# Mentoring scheme linking teenagers with toddlers shows promise in tackling school absenteeism



Since the COVID-19 pandemic, school attendance has become a growing concern in many regions, with mental health and disengagement from school playing significant roles in rising absenteeism. In response, innovative programmes are emerging to address these challenges, such as a mentoring scheme linking teenagers with toddlers in local nurseries. This approach, currently active in London and Manchester and run by the charity Power2, pairs disengaged teenagers with young children to foster responsibility and improve school attendance and engagement.

One participant, 13-year-old Siena, explains how the project helped her combat anxiety and more than doubled her school attendance. Initially sceptical about the scheme's impact, she credits her mentorship role with a three-year-old child for teaching her communication and confidence skills. Similarly, another teenager, 12-year-old Miller, reports feeling calmer and more focused on his schoolwork since joining the project. He describes a close bond with the toddler he mentors, which has helped reduce his restlessness in class. The charity reports that 78% of young people involved show improved attitudes to learning, and 83% exhibit better self-esteem. The project also benefits the toddlers, many of whom have additional needs, by providing them with one-on-one attention and fostering social development.

This approach comes amidst a broader context of increased absenteeism linked to mental health issues. England has seen a near doubling in persistent absence rates, with recent data from the 2024/25 academic year showing that 17.79% of pupils missed 10% or more of school sessions. Government figures, corroborated by studies such as those from the Centre for Social Justice, indicate that severe absence has become endemic, with one in five children persistently absent during the spring term of 2024. Nationally, over 170,000 children missed at least half of their classes in 2024, representing a record high.

Experts attribute much of this rise in school absence to anxiety and mental health problems exacerbated by the pandemic. Nearly 90% of secondary school leaders surveyed in England reported increased absences due to mental health issues, notably among pupils in years 9 and 10. Reduced school support due to budget cuts has made it harder to re-engage vulnerable students, while some parents remain cautious about sending children to school with minor ailments following COVID public health messaging. These issues are not limited to England; Wales has also experienced a sharp rise, with persistent absences among primary children nearly doubling in recent years. Likewise, similar trends have been observed internationally, such as a 50% increase in student absenteeism in Florida since the pandemic.

The challenge of absenteeism in schools is complex, involving mental health, social dynamics, and systemic support shortcomings. Programs like the Power2 mentoring project offer a promising, human-centered intervention that builds confidence and responsibility, helping young people re-engage with education by fostering meaningful relationships. As schools face the daunting task of addressing absenteeism amid ongoing mental health crises, such innovative models provide valuable lessons in blending care, responsibility, and learning for improved outcomes.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5ypm4z19myo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5ypm4z19myo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5ypm4z19myo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[6]](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/newsroom/schools-absence-endemic), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/mar/20/record-170000-children-in-england-missed-at-least-half-of-classes-in-2024)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/jun/14/mental-health-anxiety-absences-pupils-schools-covid-pandemic-headteachers), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/apr/23/rise-in-school-absences-since-covid-driven-by-anxiety-and-lack-of-support-say-english-councils), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c90exkyw15no), [[6]](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/newsroom/schools-absence-endemic), [[7]](https://www.governing.com/policy/student-absenteeism-in-florida-up-50-since-pandemic)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5ypm4z19myo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/jun/14/mental-health-anxiety-absences-pupils-schools-covid-pandemic-headteachers), [[6]](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/newsroom/schools-absence-endemic)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5ypm4z19myo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/jun/14/mental-health-anxiety-absences-pupils-schools-covid-pandemic-headteachers> - A 2024 article in The Guardian highlights that nearly 90% of secondary school leaders in England reported a significant increase in pupils missing school due to mental health issues since the COVID-19 pandemic. The article discusses how anxiety and mental health concerns have become major drivers of rising school absences, with headteachers noting that children in years 9 and 10 faced the biggest challenges. The piece also touches upon the government's plan to raise fines for parents and its potential impact on attendance rates.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/apr/23/rise-in-school-absences-since-covid-driven-by-anxiety-and-lack-of-support-say-english-councils> - In April 2023, The Guardian reported that increased anxiety and lack of mental health support were driving a steep rise in children missing school in England since the COVID-19 pandemic. Local authorities highlighted budget pressures leading to cuts in school support staff, making it harder to encourage vulnerable children to attend. The article also noted that some schools were 'off-rolling' students to artificially boost exam results, and that parents were more cautious about sending children to school with minor ailments due to public health messaging during the pandemic.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/mar/20/record-170000-children-in-england-missed-at-least-half-of-classes-in-2024> - A March 2025 article in The Guardian revealed that more than 170,000 children in England missed at least half of their school lessons in 2024, marking a record high. This amounted to 2.3% of pupils being 'severely absent,' up from 2.0% in 2022-23. The article discusses the implications of this trend on education and the challenges faced by schools in addressing absenteeism.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c90exkyw15no> - A March 2024 BBC News article reported a sharp rise in primary school absences in Wales since the COVID-19 pandemic. The proportion of primary pupils who were persistently absent—defined as missing 10% of school sessions—more than doubled, reaching 28.9% in the year ending July 2023, compared to just 12.9% in 2018-19. The article highlights the challenges faced by schools in addressing this issue and the impact on students' education.
6. <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/newsroom/schools-absence-endemic> - An October 2024 report from the Centre for Social Justice highlighted that severe school absence in England had increased by 12.4% compared to the previous year and was 160.7% higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic. The report also noted that one in five children were persistently absent in the Spring term of 2024, missing 10% or more of school time. The Centre called for urgent action to address the endemic nature of school absenteeism.
7. <https://www.governing.com/policy/student-absenteeism-in-florida-up-50-since-pandemic> - A 2024 article from Governing magazine reported that student absenteeism in Florida had increased by 50% since the COVID-19 pandemic. The article discusses how chronic absenteeism rates nearly doubled from 16% before the pandemic to about 28% during the 2022-23 school year. It also highlights the challenges faced by educators in addressing this issue and the impact on student learning and achievement.