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Children with neurodevelopmental conditions: School attendance and elective home education one year after COVID-19

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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

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

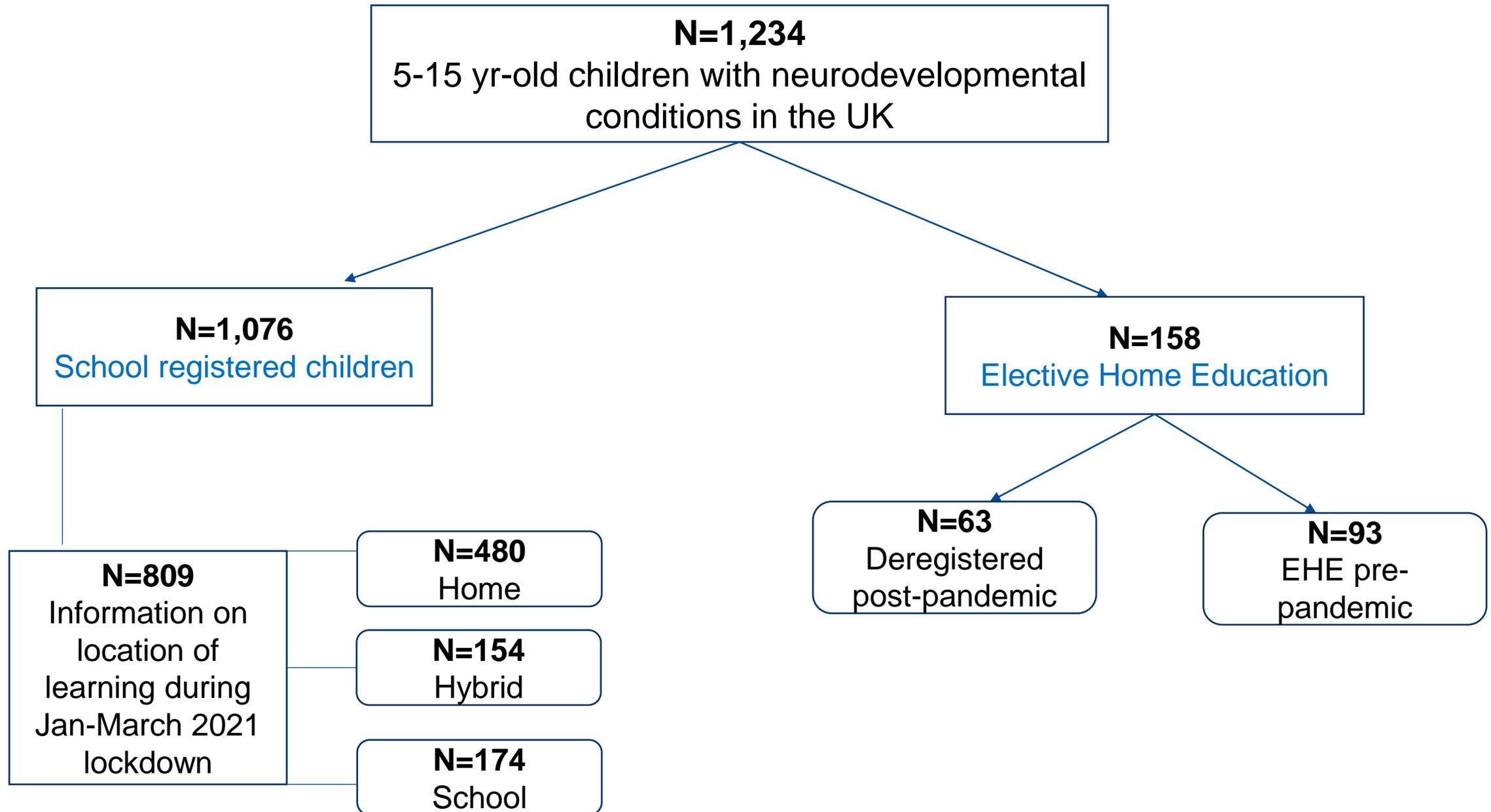


Mother who's kept her five children off school for seven months reveals she's been threatened with fines and police action - but insists she won't send them back until there's a Covid-19 vaccine



Research Aims

- To investigate school attendance problems and types of school attendance approximately 1 year after the pandemic started in the UK (May 2021)
- To investigate child, family and school factors associated with school attendance problems with emphasis on child mental health (esp. anxiety) and parent mental health (pandemic anxiety).
- To describe barriers and facilitators of school attendance
- To describe families' experiences of home schooling during the Jan-March 2021 national lockdown
- To describe families' experiences of Elective Home Education





**6 key findings
and
5
recommendations**

1. Physical health problems: not a major barrier to school attendance

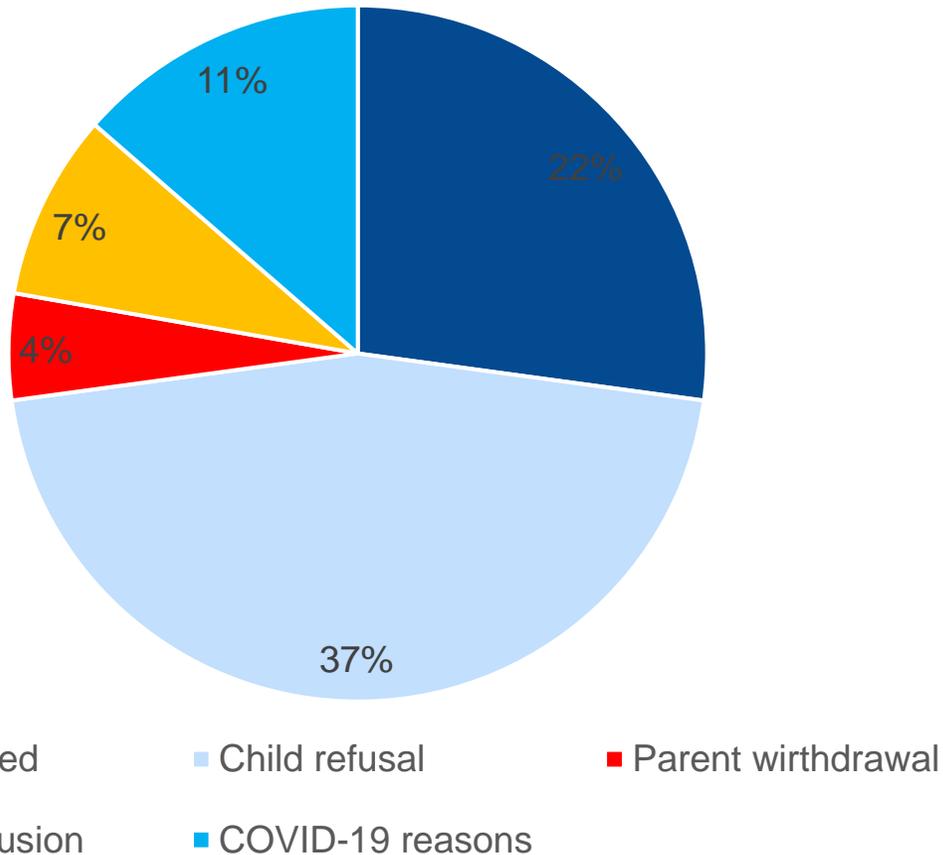
- Physical health problems did not impede overall school or persistent absence
 - COVID-19 absence less likely for these children
 - No more likely to be home schooled during lockdown
 - No more likely to be de-registered compared to EHE pre-pandemic
- **Schools likely well prepared to cater for vulnerable physical health**

2. COVID-19 had a very limited impact

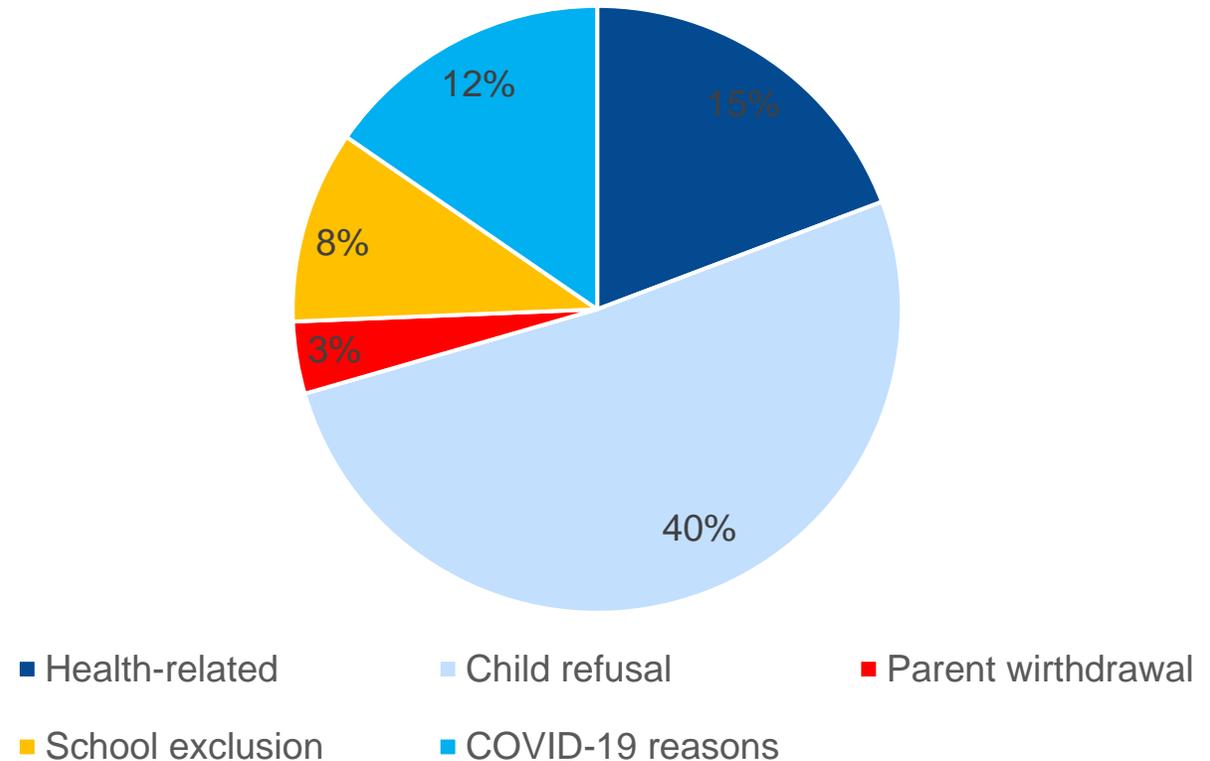
- Persistent absence in 32%, but COVID-19 not the main reason for absence or persistent absence in May 2021
 - COVID-19 featured in just 3% of 2,000+ barriers to attendance.
 - COVID-19 risk to child safety was **not the main reason** for de-registering from school after March 2020 (7th /11 reasons)
- **The assumption that COVID-19 underpinned school absence and de-registration does not withstand the evidence here**

Type of school absence

Among students with 1+ absence



Among students with persistent absence



3. Child unmet need in school a significant barrier

- For parents, this was the most significant barrier to school attendance (31%)
- The main reason for de-registration and EHE (71%-78%)
- Personalising education: main benefit of EHE

Lack of differentiated support and provision

No support for social inclusion (bullying too)

Sensory difficulties related to school environment

Poor teacher relationship & understanding

➤ **Mismatch between school offer and child learning needs likely underpins attendance problems and de-registration**

4. Mental health an important barrier

Child anxiety:

- More days absent
- More likely persistent absence
- More days school refusal

- Anxiety & mental health significant *barrier* to daily attendance

- MH no better or worse in EHE education but for parents better child mental health is an important benefit of EHE

Parent Pandemic Anxiety:

- **Not** associated with any school absence

➤ **Child mental health a significant area where children need support**

5. School closures were not helpful

- Low satisfaction with school support for home schooling
- Home schooling increased likelihood of persistent absence by **150%**
- Home schooling increased rate of absence by **88%**

	Total days missed (0-19)
Home Learning	4.1
Hybrid learning	2.7
School learning	1.9

- **Blanket school closures and home schooling likely exacerbates existing difficulties with school attendance – one of the paths to educational losses**

6. Parent-teacher relationship

- Positive relationship reduces:
 - Rate of absence
 - Persistent absence
 - School Refusal
 - School Exclusion
- Positive relationship + understanding & adaptation around child need => a significant facilitator of attendance



➤ **School absence is a systemic phenomenon and relationships matter**

Preliminary Recommendations for discussion

1. Let's look beyond COVID-19 to address school absence
2. Let's think twice before closing schools again for these children. They are already at the bottom of educational attainment indicators
3. Let's bridge the gap between school environment and child need; even small adaptations could make a big difference (but what works for one child may not work for another- ask)
4. Bridging the gap includes supporting mental health
5. Let's build bridges with families – the rewards will be felt across the board

Thank you!

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