience learning alongside academic expectations.

With persistent absence defined as missing 10% or more of sessions, the current national rate means nearly one in five children are at increased risk of the mental health difficulties identified in the research.

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