

Additional information from the National Association of Head Teachers following the meeting on 16 June 2022

Learner absence snap poll

On 9th June 2022 NAHT Cymru asked members to respond to a survey on levels of learner absence in schools.

By type, 59% of respondents were from LA maintained schools, 1% from Special schools, 23% from community schools and 11% from voluntary aided schools.

By phase, 91% of respondents were from primary schools and 6% were from secondary schools.

Key points:

- The top three reasons for persistent absenteeism were reported as illness (47%), mental health concerns (35%) and anxiety about coming to school because of coronavirus (24%)
- Non-covid related absenteeism had increased for a majority of respondents (60%)
- An increase in absenteeism has increased school leader workload, with 85% of respondents reporting this (61% increased, 24% greatly increased)
- The main reasons for an increase in workload as a result of pupil absence were a lack of external support (61%) and lack of capacity (54%)
- Persistent absenteeism was reported as more prevalent among students eligible for free school meals (48%)
- The majority of respondents had not experienced an increase in either levels of pupil deregistration or elective home education. However, 22% had experienced higher levels of pupil deregistration and 29% had experienced higher levels of elective home education.

Breakdown of questions:

Q1: Which of the following, if any, are the main reasons for persistent absenteeism in your school?

- Nearly half, 47%, of respondents said illness
- 35% of respondents said Mental health concerns
- 24% of respondents said anxiety about coming to school because of coronavirus
- 13% said pupil concern about being in school due to living with someone who is at greater risk from coronavirus
- 7% said family bereavement
- 4% said long covid
- 1% said exam pressure
- 39% of respondents said 'other' issues were causing persistent absenteeism in their schools. Happy to provide a list of responses.
 - Themes covered in these responses include (not verbatim answers):
 - Children and parents have got out of the habit of going in to school, with the assumption that children can learn from home
 - Children do not want to come back to school after having been accustomed to learning at home.
 - The pandemic has exacerbated poor attendance of those with previously poor attendance

- Parents booking family holidays either since lockdown or going on holidays that were booked pre-lockdown

Q2: To what extent, if any, has non-covid related absenteeism for pupils changed in your school since the covid-19 pandemic?

- The majority of respondents said that non-covid related absenteeism had either increased, or greatly increased. 60% of respondents said that it had increased, 22% said that it had greatly increased.
- 16% said that it had neither increased nor decreased
- Just 2% of respondents said that non-covid related absenteeism had decreased (0.7%) or greatly decreased (1.4%)

Q3: Why do you think non-covid related absenteeism has increased in your school since the covid-19 pandemic?

- 97 respondents answered this question, I can give a full list of responses on request
- Some common answers included::
 - Parents being used to children being at home, less worry about keeping them off school
 - The lockdowns have left a legacy of understanding in parents that a child can just be set online work
 - No repercussions for absence
 - Holiday requests have increased
 - Absence for minor illnesses has increased
 - Mental health issues, increased anxiety and increased behaviours associated with ASD

Q4: [those who reported that absenteeism has increased] What impact, if any, has increased pupil absence in your school had on your workload?

- 85% of respondents said that their workload had either increased (61%) or greatly increased (24%)
- 15% of respondents said that their workload had neither increased nor decreased
- No respondents said that their workload had decreased

Q5: Which, if any, are the main reasons for an increased workload in relation to pupil absence?

- 61% of respondents said lack of external support (e.g. from social and health services)
- 54% of respondents said lack of capacity
- 43% said there is nobody else to help tackle this issue
- 41% said lack of resources
- 17% of respondents gave 'other' reasons for an increase in workload, available on request.

Q6: Please add any further comments below:

- Comments listed on Excel sheet. A lot of comments focused on the impact of coronavirus lockdowns and school closures on parents and pupil attitudes to school

Q7: Are levels of persistent absenteeism more prevalent in your school among any of the following groups of pupils?

- 48% of respondents said that persistent absenteeism was more prevalent among pupils eligible for free school meals
- 43% said that there are no groups of pupils where persistent absenteeism is more prevalent
- 23% said pupils with additional learning needs
- 7% said Pupils with English as an additional language

Q8: Compared to before the pandemic, what change, if any, has your school experienced in levels of pupil de-registration?

- The majority of respondents (69%) had not experienced any change in the levels of pupil de-registration
- 22% of respondents had experienced higher levels of pupil de-registration. This was 19% higher and 3% much higher.
- No respondents had experienced lower levels of pupil-de-registration, the remaining 8% were unsure

Q9: Compared to before the pandemic, what change, if any, has your school experienced in levels of elective home education?

- 69% had not experienced any change in rates of elective home education
- 29% of pupils had experienced higher levels of elective home education. This was 26.45% higher and 2.48% much higher.
- No respondents had experienced lower levels of elective home education, the remaining 2% were unsure.