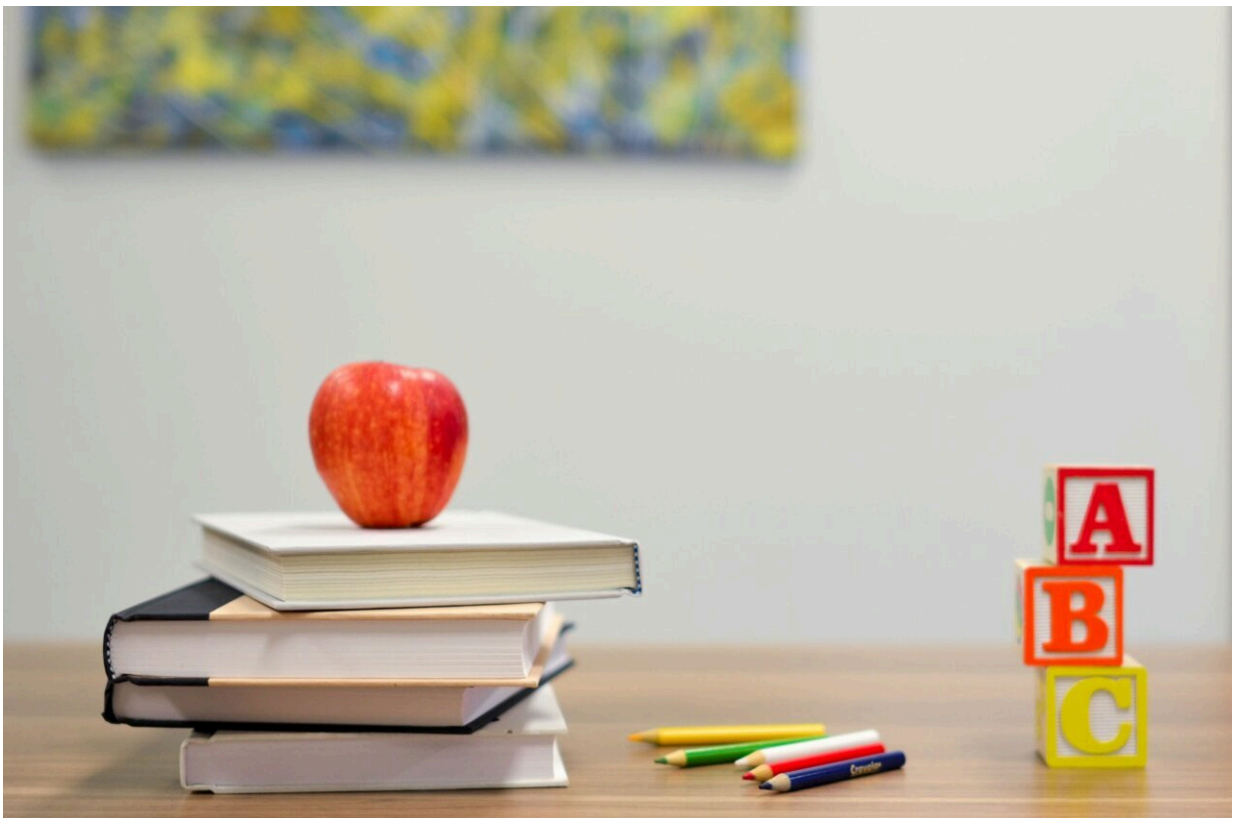


Lack of support to tackle school non-attendance leads parents to lose faith in the education system, study shows

October 27 2022



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Some parents have "lost all faith" in the education system because of a lack of support to tackle children's non-attendance from teachers and

local authorities, a new study warns.

Experts have called for policies from councils and government to be reformed to take account of the underlying causes when pupils miss lessons, rather than automatically adopting a punitive approach. Parents said the threat or use of prosecution had a negative impact on the situation and children's mental health.

The study says support for non-attendance needs to be tailored to the individual child because of the complex and individualized nature of the problem.

Parents and caregivers said a lack of help left them with no other choice but to de-register their child from the school; 7 percent of parent/caregivers reported that their child was no longer on the school roll.

Parent/caregivers also reported feeling blamed for their child's non-attendance and that staff believed their child was "choosing" not to attend. They said there was no appropriate support because poor parenting was viewed as the cause and the problem was misunderstood.

Those who reported limited communication with school said this led to their child feeling disconnected from school life, which further prevented their full return.

Of a total of 289 [parents](#) and caregivers were surveyed who had a child or children who had experienced difficulties attending school:

- 56 percent of participants reported that their child's difficulties began during key stage three at [secondary school](#), and 33 percent of parents/caregivers reported it started during [primary school](#).
- 64 percent of participants reported that their child had been

diagnosed with an additional need. Half of the participants had children with autism and half said their child had anxiety.

- 70 percent of participants said they had regular contact with school.
- A total of 73 of participants reported being in contact with a key person, and 22 percent reported they were not.
- A third of parents/caregivers believed that support from school staff was "not at all" helpful.
- 67 percent of participants believed that support had been helpful in some way with responses ranging from "a little" (23 percent), to "to some extent" (21 percent), to "a lot" (13 percent) to "a great deal" (10 percent).
- Many parents/caregivers reported a lack of appropriate support to meet their child's needs, with 18 percent saying they had received none.

Several parents/caregivers noted that during lockdown there was a dramatic improvement in communication with their school. A total of 76 percent of participants reported that they believed support from schools could be improved.

The research, by Kerrie Lissack, from the University of Exeter and Christopher Boyle, now at the University of Adelaide, is published in the journal *Review of Education*.

Dr. Lissack said, "Supporting children who experience attendance difficulties will continue to challenge all those involved because of the complex nature of the problem. By considering the complexities within a holistic, ecological perspective that places the child at the center of all endeavors and prioritizes positive relationships, practitioners are likely to better understand the problem and [support](#) families through a potentially very difficult and challenging situation.

"Support from [school staff](#) needs to be consistent and predictable. Positive relationships and communication between home and [school](#) are significant. Parents/caregivers want to feel listened to and not blamed during periods of non-attendance, as opposed to the 'out of sight, out of mind' narrative that some parent/caregivers reported. Schools should use compassionate and empathetic language when interacting with children and changing the way they label non-attendance."

More information: Kerrie Lissack et al, 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). [DOI: 10.1002/rev3.3372](#)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Lack of support to tackle school non-attendance leads parents to lose faith in the education system, study shows (2022, October 27) retrieved 24 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-10-lack-tackle-school-non-attendance-parents.html>

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