

**Attendance in
Schools, Elective
Home Education and
Children Missing
Education
Annual Report
2022/23**

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Table of contents

- Background.....3
- Working together to improve school attendance3
- School attendance/absences5
- Notification of children who are missing out on education5
- Children missing education6
- Pupils not attending regularly – 10 consecutive days unauthorised absence.....6
- Fixed penalty notices.....7
- Prosecutions for non-school attendance7
- Children on reduced timetables.....7
- Children who are electively home educated8
- Key messages.....10

1. Background

The local authority has a statutory duty to arrange suitable full-time education for children of compulsory school age at school or otherwise. This education must be suitable to their age, aptitude and any special educational needs they might have. The local authority has a duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to establish the identities of children in their area who are not receiving a suitable full-time education, as described. The DfE has introduced a new live data collection site which presents, for the first time, data for the academic year much sooner than previous years. This report will present Lincolnshire attendance rate against national using this data set with a caveat that this is experimental statistics for both local and national data.

A parent has a right to home education their child as an alternative to sending them to school. The education provided must be full-time, efficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs. This report provides data on the children who have been electively home educated through the 2022/23 academic year.

Whilst most children attend school regularly or are being provided a suitable education elsewhere, there are some who, for many reasons are not receiving a full-time education or are unable to attend. The groups of children who are referred to in this report are:

- **Children missing education (CME)**
children who are not on roll of a school
- **Children not attending regularly**
pupils who have not attended school for a period of 10 consecutive school days and their absences have been unauthorised (**PNAR**)
pupils for whom a fixed penalty notice (**FPN**) has been issued due to persistent absence/unauthorised holiday
pupils whose parents are being prosecuted due to their child's poor attendance
- **Pupils on reduced timetables**
pupils who are not receiving a full-time education due to e.g., medical needs

2. Working Together to Improve School Attendance

In March 2022, the DfE introduced a new document [Working Together to Improve Attendance](#). The guidance outlines a broader multi-agency approach stressing that improving school attendance is everyone's business. It emphasises that non-attendance is a symptom of some other issue that is presenting a barrier to a child attending full-time. The guidance clearly outlines the responsibilities of parents, schools and the local authority in partnership with other agencies and the wider community to improve attendance across all

schools including academies and independent schools. Anything below 95% attendance is considered not good enough and requires some action.

The national guidance applied from September 2022. Lincolnshire has developed its own strategy [School attendance strategy – Forward - Lincolnshire County Council](#) which was launched in Spring 2023. Regular meetings have been held with the DfE representatives who reported positively on the work that is carried out in Lincolnshire.

The following progress has been made on the implementation of the Attendance Strategy.

1. The development of a new Attendance Team (as required by the DfE) within the current Inclusion and Attendance service area

There are now 4 officers within the Attendance Team who are responsible for holding meetings with schools three times per year. They are also linked to every school in Lincolnshire and act as a point of contact should the school require advice on attendance issues. They continue to hold regular training sessions that schools can access free of charge. So far schools have responded well to the offer of these meetings and have found them useful.

2. Targeting Support Meetings with all schools including alternative provision and independent schools, three times per year (total of approx. 1200 meeting per year)

During these meetings, the school discuss data and the support they are offering to pupils/groups of pupils. The priority groups as outlined in the strategy are discussed in meetings across all schools. These meetings are led by different local authority officers depending on the type of school. All meetings with maintained schools are led by the education locality leads, meetings with special schools are completed by practitioners within the Special Educational Needs service area and meetings with the Pilgrim school are done by the Pupil Reintegration team. The remaining schools (academies, independent schools and alternative provision) meet with the Attendance team. This division allows conversations around attendance to be picked up through other service area meetings resulting in a more effective and efficient process and embraces the principle of 'attendance being everyone's business'. The Attendance team are in regular contact with the other service areas conducting the meetings and provide advice on attendance issues where required.

3. The establishment of Attendance Champions in every Lincolnshire school

As outlined in the national guidance, every school must have an Attendance Champion who is a member of the Senior Leadership team. The Attendance team have worked with schools to upskill staff and are now confident that the majority of our schools have a level of expertise in relation to attendance. Regular training and information from the team supports the expected constant school staff mobility and ensures that this expertise remains in the school.

4. School sign up to the DfE Attendance live data dashboard

As part of the DfE approach to improving school attendance, they introduced a dashboard of live attendance data. Each school is required to sign up to this which then allows the local authority to see current attendance across all schools as well as the attendance of individual pupils. This is the data that is being presented in this report. Lincolnshire has almost 100% of its state-funded schools signed up and nationally most schools are participating. This data remains experimental however, whilst schools continue to be added to the overall picture of attendance.

5. Further development of a multi-agency approach to addressing attendance

Several awareness-raising events have taken place with schools and the wider children's services workforce across the year. Schools have received regular updates and reminders of the key role that Early Help plays in addressing the barriers to attendance. In addition, input into other service areas development has been requested demonstrating the investment made across children's services. These include presentations at Futures4me whole team events and Early Help forums. Future4me, for example, has a whole team appraisal target linked specifically to improving access to education.

3. School Attendance/Absences

Lincolnshire has seen many children return to school following the pandemic, however, as expected, there continues to be a gap between pre-Covid and post-Covid attendance. There is significantly more data available for schools through the DfE daily data collection, which helps to measure attendance across groups of children and this is being used as a focus within the new Targeted Support Meetings between the local authority and schools. The data available to the local authority at this point is:-

- A) historical data collected at census. This is available for 2 terms - Autumn and Spring, of 2022/23 academic year. This is data for every school but does not give a full picture of attendance for the year. A full year is available in March of the next academic year, and this will eventually be replaced by the data sets outlined in B.
- B) Full 2022/23 academic year data collected via the DfE daily data collection process. This was introduced in September 2022 and throughout the year, schools have joined the system and data has been added accordingly. Whilst Lincolnshire has nearly all its schools contributing to the data collection process, therefore producing accurate attendance data, this isn't the case across the country, making the whole data set experimental at this stage.

In future reports, a more detailed analysis of data trends across our priority groups will be presented. At this stage, both data sets are showing a decrease in absence compared with the previous year (e.g. 7.5% overall absence compared with 7.9% in equivalent period of 2021/22). Experimental data is showing lower absences than national for primary schools and higher for secondary and special schools. Improved data sets will allow more informed analysis and understanding of trends and will also give us better data in relation to the new

persistent absence category of children with less than 50% attendance and our priority groups outlined in the strategy (e.g. children with an EHCP, known to Futures4me etc).

4. Notification of Children who are Missing Out on Education (CMOE)

All schools must notify the local authority of children who are, or may be at risk of, missing education. The introduction and use of the Synergy System in 2018 allowed the local authority to improve the processing of the leaver/joiner files. Most school management information systems (MIS) providers have now built the use of these files into their system and schools can therefore more easily provide the local authority with the data it requires. Once received, the system matches leavers and joiners; when a child is not matched, further enquiries are made with schools to ensure that they have used the notification survey as required. If the child's whereabouts cannot be confirmed, the child is considered as missing education and the search for this child is supported through the child missing education process.

5. Children Missing Education

The Inclusion and Attendance Team continue to successfully locate and support those children and families in Lincolnshire, who find themselves without a school place. All schools must use the online notification survey to report a child, as missing education. We are proactive through regular communications with our schools, to remind them of their duty to report CME's and to ensure these children do not incur unnecessary delays when returning to education. Other authorities who may wish to report a child missing education can do this by referring directly to the CME team. There were 1942 children logged as CME in 2022/23, a 6.17% increase compared with the previous year's data.

Some of the continued rise in CME numbers can be attributed to the improvement in school reporting. Schools are now much more robust in notifying our service of children believed to be CME. We also continue to see some familiar trends, from the previous year's data. This is true of the Boston area, where it continues to have a higher proportion of reported CME children, with 23.1% of referrals coming from this district. One of the main contributing factors for Boston is its diverse and culture rich population, resulting in an elevated level of mobility, with a number of families choosing to return to their home country, with medical, religious and extended holidays being given as just some of the reasons for their absence.

A CME is often triggered where families do not notify their school, prior to leaving the area. There are many reasons leading a child to become CME, for example, 4.8% children were previously electively home educated, where parents had failed to provide information to the authority to satisfy, a suitable education. At this point, children should be returned to school either by parental will or, if necessary, using a School Attendance Order.

6. Pupils Not Attending Regularly: 10 consecutive days of unauthorised absence

The [Children Missing Education guidance](#) September 2016 stated that schools should agree with the local authority, an interval at which they will inform the local authority of a pupil that fails to attend regularly. To support this, a notification survey was designed that allows schools to notify the local authority of any child who has been absent from school without permission for more than 10 consecutive school days. For the academic year 2022/23, 1202 children were reported as having 10 consecutive unauthorised days absence with 429 children being reported more than 3 times. These children are likely to come under the categories of either 'at risk of severe absence' or 'at severe absence' and are being discussed at the targeted school meetings held termly. Whilst in theory schools could decide to prosecute for unauthorised non-attendance, the meetings will support schools to consider all courses of action to address the key barrier to non-attendance prior to the legal option. This approach is most likely to be reiterated in the new guidance for Fixed Penalty Notices and Prosecutions due to be introduced in September 2024.

7. Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN)

When a child has unauthorised absence of more than 4.5 days over a six-week period, schools have the option to request that the local authority issues a fixed penalty notice. There were 3576 FPN's issues in 2022/23 an increase of 103% on the previous year. 91% of fines issued are a result of holidays taken during school time. Whilst an FPN can be issued for persistent absence, it has not proven to be a successful strategy to support persistently absence children, returning to full-time education. The *Working Together to Improve School Attendance, DfE May 2022* document, encourages schools to use a wider range of pathways, tools and interventions at a much earlier stage, prior to them becoming persistently absent or severely at risk of persistent absence.

8. Prosecutions for Non-School Attendance

The LA has the use of various legal powers to enforce school attendance, this includes prosecution for non-payment of fixed penalty fines, prosecution for persistent absence, a breach of an Education Supervision Order, and breach of School Attendance Order. An Aggravated prosecution can also be brought against a parent, for repeat cases of persistent absence, or withholding a child from education.

Prosecutions for the period 2022/23 show an increase of 20.16% compared to the previous year. 89.93% of the total prosecutions brought by the LA, are a result of unpaid FPN fines, with the majority of these for holidays taken during term time. The number of prosecutions due to non-payment of fine has increased by 78.66%, but this is an expected increase due to a rise in the total number of fines issued (an increase of 103%).

The new *Working Together to Improve School Attendance, guidance (DfE, May 2022)* has placed a greater emphasis on legal prosecution for non-school attendance only being considered when all other strategies have failed. This guidance has been built into our new

attendance strategy and shared with schools, academies and our colleagues in children's services.

9. Children on Reduced Timetables

The legislation states that all children have a right to a full-time education which was previously defined by Ofsted as 25 hours per week. From September 2023 the DfE expect schools to provide a school week of at least 32.5 hours. If at any point in a child's education, it is deemed that they are not capable of a full-time education, principally due to medical needs, the school must inform the local authority. The school must indicate why the reduced hours timetable is in place and for how long; this should be for episodes of no more than 6 weeks and agreed with the parents. A new period of reduced timetable can be considered again providing the approach is likely to improve attendance.

The Reduced Timetable protocol is available to schools and the local authority monitor the use of the notification survey, principally looking at children who are subject to several periods of reduced timetables and schools who frequently use this approach.

Some children who have emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) will not be attending school at all but will be receiving support from the school to continue their education and begin to break down the barriers to going to school. These children are recorded as 0 hours with a plan of increasing this over time. There is also an expectation that these children are on the Local authority EBSA pathway and that the school continues to review the plan and refer to the Medical Panel if there is insufficient progress.

Numbers of children on reduced timetables has significantly increased this year to 3705 (compared with 950 for 2021/22). There are 2260 repeat notifications. Primary school notifications appear to be evenly spread across the year groups except for Year 3 for which there are significantly fewer notifications. Secondary as expected, has increasing numbers for key stage 4 pupils. Better reporting may account for some of the increase, however further work is needed to understand the 'other category' given as reason for reduced timetable outside medical grounds. To improve the quality of reporting 'other' alone will be removed from the list.

10. Children who are Electively Home Educated (EHE)

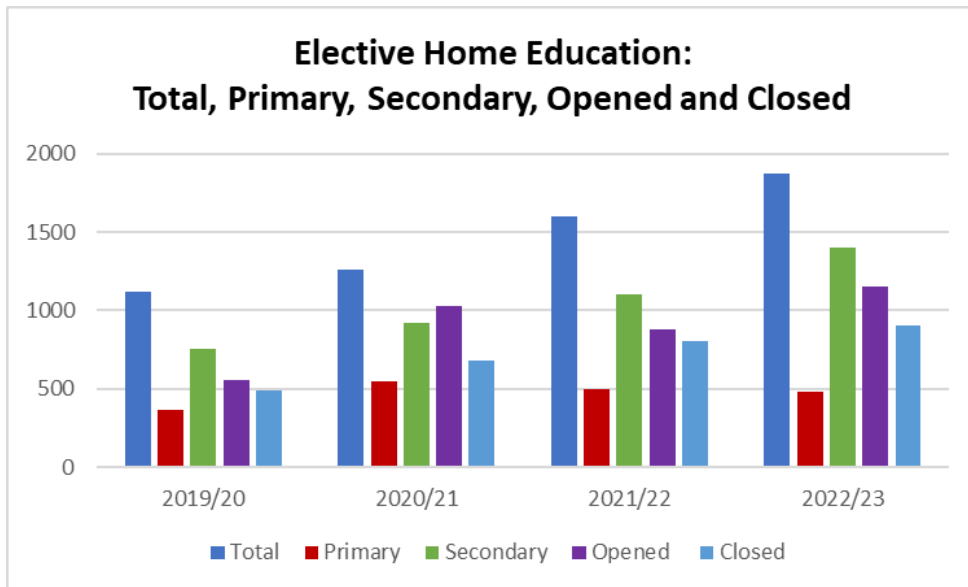
The local authority maintains a register of children who are home educated. Schools are legally required to inform the local authority when a parent decides to remove their child from school, to home educate. Children who have never entered the education system are often identified by our CME team, or other agencies. At the end of the academic year there were 1878 EHE children known to the local authority. This is a 17% increase in overall numbers, but the increase is less than we saw the previous year, which saw a growth of 21%.

The DfE has introduced the collection of EHE and CME data from the local authority. This data is provided three times per year.

For most families, EHE is a lifestyle choice; with families opting to home educate for a variety of reasons from travelling abroad, or around the UK, to waiting for a preferred school choice. Most families are able to show an intention to educate and go on to provide evidence that they are providing a suitable education for their children at home. A significant number of those cases which move to 'unsuitable' are in fact due to failed visits, where the family have not responded to our attempts to contact. Home visits have not resumed post pandemic, however, if a parent is unable or unwilling to provide suitable or sufficient evidence, the case is passed to a Safeguarding and Education Welfare Officer who will then contact the family, to encourage their engagement. All EHE advisors are trained to identify safeguarding concerns and respond appropriately. We have seen a rise in the number of children with a status of Child in Need and those with Education Health Care Plans. The progress of these cases is tracked and joined up working is a priority, to ensure the best outcomes are achieved. Whilst there is no indication that children are at an increased risk due to being home educated, the absence of a home visit means that children are unlikely to be seen by our team and may not be seen by any other agency during their period of home education. This highlights the importance of timely notifications from schools to alert the authority of a child withdrawn to home educate and also the sharing of any wider concerns the school may have, which may be appropriate when reviewing the education plan.

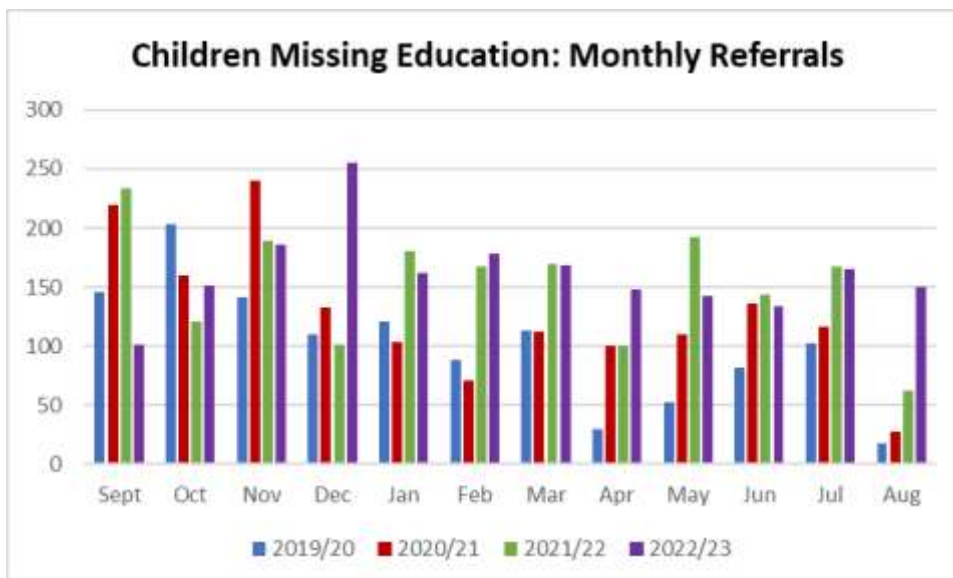
11. Key Messages

Elective Home Education



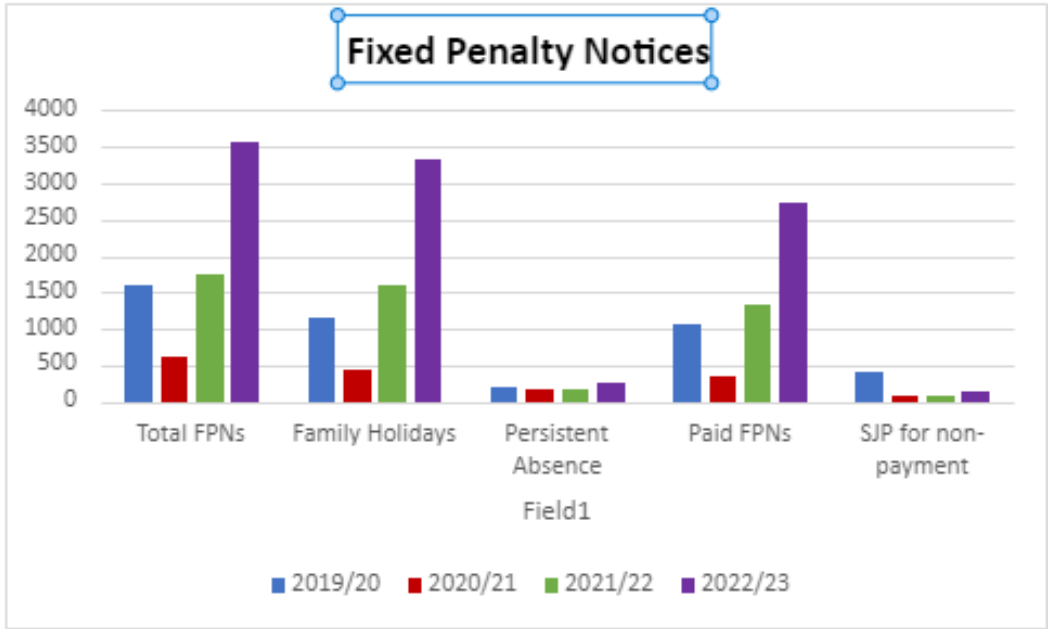
Key Messages: Number of children who are electively home education is rising. The increase is mainly in the secondary sector.

Children Missing Education



Key Messages: Numbers of children continue to rise which may reflect better reporting of children by schools as well as increased mobility.

School Non-Attendance



Key Messages: Number of FPN’s have increased significantly as schools are more prepared to use this strategy to address absences (predominantly holidays) during term time. Payments have increased resulting in a reduction in cases going through to Single Justice Process (prosecutions).

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