

Lincolnshire Virtual School

School attendance during
the academic year 2021-
2022

April 2023

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Purpose of this report

In January 2023, the interim Virtual School Head presented the statutory annual report on the role of the Virtual School and outcomes for our children in care. The report did not include school attendance as national and regional comparative data had not been published at that time.

This report provides an overview of the school attendance during the academic year 2021-22 of children who were in the care of Lincolnshire for one year or more as of 31st March 2022.

Inclusion – How regularly do our children attend?

Due to covid restrictions in early 2020 we do not have any nationally published attendance data for the whole year for 2020. Autumn term 2020 data is included as a comparison though absence is usually higher in autumn term compared to a whole year of data. The 2021 data shows a significant increase in absence rates for children in care. This is due to Spring term 2021 when only the workers of critical workers and vulnerable pupils could attend school during the period of lockdown from 4th January 2021 to 8th March 2021 when restrictions were lifted for all other pupils. Other pupils who were not eligible to attend school, during restrictions, were recorded as 'not attending in circumstances relating to coronavirus'. This means that the absence rates for pupils who were prioritised to continue attending school will be higher than for those who were not eligible to attend.

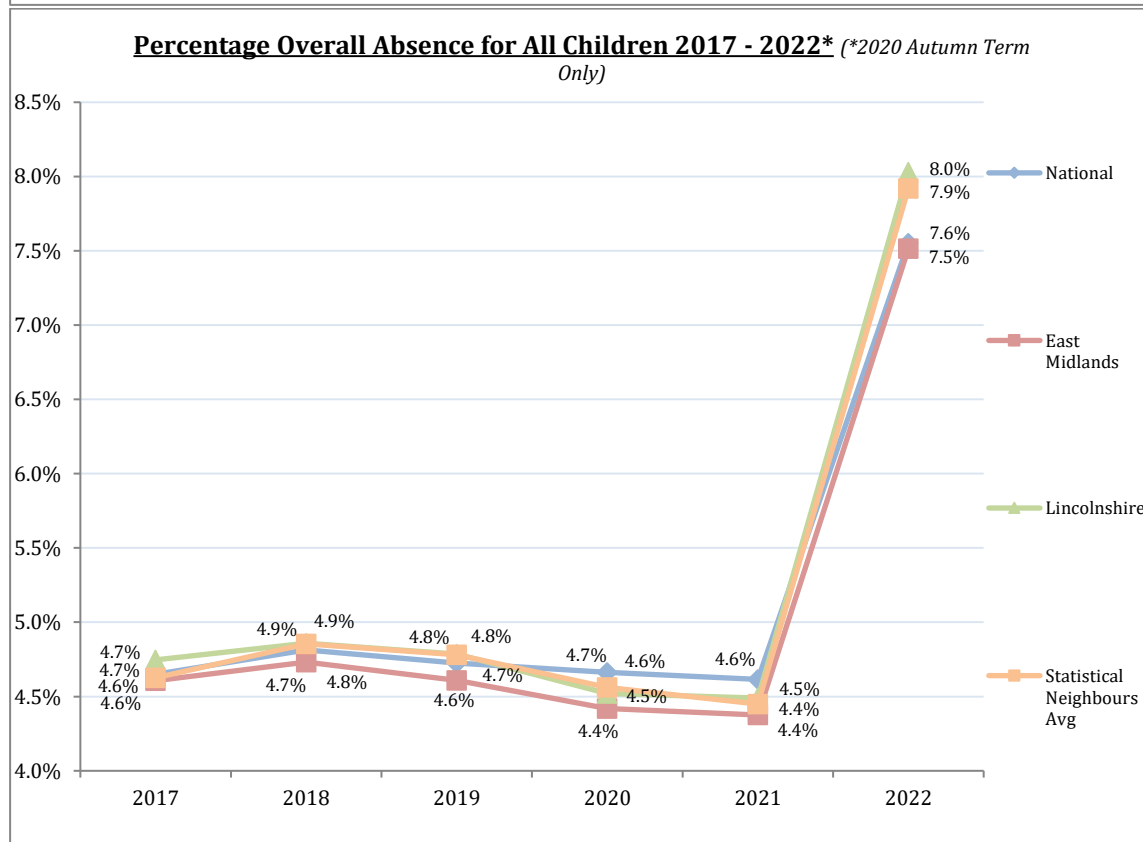
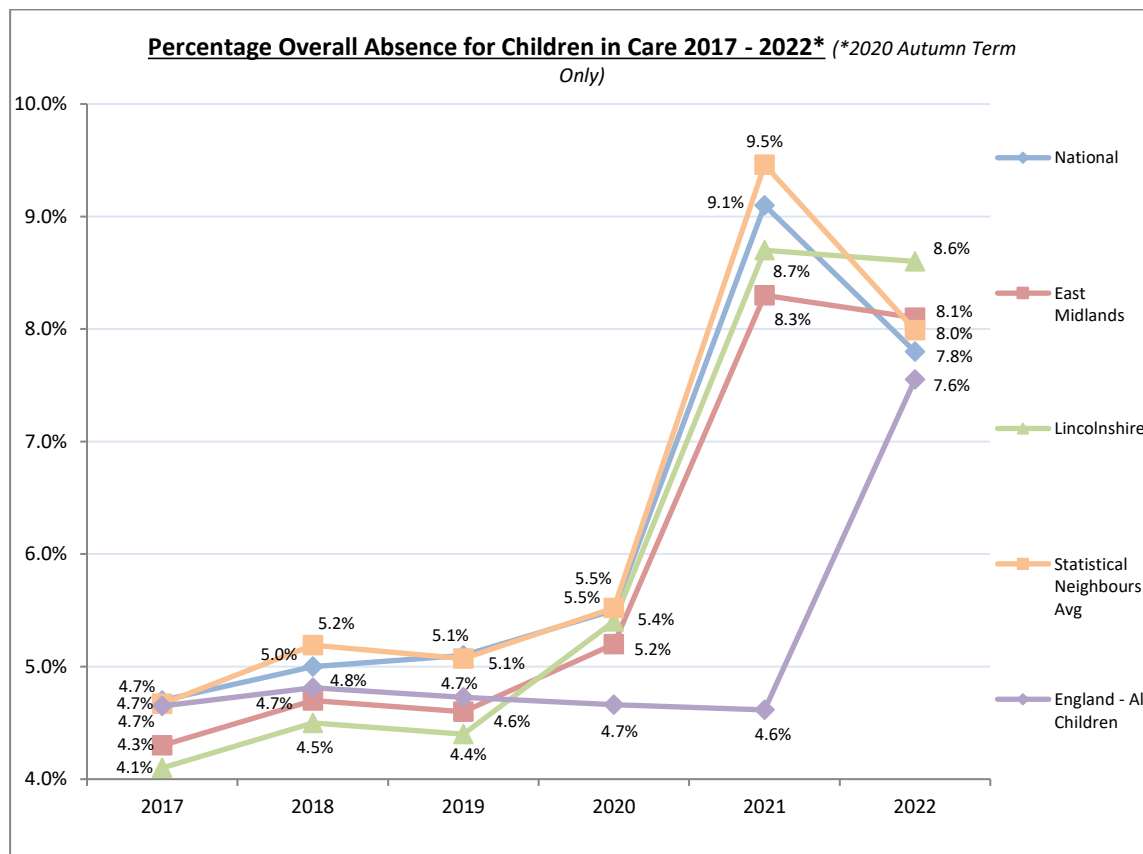
The last 3 years of complete data prior to Covid show that Lincolnshire children in care attend more regularly than their looked after peers nationally and regionally. This maintains a long trend of being in line or better than our national, east midlands and statistical neighbour average comparators.

The autumn term 2020 and whole year 2021 and 2022 data shows Lincolnshire children in care trending towards attending less regularly than our national and statistical neighbour average comparators. This has culminated in Lincolnshire children in care attending less regularly (absence rate of 8.6%) than our comparators (East Midlands 8.1%, Stat Neighbours 8.0% and National 7.8%) in the most recent year of data.

It should be noted that significant increases in absence have been seen across the board across all comparators in 2022. The increases have been larger in Lincolnshire and has impacted all pupils. Lincolnshire's overall absence rates for all children have also increased and Lincolnshire now has higher absence rates (absence rate of 8.0%) than our comparators (East Midlands 7.5%, Stat Neighbours 7.9% and National 7.6%).

The main reason for the large increases across all comparators appears to be absence for illness. Nationally absence for illness averaged around 2.5-2.6% pre-pandemic and increased to 4.4% in the most recent academic years (2021-22) data, representing an increase of around 1.8% on average for illness nationally. Lincolnshire saw a larger increase in illness in the 2021-22 academic year of 2.3%. Absence for illness averaged around 2.8% pre-pandemic

and increased to 5.1%; this is 0.8% above national and 0.7% above the regional east midlands average.

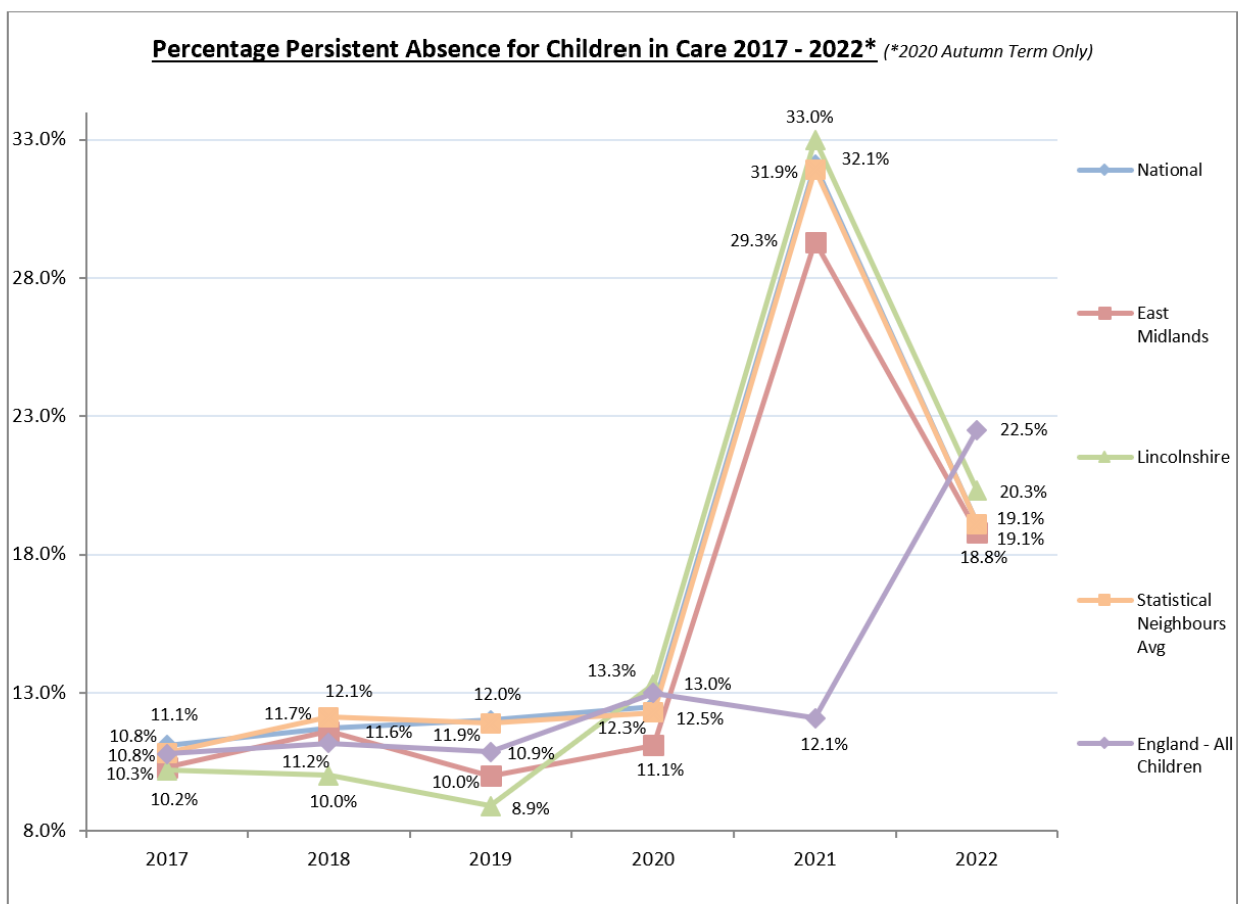


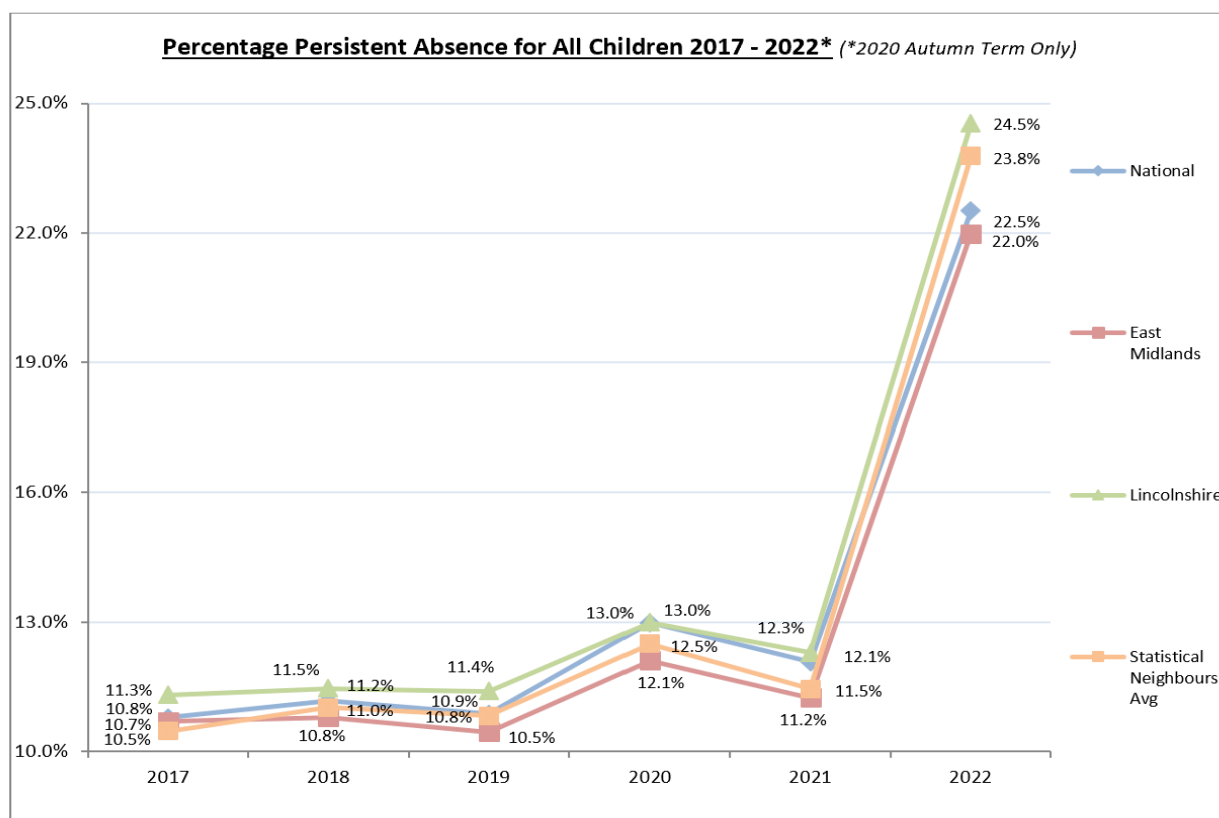
Persistent Absence

Our children and young people have performed well historically for persistent absence, with the last 3 years of complete data prior to Covid showing fewer persistently absent pupils compared to national, regional, and statistical neighbour averages. This maintains a long trend of being in line or better than our national, east midlands and statistical neighbour average comparators.

The autumn term 2020 and whole year 2021 and 2022 data indicates that Lincolnshire children in care are trending towards higher persistent absence rates when compared to our national, regional, and statistical neighbour averages. This has left Lincolnshire children in care with a higher persistent absence rate (20.3%) than all our comparators (East Midlands 18.8%, Stat Neighbours 19.1% and National 19.1%) in the most recent year of data.

As with overall absence there have been large increases in persistent absence across the board across all pupils and all comparators in 2022. The peak in persistent absence for children in care in 2021 was an anomaly compared to all pupils and was due to pupils of critical workers and vulnerable pupils attending during lockdown as described earlier. Lincolnshire's persistent absence rates for all children has increased significantly from 12.3% to 24.5% and is now above the persistent absence rate for Lincolnshire Children in Care (20.3%) and our comparators figures for all pupils (East Midlands 22.0%, Stat Neighbours 23.8% and National 22.5%).





Factors that may affect school attendance

The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex and are often specific to individual pupils and families. For our children in care, these may include:

- Placement changes which may involve a mid-year application to a new school
- A young person's well-being manifesting in emotionally based school avoidance
- A temporary part-time timetable to meet a pupil's individual needs
- Suspensions

Improving school attendance

In April 2022, the Department for Education published guidance on 'Working together to improve school attendance.' The document recognises that 'Improving school attendance cannot solely be the preserve of a single person or individual organisation, it must be a concerted effort across all staff in schools, the trust or governing body, the local authority and other local partners'. In line with the guidance and to facilitate early identification of patterns of attendance, the local authority will be organising termly Targeting Support Meetings with each school in Lincolnshire to identify, discuss and agree joint targeted actions for all pupils who are persistently or severely absent and those at risk of becoming so.

A ladder of support has been developed in Lincolnshire for the growing number of pupils presenting with emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA). The ladder focuses on facilitating a ‘step-change’ in how professionals and families support children and young people with their mental health and well-being when that drives school avoidance.

For our children in care, termly Personal Education Plans (PEPs) co-ordinated by the Virtual School record the child’s attendance, acknowledging if this is a strength or exploring the barriers and the agreed interventions/support to improve attendance if it is less than 95%. From April, in addition to recording the attendance percentage, termly PEPs of statutory school aged children will include the following boundaries and descriptions to strengthen aspirations.

Boundary	Description
95-100%	As expected
91-94%	At risk of persistent absence
80-90%	Persistent absence
51-79%	At risk of severe absence
<=50%	Severe absence

In addition to the individual monitoring of attendance through PEPs, the Virtual School is developing half termly attendance monitoring meetings. Cohort attendance data will be rigorously scrutinised to promote early identification of patterns of poor attendance and ensure that all professionals supporting individual children can work together to remove any barriers to improved attendance.

Whilst we aspire to all our children accessing a full education, in exceptional cases a temporary part time timetable may be appropriate to support a young person’s individual circumstances. Virtual School co-ordinators ensure the school sends work home for any child who is not attending due to an agreed temporary part-time timetable or if they have been suspended. When there may be a longer period of absence due to a school move, the Virtual School commissions home tuition to ensure the young person continues to access education until a new school place has been identified. The Virtual School continues to work in partnership with schools to avoid any suspensions of our children in care.

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