

IT'S TIME TO ACT: COUNTERING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS

This new report, published last month by Social Finance and Cheshire West and Chester Council, reveals data insights on the impact of the first national lockdown on pupils and schools ([click here](#) for the full report). As it's too early to decipher all the nuanced and mixed impacts of the pandemic across the country, this report is crucial in spotting trends early and **ACTing** now: **A**nalysing data, **C**odifying learning and **T**argeting support.

USING DATA TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON ABSENTEEISM AND EXCLUSIONS

Absenteeism is often a precursor to a safeguarding need. As shown in our previous report, attendance tends to deteriorate before an exclusion event and does not recover after.¹ Fixed term exclusions are also strongly correlated with adverse life outcomes for pupils and often indicate unmet need.²

The new report focusses on these two key outcomes, which are at the heart of the Timpson Review, to spot signs of changing trends and start to understand the impact of the pandemic. Using data from Autumn term 2020,³ as schools returned after the first national lockdown, it found:

- **A widening attendance gap** between pupils with full attendance and increasingly absent pupils – a trend hidden by average attendance figures
- **25% increase in persistently absent pupils** (from 13% to 16%), excluding Covid-19 related absences
- **61% of persistently absent pupils were experiencing disadvantage before the pandemic** such as eligibility for free school meals, contact with children's services, or had special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- **1 in 10 pupils living in the most deprived areas missed a day a week of school or more** (20% or more)
- **1 in 4 pupils with previous fixed term exclusion missed a day a week of school or more** (20% or more)
- **50% increase in first time fixed term exclusions** (from 62 to 93 pupils) in the autumn term alone
- **Threefold increase in the number of children removed from school** for elective home education⁴

RECOMMENDATIONS

All recommendations align with and reinforce Timpson Review (2019) recommendations, these have become ever more urgent and important in the context of the pandemic.

Local authorities should drive multi-agency action:

Our findings support the Timpson Review recommendations to clarify the power of local authorities and establish a practice improvement fund to facilitate early intervention work that recognises safeguarding needs are driven by multiple factors.

We need better use of data and data sharing:

Understanding pupil movements out of schools as recommended in the Timpson Review requires investment in infrastructure for creating and sharing analysis, allowing more local authorities to complete data analysis like in this report.

The government should incentivise inclusion and reduce pressure on schools:

To prevent a potential surge in exclusions, the Timpson Review's recommendation to reward inclusive schools is crucial, alongside flexible funding to support them locally. If pupils are not in school they cannot learn nor access 'catch up' support available – flexible funding to local areas will release pressure from schools and allow experts to support disadvantaged pupils to stay in school.

See Sky News coverage of this report:

COVID-19: More disadvantaged children at risk of missing school since lockdown.

¹ *Who's at risk of exclusion? An analysis in Cheshire West and Chester*, July 2020. Social Finance.

² *Making The Difference: Breaking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion*, 2017. IPPR.

³ The analysis brings together a range of datasets (such as SEND, contact with children's services, eligibility for free school meals and indices of multiple deprivation) covering 1 September – 1 December 2020, when schools were mandated to welcome all pupils back after the first national lockdown, comparing this to the same period in the previous three years.

⁴ 163 children were removed from school between 1st September and 24th November 2020 compared to 65 children during the Autumn term 2019 and 53 during the Autumn Term 2018. It is important to note that these figures do not reflect the overall fluctuation of children in elective home education with some children being removed from school whilst others return to school.