



Rise in School Absences Since Covid

The figures for school absences have risen since school closures in the covid lockdown in Great Britain.

The articles below show some of the consequences of lockdown.

England: Missing Children, Missing Grades

“Since becoming Children’s Commissioner for England, I have made tackling school absences one of my top

priorities. I first came into this role in March 2021, after 30 years of experience in education as a multi-academy trust leader and headteacher. The nation was emerging from successive lockdowns and children’s education had been immensely disrupted. I sensed that there were deep issues unravelling in our



school system. We have since seen that school absence rates have become stuck at crisis levels.

"I fear that attendance has become the issue of our time. The number of children regularly missing school has more than doubled compared to pre-pandemic and we are only making slow progress in steadying school absence rates. Worryingly, over 120,000 children are missing at least half of their time in school."

November 2023 Read report [here](#)



Scotland: 'Alarming' rise in school pupil absence rates, says report

An "alarming" rise in school pupil absence rates since the Covid pandemic is seriously harming learning, an education think tank has said. It is estimated that 40% of secondary pupils of exam age in Scotland are missing a day of

school a fortnight. The Commission on School Reform, an independent group of education experts, says the findings also suggest a fifth are missing one day a week. Attendance has dropped across Scotland since disruption caused by Covid.

Read [here](#).

Wales: One in six secondary pupils regularly absent in Wales

About one in six secondary school pupils in Wales are persistently absent from school, new figures have



shown. Welsh government data suggests 16.3% of pupils aged 11-15 fell into this category in 2022-23, three times higher than pre-pandemic levels. For pupils eligible for free school meals, this figure was more than twice as high at 35.7%. Education Minister Jeremy Miles said a "task force" would "look in depth" into the reasons behind non-attendance. Persistent absence is defined as missing 20% of the most common required sessions. Overall levels of absence, based on missed half-day sessions, have also doubled. Read [here](#)

The Covid kids starting school unable to speak

Aldine and Adam's five-year-old daughter Ivy is among those currently being helped by the (Reading) clinic. They say the stress of the pandemic and not being able to see friends and family took a big toll on Ivy. When the family went out for walks, Ivy wanted to go to talk to other children - but could not because of Covid restrictions. "She had no interaction with anyone her own age, so that slowed down her development," Aldine says. Read [here](#).



Children's Use of Technology

Technology has its place, but what is that place?

A Rain of Statistics



The rain of statistics these days about our youth's "mental health"—unsettling phrase—is pummelling. Do you know some of these statistics? Do they have to be recounted? I myself don't know what to do with them. What does one make of the CDC's (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) reporting that 57% of high school females in 2021 felt so sad and hopeless they stopped doing their usual activities? And what does one make of how different this number was in 2011 (36%)? What does one make of the recorded 22% of high school students who seriously considered suicide in 2021; the 18% who made a plan; and the 10% (ten percent!) who actually tried to kill themselves? How does one respond to this? (And our mental health crisis is not merely a response to COVID. As you likely know, youth anguish has been surging in recent years.) And what does one make of the commentary on such statistics? Listen to writer and NYU professor Jonathan Haidt in his bluntly titled piece 'Social Media is a Major Cause of the Mental Illness Epidemic in Teen Girls.

Here's the Evidence.:

"...two threads are both essential for understanding why teen mental health collapsed in the 2010s. In brief, it's the transition from a play-based childhood involving a lot of risky unsupervised play, which is essential for overcoming fear and fragility, to a phone-based childhood which blocks normal human development by taking time away from sleep, play, and in-person socialising, as well as causing addiction, and drowning kids in social comparisons they can't win." Read the full article [here](#).

Teddy Macker Waldorf Today *The Girl Inside the Raindrop* (3 Oct 2023). Ref. Jonathon Haidt (22 Feb 2023) *Social Media is a Major Cause of the Mental Illness Epidemic in Teen Girls*. Here's the Evidence. Read [here](#).

My fight to get screens out of schools

It was gratifying to see the recent Unesco report recommending moderation on the topic of tech in the classroom. I do hope the Department for Education, Ofsted and every school head in the country has read it. Britain seems to have submitted to the tidal wave of digital learning without so

much as a minnow of doubt. The switch to online lessons during the lockdowns should have been temporary, an emergency measure – not something we then accepted wholesale. Personally, I find the sight of 26 bright faces glued to 26 bright screens for lesson after lesson indefensible. The argument that these platforms are ‘adaptive’ is unpersuasive – a good teacher is adaptive.

Multiple teachers have been very candid with me about the failure of tech in the classroom. Rachael G, an assistant principal from a school in Hackney, east London, saw first-hand the damage caused by giving every child an iPad in her previous school. ‘Students would be in lessons but instead of listening to the teacher and processing the learning, they were staring at their iPad,’ she says. ‘It overstimulates the brain, is incredibly addictive to look at and the children became zombie-like. Even the best students with the best intentions would focus on the process of acquiring the facts rather than actually being able to learn them. [The iPad] sought only to stoke their screen addictions and took away from the purest form of teaching: explanation. The goals of digital learning – to be more efficient, to increase independence, to reflect the real world and give students the tools needed when they leave school – largely fail on all accounts.’

Read the article [here](#). Sophie Winkleman 31 August 2023. From Spectator Life

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UK www.allianceforchildhood.org.uk
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UN warns of risk of having smartphones in schools

The United Nations has warned of the risks of smartphones in schools, stating "only technology that supports learning" is merited in schools.

Mobile devices can cause distraction, risk pupil privacy and lead to cyber-bullying says Unesco, the UN's education, science and culture agency. But less than one-in-four countries have laws or policies banning phones in schools, the report found. In the UK, head teachers set the rules but restrictions apply in most schools. Manos Antoninis, the author of the 2023 Global Education Monitor report, told the BBC their study found "examples of smartphone use in school that is distracting students from learning and increasing risks to their privacy at the same time". "Only technology that supports learning has a place in school," he said. Read the article [here](#). Chris Vallance & Tom Gerken BBC 26th July 2023.

Children's Play and Virtual Reality

Pennie Brownlee

Virtual reality as a 'thing' proliferated in the second half of the twentieth century in association with the exponential developments in the computing technology sector. When we think of virtual reality (VR), many of us think of gaming where players 'play' in an immersive life-



like simulated world. While this sector of VR is set to expand as the demand for 'real-life like' entertainment increases, VR is currently employed in areas as diverse as psychology, medicine, education and manufacturing.....

If imaginative play is the original virtual reality and the seedbed of all human creativity, what does the VR created by humans offer the organic 'nature-built' human child? Equipped with 21+ senses, the human child is a super-sensory learning specialist. With a sensory brain-system resulting from eons of research and development, the child is designed for living in a super sensory world as a member of a social species. The human child's first great developmental need then is human connection, beginning with the attachment at birth. Emotional and physical nurture, with face-to-face communication, these are the glue of social connection. Read [here](#).

Play

Chris Packham: ‘Let kids explore – getting stung by nettles never killed anyone’

My heart sinks when I see groups of children taken out to the countryside in hivi jackets,” says Chris Packham. “

It’s sending entirely the wrong message: that the natural world is a dangerous environment.” The 63-year-old Springwatch presenter shakes his head in frustration. “Parents and teachers need to find the courage to let kids explore on their own terms. It doesn’t matter if they get muddy or wet. Getting scratched by a bramble or stung by nettles never killed anyone.” Read full article [here](#).



Philadelphia families rejoice at school’s new playground amid fears for children’s safety

When Duane Watts was a student at Edward Steel Elementary School in Philadelphia’s Nicetown neighbourhood more than 40 years ago, he remembers running excitedly out of his classroom for recess and being confronted with concrete. No swings, no slides, no monkey bars to climb on. “We would play tag, but nothing was actually present and given to us to play with,” he said. But that’s no longer true for the children attending Steel, a pre-K-8 school of more than 300 students. On Thursday morning, school officials and nonprofit leaders cut the ribbon on a new \$45,000 playground in Steel’s side yard. Built over the summer with donated funds, the playground gives children more room to play at a time when policies like the city curfew and restrictions on unaccompanied minors at businesses, as well as gun violence that has affected Nicetown and other Philadelphia neighbourhoods, have made it harder for children to congregate and spend productive time together in public spaces. Teachers and counsellors at Steel who fought for the playground by writing grants and building partnerships and community support for it looked on in tears at the ribbon cutting. At least a dozen parents brought their children to be the first to test out the new equipment. “This is a huge deal for us,” said Nicole Wyglendowski, a special education teacher for K-3 students who helped with the effort. Younger children especially need playgrounds with inviting activities to help them to learn to get along with each other and “just have fun,” she said. Read the full article [here](#).

Environments of Children and Youth and Mental Health



The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group (AfC ENG) held its 90th Quality of Childhood (QoC) talk in the European Parliament on 26th September 2023. The theme was Environments of Children and Youth and Mental Health. *The quality of the environments in which children live is key to their mental and physical health and well-being. Providing safe, supportive and civil environments, coupled with opportunities for children*

to play, learn and express themselves with others, is a simple set of conditions that all European countries have committed to through the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The session was introduced by Christopher Clouder from AfC ENG and Radka MAXOVÁ MEP. Speakers included Dominic Richardson • Managing Director of the Learning for Well-being Institute, Prof. Joanna Inchley • Coordinator of the Health Behaviours in School aged Children Study and Prof. Sonia Livingstone • Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science. There was a Children and Youth Panel with: 2 young participants (< 18) Üwen Ergün • Head of ACT2gether Germany and Grace McMeekin • Programme Lead of the Resilience Project. You can see the proceedings [here](#).

Children, young people and the built environment

UK Government Inquiry Call for Evidence

This inquiry is looking at how better planning and building and urban design in England could enhance the health and well-being of children and young people, while also benefitting the population as a whole. It will look at how children and young people can use outside public spaces and move around their neighbourhoods: how they can be active and visibly part of their communities – whether it is their street, housing development, estate, town centre, village, public square or park. And it will look at what role the Government may have in making the built environment work in the best way possible. See more details [here](#). Call for Evidence [here](#).





The Big Ambition' Survey

The Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Sousa, has launched 'The Big Ambition' survey to hear directly from children, young people, and parents across the country. She writes: 'I want to hear about what they enjoy about their schools, communities, family life, and the wider world. I also want to know what they want for their future, their hopes and their aspirations. 'I am going to make sure I hear from the widest group of young people as possible, and want to particularly hear the experiences of children in care. Over the next few months, my team and I will be visiting schools, colleges, children's homes, secure children's homes, residential special schools, hospitals, young offender institutes, youth clubs and many other locations across England to get children and young people involved, so they can have their say. 'Every response counts so please share The Big Ambition survey with children, parents, and carers within your network.' Read more [here](#).

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