

Insights Update: Understanding Attendance

In this Insights Update, we share the latest evidence from our research on Understanding Attendance. This research project is the largest national study of attendance in England, and it is helping schools and Trusts to identify the underlying drivers of pupil absence in their settings. Our first national Understanding Attendance report was released in January 2024, and this was followed by the publication of a second national report in July 2024. These reports looked at attendance rates for over 70,000 students and surveys from over 30,000 students to understand the relationship between social and emotional measures and their attendance. We now hold over 2 million data points for over 100,000 students through this initiative.

Attendance remains a challenge across the UK, and it is a moving picture for schools and Trusts. We have continued to refine our methodology to support schools in the Understanding Attendance cohort throughout the academic year 2024/25 and have new insights to share with the sector to enhance the understanding of attendance drivers. Specifically, our latest analysis identifies the factors that drive low attendance, with a focus on socio-economic factors.

Analytical Aims

We are drawing on our latest attendance and survey data from 2025. In total, we analysed attendance and survey responses from over 30,000 students from 85 primary and secondary schools across England. In terms of the census window, the attendance data was between February and May 2025, and students completed the survey in June 2025. The survey was a Likert scale survey (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), and included items grouped into 6 domains that research shows can impact attendance levels:

1. Adult and Peer Relationships
2. Family and Home Environment
3. School Environment
4. Inclusion
5. Wellbeing
6. Incentives and Rewards

In this update, we focus on the findings for Adult and Peer Relationships, Family and Home Environment, and Incentives and Rewards. Alongside these domains, demographic data, including markers of disadvantage, were looked at to understand how they impact attendance levels and, crucially, how these factors interact with students' survey responses to decrease or increase levels of attendance, including:

- Year Group
- Gender
- Pupil Premium
- English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- School Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Decile
- School

In terms of the analyses, this included a series of regression models with attendance as the outcome variable that looked at:

- The relationship between demographic factors and attendance.
- The relationship between survey responses and attendance.
- The interactions between demographic factors and survey responses and how that relates to attendance.

It is the interactions between different survey domains and demographic factors and how it predicts attendance levels that we were most interested in. From this, we are able to provide actionable insights to schools and Trusts that take into account the complexity, and often interdependent nature, of the factors their students experience.



Key Findings

The overarching finding across all the analyses is that demographic factors are driving attendance rates and that the impact of the survey domains comes from the interaction with the demographic factors. Key headline findings include:

1. The family and home environment is consistently the most impactful domain on attendance, and it is the mindset around the importance of attending when feeling slightly unwell that is crucial in terms of attendance outcomes.
2. The family and home environment is more important for older year groups than younger year groups in terms of impacting attendance.
3. The family and home environment has a greater impact on female students than male students, showing that if female students score low or high on the family and home environment, then their attendance rate is lower or higher, respectively, compared to male students.
4. Adult relationships is associated with higher attendance for male students whereas peer connections are linked to lower attendance for male students.
5. Adult relationships have a stronger impact for younger students, whereas peer relationships have a stronger impact for older students in terms of driving attendance.
6. Peer relationships has a protective effect for Pupil Premium students in terms of attendance.
7. Students in deprived areas are significantly less likely to have low attendance when they feel that good attendance is rewarded by their school.
8. Pupil Premium was consistently the single most impactful factor and is a risk factor when it comes to attendance rates.
9. EAL was consistently one of the most impactful positive factors for attendance.

Further insights, including how much different survey domains and demographic factors increase or decrease attendance levels, are provided below.

Family and Home Environment

The Family & Home Environment focuses on Attendance Decisions, Getting Ready for School, and Sleep – it includes survey statements such as ‘I can tell the difference between feeling a bit poorly and being too sick for school’; ‘I have a routine that helps me get ready for school on time’; and ‘I get enough sleep on school nights to feel rested in the morning’. Overall, this domain is consistently the most impactful on attendance across all regression models, a 1-point increase in survey response was associated with a 1.65% increase in attendance. Furthermore, the impact of the Family and Home Environment on attendance is primarily a result of the significant interaction of these survey responses with demographic factors, including significant interactions with Year Group, Gender, Pupil Premium, EAL, and School IMD Decile. In practice, this means that the impact of Family and Home Environment is more important for older year groups than younger year groups. For example, in Year 3, a 1-point increase in survey response was associated with a 0.3% increase in attendance, whereas, for Year 7 the same change led to a 1.7% increase, and in Year 12 a 3.4% increase – Figure 1 shows the differing impact of Family and Home Environment on attendance as a function of Year Groups.

The Family and Home Environment also has a differential impact based on Gender. Specifically, it has a greater impact on female students than male students showing that if female students score low (1) or high (5) on the Family and Home Environment domain, then their attendance rate is lower or higher, respectively, compared to male students – this is shown by the steeper incline for female students compared to male students shown in Figure 2.

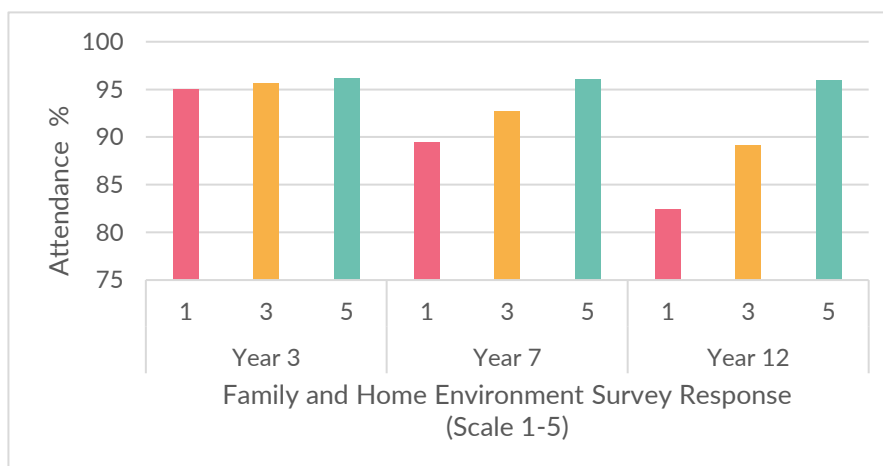


Figure 1: The impact of Family and Home Environment as a function of Year Group on Attendance.

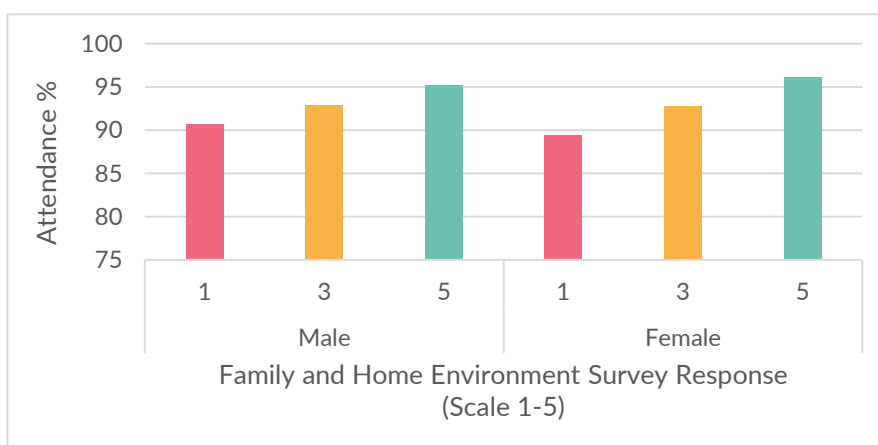


Figure 2: The impact of Family and Home Environment as a function of Gender on Attendance.

We also looked at the subdomains of the Family and Home Environment to understand further what was driving these differences in attendance rates for certain demographic groups (i.e., Attendance Decisions, Getting Ready for School, Sleep). From our analysis, we find that Attendance Decisions is the most significant subdomain. This means that the mindset around the importance of attending when feeling slightly unwell is shown to be one of the most significant contributors which is driving the interaction between the Family and Home Environment and demographic factors (e.g., 'I try to come to school even if I am not feeling my best'; 'I can tell the difference between feeling a bit poorly and being too sick for school'). For example, a 1-point increase in the survey responses about Attendance Decisions is associated with a 0.80% increase in attendance.

Adult and Peer Relationships

The Adult and Peer Relationships domain explores a range of relationships students have in school. In terms of adult relationships, students respond to survey statements such as 'Adults in school check in to ask how I am when I miss school' and for peer relationships, statements include 'Attending school regularly helps me stay connected with other students'. Overall, we see significant differences in how

adult and peer relationships impact attendance across Gender, Year Group, and Pupil Premium. Strong adult relationships are especially associated with higher attendance for male students. For example, for male students a 1-point increase in survey response is associated with a 0.51% increase in attendance whereas peer connections are associated with a lower attendance for male students; a 1-point increase in survey response was associated with a -0.38% decrease in attendance, while the effect for female students is near zero. Furthermore, adult relationships have a stronger impact for younger students, whereas peer relationships have a stronger impact for older students in terms of driving attendance. Lastly, peer relationships is a protective effect for Pupil Premium students (a 0.53% increase in attendance).

Incentives and Rewards

Incentives and Rewards focus on how schools celebrate and reward good attendance – for example, the extent to which students agree or disagree with the statement ‘my school celebrates and rewards students who have good attendance’ or ‘I feel motivated to go to school because good attendance is recognised’. This domain has a significant interaction with the School IMD Decile. That is, students in deprived areas are significantly less likely to have low attendance when they feel that good attendance is rewarded. Figure 3 shows for a school in the most deprived decile (decile 1), those with a high incentives score are almost a quarter less likely to have low attendance relative to those with low incentive scores. However, for students in a school in the middle deprivation decile (decile 5), the impact is minor. This suggests that rewarding attendance is a particularly effective strategy for schools in more deprived areas.

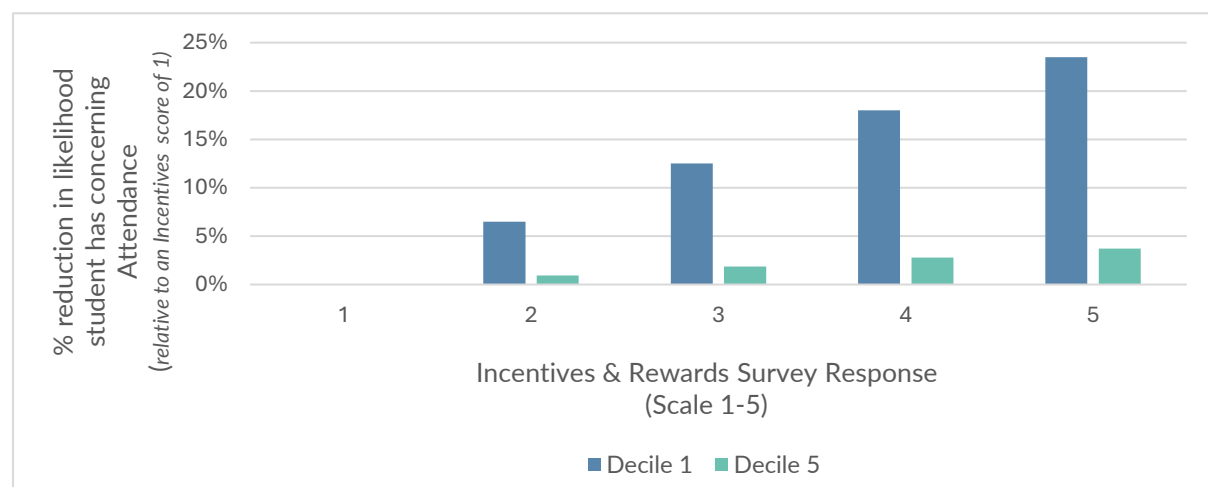


Figure 3: The impact of Rewards and Incentives as a function of School IMD Decile on Attendance.

Pupil Premium and EAL

Pupil Premium is consistently the single most impactful factor across all the regression models. For example, Pupil Premium students are 2.1 times more likely to have concerning absence (below 94%) compared to non-Pupil Premium students. Therefore, this shows that Pupil Premium is a risk factor when it comes to attendance rates. However, counteracting this, we also see that EAL is consistently one of the most impactful positive factors for attendance across all regression models. This means that for EAL students there is a far smaller negative impact on attendance from being Pupil Premium eligible than native English speakers. As shown in Figure 4, controlling for other factors, students eligible for Pupil Premium have a 5.0% lower attendance compared to their non-Pupil Premium peers and, in contrast, for students with EAL they have a 3.1% higher attendance compared to their non-EAL peers. Interestingly, students who are both Pupil Premium eligible and EAL have a 0.1% lower attendance compared to their non-Pupil Premium x non-EAL peers, which means that there is an interaction effect between Pupil Premium and EAL that is magnifying the positive impact of EAL further.



Figure 4: The impact of Pupil Premium (PP) and EAL on Attendance.

Furthermore, the negative impact of being eligible for Pupil Premium slightly increases as the affluence of the school area increases. The likelihood of poor attendance is determined by two factors:

- 1) A higher School IMD Decile, which indicates a more affluent area, means there is a lower risk of poor attendance.
- 2) Pupil Premium means that there is a higher risk of poor attendance.

However, the Pupil Premium gap becomes slightly larger in higher-decile areas. In one of the most deprived areas, a Pupil Premium student is 2.1x more likely to have poor attendance than a classmate not on Pupil Premium. Whereas, in one of the most affluent areas, a Pupil Premium student is 2.7x more likely to have poor attendance than a classmate not on Pupil Premium. This suggests schools in areas with low deprivation should be particularly mindful of the challenges their, likely fewer, students from less advantaged backgrounds face.

Insights for School Leaders and Policy Makers

These latest insights from Understanding Attendance reinforce that pupil attendance is shaped by complex interactions between some of these wider factors related to attendance and students' demographic factors. The Family and Home Environment domain consistently emerged as the most impactful factor, particularly for older students and those from more deprived areas, underlining the importance of routine, sleep, and attitudes toward attendance and mild illness. Meanwhile, adult relationships at school are strongly linked to improved attendance, especially when tailored by for different pupil groups. Importantly, attendance rewards are shown to be especially effective in deprived contexts. These findings indicate the continued need for targeted and relational approaches to attendance to ensure that interventions are most impactful for particular groups of students.

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