

Isolation, suspension and permanent exclusion; non-attendance and behaviour issues

Pupil Wellbeing Survey

2026

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Introduction

Experiencing a period of permanent exclusion from an education setting, be that a suspension or a permanent exclusion, or experiencing a period of exclusion from their mainstream lessons through an internal isolation can have a significant impact on a student.

School Isolation (Internal Exclusion or Removal)
Definition: A student stays on school grounds but is taken out of their regular classroom.
Setting: The child works in a separate, supervised room, often in individual booths or silent study areas.
Goal: To stop ongoing classroom disruption while letting the student keep doing schoolwork.
Suspension (Fixed-Term Exclusion)
Definition: A student is temporarily not allowed to attend school for a set number of days.
Duration: Can last from a small part of a day (like lunchtimes) up to 45 school days in one academic year.
Goal: The student must stay home (or is placed in alternative provision) and is expected to return to the school once the time ends.
Exclusion (Permanent Exclusion)
Definition: A student is permanently removed from the school roll.
Action: The child is not allowed to return to that specific school, and the local authority must find a new educational placement.
Goal: Used only as a last resort for very serious or persistent rule-breaking where the child's presence harms the safety or learning of others.

Students may also miss out on education due to general absence; this may be for accepted reasons such as illness and are therefore marked as 'authorised', however absence can also be due to un-authorised reasons such as un-authorised holidays and truancy. The effect of absence whether authorised or un-authorised can also have a significant impact on a student's education and development.

The effects of missing out on education (whether due to general absence; an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion) on a student's life can cover many areas, from health to career and education opportunities. Isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion can also cause low self-esteem and social isolation. In all phases of education; general absence; isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion can negatively impact on achievement and attainment, and also damage or limit future prospects in general[1]. Isolation, suspension, or permanent exclusion may lead to increased involvement risk of exploitation and/or NEET. These outcomes can have significant consequences for both individuals and society as a whole.

The Department for Education (DfE) reports statistics on the number of students receiving a suspension or permanent exclusion, the Pupil Wellbeing Survey asks students if they have received an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion and their experiences of the process. Analysis of the survey results shows that outcomes for students, regardless of which behaviour sanction experienced - isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion; are almost always similar and as such for some outcome analysis all students who have received an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion are grouped together for the purposes of this report[2]. Where relevant these are given as separate results.

The DfE also reports on the proportion of students with persistent absenteeism (when more than 10% or more of possible sessions are missed) and severe absenteeism (when more than 50% or more of possible sessions).

The Pupil Wellbeing Survey

The Pupil Wellbeing Survey (PWS) and Online Pupil Survey™ (OPS) is a biennial survey that has been undertaken with Gloucestershire school children since 2006. Students participate in Years 4, 5 and 6 in primary schools; Years 8 and 10 in secondary schools; and Years 12 and 13 in post-16 settings such as sixth forms and colleges. A large proportion of mainstream, special and independent schools, colleges and educational establishments take part, representing approximately 70.0% of students in participating year groups in 2026. The PWS asks a wide variety of questions about student's characteristics, behaviours and lived experience that could have an impact on their overall wellbeing. The 2026 PWS was undertaken between January and April 2026.

Limitations and caveats of the survey

Not all children and young people who are resident in Gloucestershire attend educational establishments in the county and similarly not all students attending educational establishments in Gloucestershire are residents in the county. It is

[1] https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Early-adult-outcomes-for-suspended-pupils-FINAL.pdf

[2] We recognise though that that the DfE are very clear that an internal isolation is not an exclusion

therefore important to remember this analysis is based on the student population who responded to the survey, not the resident population.

Gloucestershire is a grammar authority and has a number of notable independent schools, and several mainstream schools very close to the county's boundary; these all attract students from out of county. This results in the school/college population (particularly at secondary phase) having slightly different characteristics, especially ethnicity, to the resident young people's population. 12.3% of Gloucestershire's resident population (2021 Census) were estimated to be from diverse ethnic communities; however, 23.1% of Gloucestershire's student population[3] were from diverse ethnic communities in January 2026 and 23.4% of the PWS cohort were students from diverse ethnic communities in the 2026 survey.

Although a large proportion of the county's educational establishments took part in the survey, some only had low numbers of students completing the survey; in contrast, others had high numbers. Although this doesn't impact the overall county analysis, as demographics are represented as expected at this geography, analysis by district and education phase might only have certain demographic groups represented due to low student take-up (for example, low numbers completing the survey in Tewkesbury at post-16 phase). Where post-16 provision is situated also impacts the survey, as older students travel further to access post-16 provision.



Analysis of deprivation

Educational settings have been categorised into statistical neighbour groups which cluster settings with students of a similar socio-economic profile within the same type of setting (a similar level of deprivation, affluence or personal/family characteristics).

We use Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to determine the relative deprivation of students. The IMD is based on the home postcode of students (collected in the School Census). This is aggregated to give an overall IMD score for the setting, reflecting the deprivation levels experienced by students. The settings are then split into quintiles based on their scores: quintile 1 is the most deprived and quintile 5 is the least deprived in Gloucestershire.

In addition:

- Grammar/selective schools are compared to other grammar/selective schools in their phase without reference to the IMD.
- Independent schools are compared to other independent schools in their phase without reference to the IMD.
- Post-16 only/Further Education (FE) colleges are compared to all other post-16 only colleges without reference to the IMD.
- Special schools are compared to all other schools of this type in the same phase without reference to the IMD.
- Vocational and alternative settings/schools are compared to other settings/schools in the same phase without reference to IMD.



[3] As recorded in the January 2026 Pupil Census

Isolation, Suspension and Permanent exclusions

Key takeaways:

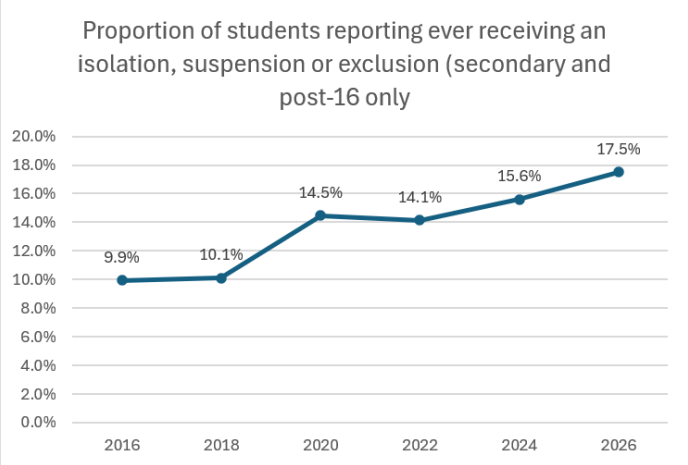
- Experiences of behavioural sanctions have become more common over recent years, with the increase largely driven by greater use of internal isolation measures.
- Despite this trend, most students have never experienced a formal behavioural sanction during their time in education.
- Male students were significantly more likely than female students to report having received a behavioural sanction.
- The likelihood of receiving a behavioural sanction was higher among students living in more deprived communities.
- Students from diverse ethnic backgrounds were significantly more likely to report having experienced a behavioural sanction.
- Students who had experienced a behavioural sanction were disproportionately likely to come from vulnerable groups and were more likely to report adverse outcomes, including risky and health-harming behaviours, poorer educational engagement, involvement with the police, lower wellbeing, and challenging home circumstances.
- Students who had experienced a behavioural sanction were more likely to feel listened to than in 2024; however, many still felt they had little said in the process and most reported that nothing changed afterwards.
- Students who had experienced a behavioural sanction were significantly less likely to have a trusted adult to go to for help significantly more likely to report Low Mental Wellbeing (LMW)

In 2026 questions about isolation, suspension and permanent exclusion were extended to include primary students where previously these were only asked to secondary and post-16 students. This was following a national and local increase in suspension or permanent exclusion for primary students.

Published data for the academic year 2024/25 shows overall in Gloucestershire schools, 3.2% of students received a suspension in that year and 0.1% of students received a permanent exclusion, however, data regarding internal isolations are not published. In the PWS students are asked if they have ***ever*** had an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion. Most findings around lived experience and wellbeing are similar for students following an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion. However, where there are differences, these have been highlighted in the report.

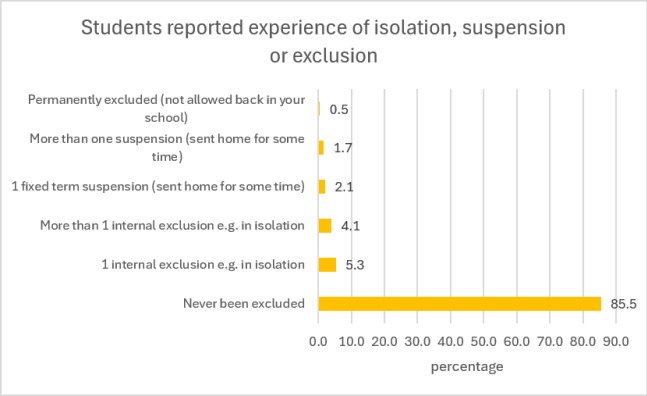
Prevalence

In 2026 12.3% of all students and 17.8% of secondary and post-16 students reported ever having at least one isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion, this continues the upwards trend since 2018.



The increase between 2024 and 2026 appears to be attributable to more students reporting an internal isolation.

Over 8 in 10 students reported they had never experienced an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion.



The way the question is asked in the survey allows students to check multiple boxes to indicate all the behaviour sanctions they have received, some students may have received all three sanctions (isolation, suspension and permanent exclusion) and will therefore check all three boxes. By separating students into the most serious reported sanction, it shows 8.0% of all students had received no higher than a period of isolation in their education setting, 3.5% had received no higher than a suspension and 0.5% had experienced a permanent exclusion. Reported levels of suspension and permanent exclusion are similar to the nationally published data.

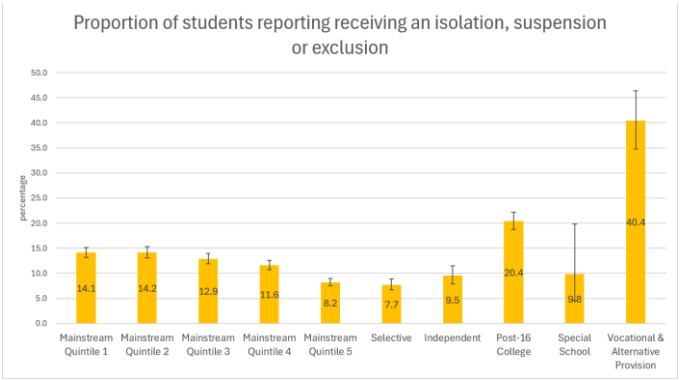
Where students are categorised into groups in subsequent analysis grouping reflects the most serious reported sanction, i.e. the isolation group reflects they have only experienced an internal isolation and not reported experiencing a suspension or permanent exclusion.

Where students said they had received an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion two-thirds (66.3%) had had an internal isolation, over a quarter had a suspension (29.5%) and just under 1 in 20 (4.2%) reported having a permanent exclusion.

Who gets an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion?

Male students (15.1%) were overall significantly more likely to report receiving an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion than female students (7.9%). They were also almost twice as likely to report receiving an isolation (9.8% vs. 5.4%), a suspension (4.5% vs. 2.2%) and reporting receiving a permanent exclusion (0.7% vs. 0.3%).

Experience of an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion appears to be linked to deprivation. In mainstream settings isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion appears to reduce as deprivation decreases with students in quintile 5 (least deprived) schools and selective schools having the lowest reported level of isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion.



Higher rates of isolation, suspension, and permanent exclusion were reported among students in vocational and alternative provision settings, which aligns with the needs and circumstances of the cohorts these settings typically support. Although alternative provision settings also support students with attendance issues to return to mainstream settings.

In mainstream settings students in quintile 1 (most deprived) were the most likely to report they have had an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion. Whilst this pattern was also observed in suspensions, there was a similar proportion of students reporting experiencing an isolation or a permanent exclusion across the first 4 quintiles of deprivation. This suggests suspension is more likely to be used in settings with higher levels of student deprivation as a behaviour sanction.

When looking at isolation, suspension and permanent exclusion by age, experience of isolation and suspensions rises steeply between age 11 and 12. In contrast experience of permanent exclusion only rises significantly at age 16, this could indicate a countywide reduction in permanent exclusions in recent years.

In official statistics permanent exclusion and suspension rates are highest for students aged 13 and 14. There is a steep rise between ages 11 and 12 due to permanent exclusion and suspensions being more common in secondary schools, however, individual setting's policies will also play a part.

Students from diverse ethnic communities were significantly more likely to report experiencing an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion, however when these are separated into type of

sanction it appears this is driven by level of suspensions in diverse ethnic communities. Mixed ethnicity students and those from Other white backgrounds were significantly more likely to report experiencing isolation or suspensions than their white British peers. There was no significant difference by ethnic background in reported permanent exclusion, although permanent exclusions were highest in Other white and Black students.

Influencing factors and consequences of isolation, suspension and permanent exclusion

The likelihood of students from the following groups reported receiving an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion was twice their less vulnerable peers:

- Those bullied regularly (*OR 2.1*)
- Those known to social care (*OR 2.3*)
- Those with a disability (*OR 2.2*)
- Those receiving support for special educational needs (*OR 2.3*)
- Those eligible for FSM (*OR 2.1*)
- Those with low mental wellbeing[4] (*OR 2.0*)
- Those experiencing +4 ACEs (*OR 2.2*)

Compared to students with no isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion history students who said they had received an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion were:

More likely to be at risk of exploitation or is being exploited

- more likely to be in trouble with the police (*OR 9.7*)
- more likely to have early sexual debut (under 16 yrs) (*OR 3.0*)
- more likely to self-harm (*OR 2.0*)
- more likely to engage in violent behaviour (*OR 4.5*)

More likely to engage in health harming behaviours

- more likely to drink alcohol regularly (*OR 4.0*)
- more likely to smoke cigarettes regularly (*OR 6.7*)
- more likely to use drugs (*OR 3.3*)

More likely to disengage from education

- more likely to have frequent school absence (authorised or unauthorised) (*OR 2.2*)
- more likely to report **not** achieving (*OR 3.1*)

More likely to experience a complex home life

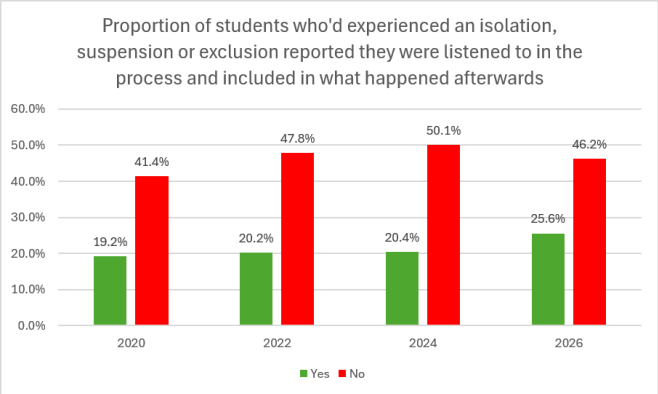
- more likely to feel unsafe at home (*OR 3.0*)
- more likely to have witnessed domestic abuse (*OR 2.4*)
- more likely to report they often went without food at home (*OR 2.2*)
- more likely to report 4+ ACEs (*OR 2.2*)
- more likely to report excessive screentime (*OR 2.5*)



Experience of the process of behaviour sanctions

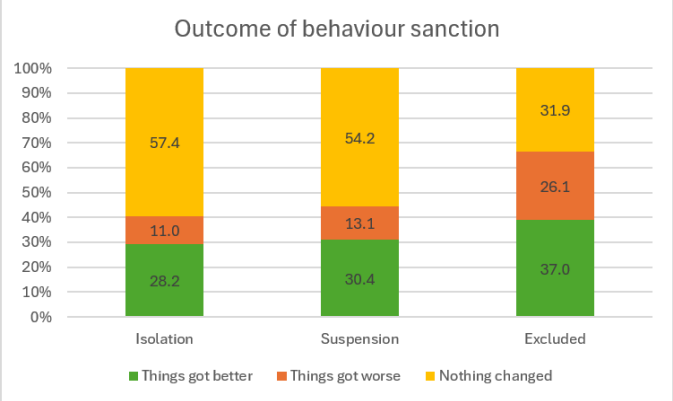
Just under half (46.2%) of students who said they had received an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion said they were ***not*** listened to in the process and did not have a say in what happened afterwards. This was decrease on the previous survey year after a period of significant increase between 2020 and 2024.

[4] Mental wellbeing is measured in the survey using the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/

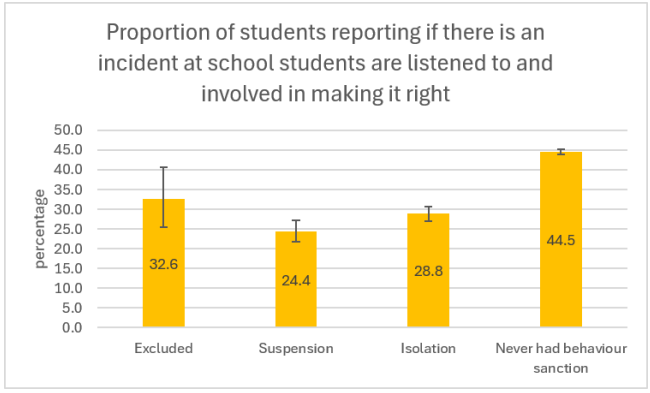


Students who said they had received a permanent exclusion were the least likely to say they felt listened to in the process (20.0%), however, it was not significantly lower than the proportion of students who had experienced isolation (26.5%) or suspension (24.3%) saying they felt listened to in the process.

55.5% of all students who said they had received an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion said that the situation didn't change either for the better or for the worse after their isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion. 1 in 4 (26.1%) of students who received a permanent exclusion said afterwards things got worse, down from 1 in 3 in 2024.

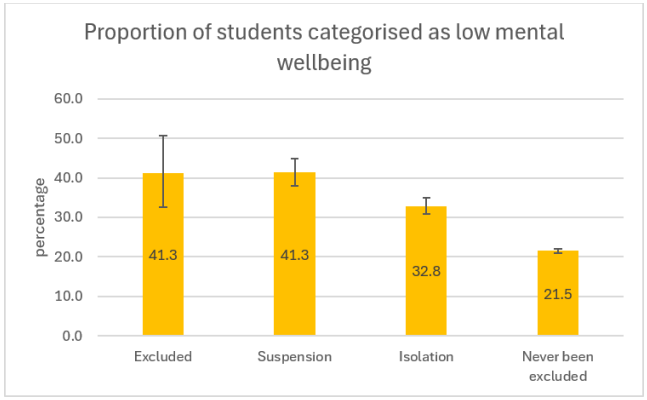


1 in 3 students who said that had received an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion said if there is an incident or issue at school students weren't listened to or involved in making it right compared to 1 in 5 students who said they had no isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion history. There was no significant difference between those who received an isolation (33.9%), suspension (37.6%) or permanent exclusion (28.4%).



When students said they had received an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion, they were significantly less likely to have a trusted adult to go to for help if they were worried than those who had no isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion history (86.0% vs. 93.5%). There was no significant difference between those who said they had received an isolation (86.9%), suspension (84.5%) or permanent exclusion (82.1%).

Students who said they had an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion were significantly more likely to report Low Mental Wellbeing (LMW) than those who said they had no isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion (35.6% vs. 21.5%). There was no significant difference between those who said they had received a suspension (41.3%) or permanent exclusion (41.3%).



1 in 4 students who reported a history of isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion felt they had been listened to in the process, these students were less likely to report LMW (20.7%) than those who did not feel listened to (44.9%).

If students felt things got worse after an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion, they were significantly more likely to report LMW (52.8%) than those who felt things got better (20.0%).



Absence from educational setting

Key takeaways:

- Persistent absence has decreased substantially since 2024, with fewer students reporting missing 10% or more of school sessions in the previous term, although around one in five students still met the threshold for persistent absence.
- Mental health is a key driver of persistent absence, particularly among students missing the largest amounts of education.
- Attendance inequalities have re-emerged following the pandemic, with students in disadvantaged communities experiencing higher levels of absence.
- Students with disabilities, neurodivergence, experiences of bullying, domestic abuse, and multiple ACEs were more likely to report persistent absence.
- Behavioural difficulties continue to be associated with deprivation and poorer wellbeing, although reports of being frequently in trouble or aggressive have declined over time.
- More students are reporting a need for support with anger management, suggesting ongoing demand for emotional wellbeing and behaviour support.

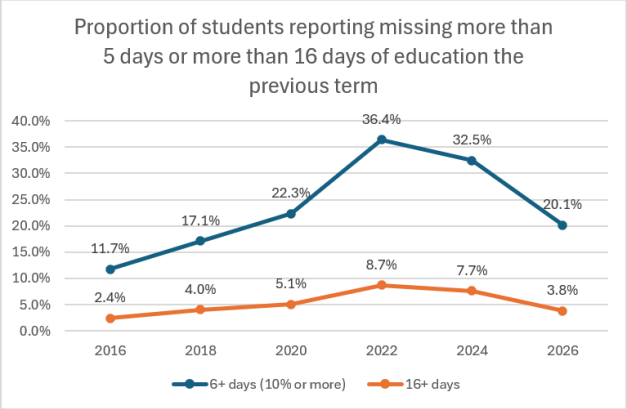
The findings reinforce the strong links between attendance, behaviour, wellbeing, and wider life circumstances, highlighting the importance of early support for vulnerable students.

Students were asked how many school days (each school day includes 2 sessions) they had missed in the previous term (in the 2026 survey this would have been Autumn term 2025). Students may miss education due to both authorised and un-authorised reasons.

Persistent absence is a measure used by the Department of Education to track when a student's overall absence equates to 10% or more of their possible sessions. In the survey it isn't possible to determine if student reported absence is authorised or unauthorised and so a comparison to nationally published figures isn't appropriate. The most recent nationally published data shows 17.2% of Gloucestershire students were persistently absent in 2024/25[5].

In the 2026 survey just under 1 in 5 students (20.1%) reported being absent from education for 10% or more of sessions (up to 5 days in this instance) in the previous term (authorised and unauthorised), compared to 1 in 3 students (32.5%) in the 2024 survey (Autumn term 2023).

3.8% of students reported missing more than 16 days of education in the previous term (equates to missing 25% or more of education) this was a decrease on the 2024 figure (7.7%).



Who misses more days of education?

There was no difference in the proportion of students from diverse ethnic communities reporting being absent from education for 10% or more of sessions compared to their white British peers, however students from a number of ethnic communities were significantly more likely to report being absent for more than 5 days.

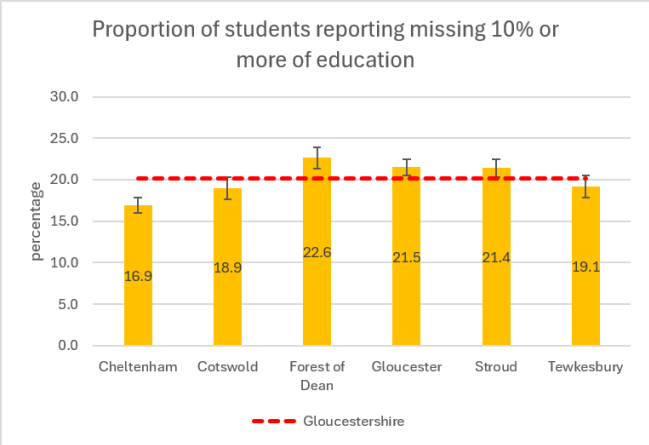
Ethnic community	% missing 5+ days
White British	**19.9**
Any other ethnic background	21.0
Any other mixed background	22.5
White eastern European	24.4
Mixed - White and Black African	25.3
Other White background	25.4
White Irish	25.6
Pakistani	26.7
Bangladeshi	27.9
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	29.6
Black Caribbean	35.1
Gypsy or Roma	36.2
Traveller of Irish heritage	36.6

Conversely students from *Black African (8.5%)* backgrounds were significantly less likely to report being absent from education for 10% or more of sessions and those from Any other Asian background (17.6%), Any other black background (14.3%) and Indian background (17.7%) were also less likely but not significantly.

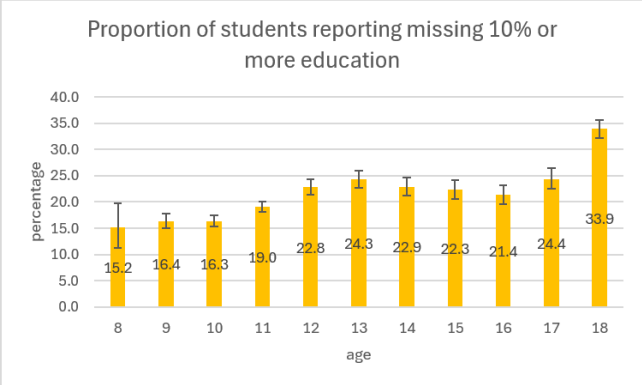


Reported absence from education for 10% or more of sessions was highest in schools within Forest of Dean, Gloucester and Stroud districts and lowest in Cheltenham schools. This was a similar trend to 2024.

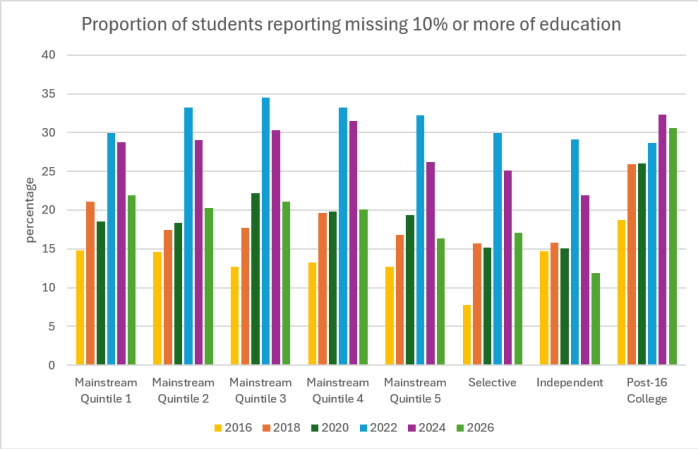
[5] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/055da0c3-8db5-43ff-11bc-08ded6b7248d



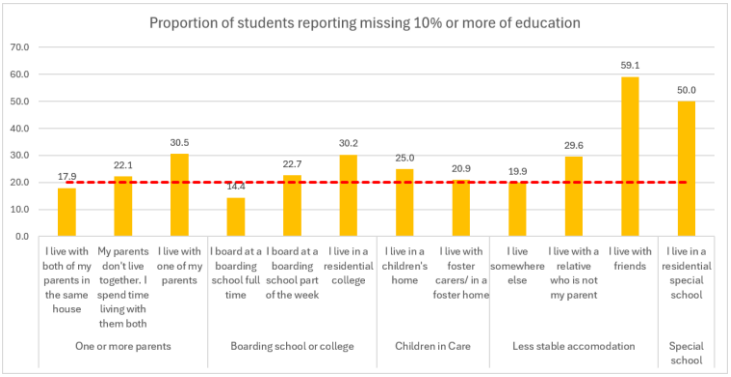
Students reporting being absent from education for 10% or more of sessions appears to increase slightly between primary and secondary phases and was highest at age 18.



In a change to the covid period where there was no significant difference in being absence from education for 10% or more of sessions in different statistical neighbour groups, in 2024 and 2026 reported absence from school for 10% or more of sessions reduced as deprivation did and was significantly lower in quintile 5, selective and independent schools than schools in quintiles 1 to 4. The impact of the pandemic on attendance is stark in the chart below. Students in post-16 only colleges appear to have experienced a slightly different trend to students in other statistical neighbour groups.



Where a student lives appears to have an impact on education attendance. Students who said they lived with friends were the most likely to report missing 10% or more of education (59.1%) followed by those in a residential special school (50.0%). Students living in a single parent household (30.5%), in residential college (30.2%) or with a relative other than parents (29.6%) were also significantly more likely to report missing 10% or more of education than those living with both their parents (17.9%).

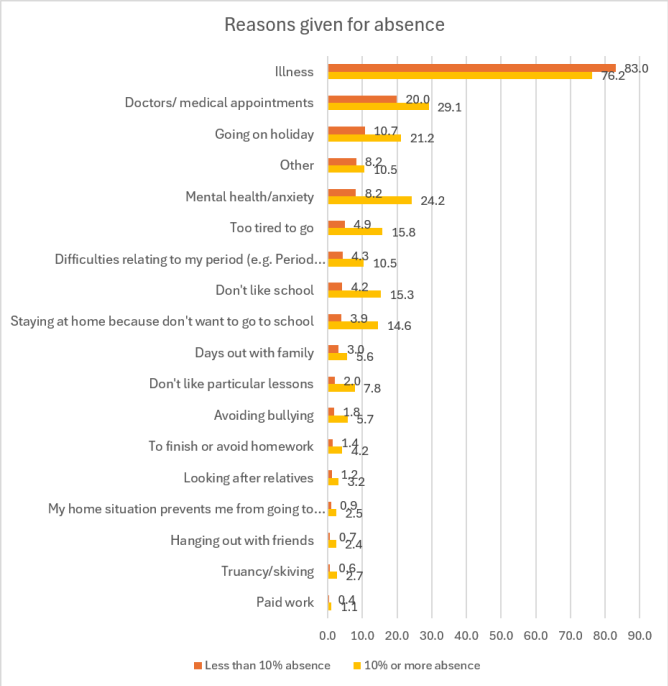


Students experiencing 4+ ACEs were significantly more likely to report missing 10% or more of education (*OR 2.2*). Missing 10% or more of education was also more likely in students with a disability (*OR 1.9*), neurodivergent students (*OR 1.9*), bullied students (*OR 1.8*) and students eligible for FSM (*OR 1.8*)

Almost half of those who said they had witnessed domestic abuse (44.6%) also reported missing 10% or more of education, compared to 1 in 5 of those who had never witnessed domestic abuse (21.7%).

Why students say they miss education

When asked why they had missed education, illness was the most cited reason (81.1% in 2026) for all students, missing education due to illness would be an authorised absence. This was followed by Doctor's/medical appointment, which was cited by 1 in 5 students (22.5%) who had missed any days of education, again this would be an authorised absence. 1 in 7 students reported having missed education due to a holiday.



Students who reported missing 10% or more of education had the same top two reasons for missing education as those with less than 10% absence; illness (76.2%), and Doctor's/medical appointment (29.1%), however the third most common reason given was mental health/anxiety (24.2%).

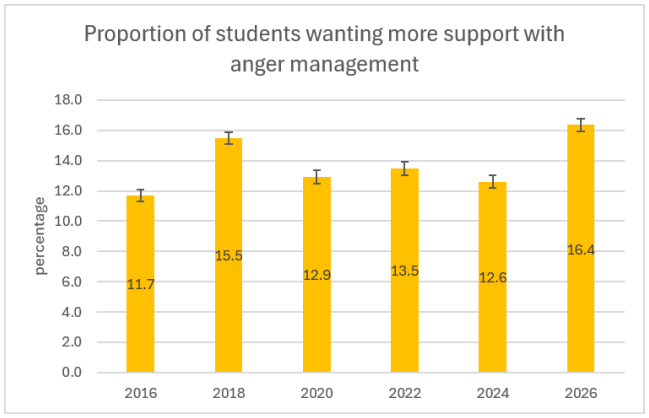
More than 1 in 3 students (37.3%) who said they had missed more than 16 days/25% of education the previous term said they had missed education due to mental health/anxiety. Students identifying as neurodivergent were 3 times as likely to say they missed any education due to mental health/anxiety than neurotypical students.

Students who reported being absent from school for 10% or more of sessions were 3 times more likely than those who had missed less than 5 days in the previous term to say they missed school due to *Too tired to go* and twice as likely to say they missed school due to *Difficulties relating to my period (e.g. Period symptoms, such as bleeding abdominal cramps and headaches, lack of period/sanitary product)*.

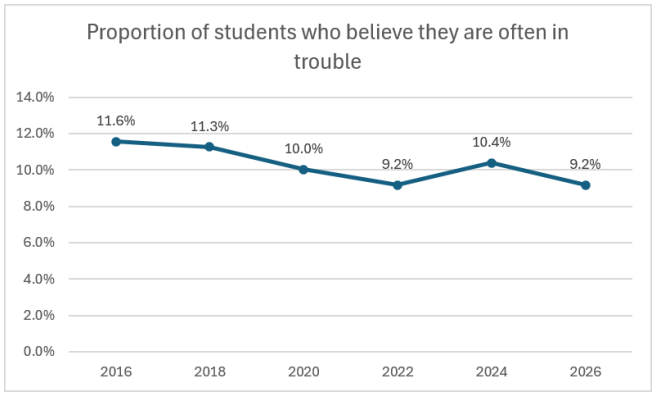
Behaviour regulation issues



The proportion of students reporting they would like more support in *Anger management* in 2026 (16.4%) has increased since 2024 (12.6%). Students in the primary phase are the most likely to report wanting more support about *Anger management*.



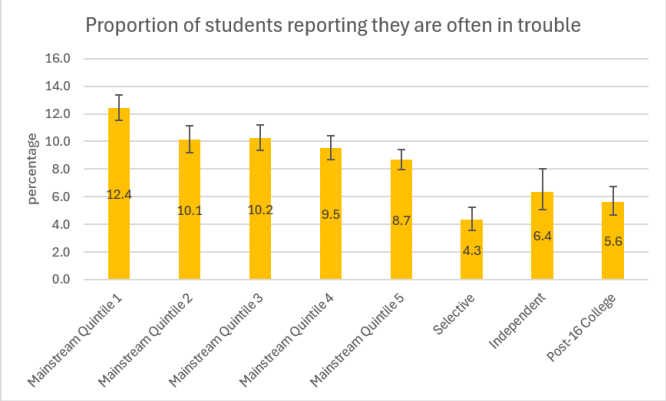
The proportion of students reporting they are *often in trouble* has been reducing slightly since 2016.



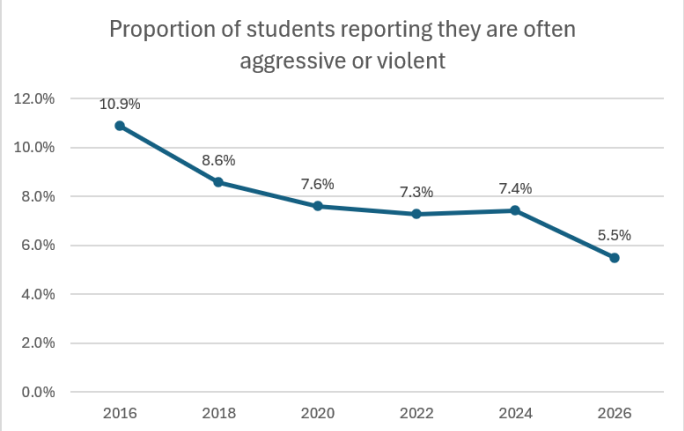
Students in Year 8 are the most likely to report often being in trouble. Students with LMW were significantly more likely to report often being in trouble than those with A/HMW. Students from diverse ethnic communities were broadly not significantly more likely to report often being in trouble than white British students; however, students from mixed-ethnicity and Other white

backgrounds were significantly more likely to report often being in trouble.

The chart below shows mainstream settings with higher numbers of students living in quintile 1 neighbourhoods were the most likely to report often being in trouble (12.4%) and the proportion reduces as deprivation decreases, although the type of education setting may also be a factor. Those in selective schools (4.3%) and post-16 colleges were the least likely (5.6%) to report often being in trouble.

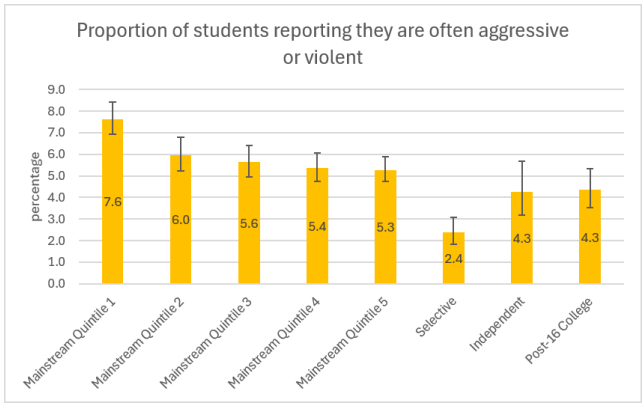


The proportion of students reporting they are *often aggressive or violent* has also been reducing since the question was first asked in 2016 from 10.9% to 5.5% in 2026.



This reduction is mainly influenced by a reduction in older students reporting they are *often aggressive or violent*.

Again, being *often aggressive or violent* appears to be linked to deprivation with the highest levels in mainstream schools in IMD quintile 1 and the lowest levels in students at selective schools.



Students with LMW were twice as likely to report being *often aggressive or violent* than those with A/HMW.

Conclusion

Overall, the 2026 Pupil Wellbeing Survey shows that missing out on education, whether through absence, isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion, remains closely linked to wider indicators of vulnerability, disadvantage and poorer wellbeing.

Although reported absence has reduced since 2024, 1 in 5 students still reported missing 10% or more of education in the previous term, with higher levels among students experiencing deprivation, complex home circumstances, disability, neurodivergence, bullying, ACEs and low mental wellbeing.

Similarly, students who had experienced an isolation, suspension or permanent exclusion were more likely to report a range of poorer outcomes, including experiencing disconnection from education, experiencing health related risk behaviours and reporting low mental wellbeing.

The findings suggest that behaviour and attendance should continue to be understood in the context of students' wider lived experiences.

