Key facts about school absenteeism & the role of sport and physical activity

A sense of belonging to school is a key driver of attendance (ImpactEd Evaluation, 2024).

Adult–youth mentoring programmes (that pair youth with non-parental adults as ‘mentors’) can significantly improve schooling outcomes including attendance, engagement and attainment (Raposa et al., 2019).

The House of Lords identifies a role for sports-based interventions to improve attendance. They recommended additional government investment and research to ascertain the link between sports-based interventions and improved attendance (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023).

Youth work (that promotes young people’s personal and social development, through non-formal educational activities that combine enjoyment, challenge and learning) is shown support young people to develop a positive relationship with their school and help address barriers to attendance (National Youth Agency, 2023).

31% of parents believe that sport and play help with increased attendance and engagement with school (Youth Sport Trust and YouGov, 2024).

Participating in sport in school is associated with higher levels of wellbeing, including belonging (Denovan and Dagnall, 2023).

77% of young people experienced at least a moderate improvement in their sense of belonging as a result of YST programmes; Barclays Game Changers, Set for Success and Whistlers saw the greatest improvements (Youth Sport Trust, 2023; internal analysis).

82% of practitioners report improvements to young people’s engagement with school as a result of a YST programme (Youth Sport Trust, 2023).

39% of teachers believe that sport and play help with increased attendance and engagement with school (Youth Sport Trust and YouGov, 2024).

Teachers report pupils who attend after school or breakfast clubs feel a greater sense of belonging to school (Callanan et al., 2016).

Continuation (from age 8-11 to age 16-17) in sport participation was associated with lower odds of being absent from school. Team sport participation was also associated with reduced absenteeism (Owen et al., 2023).

A school-based intervention to improve schools’ health and wellbeing policies and procedures was found to reap benefits beyond health, including reduced incidence of bullying, improved behaviour and improved attendance (NIHR CLAHRC North Thames, 2016).

For more facts, please visit here to access the Youth Sport Trust’s Knowledge Bank, and here for another factsheet about the mental health benefits of sport and physical activity.