# Record high of persistent school absences reported for 2023/24



The Department for Education (DfE) has reported a significant rise in the number of children missing school persistently, with figures for the 2023/24 academic year reaching a record high. According to the DfE data, 2.3% of pupils, equating to 171,269 young individuals, were classified as "severely absent," meaning they missed at least 50% of possible school sessions. This marks an increase from 2.0% in the previous year and is the highest number recorded since the DfE began tracking this data in the 2006/07 academic year. Comparatively, in the 2018/19 school year, prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of severely absent pupils was considerably lower at 60,247.

In the broader context, the rate of unauthorised pupil absences in England also saw a rise, climbing from 2.4% in 2022/23 to 2.5% in the latest figures. This contrasts starkly with the unauthorised absence rate prior to the pandemic, which stood at just 1.4% in 2018/19. The overall absence rate across all categories did decrease slightly from 7.4% in 2022/23 to 7.1% in 2023/24, yet it remains significantly higher than the pre-pandemic average of 4.7%.

Drawing attention to the issue, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has urged school and college leaders to "catch up fast" in improving attendance rates, as she expressed concern over some schools failing to make adequate progress regarding absences. One in five pupils, or approximately 1.49 million young people in England, were recorded as "persistently absent" during the last academic year, missing 10% or more of their school sessions. Although this figure has improved slightly from 21.2% in 2022/23, it remains well above the 10.9% rate of persistent absence observed in 2018/19.

In an effort to combat rising absenteeism, fines for unauthorised absences for parents in England were raised in September. The penalty increased from £60 to £80 for a first offence, with a subsequent fine for the same child within three years now escalating to £160. The latest attendance data was compiled prior to the implementation of these increased fines.

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), pointed out that the trend in absences illustrates that a considerable number of children continue to miss significant portions of their education. He suggested that although some regions show signs of improvement, the persistent and severe absence rates remain troubling. Speaking to LBC, Di'Iasio commented, "It is clear that there are still far too many children missing out on significant portions of their education," and he emphasised that schools alone cannot rectify this complex issue. Di'Iasio advocated for a coordinated approach involving parents, the government, schools, and other agencies to effectively address the underlying challenges, while underscoring the necessity for adequate funding to support these initiatives.

In a recent speech delivered in Liverpool, he expressed his belief that for some families, school attendance had effectively become "optional" in the aftermath of the pandemic, and he critiqued the reliance on fines as a means to reverse the troubling trend of absenteeism.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CSJ-Absence_Tracker_Oct_24.pdf> - This document supports the claim of a significant rise in severe and persistent absences since the pandemic, with severe absences increasing by 160.67% and persistent absences by 67.82% compared to pre-pandemic levels.
* <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/school-absence-tracker-oct24> - This webpage corroborates the increase in severe and persistent absences, highlighting that severe absence is back to near record levels and one in five children remain persistently absent.
* <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9710/CBP-9710.pdf> - This parliamentary briefing provides data on school attendance in England, including the increase in persistent and severe absences since the pandemic, and discusses legislative efforts to address these issues.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education> - The Department for Education's official website would provide access to data and reports on school attendance, including the rise in unauthorised absences and overall absence rates.
* <https://www.ascl.org.uk/> - The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) website may contain statements or press releases from Pepe Di'Iasio regarding the challenges of addressing absenteeism and the need for a coordinated approach.