



School attendance support survey 2024

Research Report

Conducted May – July 2024



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Summary

Background

The School Attendance Support Survey was sent to all education authorities in England in order that the Local Government Association (LGA) could get a clear picture of the extent to which councils were incurring extra costs where they were already adhering to the Department for Education's non-statutory guidance, and use these findings in on-going lobbying work with DfE. This follows a number of councils raising concerns with the LGA and Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) that DfE's new burdens assessment had not adequately captured the additional workload placed on councils.

In 2022 DfE published non-statutory guidance, ['Working together to improve school attendance'](#), which was produced "to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance." In March 2024, DfE announced that this guidance would be placed on a statutory footing from 19th August 2024.

A total of 97 out of 153 authorities responded, equivalent to 63 per cent.

Key findings

- In 2023/24, nine out of ten authorities had adhered to DfE's 2022 guidance either fully/to a great extent (54 per cent) or a moderate extent (36 per cent);
- 68 per cent of those which adhered to some extent had incurred additional costs and 67 per cent had had to expand its school attendance team;
- It is estimated that authorities spent an additional £40 million adhering to the guidance, and created around an additional 1,100 posts;
- 42 per cent of authorities had lost income from its traded offer in 2023/24 while 54 per cent had not;
- 43 per cent of authorities had conducted additional targeted support meetings with local independent schools.

Introduction

The survey was emailed to directors of education, or nearest equivalent, in all education authorities in England in May 2024 in order that the LGA could get a clear picture of the extent to which councils were incurring extra costs where they were already adhering to the non-statutory guidance, and use these findings in on-going lobbying work with DfE. This follows a number of councils raising concerns with the LGA and ADCS that DfE's new burdens assessment had not adequately captured the additional workload placed on councils.

In 2022 DfE published non-statutory guidance, 'Working together to improve school attendance', which was produced "to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance." In March 2024, DfE announced that this guidance would be placed on a statutory footing from 19th August 2024.

Methodology

A total of 97 out of 153 authorities responded, equivalent to 63 per cent.

While respondents may not be fully representative of all education authorities, the overall level of response means that the results are likely to provide a good indication of the position of the sector as a whole.

Response is detailed in tables 1 and 2.

It varied little by type of authority, being highest in London boroughs and metropolitan districts (both 64 per cent) and lowest in counties (57 per cent). There was not much variation by region either, with response highest in Yorkshire and the Humber (73 per cent), and between 57 per cent and 68 per cent in every other region.

Table 1: Response rate by type of authority

Type of authority	Number of authorities	Number of responses	Response rate
County	21	13	62%
London borough	33	21	64%
Metropolitan district	36	23	64%
Unitary	63	40	63%
England	153	97	63%

Table 2: Response rate by region

Region	Number of authorities	Number of responses	Response rate
East of England	11	7	64%
East Midlands	10	6	60%
London	33	21	64%
North East	12	7	58%
North West	24	15	63%
South East	19	13	68%
South West	15	9	60%
West Midlands	14	8	57%
Yorkshire and Humber	15	11	73%
England	153	97	63%

All data in this report, unless otherwise stated, has been grossed to the equivalent of a 100 per cent response. The base number of respondents reported in tables is the number of authorities which actually responded to that question, and this can vary between questions as not all authorities answered, or were required to answer, every question. Throughout the report, percentages may not appear to add up to exactly 100 per cent due to rounding.

Additional costs (Table 5) were grossed by calculating the ratio of costs to total expenditure on education services in 2023/24 (from the Revenue Accounts) observed among respondents. This ratio was then applied to total expenditure from RA across all authorities. This was done by type of authority and aggregated to produce a national figure. The number of posts (Table 7) was grossed in a similar

way, but the control source was the number of centrally-employed education staff from DfE's Workforce Census 2023.

School attendance support survey

In 2023/24, just over half of authorities (54 per cent) had adhered to the 2022 guidance fully or to a great extent, a further 36 per cent had adhered to it to a moderate extent and 9 per cent had done so to a small extent. See Table 3.

Table 3: Over the financial year 2023/24, to what extent, if at all, did your council adhere to the 2022 ‘Working together to improve school attendance’ guidance?

	Number	Per cent
Fully or to a great extent	82	54%
To a moderate extent	55	36%
To a small extent	14	9%
Not at all	0	0%
Don't know	2	1%
Total	153	100%

Base: 97 authorities.

Those authorities which had adhered to the guidance to at least some extent were asked if doing so had caused the authority to incur costs above its original budget for school attendance support. Just over two-thirds (68 per cent) reported that they had incurred additional costs. See Table 4.

Table 4: As a result of following the guidance did your authority incur costs in addition to your authority’s budget for school attendance support?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	104	68%
No	43	28%
Don't know	6	4%
Total	153	100%

Base: 93 authorities.

Authorities which had incurred additional costs were asked to quantify them. It is estimated that authorities’ total 2023/24 budget for school attendance support was around £69.6 million and that following the guidance cost an additional £39.9 million, producing an overall total of £109.5 million. The additional cost therefore was equivalent to a 57 per cent increase on the original budget.

There was considerable variation among the 46 authorities which provided figures – in 16 the increase was less than 20 per cent, in 24 it was between 26 per cent and 86 per cent, and in six it exceeded 100 per cent meaning that the additional cost was more than the original 2023/24 budget. See Table 6.

Table 5: Please indicate your authority’s total budget for school attendance support for the financial year 2023/24 and the additional cost incurred above this figure as a result of following the guidance

	Amount (£)
Total 2023/24 budget	£69.6 million
Additional cost incurred due to guidance	£39.9 million
Total spend on school attendance support	£109.5 million

Base: 46 authorities.

Those authorities which had adhered to the guidance to at least some extent were asked if doing so had required the authority to increase the size of its school attendance team. A similar percentage as that for costs, 67 per cent, reported that they had had to employ more staff. See Table 6.

Table 6: As a result of following the guidance did your authority expand the size of its school attendance team?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	102	67%
No	51	33%
Don't know	0	0%
Total	153	100%

Base: 92 authorities.

Authorities which had expanded their team were asked to quantify the increase. It is estimated that authorities had a total of 1,826 full-time equivalent posts in school attendance support teams at 1st April 2023, and that following the guidance meant that they created a further 1,143 FTE posts, producing an overall total of 2,969 FTE posts. The additional number of posts therefore was equivalent to a 63 per cent increase on the original establishment.

There was considerable variation among the 55 authorities which provided figures – in 13 the increase was less than 20 per cent, in 29 it was between 22 per cent and 83 per cent, and in 13 it exceeded 100 per cent meaning that the additional number of posts was greater than the original establishment. See Table 7.

Table 7: Please indicate the number of posts in your authority’s school attendance team at 1st April 2023 and the number of extra posts created in order to adhere to the guidance

FTE posts	
Number of posts at 1 st April 2023	1,826
Number of extra posts created	1,143
Total number of school attendance posts	2,969

Base: 55 authorities.

Just over half of authorities (54 per cent) reported that their authority had not lost income from its traded offer in 2023/24 while 42 per cent had lost income. See Table 8.

Table 8: Did your authority lose income from its traded offer over the financial year 2023/24?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	64	42%
No	82	54%
Don't know	6	4%
Total	153	100%

Base: 94 authorities.

Authorities which had lost income were asked to quantify the loss. A total of 25 did so and because of the relatively small number this data has not been grossed, but is based on respondents only.

Across these authorities, the total income lost amounted to £1,608,918. On average this is £63,357 per authority according to the mean and £32,824 according to the median. The median is considerably lower than the mean due to a small number of authorities reporting much higher losses which skews the distribution. Hence, the median is probably a better measure. In all, seven authorities reported losses of less than £20,000, ten reported losses of between £22,000 and £69,000, and eight reported losses of £70,000 or more. See Table 9.

Table 9: Please indicate how much income your authority lost from its traded offer in 2023/24

	Lost income (£)
Total amount lost	£1,608,918
Mean amount lost	£63,357
Median amount lost	£32,824

Base: 25 authorities.

Around two out of five authorities (43 per cent) had conducted additional targeted support meetings with local independent schools and 55 per cent had not. See Table 10.

Table 10: Has your authority conducted additional targeted support meetings with independent schools in your area?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	66	43%
No	83	55%
Don't know	3	2%
Total	153	100%

Base: 94 authorities. This relates to page 25 of the guidance.

Authorities were invited to write-in any other comments they had on the topics covered by the survey, including any additional burdens arising from adhering to the guidance, and 67 did so. (The numbers of respondents in this section are not grossed.) Although most comments focussed on the burdens arising from the guidance, most were also supportive of its aims. The main themes arising from comments are shown below:

- Extra burden on top of pre-existing financial and workload pressure in general (29 respondents);
- General need to recruit more staff/create more posts (19);
- Reduced (or loss of) revenue from traded income (10);
- More time required for targeted support meetings (10);
- Independent schools (9);
- Resources having to be diverted from other areas (8);
- Increased administrative costs (7);

Annex A: Questionnaire

1. Over the financial year 2023/24, to what extent, if at all, did your council adhere to the 2022 ‘Working together to improve school attendance’ guidance?

[Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance) (the guidance that applies up to 18th August 2024).

Fully or to a great extent

To a moderate extent

To a small extent

Not at all

Don't know

[If some extent in Q1]

2. As a result of following the guidance did your authority incur costs in addition to your authority’s budget for school attendance support?

Yes

No

Don't know

[If yes in Q2]

3. Please indicate your authority’s total budget for school attendance support for the financial year 2023/24 and the additional cost incurred above this figure as a result of following the guidance.

Support covers activities referred to in section 4 of the guidance.

Please enter ‘NK’ if you do not know.

Total budget financial year 2023/24 (£)

Additional cost (£)

[If yes in Q1]

4. As a result of following the guidance did your authority expand the size of its school attendance team?

Yes

No

Don't know

[If yes in Q4]

5. Please indicate the number of posts in your authority’s school attendance team at 1st April 2023 and the number of extra posts created in order to adhere to the guidance.

Please enter in full-time equivalent terms.

Number of posts at 1st April 2023

Additional posts created

6. Did your authority lose income from its traded offer over the financial year 2023/24?

Yes

No

Don't know

[If yes in Q6]

7. Please indicate how much income your authority lost from its traded offer in 2023/24?

Please enter 'NK' if you do not know.

Amount of income lost (£)

8. Has your authority conducted additional targeted support meetings with independent schools in your area (see page 25 of the guidance)?

Yes

No

Don't know

9. Please add any other comments you have on the topics covered by this survey, including any additional burdens arising from adhering to the guidance.



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