

Research project on supporting pupils in Years 7-to-11 to return to school following absence: information for parents and carers

Why am I receiving this information sheet?

The National Foundation for Educational Research ([NFER](#)) are undertaking research into how best to support pupils returning to school following absence. You have been sent this document because we would like to invite your child to take part in a research project exploring how schools are supporting pupils to return to school following a period of absence. We are contacting you because we understand your child has missed some days of school recently, and we would like to hear about how that made them feel and what it has been like coming back to school.

It is up to you and your child if you would like to take part in this research. We have provided some information below to help you decide. We have also provided some information to your child.

What are the aims of the project?

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, more pupils have been missing school, especially in secondary schools. It's important to find the best ways to help pupils return to school so they can succeed. This project will look at how schools can support pupils coming back after they have been away and stop short absences from turning into bigger problems.

Who is conducting the project?

The research is being undertaken by NFER, which is the leading provider of independent educational evidence and assessments in the UK. As a registered charity, our mission is to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere and to support positive change across education systems.

What will the project involve for my child?

Your child will be asked to take part in a focus group discussion with 3-5 other pupils. We will work closely with your child's school to ensure they feel comfortable taking part in a group discussion with the other pupils in the group. The discussion will be led by a researcher from the NFER, who will explore:

- How pupils feel when they are absent from school.
- How pupils feel about the support they received when returning to school following absence.

- Whether there are any additional forms of support that pupils believe would help them to feel more comfortable and prepared to return to school after an absence.

The discussion will not focus on the reasons why your child has recently missed school. Instead, it will explore how they felt when they were away from school, and how they felt when they returned. For one part of the discussion, the questions will focus on a fictional character, not your child's own experiences. There are no right or wrong answers, we are just interested in your child's views and experiences.

No schools or pupils will be named as part of the research. We will not share what your child tells us with the school unless they say something that makes us feel worried that they might get hurt or be unsafe.

Why have you approached my school to take part?

We have selected secondary schools that have told us they are trying new approaches to supporting attendance or have maintained or improved their absence rates in recent years. Schools have been picked based on their attendance data and things like how many pupils get free school meals, how many have special needs, and whether the school is part of a trust or not.

How will I benefit from taking part in the research?

By taking part, your child will help us to understand how schools are supporting pupils when they return after being absent. We hope this will help schools and policy makers know what is working and what could be improved, so more pupils can benefit from what we learn.

How will NFER use and protect the data collected?

The results of the project will be shared in an easy-to-read report, giving suggestions for how schools and policy makers can improve the way they support pupils. The report will be published on the NFER website in spring 2025.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and schools/interviewees can withdraw from the study at any time. With the pupils' agreement, the discussion will be audio recorded so that the researcher can take detailed notes. This recording will be deleted as soon as the notes have been written up. Full details of how your child's personal information will be collected, stored and used can be found in our privacy notice, which is on the [project web page](#).

Who to contact?

If you have any questions or would like further information about the research, please contact the NFER project team at attendance@nfer.ac.uk.