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Trajectories of school absence from 9 to 13 years of age and over time

EMER SMYTH, ANNA MOYA AND MERIKE DARMODY

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Seirbhís Tacaíochta Oideachais Tusla
Tusla Education Support Service

AN INSTITIÚID UM THAIGHDE EACNAMAÍOCHTA AGUS SÓISIALTA
ESRI ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Emer Smyth

Anna Moya

Merike Darmody

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THE AUTHORS

Emer Smyth is a Research Professor at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and an Adjunct Professor at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Anna Moya Ponce is a Research Assistant at the ESRI. Merike Darmody is a Research Officer at the ESRI and an Adjunct Assistant Professor at TCD.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Adverse childhood experiences
CES-D	Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme
EL	English learners
FAS	Family Affluence Scale
GUI	Growing Up in Ireland study
NFP	Negative family processes
PFP	Positive family processes
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SEN	Special educational needs
SES	Socioeconomic status
TESS	Tusla Education Support Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Ireland, like many other countries, has seen a significant increase in school absence in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with over a fifth of primary and post-primary students missing 20 or more days per school year (in 2023/24) (TESS, 2025). Existing international and Irish research has pointed to the multiplicity of factors at individual, family, community and school levels that shape school absence (see, for example, Gubbels et al., 2019; Sosu et al., 2021). However, few studies have sought to examine the reasons underlying post-pandemic growth in non-attendance or whether particular groups of young people are disproportionately affected. This report draws on Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) data to contribute to the evidence base on school absence in two ways: first, data from Cohort '08, who made the transition to post-primary education during the period of school closures, are used to look at changes between 9 and 13 years in patterns of absence; second, data from Cohorts '98 and '08 are used to compare 13-year-olds a decade apart in their levels and patterns of non-attendance.

SCHOOL ABSENCE AMONG 13-YEAR-OLDS

School absence is based on reports by the young person's mother, with over a fifth of the 13-year-olds in the GUI sample missing 11 or more days in 2021/22.[1] No differences are found in absence levels by gender, but disability is a strong predictor of missing school. Absence rates are strongly socially differentiated, with higher rates among unskilled and non-employed families, those whose mothers have lower levels of education, families experiencing financial strain (that is, having difficulties making ends meet) and lone-parent households. Migrant-origin young people have better attendance, taking account of a wide variety of other factors. Absence rates also vary by area-level characteristics, being higher among those in rented accommodation and those living in areas with low social capital (that is, with lower community bonds and poorer facilities for teenagers). A number of family characteristics and processes, including maternal depression, mother-child conflict, lack of consistency in parenting, a harsher parenting style (such as shouting), a lack of routine and adverse life events (like bereavement or addiction), are significant predictors of school absence.

[1] Social desirability may have resulted in mothers' under-reporting of school absence compared to administrative data or they may have been unaware of truancy. Thus, international research indicates that mothers can underestimate their children's by a factor of two (Rogers and Feller, 2018). Nonetheless, there is considerable variation among the sample in their levels of non-attendance.

School characteristics and young people's experiences at school make a difference to their absence rates. The higher absence rates in DEIS schools[2] are found to be related to the concentration of socio-economic disadvantage in these schools but having attended a high-absence primary school is a risk factor, even taking account of family background. Schools that involve students to a greater extent in decision-making emerge as having lower absence rates. Absence rates are higher among those with negative attitudes to school at 9 and/or 13 years, those who have poorer quality relationships with their teachers and those who experienced bullying at age 9.

TRAJECTORIES OF ABSENCE FROM 9 TO 13 YEARS

Information on attendance at ages 9 and 13 years is used to look at how patterns over time differ across groups of students. Four trajectory types are evident: stable low levels of school absence (44 per cent), stable high levels of absence (14 per cent), improving levels of attendance (14 per cent) and declining levels of attendance (22 per cent). Disability is significantly associated with attendance issues, while young people for whom a disability emerged or was identified between 9 and 13 years tend to have increasing absence rates. Young people from working-class or non-employed households, those with lower levels of education, those living in rented accommodation and in areas with low social capital tend to have poorer patterns of attendance at primary level, with many of this group maintaining this pattern into post-primary level. High or increasing absence levels are also related to exposure to adverse childhood experiences, an absence of routine for the young person and maternal depression. Not liking post-primary school and negative interactions with teachers play an important role in maintaining or triggering poor attendance.

The pandemic significantly disrupted the lives of children and young people, and school principals report it as having contributed to poorer wellbeing and lower attendance levels, especially in DEIS schools. Some aspects of variation in the pandemic experience are found to make a difference. Not having a quiet place to study remotely is predictive of moving from low to high absence levels. High absence levels at 13 are evident among those who gave up on studying during the school closure and those who found it harder to settle back into school. Teachers going over material did appear to have a protective effect on young people not moving into high absence levels. Perhaps the strongest pandemic effect[3] was related to greater socio-emotional difficulties among many young people, with an increase in difficulties an important risk factor for later absence.

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2 DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) is an initiative in Ireland aimed at addressing educational disadvantage by providing additional resources and support to schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

3 While it cannot definitely be established that this increase is solely due to the pandemic, the longitudinal and cross-cohort analyses do point to significant changes over a relatively short period of time (see also Smyth and Russell, 2024).

Comparing Cohorts ’98 and ’08, absence rates are stable at age 9 but increase significantly among 13-year-olds, a pattern that is evident for both girls and boys and across all social groups. The impact of two main factors appears to have changed over time. First, not liking school is more strongly predictive of absence than previously. Second, absence at age 13 has increased more among those who had higher levels of emotional and conduct difficulties at age 9 and those with higher levels of emotional, conduct, hyperactivity and peer difficulties at age 13. While the processes cannot fully be unpacked using the available data, these patterns suggest that parents may be more willing than previously to allow their teenage children to stay away from school, and young people themselves more likely to avoid school, if they are more negative about it and/or have poorer socio-emotional wellbeing.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The study findings point to the multiplicity of individual, family, neighbourhood and school factors that influence school absence, suggesting the need for policy responses to be multi-dimensional and integrated. Disability, particularly a recently identified or emerging condition, emerges as a strong driver of school absence, with further research needed to unpack the processes at play. The strong association found between socio-economic disadvantage at family and area level and school absence highlights the need for broader anti-child poverty policy to bolster educational interventions. The link with maternal depression, poorer child wellbeing post-pandemic and adverse childhood experiences points to the necessity for mental health and parenting support services to assist families through challenging life events. Nonetheless, schools can make a difference through fostering positive attitudes to school, greater student involvement and reducing negative teacher-student and peer interaction to enhance attendance.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Ireland, like many other countries, has seen a significant increase in school absence since the pandemic (TESS, 2025). At primary level, chronic absence (that is, missing 20 or more days in the school year) increased from 10.7 per cent in 2018/19 to 22.1 per cent in 2023/24, having peaked in 2021/22. At post-primary level, a similar trend is evident, increasing from 14.5 per cent in 2018/19 to 21.2 per cent in 2023/24 (TESS, 2022; 2025). However there has been a lack of research on the factors underlying this trend, and whether particular groups of young people have increased absence levels. This study takes advantage of the longitudinal nature of the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study to look at the experiences of members of Cohort '08 from 9 to 13 years, a period that included the pandemic. Furthermore, the existence of two GUI cohorts facilitates the analysis of absence levels among 13-year-olds a decade apart, allowing us to determine whether some factors have become more important drivers of non-attendance in the wake of the pandemic. The research questions addressed in this study are:

- What individual, family and school factors are associated with higher levels of school absence at 13 years of age?
- What are the attendance trajectories of young people between 9 and 13 years?
- What individual, family and school factors are associated with changes in attendance between 9 and 13 years of age?
- Comparing two cohorts of young people, have the factors influencing absence changed over time?

The remainder of this chapter places the study in the context of previous international and national research on school absence, and outlines the methodology used.

1.2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON PATTERNS OF SCHOOL ABSENCE

1.2.1 Individual-level characteristics

1.2.1.1 Gender and sexuality

Although gender is not typically examined as a primary factor of interest in studies on attendance, research has nonetheless explored its role, often as part of broader analyses, with mixed findings.

A number of studies suggest that male youth are more likely to engage in truancy (being absent from school regularly without permission) than their female peers. For instance, Maynard et al. (2012), using a large-scale US sample of adolescents aged 12–17, identified distinct profiles of truant youth. Their findings indicate that students with the best attendance records were disproportionately female, 70 per cent, whereas only 35 per cent of chronic truants were female. Similar patterns have been observed in Germany (Wagner et al., 2000), the Netherlands (Veenstra et al., 2010), and Switzerland (Sälzer et al., 2012) where young boys were found to be generally more prone to truancy than girls.

Conversely, when studying other types of absenteeism than truancy, multiple studies have found no significant gender differences or have reported findings that do not align with the trend of higher absenteeism among males. Pflug and Schneider (2016), in a population-representative study on school absences in Germany, reported no significant gendered disparities in attendance among secondary school-aged youth. Similarly, Anderson and Romm (2020) and Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), in their studies of US contexts, find no consistent gendered inequalities in attendance during compulsory education. Perhaps surprisingly, Wood et al. (2024) and García and Weiss (2018), analysing data from Bradford, UK, and US national data, respectively, find that females are slightly more prone to chronic absenteeism than their male peers.

Findings from Ireland reflect this complexity. Darmody et al. (2008), using a sample of school leavers, found that male students were more likely to engage in truancy during their final year of secondary school. However, when examining absenteeism more broadly, Thornton et al. (2013), drawing on GUI data from the first phase of a cohort of nine-year-olds, found no significant gendered differences in persistent absenteeism, that is, those absent for 20 or more days in the school year. Further research is warranted to clarify the nature and context-dependent variations of the associations between absenteeism and gender.

A number of US studies have underscored the significance of sexual orientation as a factor influencing disparities in school attendance. Robinson and Espelage (2011), analysing longitudinal data from middle and high school students in Wisconsin, found that LGBTQ students had significantly higher rates of unexcused absences compared to their heterosexual peers. While only 7 per cent of heterosexual students reported unexcused absences in middle school, the figure rose to 22 per cent among LGBTQ students. Pampati et al. (2020), examining high schools in Florida, highlights concerning absenteeism rates among transgender youth, with transgender students being 1.5 times more likely to report missing three or more days of school within a 30-day window. Aragon et al. (2014), in their study of high school students across 20 schools in the Midwestern United States, found that LGBTQ students were more than twice as likely as non-LGBTQ students

to skip school. While various factors may contribute to this pattern, Aragon et al. (2014) highlighted increased victimisation (bullying) as a partial explanatory factor, whereas Robinson and Espelage (2011) pointed to the diminished sense of school belonging for LGBTQ youth as relevant to look at.

1.2.1.2 Age and stage

In a longitudinal study such as this one, there is a valuable opportunity to examine the role of age, which has consistently been a meaningful factor – albeit to varying degrees – when analysing attendance trajectories over time. Several studies have drawn on longitudinal data covering multiple school grades, or even full schooling trajectories, to examine how attendance patterns evolve over time and how frequently different patterns occur. Many of these studies identify distinct groups of students who follow different attendance pathways, which we review below.

Wei (2024) looks at the first decade of education, tracking students from pre-kindergarten through third grade (covering ages 3 to 9 approximately) in Massachusetts public schools. They find that most children follow a trajectory of consistently low absences. The next most common pattern – though it accounts for only about 8 per cent of the sample – involves students who start with high absenteeism in pre-kindergarten (which, in Ireland, would be equivalent to Junior Infants), but whose attendance improves in the later grades.

Covering a larger period, Simon et al. (2020) base their analysis on the US Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, following students from kindergarten through eighth grade (ages 5 to 14 approximately). Their findings show that low absenteeism is the most common pattern, representing 46 per cent of students. They also identify two similarly sized groups: an increasing-absenteeism trajectory (22 per cent) and a decreasing-absenteeism trajectory (24 per cent). Students in the increasing-absenteeism group show relatively good attendance from kindergarten (ages 5-6) to first grade (ages 6-7) but then experience a sharp rise that reaches chronic absenteeism by third grade (ages 8-9), after which it stabilises. In contrast, the decreasing-absenteeism group begins with chronic absenteeism in kindergarten but improves by first grade and then stays stable. The final and smallest class is the high-absenteeism group, accounting for about 8 per cent of the sample.

A study covering the same, extensive period is that by Schoeneberger (2012), which examines longitudinal data from a school district in the southeastern United States, following students across both elementary and middle school (with elementary school usually covering ages 5 to 11 and middle school 11 to 14). The largest group they identify consists of constant attendees, who maintain good

attendance throughout. They also find a group of developing truants, about 9.4 per cent of the sample, who attend regularly in elementary school but whose absences increase once they reach middle school. Another group, the early truants (about 5.2 per cent), begin with attendance problems early in elementary school but show improvement over time. The final group, making up 3.3 per cent of the sample, are chronic truants, who show persistent attendance issues throughout the period studied. The results are similar to those reported by Simon et al. (2020) in that the transition into middle school appears to be a key turning point, with the increasing-absenteeism groups in both studies showing their rise at this stage. However, the studies differ in that the trajectory groups in this study other than the consistently low absence group are noticeably smaller in size.

Liu and Lee (2022) add further insights, given that they separate excused and unexcused absences and also cover the high school period. They analyse data from a large urban school district in the United States. They find that excused absences vary little across grade levels, but this is not the case for unexcused absences. Both the overall levels of unexcused absences and their year-to-year growth are substantially higher in high school than in middle school. Within high school, they also report a steep upward trajectory, with unexcused absences increasing by a sizeable margin with each grade.

One study that is not based in the United States is Dräger et al. (2024), who use data from the English subsample of nationally representative Millennium Cohort Study to trace students' absence patterns across their full period of compulsory schooling. They identify several distinct groups. The largest cluster is the consistently low-absence group, which includes roughly two-thirds of all students. The second largest group, making up 28 per cent, consists of students with consistently moderate authorised absences. Beyond these two large groups, they identify three much smaller clusters characterised by rising absences over time. The moderately increasing unauthorised absences group (3.5 per cent) consists of students who already show relatively high levels of unexcused absences from Year 1 through Year 6, which then increase further. The strongly increasing authorised absences group (1.62 per cent) is marked by authorised absences that rise sharply from primary school levels, averaging around 7 per cent, to more than 30 per cent by Year 11. Finally, the strongly increasing unauthorised absences group (0.82 per cent) includes students whose unexcused absences start off relatively low in primary school but rise steeply once they enter secondary school.

Benner and Wang (2014) examine data from a large school district in a central southern US city and focus on the transition from middle school to high school, which typically occurs when students are around 14 to 15 years old. They create several attendance-trajectory classes to track how students' patterns evolve across this transition. Overall, 44 per cent of students stay on the same attendance

pathway as they move into high school. However, the transition often signals growing disengagement: 38 per cent of students shift into worse attendance trajectories, while only 18 per cent move into more positive ones.

Two additional studies provide insights into how attendance shifts over time, although they do not work with group analysis. Ansari and Gottfried (2021) use data from the US Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. Although their main research question is not about attendance trajectories over time, their descriptive analyses reveal some early-school attendance pattern: absenteeism is highest in kindergarten (around ages 5–6), drops noticeably in first grade (6–7 years old) and second grade (7–8 years old), and then rises slightly but stays relatively stable from third through fifth grade (roughly ages 8–11). Skedgell and Kearney (2018) look at large-scale sample from Nevada, covering elementary, middle, and high school absenteeism levels. They find that risk factors are being in the earliest grades (1, 2) – similar to the results by Ansari and Gottfried (2021) – and the later high school years (grades 9–12).

Overall, the findings across these studies point at several phases in the schooling journey that tend to be especially concerning in terms of attendance trajectories. Problematic patterns often emerge in the early grades, during the transition from middle school to high school (bearing in mind this is a US-specific transition), and again in the later years of high school. It is also worth noting that most of the research identifying attendance-trajectory groups is based on US data, so any interpretation should be made with some caution, as certain patterns may be shaped by features and dynamics which are unique to the US education system.

1.2.1.3 Mental health, long-term illness and disability

An extensive body of literature has reported a significant association between mental health difficulties and school attendance, primarily in the US (Gottfried and Gee, 2017; Egger et al., 2003; Kearney and Albano, 2004), but also across other countries, such as Germany (Enderle et al., 2024; Schlesier et al., 2023), Ireland (Flynn et al., 2024: Thornton et al., 2013), the UK (Villadsen et al., 2024; Attwood and Croll, 2017), and Norway (Ingul et al., 2012). The links between mental health and school absences are supported by two systematic literature reviews examining depression and anxiety as related to absenteeism (Finning et al., 2019a; 2019b). However, these reviews underscore the need for more high-quality, longitudinal research to provide greater clarity on the interpretation of these associations and to accurately estimate the causal impact of mental health issues on school absences.

The limited longitudinal research complicates the conventional understanding of the link between mental health and absenteeism. Wood et al. (2012), using a nationally representative US sample, found that higher levels of absenteeism at the first assessment were significantly associated with higher reported anxiety and depression at the follow-up, 12 months after the initial assessment, in middle school but not high school students. Similarly, Burton et al. (2014), employing a longitudinal methodology with a US sample of high school students, found that baseline depression was related to subsequent unexcused absences among sexual minority students but not among heterosexual students, while anxiety did not appear to lead to absences in any group.

Panayiotou et al. (2023) highlight that even those employing longitudinal methodologies on the topic often lack the robustness needed to establish causality. Controlling for both between- and within-subject effects, their study presents findings that, to some extent, contradict the existing literature. Their study indicates that emotional difficulties were not associated with later authorised absences at any time point and that greater emotional difficulties predicted fewer unauthorised absences at later time points. A suggested, albeit untested, explanation for this trend may be heightened levels of support both inside and outside of school, which could mitigate absences.

Overall, further longitudinal research is needed to clarify the strength, direction, and nature of the relationship between mental health and school absences, to which this study aims to contribute.

Internalising and externalising behaviours[4] have been widely used as indicators of child and adolescent mental health (see, for example, Vallely et al., 2025). Externalising behaviour has been examined as a major risk factor for absenteeism. A comprehensive meta-review of the literature on absenteeism and dropout risk factors by Gubbels et al. (2019) – encompassing both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies in which risk factors were present prior to any (potential) school absenteeism or dropout – explores a large spectrum of elements. Their findings indicate that externalising behaviour is amongst the factors with the highest overall impact on absenteeism.

Chronic illness has been linked to absenteeism in numerous studies (Borrego et al., 2005; Mackner et al., 2012; Duquette et al., 2007; Agoston et al., 2016) among the ones examined. A systematic literature review by Kearney (2008) identifies physical health conditions as a key factor in international research on school

[4] Internalising behaviours comprise emotional and peer difficulties while externalising behaviours comprise conduct difficulties and attention problems/hyperactivity.

absenteeism, with asthma and related complications being among the leading causes. Similarly, a meta-literature review by Gubbels et al. (2019), encompassing both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies, establishes a statistically significant association between poor physical health and absenteeism. However, compared to other factors, its effect size is moderate. In the Irish context, Thornton et al. (2013:496), using longitudinal data from a cohort of nine-year-olds, found that 'children with a chronic illness were more than twice as likely to have attendance issues [missing 20 or more days a year] as those without chronic illness'.

Disability and special educational needs (SEN)[5] have also been identified as playing a role in school absenteeism. Gottfried et al. (2019), using longitudinal, student-level administrative data from New York City, find that students with disabilities are 66 per cent more likely to be chronically absent than their general education peers, with those diagnosed with emotional and learning disabilities being the most affected. Christani et al. (2015), using a nationally representative US dataset, find no meaningful practical differences in absence patterns between students with and without disabilities for certain measures of absenteeism, particularly skipping school and excused absences. However, they do find significant differences in absences due to emotional and health issues. Hatton (2018), drawing on descriptive statistics from the English Department for Education, reports that students with SEN have higher rates of authorised absences than their non-SEN peers, largely due to health-related reasons. However, unauthorised absences are generally lower among SEN students, with some subgroup exceptions. In the context of persistent absenteeism in Ireland, Thornton et al. (2013) show that children with SEN are twice as likely to experience attendance issues compared to their peers without SEN.

1.2.2 Family-level characteristics

1.2.2.1 Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the most widely examined factors in relation to school absenteeism and broader disengagement. Sosu et al. (2021) provide a systematic review on this topic, analysing 55 longitudinal and cross-sectional studies. Their findings indicate that 94 per cent of the studies on high-income countries report a negative association between socioeconomic background and absenteeism. However, they emphasise that the overall effect tends to be small or marginal. Similarly, Gubbels et al. (2019), in a meta-analysis review, identify low family SES – measured through various indicators in the considered studies – as a

[5] It is important to recognise that disability can influence attendance at the individual level. At the same time, the extent to which schools provide appropriate accommodation and support can help mitigate these effects. Practices such as creating a more inclusive learning environment, including adaptations to assessment and classroom layout, using differentiated instruction, fostering an open and supportive classroom climate, and maintaining strong collaboration and communication with relevant stakeholders have been empirically associated with improved attendance among students with disabilities (Sakız, 2017; Anderson, 2020).

predictor of absenteeism. However, while statistically significant, its effect size remains moderate to small compared to other contributing factors at the individual, school and system level.

The majority of the studies on the topic have been conducted in the US. Using a diverse sample of children from kindergarten to fourth grade, Morrissey et al. (2014) analyse longitudinal data from a public school district in California. Employing random effects and fixed effects models, they find 'very small but significant associations' between eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch and higher rates of absences and being late for school (7:2013). Ready (2010), drawing on longitudinal national data, reports that kindergarteners with poor attendance have, on average, a one-third standard deviation lower SES than those with good attendance, with a slightly smaller SES gap observed in first grade. Regarding truancy, Maynard et al. (2012), using a large-scale US sample of adolescents aged 12–17, identify distinct profiles of truant youth and find that chronic skippers (with a mean average of 12.96 days missed in the last 30 days) are disproportionately from families earning below $50,000. Gennetian et al. (2018), analysing longitudinal administrative data from NYC low-income 4th, 7th, and 9th graders, find that a $1,000 increase in annual income corresponds to a 0.3–0.4 percentage point rise in attendance rates.

International literature beyond the US further supports a link between SES and attendance patterns. Recently, Wood et al. (2024), using longitudinal data from Bradford, UK, find that socioeconomic circumstances, measured by eligibility for free school meals, are a major risk factor for persistent absence among children aged 5–13 years. In Germany, Pflug and Schneider (2016) use a composite SES measure based on the Family Affluence Scale (FAS) and report a negative association between SES and absenteeism. Expanding on these findings, Enderle et al. (2024) conduct in-depth interviews with German high school students, portraying household financial struggles as a stressor that contributes to difficulties in attending school. In a widely cited Norwegian study, Ingul et al. (2012), analysing cross-sectional data from two high schools, find that absenteeism is higher among students whose mothers have lower levels of education.

Despite a general trend documenting the intersection between SES and absenteeism, it is worth noting that not all studies have found a significant association. Sälzer et al. (2012:316), examining Swiss students in grades 7–9, report no statistically significant relationship between truancy and socioeconomic status.[6]

[6] These findings may be explained by Switzerland's comparatively higher income levels and lower levels of inequality, which mean that differences between students are less extreme, and by strong social protection and public service provision, which can mitigate economic disadvantages.

In the Irish context, Darmody et al. (2008) use data from school leavers to examine truancy. To analyse social class differences, the study employs a six-category classification system, revealing significant disparities in truancy rates. Young people from professional and farming backgrounds have the lowest levels of truancy, while unskilled manual and non-employed households, as well as those without social class information, show the highest rates. Notably, students from unskilled manual backgrounds are 2.2 times more likely to truant than those from higher professional backgrounds. The study interprets truancy 'as a form of resistance to school culture, reflecting a mismatch between the cultures of home and school' (2008:8). Thornton et al. (2013), using GUI data and focusing on persistent absenteeism, indicate that children from unemployed families are three times more likely to experience attendance issues compared to those from higher social classes. They also identify a link between maternal education and absenteeism. However, the study highlights that these effects are partially mediated by various family and child-related factors, including witnessing parental conflict. Earlier research by Smyth (1999), based on post-primary pupils, further confirms links between parental class and education with absenteeism in the Irish context.

There are still important gaps in the literature on socioeconomic status (SES) and school absenteeism. The systematic review by Sosu et al. (2021) highlights a key limitation, noting that nearly three-quarters of studies examine only one SES dimension in multivariable analyses. However, based on their findings, the authors suggest that different aspects of SES may shape attendance in distinct ways, with financial conditions potentially playing a stronger role than socio-cultural resources. They stress that future research 'needs to consider the multidimensionality of family SES', as much of the existing literature 'fail[s] to address the unique effects of different socioeconomic dimensions on the risk of school absence' (2021:22). This study takes a broader approach to SES, recognising that different dimensions (such as social class, parental education and financial strain) may have varying impacts on attendance.

1.2.2.2 Migrant background, ethnicity and race

Multiple studies have provided evidence of a significant association between ethnicity and migration background and attendance outcomes, though findings vary across geographic contexts and ethnic groups, possibly reflecting differences in migration histories and the profile of migrants.

In the US, several studies have shown that White and Asian students generally have better attendance outcomes than other groups (García and Weiss, 2018; Rappaport et al., 2011; Ready, 2010; Skedgell and Kearney, 2018). For instance,

García and Weiss (2018), focusing on 4th and 8th graders, report that Hispanic English learners (ELs) (24.1 per cent) and Native American students (24 per cent) have the highest absenteeism rates, followed by Black (23 per cent), Hispanic non-EL (19.1 per cent), and White students (18.3 per cent). In contrast, Asian non-EL students have the lowest absenteeism rates (8.8 per cent). However, it is worth noting that not all studies align with this pattern. Lim et al. (2019), analysing a nationally representative US sample of children aged 6 to 17, find that not only Asians but also Black and Mexican Hispanic students were less likely to be chronically absent than White students. Additionally, their findings indicate that US-born children had higher absenteeism rates than foreign-born children. However, the authors caution that their measure – missed school days due to illness or injury – may not fully capture other key reasons for absenteeism, such as bullying or school-related violence, truancy or family reasons, which could explain the contradiction between their findings and those of previous research.

It is important to consider that the US has unique dynamics regarding migration and its impact on school attendance, including strict immigration policies that have been argued to deter children from attending school[7] (Kirksey and Sattin-Bajaj, 2021). However, studies in other countries have also found concerning links between ethnicity, migration background, and absenteeism.

Wood et al. (2024), using a large sample of schoolchildren in Bradford, UK, and Sälzer et al. (2012:8), using a Swiss sample, identify migration background as a contributing factor to absenteeism. This trend appears to be evident globally, as Yang and Ham (2017:8), drawing on data from 29 OECD countries, find that 'the probability of truancy appeared significantly higher among immigrant students than among non-immigrant students'. Yet there is reason to believe that the pattern of racialised groups experiencing worse attendance outcomes is not absolute or static. In Wales, Bellis et al. (2018), analysing national survey data, find higher absenteeism rates among White students.

In Ireland, research on the relationship between ethnicity, migration, and school absenteeism remains relatively limited. Thornton et al. (2013), using the GUI dataset to examine persistent absenteeism, find that children with migrant mothers have lower absenteeism rates. Additionally, they report that children with ethnically Irish mothers are 2.5 times more likely to belong to the high absenteeism group – a finding that appears to contradict some broader patterns observed in the

[7] Kirksey and Sattin-Bajaj (2021) investigate how county-level immigration arrests in California relate to educational outcomes, including attendance. Their analysis shows that higher arrest rates are linked to increased absenteeism among Latino students; in fact, a one standard deviation rise in arrests corresponds to roughly a 5 percentage point increase in absenteeism.

literature and may relate to unique migration patterns in the country.[8] However, it is also worth noting that the study does not distinguish between different ethnic groups, which – given the reviewed heterogeneity amongst ethnic communities – may account for these findings.

Nonetheless, there is some evidence that students from disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds in Ireland, particularly Traveller students, do face heightened risks of absenteeism. Darmody et al. (2008), drawing on a sample of early school leavers, report that Traveller students are 3.4 times more likely to truant than their settled peers. O'Toole and Ćirić (2024) further support this through qualitative research. In a focus group with Traveller male youth, absenteeism is linked to experiences of perceived rejection and differential treatment in schools. Some of their statements reflect these feelings, such as: 'When I walk into the class, he [the teacher] comes straight for me', with some feeling that their treatment was 'rude', or experiencing depression and a sense of being out of place (2024:9).

In relation to ethnicity and migration, another factor that warrants attention is language. Thornton et al. (2013), examining persistent absenteeism among nine-year-old Irish primary school pupils using GUI data, found that:

> *the biggest single factor associated with school attendance (...) was the main language spoken to the child in the home,* [with] *the odds of having a poor attendance record more than nine times greater for children of mothers whose native language was neither English nor Irish (Thornton et al., 2013: 494).*

Likewise, Ready (2010), using longitudinal US national data on students in kindergarten and first grade, finds that those who miss more than ten days of school are more likely to speak a native language other than English.

While the role of language in school attendance remains relatively underexplored in the literature, findings on this relationship are not entirely consistent. Lim et al. (2019), analysing nationally representative panel data from the US on students aged 6 to 17, find that children who speak a language other than English are less likely to experience chronic absenteeism. Similarly, Santibañez et al. (2024), using a large longitudinal dataset from California school districts, found that English learner (EL) students had fewer absences than non-EL students across both elementary and secondary school levels.

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8 In particular, better attendance may reflect the higher educational expectations for their children found among migrant-origin mothers in Ireland (Darmody and McGinnity, 2016).

Given the link between migrant background, ethnicity and absenteeism in international literature, it is important to reassess this relationship, particularly in light of shifting migration profiles among new student cohorts in Ireland and the post-pandemic context (Potter et al., 2025), which has been identified as a relevant factor in shaping attendance trends.

1.2.2.3 Family structure and processes

Gubbels et al. (2019), in their meta-analytic review of risk factors for school absenteeism and dropout, identify family structure as an important theme, finding that non-nuclear family structures have a moderate, significant association with absenteeism. In line with this, studies have found a relationship between lone parenthood and absenteeism. Ready (2010), using representative US data on kindergarten and first graders, finds that children from single-parent households are at greater risk of absenteeism. Similarly, Maynard (2012), examining profiles of truancy among US youth, identifies absent fathers as a factor differentiating those with higher and lower levels of truancy. Furthermore, single parenthood has also been linked with higher absenteeism among secondary school students in Germany, even controlling for other socioeconomic characteristics, as shown in a nationally representative study by Pflug and Schneider (2016).

Yet it is important to note that not all studies consistently link single parenthood to absenteeism. Lim et al.'s (2019) findings seem to complicate the established patterns. Using US representative data on children aged 6 to 17, they find that family type and size are significant in univariate analyses, but when controlling for sociodemographic variables, only family size remains significant, not family type. Thus, while single parenthood does not appear to be significant, they do find that children from larger families (size > 4) are less likely to be chronically absent compared to those from smaller families (size ≤ 4), possibly due to broader support networks.

Marlow and Rehman (2021) conduct a meta-analysis across 33 studies on the relationship between family processes and school absenteeism and dropout. They differentiate between positive family processes (PFP) – defined as: 'factors that contribute towards the positive or effective functioning of the family unit and individuals within it' – and negative family processes (NFP) – described as 'variables that have an adverse impact on the functioning of the family and its members' (2021:2). A key conclusion they draw is that the topic remains underexamined, stating that:

> *no study to date has systematically and quantitatively investigated the relationship between family processes and absenteeism and dropout in school-age children (2021:7).*

Despite this, their review confirms the expected associations, with PFP linked to better attendance patterns and NFP associated with higher absenteeism. Notably, they also find that the relationship between PFP and absenteeism is stronger among primary school pupils than secondary school students.

A well-documented aspect of family processes in the literature is the benefits of parental involvement for children's educational engagement and outcomes (Enderle et al., 2024; Kearney, 2008; Steinhausen et al., 2008; Fernandez-Suarez et al., 2016; McNeal, 2014; Thornton et al., 2013). McNeal (2014), using US representative longitudinal data on 8th and 10th graders, examines the differential effects of parental involvement on student outcomes. They find that parental involvement through discussion has the strongest positive impact on reducing absenteeism and truancy, with monitoring also playing a strong role. Similarly, Thornton et al. (2013), examining persistent absenteeism in Ireland, finds that parental engagement in education, including having books available at home and attending parent-teacher meetings, has a significant impact on school attendance. Notably, students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher meetings were more than three times as likely to face attendance difficulties. In a qualitative study about secondary pupils in Germany, Enderle (2024:13) discuss that:

> *students underscore the need for parents to discuss concerns, build trust, and support the child to address attendance challenges (Enderle, 2024:13).*

An interviewed girl recalls:

> *My mother didn't think it was particularly great that I skipped lessons. She encouraged me to go [to school] anyway, even if the teachers were annoying and even if I didn't feel like going, because attendance is important (2024:13).*

Yet it is worth noting that not all studies have found a significant link in this regard. For instance, Havik et al. (2015:231), in their study of Norwegian primary and secondary schools, report 'weak associations' between parental interest in schoolwork and school refusal and truancy.

The nature and quality of family relationships have also been identified as playing a role in school absenteeism. Fornander and Kearney (2019), studying a US sample of children aged 5–17 with attendance issues, find that family risk factors become stronger predictors as absenteeism worsens, with family cohesion and control having a significant association in severe cases. Longitudinal research further supports this link. Veenstra et al. (2010) in the Netherlands and Steinhausen et al.

(2008) in Switzerland both find that perceived parent-child relationship quality is associated with youth truancy behaviour. Beyond direct parent-child interactions, a number of other parental-related circumstances have also been linked to absenteeism, including paternal conflict (Thornton et al., 2013), maternal depression (Thornton et al., 2013) and maternal incarceration (Bell et al., 2024).

Recently, increasing research is uncovering significant associations between undergoing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and attendance issues. Stempel et al. (2017), using US national data on students aged 6 to 17, find that children and youth with two or more ACEs have a higher likelihood of chronic absenteeism. Additionally, they note that:

> *certain ACEs, such as neighbourhood violence and family substance use, appear to have a greater effect on the odds of chronic absenteeism (Stempel et al., 2017: 840).*

This association is further supported by Blodgett and Lanigan (2008) and Crouch et al. (2019), who find similar patterns among children in a representative sample of public elementary school children and in national US data, respectively. In Wales, Bellis et al. (2018), analysing national data, report that high school absenteeism increases with the number of ACEs. In Ireland, Flynn et al. (2024), through a qualitative study, illustrate the impact of traumatic incidents, such as parental loss, on school disengagement and absenteeism via pathways of grief, anxiety and mental health struggles.

However, it is important to note that all the mentioned quantitative studies are cross-sectional, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships. This highlights the need for longitudinal research, such as the approach taken in this study, to better understand the impact of ACEs on absenteeism.

1.2.3 School-level characteristics

1.2.3.1 Compositional features of the school

Since Coleman's (1966) seminal work *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, extensive research has examined the impact of school characteristics and composition on student outcomes. Many studies have shown that schools with a higher proportion of students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds exert a negative contextual influence on student outcomes beyond individual sociodemographic characteristics (Claes et al., 2009; García-Gracia and Valls, 2023; Demanet and Van Houtte, 2014). However, other research has found no significant impact of school context or that any effect is a statistical artefact, suggesting that the relationship may be nuanced (see, for example, Nash, 2003; Thrupp et al., 2002).

In Ireland, there is evidence that the socioeconomic composition of schools can deepen educational inequalities. Young people attending post-primary schools with a higher proportion of working-class students tend to have worse outcomes in terms of school leaving and academic performance (Smyth, 1999; Sofroniou et al., 2004), as well as lower chances of progressing to higher education (McCoy et al., 2014a). For primary schools, McCoy et al. (2014b) find no contextual effects for rural disadvantaged schools, whereas DEIS Urban Band 2 schools show a contextual effect for reading but not for mathematics. In contrast, DEIS Urban Band 1 schools exhibit a significant (negative) contextual effect for both reading and mathematics.

A review of the debate on how school characteristics may influence student outcomes is not the focus here; rather, it is to underscore that, as García-Gracia and Valls (2023) highlight, little research has examined the possible link between compositional school features and absenteeism specifically. Given the patterns identified by McCoy et al. (2014b) regarding school composition and academic performance in Ireland, it is important to examine whether absenteeism may also be shaped by socioeconomic contextual factors. Some evidence already points to this connection in Ireland. Smyth (1999) finds higher levels of non-attendance in post-primary schools with a lower average social class, even taking account of individual socioeconomic characteristics. Furthermore, Darmody et al. (2008) find that school social mix predicts truancy beyond individual-level effects. However, further research is needed, particularly at primary level.

Ireland's unique educational landscape is also characterised by gender segregation. Although this trend has been decreasing, in 2023/24, 33 per cent of girls attended all-girls schools and 26 per cent of boys attended all-boys schools (Department of Education, 2024). Therefore, an understanding of the links between attendance and school-level characteristics in Ireland should also consider the potential influence of school gender composition, which some evidence suggests may be significant. Thornton et al. (2013), using data from GUI for primary school students, find that pupils attending single-sex boys' schools are twice as likely to exhibit problematic attendance patterns compared to those attending single-sex girls' schools. Interestingly, the study reports no statistically significant differences between students attending girls' schools and those in mixed-gender schools, suggesting that the effects of gender segregation on attendance may be specific to boys' schools. Further research would be helpful in clarifying the validity and strength of this finding.

1.2.3.2 School efficacy and climate

Extensive research on school effectiveness has examined how contextual variables influence a wide range of student outcomes, with some schools proving more effective at promoting wellbeing, motivation, engagement, and attainment beyond the individual and family circumstances of their student body (Granvik Saminathen et al., 2018; Ramberg et al., 2019; Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Rutter and Maughan, 2002; Claes et al., 2009). Although definitions of school effectiveness vary across studies, the literature consistently highlights several key characteristics that contribute to strong school efficacy, including effective school leadership, a positive school ethos, and collaborative teacher cooperation (Scheerens, 2016). In terms of attendance, as Havik et al. (2015:222) note, much of the existing research focuses on individual and family-related factors, leaving the role of school-related variables, including school effectiveness, relatively underexplored. Nonetheless, a growing number of studies suggest that school contextual factors play a significant role in shaping attendance patterns.

In a widely cited longitudinal study, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) examined 18 US schools, including 12 elementary schools and six secondary schools. Schools participated by returning baseline, midyear, and final surveys while implementing various initiatives to improve attendance. The study finds that school-based initiatives play a meaningful role in promoting positive attendance outcomes. Specifically, activities such as student awards, communication with families, designated school contacts for parents, parent workshops, and after-school programmes were shown to improve daily attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism.

Cross-sectional evidence has also yielded insights. Lenhoff and Pogodzinski (2018) conducted a study on public schools in Detroit, examining school effectiveness through a composite variable that includes five dimensions: (a) effective leadership, (b) collaborative teachers, (c) ambitious instruction, (d) supportive environment, and (e) involved families. Their findings reveal that this composite measure is significantly negatively associated with chronic absenteeism. However, this association does not hold for charter schools – institutions with greater flexibility – suggesting that the impact of school effectiveness on absenteeism may be, at least to some extent, context-dependent. Sheldon (2007) conducted a study in Ohio, comparing elementary schools that implemented a series of initiatives aimed at improving educational outcomes with a matched sample of schools that did not. The findings revealed that schools with strong family and community engagement, particularly those that involved parents in school decisions and shared values, showed improved attendance rates. Ramberg et al. (2019), in their study of secondary schools in Stockholm, confirm the relationship between school effectiveness and absenteeism.

Closely related to school effectiveness, Van Eck et al. (2017), using data from a US public school district, examined the relationship between students' perceptions of school climate – encompassing the domains of safety, engagement, and environment – and attendance. The study found that as the proportion of students perceiving the school climate as 'moderate' or 'negative' increases, so too do chronic absence rates. Darmody et al.'s (2008) study on truant youth in Ireland reports similar results. Additionally, García-Gracia and Valls (2023) provide further insights, demonstrating that emotional engagement with school is associated with lower absenteeism across three different educational models in Barcelona (Spain), Ghent (Belgium), and Bergen.

Enderle et al.'s (2024) qualitative study of secondary students in Germany insightfully illustrates the relevance of school effectiveness and climate from the students' perspectives. The participants emphasised the value of 'meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences,' noting that 'more creative and fun teaching approaches are important in fostering motivation to attend classes' (2024:12-13). In addition, the students discussed the importance of cultivating a supportive atmosphere that actively discourages bullying and mistreatment. In this regard, they stressed the need for schools to take issues of exclusion and bullying seriously. Students also highlighted the importance of safe spaces within schools, noting the advantages of 'the rooms where you can retreat if you need some time', and advocated for improvements in classroom environments, suggesting that '[the teacher] could perhaps decorate the classroom a bit, like more colourful' to foster a more welcoming atmosphere (2024:12). Similarly, O'Toole and Ćirić (2024), in their qualitative research with Irish youth, highlight the importance of an inclusive education system, particularly for students with special educational needs (SEN). As one psychologist explains, 'I spend a lot of time trying to fit kids into schools, and I'd like the school to fit to the kid' (2024:5).

1.2.3.3 Relationships with teachers

Teacher characteristics and relationships have been generally found to be significantly associated with student attendance. Gershenson (2016) conducted a longitudinal study on third- through fifth-graders using a North Carolina sample that is largely representative of public primary school teachers in the United States. The study finds that teachers have statistically significant effects on student absences. Specifically, they report that:

> *the difference between the effect of a 90th percentile teacher and a 10th percentile teacher is about 90 per cent of an absence SD, and the difference between teachers at the first and third quartiles is about 40 per cent of an absence SD (2016:134).*

Interestingly, these effects are found to be independent of academic achievement, suggesting that effective teaching encompasses multiple dimensions beyond academic instruction alone.

Although Gershenson (2016) does not examine specific aspects of teaching, other studies provide further insights into the teacher-related factors associated with absenteeism. Holt and Gershenson (2019) and Hadden et al. (2025) suggest that student-teacher similarities and identification play an important role in this sense. Holt and Gershenson (2019), using longitudinal administrative data on kindergarten through fifth-grade students in North Carolina's public schools, provide evidence of a causal relationship between student-teacher racial mismatch and absenteeism. Ladd and Sorensen (2017) examine the role of teacher experience in influencing student attendance. Using longitudinally matched administrative data on middle school students and teachers in North Carolina, they control for teacher quality with fixed effects and still find that experience plays a significant role in reducing absenteeism. Supporting connections between teachers and attendance patterns, Havik et al. (2015) find that effective classroom management is associated with lower truancy rates among secondary students in Norway, based on cross-sectional data.

Yet it is important to acknowledge that not all studies have found strong links between teachers and attendance patterns. Teuscher and Makarova (2018), using cross-sectional data from seven lower secondary public schools in Switzerland, find that while positive student-teacher relationships are strongly associated with student engagement, they do not significantly influence truancy rates. Similarly, Rosenfeld et al. (2000), drawing on US national data, suggest that while teacher support is relevant to truancy, its impact is relatively minor compared to its influence on student engagement.

Further research will help better understand the impact of teacher-related behaviours on student attendance, given Smyth (1999) found, in Ireland, that attendance was better when interaction with teachers was more positive and worse when interaction with teachers was more negative. However, this was a cross-sectional study so it could not unpack the direction of the effects.

1.2.3.4 Peer relationships and experiences of bullying

Multiple cross-sectional studies have demonstrated a significant association between bullying victimisation at school and absenteeism (Schlesier et al., 2023; Steiner and Rasberry, 2015; Jan and Husain, 2015; Meyer-Adams and Conner, 2008). For instance, Schlesier et al. (2023:8), in their study of secondary school students in northern Germany, find that:

> *higher victim scale values are associated with significantly more school displeasure, which in turn are related to significantly more absenteeism.*

Similarly, in Ireland, Thornton et al. (2013) report that victims of bullying in primary schools are 40 per cent more likely to experience attendance problems compared to their peers.

In Ireland, qualitative research further supports the connection between bullying and school attendance. O'Toole and Ćirić (2024) conducted interviews with practitioners, social workers, and students to explore the factors contributing to attendance struggles. A significant theme that emerged was bullying, which appears to be exacerbated by current smartphone use that allows for the distribution of non-consensual images or videos. A primary deputy principal explains:

> *I have so many young people for whom that's the reason – one photograph went around the school four months ago and 'I'm never coming back!' They really, really feel the victims of this kind of bullying (2024:4).*

Flynn et al. (2024), through interviews with students experiencing school disengagement, also highlight the role of bullying in contributing to absenteeism and how this issue is intricately linked to mental health struggles. The authors note that:

> *School is usually viewed by children and adolescents as a stable, safe environment, but when it is the place associated with a traumatic event in the child or young person's life, it is not surprising that these children/young people then school refuse. (2024:8)*

However, other cross-sectional studies have found weak or no association between bullying and absenteeism (Attwood and Croll, 2006; Glew et al., 2005; Wolke et al., 2001). In the UK context, Attwood and Croll (2006) and Wolke et al. (2001), examining secondary and primary schools respectively, report no statistically significant association between bullying and truancy or absenteeism. Similarly, in the US, Glew et al. (2005), studying a public school district on the West Coast, find that being either a perpetrator or victim of bullying is associated with a lower sense of belonging at school but not with increased absenteeism.

A number of longitudinal studies position bullying as a driver of absenteeism, though the relationship is not entirely straightforward (Alanko et al., 2023; Buhs et

al., 2006; Daraganova et al., 2014; Juvonen et al., 2000). Alanko et al. (2023), using Finnish longitudinal data on students aged 14–17, find that both bullying victimisation and perpetration are associated with sickness-related absences. Using nationally representative Australian data, Daraganova et al. (2014) show that children who experienced bullying were 1.29 times more likely to be in the top quartile of non-attendance, although this association appears only at ages 6–7 and not at later ages. Contrastingly, Feldman et al. (2014), using five years of longitudinal data from middle schools in the southeastern United States, find no significant relationship between bullying victimisation and attendance. They argue that while some students may avoid school to escape victimisation, 'this strategy is rare enough for it not to affect objective rates of attendance' (2014:1057).

The systematic review by Laith and Vaillancourt (2022) cautions that interpretations of the links between bullying and attendance should be approached with care due to the limited longitudinal evidence available and the mixed findings by both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. They note that 'to date, few studies have examined the relations between these variables over time' (2022:5).

Gottfried et al.'s (2020) novel findings suggest that bullying may not be the only way that peers can negatively influence school attendance. Their research explores the link between individual and classmate absenteeism using large-scale administrative data from an urban school district in California. Findings indicate that students are more likely to miss school in the spring if their classmates had high absenteeism in the fall, a pattern that holds across different models. An important implication is that absences do not just affect the individual but can have a ripple effect across the classroom. While the exact reasons are not tested, the authors propose that frequent absences may slow the pace of instruction, making lessons less engaging and arguably leading to collective disengagement.

1.2.4 Structural-level characteristics

1.2.4.1 Cross-national perspectives

As indicated by Fredriksson et al. (2023), comparative cross-national work on attendance is limited. In their own words, 'there are few comparisons between countries, which is partly due to a lack of shared definitions of concepts' (2023:2). However, they do provide a comparative study of Germany, Japan, Sweden and the UK. The authors examine whether differences can be explained by characteristics of educational systems (with particular attention to tracking), welfare regimes, and national value systems, such as levels of individualism or masculinity. They do not identify consistent patterns across these factors, although they note that this may be due to the small number of countries included in the analysis.

Another comparative study is provided by Rahman et al. (2023), who analyse chronic absenteeism among adolescents in 71 low, middle, and high income countries. Their findings reveal certain regional patterns. In most regions, male students are more likely to be chronically absent than female students, with the exception of the Americas and Europe. The authors suggest that this disparity may reflect efforts to promote girls' educational participation and female empowerment in parts of the Global South. They also report higher levels of chronic absenteeism among food-insecure adolescents across most regions, again with the exception of the Americas and Europe, suggesting that these regions may have somewhat stronger educational support for the materially deprived.

A third source of cross-national insight is the report on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 results, which examines truancy across participating countries. The findings show considerable variation. Countries with particularly high levels of reported truancy include Georgia, Panama, Montenegro, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Uruguay. Ireland performs comparatively poorly, with truancy rates (as measured by the share of students reporting skipping a day of school in the last two weeks) above the OECD average. By contrast, some of the lowest levels are observed in China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Netherlands and Iceland.

They also find a gendered pattern, which largely mirrors that identified by Rahman et al. (2023), with boys more likely than girls to skip school or arrive late, particularly in middle income countries. One of the most consistent findings across contexts is the strong association between truancy and lower reading performance. This relationship may reflect the detrimental academic effects of missing school, but it may also operate in the opposite direction, with students who struggle academically becoming more disengaged and therefore more likely to skip school. Two further patterns appear across regions. Students who report having been bullied are more likely to play truant, whereas those who believe that school is important, who receive emotional support from their parents, and who experience a positive disciplinary climate are less likely to do so.

1.2.4.2 COVID-19 pandemic experiences

As Tomaszewski et al. (2023:112) point out, research on the effects of the pandemic on education has predominantly focused on learning loss due to school closures, while:

> *research exploring the effects of COVID-19 on outcomes beyond academic achievement, such as attendance, retention, or completion, remains scarce*

– a concern also echoed more recently by Dee (2024). Nonetheless, descriptive statistics and emerging studies are increasingly shedding light on heightened and divergent absenteeism patterns worldwide in the aftermath of the pandemic. Evidence from various contexts, including the United States (Dee, 2024; Fuller et al., 2024; Swiderski et al., 2025; Malkus, 2024), the United Kingdom (Department of Education, 2023; 2024), Brazil (Lichand et al., 2024), and Australia (Tomaszewski et al., 2023), points to significant disruptions in school attendance post-pandemic.

Data from the UK Department of Education (2022; 2023; 2024) reveal that in the 2022/23 academic year, the overall absence rate stood at 7.4 per cent, a slight decrease from 7.6 per cent in 2021/22, yet still significantly higher than the pre-pandemic level of 4.7 per cent in 2018/19. For the autumn and spring terms of 2023/24, the rate declined further to 6.9 per cent, down from 7.3 per cent in 2022/23, but remained elevated compared to pre-pandemic two-term rates, which were below 5 per cent. In the United States, a report by Malkus (2024) indicates that the rate of chronic absenteeism – defined as students missing at least 10 per cent of the school year – increased sharply from 15 per cent in 2018 to 28 per cent in 2022. Although 33 out of 39 states that reported data saw a decline in absenteeism in 2023, rates remained 75 per cent higher than pre-pandemic levels.

In Ireland, the aggravated absences rate is reflected in the data provided by the Tusla Education Support Service (Denner et al., 2022; Department of Education, 2024; Tusla, 2023). Pre-pandemic, in the 2018/19 academic year, 9.15 per cent of primary school students and 8.22 per cent of post-primary students missed 20 or more days of school. However, by 2020/21, these rates had begun to climb, with 11.1 per cent of primary students and 12 per cent of post-primary students experiencing prolonged absences. The situation worsened significantly in 2021/22, with 40.3 per cent of primary students and 26.8 per cent of post-primary students missing at least 20 school days. Although 2022/23 saw a slight improvement, absenteeism remained a serious concern, with more than a quarter of primary pupils and over one-fifth of post-primary students still missing at least 20 school days. The problem was especially severe in schools serving disadvantaged populations, where 42 per cent of primary pupils and 30 per cent of post-primary students faced prolonged absences.

The reasons for these elevated absenteeism rates are multifaceted and, as Dee (2024) and McDonald et al. (2023) highlight, require further investigation. However, several hypothesised explanations have emerged. For one, a related factor may be the learning deficits and disengagement resulting from difficulties in keeping up with remote learning, especially amongst disadvantaged children who lacked access to parental support and physical resources to sustain a conducive learning environment (see Hammerstein et al., 2021). As suggested by Lester and

Michelson (2024) and Tomaszewski et al. (2023), these challenges may contribute to ongoing disengagement that ultimately led to attendance issues.

Another contributing factor may be mental health. As documented by the international systematic reviews by Panchal et al. (2023) and Samji et al. (2022), the pandemic had profoundly detrimental effects on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, with such patterns being shaped by socioeconomic background, gender, age and disability, amongst other factors. In Ireland, longitudinal data show that migrant youth and those whose families experienced financial difficulties during the pandemic had poorer wellbeing outcomes (Smyth et al., 2025; Smyth and Murray, 2022). Qualitative research by McDonald (2023) in the UK highlights how worsening mental health difficulties during the pandemic have made it particularly challenging for children – especially those with pre-existing needs such as SEN – to return to school. As one practitioner explains:

> *Where they [children] may have experienced anxiety, maybe a bit more than other kids before COVID, I think it was just exacerbated (...). And the thought of going back into school, it's just like they don't want to do it because they've been at home for so long and it's become comfortable for them. (McDonald, 2023).*

Anders et al. (2024), in their international study on post-pandemic adolescent truancy, draw attention to the potential gendered nature of mental health as a factor influencing absences. They observe that 'the increase in truancy seems to be driven by an increasing proportion of teenage girls skipping school', which they hypothesise may be linked to 'a rise in lower-level mental health challenges (that, hence, do not necessarily lead to sickness absence) disproportionately among girls' (2024:16).

Furthermore, Lester and Michelson (2024:2) suggest that 'parental attitudes toward daily school attendance have perceptibly shifted' due to the disruption in ties between schools, parents, communities, and children. This shift may be linked to communication challenges, as Kim et al. (2021), in their qualitative analysis with English teachers, highlight how pandemic restrictions – even after schools reopened – destabilised and weakened channels of communication between educators, students and families. It is possible that these disruptions have had lasting consequences, potentially continuing to affect school engagement and attendance today. Additionally, the rise of remote work may have further contributed to less rigid attitudes among parents toward regular attendance, as children will not be left alone if they stay home. A final factor may be heightened financial struggles resulting from the pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, which can contribute to attendance issues by, amongst others, making it

more difficult for families to afford transportation and other school-related expenses (Lester and Michelson, 2024).

A common thread among these potential explanations is that their impact has not been experienced equally by all students. In this sense, there is reason to believe that post-pandemic attendance patterns have not increased uniformly across all groups.

Tomaszewski et al. (2023), which examines grades 9–12 in Tasmania's government schools, find that:

> *while the attendance rates for high-SES students were similar pre- and during-COVID-19, there was a significant drop in attendance rates under COVID-19 among low-SES students and those from jobless households*

with the only exception being those in their final year of high school (2022:124). Similarly, Swiderski et al. (2025) analyse three post-pandemic years (2021–2023) in North Carolina, focusing on students enrolled in kindergarten to 6th grade. They report that the spike in chronic absenteeism 'is not spread evenly across the population', with Black and Hispanic students and those in high-poverty schools being particularly affected (2025:5). Moreover, as previously introduced, Santibañez et al. (2024), using a large longitudinal dataset from California school districts, found that while English learner (EL) students had fewer absences than non-EL students across both elementary and secondary school levels, there has been a marginal increase in absences and chronic absenteeism among English learners after the pandemic.

Overall, further research is needed to explore how the wide-ranging effects of the pandemic – including financial hardship, learning loss, disengagement, and wellbeing challenges – may have shaped new absenteeism patterns, potentially exacerbating educational inequalities related to socioeconomic status, migration background, disability, gender, and special educational needs (SEN), amongst other factors.

1.3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Data

This study primarily draws on data from GUI Cohort '08, who were first surveyed when the child was 9 months old and followed at 3, 5 and 9 years of age. At age 13, a total of 10,052 young people and their families were targeted, made up of those who had taken part when the young person was nine years of age and a small proportion of those who had taken part in earlier rounds but not at nine. Because

of ongoing pandemic-related restrictions in 2021, fieldwork shifted from face-to-face interviews to telephone interviews, with the sensitive questions completed online. Fieldwork took place over the period July 2021 to June 2022, a period after schools had reopened and spanning the gradual removal of remaining restrictions; the response rate was 78 per cent of the valid sample (Murray et al., 2023). Non-response and attrition were greater among more socio-economically disadvantaged groups, so weighting is used to make the sample representative of the population as a whole. In addition to the young person and their caregivers, a survey of all post-primary principals was conducted, collecting information on the school context and the pandemic impact, and matched to the young people's data. These data were used to look at the factors associated with school absence at age 13. Analyses also exploited the longitudinal nature of the data, using latent class analysis to identify trajectories of absence over the period of 9 to 13 years, a timeframe spanning the pandemic. Another dimension of change over time was possible by conducting a cross-cohort analysis, matching data on 13-year-olds in Cohort '08 to those from Cohort '98, and investigating changes over time in the level of absence and the extent to which any such change was related to specific factors.

1.3.2 Outcome and explanatory variables

1.3.2.1 School absence

Absence from school is measured at 13 years of age, and previously at age 9, and based on reports by the young person's mother. Mothers were asked 'during the last school year, about how many days was [name] absent from school for any reason?'.[9] Response categories ranged from '0 days' to 'more than 20 days'. Self-reported rates are subject to desirability bias and are indeed lower than comparable rates from administrative sources (TESS, 2024). Nonetheless, the data do capture a good deal of variation in absence levels, allowing for a detailed analysis of the factors shaping this outcome. Future waves of GUI could potentially explore the potential for administrative data linkage, thus providing a more robust measure and more detailed information on patterns on an annual basis.

The explanatory variables were selected on the basis of the factors identified in previous international and national research (see Section 1.2). They are grouped into four sets of factors: individual characteristics and family background; family processes; neighbourhood characteristics; and school characteristics and experiences.

[9] Respondents were specifically instructed: Only include days the child was absent when the school was open e.g. do not include days missed because of their whole school or class being closed due to COVID-19 or bad weather.

1.3.2.2 Individual and family background

The individual characteristics analysed included gender and disability. The measure of disability was based on mother's report of whether the young person had a long-standing illness or disability and was hampered, at least to some extent, in their day-to-day life by that condition. Previous research has indicated a higher proportion of young people with a disability at 13 than at 9 years of age (Smyth and Russell, 2024). For this reason, two measures are derived: whether the child had a disability at age 9; and whether a disability was identified or emerged between the ages of 9 and 13.

The analyses adopt a multi-dimensional approach to measuring socio-economic background, consisting of maternal education (from Junior Certificate or lower to degree), household social class (based on the higher occupational level of parents if both are in employment), financial strain (that is, having difficulty or great difficulty making ends meet), and family structure (distinguishing between lone- and two-parent families; and number of siblings). This multi-dimensional approach has been argued to be necessary, despite its limited prevalence, in analyses of the drivers of non-attendance (Sosu et al., 2021).

In addition, the analyses take account of whether the young person comes from a migrant background, that is, where both parents were born outside Ireland (or one parent if it is a lone-parent family). These background factors were measured at the age 9 wave. In addition, analyses are conducted to see if the effects of these background factors are robust to the inclusion of conditions at school start. These conditions are measured at age 5 in terms of vocabulary test score (in the British Ability Scale), socio-emotional difficulties (based on the Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) questionnaire) and a scale of lack of preparedness for learning (based on teacher reports of the child coming to school hungry, tired etc.).

1.3.2.3 Family processes

A number of different measures of family processes were analysed separately and in combination. The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) scale was used to capture maternal and paternal depression when the young person was 9 and 13 years. Two subscales of the Pianta Parent-Child Relationship Scale were used to measure mother-child and father-child closeness and conflict at age 9. Two subscales of the Parenting Style Inventory were used to measure maternal consistency and hostility, also at age 9. Another measure of parenting style in relation to discipline was used. This scale, characterised as a harsh parenting style, summed the frequency with which parents used the following techniques: shouting or yelling at the child; sending the child to their bedroom (or naughty step); taking away treats or pocket money; telling the child off; and grounding the

child. At age 9, these were reported by the mother, while at age 13 the young person themselves reported the frequency.

As negative family processes may manifest in an absence of routine, which in turn can impact on child development (Selman and Dilworth-Bart, 2024), a measure of going to bed late (at 11pm or later), asked of the mother for 9-year-olds and of the young person at 13, was used. Another measure of lack of routine (and of material deprivation), potentially affecting engagement in learning, was the frequency with which the 13-year-old reported having breakfast (at home or at school), with responses ranging from every day to less than once a week/never.

A number of studies have pointed to the role of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in affecting school attendance (see Section 1.2) and in broader outcomes such as health and mental health into adult life (Abate et al., 2025; Hughes et al., 2017). At age 9, mothers were given a set of events and asked if the child had experienced any of these since the last survey (at age 5). These included: death of a parent, close family member or close friend; divorce/separation of parents; moving house;[10] moving country; a serious illness/injury of the child or family member; drug taking/alcoholism in the immediate family; 'mental disorder' in the immediate family; and a conflict between parents. At age 13, mothers were given the same list (with an additional item on the house being broken into) and asked about the occurrence since the age of 9. For both measures, the items were scaled and recoded into none, one and two or more; this reflects the findings that multiple ACEs have a worse effect on child outcomes.

1.3.2.4 Neighbourhood characteristics

A measure of population density in the location in which the family lived was used to construct an urban/rural cut-off. Different specifications were tested with the main differentiation evident between those living in open country or a village and all others. Six items were used to construct a scale of neighbourhood social capital; these related to perceived safety of the area for teenagers, places and facilities for them, neighbours being trustworthy, feeling a sense of identity with the neighbourhood. The scale was recoded into a binary variable distinguishing between those with low neighbourhood social capital and those with medium or high levels. Information on housing tenure at age 9 was used to distinguish between those in rented accommodation (social housing or private rented) and all others.

[10] Previous GUI-based research shows that moving house only has a negative effect on child outcomes for low-income families (Laurence et al., 2023).

1.3.2.5 School characteristics and experiences

Information from the principal survey was used to construct measures of school characteristics. At primary level, school size and Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) status were analysed.[11] At post-primary level, the measures used were DEIS status, school size and gender mix, given the significant prevalence of single-sex schools at post-primary level. At both levels, principal reports of the number of chronic absentees (that is, missing 20 or more days in a school year) in the school were used to construct measures of whether the young person attended a high-absence primary and/or post-primary school. Three measures of school support were used: the number of supports in place to support the integration of first year students (such as transition programmes, student mentors etc.); the main person or people involved in providing socio-emotional support for students; and the involvement of students in decision-making over school uniforms, used as a proxy for the importance of student voice in the school.

Even within the same school, children and young people may have very different experiences. A number of measures were therefore used to capture school experiences and engagement. At age 9, children were asked whether they liked school and their teacher, with responses comprising 'always', 'sometimes' and 'never'. In addition, the children were asked whether their teacher talked to them about issues other than school, to capture the quality of the relationship; the measure distinguishes between those who are never said to do so and those who reported this regularly or sometimes happened. In addition, a measure of having been picked on in the previous three months is used to capture bullying experiences.

At post-primary level, a scale of difficulties making the transition to post-primary education is constructed, comprising of items relating to academic and social difficulties (e.g. missing primary school friends). A dummy variable is used to capture the school year at the time of the survey. At 13, young people were again asked whether they liked school, with more differentiated responses than at age 9, ranging from 'like it very much' to 'don't like or hate it'. A scale of teacher-student interaction, both positive and negative dimensions, is constructed as these measures have been predictive of a range of student outcomes in previous research (see, for example, Smyth et al., 2011). A scale of exposure to different types of bullying behaviours in the previous three months is also included.

[11] The DEIS programme provides additional resources and supports for schools serving socio-economically disadvantaged populations. At primary level, there is a distinction between Urban Band 1 (the most deprived), Urban Band 2, Rural DEIS and non-DEIS schools. At post-primary level, there is a dichotomy between DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

1.3.2.6 Pandemic experiences

In order to explore the potential impact of pandemic experiences on changes in school attendance, the study uses information from both the COVID-specific wave of data collection conducted with 12-year-olds and their primary caregivers in December 2020 and the retrospective accounts young people gave of their pandemic experiences when surveyed in 2021/22. Because of a short time window for completion, the numbers taking part in the COVID wave were smaller (38 per cent of 12-year-olds and 45 per cent of primary caregivers) and responses related to the first period of lockdown. When reflecting on the pandemic retrospectively, it is not clear whether young people answered in relation to the most recent period of restrictions or not. While all young people underwent pandemic restrictions, the analyses capture variation in experiences, looking at remote learning (including having a quiet place to study and an adequate device or broadband), family circumstances (including income and job loss) and effect on day-to-day activities (such as contact with friends and involvement in sports). In addition to the young person reports, information was collected from their school principals in 2021/22. At this stage, principals were asked about the supports put in place in their school to ease student re-entry and how effective they were thought to be.

1.3.3 Methodology

Chapter 2 analyses the factors influencing school absence at age 13 using ordinal logit models, as the outcome is categorical. The coefficients are presented as odds ratios; a ratio of greater than one indicates that the variable is positively associated with school absence while a ratio less than one indicates that the variable negatively predicts non-attendance. Explanatory variables are analysed separately in four blocks: individual characteristics and family background; family processes; neighbourhood characteristics; and school characteristics and experiences. Then a more parsimonious model using the main factors found to be significant is estimated.

In Chapter 3, latent class analysis is used to capture trajectories of school absence at ages 9 and 13. A four-group solution was found to provide the best model fit, with the characteristics of these four groups discussed in Chapter 3. The same blocks of variables analysed in Chapter 2 are then used to predict absence trajectory patterns using multinomial logit models. In Chapter 4, regression models are used to look at variation by school type in the post-pandemic supports offered by schools and their perceived effectiveness. These factors along with individual experiences of the pandemic are included in multinomial logit models predicting members of the absence trajectory groups.

In Chapter 5, data from Cohorts ’98 and ’08 are pooled to determine whether absence has changed over the decade between cohorts and whether any change

is related to shifts in individual, family, school and neighbourhood characteristics. As some measures changed over time, the analyses are based on a smaller set of variables than those presented in Chapters 2 and 3. In order to test whether certain factors affect absence differently post-pandemic, the interaction between that factor and cohort membership is estimated.

1.4 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 looks at the individual, family, neighbourhood and school factors associated with school absence levels at age 13. Chapter 3 uses information on attendance at age 9 and 13 to develop groups of young people who had stable absence levels (high or low), improved their attendance or had worsening absence levels. The chapter then outlines the factors associated with these patterns while Chapter 4 adds in measures of pandemic experiences to look at their impact on attendance. Chapter 5 compares patterns in Cohorts ’98 and ’08 to see whether the influences on absence have changed over time. Chapter 6 summarises the main findings of the study and discusses the implications for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

Patterns of non-attendance at 13 years of age

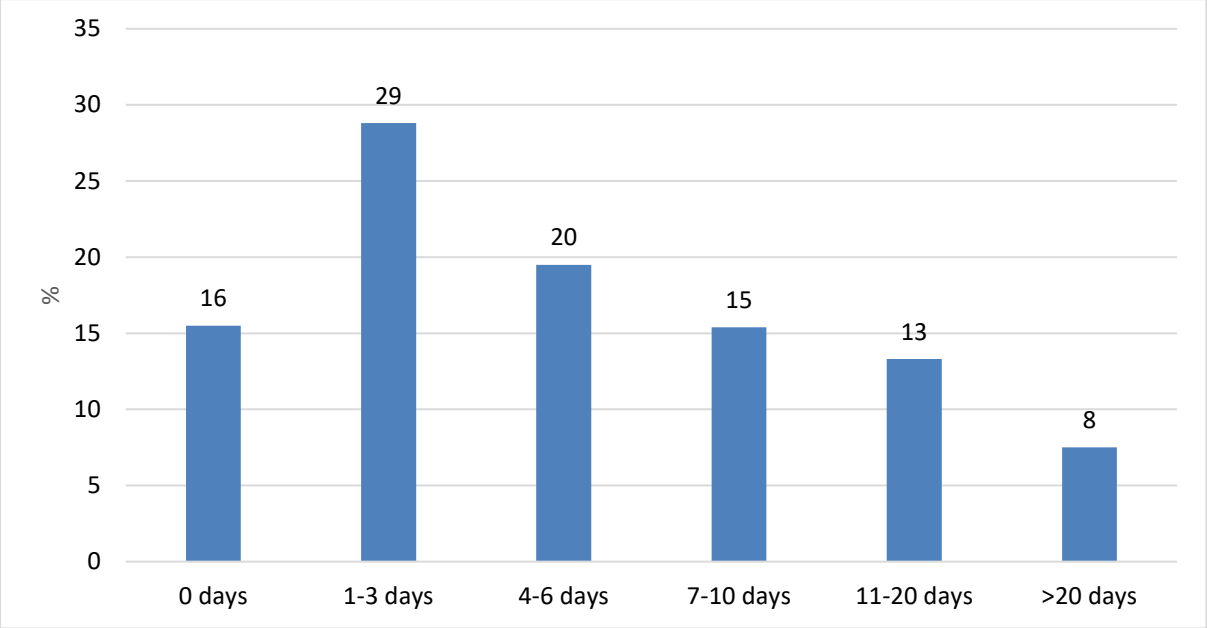
2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the factors associated with school absence among 13-year-olds. Chapter 1 has highlighted the multiplicity of factors associated with non-attendance found in previous research. To reflect this complexity and the interrelationships among many factors, the analyses presented in this chapter are grouped into four sets of factors looked at separately: family background; family processes; neighbourhood characteristics; and school characteristics and experiences. A final model then explores the impact of the main factors simultaneously.

2.2 ABSENCE AT AGE 13

Figure 2.1 shows the patterns of school absence, as reported by the young person's mother, over the previous school year. The most common pattern is missing one to three days, but over a fifth of the 13-year-olds had missed 11 or more days.

FIGURE 2.1 SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13



Source: GUI Cohort '08.

2.2.1 Family background

Table 2.1 looks at a number of different dimensions of individual characteristics and family background and how they relate to school absence. No significant difference in absence levels is found by gender, which is not surprising given that

it is not generally positioned as a meaningful driver of attendance in the literature. Young people who were reported to be hampered, at least to some extent, by a long-standing illness or condition at age 9 are almost twice as likely to be absent from school as those with no disability (Model 1). Absence levels are even higher among the group of young people among whom a disability was identified or emerged between 9 and 13 years of age.[12] There is a clear social gradient in absence rates, with the lowest levels among those from professional family backgrounds and the highest levels among those from unskilled manual or non-employed households. The gap between social classes is larger than the gap associated with parental education. However, students with graduate parents still have better attendance, even after accounting for social class. Over and above class and education, experience of financial strain (difficulties in making ends meet) is associated with higher absence rates. School absence is somewhat lower among those from migrant backgrounds.

Model 2 takes account of family structure. Young people from lone-parent families are found to have significantly higher absence levels than those from two-parent households. Number of siblings is not significantly related to school absence. Model 2 tests whether these differences in absence by social background can be explained by children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills on school entry, that is, by their measures of their cognitive development (vocabulary score), readiness to engage in learning and socio-emotional difficulties. Those who had higher levels of socio-emotional difficulties at age 5 are somewhat more likely to be absent from school at age 13 (though this relationship is only significant at the 10 per cent level). There is no difference in absence levels by vocabulary scores at age 5 or by whether teachers reported they were less prepared to engage in learning (because of being hungry or late for school, for example). Further, none of these factors account for the social differentiation found in school absence patterns (compare coefficients in Models 2 and 3).

[12] Previous analyses of GUI indicates that disability among Cohort '08 grew from 13 to 23 per cent between the ages of 9 and 13 years (Smyth and Russell, 2024).

TABLE 2.1 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY FAMILY BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Female (Ref. Male)	0.986	0.988	1.042
Disability:			
At age 9	1.914***	1.925***	1.783***
By age 13	2.563***	2.541***	2.419***
(Ref. No disability)			
Social class:			
Professional	0.482***	0.575**	0.553**
Managerial	0.576***	0.678*	0.632**
Other non-manual	0.651**	0.735*	0.715*
Skilled/semi-skilled	0.661**	0.765±	0.709*
(Ref. Unskilled/non-employed)			
Mother's education:			
Leaving Certificate	0.854	0.832	0.765
Post-secondary	0.823	0.812	0.794
Degree or higher	0.749±	0.731*	0.732*
(Ref. Lower secondary or less)			
Financial strain at age 9	1.375*	1.312*	1.256±
Migrant-origin family	0.792±	0.757*	0.728*
Family structure			
Lone parent-family		1.435**	1.367**
(Ref. Two-parent family)			
Number of siblings		1.018	1.014
Conditions on school entry:			
Socio-emotional difficulties			1.015±
Vocabulary score			0.999
Teacher-reported unpreparedness for learning			1.019
Pseudo R^2	0.021	0.023	0.023
N	6,004	6,004	5,662

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. The cut-points for Model 1 are -2.19, -0.67, 0.16, 0.97 and 2.2. The cut-points for Model 2 are -2.00, -0.48, 0.36, 1.18 and 2.41. The cut-points for Model 3 are -1.86, -0.35, 0.50, 1.32 and 2.56.

2.2.2 Family processes

This section looks at the relationships between the quality of parent-child relations, maternal depression, adverse childhood experiences and school absence. These analyses control for gender, disability, social class, parental education, financial strain, migrant background and family structure. As the different dimensions of family processes can be interrelated, the models test measures separately in Table 2.2. Maternal depression at age 9 and age 13 is significantly related to higher absence levels at age 13 (Models 1a and 1b). However, paternal depression, measured only for resident fathers, has no significant relationship with school absence (Models 1c and 1d). At both 9 and 13 years, mothers and fathers were asked a range of questions which yielded measures of closeness and conflict with the child. Maternal conflict is associated with higher absence but closeness has no

significant effect (Model 2a). There is no significant relationship between absence and measures of father-child relationship quality (Model 2b). Measures of parenting style indicate that absence rates are higher where parents use harsher approaches (such as shouting at the child) and lower where mothers use a consistent parenting style.

Going to bed late or skipping breakfast may be taken as proxy measures for a less orderly family climate or indeed, in the case of breakfast, higher levels of material deprivation. Young people who went to bed late at ages 9 and/or 13 have higher rates of school absence as do those who regularly go without breakfast (at home or school). Young people who had experienced two or more adverse childhood experiences (such as bereavement or family addiction) between ages 5 and 9 were more likely to be absent from school four years later. Even one adverse experience between ages 9 and 13 was significantly related to school absence. Later in the chapter, analyses test which of these measures of family processes have the strongest relationship with school absence.

TABLE 2.2 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY FAMILY PROCESS FACTORS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1a	
Maternal depression at age 9	1.353*
Model 1b	
Maternal depression at age 13	1.362*
Model 1c	
Maternal depression at age 9	1.335*
Paternal depression at age 9	1.104
Model 1d	
Maternal depression at age 13	1.357*
Paternal depression at age 13	0.991
Model 2a	
Mother-child closeness	0.994
Mother-child conflict	1.020**
Model 2b	
Mother-child closeness	0.997
Mother-child conflict	1.012
Father-child closeness	1.006
Father-child conflict	1.013
Model 3a	
Parenting style:	
Consistency	0.824**
Hostility	1.055
Model 3b	
Harsh parenting style (e.g. shouting) at age 9	1.026*
Model 3c	
Harsh parenting style (e.g. shouting) at age 13	1.100***
Model 4a	
Went to bed late at age 9	1.239*
Model 4b	
Went to bed late at age 13	1.509***
Model 4c	
Have breakfast (at home or school):	
5-6 days a week	1.098
3-4 days a week	1.588**
1-2 times a week	1.642**
Less than once a week/never (Ref. Every day)	2.072***
Model 5a	
Adverse childhood experiences 5-9 years	
One	1.056
Two or more (Ref. None)	1.201*
Model 5b	
Adverse childhood experiences 9-13 years	
One	1.165*
Two or more (Ref. None)	1.777***
N	5,930

Source: GUI Cohort '08 at ages 9 and 13.

Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

2.2.3 Neighbourhood characteristics

Three measures of neighbourhood characteristics were examined: population density; whether the mother reports low levels of neighbourhood social capital (that is, lack of sense of belonging and trust in others as well as lack of safe facilities for teenagers); and housing tenure. Taking account of individual and background factors, rates of school absence are much lower among those living in rural areas, that is open country or a village, than those in other areas. This may reflect a stronger social penalty to absence in a smaller, more tight-knit community. Young people living in areas with lower social capital have significantly higher rates of absence than their peers in other areas. Furthermore, young people living in rented accommodation are significantly more likely to miss school. While rented tenure is commonly a proxy for broader disadvantage, this effect is evident even taking account of a range of individual and social background factors that might be expected to affect absence.

TABLE 2.3 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Population density **Rural (open country/village)** **(Ref. Town/city)**	0.780***
Low neighbourhood social capital **(Ref. medium/high social capital)**	1.272**
Rented accommodation (social/private) **(Ref. Owner-occupied)**	1.508***
Pseudo R^2	0.027
N	5,797

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Model 2 controls for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure. The cut-points are -1.84, -0.30, 0.55, 1.37 and 2.63.

2.2.4 School characteristics and experiences

Table 2.4 shows the relationship between type of school and level of school absence, first without taking account of any other factors (Model 1), and then adding a range of individual and family background factors. This allows us to separate out the effects of school context from those of school composition. Levels of school absence at age 13 are significantly higher among those who had attended an Urban Band 1 DEIS school and (at the 10 per cent significance level) those who attended Urban Band 2 schools. These results are in keeping with analysis of administrative data from schools (Moya et al., 2026). However, when we take account of individual and family background factors, the difference by DEIS status is no longer significant. In other words, higher levels of absence in urban DEIS schools are due to the concentration of families with lower social class and education levels. Primary school size is not significantly related to absence at age 13.

TABLE 2.4 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY PRIMARY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2
Primary school characteristics		
DEIS status:		
Urban Band 1	1.534**	1.208
Urban Band 2	1.404±	1.238
Rural DEIS	1.029	0.997
(Ref. Non-DEIS)		
School size:		
151-300 students	1.101	1.122
302-450 students	1.047	1.086
>450 students	1.024	1.125
(Ref. 150 students or fewer)		
Pseudo R^2	0.003	0.023
N	6,021	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Model 2 controls for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure. The cut-points for Model 1 are -1.59, -0.12, 0.68, 1.46 and 2.64. The cut-points for Model 2 are -1.85, -0.33, 0.51, 1.33 and 2.56.

Table 2.5 repeats this analysis for post-primary school characteristics. DEIS schools have a higher absence rate than non-DEIS schools, but this is related to the concentration of disadvantage in their school population (compare Models 1 and 2). There is little systematic variation by school size, while girls' schools have slightly lower absence levels (but only at the 10 per cent significance level), a pattern that is due to the profile of students in the school. Young people who had attended a primary school with a high rate of chronic absence (15 per cent or more of the school population) are significantly more likely to miss school at age 13 (Model 3). However, the absence rate of the post-primary school attended makes no significant difference, over and above other factors. Principals were asked to identify the main person or team of people involved in providing socio-emotional support for students in their school. Rates of school absence did not vary significantly by the roles involved or by the number of supports in place to support the transition into post-primary education (Model 4). However, rates of school absence were found to be significantly lower in schools where students were more involved in decision-making (using decision-making over school uniforms as a proxy).

TABLE 2.5 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS, ABSENCE LEVELS OF SCHOOL ATTENDED AND SCHOOL SUPPORTS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Post-primary school characteristics				
DEIS status:				
DEIS school	1.299*	0.922		
(Ref. Non-DEIS)				
School size:				
501-799	0.973	1.025		
701-900	0.923	0.970		
>900	0.820±	0.849		
(Ref. <501 students)				
Gender mix:				
Boys'	0.916	0.986		
Girls'	0.836±	0.828		
(Ref. Coeducational)				
Attended high-absence primary school			1.355**	
Attended high-absence post-primary school			1.021	
Number of transition supports				0.988
Main support for students				
Guidance counsellor				1.051
Student support team				1.006
Year heads				0.878
Class tutors				0.954
Other				1.254
(Ref. Principal)				
Student involved in decision-making re uniforms				
Disagree				0.829
Agree				0.491*
Strongly agree				0.473*
(Ref. Strongly disagree)				
Pseudo R^2	0.002	0.023	0.028	0.030
N	6,004		3,289	2,504

Source: GUI Cohort '08.

Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Models 2, 3 and 4 control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure. The cut-points for Model 1 are -1.73, -0.26, 0.54, 1.32 and 2.49. The cut-points for Model 2 are -2.05, -0.53, 0.31, 1.13 and 2.36. The cut-points for Model 3 are -1.97, -0.40, 0.48, 1.30 and 2.52. The cut-points for Model 4 are -2.98, -1.40, -0.55, 0.26 and 1.65.

Table 2.6 looks at the extent to which absence varies by experience at school at primary level, over the transition to post-primary and within junior cycle. The small group of young people who 'never' liked school at age 9 are significantly more likely to miss school at age 13 (Model 1). However, liking their teacher is not related to

absence, though non-attendance is somewhat higher where teachers did not talk to the child about non-school issues, a potential indicator of a less close relationship. Having been bullied or picked on at age 9 is significantly related to later school absence.

TABLE 2.6 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Primary school experiences				
Liked school at age 9				
Sometimes	1.017			
Never	1.445*			
(Ref. Always)				
Liked teacher at age 9				
Sometimes	0.979			
Never	1.312			
(Ref. Always)				
Teacher never talked about non-school issues				
(Ref. Sometimes/regularly)	1.133±			
Bullied at age 9	1.282***			
Transition difficulties (scale)		1.036**		
Subject difficulty (scale)		1.035±		
Year group: 2nd year (Ref. 1st year)			0.546***	
Post-primary school experiences				
Attitudes to school				
Don't like/hate				2.488***
Like a bit				1.504***
Like quite a bit				1.286**
(Ref. Like very much)				
Positive interaction with teachers				1.005
Negative interaction with teachers				1.129***
Experience of bullying behaviour (scale)				1.035*
Pseudo R^2	0.025	0.018	0.028	0.026
N	5,657			

Source: GUI Cohort '08.

Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure. The cut-points for Model 1 are -1.70, -0.18, 0.67, 1.52 and 2.76. The cut-points for Model 2 are -0.84, 0.67, 1.54, 2.37 and 3.64. The cut-points for Model 3 are -2.35, 0.85, 1.41, 1.00 and 2.14. The cut-points for Model 4 are -0.58, 0.96, 1.84, 2.68 and 3.98.

Young people who report greater difficulties making the transition to post-primary education (such as missing their friends or finding the amount of homework too much) are more likely to be absent from school, while finding subjects difficult is also associated with higher absence rates (though only significant at the 10 per cent level) (Model 3). Attitudes to school at age 13 are strongly associated with absence rates, with particularly high levels among those who do not like or hate school (Model 4). Over and above attitudes to school, negative interaction with teachers (such as being reprimanded) is significantly related to absence. Positive interaction with teachers is found to have no protective effect. Young people who have experienced more bullying behaviour are also more likely to miss school.

2.2.5 Family, neighbourhood and school factors

Table 2.7 draws together factors across the different domains of family, neighbourhood and school to highlight the main influences on school absence at age 13. Disability continues to be strongly related to missing school, even taking account of a range of factors, including experiences of school. Among family background factors, only migrant origin retains a significant net effect, with lower rates of school absence among young people from migrant backgrounds. The social differentiation in absence rates by social class, maternal education, financial strain and family structure illustrated in Table 2.1 is explained by differences in family processes, neighbourhood characteristics and school experiences. While the role of family background characteristics is largely explained by the other factors considered, the social profile of the area in which families live continues to be influential. Young people living in rented accommodation (either social housing or the private rented sector) are more likely to miss school, as are those living in areas with a lack of social capital including safe facilities and strong community bonds. Living in open country or in a village appears to play a protective role in promoting school attendance.

Family processes and experiences are found to play a significant role. Maternal depression when the young person was 9 years of age and the lack of a regular routine (such as bedtime) are significantly related to missing school. Having a more consistent parenting style has a protective effect on school absence. Experience of adverse life events, such as death, illness or addiction of family members, plays a significant role in school absence.

Patterns of school absence are also responsive to young people's experience of school. Attendance appears to be better in schools that involve young people in decision-making. Experiencing difficulties making the transition to post-primary education and not liking school are predictive of school absence as is negative interaction with teachers. Experience of being bullied at age 9 continues to have an impact, with higher rates of absence among this group four years later.

TABLE 2.7 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY FAMILY, NEIGHBOURHOOD AND SCHOOL FACTORS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Female (Ref. Male)	1.055
Disability:	
At age 9	1.637***
By age 13	1.799***
(Ref. No disability)	
Social class:	
Professional	0.926
Managerial	1.048
Other non-manual	1.086
Skilled/semi-skilled (Ref. Unskilled/non-employed)	1.017
Mother's education:	
Leaving Certificate	1.054
Post-secondary	0.967
Degree or higher (Ref. Lower secondary or less)	0.959
Financial strain at age 9	1.114
Migrant-origin family	0.672**
Family structure	
Lone parent-family (Ref. Two-parent family)	1.144
Number of siblings	0.967
Family processes:	
Maternal depression at age 9	1.450*
Maternal consistency	0.834**
Maternal hostility	0.926
Goes to bed late at age 13	1.412***
Adverse childhood experiences ages 9 to 13:	
One	1.223**
Two or more	1.712***
Neighbourhood characteristics:	
Rural area (open country/village)	0.869*
Low neighbourhood social capital	1.259*
Rented accommodation	1.431**
School factors:	
Student involved in decision-making re uniforms	
Disagree	0.713
Agree	0.570*
Strongly agree (Ref. Strongly disagree)	0.538*
Pseudo R^2	0.050
N	5,361

Contd.

TABLE 2.7 CONTINUED

	Coefficients
School experiences:	
Liked school at age 9	
Sometimes	0.950
Never (Ref. Always)	0.964
Bullied at age 9	1.233**
Transition difficulties	1.025±
Attitudes to school at 13	
Don't like/hate	2.388***
Like a bit	1.519***
Like quite a bit (Ref. Like very much)	1.290**
Negative interaction with teachers	1.115**
Experience of bullying behaviour	1.019
Pseudo R^2	0.050
N	5,361

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. The cut-points are -1.77, -0.16, 0.79, 1.67 and 3.0.

2.3 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explored the individual, family, neighbourhood and school factors associated with school absence at age 13. As indicated in administrative data (TESS, 2025), there is no difference in absence rates by gender. Disability emerges as a strong predictor of missing school, both in terms of conditions already evident at age 9 and those that emerged or were identified between the ages of 9 and 13.

There is strong social differentiation in absence rates, with higher rates among the unskilled manual and non-employed groups, those with lower levels of education, lone-parent households and families experiencing financial strain. These patterns are not due to child characteristics (such as cognitive and socio-emotional development) on school entry. However, they are explained by differences in neighbourhood characteristics, family processes and later school experiences. Migrant-origin young people are found to have better attendance levels, even taking account of a wide variety of other factors, most likely reflecting higher average educational expectations among their parents. Young people living in rented accommodation are found to have higher absence rates, which may reflect area-level deprivation and/or greater housing mobility among this group. Absence rates are also higher in areas with low social capital, that is, fewer safe facilities for teenagers and lower bonds with the local community, but lower in rural areas (open country or villages), a pattern which may also reflect the role of local social capital.

Several interrelated family factors are associated with school absence. Overall, maternal characteristics play a much stronger role than paternal factors. Absence is strongly related to mother-child conflict, lack of consistency, a harsher parenting style (such as shouting rather than explaining) and a lack of routine (around bedtime and breakfast). Maternal depression is also a risk factor for missing school. Major life events, such as bereavement, illness and addiction, emerge as a strong driver of school absence.

Absence rates are also related to the characteristics of the school attended and young people's experiences at school. Absence rates are higher in DEIS schools (see also TESS, 2025) but these patterns are related to the concentration of socio-economic disadvantage in these schools. This is in line with studies finding that the socioeconomic composition of schools does not exert a negative influence beyond students' sociodemographic characteristics (Nash, 2003; Thrupp et al., 2002). However, even controlling for family background, having attended a primary school with a high rate of absence is a risk factor for missing school at age 13. Schools that involve students to a greater extent in decision-making emerge as having lower absence rates, even taking account of student characteristics. The small number of young people who never liked school at age 9 are more likely to be absent, though this is explained by greater transition difficulties and continuing negative attitudes to school at age 13. Those who are more negative about school at 13 and have poorer-quality relationships with their teachers are more likely to miss school, a process that is likely to be mutually reinforcing. Earlier experience of bullying continues to be a risk factor for later absence.

This chapter has explored the factors associated with school absence at age 13, without taking account of earlier attendance patterns. The next chapter looks at trajectories of absence between 9 and 13 years of age and the factors related to these patterns.

CHAPTER 3

Trajectories of school absence: individual, family, school and neighbourhood factors

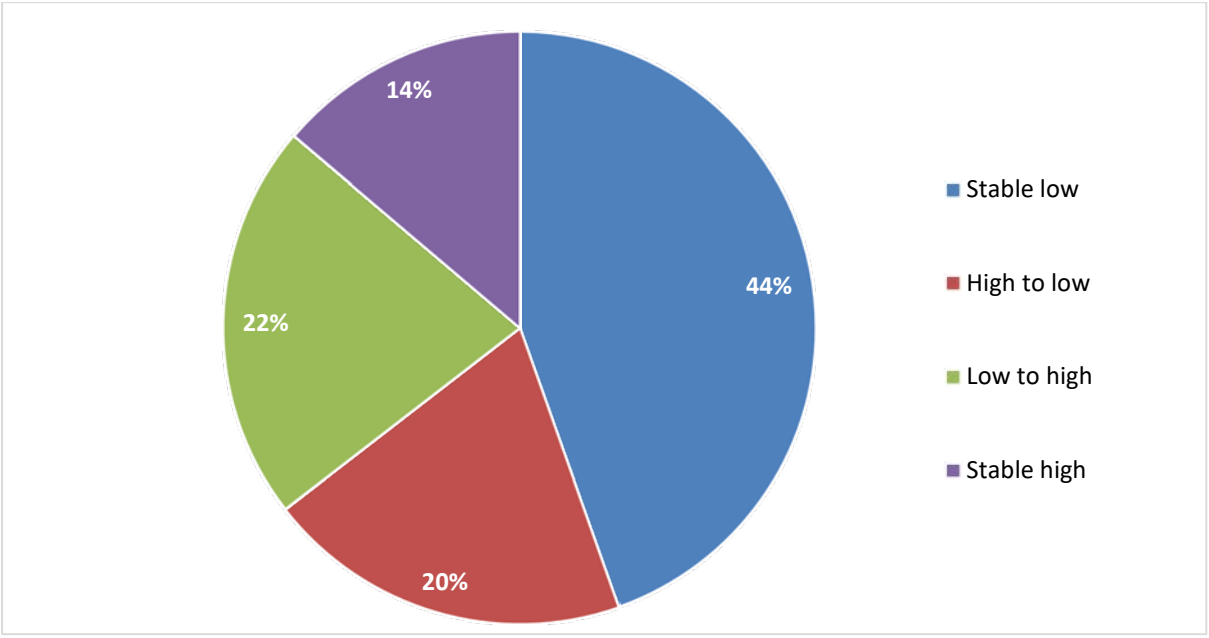
3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 has looked at the factors associated with attendance at age 13. However school absence should more properly be regarded as a trajectory, with children and young people experiencing different patterns of absence over their school career (see Dräger et al., 2024). This chapter uses latent class modelling to characterise groups based on their school absence at ages 9 and 13. It then looks at the individual, family, neighbourhood and school factors associated with these trajectories. This analysis is useful from a policy perspective as it can identify factors associated with improving or declining attendance rates.

3.2 TRAJECTORIES OF ATTENDANCE

Latent class modelling was used to identify groups of young people on the basis of their attendance at ages 9 and 13. Analyses tested for two to five latent classes, with four classes emerging as having the best model fit. These four groups comprise those who have stable low levels of school absence (44 per cent), those who have stable high levels of absence (14 per cent), those who had improving levels of attendance (14 per cent) and those who had declining levels of attendance (22 per cent) (Figure 3.1).

FIGURE 3.1 ATTENDANCE TRAJECTORIES BETWEEN 9 AND 13 YEARS OF AGE

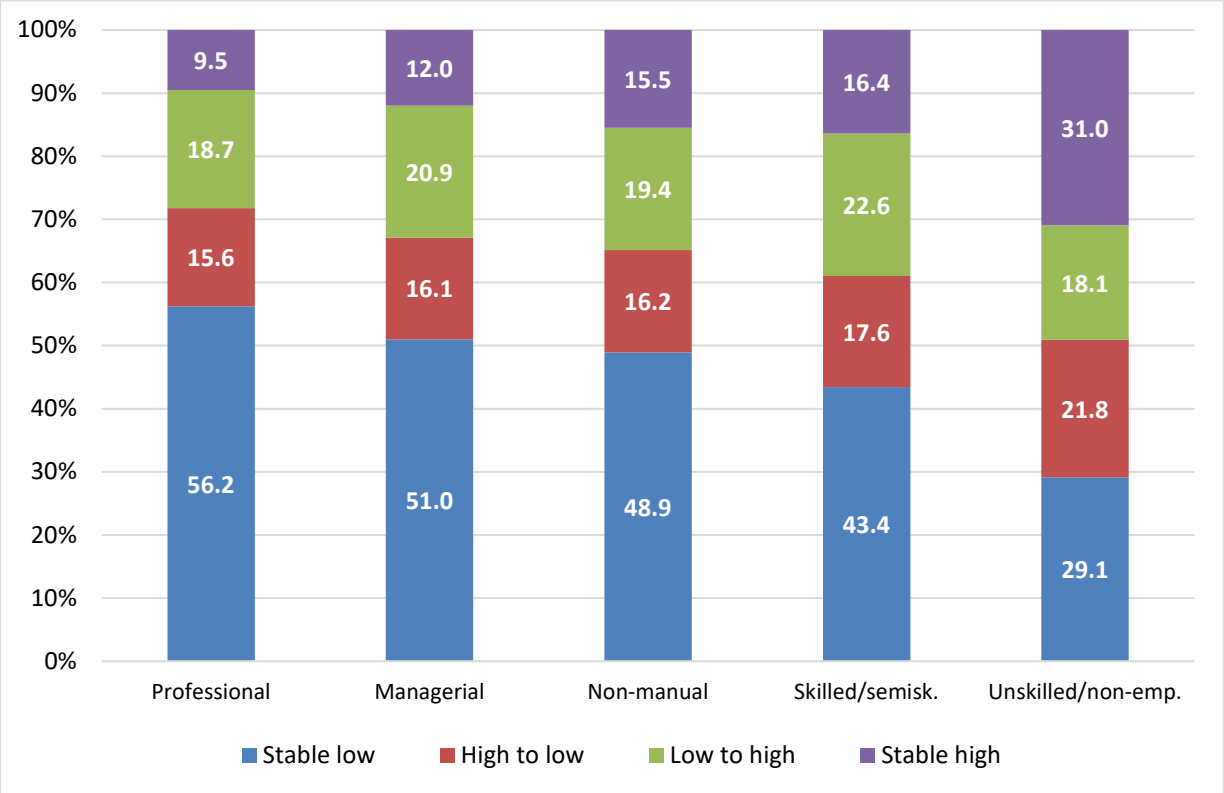


Source: GUI Cohort '08.

3.2.1 Trajectories by individual and family background

Figure 3.2 shows the relationship between social class and attendance trajectories, without taking account of any other factors. The strongest contrast is between those from unskilled manual or non-employed households and all others. This group has much lower rates of stable low absence, almost half the level of those from professional families, and almost a third have consistently high levels of school absence, at least double that of other class groups. It is worth noting that the group who experienced an increase in absence over time is relatively similar across social classes, at around 19 to 23 per cent of each.

FIGURE 3.2 ATTENDANCE TRAJECTORIES BY SOCIAL CLASS BACKGROUND



Source: GUI Cohort '08.

Table 3.1 looks at the influence of a range of individual and family background factors on the attendance trajectory, with those with consistently low school absence as the base category. No significant gender difference is found in patterns of absence over time. The group of young people who have consistently higher absence rates are characterised by higher levels of disability, a greater likelihood of coming from the unskilled or non-employed class, lower levels of maternal education and higher levels of financial strain. This group does not differ in family structure or size.

TABLE 3.1 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY FAMILY BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS (RELATIVE RISK RATIOS) (BASE CATEGORY: STABLE LOW ABSENCE)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Female	0.954	0.964	1.208
(Ref. Male)			
Disability:			
At age 9	1.779***	1.277	4.276***
By age 13	0.954	2.089***	3.584***
(Ref. No disability)			
Social class:			
Professional	0.476**	0.781	0.306***
Managerial	0.521**	0.931	0.402***
Other non-manual	0.504**	0.795	0.452**
Skilled/semi-skilled	0.571*	1.061	0.474**
(Ref. Unskilled/non-employed)			
Mother's education:			
Leaving Certificate	0.705	0.893	0.784
Post-secondary	0.587*	0.860	0.631*
Degree or higher	0.570*	0.757	0.552**
(Ref. Lower secondary or less)			
Financial strain at age 9	1.092	1.177	1.418*
Migrant-origin family	1.314	0.660*	1.253
Family structure			
Lone parent-family	1.129	1.516*	1.380
(Ref. Two-parent family)			
Number of siblings	0.863**	0.982	0.947
Pseudo R^2		0.045	
N		6,038	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

Improving attendance (the high to low absence group) is more common among those who had been identified with a disability by age 9, those from the unskilled or non-employed class, and those with lower levels of maternal education. Those with more siblings are less likely to improve their attendance over time if it was low at age 9.

School absence increased among over a fifth of the cohort in the wake of the pandemic. This group does not differ from those with consistently low attendance in their social class, levels of maternal education or experience of financial strain. Only a few key risk factors emerge from the analysis – identification or onset of a disability between 9 and 13 years of age and living in a lone-parent family. In contrast, being from a migrant-origin family plays a protective role.

Table A.3.1 looks at whether conditions at school entry make a difference for later trajectories. Having greater socio-emotional difficulties at age 5 is associated with being in the consistently high absence group and the group that moves from high to low levels of absence. Vocabulary test score is not significantly related to attendance trajectory. Being seen by the teacher as unprepared for learning (because of hunger or tiredness for example) is much less common among the stable low absence group than among any of the other groups. The patterns for other family background factors remain unchanged with the inclusion of these measures.

3.2.2 Trajectories by family processes

Table 3.2 presents an overview of separate models on the relationship between different types of family process factors and attendance trajectories (see Table A.3.2 for full models, including paternal depression and father-child relationships). Maternal depression when the young person was either 9 and/or 13 years is associated with consistently high rates of school absence, while maternal depression at age 9 is also somewhat related to declining attendance (though only significant at the 10 per cent level). There is little systematic variation by parent-child relationship quality, though higher mother-child conflict is evident among the group with consistently poor attendance. In contrast, parenting style is more closely linked to attendance trajectory, with maternal consistency playing a protective role in avoiding consistently high attendance, while a harsh parenting style at age 9 is linked to poorer attendance. A harsh parenting style with 13-year-olds is significantly related to all of the suboptimal attendance patterns. A lack of routine, as evidenced by going to bed late and skipping breakfast, is linked to consistently high absence and declining attendance. Early adverse childhood experiences are linked to consistently poor attendance while experience of adversity between 9 and 13 years is significantly related to all of the suboptimal attendance trajectories.

TABLE 3.2 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE TRAJECTORIES BY FAMILY PROCESS FACTORS (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Model 1a			
Maternal depression at age 9	1.027	1.348±	1.548*
Model 1b			
Maternal depression at age 13	1.254	1.096	1.437±
Model 2a			
Mother-child closeness	0.999	0.997	0.988
Mother-child conflict	1.015	1.015±	1.021*
Model 3b			
Harsh parenting style (e.g. shouting) at age 9	1.013	1.009	1.045*
Model 3c			
Harsh parenting style (e.g. shouting) at age 13	1.113**	1.115***	1.076*
Model 4a			
Went to bed late at age 9	1.192	1.235±	1.506**
Model 4b			
Went to bed late at age 13	1.086	1.282*	1.858***
Model 5a: Adverse childhood experiences 5-9 years			
One	0.991	0.959	1.189
Two or more (Ref. None)	1.082	1.213	1.480*
Model 5b: Adverse childhood experiences 9-13 years			
One	1.032	1.105	1.239
Two or more (Ref. None)	1.401*	1.666***	2.741***

Source: GUI Cohort '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure. Further details on sample size and model fit are given in Table A.3.2.

3.2.3 Trajectories by neighbourhood factors

Living in rented accommodation is significantly related to all suboptimal types of attendance, with this group almost twice as likely to have consistently high absence than to have consistently good attendance (Table 3.3). Those living in open country or a village are less likely to have consistently high or initially high levels of absence. Over and above population density, those living in neighbourhoods with low levels of social capital are likely to have steadily high or increasing levels of absence.

TABLE 3.3 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS (RELATIVE RISK RATIOS) (BASE CATEGORY: STABLE LOW ABSENCE)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Population density Rural (open country/village) (Ref. Town/city)	0.779*	0.857	0.701**
Low neighbourhood social capital (Ref. medium/high social capital)	0.974	1.301*	1.528**
Rented accommodation (social/private) (Ref. Owner-occupied)	1.561**	1.644**	1.917***
Pseudo R^2		0.054	
N		5,824	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. The model controls for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

3.2.4 Trajectories by school processes and experiences

There is little systematic variation in attendance trajectories by primary school characteristics. However, both Urban Band 1 and Band 2 schools have consistently higher levels of absence than non-DEIS schools (Model 1, Table 3.4). This pattern is due to the greater concentration of socio-economic disadvantage among the families of children attending these schools (Model 2). Taking account of family background characteristics, those attending larger primary schools (that is, with over 300 students) are more likely to have consistently high levels of absence.

TABLE 3.4 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY PRIMARY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Model 1 (without controls)			
Primary school characteristics			
DEIS status:			
Urban Band 1	1.210	1.427±	2.155***
Urban Band 2	1.318	1.196	1.888**
Rural DEIS	0.853	0.923	1.162
(Ref. Non-DEIS)			
School size:			
151-300 students	1.260	1.077	1.235
302-450 students	1.072	0.966	1.409±
>450 students	1.023	1.028	1.295
(Ref. 150 students or fewer)			
Model 2 (with controls)			
Primary school characteristics			
DEIS status:			
Urban Band 1	0.914	1.247	1.403
Urban Band 2	1.070	1.094	1.264
Rural DEIS	0.792	0.829	1.212
(Ref. Non-DEIS)			
School size:			
151-300 students	1.216	1.081	1.239
301-450 students	1.053	0.986	1.485*
>450 students	1.071	1.107	1.422±
(Ref. 150 students or fewer)			
N	6,038		

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Model 2 controls for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

Similarly, there is little systematic variation in attendance trajectories by post-primary school characteristics (Table 3.5). Those attending larger schools (with over 900 students) are less likely to fall into the consistently high absence group, with this difference still significant at the 10 per cent level even taking account of a range of individual and background factors. Boys' schools have fewer students with consistently or initially high absence, but this pattern is related to the profile of students in these schools. Girls' schools have fewer students in the changing patterns of absence groups, a pattern that is largely but not entirely due to the profile of students. Having attended a primary school with a high level (15 per cent or more) of chronic absence is associated with being in the consistently high absence group, though this is only significant at the 10 per cent level. A high level of student involvement in school decision-making is significantly related to lower levels of consistently high or (to some extent) increasing absence (Table 3.6). Consistently high absence is less common in schools in which the guidance counsellor, year heads and/or class tutors play the most important role in student support.

TABLE 3.5 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Model 1 (without controls)			
DEIS status:			
DEIS school	1.021	1.218	1.268
(Ref. Non-DEIS)			
School size:			
501-799	0.978	1.009	0.744
701-900	0.763	0.746±	0.870
>900	0.797	0.850	0.634*
(Ref. <501 students)			
Gender mix:			
Boys'	0.734±	0.859	0.633*
Girls'	0.724*	0.758±	0.812
(Ref. Coeducational)			
Model 2 (with controls)			
DEIS status:			
DEIS school	0.874	1.059	0.941
(Ref. Non-DEIS)			
School size:			
501-799	1.017	1.036	0.789
701-900	0.782	0.770	0.981
>900	0.843	0.868	0.687±
(Ref. <501 students)			
Gender mix:			
Boys'	0.755	0.881	0.745
Girls'	0.780	0.747±	0.729
(Ref. Coeducational)			
Model 3			
Attended high-absence primary school	1.147	1.267	1.443±
Attended high-absence post-primary school	1.032	0.979	1.100
N		6,038	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.

Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Model 2 controls for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

TABLE 3.6 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL SUPPORTS (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Number of transition supports	0.416	0.924	1.050
Main support for students			
Guidance counsellor	0.612	1.107	0.355*
Student support team	0.756	1.180	0.529
Year heads	0.583	1.084	0.408*
Class tutors	0.656	1.408	0.395*
Other	0.416	0.364	0.286
(Ref. Principal)			
Student involved in decision-making re uniforms			
Disagree	0.365	0.615	0.374
Agree	0.538	0.468	0.207**
Strongly agree	0.636	0.352±	0.225**
(Ref. Strongly disagree)			
Pseudo R^2		0.068	
N		2,563	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Models 2, 3 and 4 control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

Looking at primary school experiences, those who were less positive about school are more likely to fall into the consistently or initially high levels of absence groups (Table 3.7, Model 1). Having been bullied at age 9 is also more common for the group with steadily high levels of absence. Young people who found the transition to post-primary education difficult are more likely to fall into the high absence group, most likely reflecting the bidirectional relationship between absence and lack of school belonging. Compared to first year students, second years are less likely to fall into the consistently high or increasing absence groups. Not liking school at age 13 is significantly related to consistently high or increasing absence while negative interaction with teachers is related to consistently high levels of absence.

TABLE 3.7 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Model 1: Primary school experiences			
Liked school at age 9			
Sometimes	1.478**	1.052	1.117
Never	1.656±	1.411	2.016*
(Ref. Always)			
Liked teacher at age 9			
Sometimes	0.887	0.969	0.951
Never	1.145	1.470	1.011
(Ref. Always)			
Teacher never talked about non-school issues			
(Ref. Sometimes/regularly)	1.010	1.037	1.151
Bullied at age 9	1.062	1.114	1.364**
Model 2: Transition experiences			
Transition difficulties (scale)	1.101	1.014	1.052*
Subject difficulty (scale)	1.012	1.031	1.033
Model 3			
Year group: 2nd year (Ref. 1st year)	0.927	0.450***	0.563***
Post-primary school experiences			
Attitudes to school			
Don't like/hate	1.145	1.623*	2.627***
Like a bit	1.095	1.333*	1.650**
Like quite a bit	1.193	1.118	1.557*
(Ref. Like very much)			
Positive interaction with teachers	0.966	0.997	1.049
Negative interaction with teachers	1.087	1.075	1.257***
Experience of bullying behaviour (scale)	0.980	1.025	1.039
N		6,038	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.

Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

3.2.5 Trajectory by family background, family process, neighbourhood and school factors

As in Chapter 2, the main factors identified as significant across the domains of family background and process, neighbourhood and school are included in a combined model (Table 3.8).

TABLE 3.8 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY FAMILY, NEIGHBOURHOOD AND SCHOOL FACTORS (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Female (Ref. Male)	1.012	1.022	1.383*
Disability:			
At age 9	2.078***	1.350	3.536***
By age 13	0.817	1.466*	2.585***
(Ref. No disability)			
Social class:			
Professional	0.518*	1.228	0.481*
Managerial	0.614±	1.529	0.569*
Other non-manual	0.578*	1.194	0.582±
Skilled/semi-skilled (Ref. Unskilled/non-employed)	0.635±	1.355	0.632±
Mother's education:			
Leaving Certificate	0.691	1.162	1.065
Post-secondary	0.624*	1.069	0.789
Degree or higher (Ref. Lower secondary or less)	0.610*	0.984	0.851
Financial strain at age 9	1.116	1.092	1.132
Migrant-origin family	1.234	0.679±	1.064
Family structure			
Lone parent-family (Ref. Two-parent family)	1.159	1.236	1.014
Number of siblings	0.831**	0.950	0.828**
Family processes:			
Maternal depression at age 9	0.876	1.453±	1.566*
Maternal consistency	0.937	0.918	0.744**
Maternal hostility	0.950	0.996	0.812
Goes to bed late at age 13	1.084	1.254*	1.721***
Adverse childhood experiences ages 9 to 13:			
One	1.071	1.180	1.208
Two or more	1.326±	1.657***	2.354***
Neighbourhood characteristics:			
Rural area (open country/village)	0.767*	0.958	0.743*
Low neighbourhood social capital	1.013	1.396**	1.382*
Rented accommodation	1.436*	1.615**	1.604**
School factors:			
Student involved in decision-making re uniforms			
Disagree	0.425±	0.572	0.470±
Agree	0.613	0.584	0.440*
Strongly agree (Ref. Strongly disagree)	0.688	0.485*	0.393*

Contd.

TABLE 3.8 CONTINUED

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
School experiences:			
Liked school at age 9:			
Sometimes	1.412**	1.017	1.129
Never (Ref. Always)	1.560	1.011	1.776±
Bullied at age 9	1.045	1.096	1.591**
Transition difficulties	1.010	1.013	1.033
2nd year (Ref. 1st year)	0.836	0.383***	0.445***
Attitudes to school at 13:			
Don't like/hate	1.004	1.798**	1.769*
Like a bit	1.082	1.429*	1.340
Like quite a bit (Ref. Like very much)	1.107	1.186	1.289
Negative interaction with teachers	1.088	1.096±	1.202**
Experience of bullying behaviour	0.975	1.015	1.012
Pseudo R^2		0.086	
N		5,382	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

There are few gender differences found. However, girls are more likely to fall into the consistently high absence group than might be expected given their other characteristics, especially their more positive engagement with school. Having a disability recorded at age 9 is significantly related to consistently or initially high rates of absence, even taking account of a wide range of other factors. A disability that emerges or is identified between the ages of 9 and 13 is significantly related to consistently high or increasing absence levels.

Being from a higher social class group appears to be protective against being in the consistently or initially high absence categories, while higher maternal education is also linked to lower chances of being in the initially high absence group. Those with more siblings are less likely to fall into the consistently or initially high absence groups. It is worth noting that those who increase their absence levels over the transition to post-primary education do not differ from those with low absence levels in their socio-economic background characteristics.

Family processes also play a role in shaping attendance trajectories. Maternal depression when the child was 9 years old and a lack of routine (as evidenced by going to bed late) are significantly related to consistently high and, to some extent, increasing absence levels. In contrast, a parenting style that is consistent is protective against high levels of absence. Experience of adverse childhood experiences is significantly related to all types of suboptimal attendance, being particularly strongly predictive of consistently poor attendance.

Over and above family background factors, the neighbourhood within which families live has an influence on attendance trajectories. Living in rented accommodation is linked to all types of suboptimal attendance, while living in a neighbourhood with low social capital is predictive of consistently high or increasing absence. Living in a rural area (open country or village) is protective against consistently or initially high levels of absence.

Student involvement in school decision-making is related to lower levels of high and increasing absence. None of the school experience factors are related to declining attendance, except for higher levels among those who sometimes liked school at age 9. Second year students are much less likely to fall into the high and increasing absence groups than their first year counterparts. Not liking school and having negative relationships with teachers is predictive of high and increasing absence levels.

3.3 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has used information on attendance at ages 9 and 13 years to look at how patterns differ across groups of students. Four trajectory types are evident: stable low levels of school absence (44 per cent), stable high levels of absence (14 per cent), improving levels of attendance (14 per cent) and declining levels of attendance (22 per cent). These trajectories reflect individual and social background, family relationships, neighbourhood settings and school experiences.

Disability emerges as a strong predictor of attendance issues, with the findings highlighting the dynamic nature of the emergence and identification of conditions. In particular, absence levels tend to increase for those young people for whom a disability is recognised between the ages of 9 and 13 years. Young people from working-class or non-employed households or those with lower levels of education tend to have poorer patterns of attendance at primary level, with many of this group maintaining this pattern into post-primary level. Exposure to adverse childhood experiences (such as separation, bereavement or addiction) influences high or increasing absence levels, as do the absence of a routine at home for the young person and maternal depression. Over and above socio-economic background, local area deprivation plays a role, with poorer attendance trajectories for those living in social or private rented housing and in areas characterised by poor facilities and weak bonds among the community.

There are few differences in attendance trajectories by objective school characteristics, with differences between urban primary DEIS and other schools explained by the profile of students in these schools. However, how young people experience their school setting makes a difference, with not liking post-primary school and negative interactions with teachers playing an important role in maintaining or prompting poor attendance.

CHAPTER 4

Trajectories of school absence: the influence of pandemic experiences

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Administrative data show a very large increase in school absence in Ireland in the wake of the pandemic (TESS, 2025; Moya et al., 2026). Pandemic-related restrictions impacted on all children and young people, with prolonged school closures in Ireland and disruptions to social interaction. However, research indicates that young people's wellbeing was differentially affected by these restrictions because of variation in the resources they had to engage in remote learning, in the loss of employment and income among their families, and in the nature of family relationships at a time of strain (Smyth and Murray, 2022; Smyth et al., 2025). This chapter explores whether experiences of the pandemic have impacted on later attendance patterns among young people and, if so, which dimensions have made the most difference.

4.2 SCHOOL RESPONSES TO THE PANDEMIC

Ireland saw more prolonged periods of school closure than in many other countries.[13] The first period of closure required schools to pivot to remote teaching and to help support students in accessing digital devices, with schools experiencing significant challenges in ensuring engagement in learning (Mohan et al., 2020). In only a minority of cases (18 per cent) were principals very satisfied with the remote learning their school could provide during this period, with 30 per cent not very or not at all satisfied (Figure 4.1). The situation during the second period of school closures was very different, with the majority of principals (63 per cent) indicating they were very satisfied with the remote learning they could offer. Satisfaction with remote learning varied across different types of schools. Those in DEIS schools had much lower levels of satisfaction in relation to both periods of school closure (Table 4.1). Girls' schools tended to be less satisfied with remote learning than coeducational or boys' schools. The pattern by school size was not clear-cut, but medium-sized schools tended to be more satisfied, with very large schools experiencing some challenges in the second period of closures.

[13] https://covid19.uis.unesco.org/global-monitoring-school-closures-covid19/country-dashboard/.

FIGURE 4.1 PRINCIPAL SATISFACTION WITH THE REMOTE LEARNING THEIR SCHOOL COULD PROVIDE DURING THE FIRST AND SECOND PERIODS OF CLOSURE

Source: GUI Cohort '08.

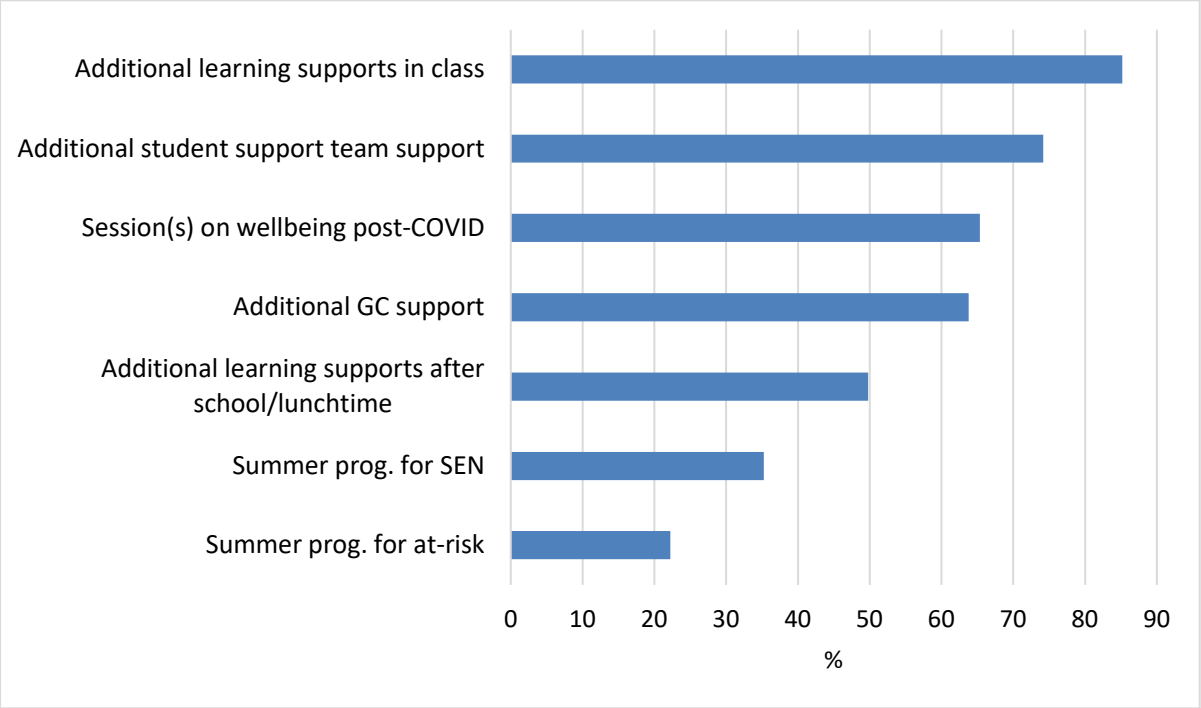
TABLE 4.1 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF PRINCIPAL SATISFACTION WITH REMOTE LEARNING IN FIRST AND SECOND PERIODS OF CLOSURE (BASE: NOT VERY/NOT AT ALL SATISFIED) (ODDS RATIOS)

	First period		Second period	
	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied
DEIS school (Ref. Non-DEIS)	0.605**	0.588***	0.104***	0.193***
Boys' school	1.022	1.266	1.338	1.121
Girls' school (Ref. Coeducational)	0.639**	0.785±	0.231**	0.224**
School size				
501-700	1.988***	0.908	2.949**	2.209±
701-900	1.513*	0.926	2.254	1.633
>900 (Ref. <500)	1.397	1.317±	0.317*	0.300*
Pseudo R^2	0.026		0.037	
N	4,482		4,495	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

In the GUI survey, principals were asked about the kinds of supports they had put in place for students to adjust back to school after the period of closures (Figure 4.2). The majority of schools put in place additional learning supports in class as well as wellbeing supports through specific sessions, the student support team and/or the guidance counsellor. In around half of cases, additional learning support was offered at lunchtime or after school, with a fifth to a third of schools offering summer programmes.

FIGURE 4.2 PRINCIPAL REPORTS ON PROVISION OF POST-PANDEMIC SUPPORTS IN THEIR SCHOOL



Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: GC denotes guidance counselling.

Schools typically provided a number of post-pandemic supports, with the majority (63 per cent) of young people attending schools that offered four or more such supports. DEIS schools tended to offer more post-pandemic supports as did single-sex schools (Table 4.2). Schools with more than 700 students tended to offer more supports.

TABLE 4.2 OLS REGRESSION MODEL OF THE NUMBER OF POST-PANDEMIC SUPPORTS IN THE SCHOOL

	Coefficients
DEIS school (Ref. Non-DEIS)	1.155***
Boys' school	0.460***
Girls' school	0.596***
(Ref. Coeducational)	
School size	
501-700	0.011
701-900	0.345***
>900	0.684***
(Ref. <500)	
R^2	0.099
N	4,437

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

In 14 per cent of cases, these supports were seen as very effective by principals; three-quarters saw them as fairly effective while 9 per cent thought they were not very or not at all effective. Table 4.3 shows that perceived effectiveness varied across school types. Those in DEIS schools were much less likely to see their supports as very effective, with this difference larger when the greater number of supports provided is taken into account (compare the coefficients in Models 1 and 2). Single-sex schools were more likely to see their provision as very effective, a pattern that was only partly related to the greater number of supports offered. There was little consistent variation by school size.

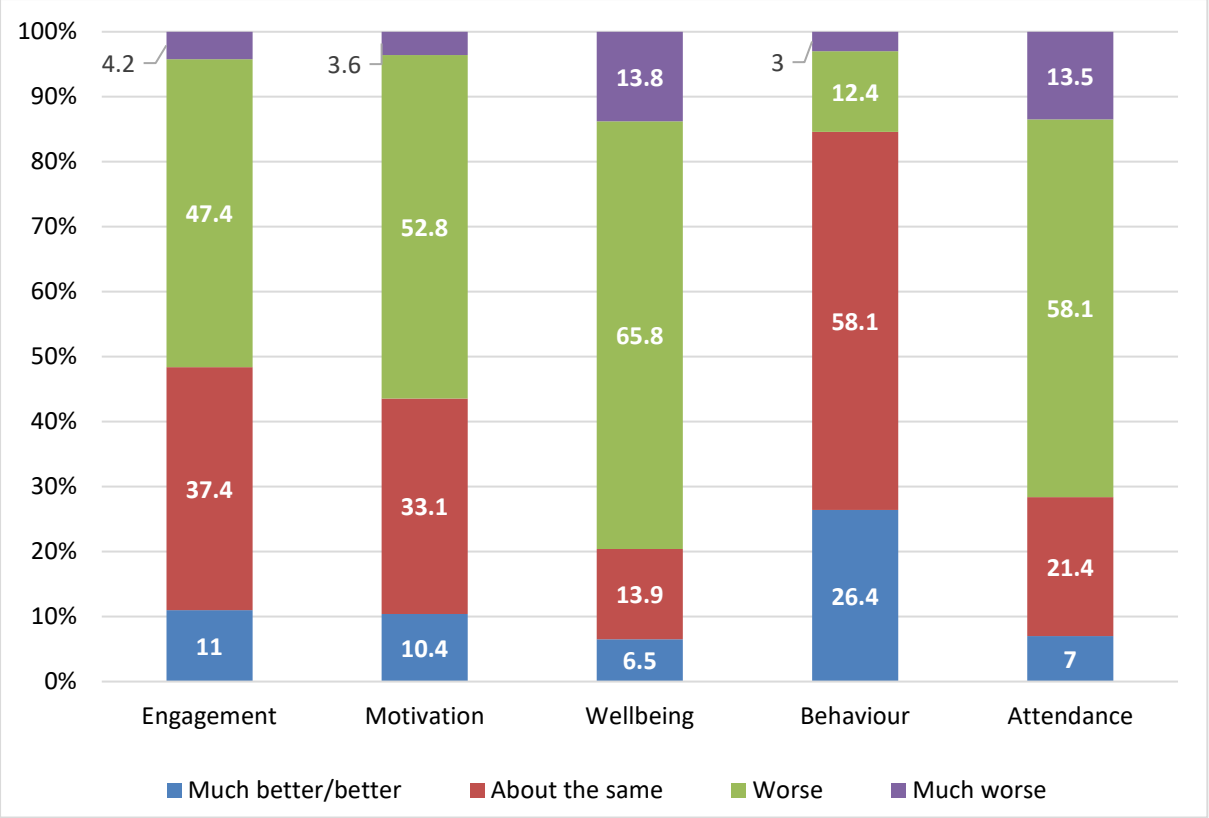
TABLE 4.3 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POST-PANDEMIC SUPPORTS IN THE SCHOOL (BASE: NOT VERY/NOT AT ALL EFFECTIVE) (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Very effective	Fairly effective	Very effective	Fairly effective
DEIS school (Ref. Non-DEIS)	0.520*	1.435±	0.212***	0.990
Boys' school	4.079***	2.016**	2.448**	1.495
Girls' school	2.421***	1.445	1.800*	1.261
(Ref. Coeducational)				
School size				
501-700	1.895*	1.431±	1.891*	1.467±
701-900	0.803	0.719±	0.444**	0.563**
>900	2.553***	1.491±	1.819*	1.176
(Ref. <500)				
No. of post-pandemic supports			2.404***	1.606***
Pseudo R^2	0.040		0.095	
N	4,352			

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

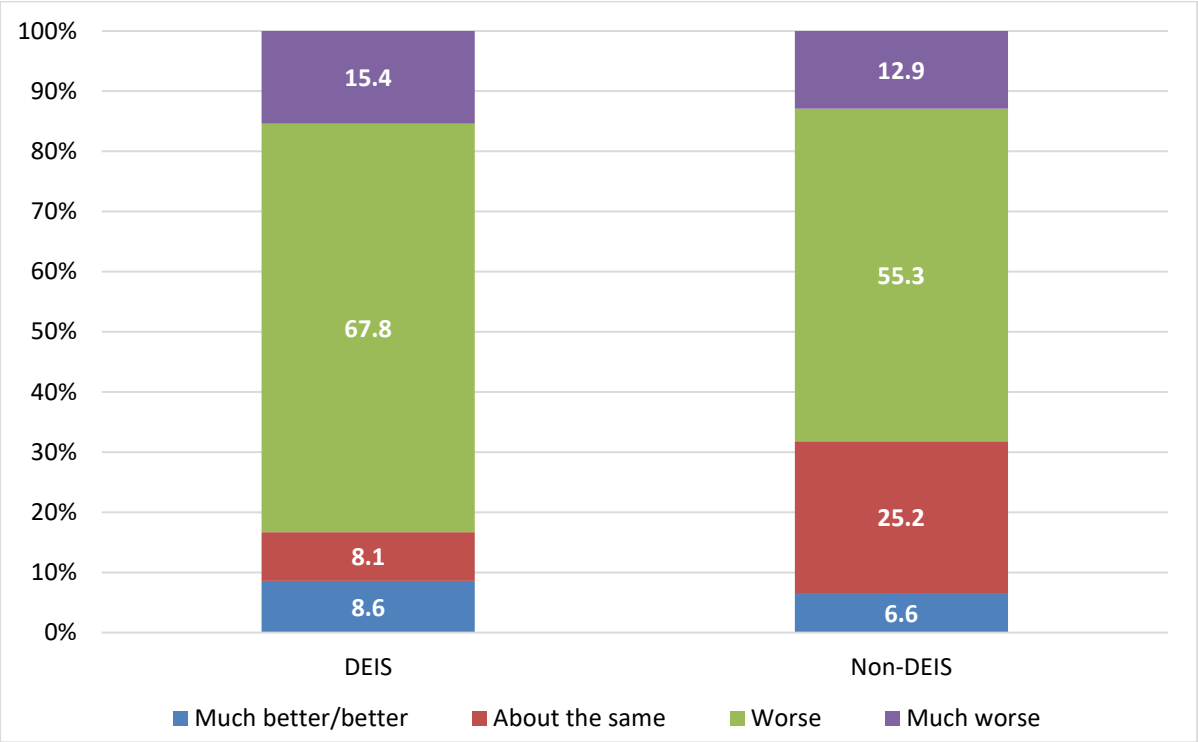
In order to explore post-pandemic challenges in schools, principals were asked to compare student engagement, motivation, wellbeing, behaviour in class and attendance at the time of the survey (2021/22) compared to the period before the pandemic (Figure 4.3). In the majority of cases, motivation, wellbeing and attendance were seen as worse or much worse than pre-pandemic. Around half saw engagement as worse while only a minority saw behaviour as worse. DEIS schools were much more likely to see attendance as worse than those in non-DEIS schools (83 per cent compared with 68 per cent), though a decline was evident in both settings. DEIS schools saw all other student outcomes as significantly worse than those in non-DEIS schools (not shown here).

FIGURE 4.3 PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT, MOTIVATION, WELLBEING, BEHAVIOUR IN CLASS AND ATTENDANCE IN THEIR SCHOOL POST-PANDEMIC (2021/22)



Source: GUI Cohort '08.

FIGURE 4.4 PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE IN THEIR SCHOOL POST-PANDEMIC (2021/22) BY DEIS STATUS



Source: GUI Cohort '08. Differences are significant at the p<.001 level.

4.3 EXPERIENCES OF THE PANDEMIC AND LATER ATTENDANCE

While all young people experienced disruption during the pandemic, research has shown a difference by social background, with those from more disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to have the devices and space to study during school closures than those from more advantaged backgrounds (GUI Study Team, 2021; Smyth and Murray, 2022). This section examines whether experience of the pandemic, in terms of remote learning, economic impact, family relations, disruption to social activities and socio-emotional wellbeing, is related to later school absence. Information was used from two time points: a specific short online survey conducted with the cohort in December 2020 when they were 12 years of age; and retrospective accounts of pandemic experiences reported by 13-year-olds and their mothers in 2021/22. Information from both time points is used as these data have advantages and disadvantages. The 2020 survey provides valuable contemporaneous evidence of the experiences of the pandemic. However, the short window for data collection meant a lower response rate, with a smaller achieved sample making it more difficult to identify significant differences. The 2021/22 account relates to a much larger group of young people, but retrospective accounts must be treated with some caution as those who have adjusted better back to post-pandemic life may reframe their pandemic experiences more positively.

TABLE 4.4 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY EXPERIENCE OF REMOTE LEARNING (BASE: STABLE LOW ABSENCE) (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Retrospective:			
Always had quiet place to study (Ref. Sometimes/never had quiet place to study)	1.010	1.294*	1.030
Did not always have online classes (Ref. Always/sometimes had online classes)	0.989	1.137	1.711***
Pseudo R^2		0.047	
N		5,746	
Contemporaneous:			
Quiet place to study:			
Sometimes true	0.866	1.083	0.856
Never true	0.600	0.998	0.912
(Ref. Always true)			
Did not always have online classes (Ref. Always/sometimes had online classes)	1.193	1.097	1.634**
Had device for remote learning:			
Sometimes true	1.282	1.176	0.818
Never true	1.200	0.850	0.595
(Ref. Always true)			
Gave up on studying until after school reopened:			
Always true	1.175	1.595*	1.858*
Sometimes true	1.456*	1.334±	1.624*
(Ref. Never true)			
Pseudo R^2		0.067	
N		2,761	

Source: GUI Cohort '08, COVID-19 and 13-year waves.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

Table 4.4 looks at the relationship between experience of remote learning and attendance trajectory between 9 and 13 years of age. These models control for a number of individual and family background factors, so the model results show us whether pandemic experience has an impact over and above these characteristics. Using retrospective accounts, not having a quiet place to study during school closure is significantly related to being in the group that increased their absence levels between 9 and 13. The consistently high group are more likely to say they did not have online classes; it is not possible from the available evidence to determine whether these classes were not provided or whether these students did not engage with remote learning. More information on remote learning during the first period of school closure is available from the COVID-specific survey in December 2020 (GUI, 2021). Here we see no relationship between later attendance and either having a quiet place to study or having a device to engage in remote learning. As with retrospective accounts, the consistently high absence group are more likely to say they did not always have online lessons. Young people

were also asked whether they gave up on studying until after the school reopened. Responding that this was true (always or sometimes) was linked to all sub-optimal absence patterns. It is worth noting that this relationship is strongest for those who continued or began poorer attendance over the period from age 9 to 13.

TABLE 4.5 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY TRANSITION BACK TO SCHOOL (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Contemporaneous:			
Made transition to post-primary over first period of school closure	0.853	0.418***	0.474***
Finding it hard to settle back into school:			
Always true	1.026	1.683	2.810*
Sometimes true	0.980	1.237	1.082
(Ref. Never true)			
Finding schoolwork more difficult:			
Always true	1.752	1.142	1.314
Sometimes true	1.377±	1.248	1.409
(Ref. Never true)			
Teacher always goes over material (Ref. Sometimes/never true)	1.280	0.685**	0.861
Pseudo R^2		0.074	
N		2,761	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

In December 2020, young people were asked a series of questions about their return to school after the first period of school closure. Six-in-ten of this cohort made the transition to post-primary education over the first period of school closure. It might be expected that this group would be adversely impacted given the lack of structured preparation for the transition than would have been the case for previous cohorts, and a negative effect on their wellbeing is evident (Smyth and Murray, 2022). However, this group is actually less likely to fall into the high absence groups (Table 4.5); this most likely reflects the higher absence found among first-year students (see Chapter 2). Those in the consistently high absence group are more likely to report difficulties settling back into school after the period of closure while there is no consistent relationship between finding schoolwork more difficult and attendance. Teachers revising material that students have missed appears to play a protective role in avoiding the transition from low to high rates of absence.

TABLE 4.6 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Retrospective:			
One parent lost job	1.292*	1.039	0.978
Both parents lost job	2.133**	1.245	1.437
None previously employed	1.324	1.803*	2.486***
(Ref. No job loss)			
Household income fell a lot	1.137	1.116	1.818***
(Ref. Income fell a little/stayed the same/ increased)			
Pseudo R^2		0.047	
N		5,746	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

The pandemic operated as an economic shock to many families, with significant job loss and consequent income reductions (GUI Study Team, 2021). Overall, the patterns appear to reflect the relationship between economic vulnerability and poor attendance (Table 4.6). The consistently high absence group are more likely to have parents that were not employed before the pandemic and also to have experienced an income reduction. Similarly, non-employment is more common among the low to high absence group and job loss is more common among those with initially high rates of absence.

The pandemic was also likely to have an impact on family life, with many enjoying more time together while a significant group reported more arguments with parents and/or siblings (GUI Study Team, 2021). The analyses (Table 4.7) show few systematic relationships between these family processes and later school absence. However, arguments with siblings are more prevalent among those who moved from having low absence to high absence levels.

TABLE 4.7 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY FAMILY RELATIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC OF THE PANDEMIC (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Contemporaneous:			
Argued with parents more than usual:			
Always true	0.641	0.829	1.067
Sometimes true	1.090	0.959	0.942
(Ref. Never true)			
Argued with siblings more than usual:			
Always true	1.038	1.754*	0.910
Sometimes true	0.655*	1.026	0.709±
(Ref. Never true)			
Spend time with family less than usual (Ref. More/about the same)	1.502	1.210	1.585
Pseudo R^2		0.062	
N		2,761	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

Table 4.8 looks at the potential impact of disruption to social and other activities on later attendance levels. Using retrospective accounts, there are few systematic relationships found. However, those who increase their absence levels report having eaten more junk food or sweets than previously. Both of the groups who change absence levels report taking less exercise than before the pandemic. Accounts in 2020 show that the consistently high absence group were more likely to be seeing their friends less than before the pandemic and were taking less exercise than previously.

TABLE 4.8 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY DISRUPTION TO FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS AND OTHER SOCIAL ACTIVITIES (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Retrospective			
Missed friends:			
Always true	1.414	1.343	0.697
Sometimes true	1.320	1.508	0.711
(Ref. Never true)			
Contact with friends:			
Less than before pandemic – always true	1.316±	0.869	0.876
(Ref. Sometimes/ never true)			
Eating more junk food/sweets than before pandemic:			
Always true	0.894	1.383*	1.307
Sometimes true	0.774±	0.998	1.167
(Ref. Never true)			
Exercise compared to before pandemic:			
More	1.145	1.087	1.154
Less	1.434*	1.332*	1.173
(Ref. The same)			
Pseudo R^2		0.052	
N		5,747	
Contemporaneous			
Face-to-face contact with friends:			
Less than before pandemic	0.868	0.849	1.474*
(Ref. More/about the same)			
Eating junk food/sweets:			
More than before the pandemic	1.018	1.282	1.107
(Ref. About the same/less)			
Exercise compared to before pandemic:			
Less	1.225	1.006	1.126
(Ref. More/ about the same)			
Screentime compared to before pandemic:			
More	0.996	0.978	0.997
Less	0.514±	1.075	2.194*
(Ref. About the same)			
Pseudo R^2		0.062	
N		2,761	

Source: GUI Cohort '08, , COVID-19 and 13-year waves.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

Principals had highlighted the worsening wellbeing among their students in the wake of the pandemic. GUI data for Cohort '08 indicate a significant increase in socio-emotional difficulties, especially internalising difficulties, between the ages of 9 and 13 years, a pattern not evident for Cohort '98 (Vallely et al., 2026). It is likely but not definitive that this pattern is related to the impact of the pandemic. Table 4.9 shows that self-reported wellbeing during the pandemic does not impact significantly on later attendance. However, prior levels of and changes in socio-

emotional difficulties do make a significant difference. The group who moved from high to low absence levels had greater internalising difficulties at age 9 but did not differ markedly in their patterns of change between 9 and 13. In contrast, compared to those with stable low absence levels, those who had high absence at 13 (whether consistently high or increasing) had greater socio-emotional difficulties (total, internalising and externalising) but also were more likely to have increases over time in these difficulties.

TABLE 4.9 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY SOCIO-EMOTIONAL WELLBEING (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Self-reported wellbeing during pandemic (December 2020)	0.995	1.000	0.997
Pseudo R^2		0.053	
N		2,761	
Difference between parent-reported SDQ total difficulties at 13 years and 9 years (post- and pre-pandemic)	1.000	1.060***	1.057***
SDQ total difficulties at 9	1.023±	1.049***	1.080***
Pseudo R^2		0.055	
N		6,032	
Difference between parent-reported SDQ internalising difficulties at 13 years and 9 years (post- and pre-pandemic)	1.023±	1.061***	1.098***
SDQ internalising difficulties at 9	1.043**	1.085***	1.135***
Pseudo R^2		0.058	
N		6,032	
Difference between parent-reported SDQ externalising difficulties at 13 years and 9 years (post- and pre-pandemic)	0.991	1.074***	1.053*
SDQ externalising difficulties at 9	1.022	1.046**	1.093***
Pseudo R^2		0.051	
N		6,032	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

Section 4.2 outlined the measures used by schools to help students settle back after the period of school closures. The analyses in Table 4.10 show no significant relationship between the number or perceived effectiveness of supports and school absence levels.

TABLE 4.10 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF ABSENCE TRAJECTORY BY SCHOOL POST-PANDEMIC SUPPORTS (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
No. of post-pandemic supports	0.964	0.988	0.971
Pseudo R^2		0.050	
N		4,421	
Perceived effectiveness of post-pandemic supports			
Fairly/not very effective (Ref. Very effective)	1.039	0.972	0.779
Pseudo R^2		0.051	
N		4,336	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic significantly disrupted the lives of children and young people through school closures, reduced contact with friends and constraints on engagement in recreational activities. It is seen by school principals as having contributed to poorer wellbeing and lower attendance levels, especially in DEIS schools. While many experiences were shared, evidence shows that families were differentially affected in terms of having the resources to facilitate remote learning, leading to inequalities in engagement in learning (GUI Study Team, 2021). Analyses in this chapter seek to exploit variation in experiences of the pandemic to look at the impact on later attendance.

Overall, any impact found is modest. This may be because the analyses control for a range of social background factors which themselves affected pandemic experiences. Alternatively, the impact may have been greater on other outcomes such as achievement and wellbeing. Nonetheless, some patterns are worth highlighting. Not having a quiet place to study during school closures was significantly related to moving from low to high absence levels. Furthermore, giving up on studying in the period of remote learning was significantly predictive of high absence levels at age 13. There is some evidence that remote learning reinforced pre-existing disengagement, with the consistently high absence group reporting not always having online classes and finding it harder to settle back into school after it reopened. Formal post-pandemic supports offered by the school did not appear to enhance attendance[14] but teachers going over material did appear to protect young people from moving into high absence levels. Those with high absence levels at age 13 had greater socio-emotional difficulties at age 9 but also had an increase in such difficulties between the ages of 9 and 13 years. The

[14] It should be noted that GUI collected information on the presence of school-level supports rather than on the quality of any such supports.

following chapter compares Cohorts ’98 and ’08 to further examine the relationship between socio-emotional wellbeing and attendance patterns.

CHAPTER 5

Comparing non-attendance patterns over a decade

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes advantage of the two-cohort nature of the GUI study to compare school absence patterns among 13-year-olds a decade apart. The analyses presented provide insights into whether absence levels grew among all young people or just particular groups. This decade saw changes that might have been expected to reduce absence rates, with higher levels of parental education, lower incidences of financial strain and a more democratic parenting approach. On the other hand, this period saw changes that might have been expected to exacerbate school absence, including the increased prevalence of disability and socio-emotional difficulties as well as the disruption caused by the pandemic.

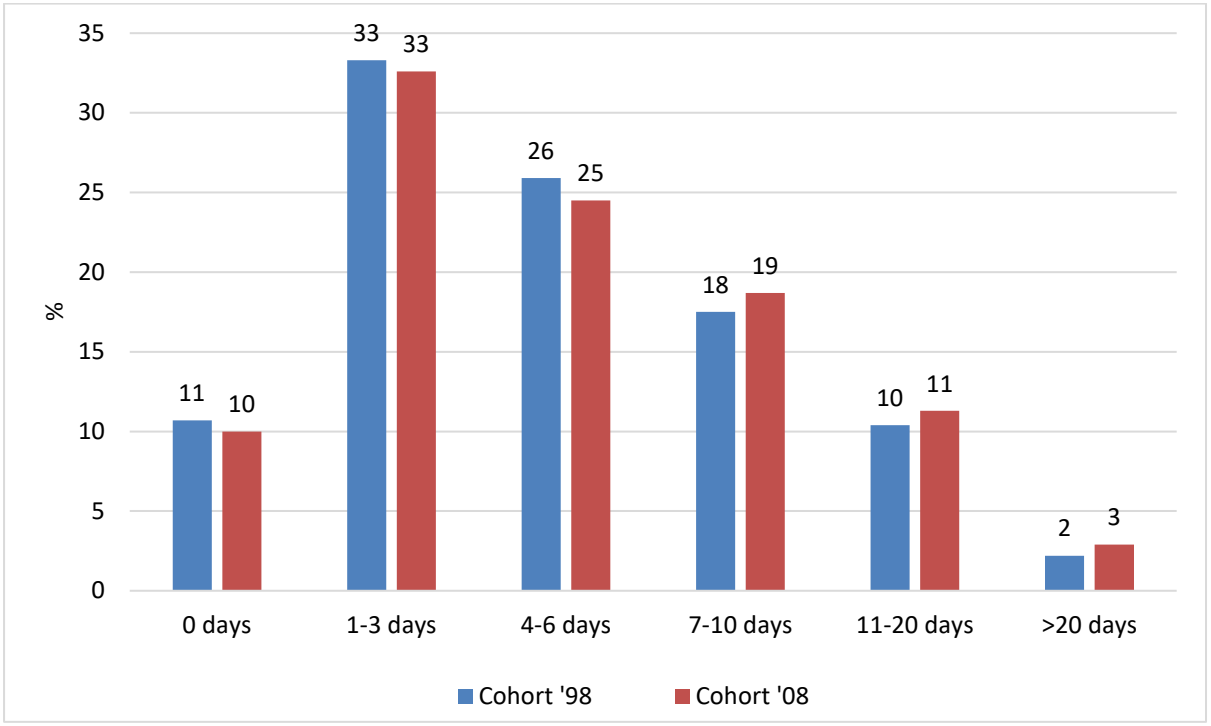
Analyses in this chapter are based on pooled data from Cohorts ’98 and ’08. As some measures changed over time, the analyses are based on a smaller set of variables than those presented in Chapters 2 and 3. The approach taken is to test whether the effects of particular factors change over time by estimating the interaction between that factor and cohort membership. Where significant interaction effects are found, graphs are used to depict the patterns found.

5.2 CROSS-COHORT CHANGES IN SCHOOL ABSENCE

5.2.1 Raw differences in school absence

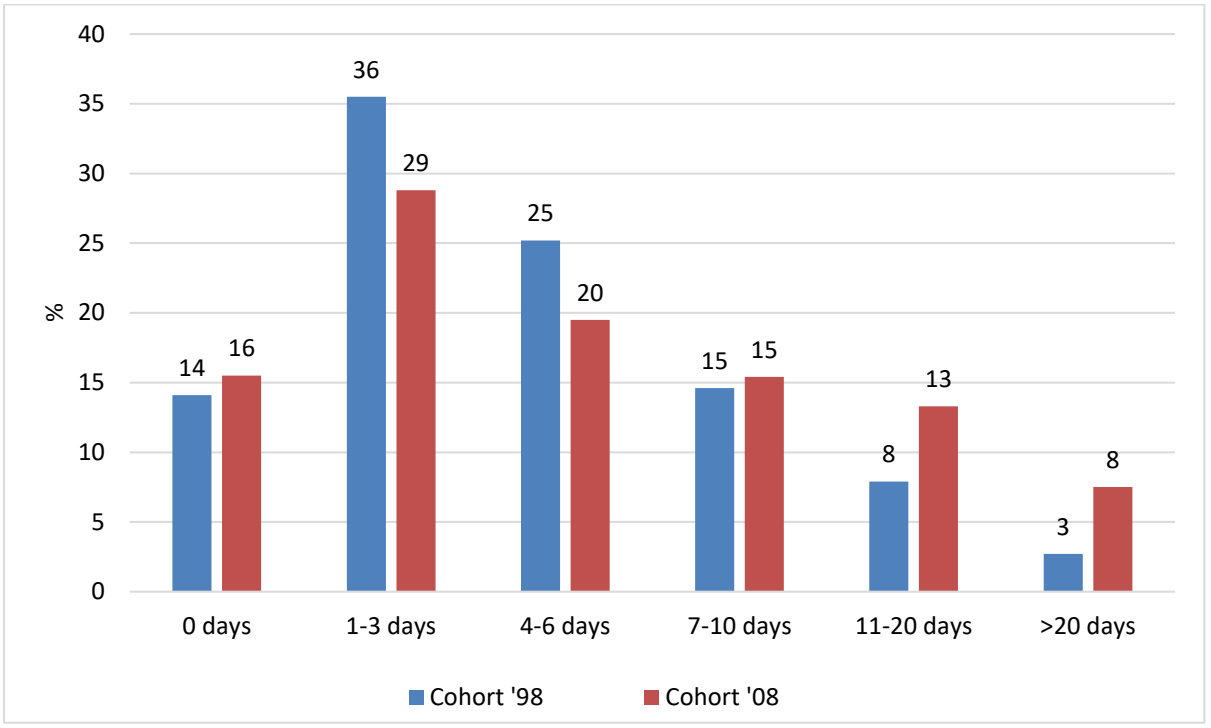
Figures 5.1 and 5.2 compare levels of non-attendance between Cohort ’98 and Cohort ’08 at ages 9 and 13. No significant change over time in absence is found among 9-year-olds a decade apart. However, there is a significant change in non-attendance at age 13, with an increase in the proportion missing 11 or more days from 11 to 21 per cent.

FIGURE 5.1 SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 9, COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.

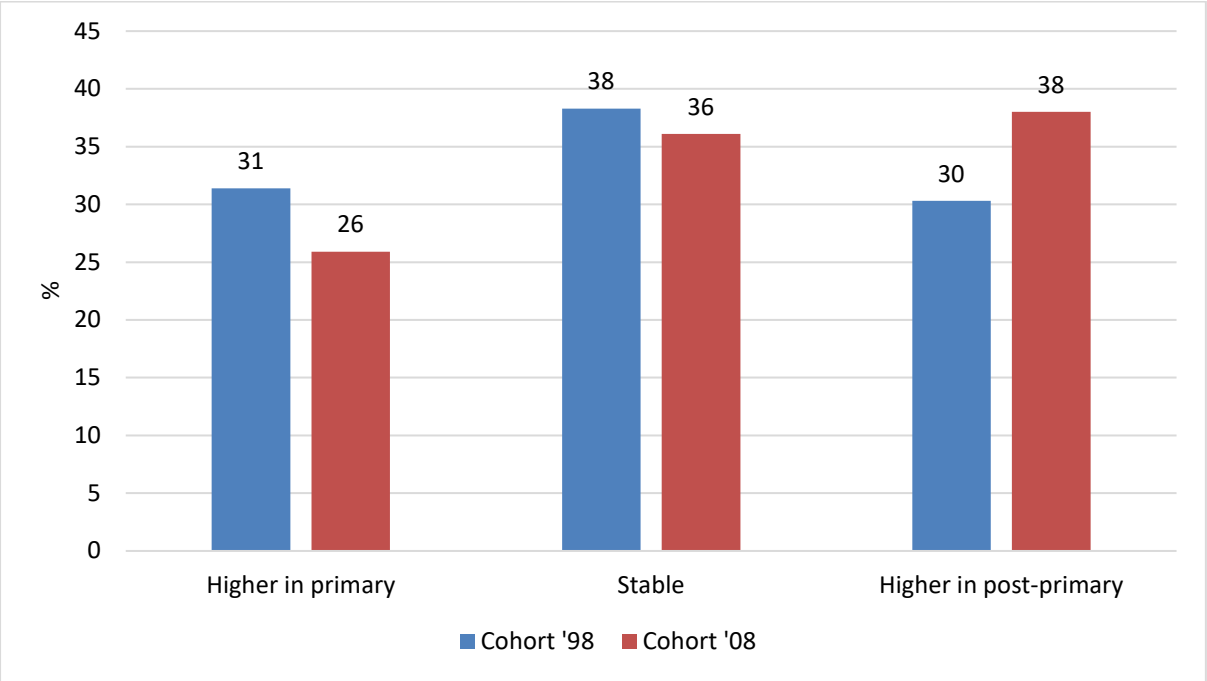
FIGURE 5.2 SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13, COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: p<.001.

Figure 5.3 compares the trajectories of the two cohorts. Cohort ’08 are more likely to have higher absence in post-primary than in primary school than is the case for Cohort ’98. Conversely, they are less likely to have higher absence in primary school than Cohort ’98.

FIGURE 5.3 TRAJECTORIES OF ABSENCE OVER TIME, COHORTS ’98 AND ’08



Source: GUI Cohorts ’98 and ’08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: p<.001.

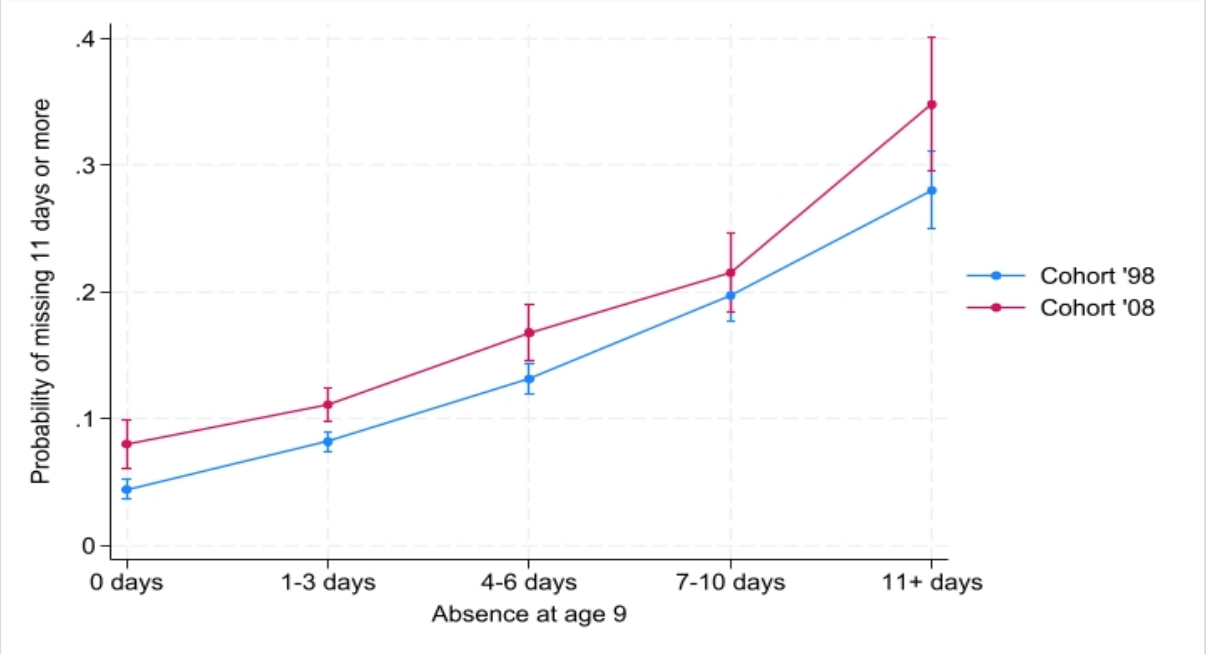
Model 1 in Table 5.1 shows the same pattern as in Figure 5.2, with a significant increase in absence at age 13 between Cohorts ’98 and ’08. Absence at age 9 is predictive of later absence (as in Chapter 2) but the between-cohort increase holds even taking account of prior attendance. Model 3 examines whether the relationship between early and later absence has changed over time. For ease of interpretation, Figure 5.4 shows the patterns; while the level of absence is consistently higher for Cohort ’08, this difference is significant only for those with lower levels of prior non-attendance. In other words, even those with lower levels of absence at age 9 increased their non-attendance at age 13 in the cohort that experienced the pandemic.

TABLE 5.1 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY COHORT AND PRIOR ATTENDANCE (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Cohort '08 (Ref. Cohort '98)	1.367***	1.361***	1.881***
Absence at age 9:			
1-3 days		1.705***	1.923***
4-6 days		2.829***	3.256***
7-10 days		4.253***	5.292***
11+ days		7.361***	8.385***
(Ref. 0 days)			
Absence at age 9*Cohort '08:			
1-3 days*Cohort '08			0.745±
4-6 days*Cohort '08			0.710±
7-10 days*Cohort '08			0.593**
11+ days*Cohort '08			0.729
Pseudo R^2	0.002	0.032	0.033
N		13,443	

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

FIGURE 5.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABSENCE AT AGES 9 AND 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Model 3, Table 5.1.

5.2.2 Individual and social background factors over time

Table 5.2 shows the pooled model for the two cohorts. The pooled analyses show similar patterns to those shown just for Cohort '08 in Chapter 2. There is no

significant difference by gender, but a strong relationship is found between having a disability and being absent from school at age 13. The difference is greater for those with a disability that arose or was identified later on, that is by age 13 rather than age 9. Family background is significantly related to school attendance, with higher social class and maternal education having protective effects. School absence is greater in families experiencing difficulty making ends meet (financial strain) and in lone-parent families. Young people from a migrant-origin family tend to have somewhat lower levels of school absence than their peers. Even taking account of changes over time in the socio-economic circumstances of families, absence is found to be significantly higher among young people in Cohort '08.

In order to test whether the increase in absence is greater for some groups than others, a series of models were estimated of the interaction between cohort and background factors (Appendix Table A.5.1). None of the interaction terms are significant, indicating that an increase in school absence was evident across all social groups and for both girls and boys, with no evidence that any groups had increased more than others.

TABLE 5.2 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY COHORT AND INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Cohort '08	1.248***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Female	1.006
(Ref. Male)	
Disability at age 9	1.893***
Disability by age 13	2.794***
(Ref. No disability)	
Social class:	
Professional	0.562***
Managerial	0.710**
Other non-manual	0.754**
Skilled/semi-skilled	0.825±
(Ref. Unskilled/non-employed)	
Mother's education:	
Leaving Certificate	0.725***
Post-secondary	0.710***
Degree or higher	0.620***
(Ref. Lower secondary or less)	
Financial strain at age 9	1.362**
Migrant-origin family	0.805*
Lone-parent family	1.310**
Pseudo R^2	0.022
N	13,453

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

5.2.3 Family processes over time

Table 5.3 presents a model of the relationship between family processes and school absence. Young people are more likely to be absent from school at 13 if their mother had depressive symptoms when they were 9 years old and if they experienced a more punitive parenting style (e.g. being given out to or shouted at). Young people who experienced an adverse childhood experience (ACE) between the ages of 9 and 13 are more likely to be absent from school, with the highest level of absence found among those with multiple ACEs. Even taking account of (changes in) family processes over time, absence is significantly higher among those in Cohort '08.

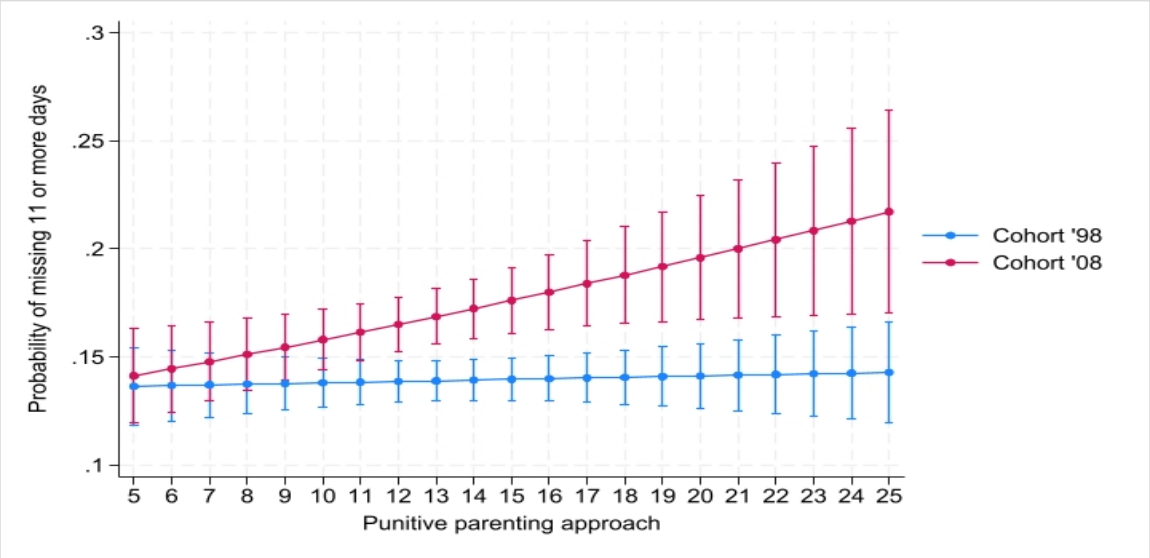
TABLE 5.3 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY COHORT AND FAMILY PROCESSES (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Cohort '08 (Ref. Cohort '98)	1.272***
Maternal depression at age 9 (Ref. Mother not above depression threshold)	1.235*
Level of punitive parenting (scale)	1.014*
Adverse childhood experiences between 9 and 13:	
One	1.284***
Two or more	1.735***
(Ref. None)	
Pseudo R^2	0.027
N	12,713

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

Analyses explored whether the effect of family processes changed between cohorts (Appendix Table A.5.2). The patterns for maternal depression and ACEs did not differ between Cohort '98 and Cohort '08. Family processes have become more democratic over time, with a greater emphasis on parents explaining what young people did wrong rather than shouting at them or giving out to them (Smyth et al., 2025). Analyses show that school absence has increased more over time among the smaller group of parents who use more punitive approaches (see Figure 5.5).

FIGURE 5.5 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUNITIVE PARENTING AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Model 2, Table A.5.2.

5.2.4 School and school experiences over time

Table 5.4 shows that school absence is higher in Urban Band 1 primary schools and post-primary DEIS schools than in non-DEIS schools, even taking account of a range of family background factors. The variation by DEIS status does not change over time (Appendix Table A.5.3).

TABLE 5.4 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY SCHOOL DEIS STATUS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.259***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Primary school DEIS status:	
Urban Band 1	1.208*
Urban Band 2	1.179
Rural DEIS	0.983
(Ref. Non-DEIS)	
Model 2	
Cohort '08	1.207***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Post-primary school DEIS status:	
DEIS	1.144*
(Ref. Non-DEIS)	
N	13,433

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

Table 5.5 indicates that absence rates are lower among second year students than among their first-year counterparts. On further inspection, the relationship between year group and non-attendance differs significantly between cohorts (Figure 5.5): for Cohort '98, absence rates were somewhat higher among second year students, while for Cohort '08, absence rates were much higher among first year students.[15] Principal reports of how involved students are in decision-making about the school uniform is used as a proxy for overall student voice in the school. Absence rates are lower where students are more involved (Table 5.5), with this pattern confined to Cohort '08.

TABLE 5.5 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY SCHOOL YEAR GROUP AND LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING IN THE SCHOOL (ODDS RATIOS)

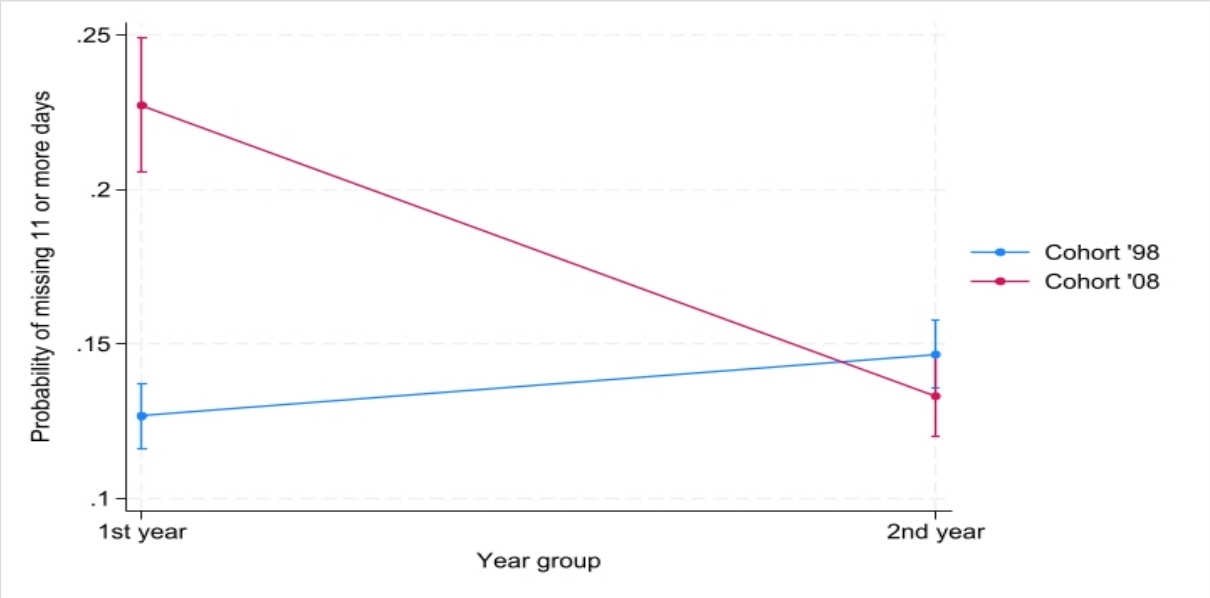
	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.230***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Year group:	
2nd year	0.860**
(Ref. 1st year/other)	
Model 2	
Cohort '08	1.242***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Student involvement in decision-making re school uniform:	
Disagree	
Agree	0.892
Strongly agree	0.838±
(Ref. Strongly disagree)	0.818±
N	11,338

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.

Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

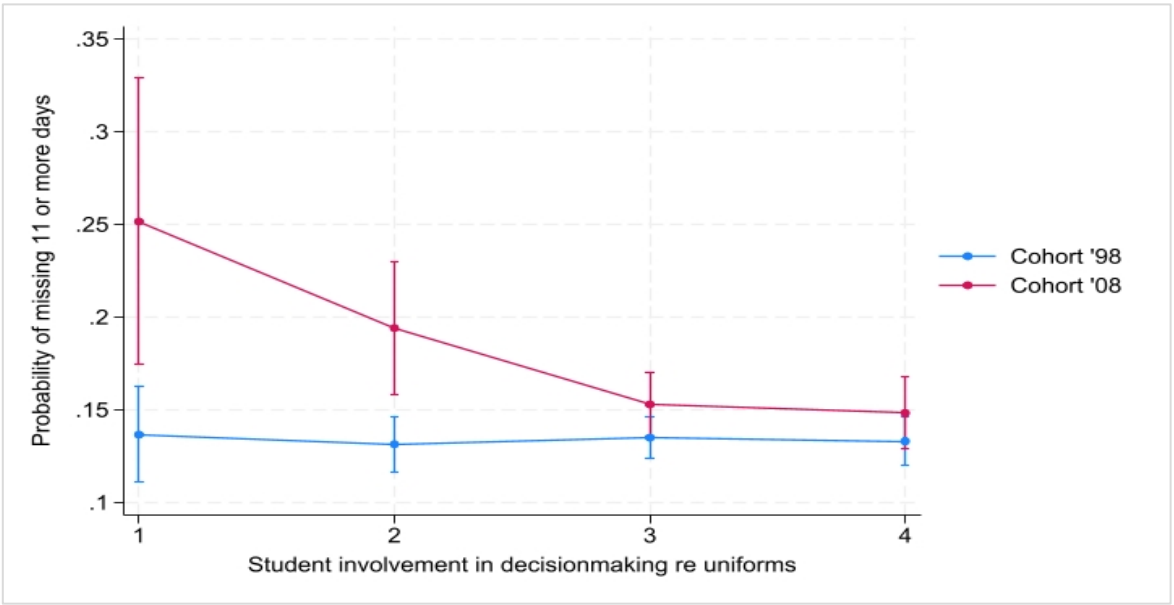
[15] On the basis of available information, it is difficult to discern the reasons for this shift. Junior cycle reform may have meant less disengagement found among second years in Cohort '08.

FIGURE 5.6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL YEAR GROUP AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Model 1, Table A.5.4.

FIGURE 5.7 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Model 2, Table A.5.4.

Table 5.6 presents analyses of measures of school engagement, including attitudes to school at ages 9 and 13, the quality of interaction with teachers and whether the young person had been bullied (picked on) at age 9. The small group of young people who 'never' liked school at age 9 are more likely to be absent from school at age 13, though this effect is no longer significant when current attitudes to

school (at age 13) are taken into account. There is a strong linear relationship between attitudes to school at age 13 and absence rates, with those who like school very much having the lowest levels of non-attendance. Figure 5.8 shows that the greatest increase in absence between the cohorts is found among the group who 'hate' or 'don't like' school. While this cannot be regarded as causal as the two measures are captured at the same time point, the analyses control for earlier attitudes to school, so do suggest the greater role of school disengagement in driving absence in the most recent period.

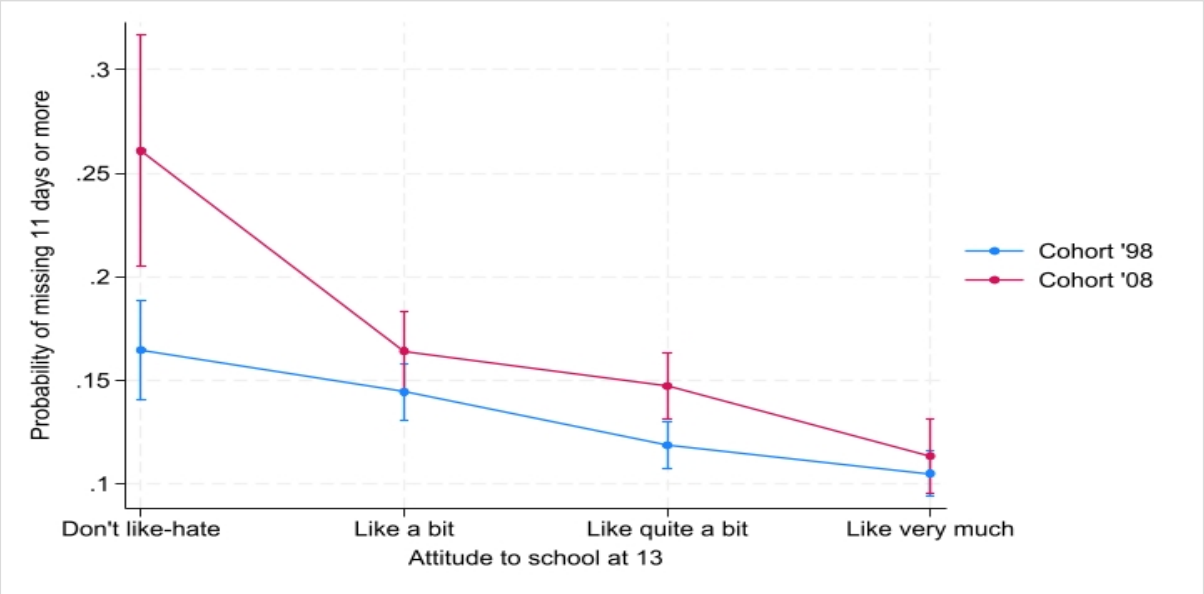
There is no significant relationship between positive interaction with teachers (such as being praised) and absence levels. However, young people who experience more negative interaction with teachers (being reprimanded) have worse attendance levels. Young people who were bullied (picked on) at age 9 are also much more likely to have higher absence rates four years later. The relationship between absence, teacher-student interaction and experience of bullying do not vary significantly between cohorts (Table A.5.5).

TABLE 5.6 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY LIKING SCHOOL, QUALITY OF TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION AND EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Cohort '08	1.246**
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Attitude to school at age 9:	
Sometimes like	0.960
Never like	1.118
(Ref. Always like)	
Attitude to school at age 13:	
Like a bit	0.721***
Like quite a bit	0.598***
Like very much	0.490***
(Ref. Hate/don't like)	
Positive teacher-student interaction	1.003
Negative teacher-student interaction	1.125***
Bullied (picked on) at age 9	1.246***
Pseudo R^2	0.025
N	12,353

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

FIGURE 5.8 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIKING SCHOOL AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Table A.5.5.

5.2.5 Neighbourhood factors

Two aspects of location were explored: the scale of disorder in the local neighbourhood (such as public drinking, graffiti etc.) and location, distinguishing between those living in open country or a village and all others. Absence rates are found to be significantly higher among those living in disorderly neighbourhoods and much lower among those living in rural areas (Table 5.7). The relationship between local area and absence levels changes over time. School absence is more strongly related to neighbourhood disorder for Cohort '98 than for Cohort '08 (Figure 5.9).[16] Figure 5.10 shows that much of the growth in absence over time occurred in more urban areas.

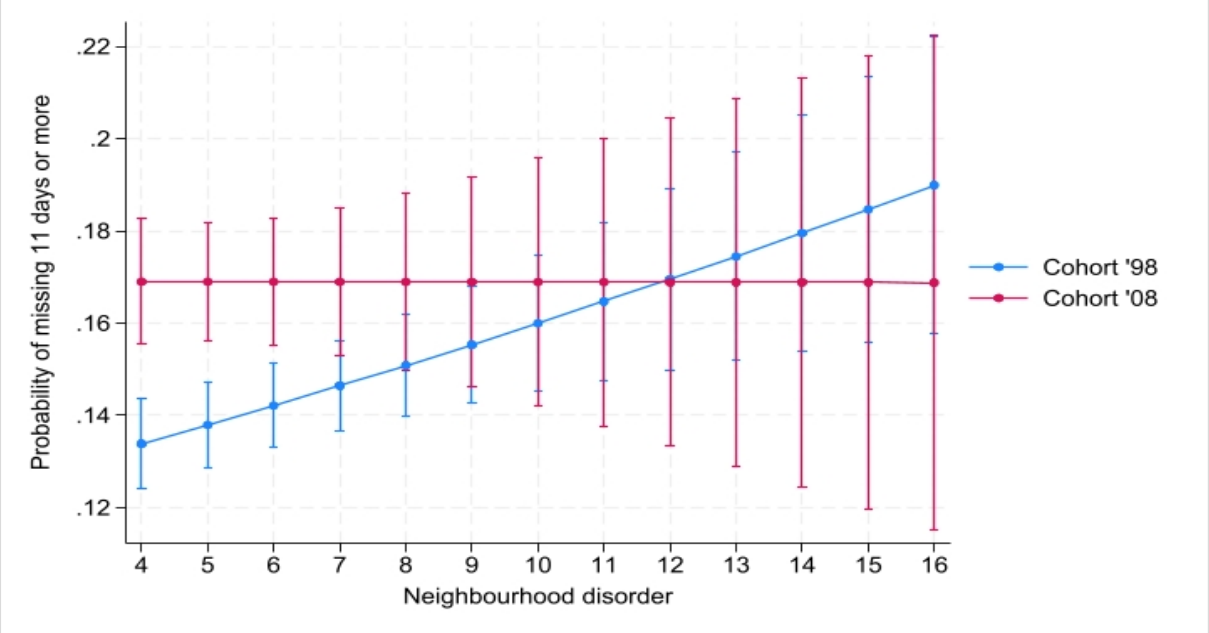
[16] It is worth noting that the raw relationship between disorder and absence is similar for Cohort '08 (not shown here) but much of the effect of disorder is driven by the socio-economic characteristics of families living in these neighbourhoods.

TABLE 5.7 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY NEIGHBOURHOOD FACTORS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.264***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Neighbourhood disorder (scale)	1.025**
Location:	
Rural (village/open country)	0.847***
(Ref. All other areas)	
Model 2	
Cohort '08	1.040***
Neighbourhood disorder	1.560***
Neighbourhood disorder*Cohort '08	0.961±
Model 3	
Cohort '08	1.387***
Rural location	0.931
Rural location*Cohort '08	0.798*
N	13,433

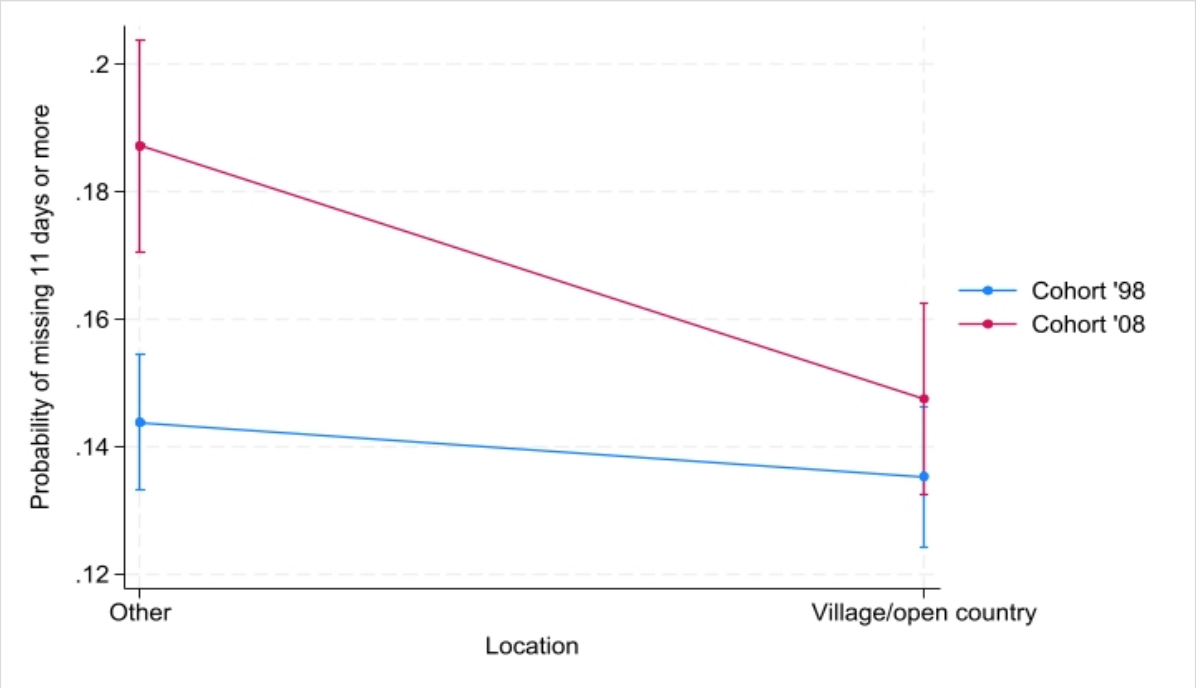
Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

FIGURE 5.9 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEIGHBOURHOOD DISORDER AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Model 2, Table 5.7.

FIGURE 5.10 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCATION AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Model 1, Table 5.7.

5.2.6 Socio-emotional difficulties and absence

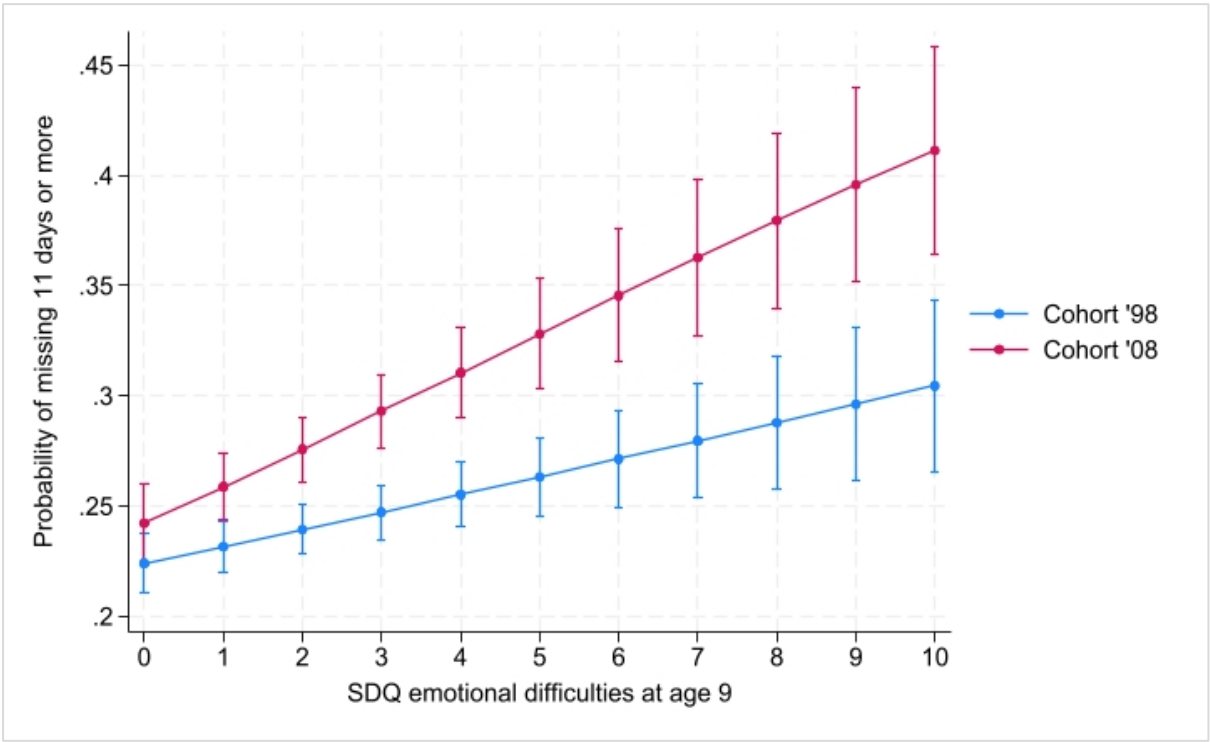
Table 5.8 shows the relationship between socio-emotional difficulties at age 9, as measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and school absence. The four dimensions of difficulties are analysed separately because of correlations among them. All four aspects of socio-emotional difficulties are significantly related to school absence, with stronger relationships for emotional and conduct difficulties than for hyperactivity and peer problems. Figures 5.11 and 5.12 show that the patterns change over time. The increase in school absence over time is much greater for young people who had emotional or conduct difficulties than for those with low levels of such difficulties. The effect of hyperactivity or peer problems does not change significantly over time.

TABLE 5.8 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES (SDQ) AT AGE 9 (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.260***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Emotional difficulties	1.077***
Model 2	
Cohort '08	1.262***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Conduct difficulties	1.059***
Model 3	
Cohort '08	1.253***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Hyperactivity/attention problems	1.021*
Model 4	
Cohort '08	1.261***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Peer problems	1.038*
N	13,445

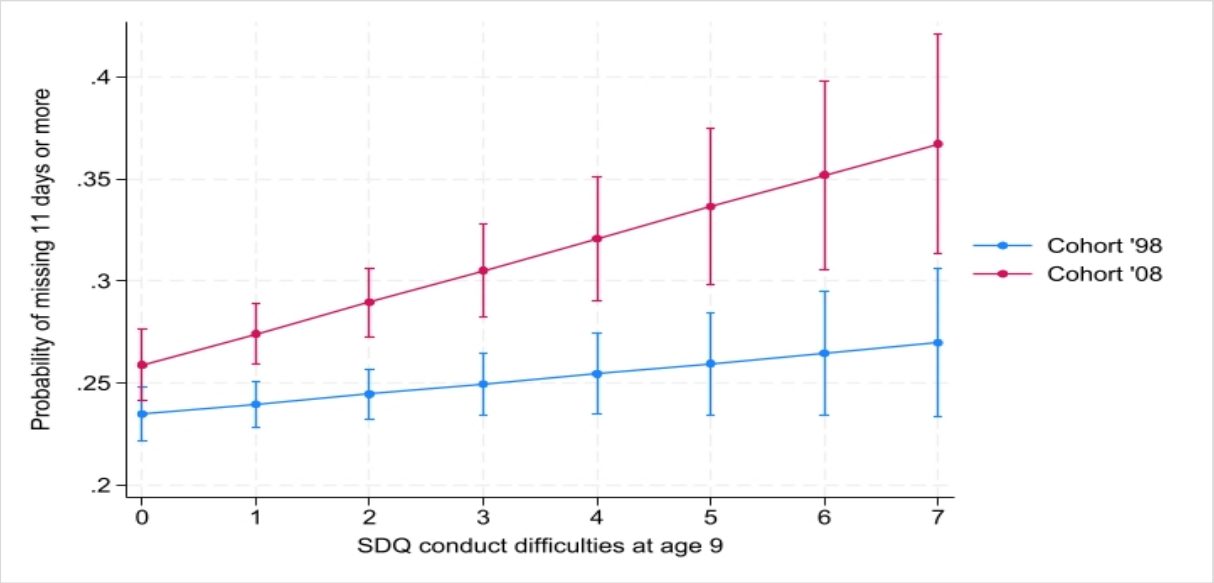
Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

FIGURE 5.11 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES AT AGE 9 AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Model 1, Table A.5.6.

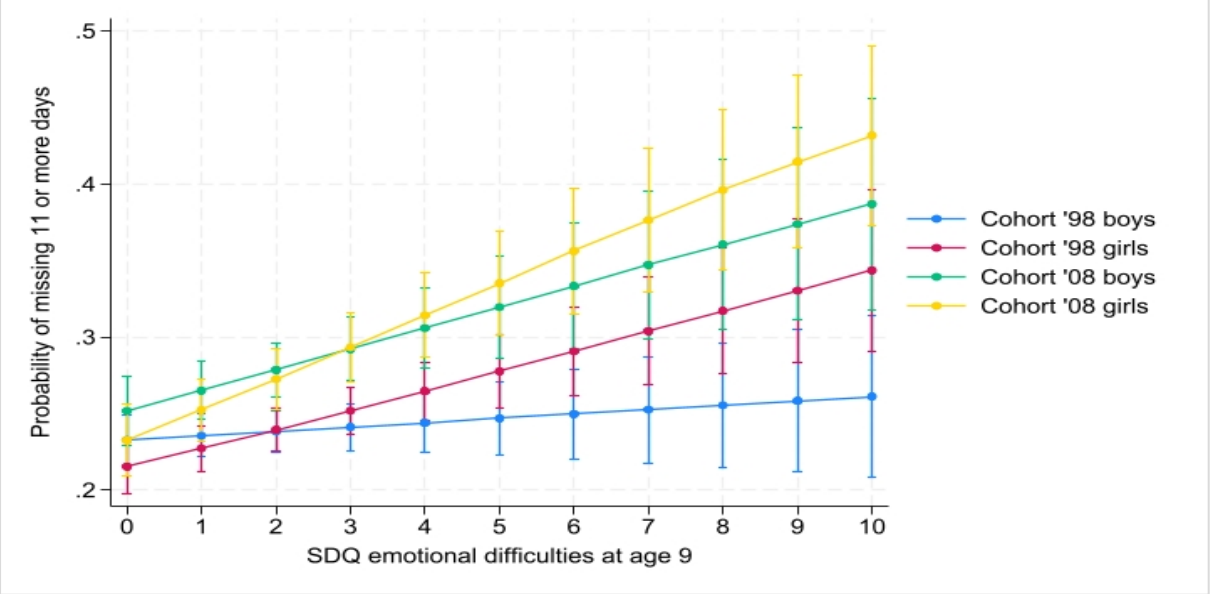
FIGURE 5.12 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONDUCT DIFFICULTIES AT AGE 9 AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Model 2, Table A.5.7.

Because of gender differences in the changes in socio-emotional difficulties over time (Smyth and Russell, 2024), additional analyses were conducted to explore the three-way interactions between SDQ scores, gender and cohort. Absence rates among girls were more responsive to all four dimensions of socio-emotional difficulties than was the case for boys (see, for example, Figure 5.13 which depicts the patterns for emotional difficulties). This gender difference was evident for both cohorts.

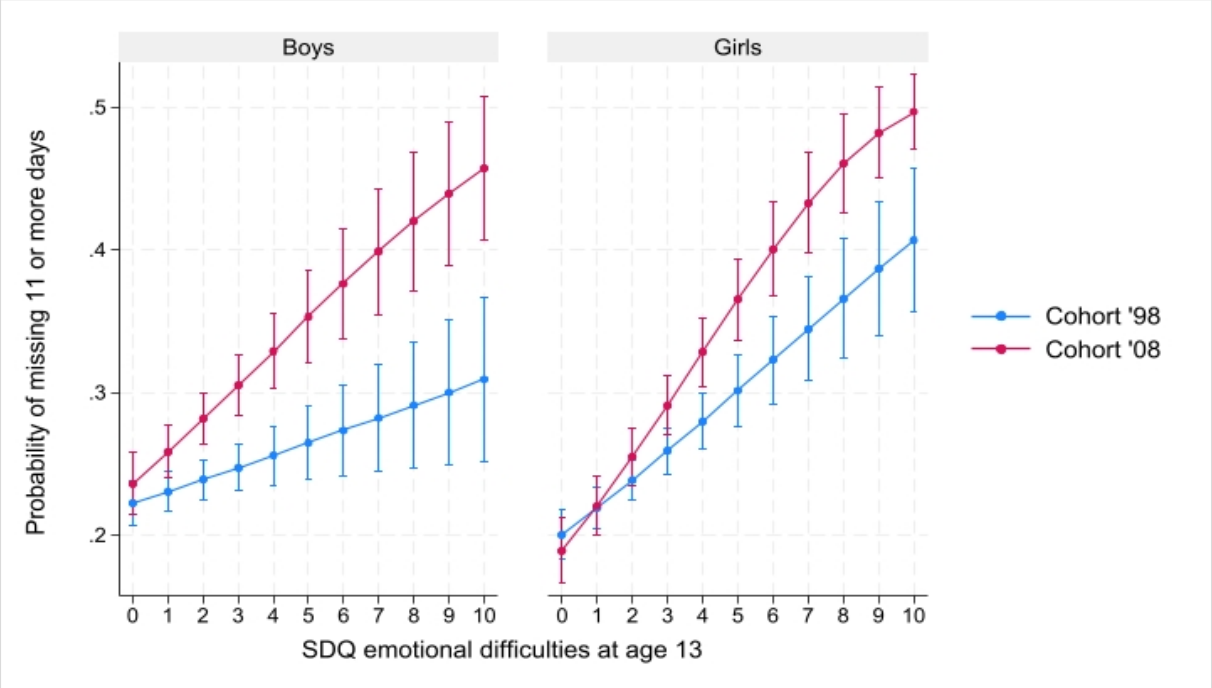
FIGURE 5.13 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES AT AGE 9, GENDER AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.

These analyses were repeated for socio-emotional difficulties at age 13. A similar pattern was found, with higher absence levels among those with greater emotional, conduct, hyperactivity and peer difficulties. The direction of causality must be interpreted with caution as absence and SDQ are measured at the same time. Higher difficulties may have driven non-attendance, but it may also be the case that prior absence itself results in greater socio-emotional difficulties. As with SDQ scores at age 9, female absence rates are more responsive to greater emotional and peer difficulties (see Figure 5.14).

FIGURE 5.14 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES AT AGE 13, GENDER AND ABSENCE AT AGE 13 FOR COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: Based on coefficients in Model 1, Table A.5.7.

TABLE 5.9 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES (SDQ) AT AGE 13 (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.214***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Emotional difficulties	1.145***
Model 2	
Cohort '08	1.281***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Conduct difficulties	1.104***
Model 3	
Cohort '08	1.270***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Hyperactivity/attention problems	1.067***
Model 4	
Cohort '08	1.244***
(Ref. Cohort '98)	
Peer problems	1.082***
N	13,450

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has compared school absence patterns among 13-year-olds a decade apart, a period where changes occurred in the nature of family processes and the pandemic had effects on adolescent wellbeing. The analyses show that, even taking account of a wide range of individual and family background factors, school absence significantly increased among 13-year-olds a decade apart. This increase applied across all social groups and for both girls and boys. This is interesting given that no such increase is apparent between the two cohorts of 9-year-olds.

The analyses point to some factors that are more predictive of absence among Cohort '08 than their earlier counterparts. More democratic parenting styles have become more prevalent over time. However, absence rates have increased more among the smaller groups of parents who use more punitive approaches (such as shouting). In terms of school factors, the pattern by year group has changed: previously second year students had higher absence levels but now first years have higher rates. Not liking school has become more predictive of absence than previously, and absence has also increased in schools which involve students less in decision-making.

Both earlier (age 9) and current (age 13) socio-emotional difficulties are associated with greater rates of school absence. Over time, absence at age 13 has increased

more among those who had higher levels of emotional and conduct difficulties at age 9. Using measures at age 13, absence levels have increased over time to a greater extent for those with higher levels of emotional, conduct, hyperactivity and peer difficulties. However, it is difficult to determine causality because absence and socio-emotional difficulties are measured at the same time.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and implications for policy

6.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

School absence in Ireland has grown since the pandemic, with over a fifth of primary and post-primary students having chronic absence levels, that is, missing 20 days or more over the school year (TESS, 2025). This phenomenon has not been confined to Ireland but to date there has been a lack of research on the factors underlying this trend and whether particular groups of young people have increased absence levels. This report uses GUI Cohort '08 data to track absence rates among a group of young people who made the transition to post-primary education over the course of the pandemic. It also employs Cohort '98 data to compare two cohorts a decade apart in terms of their levels and patterns of school absence. The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

- What individual, family and school factors are associated with higher levels of school absence at 13 years of age?
- What are the attendance trajectories of young people between 9 and 13 years?
- What individual, family and school factors are associated with changes in attendance between 9 and 13 years of age?
- Comparing two cohorts of young people, have the factors influencing absence changed over time?

This chapter summarises the main findings of the research and highlights the implications for policy concerning school absence.

6.2 FACTORS AFFECTING SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13

Research in Ireland and internationally has highlighted the multiplicity of factors involved in shaping school absence (see, for example, the review by Sosu et al., 2021). This study builds upon this body of research to provide new insights on the factors influencing non-attendance in the Irish context, examining individual characteristics, family socio-economic background, family processes, neighbourhood factors, and school characteristics and processes.

Consistent with national administrative data (TESS, 2025), no significant differences in absence levels are evident between boys and girls. Administrative data have also highlighted higher absence rates in special schools but to date no information has been available on non-attendance among children and young people with a disability who are attending mainstream schools. Using GUI data, disability is defined as having a long-lasting condition or disability that affects the

young person's day-to-day life, at least to some extent. Disability is found to be a strong predictor of missing school, whether measured in terms of existing conditions at age 9, or emerging or newly identified conditions by age 13.

Previous international research has pointed to a link between socio-economic background and school absence (Gubbels et al., 2019; Sosu et al., 2021). This study builds upon this body of evidence by taking a multi-dimensional approach to measuring family background. Absence rates are found to vary markedly by the different dimensions of family circumstances found to have independent effects, including social class, maternal education, family structure and experience of financial strain (that is, difficulty making ends meet). Thus, young people from unskilled manual and non-employed groups, whose mothers have lower levels of education, whose families are experiencing economic strain and who are living in lone-parent households are more likely to be absent from school. The findings show that this social gradient is related to differences in neighbourhood characteristics, family processes, school characteristics and experiences.

Some studies have shown that migrant-origin young people have higher rates of school absence (see, for example, Yang and Ham, 2017). However, other studies, including GUI-based research (Li and Chzhen, 2025; Darmody and McGinnity, 2016), point to the role of 'immigrant optimism', with high parental expectations for their children shaping greater engagement among some migrant groups in Ireland. Our study findings suggest the latter pattern, with lower rates of school absence among migrant-origin teenagers, taking account of other background factors.

Over and above individual social background, disadvantage at the area level plays a role in school absence. Young people living in rented accommodation (whether social housing or private rented) are found to have higher absence rates; this may reflect area-level deprivation, poorer housing quality and/or greater housing mobility among this group (Baranyi et al., 2026; Laurence et al., 2023). Absence rates are also higher in areas with low social capital, that is, places with fewer safe facilities for teenagers and lower bonds among the local community. School absence levels are found to be lower in rural areas (open country or villages), a pattern which may reflect the greater visibility of non-attendance in smaller, more close-knit communities.

An overview of existing international studies (Marlow and Rehman, 2021) points to some relationship between positive family processes and school attendance, but highlights the lack of systematic, longitudinal evidence on the topic. The richness of the GUI data allows us to explore several measures of family processes, with maternal characteristics found to play a stronger role in shaping young

people's attendance than paternal characteristics. School absence is greater in families where the mother is experiencing depression, there is more mother-child conflict, a lack of consistency and harsher approaches in parenting style (such as shouting rather than explaining), and a lack of routine in the young person's day-to-day life, evidenced by late bedtimes and not taking breakfast. There is more robust prior evidence of the role of adverse childhood experiences in shaping child educational and wellbeing outcomes in general and attendance in particular (see Stempel et al., 2017, on the US; Bellis et al., 2018, on Wales). This report indicates that major life events, such as bereavement, illness and addiction in the family, are a strong predictor of school absence.

There is a large body of research internationally that shows the way in which the composition of the student population and the climate fostered at school level can shape a range of educational outcomes (for an overview, see Chapman et al., 2016). The study examined two dimensions of school composition: the social mix of the school, proxied by DEIS status, and its gender mix. Consistent with administrative data (TESS, 2025), absence rates are significantly higher in DEIS schools. The GUI data allow us to separate out context and composition to show that these patterns are related to the concentration of individual-level socio-economic disadvantage in DEIS schools. However, even controlling for family background, having attended a primary school with a high rate of absence is a risk factor for missing school at age 13. No systematic variation in absence is found by the gender mix of the school.

School processes and climate are found to play a part in promoting attendance. Schools that involve students to a greater extent in decision-making emerge as having lower absence rates, even taking account of student characteristics. Even within the same school, young people may have different experiences of engaging with learning and interacting with teachers and peers. The small number of young people who never liked school at age 9 are more likely to be absent at 13. This pattern largely operates through greater difficulties making the transition to post-primary education and continuing negative attitudes to school at age 13. Those who are more negative about school at 13 and have poorer-quality relationships with their teachers are more likely to miss school. This process is likely to be mutually reinforcing, with school absence contributing to more negative interaction with teachers, which in turn makes it more likely that young people will not attend school. Earlier experience of bullying continues to be a risk factor for later absence, consistent with international research findings (see, for example, Schlesier et al., 2023).

6.3 FACTORS AFFECTING TRAJECTORIES OF SCHOOL ABSENCE

Looking at absence at one point in time gives us only a partial picture of how absence levels may change from school entry to completion. Trajectories of school absence have been relatively understudied internationally, though one study suggests that the transition to high school and the different school context experienced may change or reinforce pre-existing patterns of school absence (Benner and Wang, 2014). In addition, another study has shown that different patterns of school absence (stable, increasing or decreasing) have differential effects on exam grades (Dräger et al., 2024). This study uses patterns of absence at age 9 and age 13 to identify distinct groups of young people. While it would have been preferable to have information in our study on attendance on a year-by-year basis, the findings nonetheless provide new insights into the dynamics of school absence.

Based on latent class analysis, four groups of young people were identified: those with stable low levels of school absence (44 per cent), those who have stable high levels of absence (14 per cent), those who had improving levels of attendance (14 per cent) and those who had declining levels of attendance (22 per cent). The difference between those with stable low absence levels and the other poorer attendance groups reflects the family, neighbourhood and school factors discussed in Section 6.2 so this section will focus on what factors are associated with *changes* in attendance, whether positive or negative.

Absence levels tend to increase for those young people for whom a disability emerges or is recognised between the ages of 9 and 13 years. Relatedly, attendance disimproves for those young people who experienced increased socio-emotional difficulties in the wake of the pandemic. Family life is dynamic, with many families experiencing adverse events such as parental separation, bereavement, poorer health and addiction. Exposure to such events between the ages of 9 and 13 is predictive of increasing absence levels. Not liking post-primary school and negative interactions with teachers are found to play an important role in maintaining or prompting poor attendance. Experiences of remote learning appear to make some difference, with absence levels increasing among those who did not have a quiet place to study during school closures. The disruption to schooling caused by the pandemic appeared to reinforce pre-existing disengagement, with many of those with poor attendance histories giving up on studying, not engaging in online learning and having more difficulties settling back into school. Teachers going over material after schools reopened did appear to help protect young people from moving into high absence levels.

6.4 CHANGES OVER TIME IN SCHOOL ABSENCE

The study has examined changes in school absence over the period between 9 and 13 years of age. Another way of examining changes in absence rates is to compare the two GUI cohorts, capturing behaviour a decade apart. Nine-year-olds from Cohorts '98 and '08 have similar levels of school absence but there is a marked increase in school absence among the 13-year-olds. This increase is evident for both girls and boys and across all social groups, and is not explained by changes in the profile of young people and their families.

The analyses identify some factors that are more strongly associated with school absence among Cohort '08 than was the case previously. Not liking school has become more predictive of absence than previously, and absence has also increased more in schools which involve students less in decision-making. Absence at age 13 has increased disproportionately among those who had higher levels of emotional and conduct difficulties at age 9. Using measures at age 13, absence levels have increased over time to a greater extent for those with higher levels of emotional, conduct, hyperactivity and peer difficulties. While we cannot account for what is driving these patterns, they are suggestive of parents being more willing to tolerate absence if their children have socio-emotional difficulties and/or are disengaged from school. The young person themselves may also be more reluctant to attend school in these circumstances. Case-study evidence points to greater school avoidance among young people post-pandemic (Smyth et al., 2025), though there is currently no systematic evidence on its prevalence.

6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The study findings point to the multiplicity of individual, family, neighbourhood and school factors that influence school absence, suggesting the need for policy responses to be multi-dimensional, integrated and dynamic, responsive to changes in young people's wellbeing and broader family circumstances. The findings indicate that schools can make a difference by fostering positive attitudes to school, greater student involvement, reducing negative teacher-student interaction and bullying behaviour. Teachers going over material appeared to help avoid increased absence as schools reopened after the pandemic, suggesting that academic supports for those who have been chronic absentees might yield benefits. International evidence points to the effectiveness of multi-tiered attendance programmes, designed to address different groups of absentees and to tailor responses to the reason(s) underlying non-attendance (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Arbour et al., 2023). This approach underlies the Anseo programme currently being rolled out with a group of schools by TESS. The ongoing evaluation of this programme will yield important insights into the school practices that work best in the Irish context.

Disability, particularly a recently identified or emerging condition, emerges as a strong driver of absence, with further research needed to unpack the processes at play. Research could usefully explore the experience of the pilot schools offering additional in-school therapeutic supports (through the School Inclusion Model) and whether any impact is found on school absence. Higher levels of socio-emotional difficulties among young people with a disability (Smyth and Russell, 2024) may also be contributing to greater school absence among this group.

The findings highlight the complex way in which school absence and poor wellbeing interact, with socio-emotional difficulties among young people now a more important driver of absence in the wake of the pandemic. There has been a good deal of policy attention to promoting wellbeing within schools, with new guidelines, resources and supports introduced under the Wellbeing Policy Statement (Department of Education and Skills, 2018). The framework envisages a continuum of support, ranging from whole-school approaches to specific supports for students with the greatest challenges. In DEIS schools, Home-School-Community-Liaison Coordinators and School Completion Programme (SCP) staff work together to help address absence and promote school engagement (Smyth et al., 2024). However, existing evidence points to school and SCP staff having no ready access to referral pathways for children and young people with more complex needs, given waiting lists for mental health services and other supports (Mental Health Commission, 2023; Smyth et al., 2025). The OECD 2024 review of DEIS points to the need to strengthen coordination with health and therapy services. Emerging pilot interventions such as multi-disciplinary teams in DEIS schools and counselling services in selected primary schools have not yet been evaluated but point to potential avenues for greater integration of supports. The findings of this study point to the necessity for any such interventions to be flexible and responsive, as life events, such as parental separation, parental illness and depression, can trigger school absence without adequate supports.

The study findings point to the role of family socio-economic circumstances and processes as well as neighbourhood disadvantage in shaping school attendance, highlighting the need for attendance interventions at the school level to be underpinned by broader anti-poverty policy, family support programmes and community development initiatives.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A.2.1 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE TRAJECTORIES BY CONDITIONS ON SCHOOL ENTRY (RELATIVE RISK RATIOS) (BASE CATEGORY: STABLE LOW ABSENCE)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Conditions on school entry:			
Socio-emotional difficulties	1.030*	1.017	1.033*
Vocabulary score	0.997	0.995	1.000
Teacher-reported unpreparedness for learning	1.044*	1.044±	1.054*
Pseudo R^2		0.048	
N		5,695	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. This model controls for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin, family structure and number of siblings.

TABLE A.3.1 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY FAMILY BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS AND TRANSITION TO PRIMARY SCHOOL FACTORS (RELATIVE RISK RATIOS) (BASE CATEGORY: STABLE LOW ABSENCE)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Female (Ref. Male)	0.967	1.020	1.321
Disability:			
At age 9	1.630***	1.268	3.784***
By age 13	0.849	2.034***	3.336***
(Ref. No disability)			
Social class:			
Professional	0.545*	0.835	0.297***
Managerial	0.567*	0.960	0.373***
Other non-manual	0.536*	0.844	0.447**
Skilled/semi-skilled	0.606*	1.062	0.432**
(Ref. Unskilled/non-employed)			
Mother's education:			
Leaving Certificate	0.743	0.864	0.703
Post-secondary	0.645±	0.905	0.633*
Degree or higher	0.638±	0.797	0.575*
(Ref. Lower secondary or less)			
Financial strain at age 9	1.077	1.162	1.335
Migrant-origin family	1.160	0.603**	1.156
Family structure			
Lone parent-family	1.120	1.450*	1.187
(Ref. Two-parent family)			
Number of siblings	0.860**	0.989	0.917
Socio-emotional difficulties at age 5	1.030*	1.017	1.033*
Vocabulary score at 5	0.997	0.995	1.000
Lack of preparedness for learning	1.044*	1.044±	1.054*
Pseudo R^2		0.048	
N		5,695	

Source: GUI Cohort '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.

TABLE A.3.2 MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE TRAJECTORIES BY FAMILY PROCESS FACTORS (ODDS RATIOS)

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Model 1a			
Maternal depression at age 9	1.027	1.348±	1.548*
Pseudo R^2	0.046		
N	5,963		
Model 1b			
Maternal depression at age 13	1.254	1.096	1.437±
Pseudo R^2	0.044		
N	3,490		
Model 1c			
Maternal depression at age 9	1.036	1.336±	1.535*
Paternal depression at age 9	0.931	0.838	1.349
Pseudo R^2	0.048		
N	5,963		
Model 1d			
Maternal depression at age 13	1.122	1.084	1.436±
Paternal depression at age 13	0.792	0.885	0.579
Pseudo R^2	0.046		
N	3,490		
Model 2a			
Mother-child closeness	0.999	0.997	0.988
Mother-child conflict	1.015	1.015±	1.021*
Pseudo R^2	0.046		
N	6,027		
Model 2b			
Mother-child closeness	1.034	1.004	0.989
Mother-child conflict	1.002	1.005	0.995
Father-child closeness	0.951*	1.019	0.968
Father-child conflict	0.990	1.002	1.031*
Pseudo R^2	0.044		
N	4,381		
Model 3a			
Parenting style:			
Consistency	0.947	0.893	0.757**
Hostility	0.937	1.085	1.019
Pseudo R^2	0.048		
N	5,966		
Model 3b			
Harsh parenting style (e.g. shouting) at age 9	1.013	1.009	1.045*
Pseudo R^2	0.045		
N	5,957		
Model 3c			
Harsh parenting style (e.g. shouting) at age 13	1.113**	1.115***	1.076*
Pseudo R^2	0.045		
N	5.653		

Contd.

TABLE A.3.2 CONTINUED

	High to low absence	Low to high absence	Stable high absence
Model 4a			
Went to bed late at age 9	1.192	1.235±	1.506**
Pseudo R^2	0.047		
N	6,037		
Model 4b			
Went to bed late at age 13	1.086	1.282*	1.858***
Pseudo R^2	0.046		
N	5,661		
Model 4c			
Have breakfast (at home or school):			
5-6 days a week	1.108	1.056	0.936
3-4 days a week	0.852	1.117	2.132**
1-2 times a week	1.133	1.460±	1.854*
Less than once a week/never (Ref. Every day)	0.868	1.861**	1.808*
Pseudo R^2	0.047		
N	5,672		
Model 5a: Adverse childhood experiences 5-9 years			
One	0.991	0.959	1.189
Two or more (Ref. None)	1.082	1.213	1.480*
Pseudo R^2	0.046		
N	6,038		
Model 5b: Adverse childhood experiences 9-13 years			
One	1.032	1.105	1.239
Two or more (Ref. None)	1.401*	1.666***	2.741***
Pseudo R^2	0.053		
N	6,038		

Source: GUI Cohort '08 at ages 9 and 13.

Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure. The sample numbers are lower for depression at age 13 because of lower non-response rates for the online sensitive questionnaire. For father characteristics, an additional dummy variable (not reported here) is included to allow for non-resident fathers and non-completion of the survey by resident fathers.

TABLE A.5.1 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 WITH AN INTERACTION BETWEEN COHORT AND INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.272***
Female	1.023
Female*Cohort '08	0.961
Model 2	
Cohort	1.220***
Disability at age 9	1.550**
Disability at age 9*Cohort '08	1.357
Model 3	
Cohort '08	1.241***
Disability by age 13	2.647***
Disability by age 13*Cohort '08	1.080
Model 4	
Cohort '08	1.474*
Social class:	
Professional	0.854***
Managerial	0.769*
Other non-manual	0.800±
Skilled/semi-skilled	0.914
Professional*Cohort '08	0.897
Managerial*Cohort '08	0.851
Other non-manual*Cohort '08	0.864
Skilled/semi-skilled*Cohort '08	0.779
Model 5	
Cohort '08	1.112
Mother's education:	
Leaving Certificate	0.695***
Post-secondary	0.676***
Degree or higher	0.591***
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08	1.152
Post-secondary*Cohort '08	1.146
Degree or higher*Cohort '08	1.149
Model 6	
Cohort '08	1.250***
Financial strain at age 9	1.318*
Financial strain*Cohort '08	1.062
Model 7	
Cohort '08	1.264***
Migrant-origin family	0.864
Migrant-origin family*Cohort '08	0.871
Model 8	
Cohort '08	1.198***
Lone-parent family	1.184±
Lone-parent family*Cohort '08	1.268
N	13,453

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

TABLE A.5.2 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY COHORT AND FAMILY PROCESSES (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.253***
Maternal depression at age 9	1.141
Maternal depression*Cohort '08	1.180
Model 2	
Cohort '08	0.922
Level of punitive parenting (scale)	1.003
Punitive parenting*Cohort '08	1.025±
Model 3	
Cohort '08	1.303***
Adverse childhood experiences between 9 and 13:	
One	1.366***
Two or more	1.628***
One*Cohort '08	0.865
Two or more*Cohort '08	1.154
N	12,713

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

TABLE A.5.3 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY COHORT AND SCHOOL DEIS STATUS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.246***
Primary school DEIS status:	
Urban Band 1	1.167
Urban Band 2	1.119
Rural DEIS	1.020
Urban Band 1*Cohort '08	1.077
Urban Band 2*Cohort '08	1.133
Rural DEIS*Cohort '08	0.931
Model 2	
Cohort '08	1.201***
Post-primary school DEIS status:	1.133
DEIS*Cohort '08	1.026
N	13,433

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

TABLE A.5.4 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY COHORT AND SCHOOL YEAR GROUP AND LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING IN THE SCHOOL (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	2.082***
Year group:	
2nd year	1.191**
2nd year*Cohort '08	0.427***
Model 2	
Cohort '08	2.198**
Student involvement in decision-making re school uniform:	
Disagree	0.954
Agree	0.986
Strongly agree	0.969
Disagree*Cohort '08	0.738
Agree*Cohort '08	0.528*
Strongly agree*Cohort '08	0.518*
N	13,433

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

TABLE A.5.5 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY COHORT AND LIKING SCHOOL, QUALITY OF TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION AND EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.830***
Attitude to school at age 13:	
Like a bit	0.852
Like quite a bit	0.675***
Like very much	0.587***
Like a bit*Cohort '08	0.639*
Like quite a bit*Cohort '08	0.706±
Like very much*Cohort '08	0.597*
Model 2	
Cohort '08	1.306
Positive teacher-student interaction	1.004
Positive interaction*Cohort '08	0.996
Model 3	
Cohort '08	1.044
Negative teacher-student interaction	1.105***
Negative interaction*Cohort '08	1.059
Model 4	
Cohort '08	1.177*
Bullied (picked on) at age 9	1.180**
Bullied*Cohort '08	1.145
N	12,353

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin, family structure and attitude to school at age 9.

TABLE A.5.6 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY COHORT AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES (SDQ) AT AGE 9 (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.126±
Emotional difficulties	1.052***
Emotional difficulties*Cohort '08	1.057*
Model 2	
Cohort '08	1.168*
Conduct difficulties	1.032±
Conduct difficulties*Cohort '08	1.066±
Model 3	
Cohort '08	1.142±
Hyperactivity/attention problems	1.008
Hyperactivity*Cohort '08	1.029
Model 4	
Cohort '08	1.244***
Peer problems	1.032
Peer problems*Cohort '08	1.012
N	13,445

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

TABLE A.5.7 ORDERED LOGIT MODEL OF SCHOOL ABSENCE AT AGE 13 BY COHORT AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES (SDQ) AT AGE 13 (ODDS RATIOS)

	Coefficients
Model 1	
Cohort '08	1.012
Emotional difficulties	1.097***
Emotional difficulties*Cohort '08	1.093***
Model 2	
Cohort '08	1.152*
Conduct difficulties	1.061**
Conduct difficulties*Cohort '08	1.104**
Model 3	
Cohort '08	1.088
Hyperactivity/attention problems	1.012**
Hyperactivity*Cohort '08	1.058**
Model 4	
Cohort '08	1.121±
Peer problems	1.040*
Peer problems*Cohort '08	1.089**
N	13,451

Source: GUI Cohorts '98 and '08 at ages 9 and 13.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. All models control for gender, disability, social class, maternal education, financial strain, migrant origin and family structure.

Economic & Social Research Institute

Whitaker Square
Sir John Rogerson's Quay
Dublin 2

Telephone: +353 1 863 2000
Email: admin@esri.ie
Web: www.esri.ie

An Institiúid um Thaighde Eacnamaíochta agus Sóisialta

Cearnóg Whitaker
Cé Sir John Rogerson
Baile Átha Cliath 2

Teileafón: +353 1 863 2000
Ríomhphost: admin@esri.ie
Suíomh Gréasáin: www.esri.ie