

# JSNA Health and Wellbeing Profile 2026/27

## Pupil Absence (City of Bristol), (2024/25 data)

### Overview

Attendance has stabilised across the city, providing a stronger foundation for continued improvement, although attendance levels remain below where they need to be for many children.

Nationally, absence rates have continued to improve gradually since the pandemic. While they remain above pre-pandemic levels and inequalities persist, this highlights the importance of sustained focus and targeted support. Bristol continues to experience higher absence rates than national and regional comparators, reflecting a range of complex social, economic and health factors affecting children and families.

Bristol's priority is not only to further reduce absence overall, but also to address the entrenched and increasingly severe patterns of absence experienced by some groups of children. By working collaboratively across education, health and wider services, and targeting support where it is most needed, the city is committed to tackling the barriers associated with deprivation, SEND and health needs, helping more children to access and benefit from education consistently.

### National context summary (England, 2024/25)

- Overall absence rates decreased between 2023/24 and 2024/25, by 0.4ppts to 6.8% but remains higher than pre-pandemic levels.
- Persistent absence rate (10% or more sessions missed) has also decreased nationally, down to 18.1% (from 20% in 2023/24).
- The percentage of severely absent pupils (i.e. missing 50% or more sessions) was 2.4% in 2024/25, an increase from 2.3% in 2023/24.
- Main reason for absence: Illness (3.2%)
- Both authorised and unauthorised absence decreased nationally (both by 0.2ppts). Authorised is down to 4.5% and unauthorised is at 2.3%.
- Absence rates decreased across all school types and remains highest in special schools and lowest in primary schools. Unauthorised absence increased slightly in special schools.

Although national figures show improvement in overall and persistent absence, severe absence has increased and remains a significant concern. Absence levels are still considerably higher than pre-pandemic baselines (e.g. 4.7% overall absence in 2018/19) and illness related absence remains the leading cause.

### Local picture – Bristol summary

- Bristol's overall absence rate is above the national average at 7.9%, but the gap has narrowed between 2023/24 and 2024/25 (-0.2ppts).
- Higher absence rates locally are driven by higher rates of absence due to illness.

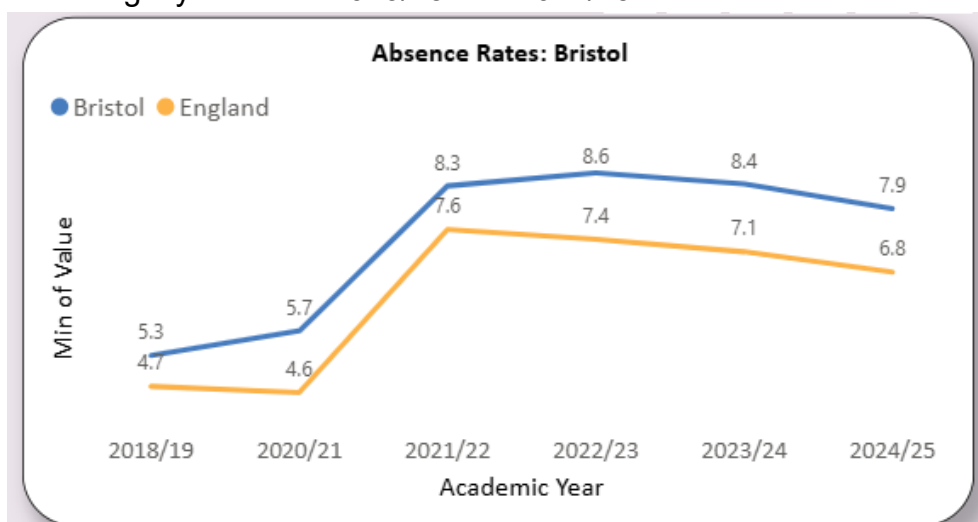
- SEND and FSM-eligible pupils in Bristol continue to experience significantly higher levels of absence and persistent absence than their peers, with gaps that are particularly pronounced when compared with national figures. The overall absence rate for FSM-eligible pupils in Bristol is 2.17 percentage points higher than the national average, while for pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the gap is 2.66 percentage points. These differences highlight the need for continued targeted support to address the barriers affecting attendance for some of our most vulnerable children and young people.
- Challenges identified include high illness-related authorised absences and mental health and anxiety continue to impact attendance.
- We recognise that attendance outcomes are not experienced equally across all pupil groups and that notable gaps remain between Bristol and national averages. Absence rates are particularly high for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils (22.27%), Black Caribbean pupils (6.65%) and White and Black Caribbean pupils (12.26%). Although the GRT cohort is relatively small, the data highlights the need for a continued focus on equity and inclusion. Understanding the specific challenges faced by different communities is essential to developing effective, targeted support. Through a collaborative and evidence-informed approach, we are committed to reducing attendance inequalities, removing barriers to participation, and ensuring that all children and young people have the opportunity to engage fully with their education.

### Key trends

- Persistent absence remains high and entrenched.
- Severe absence continues to increase in line with national trends.
- Absence is most acute in the secondary phase and concentrated in specific vulnerable groups and communities.

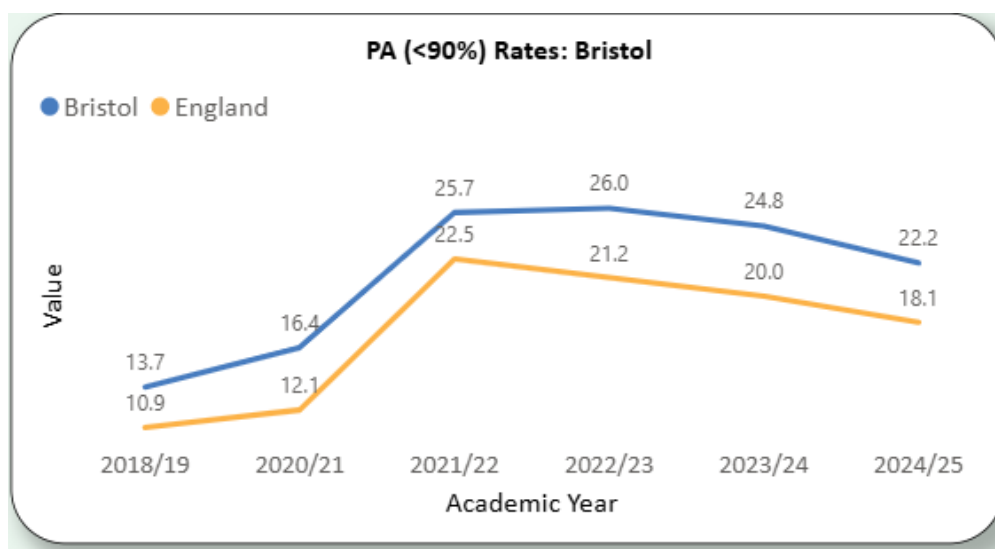
### Absence rates, including by phase

Overall, Bristol's absence rates continue to track above the national trends, and this is a long enduring persistent trend that pre-dates the pandemic. The gap between Bristol and national data has narrowed slightly between 2023/25 and 2024/25.



## Persistent Absence

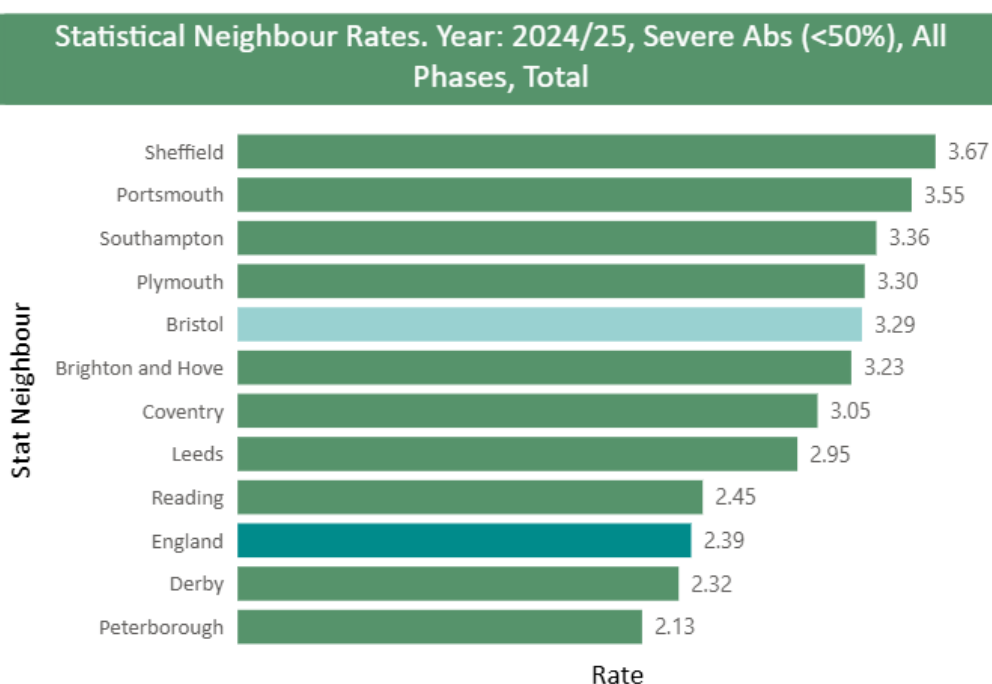
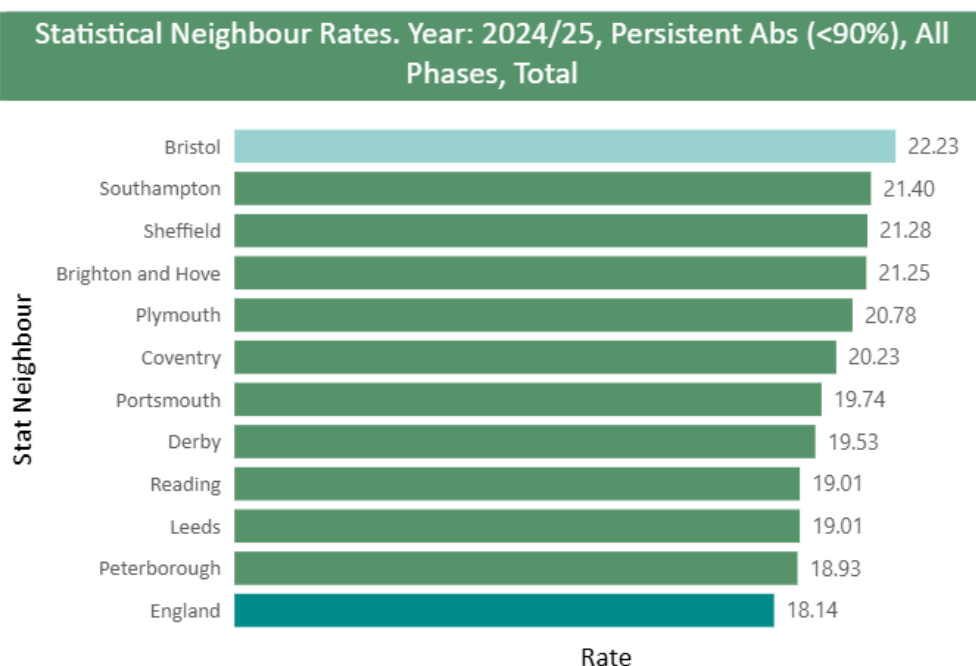
Persistent Absence (PA) is defined as the percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible sessions. The persistent absent rate has decreased over the last 2 years to 2024/25 both locally and nationally, but Bristol remains above the national average at 22.2% compared to 18.1% nationally. The gap between national and Bristol data has narrowed by 0.7ppts between 2023/24 and 2024/25.



## Statistical Neighbours

Bristol has the third highest overall absence rate of all our statistical neighbours (down from the highest in 2023/24). Peterborough continues to have the lowest at 6.69%.

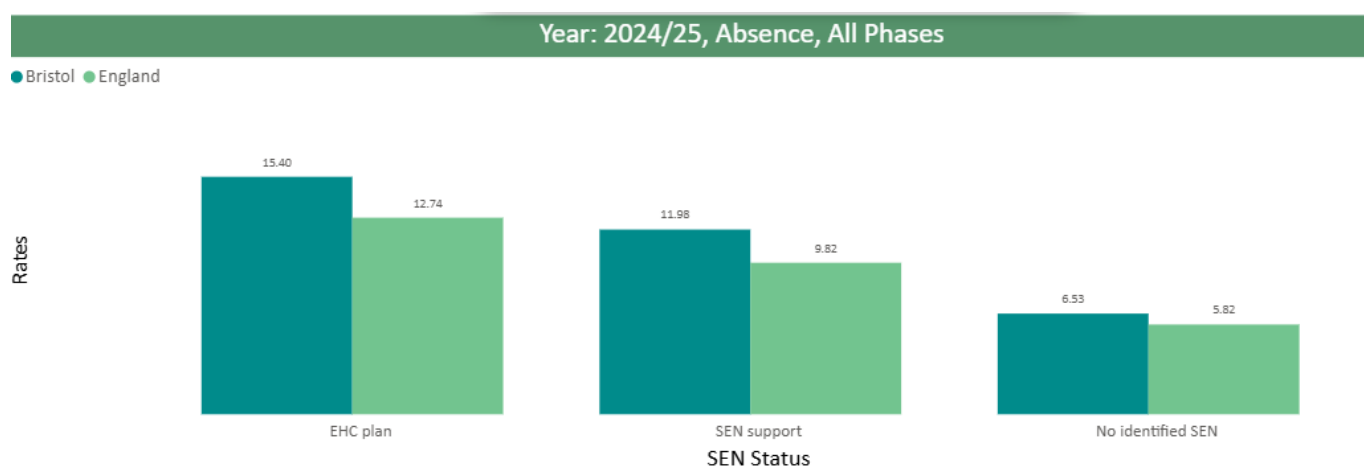
Bristol has the highest persistent absence rate when compared to statistical neighbours. Comparatively Bristol's rate of severe absence has improved between 2023/24 and 2024/25 dropping from 2<sup>nd</sup> highest to 5<sup>th</sup> highest.



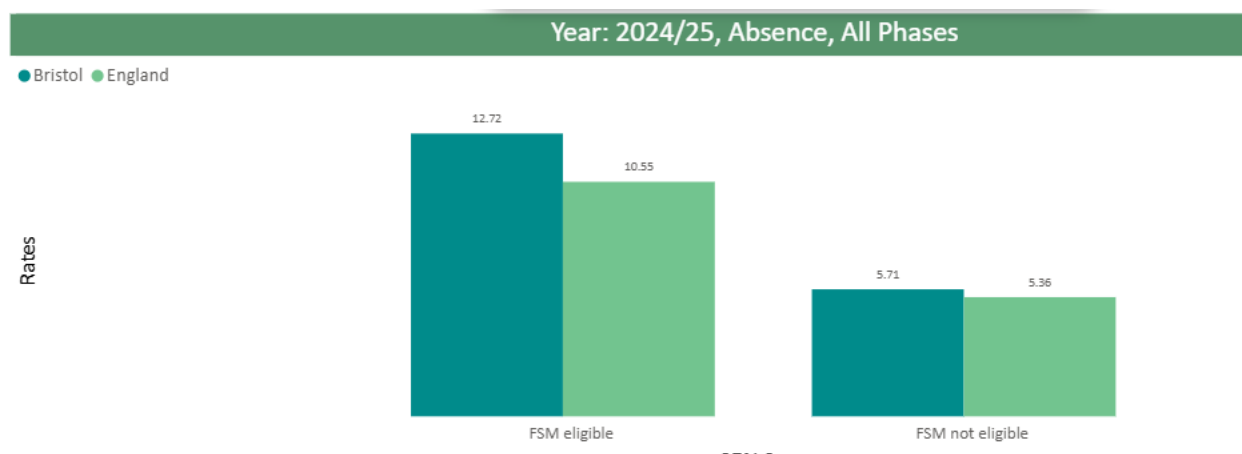
### Equalities data:

At a local level we continue to collect and analyse attendance and pupil absence data based on protected characteristics including gender and ethnicity, to allow comparison with national data where available. Data in relation to absence rates for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is also collected and analysed.

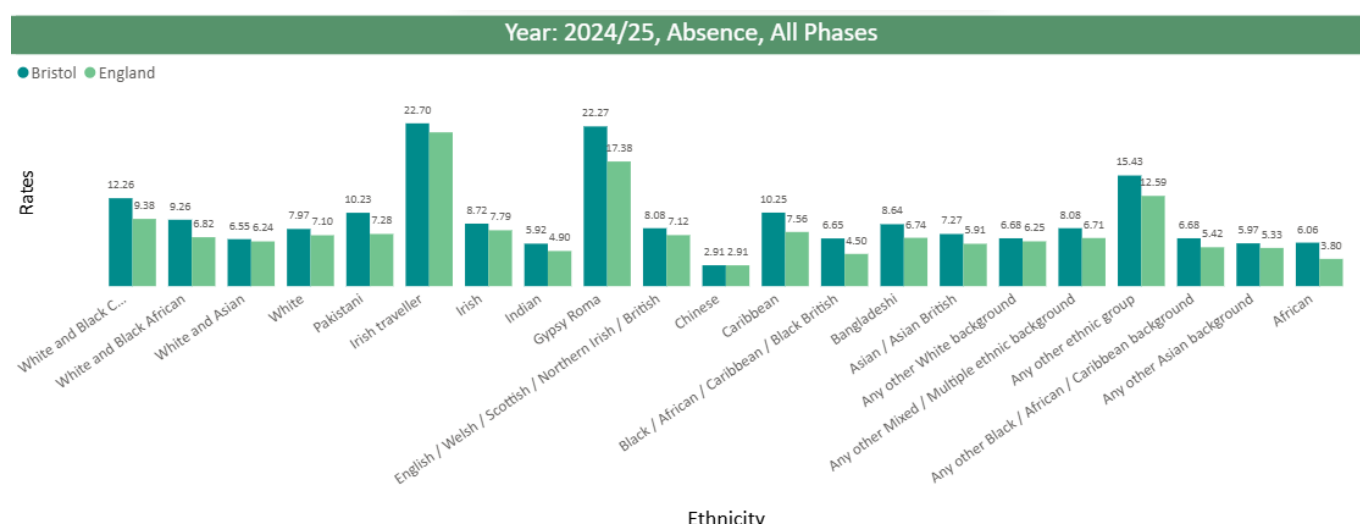
**SEND:** There is a wide disparity between the absence rates of those pupils with SEND and those without. Bristol is above average in all categories, but the gap is widest for pupils with an EHC plan. Persistent and severe absence rates for pupils with SEND are also higher in Bristol than the national average.



**FSM:** Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) have significantly higher absence rates including overall absence, persistent and severe absence. Both FSM and non-FSM pupils have an absence rate above average in Bristol but the gap to national is largest for pupils eligible for FSM. The gap between pupils with FSM and those without is most noticeable in secondary schools at 16.1% for FSM pupils compared to 7.3% for those not eligible.



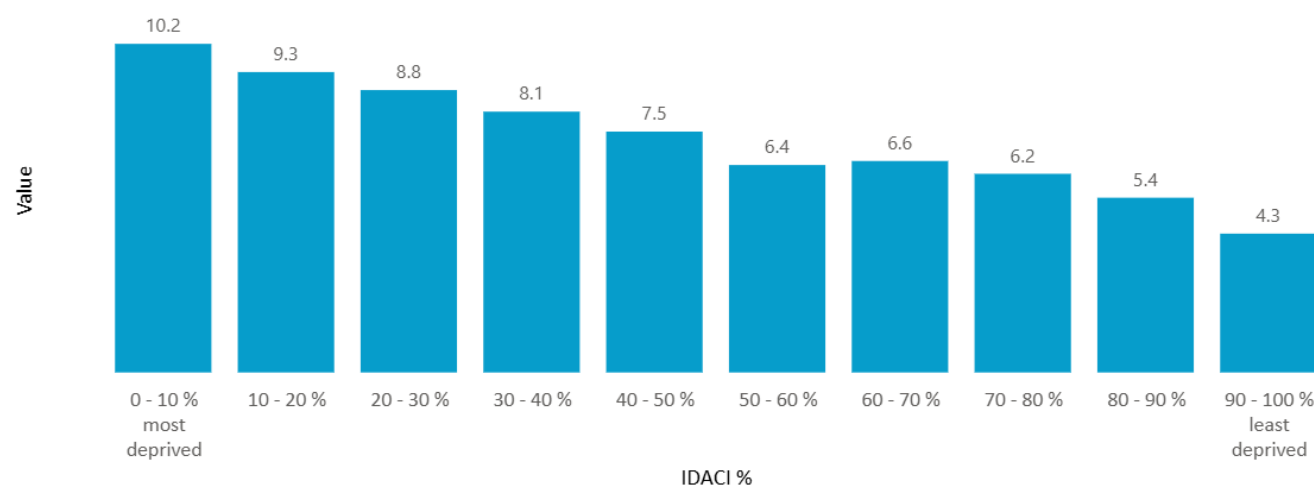
**Ethnicity:** Absence rates are significantly higher for Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller pupils. Bristol is above average in all ethnic groups except Chinese. The gap to national is largest for Gypsy Roma pupils at 4.9ppts, followed by White and Black Caribbean pupils at 2.9ppts. Work continues to understand the factors that underpin absence rates amongst the different groups to ensure there are development policies and practices to address these issues.



To understand the factors underpinning attendance and absence, further analysis has taken place locally to examine key factors including deprivation.

**Deprivation:** Historical data shows there is a clear correlation between deprivation and high rates of absence. The measure of deprivation being used here is the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). Decile 1 (0-10%) is the most deprived area, 10 (90-100%) the least. This is based on the pupils' residence rather than the location of the school. Absence rates are significantly higher for pupils living in more deprived areas at 10.2% for pupils in the 10% most deprived areas compared to 4.3% in the 10% least deprived areas.

Absence Rate by IDACI



The ongoing cost of living crisis has deepened poverty across the country. However, Bristol is disproportionately affected, with a higher proportion of pupils living in the bottom decile of the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) compared to its statistical neighbours. Analysis of absence rates among pupils in the most deprived 10% of areas shows that Bristol has the highest rate of absence among all statistical neighbours.

## Local Response and Provision

Bristol City Council continues to strengthen a whole-system approach to attendance, working in partnership with schools, families and wider services in line with the principles of *Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024*.

Recognising that attendance challenges are often linked to a range of educational, health, social and economic factors, our focus is on early intervention, targeted support and building sustainable improvement across the city.

## Key areas of activity

### Promoting the importance of attendance

- Through the Autumn Attendance Campaign, we are delivering a citywide focus on improving attendance at the start of the academic year, reinforcing positive attendance messages, sharing resources with schools and families, and encouraging early conversations where attendance concerns emerge.

### Data-led identification and intervention

- Schools are supported to make effective use of attendance data, DfE dashboards and local intelligence to identify emerging concerns, target support earlier and monitor the impact of interventions.
- Regular analysis enables a continued focus on vulnerable groups, including pupils with SEND, those eligible for FSM, and children experiencing persistent or severe absence.

### Peer challenge and school improvement

- Peer Attendance Reviews bring schools together to review practice, share effective strategies and provide constructive challenge. This collaborative approach helps to identify successful interventions, strengthen attendance leadership and accelerate improvement across the system.

### Attendance Hubs and sector-led support

- Bristol schools actively engage in the Attendance Hubs programme, enabling the sharing of evidence-based practice and successful approaches to reducing absence. This work helps build capacity within schools and ensures effective strategies are disseminated more widely across the city.

### Developing long-term solutions

- Through the Bristol Future Attendance Workstream, partners from education, health and wider services are working together to better understand the changing drivers of absence and develop sustainable, citywide responses. The workstream focuses particularly on addressing barriers linked to SEND, mental health, disadvantage and persistent absence.

### Multi-agency support for children and families

- Attendance remains a shared responsibility across services. Schools are supported to work with health, SEND, family support and safeguarding partners to address the underlying barriers preventing children and young people from attending school regularly.

### Support available

- Local Authority Attendance Team advice, support, challenge and professional development for schools.
- Attendance targeting supporting meeting discussions and consultations for pupils experiencing persistent or severe absence.

- Bristol Inclusion Panel support for complex and vulnerable cases.
- Mental health, SEND and educational psychology services.
- Family support through Family Hubs and wider early-help services.
- Access to enrichment and holiday provision, including Your Holiday Hub, helping children and families remain connected, engaged and supported throughout the year.

Together, these initiatives are helping Bristol move from managing absence to preventing it, ensuring that more children and young people attend school regularly, feel included in their education and achieve positive outcomes.

### Key priorities for 2026/27

1. Reduce persistent and severe absence
  - Focus on early identification and prevention
2. Address inequalities
  - Targeted & place-based support for vulnerable groups
3. Strengthen SEND pathways
  - Improve access to timely support and appropriate provision
4. Embed whole-system working
  - Strengthen school, LA and partner collaboration, including delivering a city-wide attendance campaign.
5. Improve mental health support
  - Lost Learning Policy launch and clearer pathways of support for anxiety-related absence/difficulty attending school or college due to anxiety (DASCA)
6. Tackle deprivation-related barriers
  - Align attendance work with wider poverty strategies – Bristol Future Programme

### Conclusion

Pupil absence in Bristol remains higher than national averages and deeply linked to inequality. While national trends show improvement, local data has stabilised but highlights persistent and systemic challenges, particularly for vulnerable groups, mirroring the southwest trend.

A strengthened, coordinated whole-system response, focused on early intervention, inclusion and tackling root causes is essential to ensure all children and young people in Bristol can access education, feel a sense of belonging, and achieve positive outcomes.

### Further links:

Links to published data set:

[Release home - Pupil absence in schools in England - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

**Date updated:** July 2026

**Next update due:** May 2027