

## Written evidence submitted by the Anti-Bullying Alliance (National Children's Bureau)

This submission is provided on behalf of the Anti-Bullying Alliance, which forms part of the National Children's Bureau, and our 52 core members. Please see a full list of our members and more about the work of the Alliance at the end of this submission.

### Summary points:

- Bullying is a significant cause of persistent absence among young people in England.
- There are not sufficient mechanisms in place currently to capture data relating to bullying being a cause of persistent absence.
- Children with SEND, those in receipt of Free School Meals, Looked After Children, young carers, LGBT young people, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, children with mental health issues, mixed race children and those who have immigrated to the UK are more at risk of experiencing bullying and therefore may be more at risk of persistent absence.
- There is evidence that schools with robust and effective whole-school approach and training relating to anti-bullying helps to reduce persistent absence however more research is needed.
- Experiencing bullying should be explored when a child is identified as at risk of being persistently absent from school and action taken to reduce the bullying.
- We believe we should be tough on the causes of persistent absence rather than tough on parents and children to ensure we can get them back into school.

### The factors causing persistent and severe absence

**All evidence indicates that bullying is a significant cause of persistent absence from school.** Children who experience bullying are significantly more likely to experience a range of negative outcomes well into adulthood including experiencing mental health issues, being absent from school and not achieving academic qualifications<sup>1</sup>. It often constitutes a safeguarding concern.

Research by NACEN in 2011<sup>2</sup> showed that at any one time over 16,000 young people aged 11-15 are missing education where the primary reason for them missing school was their experiencing bullying. When looking at pupils missing school where bullying is a contributory reason, but not a primary reason for missing school, the research found over 70,000 children missing education per day.

Since this research in 2011, much other research has supported that bullying remains a significant cause of persistent absence. Our own poll in 2019<sup>3</sup> found that over 1 in 10 children report missing school due to experiencing bullying.

missed school due

Kidscape report that over a third of participants of their ZAP courses for children who have been bullied have said they have to their experiences of bullying. Kidscape's Parent Advice

<sup>1</sup> <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/prevalence-and-impact-bullying/impact-bullying>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/22457/estimating-prevalence-young-people.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/aba-our-work/news-opinion/children-call-change-poll-reveals-they-avoid-school-social-media-and>

Line reports hearing from many parents who are considering moving their child to another school or home educating due to the bullying their children experience.

The Centre for Social Justice in 2016 released a report<sup>4</sup> stating that bullying is a significant issue when looking at reasons for self-exclusion from school.

It is estimated that 12,000 children<sup>5</sup> are moved to different schools due to the bullying they experience – we know that a vast majority of these children will have persistently missed education due to the bullying they experienced before their parents move them to other schools.

Government research from the Omnibus survey 2022<sup>6</sup> shows the report suggested a connection between school absence and bullying: pupils were more likely to report experiences of bullying if they had not attended school every weekday in the last two weeks (28% compared with 19% who did attend every day), and that percentage rose to almost half of pupils who had not attended at all (44%). Additionally, the proportion of pupils that were absent from school due to anxiety or mental health problems was higher among pupils that had been a victim of bullying (32% compared with 16% of pupils that had not been bullied)<sup>7</sup>.

A longitudinal study by the Department for Education in 2014 found that the greater the incidence of bullying, the more likely the young person is to truant. Young people who were bullied frequently (daily) were 3 times more likely to truant than those who had not been bullied.<sup>8</sup>

Persistent school absence and experiencing bullying

### **Anonymised case study examples – from Kidscape’s Parent Helpline**

#### **Case study 1:**

[Child Name] is refusing to go to school because she is getting bullied. She is 15 years old. She has severe anxiety due to her being bullied. Mum is scared of getting a fine and going to prison. She wants to protect her daughter. She has thought about home schooling but doesn’t feel ‘she has the intelligence for it’. She says she has had countless conversations with the school but now it has reached a point where her daughter won’t go to school at all.

#### **Case study 2:**

[Child Name] started year 7 in September 2021 and has had bullying during this time which has not been resolved. She had her head banged so hard against a wall her head hurt for many days. The same girl who keeps following her, hit her so hard on the head with a crutch she caused a big lump on her head and I was advised by the school to take my daughter to A and E. Previously [Child Name] was told by another girl she would get a knife to her. This was reported to the school by [Child Name] and her parent but parent received no response. [Child Name] also experienced verbal bullying and taunts. Mum says school are doing nothing to stop the bullying. Mum is worried to send [Child Name] to school in case it happens again or worse. Mum wanted to know if she is within her rights to keep her daughter at home and how she can apply to another school.

### **Persistent absence among different groups of pupils**

Little evidence exists relating to who is absent due to their experiences of bullying, the attendance register does not include bullying as a reason for school absence in spite of it being a significant cause of school absence.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Bullying-RT-Report-1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6894903/School-bullying-crisis-12-000-parents-apply-children-different-institution.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/parent-pupil-and-learner-panel-omnibus-surveys-for-2021-to-2022>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/parent-pupil-and-learner-panel-omnibus-surveys-for-2021-to-2022>

<sup>8</sup> DfE, *Longitudinal study of young people in England: cohort 2, wave 1 (2014)*

We do know however that, there are certain groups that are significantly more likely to be bullied than others. They include:

- Children with SEND<sup>9</sup>
- Care experienced young people<sup>10</sup>
- Young carers<sup>11</sup>
- Children in receipt of Free School Meals<sup>12</sup>
- Those who are or are perceived to be LGBT<sup>13</sup>
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children<sup>14</sup>
- Children with mental health issues<sup>15</sup>
- Mixed race children<sup>16</sup>
- Children who are immigrants or refugees to the UK<sup>17</sup>

It is possible to deduce as a result that these groups are more at risk of persistent absence, and we know that this is the case for many of these groups. Therefore, addressing school bullying as a reason for persistent absence will help those most at risk groups above.

Ofsted's recent findings<sup>18</sup> showed that schools that saw improvements in school attendance looked at causes of absence, including that of experiencing bullying.

ABA's core members agree a series of policy recommendations<sup>19</sup> each year. Absence data<sup>20</sup> collected termly contains a significant number of 'unauthorised other rate' –higher than any other category outside of illness. ABA believes that a large number of these 'unauthorised other rate' will be due to experiencing bullying, but the government doesn't collect that data. Therefore, **ABA's recommendation is that school absence records should record bullying as a reason for children being absent from school.**

### How can schools and families be better supported to improve attendance?

#### Families:

The evidence shows that working with parents as partners and listening closely to their concerns is what drives improvement in attendance; creating a punitive environment could be counterproductive and not achieve the

<sup>9</sup> <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/Pupil%20bullying%2C%20wellbeing%20and%20school%20experiences%20in%20schools%20in%20England%202022.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/ABA%20literature%20search%20bullying%20and%20Looked%20After%20Children\\_0.pdf](https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/ABA%20literature%20search%20bullying%20and%20Looked%20After%20Children_0.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/ABA%20literature%20search%20Bullying%20and%20Young%20Carers%20\\_0.pdf](https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/ABA%20literature%20search%20Bullying%20and%20Young%20Carers%20_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/Pupil%20bullying%2C%20wellbeing%20and%20school%20experiences%20in%20schools%20in%20England%202022.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/367481/NatCen\\_Social\\_Research\\_-\\_HBT\\_bullying\\_-\\_evidence\\_review\\_and\\_typology.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/367481/NatCen_Social_Research_-_HBT_bullying_-_evidence_review_and_typology.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/Racist%20and%20Faith%20Targeted%20Bullying%20a%20review%20of%20the%20current%20literature%20-%202020%20FINAL%20REBRAND.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> [https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/ABA-mental-health-briefing-Nov-15\\_1.pdf](https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/ABA-mental-health-briefing-Nov-15_1.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/Racist%20and%20Faith%20Targeted%20Bullying%20a%20review%20of%20the%20current%20literature%20-%202020%20FINAL%20REBRAND.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/Racist%20and%20Faith%20Targeted%20Bullying%20a%20review%20of%20the%20current%20literature%20-%202020%20FINAL%20REBRAND.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence – Ofsted (2022)

<sup>19</sup> <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/aba-our-work/policy-work/aba-policy-recommendations>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-pupil-absence>

government's intentions. However, for the small number of parents who are unwilling to engage in this process, we recognise that sanctions may be appropriate as a last resort.

Attendance should not be seen in isolation, and it is vital that schools build and foster strong relationships with families of those whose children are persistently absent. Schools should help parents to understand what is expected of them and why attendance is important to their child's attainment, wellbeing, and wider development. However, it should also include clarity on the short- and long-term consequences of poor attendance: ABA is concerned that government avoids encouraging schools to disproportionately place the responsibility of attendance on parents, when we know that many factors beyond their control underpin poor attendance, such as school anxiety or bullying.

### **Schools:**

Whole-school approaches have been particularly successful in reducing bullying and also improving attendance. Between 2017-2021, 4000 schools participated in the Anti-Bullying Alliance's whole-school anti-bullying programme, All Together, which was independently evaluated by Goldsmiths, University of London. Schools who had completed the programme reported that bullying had reduced in 71% of schools and attendance had also improved in 32% of schools.

The Education Endowment Foundation in 2021 conducted a Rapid Assessment<sup>21</sup> looking at the impact of attendance interventions. It found some evidence that interventions that targeted bullying could help improve school attendance.

### **We require more research into what works to address persistent absence due to experiences of bullying in school.**

School staff should be given the training, resources and skills to ensure schools have a whole-school approach to preventing, recording and responding to bullying.

To ensure schools can take a strategic approach to improving school attendance, they must be required to collate the data that will help them to understand who is missing school and why. Current school absence data collected by government does not include bullying as a reason for school absence.

### **We believe that schools should be required to include bullying as a reason for absence in the school register. In turn, we believe that schools must be required to record levels of bullying and alleged bullying behaviour.**

### **The impact of the Department's proposed reforms to improve attendance**

For ABA's comprehensive response to DfE's consultation into school absence in February 2022, see [this link](#). Here we focus on some relevant points:

- We would welcome the introduction of school attendance policies and guidance for school governors and academy trusts, but we'd like to see a greater focus on preventing school absence.
- **School attendance policies:**

ABA welcome the introduction of a requirement for schools to have an attendance policy, but policies alone without a whole-school approach to reducing school absence will not be effective. We believe that a whole-school approach to improving school attendance should include collecting good quality data about school absence, preventing the causes of school absence (including that of bullying) and ensuring school is an inclusive and welcoming place to be for all children and young people.

We would like for school attendance policies to include:

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<sup>21</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/attendance-interventions-rapid-evidence-assessment>

- A much greater focus on prevention – with clear expectations about how schools will prevent school absence, with a strong focus on understanding the causes of school absence. As shown earlier in this document, experiencing bullying is a significant cause of school absence and this should be referenced in policies.
- A direct link to a school’s anti-bullying policy and other relevant policies such as safeguarding and exclusions policies.
- That every child has a right to attend school safe from harm.
- Stronger emphasis on data and the Public Sector Equality Duty: schools should be required to collect data about who is persistently absent in that school and why, as well as to consider what barriers can be removed to improve access. This data should be collected with bullying as a reason for absence to enable school academy trusts and governing bodies to understand when bullying has become a cause of poor attendance.

The whole-school community’s views should be sought when drawing up school attendance policies, including that of children and young people and their parents and carers.

■ **School attendance guidance:**

Due to the strong links between experiencing bullying and school attendance, we believe that the expectations of school governing bodies and academy trusts set out in the proposed guidance should include: supporting school staff to have a good understanding of a school approach to bullying; school staff understanding that school attendance can often be a cause of school absence; and CPD anti-bullying training for all school staff.

**Attendance register proposals:**

In relation to Proposal 1’s aim of: “Simplifying the attendance register into a single list of reasons a pupil is ‘attending’ or ‘absent’”, **ABA would like to see a greater number of reasons for pupils not attending schools and including ‘experiencing bullying’ as one of those reasons.** It is not acceptable to have ‘other’ reason for unauthorised absence and not understanding better what the cause of those absences are.

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**February 2023**

**About the Anti-Bullying Alliance**

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) is a unique coalition of organisations and individuals, who work together to stop bullying and create safer environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn. ABA is hosted by the National Children's Bureau. [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk).

ABA are supported by an elected Advisory Group that includes representatives from the NSPCC, Kidscape, Ditch the Label, Wandsworth Council, Childnet, NASUWT, Mencap, Nottingham University and is chaired by Claude Knights. ABA coordinate Anti-Bullying Week each year.

This submission has been agreed by our core members which consist of (list correct as of 08/02/2023):

- |                                   |  |                                |
|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| ● Action Education                | ● BulliesOut                                   | ● Childnet International       |
| ● Anti Bullying Workshops         | ● Caludon Castle School                        | ● Cleeve Meadow School         |
| ● Anti-Bullying Quality Mark - UK | ● Centre for Evidence Based Early Intervention | ● Cognita                      |
| ● bBrave                          | ● Changing Faces                               | ● Cowley International College |
|                                   |  | ● Ditch the Label              |

- EqualiTeach
- Friends, Families and Travellers
- Global Education & Development CIC
- Gumley House School
- Herts for learning
- Heworth Grange school
- Internet Matters
- Kidscape
- King Edward VII Academy
- Leicestershire County Council
- London Borough of Wandsworth
- Lostock Hall Academy
- Mencap
- NASUWT (the Teachers Union)
- National Association of Karate & Martial Art Schools
- National Children's Bureau
- NSPCC
- Norfolk County Council
- Northern Regional College
- Nottingham Trent University
- One Day Creative
- Penketh Primary School
- Prejudice Reporting for Education
- Re Matters
- Red Balloon Educational Trust
- Richard Rose Central Academy
- RJ Working
- Safety Net
- Solutions Not Sides
- St Mary's C of E Primary School
- The Anne Frank Trust UK
- The Anti- Bullying Company
- The Ben Cohen StandUp Foundation
- The Diana Award
- The Stay Safe Initiative CIC
- Together for Children
- Unique Voice CIC
- We Are Stronger Charity
- Whickham School
- Wiltshire Council

February 2023