

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Persistent Absence and Elective Home Education	
REPORT OF Chief Executive, Camden Learning	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee	DATE 10 November 2025
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>This report discusses the prevalence of persistent absence in Camden’s schools and an overview of our work to ensure education is inclusive for all children.</p> <p>There has been an improvement Camden’s overall school attendance rate since 2022/23, however it remains lower than the comparable rates for Inner London and England schools.</p> <p>In 2024-25, the percentage of pupils considered persistently absent reduced in Camden primary schools by 1% but increased in secondary schools by 3.2%. Camden’s persistent absence rate is higher than comparable national rates. Disadvantaged children are more like to be persistently absent from school.</p> <p>The number of children who are elective home educated both in Camden and nationally has significantly increased over the last decade. In 2024/25 377 children were electively home educated. This has meant the need to adopt a risk and vulnerability-based approach to caseload management.</p> <p>The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which is before Parliament, has set out to introduce changes to policies, procedures and practice in these areas because of new duties and expectations. These are likely to constitute a new burden on local authorities.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report</p> <p>Contact Officer: Christopher Robert, Senior Adviser: Safeguarding & Inclusion, Camden Learning 5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AG chris.roberts@camdenlearning.org.uk</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATION</p> <p>That the Committee note the report.</p>	

Signed: 
Stephen Hall, Chief Executive, Camden Learning
Date: 20th October 2025

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is for the Committee to scrutinise school attendance data and provide feedback on Camden's approach to supporting schools to improve attendance, as well as Camden's approach to children and families who are electively home educated (EHE).

2. School attendance and persistent absence

- 2.1. Persistent absence from school has been recognised as a significant challenge nationally for the last few years and is one of the Department for Education's (DfE) four priorities.
- 2.2. Camden's education strategy, [Building Back Stronger](#), emphasises the potential for education to nurture and develop individuals, and shape the values of future generations to create a fairer, more inclusive and sustainable society. Significant evidence links school attendance with positive health and educational outcomes. However, the benefits of school can only be realised if pupils attend, are engaged in education, and provision meets their needs.
- 2.3. When considering school attendance there are two measures used. The first is overall attendance (OA), which is the overall attendance percentage of all pupils. The second is persistent absence (PA), which is the number or percentage of pupils whose attendance is below 90%.

3. Attendance and Absence Rates

- 3.1. The most recently available validated data relates to the Autumn and Spring terms in 2024/25. The comparable rates for Inner London and England in 2024/25 will be published in October 2025. To enable a like-for-like comparison the same rate for the Autumn and Spring terms in 2022/23 and 2023/24 has also been shown in this report.

Primary Schools

- 3.2. Whilst there has been an improvement our overall attendance rate since 2022/23 it remains lower than the comparable rate for Inner London and England primary schools.
- 3.3. The **overall attendance** percentage for Camden's primary schools was 94.1% in Autumn and Spring term 2024/25, which was 0.2% lower than the same period in 2023/24. (See table 1)
- 3.4. The **persistent absence** rate for Camden primary schools was 16.7% This is a 1%-point improvement of the same period in 2023/24, which was 17.7% and a 5.5%-point improvement on 2022/23. (See table 2)
- 3.5. There has been a welcome reduction in the rates of persistent absence in Camden primary schools since 2022/23, however the rate remains higher than the rate for Inner London and England primary schools.

- 3.6. Rates of persistent absence are not uniform across the pupil population. Disadvantaged pupils in Camden primary schools are almost twice as likely to be persistent absentees compared to their non-disadvantaged peers. The same is true of Inner London and England.
- 3.7. In the Autumn/Spring 2024/25 data, 22.1% of disadvantaged Camden primary school pupils were persistently absent compared to 11.2% of non-disadvantaged pupils. For both groups of pupils this was an improvement on 2023/24. (See table 3)

Secondary schools

- 3.8. Improving attendance in secondary schools has proved to be more stubborn. In 2022/23 and 2023/24 Camden secondary overall attendance was higher than the rate for England, but lower than the rate for Inner London.
- 3.9. In the Autumn/Spring term 2024/25 overall attendance declined by 0.9% points from 92% to 91.1%, which is lower than 91.5% overall attendance in 2022/23. (See table 4)
- 3.10. In the Autumn/Spring terms in 2023/24 rate of persistent absence in Camden secondary schools increased by 3.2% points from 24% to 27.2%. (See table 5)
- 3.11. As with primary school, disadvantaged pupils in Camden secondary schools are more likely to be persistently absent compared to their non-disadvantaged peers.
- 3.12. In the Autumn/Spring 2023/24 data 34.1% of Camden secondary age pupils were persistently absent. This compares to 18.4% of non-disadvantaged pupils. (See table 6)

4. Attendance of children in Camden's care

- 4.1. In 2024/25, with 20% of the reporting cohort (45 pupils) of children looked after (CLA) met the threshold for persistent absence; in line with previous years. This is lower than the national (21%) and London (22%) rate in 2023/24. 4% of CLA in Camden were severely absent in 2024/25, meaning they missed at least half of all sessions, compared to almost 3% across England. This is based on the reporting cohort of those children who are looked after for at least a year, as of 31st March 2025. (See table 7)
- 4.2. In the wider CLA cohort, which covers all CLA (including those in the reporting cohort and those who have been in care for less than a year), there are 106 children. Of this wider group 33% were persistent absentees and 15% were severe absentees, meaning the CLA reporting cohort had much better attendance with a significant period in care.
- 4.3. Every CLA who is at risk of persistent absence has an Attendance Plan developed by the Virtual School Education Consultants. Plans are scrutinised monthly by a multi-agency Attendance Panel chaired by the Head of the

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Services. An external provider, Welfare Call, collects daily school attendance data and alerts social workers and the Virtual School when a child is absent. This ensures that children's attendance is a priority and that intervention put in place to prevent escalation where indicated.

5. What impact does absence have on attainment?

- 5.1. There is a strong correlation between attendance and attainment in the end of Key Stage 2 tests at primary school. In 2025, provisional data indicates that 78% of children with an attendance of 95% or better achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths compared to just 53% of children with attendance below 80%. (See table 8)
- 5.2. At secondary there is a similar correlation between attendance and attainment. Children with attendance of 95% or better had a provisional Attainment 8 score of 56.2, compared to just 27.3 for children with attendance below 80%. (See table 9)

6. Which children are more likely to be absent from school?

- 6.1. Using school census and other data, Camden conducted a multivariate analysis to examine the different factors influencing school attendance. We identified four main priority cohorts of children and young people (CYP) that currently have high rates of persistent absence from school:
 - **Children with Special Educational Needs** - children in the school census with an education, health and care (EHC) Plan,
 - **Children that are known to social care** - children with a record in MOSAIC, (the database used for children's social care)
 - **Children that are eligible for free school meals (FSM)**
 - **Young Carers**
- 6.2. This is consistent with the national picture, with these same cohorts more likely to be persistently absent nationally than children who do not have these criteria.
- 6.3. Within the cohorts set out in 6.1, there are three further specific cohorts at particular risk of persistent absence:
 - **Children with physical health or mental health issues** – children that have a MOSAIC coding for mental/physical health needs,
 - **Children suffering bullying** – where bullying is listed amongst children's presenting reasons on their MOSAIC (Making Our Services In Camden Integrated) coding for mental/physical health needs.
 - **Children from Asian/Bangladeshi communities** – as recorded on the school census.
- 6.4. Some cohorts were either not well covered within our data, or the cohort size was too small to make meaningful inferences. Although not specifically

identified through the data analysis, professionals' judgement is that the following cohorts are also more likely to struggle with school attendance:

- CYP living in temporary accommodation
- Refugees
- CYP within the youth justice system
- CYP with Care Experience.

7. Why are children more likely to be absent from school?

7.1. The reasons for the increase in persistent absence since the pandemic has been the subject of numerous pieces of research, such as those conducted by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), Impetus and Public First which were both published in September 2025

7.2. The Centre for Social Justice report '[Absent Ambition](#)' identified three root causes to the school absence crisis. These are the:

- Mutual breakdown of home-school trust,
- Deteriorating educational ambition, and a
- Challenging parenting landscape.

7.3. The report '[Listening to, and learning from, young people in the attendance crisis](#)' by Impetus and Public First, found that:

- Many pupils make an active decision each morning about whether to attend school,
- 'Presenteeism' online e.g. being present for late-night gaming and group chats, leaves many pupils too tired to attend or engage with school.
- Pupils feel a lack of agency in school, viewing school as highly structured and tightly controlled as opposed to a formative experience.
- School is seen mainly as a means to an end - for some, achieving qualifications was therefore the main driver for attending school; for others who felt they would be unable to achieve those qualifications, it took away the purpose of school entirely.
- Sanctions compel attendance but damage engagement.

8. Department for Education advice and guidance

8.1. In August 2024, the Department for Education issued updated [attendance guidance](#) and put it on a statutory footing. This guidance:

- Advocates a 'support first' approach,
- Sets out the statutory responsibilities of schools, governing bodies/academy trust and local authorities,
- Revised the registration codes schools use, and
- Introduced a national framework for fixed penalty notice fines.

8.2. All schools are expected to:

- Build strong relationships and work jointly with families,
- Have a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance,

- Have a clear attendance policy,
- Accurately complete admission and attendance register and have effective day to day processes to follow up on absences.
- Monitor and analyse attendance data to identify pupil or cohorts that require support and put in place strategies to improve attendance,
- Share information and work collaboratively, and
- Provide additional support for pupils absent due to ill health or SEND (Special Educational Need and/or Disability).

8.3. The expectation of local authorities is that they:

- Rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance and unblock any area wide barriers to attendance,
- Provide advice and share best practice with schools within the area,
- Meet regularly with schools to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions,
- Provide families with access to early help family support workers who can provide practical whole-family support,
- Use attendance legal interventions where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with, and
- Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through the virtual school.

8.4. As well as providing guidance to schools and local authorities the Department for Education has developed the attendance data reporting and analysis support available. All state-funded schools now share their attendance data with the Department for Education, which through '*View Your Education Data*' (VYED) this has enabled local authorities to have a real time overview of attendance in their area.

8.5. The Department for Education has recently begun to provide schools with termly reports that enable them to benchmark their data against 20 similar schools. This enables them to compare their performance relative to schools with contexts and demographics. These reports also highlight areas of strength in the data and make suggestions as to where the school may wish to focus their improvement efforts.

9. New Ofsted school inspection framework

9.1. In September 2025 Ofsted published a new inspection framework, which will come into effect from November 2025.

9.2. Attendance forms part of Ofsted's judgement for 'Behaviour and Attendance'. To meet the 'Expected Standard' judgement school need to have overall attendance that is broadly in line with national averages or shows an improving trend over time, and that attendance is improving for any persistently or severely absent pupils that leaders have focused on.

Leaders and staff are also expected to have:

- An accurate understanding of their attendance data,
- Established effective strategies to tackle any issues,

- Analysed attendance data to identify any patterns and trends, and
 - Identified the causes of poor attendance and intervened.
- 9.3. Camden Learning is supporting schools on these changes through audits and training, which will assist them to demonstrate the impact of the work they have done to improve attendance.

10. How Camden is supporting schools to improve attendance

- 10.1. School attendance is a strategic priority for Camden and a focus of work for schools. Schools have been promoting the benefits of regular attendance and working with children and families to overcome barriers to attendance. They have been supported by Camden Learning and Camden Council in this work in numerous ways, both in terms of core practice and initiatives.
- 10.2. Given the correlation between attendance and outcomes, attendance forms a key part of Camden's approach to school improvement. Camden Professional Partner's (CPPs) meet termly with headteachers to discuss performance and strategies across a range of metrics, including attendance. Where schools are identified as need additional support this can be provided. Attendance at each school is tracked and considered at termly Schools Requiring Additional Support attended by service leads from across Camden Learning and Camden Council.

Core practice

- 10.3. Schools have access to comprehensive range of resources to support their practice as part of Camden Learning's attendance strategy and resources.
- 10.4. Camden Learning produces bespoke school attendance data booklets for school leaders. These support them to identify cohorts and trends to focus on, as well as benchmark themselves against regional and national data.
- 10.5. A monthly Camden Learning attendance update is e-newsletter is sent to all Camden school attendance leads, attendance officers and headteachers. In the updates the latest data, improvement practice tips, suggested areas to focus upon, and the latest learning from research.
- 10.6. Camden Learning convenes attendance network meetings for school attendance leads. These are an opportunity for attendance leads in schools to come together to review data, look strategically at attendance issues and share examples of effective practice.
- 10.7. The Camden Learning training offer includes training for attendance leads and officers to ensure they are equipped with the necessary knowledge to undertake their roles effectively.
- 10.8. Since their inception in January 2023, Camden Learning's three School Inclusion Support Officers (SISO) have worked closely with Camden schools to improve attendance. Each state-funded school is visited at least once a term, but more regularly for schools with the greatest attendance challenges.

They assist schools to identify the most appropriate support for those pupils at the highest risk of non-attendance. For the schools with the greatest challenges, we have been able to increase the number of visits to those schools from three to four per term from September 2025.

- 10.9. These approaches have had a positive impact with 22 of our 38 primary schools now being above national average, compared to just 10 in 2023/24. Of the remaining primary schools, eight were less than 1% below national average in 2024/25 (compared to 18 in 2023/24). (See table 10)
- 10.10. Overall attendance at five secondary schools was above national average in 2024/25 (compared to four in 2023/24) and there was one school at less than 1% below national average (compared to two in 2023/24). Four of our secondary schools remain more than 1% below national average, and they remain a priority for additional targeted support. (See table 11)
- 10.11. In 2025/26 secondary school attendance will be a priority area with additional attendance improvement support for those secondary schools with the highest rates of absence.
- 10.12. Under the national framework schools are required to consider referring to the local authority for a penalty notice where a pupil has 10 sessions (five days) of unauthorised absence in a 10-week period. In 2024/25, Camden Learning issued 602 fixed penalty notices on behalf of Camden Council. 496 of these were for unauthorised leave in term time.

Initiatives

- 10.13. Since September 2023 Camden Learning have run a 'back to school' attendance campaign involving posters with the 'every school day counts' message being displayed in bus stops around Camden. This is aimed boosting the attendance of those children who do attend school but could attend more regularly than they currently do. It highlights the negative impact of absence on wellbeing and outcomes.
- 10.14. Fitzrovia Youth in Action (FYA) were jointly commissioned by Camden Council and Camden Learning to work with secondary-age children to produce a [school attendance video and carry out a series of pupil-led workshops in secondary schools](#). The video, released in September 2024, was written and produced by pupils from five Camden secondary schools. It was shown to 222 young people over the summer holidays, with 84% of children reporting an increased awareness of the importance of attendance, and in assemblies in secondary schools during the autumn term. This initiative received positive feedback participating schools and from the Department for Education.
- 10.15. In the Spring term 2025, a text messaging pilot was trialled in three primary schools and one secondary school. This involved exploring whether a single text message could help improve attendance. Messages were sent to the parents of 300 pupils with attendance between 85% and 95%, which is around the persistent absence threshold. The results showed a statistically significant improvement at primary school, with a 1% improvement in

attendance. This was strongest in the week immediately following the message being sent. There was not a similar improvement seen in the secondary cohort.

- 10.16. A number of Camden schools utilise the services of a family support worker funded via charitable means, or occasionally from within their existing budgets. These have been shown to have a measurable impact on reducing persistent absence through building relationships with families and exploring barriers to better attendance. However, this is not a resource that is affordable for many schools. Drawing learning from this, a 'team around the school' model is being piloted in two primary schools. These are fortnightly meetings between schools, Camden Learning and the local Family Hub. The focus is on children whose absence is between 10% and 20%. These provide an opportunity to build a closer relationship between the Family Hub and the school, better understand the barriers to regular attendance and enable the best support offer for the child to be identified.
- 10.17. There has been an increase in the number of children reporting increased anxiety around attending school. This is sometimes called Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). Camden Learning is working with schools and experts in this area to develop a toolkit that can be used by schools. It will help parents, pupils and the school to come to a common understanding about what is working well in school, and what might be the underlying reasons why a child might be feeling anxious about attending school. This will be trialled with a few schools in the first instance and then launched later this academic year.

11. Elective Home Education (EHE)

- 11.1. Education for all children in the United Kingdom is compulsory, but attendance at a school is not. Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that (sic):

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable –

- a) To his age ability and aptitude, and*
- b) To any special educational needs he may have,*

Either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

- 11.2. There is specific legal requirement as to the content of home education other than it needs to be suitable, efficient and full-time. When it comes to defining a suitable, efficient, full-time education in the context of EHE the DfE guidance requires local authorities to take liberal interpretation of what is considered an education.

Department for Education guidance states that:

Education does not need to include any particular subjects, and does not need to have any reference to the National Curriculum; and there is no requirement to enter children for public examinations. There is no obligation to follow the 'school day' or have holidays which mirror those observed by schools.

- 11.3. The number of children electively home educated nationally and in Camden has increase significantly over the last decade. In Camden the number of children has increased by 143% - from 155 in 2015/16 to 377 in 2024/25. The increase in Camden is lower than the national percentage increase, which has seen a 198% increase between 2016 and 2024 from 37,500 to 111,700. (See table 12). The Department for Education does not publish an EHE percentage rate
- 11.4. In 2024/25 the total number of EHE children reach 377, of which 153 were new referrals. This is the highest number of new referrals since 2020/21. (See table 13)
- 11.5. The number of electively home educated children changes daily. Since the 2025/26 register opened during September 2025 ten cases were closed: three children went overseas, one moved to another part of England, two went to an out of borough school and four went to a Camden school.
- 11.6. The three most common reasons cited by parents for electively home educating their children were
- Parental or Lifestyle choice (13%),
 - Dissatisfaction with the school system (10%), and
 - A short-term intervention (9%).

Every parent is asked their reason for electively home education, however 40% of new referrals chose not to give a reason and there is no requirement for them to do so.

- 11.7. The [EHE pages of Camden Council's website](#) alongside a range of other resources, information and guidance for parents/carers and professionals. A Camden [annual report](#) on Elective Home Education is also published each year.
- 11.8. [Ofsted's Report](#) on Camden Council' Children's Services in 2025 stated:
- "Partnership working is mature and... electively home educated (EHE) are identified and monitored well, with an effective response to safeguarding concerns."*
- "Leaders are acutely aware of emerging trends and are identifying underlying reasons for this increase. They have strengthened their processes for schools to record and report any vulnerabilities when a child becomes EHE. This ensures better information to support risk assessments,"*
- 11.9. All new cases are reviewed in line with [Camden's policy](#) which is in line with the EHE DfE guidance (April 2019). New national guidance and legislation on elective home education is expected following the passing of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which is before parliament.
- 11.10. The significant increase in the number of electively home educated children has meant it has been necessary to adopt a risk and vulnerability-based approach to Camden Learning's oversight.

- 11.11. This means each new referral is screened based on the information provided by parents and the previous school. In addition to any safeguarding and welfare concerns raised by the previous school checks will be carried out against the education and safeguarding databases to establish if there are any vulnerabilities for this home educated child.
- 11.12. In 2023/24 a new, extended list of vulnerabilities was used in line with DFE requirements. Poor attendance (between 50-90%) was found to be the most common vulnerability, with 25% of new cases. This was the most common reason in 2023-24 too.
- 11.13. In addition, six EHE children had an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan), with SEN needs being found to be a vulnerability in several other cases having been cited by parents/carers. Twelve children had a social worker, with the largest group being current Children in Need (CIN).
- 11.14. All cases are audited at termly intervals along with updated checks via safeguarding and with officers in SEND and the Virtual School to establish if there have been any known changes in terms of risk and vulnerability for the child.
- 11.15. This approach means that those children with risk and vulnerability factors are prioritised for in-person education suitability assessments, so if there is a change in risk and vulnerability for the child that is not known to other services this may not be identified.
- 11.16. Last year the Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) commissioned a multi-agency audit into safeguarding home educated children. The audit reviewed ten home-educated children where there were known vulnerabilities to look at the practice of different agencies.
- 11.17. The audit report found the following areas of strength:
- *Comprehensive voluntary register set up*
 - *Timely review of EHE cases*
 - *Strong collaboration with other teams and agencies across Camden*
- The audit also found that there should be a review of capacity within the team as the number of home-educated children had increased significantly.
- 11.18. Camden Learning officers work closely to support families who wish to return to school either through their own choice or where the advisor has deemed the education unsuitable.

12. Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

- 12.1. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill currently before parliament will make several changes to practice and place additional new burdens on those teams working in this area.

- 12.2. There are number of changes contained in the Bill that will affect elective home education specifically. These include:
- A requirement of home-educating parents to register with the local authority,
 - Parents of children that are subject to a Child Protection Plan or are being assessed under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 would require their local authority's permission prior to before they can remove them from the school's admission register to home educate.
 - Placing a duty on local authorities to provide, as yet unspecified, support to electively home-educated children.
- 12.3. Another requirement is for local authorities to have a statutory register in Children Not in School. The current proposals put the following children in scope for inclusion on the register.
- Children missing education
 - Electively home educated children
 - Children attending alternative provision
 - Children on a part-time or reduced timetable
 - Children with education provision arranged by SEND teams
 - Pupils who have had more than 15 days absence due to illness or 10 or more days unauthorised absence.
- 12.4. It is not yet known when these changes will become statutory requirements, however it is not anticipated that this will be before September 2026 at the earliest.

13. Summary

- 13.1. Attendance and persistent absence continue to be priority area for Camden Council and Camden Learning with extensive work being undertaken with, and alongside schools to support them in this area. However, there is not one single intervention that will bring about system wide improvement but a rather the need for a sustained focus on identifying and responding to the various underlying reasons for absence that exist.
- 13.2. Whilst there has been some welcome improvement in attendance and reduction in persistent absence in Camden primary schools, secondary schools are proving more stubborn when it comes to improvement. This will have an increased focus in 2025/26.
- 13.3. The number of Elective Home Educated children in Camden and nationally has increased significantly over the last decade. This has meant the need to adopt a risk and vulnerability-based approach to caseload management, which prioritises assessing some home-educated children in-person over others.
- 13.4. Resourcing levels to support the significant increase in the number of home-educated children was identified by the CSCP as an area for consideration.

- 13.5. New legislation and associated guidance will affect policies, procedures and practice in respect of elective home education. The implementation of a statutory register of Children Not in School will change the way that local authorities record information about these pupils. The effect of these changes will likely place a new resourcing burden on local authorities.
- 13.6. We continue to focus on these key areas to ensure all children in Camden can have the best start in life.

14. Finance Comments of the Director of Finance

- 14.1. There are no immediate financial implications resulting from this report.
- 14.2. The resource impact of new burdens resulting from the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will need to be closely monitored and managed within the council's available resources.

15. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

- 15.1 Schools have a duty to refer regular absence to the local authority. Only local authorities can make decisions on whether parents should be prosecuted for school attendance offences.

16. Environmental Implications

- 16.1. No environmental implications

17. Appendices

Appendix A - Tables

REPORT ENDS