

Universiteit
Leiden



School attendance in children with neurodevelopmental conditions one year after COVID-19

Dr Vaso Totsika

Associate Professor, UCL



Economic
and Social
Research Council



Analyses are still
ongoing

School attendance and neurodevelopmental conditions

Before COVID-19, children with NDC found it harder to go to school:

	Persistent Absence (≥10%)
All children in England 2017-18	11%
All children in special schools 2017-8	30%
All children with SEN 2017-8	20%
All autistic children (EHCP) 2017-8	18%
500 autistic children in our 2017 study	43%
600 children with NDC in our Australian 2017 study	29%

March 2020

Schools in UK close

June 2020

Phased re-opening

September 2020

Compulsory return

November 2020

Schools open during 2nd lockdown

January 2021

Schools close

March 2021

Schools re-open

May 2021

Masks in secondaries not compulsory

Mother who's kept her five children off school for seven months reveals she's been threatened with fines and police action - but insists she won't send them back until there's a Covid-19 vaccine



The Observer
Special
educational
needs

This article is more than 10 months old

Special needs pupils in England living in dread of returning to the classroom

Many children have been failed by schools and as lockdown is eased the resources will no longer be there to help them at home



What was happening in the lives of children with NDC in May 2021?

1,076 children with NDCs

- 80% autistic
- 39% learning disability
- 55% other NDCs
- 10.5 yrs old (5-15 yrs)
- Parent/carer 43 yrs old (24-73 yrs)
- 4 UK countries

Which days in May 2021 was your child absent from school?

Absence is a systemic phenomenon

Type of absence: SNACK categorises absence according to who/what instigates on the day:

Ill-health

Child (refusal)

School (exclusion)

Parent (withdrawal)

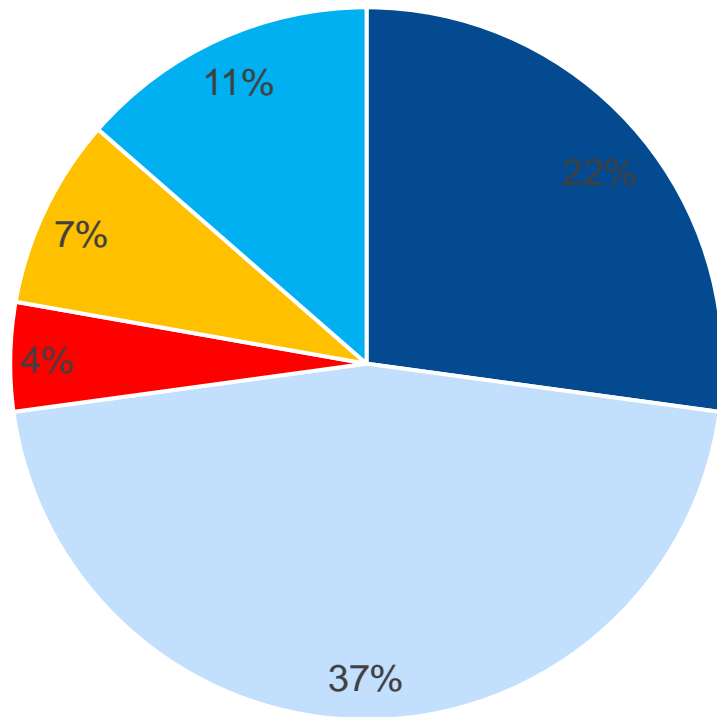
COVID-19

1. Children with NDCs are still finding it hard to go to school regularly

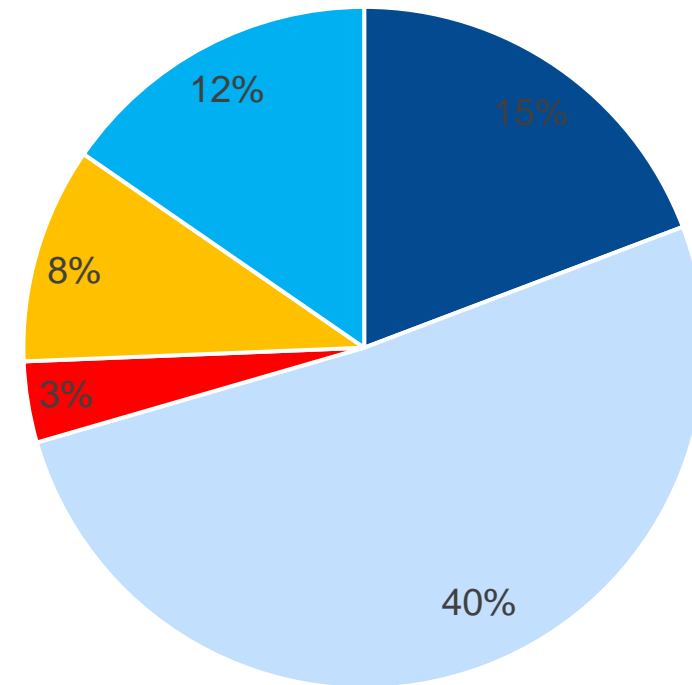
- Average absence 3.5 days out of 19.
- 34% of children > persistent absence
- No DfE data on persistent absence now. In May 2021 on any one day ~ 20% of children with EHCPs not in school, but as high as 43% in some

2.Type of absence

Among students with 1+ absence



Among students with persistent absence



- Health-related
- Child refusal
- Parent withdrawal
- School exclusion
- COVID-19 reasons

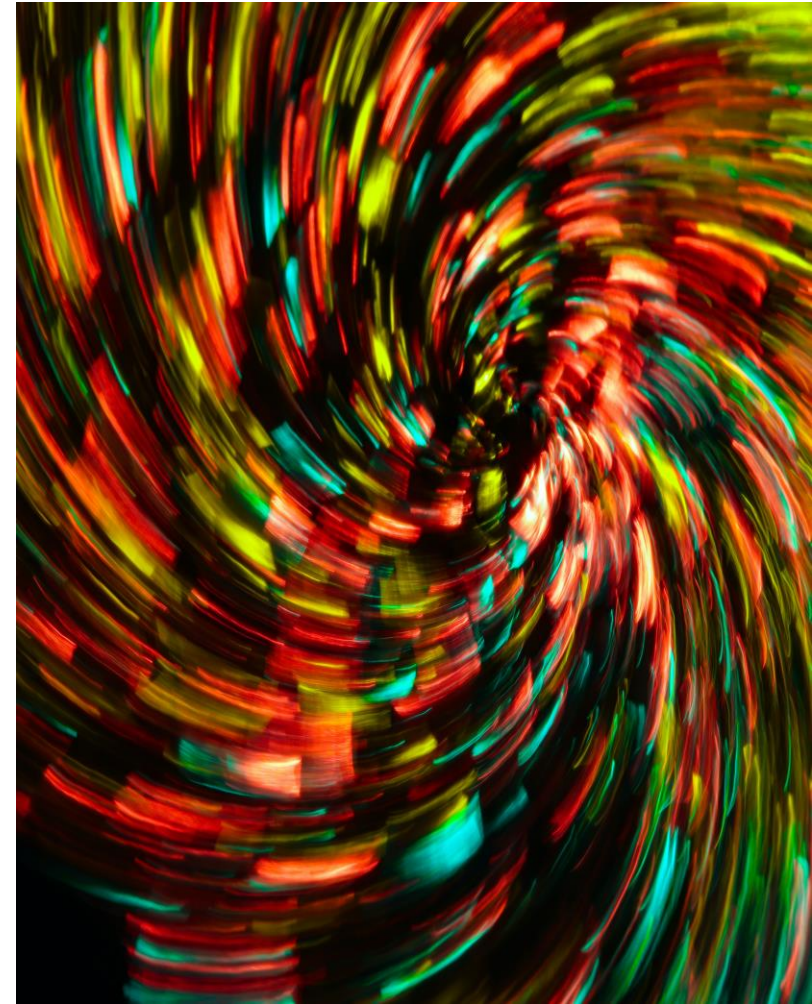
- Health-related
- Child refusal
- Parent withdrawal
- School exclusion
- COVID-19 reasons

3. COVID-19, child health & absence

- Schools well-prepared to cater for children with additional physical health problems
- School days lost to COVID likely due to changes in school COVID-19 set-up
- Schools likely supported attendance for children with hyperactivity and where families experience difficulties of their own

4. Mental health

- Child anxiety important for persistent absence and refusal but not other types of absence.
- Child conduct problems not related to absence.
- Child hyperactivity: less absence but more exclusion.
- Parent COVID anxiety not important for child school absence



5. Parent-teacher relationship

Positive parent-child relationship reduces likelihood of school absence, persistent absence, refusal and school exclusion

Open lines of communication
Positive communication
Feeling listened to
Positive interaction



We are now in 2022 but COVID-19 impacts still felt at schools

How are we going to support attendance during COVID *and* after COVID?

- Not all absence is the same: understand better, customise supports.
- Bridge the gap: unmet needs lead to anxiety in some children, externalising behaviours in other children. Lose-lose situation.
- Focus on building bridges with families: the rewards will be felt across the board

Thank you

Team:

Nancy Kouroupa (UCL)

Vicky Nicholls (UCL)

Paula Beharry (UCL)

Amanda Timmerman (UCL)

Laura Paulauskaite (UCL)

Five Wonderful Parent Advisors (UCL)

Professor Richard Hastings (Uni of Warwick)

Professor Kylie Gray (Uni of Warwick)

Mrs Amanda Allard (Council for Disabled Children)

Dr David Heyne (Uni of Leiden, Netherlands)

Dr Glenn Melvin (Deakin University, Australia)

Professor Bruce Tonge (Monash University, Australia)