95%+ attendance almost doubles odds of GCSE pass

DfE research finds missing just 10 days of year 11 halves the odds of getting a grade 5 in English and maths.

The odds of year 11 pupils achieving a grade 5 in English and maths almost double if their attendance is over 95 per cent, compared to those who miss between 5 and 10 per cent of lessons, government attendance research suggests.

The Department for Education (DfE) has published a report which examines the link between attendance and attainment of pupils taking SATs and GCSEs.

They analysed school census data from schools and exam and test results, using a model which controlled for the effect of other factors which may affect a pupil's attainment, such as their characteristics.

It comes after the Education Policy Institute (EPI) found school absences between 2019 and 2023 were a "key, and growing, driver of the disadvantage gap".

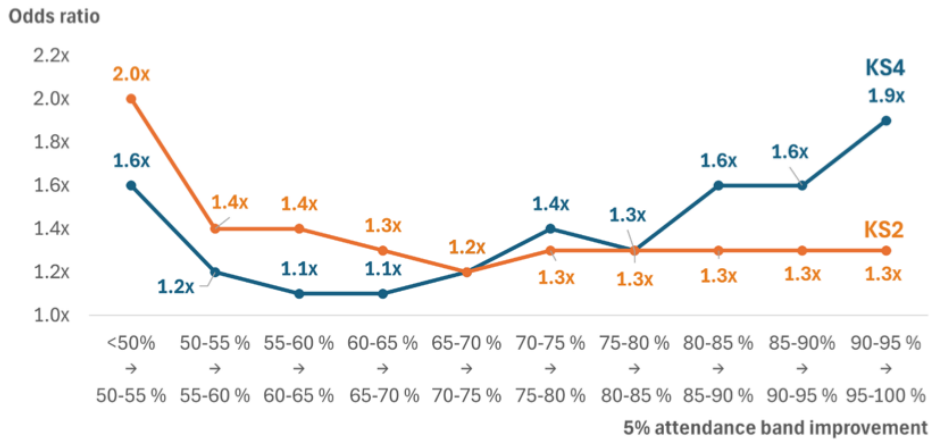
Here's what we learned from the government research.

1. Attendance is key in year 11…

The odds of pupils in year 11 achieving a grade 5 in English and maths were 1.9 times higher than those who only attended 90 to 95 per cent of the time.

Missing just ten days of year 11, the report said, halved the odds of achieving a grade 5 in the subjects.

Figure 11 The odds ratio of achieving the expected standard at KS2 and KS4 when moving up a single 5% attendance band



2. ...and year 6

The research also found the odds of year 6 pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths were 1.3 times higher among those whose attendance was 95 per cent or higher than those with 90 to 95 per cent attendance.

Missing just 10 days of year six reduced the odds of reaching the expected standard by around 25 per cent.

3. Poorer pupils have lower attendance and attainment

The report found “strong evidence that other factors may affect a pupil’s attainment”, such as their eligibility for free school meals, or special educational needs and disabilities.

Pupils eligible for free school meals are “under-represented in the higher attendance bands”, accounting for only 20 per cent of year 6 pupils in the 95 to 100 per cent attendance band but 69 per cent of those in the 65 to 70 per cent band.

27.3 per cent of year 6 pupils nationally are eligible for free school meals.

At year 11, only 14 per cent of pupils with attendance above 95 per cent were eligible for free school meals, compared to 21.3 per cent of year 11s nationally.

Pupils eligible for free school meals also had a lower likelihood of reaching the expected standard at key stage 2 or getting a grade 5 at GCSE.

Children with SEND also had lower attendance rates and were less likely to reach the expected standards.

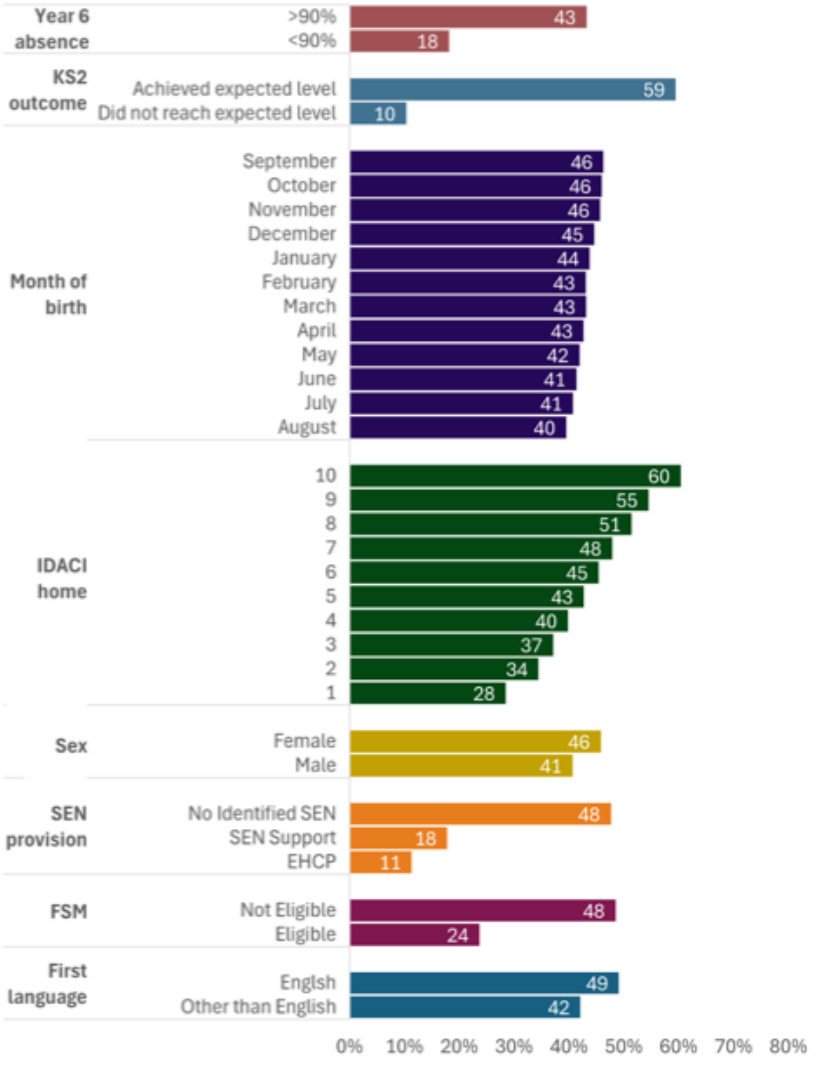



Figure 9 Proportion of pupils in the KS4 cohort who achieved Grade 5 in Maths and English GCSE for compounding factors