

ACCEPTED VERSION

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article:

Kerrie Lissack, Christopher Boyle

Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?'

Review of Education, 2022; 10(3):e3372-1-e3372-33

© 2022 British Educational Research Association.

which has been published in final form at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions.

PERMISSIONS

<https://authorservices.wiley.com/author-resources/Journal-Authors/licensing/self-archiving.html>

Wiley's Self-Archiving Policy

Accepted (peer-reviewed) Version

The accepted version of an article is the version that incorporates all amendments made during the peer review process, but prior to the final published version (the Version of Record, which includes; copy and stylistic edits, online and print formatting, citation and other linking, deposit in abstracting and indexing services, and the addition of bibliographic and other material.

Self-archiving of the accepted version is subject to an embargo period of 12-24 months. The standard embargo period is 12 months for scientific, technical, medical, and psychology (STM) journals and 24 months for social science and humanities (SSH) journals following publication of the final article. Use our [Author Compliance Tool](#) to check the embargo period for individual journals or check their copyright policy on [Wiley Online Library](#).

The accepted version may be placed on:

- the author's personal website
- the author's company/institutional repository or archive
- not for profit subject-based repositories such as PubMed Central

Articles may be deposited into repositories on acceptance, but access to the article is subject to the embargo period.

The version posted must include the following notice on the first page:

"This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: [FULL CITE], which has been published in final form at [Link to final article using the DOI]. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions."

The version posted may not be updated or replaced with the final published version (the Version of Record). Authors may transmit, print and share copies of the accepted version with colleagues, provided that there is no systematic distribution, e.g. a posting on a listserve, network or automated delivery.

There is no obligation upon authors to remove preprints posted to not for profit preprint servers prior to submission.

17 June 2024

<http://hdl.handle.net/2440/136729>

Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?'

Abstract

This article presents findings from research focusing on parent/carer views of the support received for school attendance difficulties. Research has consistently demonstrated poor short-term and long-term outcomes for children who experience school non-attendance and there is growing concern in the UK, and across the world, for children who miss education. School non-attendance is a challenging and longstanding phenomenon for schools, professionals, and families alike. There is limited existing research that explores what support is provided for children who struggle to attend school. In this study, an online questionnaire was used to gather views from parent/carers (n=289) who have a child(ren) who experiences school attendance difficulties. Parent/carer views were elicited on what support they had received. Views on how this support could be improved were also gathered. The findings demonstrate that school non-attendance represents a challenging, complex, and at times, desperate situation for many parent/carers. Parent/carers' views on the support received varied, reflecting the complex and individualised nature of attendance difficulties. Parent/carers valued home-school partnerships that encompassed kindness and removed parent/carer blame for their child's non-attendance. The findings contribute to an understanding of school non-attendance from the view of parent/carers and highlights implications for the practice of school staff and external professionals. These implications are discussed with an exploration of possible future actions for addressing the complex and challenging nature of school non-attendance.

Keywords

School; parent/carer; non-attendance; support; intervention.

Context and Implications

Rationale

School non-attendance is recognised as a complex problem with few straightforward solutions. This research places parents at the forefront of this issue and explores their views and experiences of the support that they are offered by school staff and educational practitioners.

Why the new findings matter (50 words)

The findings matter because improving knowledge of parent/carer views and first-hand experiences of support for school non-attendance is key to addressing the complex problem and to improving outcomes for children.

Implications (100 words)

School attendance difficulties is an issue for all who are involved in education. The findings from this study contribute to an understanding of school non-attendance from the view of parents and highlights the importance of home-school partnerships in not only addressing the problem of non-attendance, but also in preventing it. Implications for practice include the need for greater understanding of the complex problem among school staff that adopts a more ecological, systemic view. Building positive relationships, hearing the voice of the child and adopting individualised approaches to support are key to improving support for parents. Implications for policymakers include the need to shift away from punitive prosecution tactics because this has been unhelpful or in some circumstances, detrimental to addressing the complex problem of school non-attendance.

Introduction

School non-attendance (SNA) is a universal problem across countries and a key focus for UK Government seeking to address the problem (Heyne, 2019). It is well documented that attending and engaging in school is not only critical for children's cognitive development but also for their social-emotional development and mental wellbeing (DfE, 2019; Maynard et al., 2018). All children have a right to access full-time education, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (Melvin et al., 2019; Warnock Report; Department for Education and Science, 1978). Evidence suggests that poor emotional regulation, social isolation, and a higher risk of mental health difficulties and offending behaviours are associated with school absenteeism (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Fornander & Kearney, 2020).

In 2022, the DfE (2022a) reported that the overall absence rate in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in the Spring term of 2020/21 was 4.6%. The DfE also reported the percentage of persistent absentees (when a child misses 10% or more of their possible school sessions), was 12.1% which increased from 10.8% in 2018/19. Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, these figures are not directly comparable to previous years, yet they provide some context into school non-attendance over the past few years. The DfE have reported increases in the overall school absence figures since 2019, including authorised, unauthorised, and persistent absence (DfE, 2022a).

Conceptualising school non-attendance

There is a continuing debate regarding the terminology for SNA (Finning et al., 2020; Heyne et al., 2019). The way practitioners perceive and give meaning to the labels ascribed to children's difficulties has implications for the type of provisions and interventions employed (Boyle, 2014; Norwich, 1999). Historically, SNA has been viewed within an 'illegal truancy' perspective (Berg et al., 1993; Heyne et al., 2019). Earlier research on SNA has also used the term 'school phobia' to describe children who appeared to have a specific fear of school which reflected a clinical perspective. This term has been criticised by some researchers as being misleading because it implies the child has a fear of the school itself, which is often not the case (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Similarly, the term 'school refusal' is associated with internalising symptoms, such as anxiety. It refers to students who experience difficulties in

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carers views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

attending school for emotional reasons, while their parent/carers are aware of their non-attendance (Fornander and Kearney, 2020; González, et al., 2019). For the purposes of the present study, the term ‘school non-attendance’ will be used. This term reflects a neutral stance in describing the experiences of children not attending school without placing any judgment on them or their experiences.

Support and intervention

Research suggests that the most effective school-based interventions will be those that take an individualised approach to meet the needs of children (Lauchlan, 2003; Thambirajah et al., 2008). Nuttall and Woods (2013) argue that there is limited research into interventions that attempt to address attendance difficulties. In their case-study research, they found that successful reintegration was established when children felt safe, experienced positive relationships between home and school, and wider contextual factors such as the needs of the family were addressed. Despite these findings, most research exploring interventions has a clinical basis with a focus on therapeutic interventions that attempt to minimise the internalising disorders of anxiety and depression (e.g. Egger et al., 2003; Hannan et al., 2019). However, Finning et al. (2019a; 2019c) highlight that the association between SNA and anxiety and depression is not straightforward and a medicalised approach does not necessarily consider all factors that might be impacting upon a child’s ability to attend school.

Systemic approaches to support consider not only the child’s internalising disorder such as anxiety, but also the contextual factors that impact upon school attendance. Practitioners would need to work in collaboration to support the child, family, and the school to address the complex multi-systemic needs of individual children (Gregory & Purcell, 2014). Malcolm et al. (2003) found that most schools in the UK included Education Welfare Officers, pastoral support, and parental discussions to support children back to full-time attendance. However, Tobias (2019) argues that due to the range of different professionals involved, there can be disjointed approaches to assessment and intervention because of the differing viewpoints held regarding approaches to support.

Early identification

Research has shown that the longer a child absent from school, the more difficult it is to re-engage them in full time attendance and the poorer the outcomes for that child. Once non-attendance has become persistent and severe, schools will likely face major challenges in supporting the child back to full attendance (Heyne, 2019). Thus, early identification and intervention are critical to successful support. The key to early intervention is the recognition of difficulties by school staff, which Heyne (2019) argues is not currently done well and schools are failing to intervene early enough. Despite this, Ingul et al. (2019) argue that certain characteristics in the early stages of school attendance difficulties may be readily identified, including emotional distress such as anxiety or depression, and somatic complaints.

Parent/carers' perspectives

Heyne et al. (2019) emphasise that gaining the voices and perceptions of all stakeholders using qualitative methodology is important in developing effective interventions and a shared research agenda. In the UK, parent/carers are legally responsible for their child's attendance at school, yet there is limited research exploring their views and first-hand experiences (Dannow et al., 2020). Research that does explore parent/carer views has tended to use semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Dalziel and Henthorne (2005), for example, found that parent/carers were empowered by the support they received from Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) as it allowed them to communicate with the school about their difficulties. In contrast, Gregory and Purcell (2014) interviewed five mothers of children who were absent from school and found that they often felt blamed and patronised by professionals for their child's SNA.

Havik et al. (2014) interviewed 17 parent/carers to explore their views on the role of school factors in 'school refusal'. Parent/carers viewed school staff as playing a vital role in re-engaging children with school. Parent/carers also recognised the need for more support for their child during times of transition and the importance of the pupil-teacher relationship. Further research has evidenced the importance of positive pupil-teacher relationships for children's development and sense of school belonging (Myers and Pianta, 2008). As such, it is suggested that these factors can protect children

against developing 'school refusal behaviours' and act as a motivator for children to attend school (Havik et al., 2014; Wilkins, 2008).

Prosecuting parents for their child's non-attendance has been raised as a contentious issue as there is limited evidence to suggest that it is effective in improving attendance (Sheppard, 2011). Research also indicates that prosecuting parents for non-attendance can be a factor in their decision to deregister their child from school (Baynton, 2020; Kendall & Atkinson, 2006). The tensions associated with these experiences can be viewed within the so-called concept of 'off-rolling' (where schools informally encourage families to take their child out of school and off their roll due to difficulties with behaviour or attendance). Off-rolling has been recognised by Ofsted as an increasing problem in schools and further highlights the need to understand the first-hand experiences of school attendance difficulties from those involved (Dannow et al., 2020).

The individualised nature of SNA indicates that no single recommended intervention will be successful for all children (Elliot and Place, 2019; Lauchlan, 2003). Research suggests that the most effective school-based interventions will be those that take an individualised approach to meet the needs of children (Lauchlan, 2003; Thambirajah et al., 2008). Nevertheless, Nuttall and Woods (2013) argue that there is a lack of research into interventions that attempt to address attendance difficulties. In their case-study research, they found that a successful return to school after non-attendance was established when the child felt safe, experienced positive relationships between home and school, and wider contextual factors such as the needs of the family were addressed. Despite these findings, most studies exploring interventions and support have a clinical basis with a focus on therapeutic interventions that attempt to minimise the internalising disorders of anxiety and depression (e.g., Egger et al., 2003; Hannan et al., 2019). As discussed previously, Finning et al. (2019a; 2019c) highlight that the association between SNA and anxiety and depression is not straightforward and a medicalised approach does not necessarily consider all factors that might be impacting upon a child's ability to attend school.

A criticism of current research is that there is limited focus on in-depth qualitative explorations of these key stakeholder views and experiences (Heyne et al.,

2020). There is limited research exploring parent/carers' first-hand perspectives and experiences of non-attendance and the support they receive (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Dannow et al., 2020). Therefore this study focuses on gathering the views of parent/carers who have a child (or children) experiencing school non-attendance with the aim of capturing what support is provided to them and how support could be improved. The term parent/carer(s) is used in this article as reference to the main caregiver(s) of a child (the term is not restricted or limited to any specific caregiver status). This study aims to address the following research questions:

- (1) What are parent/carers' views on the support that is offered to them and their child for school non-attendance?
- (2) How do parent/carers think support could be improved to help their child attend school more consistently?

Methods

A wide range of participants (n=289) were recruited to gain a 'wide-angle lens' of SNA from the view of parent/carers via an online questionnaire (Braun et al., 2020). The questionnaire was predominately qualitative in nature with some additional supporting quantitative closed questions (Appendix A). We decided to use an online survey because it can "generate great data, can be less daunting than doing interviews or focus groups, and be very quick and cheap way to collect data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.136). It also allowed participants the anonymity to express their views and to use the national reach of the Facebook group for a larger, more diverse sample (Braun et al., 2020). Surveys are also ideally suited to sensitive topics because they offer participants privacy and anonymity (Braun et al., 2017). The data gathered can be focused on the chosen topic, with less influence from the researcher with standardised questions being asked in the same way (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Braun et al. (2020) also found that survey data provide more relevant information and can be more focused than interview data. They therefore discredit concerns that survey data is not rich enough:

"while an individual response may lack the meandering detail of an interview transcript, if surveys are a good 'fit' for the research question, topic and

population, then the dataset as a whole will likely be rich and complex” (Braun et al., 2020a, p.4).

The questionnaire was designed solely for use in this study and an initial pilot questionnaire was provided to an experienced research colleague prior to disseminating to examine and offer feedback. All participants were required to agree to give their consent prior to participating. It was constructed using Microsoft Forms, an online survey creator which fulfils General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements. For closed questions, Likert and multiple choice response scales were used. Open-ended questions (such as, *what support was provided to you by school staff when your child first started experiencing difficulties attending school?*) allowed respondents the opportunity to write as much or as little they wished. We also included direct questions about COVID-19 and the impact of lockdown on families. We did not want to overlook the unique situation that families were experiencing at the time, and how this might have impacted their situation.

Participants and recruitment

The target population was defined as parent/carers of school-aged children who experience school non-attendance (of any severity) in educational settings within the UK. As legislated in law, parent/carers are responsible for their child’s attendance at school (DfE, 2020) and parent/carers will be the first initial point of call for a school when a child is absent (Gregory and Purcell, 2014; Kearney, 2008a).

This study was restricted in its methods due to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were recruited during the first UK national lockdown period (April-June 2020) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, UK schools were not open to the majority of children; only children deemed as being vulnerable or children of essential workers were able to attend school. Consequently, some of the findings in this study will inevitably reflect some of the parent/carers’ experiences during lockdown with regards to the support they received from their child’s school.

We used a purposive sampling technique. Once the questionnaire was created, the webpage link was circulated via an online Facebook page of an organisation called ‘Not Fine in School’. This is a group that aims to support parent/carers and raise awareness of school attendance difficulties. The group had just over 10,000 members

at the time of this research. The group provided access to parent/carers across the UK who have current or past experiences of school non-attendance. As recruitment of participants was conducted on an online social media platform, potential participants were likely to be experienced in using and engaging in online media and therefore comfortable in sharing their views in an online survey (Braun et al., 2020).

After discussions with the founder of the group, an invitation for participants to take part in a pilot study was posted on the Facebook page. The call for participants included information about the aims of the study and a link to the online questionnaire where participants were provided with more information. The questionnaire link was available for two days (April 20th-21st 2020) and participants were asked to provide feedback. We received 23 responses. Feedback was generally positive and minor revisions were made to address respondents' comments. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was 38 minutes and there were 21 questions in total. The final version was posted in the group on April 24th 2020 and was made available for three weeks.

Data analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the online questionnaire were analysed using descriptive and frequency statistics in Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013; 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis is a recursive process where codes are adapted and developed, renamed, combined, or split throughout the process. Coding was approached in this way by revisiting the initial codes, grouping them, and continually re-checking the dataset (Braun et al., 2019). Thematic maps were created to visually represent the initial themes developed from the coding process. Codes could then be visually viewed to see how the codes fitted together, how they crossed over, and how the initial themes were developing (Braun et al., 2019). These thematic maps were adapted and developed throughout the analytical process. NVivo software was used for the initial coding stage. During the analysis of such high volumes of data (over 180 pages in total), the potential for 'analysis fatigue' became a concern. To address this, the stating points were alternated during each stage of coding and the coding was re-checked several times. This was an important stage of the analysis and a lengthy one since,

unlike data from qualitative interviews, data was collected independent of the researcher. Of the 289 respondents, all questions were answered.

Ethical Considerations

This research was designed and conducted strictly in accordance with the University of ANONYMISED Code of Good Practice in the Conduct of Research (2017), BERA (British Educational Research Ethics Framework, 2018), British Psychological Society's (BPS) code of human research ethics (2014), BPS (2018) Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Health Care Professions Council Standards of Conduct Performance and Ethics (2016). The study was approved by a University Research Ethics Committee Board (reference D1920-047).

Potential participants (those using the link to access the online questionnaire) were provided with a detailed brief in the introduction to the questionnaire. Consent was obtained through an 'opt-in' process whereby participants were asked to read the information and accept the terms of participation prior to accessing the questionnaire. No identifiable data were directly requested from participants (e.g. location, school name). However, in circumstances where participants voluntarily provided identifiable information within their open-ended responses, the researchers anonymised data as appropriate by redacting and removing names, locations etc during the analysis process.

Results and discussion

Contextual information was gathered from participants to provide insight into the nature of their current circumstances in relation to school non-attendance. With regards to age, Figure 1 shows 81% of participants' children were aged between 11 and 16 years old. Research has shown that attendance difficulties are more prevalent at this age (secondary school aged children) (Goodman and Scott, 2012) and this is reflected in this study's sample of participants.

[insert Figure 1.]

Figure 2 indicates when participants first started noticing attendance difficulties with their child. Of note here, 56% (n=162) of participants reported that their child's difficulties began during key stage three at secondary school, while 33% (n=95) of parent/carers reported it started during primary school. Perhaps surprisingly, 8% (23

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

parent/carers) reported that their child began to show signs of difficulties when attending nursery.

[insert Figure 2.]

Insight into how long children had been experiencing attendance difficulties was also obtained (Figure 3). Of note, 58% (n=167) of participants in the sample reported that their child had been experiencing SNA for over two years.

[insert Figure 3.]

Finally, information was gathered about whether the children experiencing SNA had an additional need. 64% (n=186) of participants reported that their child had been diagnosed with an additional need. To explore this further, participants were asked to select a category that best described their child's additional need (Figure 4). An option to select 'other' and describe the specific additional need was provided to participants. Responses to this option included the following:

- Selective mutism (1.3% of participants)
- Tourette syndrome (1.3%)
- Trauma (1.3%)
- PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) (2%)
- OCD (obsession compulsive disorder) (2.4%)

Of note, 51% (n=148) of participants reported their child as having autism. Existing research has evidenced an association between autism and school attendance difficulties. Munkhaugen et al. (2017, p.31), for instance, concluded that "school refusal behaviour is pervasive in students with ASD (autism spectrum disorder)". In addition, 53% (n=153) of participants reported their child as having anxiety. While this research did not specifically aim to recruit parent/carers with a child experiencing anxiety, the profile of participants may indicate a link between children's mental health and their ability to attend school. Further analysis of the qualitative data revealed parent/carers' views about the significant impact anxiety has in relation to attending school.

[insert Figure 4.]

When presenting data extracts, participants' original verbatim written responses have been maintained to preserve their ownership over their own accounts. Permission to include verbatim quotes was sought from participants in the introductory information of the questionnaire (Appendix A). For clarity, the meanings of any acronyms have been provided directly adjacent within square brackets.

Research Question 1: What are parent/carers' views on the support that is offered to them and their child for school non-attendance?

Descriptive statistics

As existing literature highlights the importance of communication between home and school during non-attendance (Kearney, 2019), parent/carers were asked if they had regular contact with their child's school (Figure 5). The findings show that 70% (n=201) of participants selected 'yes', while 26% (n=77) reported they did not have regular contact. The final 4% (n=11) corresponding to 'not applicable' might reflect the participants whose child was not currently on a school roll at the time of data collection.

[insert Figure 5.]

Insight into whether parent/carers had a key person assigned to them was also obtained. The existing literature suggests that having a key person to communicate with regarding attendance difficulties has positive outcomes (Dalziel and Henthorne, 2005; Nuttall and Woods, 2013). Figure 6 shows that 73% (n=212) of participants reported being in contact with a key person, while 22% (n=63) reported they were not.

[insert Figure 6.]

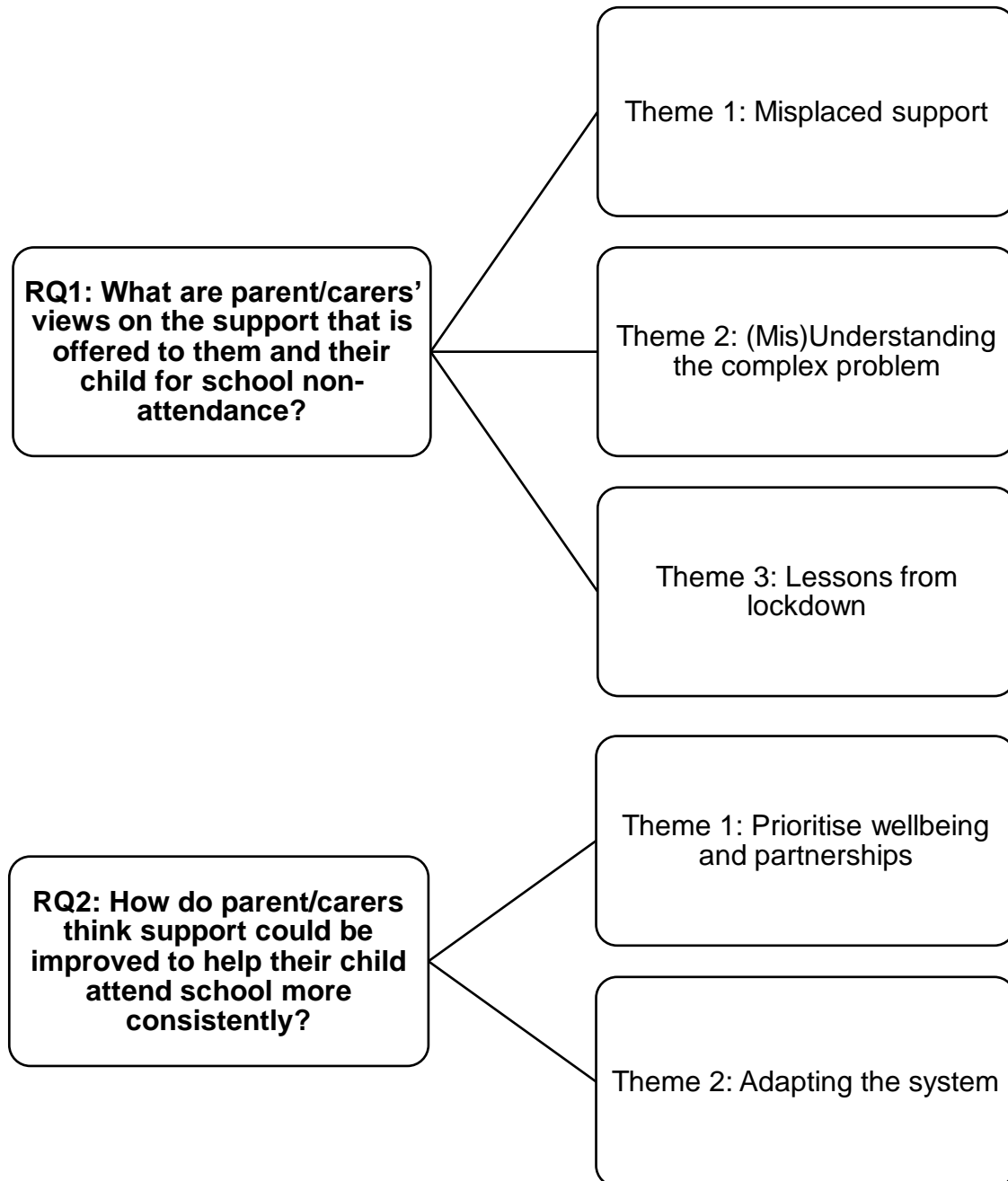
Participants were asked to what extent they believed support from school staff had been helpful. As shown in Figure 7, 33% (n=82) of parent/carers believed that support from school staff was 'not at all' helpful. Overall, 67% (n=207) of participants believed that support had been helpful in some way with responses ranging from 'a little' (23%), 'to some extent' (21%), 'a lot' (13%), and 'a great deal' (10%). The mean rating for these responses was 2.5 (SD = 1.3) which indicates varied and individualised views on support experiences.

[insert Figure 7.]

Qualitative findings

Thematic analysis identified five themes overall, with several subthemes for each theme. Themes are summarised in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Research Questions and Themes.



Misplaced support

This theme captures parent/carers' comments about the nature of how support was established for their child's SNA. Some parent/carers reported that school staff responded in a timely manner and pre-empted their child's difficulties, while others commented on a distinct lack of support.

Limited help

Many parent/carers reported a lack of appropriate support to meet their child's needs. Several parent/carers described experiences how they had not received any support. A tally of the total responses indicating that 'no support' had been offered was gathered from the questionnaire data. A total of 54 responses (18%) contained that word "none" in the open-ended response box when asked about what support they had received. Some responses were expanded upon, whilst others simply contained the single word.

When parent/carers described inadequate support, there was a sense that the implications were felt across the whole family. For instance, Parent/carer 11 wrote about the effects of a delay in accessing support, noting that their "whole family's lives have been turned upside down with the worry". Parent/carers also wrote about a lack of access to appropriate professional support when their child needed it most. The focus was overwhelmingly on the struggle to access Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Several parent/carers wrote about feeling 'stuck' without this support as they could not find a way out of their difficult situation: "without greater understanding and accessible mental health support (rather than a CAMHS waiting list) it is difficult for any of us to know what to do" (Parent/carer 17). These findings align with research by Gregory and Purcell (2014) who found parent/carers often reported a lack of support and felt isolated as a result.

Several parent/carers reported experiencing inconsistent and tokenistic support. There were several comments about support being offered, but not put into place: "support staff promised things to happen which didn't happen again and again" (Parent/carer P47). Across the dataset, there was a sense that parent/carers had "lost all trust" (Parent/carer 38) because of this inconsistent and unreliable support. Often these accounts indicated that the support being suggested by non-teaching staff (such as pastoral managers or Special Educational Needs Coordinators) had not materialised in the classroom, which might indicate limited information-sharing (Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

amongst school staff. Browne (2018) similarly found parent/carers had lost trust in staff and felt unsupported, while Havik et al. (2015) found that predictability was perceived as key to supporting children's attendance.

Some parent/carers wrote about how they have "lost all faith" (Parent/carer 55) in the education system because of the lack of help they had received. As a result, some parent/carers described how they had no other choice but to de-register their child from the school. Quantitative data showed that 7% of parent/carers (n=19) reported that their child was no longer on the school roll. While the reasons for de-registering varied, there was a sense that the underlying reason aligned with a lack of support and parent/carers' feelings of abandonment. One parent/carer recognised the difficult feelings involved in making such a decision: "we thought long and hard and decided to home educate" (Parent/carer 8). There was a sense across some parent/carers' accounts that they had in fact been encouraged to home-school their child. For example, Parent/carer 6 wrote: "we were told to take him out of school and home educate", while Parent/carer 20 commented: "school recently suggested removing my son as they are not able to meet his needs and help him overcome school refusal" [sic]. These experiences may be understood within the concept of 'off rolling'. Off rolling can be defined as:

The practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent/carer to remove their child from the school roll, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil (Ofsted, 2018, p.8).

Similar findings were reported by Epstein et al. (2019) where 17 parent/carers had taken their child off the school roll following attendance difficulties. Totsika et al. (2020) also highlighted the issue of undocumented home-schooling of children with ASD who experience attendance difficulties.

Prosecution above understanding

For some parent/carers, the threat of prosecution featured heavily in their accounts of 'misplaced support'. All parent/carers who wrote about prosecution viewed it as unhelpful and some reported how it impacted upon their own mental health, which hindered their already difficult situation. These experiences might be viewed as a negative perpetuating cycle as shown in Figure 9.

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

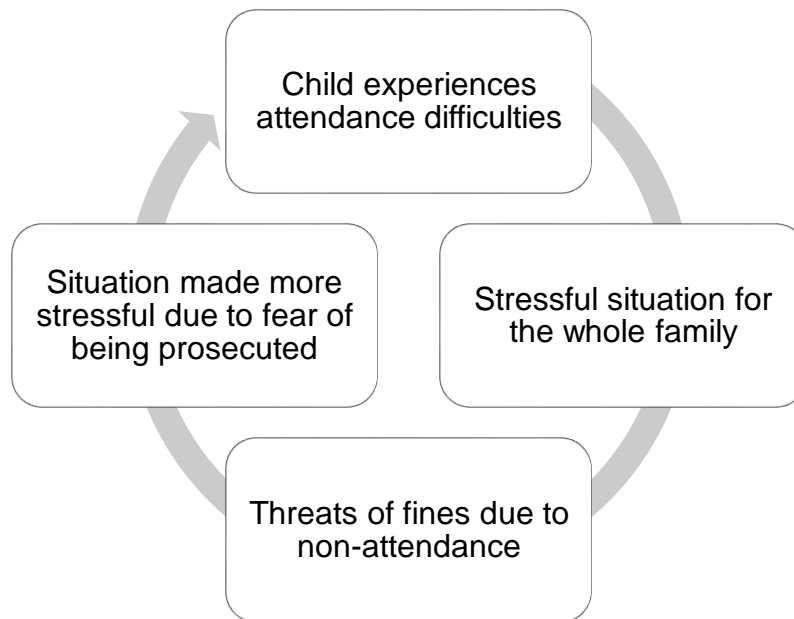


Figure 9. Visual representation of the negative cycle of threats of prosecution as reported by parent/carers.

Several parent/carers described the prosecution system as exacerbating the problem: “I think the current system of fining parent/carers punishes vulnerable and poorly [sic] children more than it tackles truancing” (Parent/carer 136). Parent/carers valued support that prioritised compassion and understanding over a legal, punitive approach:

If I’d been put under pressure about his attendance that will undoubtedly have affected how I dealt with him due to the threat of court etc (Parent/carer 95).

While previous research has acknowledged similar tensions associated with prosecuting parent/carers (e.g. Archer et al., 2003), the current study has elaborated further on the emotional impacts on parent/carers. Nuttall and Woods (2013) argue for the removal of harsh consequences and prosecution in their ecological model of successful reintegration.

(Mis)Understanding the complex problem

This theme captures two opposing views from parent/carers about how practitioners can misunderstand the complex problem of SNA because their focus is on attendance data and blaming parent/carers. Conversely, other parent/carers commented on how compassion and empathy from staff can make all the difference to their situation.

Nurture and compassion

Several parent/carers wrote about their child's access to nurture provisions and calm spaces in school which supported their child's emotional wellbeing. One parent/carer commented their child had a "nurture group in school. Option to stay inside at break. Go into school early" (Parent/carer 8) demonstrating a flexible, individualised endeavour. Similarly, Mortimer (2018) found that young people valued having pastoral support and a safe place to go in school when they had returned from a period of non-attendance. Practitioners in Tobias' (2019) study believed children experiencing attendance difficulties were prioritising lower order needs, such as feelings of safety over school attendance (Maslow, 1943). If children are experiencing difficult environmental circumstances either at home, in the community, or at school, they may not feel safe enough to leave their home to attend school (Tobias, 2019). While the current study did not directly explore children's feelings of safety, it has highlighted parent/carer perspectives on the need for children to feel supported and safe in school to support them to attend.

Other parent/carers described how the simple act of showing kindness and empathy helped their situation. Parent/carers viewed "trust and honesty" (Parent/carer 77) with staff as key because their situation was viewed in a non-judgemental way which helped them to feel empowered. One parent/carer recognised the importance of kindness even when the problem was not necessarily well understood: "teachers don't really understand it, but their kindness helped" (Parent/carer 31). This suggests positive relationships with staff are highly valued by parent/carers which echoes previous research (e.g. Nuttall and Woods, 2013). Tobias (2019) similarly found that when participants (family coaches) prioritised the building of empowering, trusting relationships with parent/carers of 'persistent non-attenders', there was a more successful outcome. Blackmon and Cain (2015) also found that success was more likely when staff and professionals prioritised establishing positive relationships with

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

the wider family. Parent/carer 199 wrote about how they and the school “came up with solutions together” and school “maintained a positive working relationship through regular contact and meetings”. Positive experiences such as these are consistent with previous research. Epstein and Sheldon (2005), for instance, found that parent/carers valued staff who recognised their emotional capacity as well as their child’s difficulties, further highlighting the importance of the parent/carer-school relationship.

Attendance at all costs

In contrast to the above theme, other parent/carers viewed attendance data to be the predominate driver for schools and that schools focused on data rather than taking time to understand the problem. Several parent/carers described instances where they felt attendance data were given priority which meant the school took a one-size-fits-all approach to support and left “vulnerable children under increased stress” (Parent/carer 136). Several parent/carers emphasised that a limited understanding ultimately impacted their child’s ability to cope in school and created “huge anxiety” (Parent/carer 232) about attending. Parent/carers also described the misunderstanding of the link between anxiety and autism:

Teachers had no understanding of difficulties or how bad the anxiety was, and [autism spectrum disorder] not recognised so constantly punished for the same things over and over [sic] (Parent/carer 71).

Some parent/carers wrote about the ‘art of masking’ and autism. Many parent/carers believed their child’s needs were misunderstood by staff as they did not recognise the ‘hidden difficulties’ associated with autism. When parent/carers wrote about their views on ‘masking’, it was predominantly in relation to girls:

Girls on spectrum present differently and although diagnosed at 3 masked well and difficulties not recognised or ignored in school until masking was no longer effective (Parent/carer 157).

These experiences resonate with existing literature on autism. For instance, Cook et al. (2018) found that parents recognised their daughters’ ability to mask their autistic characteristics. Attwood (2006) found that girls with ASD can appear to cope well, while boys receive earlier diagnoses as they are more likely to exhibit external behaviours associated with ASD. This is an interesting finding as parent/carers appear

to view their child's masking and resultant staff misunderstanding of needs to be a direct barrier to their ability to attend school. Indeed, Thambirajah et al. (2008, p.34) report that "developmental problems such as ASD are sometimes a contributory factor [to non-attendance], especially when the problems are subtle and remain unidentified".

Such accounts also echo research by Munkhaugen et al. (2019) and Totsika et al. (2020). Both studies highlight the pervasive nature of SNA in children with ASD. Munkhaugen et al. (2019) concluded that ASD is a major risk factor for 'school refusal behaviour' and suggest social, emotional, and executive functioning difficulties for this population need to be addressed through individually tailored interventions. Further, in line with suggestions by Archer et al. (2003), these findings indicate a need for greater awareness of ASD at a systemic school level and, more specifically, of children's ability to mask their difficulties (Preece & Howley, 2018; Totsika et al., 2020).

We are blamed

Parent/carers also reported feeling blamed for their child's non-attendance and that staff believed their child was 'choosing' not to attend. Consequently, appropriate support was not forthcoming because poor parenting was viewed as the cause and the problem was misunderstood. This was a recurring theme across the dataset as parent/carers acknowledged feelings of guilt. Parent/carers reflected on how staff seemed to locate the problem away from the school:

We feel that the fact she doesn't cope in school has always been blamed on us, the problem has been always framed as our problem or her problem not the school's problem (Parent/carer 90).

This reflects a within-child or within-family perspective and highlights the tensions that can exist between home and school. Feelings of guilt was also a recurring theme across parent/carers' accounts. Despite asking for help, Parent/carer 60 reported feeling blamed: "...when you ask for help you should get help, not blamed and made to feel guilty". This is further illustrated in Parent/carer 115's account of their negative experience in school meetings:

Honestly the only 'help' I have had is meetings at school where I am made to feel like I am useless and not trying my absolute best. I got up and left the first meeting as they were so accusatory (Parent/carer 115).

Again, these accounts suggest a within-family view of the situation which disregards wider systemic influences on a child's attendance (Gregory and Purcell, 2014). Such accounts are consistent with existing research that identifies parent/carer blame as a key negative experience for families (e.g. Bussard et al., 2015; Gregory and Purcell, 2014). Viewed within the systemic model of development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), parent/carer-staff interactions and home-school partnerships have implications for a child's mesosystem and proximal processes (Melvin et al., 2019).

Similarly, several parent/carers' descriptions of feeling 'unheard' and experiencing a 'constant battle' for support and acknowledgement of their difficult situation points to an 'attendance at all costs' attitude. This is illustrated by Parent/carer 89's comment:

It has been the hardest 3 years of our lives. I wish that the school had been more pro-active and more encouraging, and we should not have had to battle so hard to get the support we needed to help my son! [sic] (Parent/carer 89).

Parent/carers described occasions where they felt ignored and their concerns dismissed by staff. The experience of not being listened to and the fight for support is suggested by parent/carers to have worsened the problem for their child. Several parent/carers noted that communication with their school was limited. Parent/carer 159 described how they had "not had contact in months, always me trying contact them" [sic]. Other accounts described limited communication as negatively impacting their child's feelings of connectedness with their school community. In this way, children felt disconnected from school life, which further prevented their full return:

He does not feel part of a school community. They have made no contact with him while he has been off...he doesn't feel they care (Parent/carer 178).

This finding is concerning given that existing research highlights the importance of hearing the child's voice during attendance difficulties (e.g. Baskerville, 2020; Billington, 2018). Moreover, Bryant et al. (2013) argues that a positive school climate where students feel heard and supported is a key facilitator in promoting attendance.

Lessons from lockdown

The final theme captures parent/carers' views on support provided during the COVID-19 lockdown and school closures.

We're all experiencing it now

Parent/carers reported that lockdown had created a unique situation where every family was essentially experiencing school non-attendance. There was a sense across parent/carers' accounts that the situation represented an opportunity to raise awareness of the stresses and strains they experience during 'normal times'. One parent/carer hoped that lessons could be learned from lockdown that would impact the support provided for attendance difficulties more generally: "hopefully they will now think outside the box of traditional school attendance for those who struggle at school and care about them" (Parent/carer 142). This subtheme also captures the feelings of 'togetherness' reported by some parent/carers and how children felt more connected to their peers because they were now being educated in the same way as them (at home). Similarly, Parent/carer 38 wrote: "my child's norm has become his friends' norm and his state of mind has greatly improved". These positive experiences highlight the importance of connections and belonging to the school community. A limited sense of belonging can be a secondary cause of attendance difficulties, and so this finding highlights the importance of promoting feelings of belongingness amongst children who experience non-attendance (Kearney, 2008a; Nuttall and Woods, 2013).

Many parent/carers commented on the considerable discrepancies between support received during lockdown and support received prior to lockdown. Several parent/carers noted that during lockdown schools were providing online learning, which they had not done previously. Parent/carers also experienced a dramatic improvement in communication with their school. Parent/carer 10 wrote about these changes:

In the 3 years of my son's irregular attendance only 1 staff member has visited him, he has never had a call or email from his head of house until the covid 19 lockdown began and now she calls weekly [sic] (Parent/carer 10).

Parent/carer 56 reported how the change in support has made them feel:

It's taken the whole of UK's schools to close, for my son's school to actually make an effort with my son's education and pay attention to my son's existence. its unbelievably sad [sic].

This view is echoed by parent/carers who questioned why support and communication was not in place before lockdown. For example: “what I don’t understand if they can do home packs now during covid why couldn’t they send work home with my child’s sibling before covid [sic]?” (Parent/carer 135). These findings are unique to the current study because of the timeframe that data was collected and offer further insight into parent/carers’ views of support for non-attendance.

Research Question 2: How do parent/carers think support could be improved to help their child attend school more consistently?

This research question explores parent/carers’ views on how support for non-attendance could be improved. Participants were first asked whether they believed support could be improved (Figure 9). 76% (n=220) of participants reported that they believed support could be improved, while 9% (n=26) of participants did not think support could be improved. Participants were then asked in what ways they thought support could be improved.

[insert Figure 9.]

Qualitative findings

Prioritise wellbeing and partnerships

This theme captures parent/carers’ reports of the need for more trusting, collaborative relationships with school staff.

Trusting relationships

The concept of trust was a recurring theme across the dataset. Mirroring existing research, several parent/carers wrote about the importance of building trust and reducing blame (Sugrue et al., 2016). Parent/carers noted a key area for improvement was for school staff to build trust with their child by “sticking to what they have agreed” (Parent/carer 210). Several parent/carers suggested that building “lasting, trusting relationships” (Parent/carer 128) should be prioritised, while having a trusted adult at school was raised as an important intervention strategy. As a result of building trusting

relationships, parent/carers noted that their child would feel safer when they were able to attend:

Very important my son has a person to meet and greet and someone he can trust and feel safe to even go into school even for one hour [sic] (Parent/carer 104)

Positive relationships and trust have been shown to be important in addressing cases of SNA (Hallam and Rogers, 2008; Keppens and Spruyt, 2020). Hendron and Kearney (2016, p. 110) found that students who report negative feelings about school and their relationships with school staff “show greater attendance difficulties”. Similarly, young people in Mortimer’s (2018) study valued supportive relationships with adults when returning to school from a period of non-attendance, while Van Eck et al. (2017) found that ‘chronic absence’ was less of a problem when pupils perceived relationships with teachers as positive. The current findings elaborate on existing literature by indicating that ‘connections’ with the school community should not only be maintained but in fact strengthened to support children to attend more consistently (Keppens and Spruyt, 2020).

One parent/carer wrote how schools need to: “show some compassion! Work in partnership with parent/carers not in an adversarial way” [sic] (Parent/carer 79). Parent/carer 68 expressed how they believe professionals need to listen and learn from parent/carers:

Education professionals need to LISTEN to the families, parent/carers know their children better than nearly every teacher, stop telling them they don't! LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN!

When writing about lockdown, some parent/carers expressed feelings of sadness and frustration as they compared their experiences to ‘normal times’:

During the Covid crisis we have looked on at all the concern and support for families to educate their child at home with sadness that our child was invisible until this happened. We have lived this for years. [sic] (Parent/carer 98).

Several parent/carers wrote about how lockdown might have increased awareness of how isolating home-schooling can be, both for them and their child. These findings indicate that parent/carers want to be ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ during periods of non-

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: ‘How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?’ *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

attendance. Many parent/carers questioned why support was not available prior to lockdown. These accounts reinforce the theme ‘Prioritise wellbeing and partnerships’ as it highlights the need for improved home-school communication and partnership-working.

Parent/carers also wrote about the need for schools to listen, hear, and acknowledge their child’s concerns and build more positive relationships. One parent/carer noted that school staff “should listen to the child when they voice their reasons for not being able to attend and what they need to change” [sic] (Parent/carer 104). These findings are consistent with research reporting children’s views. Rees et al. (2013) found that older children did not feel listened to, lacked trust, and did not feel comfortable discussing their attendance difficulties with their teachers. While Baker and Bishop (2015) found that children believed their voices were often ignored when support was needed.

To improve support for children, parent/carers wrote about the need for children to feel valued in school. To achieve this, a more holistic and child-centric approach should be taken by staff:

Firstly, they could make him feel wanted and valued by speaking to him. They could hear him and understand that he doesn’t want to feel this way, he doesn’t choose to have panic attacks (Parent/carer 273).

These findings align with Nuttall and Woods’ (2013) study that found young people experiencing non-attendance wanted to feel valued and heard at school. Since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), pupil voice has become central to educational policy and practice and acknowledges the duty of professionals in involving children in decisions that affect them (Atkinson and Rowley, 2019). However, providing opportunities to elicit views and build connections becomes less accessible for children who are not attending school (Beckles, 2014). Despite this, Billington (2018) emphasises the need for adults to be aware of children’s individual subjective experiences. Parent/carers’ views in the current study appear to echo Billington’s (2018) findings that eliciting children’s views and building trusting relationships is imperative if effective reintegration into school is to be achieved.

Wellbeing over data

Several parent/carers wrote about the need to prioritise wellbeing over a “data driven” approach. To attend more consistently, parent/carers reported the need for school staff to understand their child’s difficulties more fully by hearing their voice and including them in decisions. Parent/carers reported how schools need to “re-evaluate their priorities” (Parent/carer 75) when it comes to attendance and place the child’s welfare above the need to maintain attendance figures. Parent/carers’ accounts seemed to suggest that schools do not always recognise children’s mental health as a factor in SNA. As such, parent/carers wrote about the need for educators to re-examine the way they view mental health difficulties and avoid viewing it as different to physical health. These findings are consistent with recent research by Finning et al. (2019b) who suggest that educational professionals should be aware that poor attendance may be a sign of mental health difficulties. Finning et al. (2019b, p.197) also state that “absence may provide a useful tool to identify those who require additional mental health support”. Indeed, research demonstrates the association between emotional difficulties and absence from schools, thus, these findings align with the view that greater awareness amongst school staff is needed (Finning et al., 2020; Lawrence et al., 2019).

Adapting the system

This theme captures participants’ comments about the need for a change to the education system in relation to attendance.

Earlier response

In line with existing research, parent/carers wrote about the need to recognise and address the problem of non-attendance early on (Havik et al., 2014; Pellegrini, 2007). Parent/carers described experiences of limited early support for their child and, in hindsight, intervening earlier would have made all the difference. Many parent/carers echoed the following comment that “support needs to be there as soon as the problems start” (Parent/carer 213) and parent/carers believed their situation could have been avoided or less ingrained if support was provided when difficulties first arose. Baker and Bishop (2015, p.366) suggest that a “swift but individually tailored

response” is necessary to promote positive outcomes for SNA. Early identification is integral to the model of successful reintegration proposed by Nuttall and Woods (2013), and as such, the findings from the current study align with these recommendations and further illustrate the negative implications of not taking such an early approach.

Change the label

Several parent/carers reported how non-attendance should not be labelled as ‘refusal’. While some parent/carers used the term ‘refusal’ in their written accounts, other parent/carers openly wrote about the need to look beyond this label to avoid viewing non-attendance as a choice. For example, Parent/carer 26 wrote: “it shouldn’t be called refusal and the school shouldn’t put more pressure on the child or parent/carers...both make everything far worse”. Echoing this, Parent/carer 34 noted the preconceived assumptions that are attached to the word ‘refusal’: “the label school refusal has such stigma...the kids don’t choose to refuse” (Parent/carer 34). There is limited research exploring parent/carers’ views on the use of labels for non-attendance. However, parent/carers’ reports here are in line with the views of young people in Baker and Bishop’s (2015) study who recognised the importance of language and the negativity associated with terms such as ‘refuser’. This finding elaborates on the tensions associated with labelling SNA and provides useful insight into the issue, especially given that research has suggested the labels assigned to pupils can impact the support and intervention they receive (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2020).

One size doesn’t fit all

Parent/carers wrote about how schools should look beyond the one-size-fits-all rhetoric. Several parent/carers explicitly referred to the term “one size doesn’t fit all” (Parent/carer 77) when describing how staff should not treat all children the same. Some parent/carers again referred to how the lockdown might act as a catalyst for change: “hopefully the one size fits all education system we currently have will change after all this” [sic] (Parent/carer 133). Some parent/carers acknowledged the need to address the limited understanding of masking in children with ASD by providing more training so that staff are better able to recognise masking behaviours. In addition, parent/carers would like teachers to recognise that an academically able child or a

child who displays “good behaviour and quiet demeanour” (Parent/carer 53) does not always equate to a child who is happy in school. This would suggest that there is a need for more individualised approaches to address SNA, which is widely recognised as good practice, particularly for children with ASD (Preece and Howley, 2018).

Several parent/carers’ accounts focused on the inappropriateness of legal threats for non-attendance as another element of the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. There was a sense of conflict in Parent/carer 88’s comment about being supported by the same members of staff who initiate the prosecution process: “... take away the fear of prosecution -how can they support you when they are the ones who report you?”. To improve these negative experiences, several parent/carers suggested the prosecution process needs modifying:

LAs [local authorities] should not have the power to prosecute, this should be an independent organisation and parent/carers of children not attending due to mental health / disabilities should not be prosecuted but alternative options offered which are easier to obtain than an EHCP [sic] (Parent/carer 102).

Here, the participant raises the point that children experiencing non-attendance due to mental health difficulties should not be prosecuted. In this way, the issue of labelling and the dichotomy between ‘authorised’ and ‘unauthorised’ non-attendance is again raised. These findings suggest legal threats create tensions between home and school which prevent positive relationships and meaningful connections being formed. Some parent/carers wrote about the actions schools take and the need for attendance policy to be adapted to reflect the complexities and individual needs of children. One parent/carer attributed a lack of early intervention to a disjointed and difficult-to-navigate system: “the system is completely disjointed and everything takes far too long. We spent years battling to get the help we need” (Parent/carer 223). Similarly, another parent/carer commented that the “whole system is broken” and that there “needs to be more awareness, less parent/carer blaming and more accountability of schools who are failing children” [sic] (Parent/carer 102). These views reflect a shift away from a within-child perspective and echoes existing research that identifies non-attendance as a multi-factorial problem (Kearney, 2008b). These findings can also be situated within Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ (2006) model as government attendance policy and wider education systems are represented parts of a child’s exosystem and

macrosystem (Melvin et al., 2019). Several parent/carers perceived these wider influences and systems to negatively impact on their child's ability to attend school, and as such, emphasised a need for systemic change.

Conclusion

This research has highlighted the complexities and challenges of school non-attendance from the perspective of parent/carers. Many of the findings have reflected current research and have indicated the need for an individualised and systemic approach to addressing the problem of SNA and supporting families (Melvin et al., 2019). Parent/carers' accounts of positive support appear to be underpinned by positive relationships and the findings suggest that parent/carers highly value the home-school partnership and consistent communication when their child is not attending school. When parent/carers wrote about positive experiences, it was often reflective of a relational approach which was perceived by many parent/carers to offset the challenging nature of their situation, indicating the powerful influence the simple act of establishing positive partnerships can have.

Parent/carers' views on how they felt blamed for their child's non-attendance and the prosecution procedure for non-attendance acted as a barrier to forming these trusting and meaningful relationships as it eroded opportunities to develop connections with staff. Resonating with suggestions from Finning et al. (2020) that small changes in how school staff support families can make meaningful differences, the findings suggest that all members of school staff can have a powerful impact on a child's school experiences and their ability to attend. Support from school staff also needs to be consistent and predictable. Parent/carers reported lacking feelings of trust with school staff because support was inconsistent and unpredictable.

An unanticipated yet insightful outcome of the participant sample was the high proportion of the participants who reported their child as having an ASD diagnosis. As this was not an intended aim of recruitment, this might be viewed as a limitation. However, this research has inadvertently highlighted the difficulties some children with ASD experience in attending school and mirrors existing research that demonstrates non-attendance to be a persistent and prevalent problem within this population (O'Hagan et al., 2021; Totsika et al., 2020). Future research might adopt further in-

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

depth qualitative exploration with children with ASD who experience attendance difficulties.

Supporting children who experience attendance difficulties will continue to challenge all those involved because of the complex nature of the problem. The current research has indicated the importance of adopting a systemic interactionist perspective when implementing support, as opposed to simply viewing non-attendance as a within-child problem. This can only be achieved if a collaborative systems approach is adopted. By considering the complexities within a holistic, ecological perspective that places the child at the centre of all endeavours and prioritises positive relationships, practitioners are likely to better understand the problem and support families through a potentially very difficult and challenging situation.

Limitations

The total number of participants in this study (n=289) only represents a small proportion of parents experiencing non-attendance in the UK. Thus, we acknowledge that the sample population and data gathered from the questionnaire cannot be generalised to the wider population of parents who have a child experiencing SNA. We also acknowledge that recruiting parent/carers from a social media platform limited the sample to parent/carers who are actively involved in their child's non-attendance and therefore will have created some bias. Whilst we sought to recruit parent/carers with any experience of non-attendance, the participant sampling method inevitably excluded parent/carers who are not aware of their child's non-attendance and those families who do not use social media or do not have internet access (or simply those who are not aware of the support group). We acknowledge that the sample population and data gathered from the questionnaire cannot be generalised to the wider population of parent/carers who experience SNA. The findings nonetheless provide unique insights into the views of the participants.

Feedback from the pilot stage of data collection suggested the online questionnaire provided an accessible and appropriate method for parent/carers to share their views. However, we are mindful that participants' responses varied greatly in detail and length, and the questions may have been interpreted differently by different participants. We were also unable to expand on topics raised by participants (such as

de-registration from school) which limited our ability to further elicit and interpret parent/carers' accounts.

We are mindful of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted upon children's attendance and experience of school. Future research could adopt an in-depth, longitudinal approach that explores the implications of the pandemic on children's school attendance. We also suggest that future research expands on the current findings with regards to the labelling of non-attendance. Whilst research has begun to acknowledge and address the 'labelling dilemma' (Gregory & Purcell, 2014), it appears from the findings in this study that these considerations are not necessarily widely acknowledged in practice and this could be provide an insightful avenue for further research.

Implications and further research

Practice implications

To address non-attendance, the complex problem first needs to be understood. This research has highlighted parent/carers views on the need for increased understanding of children's difficulties which will likely require an ecological, multi-systemic view of non-attendance that considers environmental stressors, as well as within-child factors (Gregory & Purcell, 2014; Pellegrini, 2007). Staff supervision and school training could serve as an important way to develop awareness and understanding, including for those in non-teaching positions and administration roles. This whole school approach might encourage a shift in thinking and thus promote small positive changes that can influence children's attendance (Finning et al., 2020). For instance, using compassionate and empathetic language when interacting with children, and changing the way schools label non-attendance (i.e. shifting away from a within-child 'refusal' label). Findings also suggest that support from school staff needs to be consistent and predictable. The importance of the simple act of 'keeping promises' (such as meeting the child at the school gates on the day of their return) is indicated as being key for children who experience SNA.

The current research has highlighted the significance of building positive relationships and communication between home and school (Reid, 2007). Participants often cited home-school partnership and kindness from staff as the foundation of their experience. Parent/carers want to feel listened to and not blamed during periods of non-

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carers views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

attendance, as opposed to the 'out of sight, out of mind' narrative that some parent/carers reported.

Policy implications

The findings suggest there is a need for attendance policymakers and senior leadership teams to re-consider the implementation of attendance policies in schools. Parent/carers reflected on the negative impact of prosecution for their child's non-attendance. The negative implications for mental health was also highlighted by participants in this study. Prosecution did not serve to support or help the situation for any parent who commented on the legal procedures involved. As such, a key implication could be the need for local authority approaches and wider government policy to be adapted so that it considers the underlying causes of non-attendance, rather than automatically adopting a punitive approach .i.e. prosecuting parents for non-attendance.

Implementation of attendance policy will need to be carefully considered during cases of non-attendance because of the complex individualised nature of the problem. The findings mirror that of existing research that suggests that support for non-attendance needs to be tailored to the individual child because of the complex and individualised nature of the problem (Lauchlan, 2003; Nuttall and Woods, 2013). Thus, a reconsideration of the way attendance policy is implemented in schools for SNA is advocated, while further research into the tensions between different stakeholders and the barriers to adapting policy might also be needed. In the UK, the Department for Education have recently (May 2022) reiterated their focus on improving school attendance and highlighted the need for collaborative working between schools, education trusts, and local authorities (DfE, 2022b). We suggest that future research focuses on the implementation of such guidance to ascertain whether applications in practice are successful.

References

- Archer, T., Filmer-Sankey, C., & Fletcher-Campbell, F. (2003). *School phobia and school 'refusal': Research into causes and remedies*. National Foundation for Educational Research. NFER.
- Atkinson, G. & Rowley, J. (2019). Pupils' views on mainstream reintegration from alternative provision: A Q methodological study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2019.1625245>
- Baskerville, D. (2020): Mattering; changing the narrative in secondary schools for youth who truant, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 24, 834-849. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2020.1772962
- Baker, M. & Bishop, F.L., (2015). Out of school: a phenomenological exploration of extended non-attendance. *Educational psychology in Practice*, 31(4), 354-368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2015.1065473>
- Beckles, C. (2014). An exploration of the perceptions and experiences of non-attenders and school staff within a secondary school context. (Unpublished Doctoral thesis). Institute of Education, University of London.
- BERA (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Education Research*. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018-online>
- Berg, I., Butler, A., Franklin, J., Hayes, H., Lucas, C., & Sims, R. (1993). DSM-III disorders, social factors and management of school attendance problems in the normal population. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 34, 1187–1203. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1993.tb01782.x>
- Billington, K. (2018). Using an active listening approach to consider the views of three young people on the topic of missing education. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 34(4), 337-351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2018.1466268>
- Birioukov, A. (2016). Beyond the excused/unexcused absence binary: Classifying absenteeism through a voluntary/involuntary absence framework. *Educational Review*, 68, 340–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2015.1090400>
- Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carers' views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*. <http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

Blackmon, B. & Cain, D. (2015). Case Manager Perspectives on the Effectiveness of an Elementary School Truancy Intervention. *School Social Work Journal*, 40 (1), 1-22.

BPS (British Psychological Society) (2014). *Code of Human Research Ethics*.

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/BPS%20Code%20of%20Human%20Research%20Ethics.pdf>

BPS (British Psychological Society) (2018) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*.

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/BPS%20Code%20of%20Ethics%20and%20Conduct%20%28Updated%20July%202018%29.pdf>

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2020). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 00, 1-11.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12360>

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L. & McEvoy, C. (2020). The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1805550>

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N. & Terry, G. (2019). Thematic analysis. In P. Liamputtong (ed.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences* (pp. 843-860). Springer.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. (2006). The Bioecological Model of Human Development. In Damon, W. & Lerner, R. (Ed.), *The Handbook of Child Psychology: Theoretical Models of Human development*, (6th ed., pp.793–828). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0114>

Brouwer-Borguis, M., Heyne, D., Sauter, F. & Scholte, R. (2019). The link: an alternative educational program in the Netherlands to reengage school-refusing adolescents with schooling. *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice*, 26, 75-91.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.08.001>

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carers views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

- Browne, R. (2018). *An exploration into the parent/carer experience of emotionally based school non-attendance in young people: An interpretative phenomenological analysis*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust/ University of Essex]. UoE Research Repository. <http://repository.essex.ac.uk/23477/>
- Bryant, V., Shdaimah, C., Sander, R., & Cornelius, L. (2013). School as haven: Transforming school environments into welcoming learning communities. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 848-855.
- Bussard, D., Harf, A., Sibeoni, J., Radjack, R., Benoit, J. P., & Moro, M. R. (2015). The parent/carers' experience of school refusal in adolescence. *Soins Pédiatrie, Puericulture*, (286), 31-36. doi:10.1016/j.spp.2015.07.006
- Chu, R., Guarino, D., Mele, C., O'Connell, J. & Coto, Patricia. (2019). Developing an online early detection system for school attendance problems: Results from a research-community partnership. *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice*, 26, 35-45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.09.001>
- Clissold, K. (2018). *A qualitative exploration of pupil, parent/carer and staff discourses of extended school non-attendance* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham]. University of Birmingham E-Theses. <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/8817/>
- Dalziel, D., & Henthorne, K. (2005). *Parent/carers'/carers' attitudes towards school attendance*. London: DfES Publications.
- Dannow, M. C., Esbjørn, B. & Risom, S. (2020). The perceptions of anxiety-related school absenteeism in youth: a qualitative study involving youth, mother, and father. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1479302>
- DfE (Department for Education) (2019). *School attendance. Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>
- DfE (Department for Education) (2020). *School attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities*. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attach>
- Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*. <http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

ment_data/file/907535/School_attendance_guidance_for_2020_to_2021_academic_year.pdf

DfE (Department for Education) (2022). *Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term>

DfE (Department for Education) (2022b). *Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities*.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1073616/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance.pdf

Egger, H. L., Costello, J. E., & Angold, A. (2003). School refusal and psychiatric disorders: a community study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 42(7), 797-807.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/01.CHI.0000046865.56865.79>

Elliot, J. & Place, P. (2019) Practitioner Review: School refusal: developments in conceptualisation and treatment since 2000. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 60(1), 4-15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12848>

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95(5), 308–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670209596604>

Epstein, R., Brown, G., & O'Flynn, S. (2019). *Prosecuting parent/carers for truancy: who pays the price?* Coventry University and University of Roehampton, London.

Finning, K., Ukoumunne, O., Ford, T., Danielsson-Waters, E., Shawd, L., Romero De Jagere, I., Stentiforde, L., & Moore, D. (2019a). The association between child and adolescent depression and poor attendance at school: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 245, 928–938.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.11.055>

Finning, K., Ford, T., Moore, D. & Ukoumunne, O. (2019b). Emotional disorder and absence from school: Findings from the 2004 British Child and Adolescent Mental

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carers views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*. <http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

Health Survey. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 1-12.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-019-01342-4>

Finning, K., Ukoumunne, O., Ford, T., Danielson-Waters, E., Shaw, L. Romero De Jager, I., Stentiford, L. & Moore, D. (2019c). Review: The association between anxiety and poor attendance at school – a systematic review. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 24, (3), 205–216. <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12322>

Finning, K., Waite, P., Harvey, K., Moore, D., Davis, B., & Ford, T. (2020): Secondary school practitioners' beliefs about risk factors for school attendance problems: a qualitative study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2019.1647684>

Fornander, M. J., & Kearney, C. A. (2020). Internalizing symptoms as predictors of school absenteeism severity at multiple levels: Ensemble and classification and regression tree analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.03079>

González, C., Inglés, C. J., Kearney, C. A., Sanmartín, R., Vicent, M., & García-Fernández, J. M. (2019). Relationship between school refusal behavior and social functioning: a cluster analysis approach. *The European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 12, 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.30552/ejep.v12i1.238>

Goodman, R. & Scott, S. (2012). *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Gregory, I.R. & Purcell, A. (2014). Extended school non-attenders' views: Developing best practice. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 30(1), 37-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2013.869489>

Gubbels, J., van der Put, J. & Assink, M. (2019). Risk factors for school absenteeism and dropout: a meta-analytic review. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48, 1637–1667. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-01072-5>

Hallam, S. & Rogers, L. (2008). *Improving Behaviour and Attendance at School*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*. <http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

Hannan, S., Davis, E., Morrison, S., Gueorguieva, R. & Tolin, D. (2019). An open trial of intensive cognitive-behavioral therapy for school refusal. *Evidence-Based Practice in Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 4(1), 89-101.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23794925.2019.1575706>

Havik, T. Bru, E. & Ertesvåg, S. (2015). Assessing Reasons for School Non-attendance. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 59(3), 316-336.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2014.904424>

Havik, T., Bru, E., & Ertesvåg, S. (2014). Parent/carer perspectives of the role of school factors in school refusal. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 19(2), 131-153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2013.816199>

Health Care Professions Council. (2016). *Standards of conduct, performance and ethics*. <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-conduct-performance-and-ethics/>

Hendron, M., & Kearney, A. (2016). School climate and student absenteeism and internalising and externalising behavioral problems. *Children & Schools*, 38(2), 109–116. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdw009>

Heyne, D. (2019). Developments in classification, identification, and intervention for school refusal and other attendance problems: Introduction to the Special Series. *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice*, 26, 1-7.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.12.003>

Heyne, D., Gren-Landell, M., Melvin, G. & Gentle-Genitty, C. (2019). Differentiation between school attendance problems: Why and How? *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice*, 26, 8-34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.03.006>

Kearney, C. A. & Graczyk, P. A. (2014). A Response to Intervention model to promote school attendance and decrease school absenteeism. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 43(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-013-9222-1>

Kearney, C. A. (2001). *School refusal behavior in youth: A functional approach to assessment and treatment*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10426-000>

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carer views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*. <http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

Kearney, C. A. (2019) *Helping families of youth with school attendance problems: A practical guide for mental health and school-based professionals*. Oxford University Press.

Kearney, C. A., González, C., Graczyk, P. & Fornander, M. (2019). Reconciling Contemporary Approaches to School Attendance and School Absenteeism: Toward Promotion and Nimble Response, Global Policy Review and Implementation, and Future Adaptability (Part 2). *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02222>

Kearney, C.A. (2008a). School absenteeism and school refusal behaviour in youth: A contemporary review. *Clinical psychology review*, 28(3), 451-471.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2007.07.012>

Kearney, C.A. (2008b). An interdisciplinary model of school absenteeism in youth to inform professional practice and public policy. *Educational Psychology Review*, 20, 257-282. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-008-9078-3>

Keppens, G. & Spruyt, B. (2020). The impact of interventions to prevent truancy: A review of the research literature. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 65,
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100840>

Kljakovic, M. & Kelly, A. (2019). Working with school-refusing young people in Tower Hamlets, London. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 24(4), 921-933.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104519855426>

Lauchlan, F. (2003). Responding to chronic non-attendance: A review of intervention approaches. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 19(2), 133–146.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0266736030303236>

Lawrence, D., Dawson, V., Houghton, S., Goodsell, B. & Sawye, M. (2019). Impact of mental disorders on attendance at school. *Australian Journal of Education*, 63(1), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944118823576>

Malcolm, H., Wilson, V., Davidson, J., & Kirk, S. (2003). *Absence from school: A study of its causes and effects in seven LEAs*. Research Report No. 424. Glasgow: The SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow.

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carers' views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.
<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

Maslow, A. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.

Maynard, B.R., Heyne, D., Brendel, K.E., Bulanda, J.J., Thompson, A.M. & Pigott, T.D. (2018). Treatment for school refusal among children and adolescents: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 28(1), 56-67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731515598619>

Melvin, G.A., Heyne, D., Gray, K., Hastings, R., Totsika, V., Tonge, B., & Freeman, M. (2019). The Kids and Teens at School (KiTeS) Framework: An Inclusive Bioecological Systems Approach to Understanding School Absenteeism and School Attendance Problems. *Frontiers in Education*, 4, 61. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00061>

Morse, J.M. (2000). Determining sample size. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10, 3-5.

Mortimer, E. (2018). *Going back to school following a period of extended school non-attendance: What do secondary-aged young people and their parent/carers find supportive? An Appreciative Inquiry*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Bristol]. University of Bristol Open Access. https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/187185892/Final_Copy_2019_01_23_Mortimer_E_PhD.pdf

Munkhaugen, E., Gjevik, E., Pripp, A., Sponheim, E., & Diseth, T. (2017). School refusal behaviour: Are children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder at a higher risk? *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 41-42, 31-38.

Myers, S. S., & R. C. Pianta. (2008). Developmental commentary: individual and contextual influences on student-teacher relationships and children's early problem behaviors. *Journal of Clinical & Adolescent Psychology*, 37, 600–608. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374410802148160>

Norwich, B. (1999). The connotation of special education labels for professionals in the field. *British Journal of Special Education*, 26(4), 179-183. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.00135>

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carers views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*. <http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

Nuttall, C., & Woods, K. (2013). Effective intervention for school 'refusal' behaviour. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 29(4), 347–366.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2013.846848>

O'Hagan, S., Bond, C. & Hebron, J. (2021). What do we know about home education and autism? A thematic synthesis review. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 80, 1-15.

Oliver, P. (2014). *Writing your thesis*. (3rd ed.). SAGE publications Ltd.

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). (2018).

School inspection update: A special edition. Retrieved August 2021, from

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742258/School_inspection_update_-_special_edition_September_2018.pdf

Pellegrini, D. (2007). School non-attendance: Definitions, meanings, responses, interventions. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23, 63–77.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360601154691>

Preece, D. & Howley, M. (2018) An approach to supporting young people with autism spectrum disorder and high anxiety to re-engage with formal education – the impact on young people and their families, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 23:4, 468-481, DOI: 10.1080/02673843.2018.1433695

Rees, G., Goswami, H., & Pople, L. (2013). *The good childhood report 2013*.

London: The Children's Society.

Reid, K. (2007). Managing school attendance: the professional perspective, *Teacher Development*, 11(1), 21-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530701194652>

Reid, K. (2014a). *An essential guide to improving attendance in your school: Practical resources for all school managers*. Oxon: Routledge.

Sugrue, E. P., Zuel, T., & LaLiberte, T. (2016). The ecological context of chronic school absenteeism in the elementary grades. *Children & Schools*, 38(3), 137-145.

Thambirajah, M. S., Grandison, K.J. & De-Hayes, L. (2008). *Understanding school refusal: A handbook for professionals in education, health and social care*. Jessica Kingsley.

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carers views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

Tobias (2019). A grounded theory study of family coach intervention with persistent school non-attenders. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 35,1, 17-33.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2018.1518215>

Tonge, B. & Silverman, B. (2019). Reflections on the field of school attendance problems: For the times they are a-changing? *Cognitive and Behavioural practice*, 26, 119-126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.12.004>

Totsika, V., Hastings, R., Dutton, Y., Worsley, A., Melvin, G., Gray, K., Tonge, B. & Heyne, D. (2020). Types and correlates of school non-attendance in students with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism*, 24(7), 1639-1649.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320916967>

United Nations (1989) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Available at: https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf?_ga=2.15573488.716301741.1583668396-1164885609.1583668396

ANONYMISED REFERENCE

Van Eck, K., Johnson, S., Bettencourt, A., & Johnson, S. (2017). How school climate relates to chronic absence: A multi-level latent profile analysis. *Journal of School Psychology*, 61, 89-102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2016.10.001>

Walker, J., & Donaldson, C. (2010) *Intervening to improve outcomes for vulnerable young people: a review of the evidence*. Research Report. Department for Education.

Wilkins, J. (2008). School characteristics that influence student attendance: experiences of students in a school avoidance program. In Graham, P. (ed. pp.12-24), *The High School Journal*, University of North Carolina Press.

Appendix A

Parent views and experiences of school non-attendance

Thank you for expressing an interest in this research, and for volunteering your time to participate. Before you take part in this study, I would like you to be fully informed about the nature of this research, why it is being done, and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The purpose of this research is to explore the views and experiences of parents whose child is experiencing school non-attendance. Please note that this research is focusing on the issue of school non-attendance prior to the current Covid-19 crisis and subsequent closure of schools. While I would like to gather some insight into what impact the school closures have had on your child's situation, I am primarily gathering information about your experiences of school non-attendance prior to the current crisis. This study is being conducted by XXXXX, Trainee Educational Psychologist, at the University of XXXXX, supervised by Dr XXXX and Dr XXXXX.

You will be invited to complete an online questionnaire, which will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. The questions will relate to:

- Your views of your child's school non-attendance.
- The experiences of the support you have received in relation to your child's non-attendance.
- How you think support could be improved.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time simply by contacting the researcher. Your responses will be confidential and no identifying information such as your email or IP address will be recorded. All information and data collected by the researcher will be kept strictly confidential, and stored in a password protected electronic format, with no identifying information associated with the files. The findings of this research will be published as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis and may be submitted for further publication within an academic journal article. This research study has been approved by the University of XXXX ethics committee and complies with the HCPC and BPS Standards of Ethics.

If you have any questions about this study, the nature of the research, or how the information you provide will be used, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher (kl470@XXXX.ac.uk).

By selecting 'yes' on the initial question below, you indicate and agree that:

You have read the above information

You voluntarily agree to participate

You agree that verbatim quotes can be used (anonymously) in the research write-up

You are at least 18 years of age

Thank you for your participation.

Background information

1. How old is your child?

--

2. What year group is your child currently in?

	Key stage 1 (year 1-2)
	Key stage 2 (year 3-6)
	Key stage 3 (year 7-9)
	Key stage 4 (year 10-11)
	Other (please specify)

3. Does your child have an additional need?

Yes	No
-----	----

b) If so, what category does it fall into?

Autism	
ADHD	
Anxiety	

Depression	
Literacy difficulty	
Medical condition	
Physical disability	
Other	

4. At what school stage did your child begin to show signs of difficulties in attending school?

	Nursery or Primary School key stage 1 (year 1-2)
	Primary School key stage 2 (year 3-6)
	Secondary School key stage 3 (year 7-9)
	Secondary School key stage 4 (year 10-11)
	Other (please specify)

5. How long has your child experienced difficulties in attending school?

	Less than 3 months
	3-6 months
	6 months – 1 year
	1 – 2 years
	Over 2 years
	Other (please specify)

Support for school non-attendance

The questions in this section focus on the support you have received in relation to your child's school non-attendance.

6. What support was provided to you by school staff when your child **first** started experiencing difficulties attending school?

--

7. Do you have regular contact with your child's school regarding their attendance?

Yes	No	Not sure

8. Do you have a key person at school you can talk to about your child's attendance?

Yes	No	Not sure

9. What arrangements are in place at present to support your child's school attendance?

--

10. To what extent do you feel the support from **school staff** has been helpful?

1 (not at all)	2 (A lot)	3 (To some extent)	4 (A little)	5 (A great deal)

11. Please explain why you have given this rating:

--

12. Have you received any involvement from organisations outside of the school?

Yes	No

13. Please describe the support you have received:

--

14. To what extent do you feel that the support you have received from other agencies/professionals has been helpful?

1 (not at all)	2 (A lot)	3 (To some extent)	4 (A little)	5 (A great deal)

15. Please explain why you think this:

--

16. Do you think support for you and your child could be improved in relation to school attendance?

Yes	No	Not sure

Lissack, K., & Boyle, C. (2022). Parent/carers views on support for children's school non-attendance: 'How can they support you when they are the ones who report you?' *Review of Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3372>

--	--	--

17. If yes, how do you think support for your child from school staff could be improved?

--

18. With regards to Covid-19 and school closures, how do you feel your child has been affected with regards to their education and/or mental health?

--

19. What impact, if any, do you think the Covid-19 crisis will have on your child's return to school when schools re-open?

--

20. Finally, are there any other comments you would like to make relating to your child's school non-attendance?

--