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From Attendance to Educational Reconnection: Building Relational and Organisational Capability for Disadvantaged Pupils and Pupils with SEMH Needs at Nields Academy

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Abstract: Persistent absence is unequally distributed, but attendance alone is an incomplete measure of educational inclusion. This paper critically evaluates U Can Shine, a 12-week relational coaching and family-engagement programme at Nields Academy, followed by an eight-week applied-learning extension. Fourteen pupils in Years 3–5 participated; 12 were eligible for Pupil Premium and six had identified social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. A practitioner-led, single-site mixed-method case study examines paired attendance percentages for 13 pupils, selected stakeholder testimony and pupil work. Independent recalculation of the individual rates corrects a consequential error in the original manuscript: mean baseline attendance was 88.1%, not 89.0%; post-programme mean attendance was 96.3%, giving a mean paired increase of 8.2 percentage points. All 13 recorded cases improved, although the missing pupil's outcome, unequal or unverified observation windows, selection on initial risk and absence of a comparison group prevent causal attribution. Pupil and family accounts suggest plausible pathways through trusted relationships, perceived belonging, manageable challenge and greater participation. These accounts were retrospective and largely collected within delivery. The case therefore offers evidence of an encouraging association and a testable organisational model, not proof of programme effectiveness or financial return. Further investment should depend on matched-window records, independent evaluation, academic and wellbeing outcomes, full costs and a credible comparison with existing support.

Keywords: school attendance, educational reconnection, school belonging, disadvantage, social, emotional and mental health, family engagement, contribution analysis, implementation.

INTRODUCTION

School attendance is an enabling condition of education, not its final objective. A pupil who is absent cannot routinely benefit from classroom teaching, friendships or the additional support already funded by a school. Yet a pupil may also be physically present while anxious, isolated or unable to engage with the curriculum. A useful account of attendance must therefore explain both why a child reaches school and what becomes possible once the child arrives. This paper uses *educational reconnection* to describe the movement from barriers to attendance towards dependable relationships, participation and learning. It treats that movement as a proposition to investigate, not an outcome established by improved registration alone.

The strategic challenge is particularly sharp for children experiencing material disadvantage or social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Their difficulties may reflect a changing combination of transport or morning-routine pressures, unmet

educational needs, fear of school, peer relationships and experiences beyond school. None of these possibilities follows automatically from a category label; each needs individual diagnosis. The statutory expectation that schools promote regular attendance remains important, but the route to that expectation must be responsive to the child's circumstances. The July 2026 version of English statutory guidance places responsibility on schools, families and local partners to identify barriers and provide support, while retaining clear roles and expectations (Department for Education, 2026d). A relational approach does not exempt a school from scrutiny. It requires leaders to ask whether the support offered has made regular attendance and meaningful engagement more feasible.

U Can Shine was introduced at Nields Academy as a targeted response to this challenge. Fourteen pupils in Years 3–5 joined a 12-week Autumn Term programme combining a weekly physical challenge, coaching, family contact and reinforcement by school adults. An eight-week Spring Term Bio Carton project then offered opportunities to transfer confidence into collaborative and public-facing learning. The intervention was not delivered in a vacuum: school teaching, pastoral provision, family decisions, and changes in individual circumstances continued alongside it. This combination asks a narrow question—*did the intervention cause the increase in attendance?* unanswerable with the available evidence. A more defensible enquiry asks what changed, whether the proposed mechanisms are plausible, what rival explanations remain, and whether leaders could test the model responsibly at greater scale.

This paper makes three contributions. First, it corrects the numerical record by recalculating all results from the 13 individual pairs in the supplied manuscript. The published-style draft's reported 89.0% baseline is inconsistent with those observations: their unweighted mean is 88.1%. Consequently, its stated gain of 7.3 percentage points and associated hypothetical pupil-day and cost-per-day estimates also require revision. Second, it links attendance to psychological and organisational theories without treating correlation, testimony, or a striking individual case as experimental proof. Third, it develops an explicit evaluation and investment framework that protects equity, safeguarding and educational value while testing whether specialist external provision adds to ordinary school support. The aim is a rigorous applied paper appropriate to a small, practitioner-led academy case, rather than a promotional account of a programme.

The Institutional and Policy Setting

Nields Academy is part of Great Heights Academy Trust in Kirklees, West Yorkshire. Its October 2025 Pupil Premium strategy statement reports **138 pupils in school plus 15 Nursery pupils**, with 27.5% identified as Pupil Premium-eligible; the statement does not specify the denominator behind that percentage (Nields Academy, 2025). The Trust describes a school-improvement offer involving diagnosis, tailored support, staff development and review, but that self-description is not evidence that this intervention delivered those functions (Great Heights Academy Trust, n.d.). Selection of 14 pupils for intensive support represented a deliberate concentration of resources on children whose risk profiles extended beyond a single threshold. Twelve were described as disadvantaged and six as having SEMH needs. Because the overlap between those two groups is not supplied, neither subgroup gains nor relative effects can be calculated.

National context clarifies why this concentration matters but is not a matched benchmark for the cohort. The Department for Education's full-year 2024/25 statistics reported **6.78% overall absence**, **18.14% persistent absence** and **2.39% severe absence** across state-funded phases; the full-year, state-funded-primary persistent-absence figure was **12.99%**. Overall absence is missed sessions divided by possible sessions, whereas persistent and severe absence are percentages of pupil enrolments missing at least 10% and 50% of their possible sessions, respectively (Department for Education, 2026a, 2026b). Kirklees' all-phase persistent-absence and severe-absence figures were 17.6% and 2.19% in the same official data. Nields' *own strategy statement* reports 2024/25 attendance of 95.7% for the whole school and 92.5% for disadvantaged pupils, and persistent absence of 13.1% and 26.5%, respectively (Nields Academy, 2025). The school figures are self-reported and lack pupil-level denominators; none is a matched comparator for a selected short-window cohort. They justify attention to inequity, not a claim that the programme closed a measured gap.

Attendance is associated with attainment, though the link is neither uniform nor automatically causal. In the Department for Education's adjusted observational analysis of Year 6 pupils in 2022/23, those in the 95–100% attendance band had **1.3 times the odds** of reaching the expected reading, writing and mathematics standard relative to the 90–95% band (Department for Education, 2025c). This is an odds ratio, not a 30% increase in probability or a programme-effect estimate. Older primary research connects prolonged absence with weaker literacy and numeracy, and a historical United States study suggests that the composition of excused and unexcused absence may matter for attainment; neither estimates a Nields intervention effect (Carroll, 2010; Gottfried, 2009). English health-exposure research further shows why illness and neurodevelopmental needs complicate a simple absence-to-attainment story (Hughes et al., 2021). The implication for this case is not a forecast of grades; it is that reducing missed teaching may protect an opportunity for learning, whose realisation must be checked with progress evidence. Kirklees' SEND sufficiency strategy supplies a planning context of more complex needs and inclusive provision, not evidence that this programme resolves them (Kirklees Council, 2025).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE

Belonging, Agency and the Meaning of Attendance

School belonging describes a child's sense of being accepted, respected and included in the school community. It is not the same as compliance with a register. A pupil may attend despite loneliness, or remain absent despite affection for a teacher when health or external pressures dominate. In a Grades 3–6 longitudinal study, relatedness to parents, teachers and peers predicted change in classroom engagement, even after accounting for perceived control; a UK cohort analysis linked primary-age school satisfaction with later exclusion and truancy (Cameron et al., 2025; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Both are observational and measure outcomes other than the Nields intervention's attendance effect. An adolescent belonging-intervention review also reported positive outcomes in only 14 of 22 controlled trials, with varied definitions and measures (Allen et al., 2022). In the present case, "School is a better place with you here" expressed an aspiration to make pupils' contribution visible. It is a statement of purpose, not a validated belonging score.

Self-determination theory provides a more specific account of how supportive relationships might alter motivation. It distinguishes three psychological needs: **autonomy**, the experience of meaningful volition; **competence**, the sense that one can meet an appropriate challenge; and **relatedness**, connection and care in relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2017). These needs do not imply removing boundaries. Well-explained expectations and carefully matched support may sustain autonomy better than either coercion or an absence of structure. In U Can Shine, choosing a personal target may support autonomy, incremental gains in a Run Challenge may make competence visible, and repeated contact with a trusted adult may support relatedness. A review of 36 educational self-determination interventions found support for autonomy and competence but **no statistically significant aggregate effect on relatedness**; the included contexts and measures varied (Wang, Wang, Wang, Wind, & Gill, 2024). This contrary result makes the relational mechanism a hypothesis, not a demonstrated effect. None of the three constructs was measured prospectively in this case.

There is a useful distinction between a pupil's *capacity* to attend, *motivation* to attend and *opportunity* to learn after arriving. A relationship may reduce anticipatory distress without resolving an unsuitable classroom environment; a breakfast-club place may improve morning readiness without changing peer conflict. The programme's integration of family contact, coaching and classroom reinforcement has theoretical coherence precisely because it allows different barriers to be addressed. However, an integrated package complicates interpretation: a positive outcome cannot reveal whether the physical challenge, the mentor, family dialogue, the school welcome, increased adult attention or their interaction mattered most. Reviews warn against treating attendance difficulties as one homogeneous behaviour or assuming that distress-linked school refusal describes every absence pattern (Boaler & Bond, 2023; Maynard et al., 2015). Case formulation should precede support rather than follow a label such as "non-compliant".

Social and Emotional Learning, Challenge and Transfer

Social and emotional learning (SEL) offers another plausible explanation for the intervention's design. Explicitly taught self-awareness and regulation can help children notice difficult feelings, choose a manageable response and return to learning after a setback. Evidence syntheses report benefits from well-implemented school-based SEL, while also showing that content, implementation and context affect outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). A single weekly conversation should not be presumed sufficient to change behaviour across the school day. Its potential depends on active practice, repetition and teachers' opportunity to reinforce the same language in ordinary lessons.

The Run Challenge operationalised this principle more concretely than an abstract exhortation to "be resilient". Each child pursued a personal-best time rather than a rank against peers. A difficult feeling could therefore be discussed in relation to an observable task: approaching the start, managing frustration, persisting, recovering and trying again. Repeated success may strengthen self-efficacy, defined as belief in one's ability to organise and carry out action in a particular setting (Bandura, 1997). Yet success in running does not automatically transfer to reading, friendship or punctuality. Transfer requires deliberately connecting the experience with a new context and then observing change there. The later

Bio Carton work, in which pupils collaborated on a sustainable-packaging idea and presented it to an audience, offered a candidate opportunity for transfer. No independent pre–post measure of collaboration, academic skill or self-efficacy accompanied that activity.

A review of resilience interventions for adolescents may support the general plausibility of structured, multi-component provision, but its participants are older than these seven- to ten-year-olds (Llistosella et al., 2023). Developmental transfer should therefore be presented as a question, not assumed from an aggregate review. Likewise, a pupil's retrospective statement that they feel more confident is valuable experiential evidence but cannot be interpreted as the same outcome as a validated longitudinal SEMH measure. An academically credible evaluation needs both kinds of knowledge while preserving the difference between them.

Family Relationships and Relational Accountability

Family engagement is not a one-way request for parents to fix an attendance problem. Work with a parent may reveal a practical barrier, a child's unspoken anxiety or a mismatch between the school's expectations and available support. English guidance emphasises early identification of barriers and joint working when difficulties persist (Department for Education, 2026d). A meta-analysis of family–school partnership interventions found small-to-moderate average effects on academic, behavioural and social-emotional outcomes, with reciprocal communication and collaboration among productive components (Smith, Sheridan, Kim, Park, & Beretvas, 2020). These outcomes are not attendance-specific. A 2026 review of randomised attendance trials found a **small pooled gain of 0.43 days attended** for parental-engagement interventions, but heterogeneity was very high (I^2 = 91.9%); mentoring's pooled confidence interval crossed zero (Strelitz et al., 2026). These findings support testing family partnership, not assuming a local 8.2-point effect from it. At Nields, breakfast-club access illustrates how a welfare or routine issue may become visible after trusted contact. The record does not quantify that support across families.

Relational accountability is the organising principle proposed in this paper. It pairs high expectations for safety, attendance and learning with an obligation on adults to understand barriers, make suitable provision and review what happens. This differs from an uncritical rejection of formal attendance procedures. Schools still need lawful, consistent and transparent arrangements; a compassionate response cannot conceal missed education. The distinction is between treating the register as a sufficient diagnosis and treating it as an early signal. A child-centred conversation may sometimes identify an unmet educational need that requires a reasonable adjustment or referral, rather than more coaching. The model is therefore explicitly conditional: relational practice must be connected to teaching, SEND processes and safeguarding pathways, not offered as a substitute for them.

Organisational Capability and Implementation

The resource-based view of organisations asks whether valuable resources are assembled and used in ways that others find difficult to reproduce (Barney, 1991). Its definitions of resource and value, and its emphasis on competitive advantage, have been criticised (Kraaijenbrink, Spender, & Groen, 2010). Applied to a public school, its purpose must be recast: the relevant return is not competitive exclusion, but dependable and equitable

educational value. Relationships with families, knowledge of pupils and routines that allow teachers and leaders to respond coherently may become capabilities. They may also be fragile. If trust resides solely with an external practitioner, pupils can lose continuity when the contract ends and the academy cannot necessarily reproduce the approach internally.

Implementation research explains why copying a programme label across schools is insufficient. Context, staff readiness, leadership engagement, available resources and the consistency of delivery all influence whether a complex intervention reaches children as intended (Damschroder et al., 2009; Moir, 2018). The former framework originated in health services; the latter explicitly considers educational settings. Neither provides a school-specific effect estimate. A future Trust-wide pilot should distinguish indispensable components—barrier diagnosis, trusted-adult continuity, structured practice, family contact and classroom reinforcement—from adaptable features such as the exact form of a challenge. Codification should support judgement, not replace responsive relationships with a rigid script. Together these theories form a **conditional pathway**. Diagnosis may identify modifiable barriers; trusted contact and appropriate provision may make school safer and more manageable; repeated challenge may build competence; family partnership may improve routines and disclosure; more regular presence may make participation and learning more likely. Each link is falsifiable. Improved attendance without increased participation would challenge the claim that reconnection had occurred; improved wellbeing without attendance change could indicate progress on a different outcome; gains that vanish when the coach leaves would challenge the organisational-capability claim. The contribution of the case is to make those propositions explicit and open to better measurement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

Questions, Design and Researcher Position

Three questions guide the evaluation. How did attendance change among pupils with complete baseline and post-programme percentages? To what extent do stakeholder accounts and pupil work support the proposed pathways of trust, belonging, competence and participation? What evidence and governance would be needed to decide whether the intervention adds value to existing provision and merits wider adoption?

The design is a small, theory-informed mixed-method case study developing an **initial contribution story**, with a within-person, uncontrolled before-and-after comparison for attendance. It covers 14 pupils who took part in the 12-week Autumn Term delivery and subsequent project activity. Thirteen have complete paired attendance percentages in the original paper; one has no paired value and was not imputed in the primary analysis. The exact start and end dates, underlying number of possible sessions, absence codes and uniformity of each observation window were not supplied. “Pre” and “post” consequently name the paired columns in the provided table, not independently audited, like-for-like register windows. That constraint is central: equal-weighted percentage averages cannot be transformed confidently into realised days or compared causally with national full-year rates.

The author was the coach and programme designer, which provided access to the texture of delivery and families’ accounts while creating an obvious interest in a favourable

interpretation. This is an insider-research advantage and a source of potential confirmation bias (Chavez, 2008). The Principal also helped select pupils. Selection was purposive, involving low or worsening attendance, disadvantage, SEMH concerns, disengagement, anxiety, confidence and learning circumstances. This improves practical targeting but creates a particularly strong risk of **regression towards the mean**: pupils selected because a recent measure is unusually low may improve on later measurement even without the intervention. Responses to additional adult attention, seasonal differences, unrelated changes in household circumstances and parallel school support are further alternatives. Without a contemporaneous comparison group, no statistical test can remove them.

Data, Analysis and Evidential Boundaries

Quantitative analysis was re-created from the 13 anonymised pairs published in the source table. For each pupil, the baseline percentage was subtracted from the post percentage to obtain the paired change in percentage points. The unweighted means, median, spread, threshold counts and leave-one-out sensitivity were calculated afresh. An exact two-sided sign test describes how consistently the available paired values moved in one direction under a stylised no-direction null. A 95% interval for the mean paired change describes sampling variability only under strong assumptions; neither that interval nor a small p value identifies a programme effect in a selected, uncontrolled group. The denominator of 13 is used throughout for complete-case outcomes, while 14 remains the number enrolled.

Qualitative material in the source comprised a Principal account, statements from three pupils and accounts from two family units, one reporting experiences for more than one child. The supplied paper also described engagement during coaching, a pupil-created AI-supported attendance presentation and the Bio Carton project. The present analysis organises these observations around proposed mechanisms—adult trust, school belonging, manageable challenge, family partnership and participation—then tests them against alternative explanations and the timing information actually available. Mixed-method integration requires explicit comparison of what different streams show and where they diverge; their coexistence alone does not constitute triangulation (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). This paper does **not** claim a new independently coded interview dataset, calculate frequencies from illustrative quotations or interpret selected positive accounts as the views of the entire cohort. More than one child in a family does not create independent family reports.

The original manuscript says testimony was collected with informed consent and age-appropriate pupil agreement and that records were handled securely. This paper cannot audit the underlying consent forms, recruitment script or access logs, so it describes those safeguards as reported rather than verified. Quotations are used sparingly and without pupil names; exact age, unusual attendance trajectory and family events are not attached to them. In a school cohort of 14, even that precaution may not fully prevent local recognition. Public dissemination should require a school-led re-identification review and renewed, ongoing child assent and parental permission (British Educational Research Association, 2024). The same caution applies to AI-assisted pupil work: illustrations may show authentic participation while containing unverified factual claims. Such products are artefacts of learning, not evidence that a carton is compostable or that a specific number of lessons was lost.

Contribution analysis offers a useful *future discipline* for these imperfect data. It asks whether a plausible theory of change is supported by outcome patterns and multiple lines of evidence after serious rival explanations and implementation have been examined (Delahais & Toulemonde, 2012; Mayne, 2012). The present evaluation has not completed all those tasks: dose and fidelity are not documented systematically, alternatives cannot be tested with an adequate comparator, and feedback selection remains unclear. It therefore develops an **initial contribution story**, not a completed contribution analysis. Agreement among attendance figures, pupil reports and family reports strengthens plausibility, but these sources are not wholly independent. **Observed change** is established for the 13 recorded pairs. **Proposed mechanisms** are supported unevenly by narrative and artefacts. **Causal impact**, generalisability and incremental value over existing support remain unestablished.

Table 1: Reconnection pathway: proposed mechanism and appropriate measure

Stage	Proposed mechanism	Evidence needed
Identify barriers	Combine register trends with pupil, family, learning and SEND information.	Baseline periods; authorised sessions; reason codes; barrier profile.
Build safety and agency	Predictable trusted adult, respectful family contact, meaningful choice and achievable challenge.	Delivery log; pupil and family voice; trusted-adult item; goals.
Practise participation	Repeated reflection, emotional regulation, classroom reinforcement and purposeful group work.	Session fidelity; participation rubric; behaviour and punctuality.
Re-enter learning	More frequent attendance enables greater curriculum contact, provided teaching is accessible.	Same-window attendance; work scrutiny; reading and mathematics.
Sustain gains	Adjust help to changing needs and retain effective school routines.	12- and 24-week follow-up; equity; costs; adverse effects.

Note: Arrows between stages represent hypotheses, not established causal links; attendance and attainment must be measured separately.

The Intervention and its Operational Logic

The programme joined several activities that should not be collapsed into a single "mentor effect". At entry, the Principal and coach selected the cohort and met pupils and families to discuss barriers and expectations. During the 12-week programme, each pupil had a weekly one-hour session; approximately half an hour involved an individualised Run Challenge and the remaining time used reflection and coaching around purpose, feelings, choices and persistence. Family contact continued as needs emerged, while teachers and leaders were expected to reinforce learning in ordinary school life. A subsequent eight-week project asked pupils to develop and communicate a Bio Carton concept using research, group work and AI-supported ideation. The programme cost in the source was £4,800 for its core and £2,000 for the extension, or £6,800 in total.

The theory of change depends on a sequence that is educationally sensible but not automatically realised. Delivery must first reach the pupils for whom it is intended and

distinguish barriers within each case. Pupils must then experience repeated, sufficiently safe encounters with trusted adults and meaningful challenge. Families and teachers need an actionable shared account of what helps. Attendance may improve if those conditions change the balance of distress, opportunity and support. Curricular benefit requires a further step: teaching must be accessible and learning progress must be observable. Because this evaluation lacks systematic fidelity, belonging and attainment measures, it cannot verify the full sequence. Table 1 translates its logic into measures for a prospective test.

RESULTS

Correcting the attendance record

The most consequential result of the audit is a correction, not an additional statistical flourish. The original text said mean attendance moved from 89.0% to 96.3%, a gain of 7.3 percentage points. Summing the 13 listed baseline values and dividing by 13 gives **88.0769%**; the corresponding post mean is **96.3000%**. Thus the observed average paired change is **8.2231 percentage points**, appropriately reported as **8.2 points**. The source's lower baseline cannot be reproduced by ordinary rounding of its own individual rates. The means and gain in this paper use the individual table as the auditable record and make the discrepancy visible rather than silently replacing it. It remains possible that the source's 89.0% reflected another extract, but no such extract or reconciliation was supplied.

Table 2: Recalculated attendance results from the 13 complete paired cases

Measure	Baseline	Post-programme / change
Mean attendance	88.1%	96.3%
Median attendance	89.3%	97.0%
Mean paired change	—	+8.2 percentage points
Median paired change	—	+8.5 percentage points
Pupils below 90%	7/13	1/13
Pupils at or above 95%	0/13	10/13

Note: Unweighted means were recomputed from the 13 individual percentages in the original Table 2. Reported means in the source text gave an incorrect baseline of 89.0%. Rounded percentage data and unequal observation windows limit interpretation.

The direction of the observed changes is unusually consistent. All 13 pupils with complete pairs had a higher post percentage. Gains ranged from 2.5 to 20.5 percentage points; their median was 8.5 points and standard deviation approximately 4.5 points. The median baseline was 89.3% and the median post percentage 97.0%. Seven of the 13 recorded pupils began below the 90% attendance threshold, while only one remained below it afterwards. Ten finished at or above 95%, compared with none at baseline. These thresholds describe children's percentages in the supplied periods; they are not equivalent to the Department for Education's full-year school-level persistent-absence rate. Without knowledge of the observed sessions, small percentage differences close to a boundary should not be overinterpreted.

Figure 1 displays each paired observation without implying a smooth collective trajectory. The two lowest starting observations—78.0% and 79.5%—had substantial gains,

but the first remained at 87.9% post-programme. This matters strategically: an apparently successful average must not obscure a pupil for whom attendance continued to signal significant risk. The pupil who began at 79.5% reached 100% in the supplied post percentage; the original manuscript states that full attendance then continued for the remainder of the academic year. That longer-term statement was not accompanied by a dated follow-up register extract and should be treated as a reported single-case observation, not cohort-level persistence.

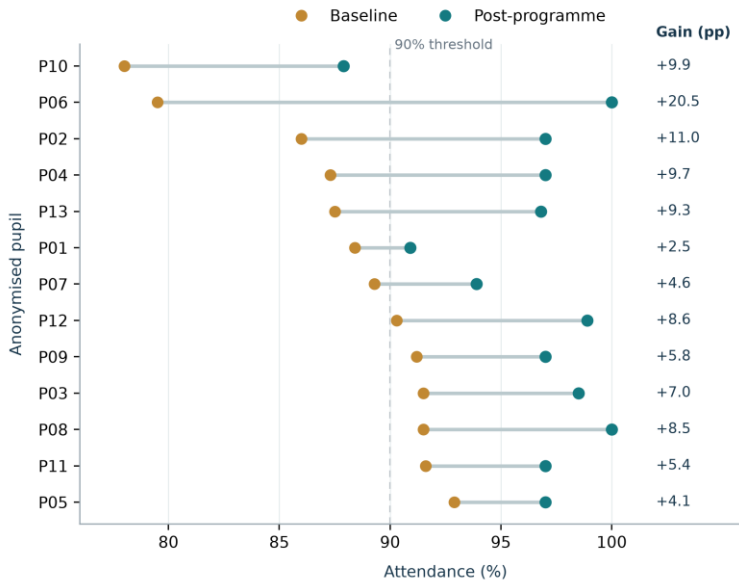


Figure 1: Attendance percentages for 13 complete paired cases, sorted by baseline. Dots reproduce the rounded values in the supplied manuscript. The post observation windows and underlying session denominators were not independently verified; connectors indicate paired records, not causal effects.

The mean increase remains positive if the largest gain is removed: it becomes 7.2 percentage points across 12 cases. The leave-one-out mean ranges from 7.2 to 8.7 points, indicating that the observed direction is not solely the result of one exceptional pupil. An exact two-sided sign test of 13 positive changes gives p = .00024 under a stylised equal-probability model; a conventional paired-mean 95% interval is approximately 5.5–10.9 points. These calculations describe the listed changes, but their assumptions are not a remedy for purposive recruitment or missing counterfactual data. A small p value does **not** establish that coaching caused an improvement. In particular, a selected cohort with weak initial attendance may improve because the selection point was unusually poor, because a whole-school attendance campaign affected everyone, or because children received other contemporaneous help.

The fourteenth pupil is neither an observed success nor an observed failure. If that pupil's paired change were hypothetically zero, the all-enrolled arithmetic mean would be 7.6 points; if it were −20 points, it would be 6.2 points. These are transparent sensitivity exercises, not imputations or plausible estimates of the actual missing result. Their purpose is to show that a missing record changes the denominator and that the factual conclusion must continue to be phrased as "13 of 13 complete cases improved", not "all 14 pupils improved". A future evaluation should explain why each record is missing, report outcomes

for every enrolled child where lawful and distinguish non-attendance at sessions from non-response to measurement.

Table 3: Descriptive checks and sensitivity of the paired change

Check	Result	Interpretation
Range of paired gains	+2.5 to +20.5 pp	All 13 observed changes positive.
Dispersion of gains	SD = 4.5 pp; IQR = 5.4–9.7 pp	Substantial between-pupil variation.
Without largest gain	Mean = +7.2 pp	Pattern not driven solely by P06.
Exact two-sided sign test	13/13; p = .00024	Directional consistency under a symmetry null; not programme causality.
Missing pupil: no change	14-pupil mean = +7.6 pp	Hypothetical sensitivity, not an imputation.
Missing pupil: −20 pp	14-pupil mean = +6.2 pp	Illustrative adverse scenario, not observed.

Note: pp = percentage points; SD = standard deviation; IQR = interquartile range. The comparison periods and underlying daily registers were unavailable; no causal effect is estimated.

Why Estimated Days and Lessons are not Observed Outcomes

The original manuscript converts percentage-point gains into 56.7 additional pupil-days and 298.4 lessons, using an illustrative 60-day period. The first conversion inherits the incorrect mean of 7.3 points: multiplying the **recalculated** 8.2231-point mean by 60 days and 13 pupils yields **64.14 scenario-equivalent pupil-days**. This is not a register count. The actual baseline and post denominators, dates and possible school sessions were not provided, so even the corrected 64.14 is a counterfactual arithmetic illustration rather than a verified increase in realised school days. Moreover, the counterfactual "what these same pupils would otherwise have attended" is unobserved. The paper therefore does not use the number as a headline impact estimate.

The lesson figure is less defensible still. It depends on an implicit assumption about lessons per day and converts a hypothetical day estimate into a further hypothetical quantity, with spurious decimal precision. Pupil-created slides also use rounded annual examples of days and lessons missed, which serve as accessible communication rather than audited register data. In the absence of an actual timetable and session-level records, there is no valid observed "lessons recovered" statistic for this cohort. The appropriate future measure is matched-window sessions attended, accompanied by information about whether the child was available to learn when present.

Experience, Relationships and Participation

The testimony gives the numbers human and organisational context. Three pupils described reduced worry, stronger friendships, greater confidence and enjoyment of learning. One said, "Before the programme, I used to feel nervous and scared about coming to school" and later described being "more excited". Another reported enjoying friends and lessons alongside confidence and determination. A third associated a better experience of school with courage in peer relationships and pride in contributing to a group task. The children's identities are not connected here with case labels, year groups or exact attendance trajectories. Their accounts are consistent with belonging and competence hypotheses, but

the interview selection, dates and wording of questions are not sufficiently documented to show how typical these experiences were.

The original paper also reported retrospective "feelings gauge" changes for those three pupils: 4 to 9, 3 to 10 and 2 to 10, respectively, on a self-described 1–10 readiness scale. It would be misleading to pool them into a programme mean or interpret a six-point jump as a clinical improvement. The baseline scores were remembered later, the scale was not validated and the three pupils were not a random sample. Their value is interpretive: children themselves connected school entry with fear, friendship, confidence and lessons. A future assessment should ask similar questions prospectively at fixed points, allow children to decline, and avoid pressuring them to perform a "success story" for a trusted adult.

Families' evidence is illuminating and limited in a different way. One parent said, "As parents, we felt supported rather than judged", a concise account of non-judgemental contact. One family reflected on support for more than one child, while another described greater willingness to attempt unfamiliar experiences after school-entry anxiety. That second account explicitly acknowledged that worry had not disappeared altogether. These accounts suggest that partnership and confidence may have extended beyond the school gate. They come from only **two family units**, however, and were collected retrospectively. They cannot establish the prevalence of these changes among all 14 households or isolate family engagement from coaching, maturation and other support.

The Principal described improved readiness to learn, peer relationships, behaviour, family trust and pupil voice, and linked the experience to regular coaching and purposeful challenge. As a school leader and co-selector of the cohort, her account is strategically relevant but not independent evaluation. The convergence between her narrative, selected pupils' words and family reports raises the credibility of the hypothesised mechanisms without multiplying the number of independent data sources. The strongest triangulation concerns the same child when a paired attendance record, a pupil statement and a family account point in a compatible direction. Even there, the accounts reflect shared knowledge of the intervention and cannot resolve what would have happened without it.



Figure 2: A pupil-created, AI-supported attendance slide retained as an artefact of participation and communication, not a quantified outcome. Source: material embedded in the supplied Nields Academy manuscript.

The artefacts show a further distinction between attendance and participation. Pupils helped produce an AI-supported presentation whose central message was “School is a better place with you here”. Choosing and communicating this message required them to consider the effects of absence and address an audience rather than simply receive an adult instruction. Figure 2 retains one slide as documentary evidence of the co-created message. Its decorative text and icons are not an independently validated theory-of-change model; no personal identifiers are shown in the image used here. The subsequent Bio Carton project involved idea development, collaboration and public presentation, providing examples of purposeful learning. However, the environmental performance claims depicted in some original artwork were not verified. That artwork is not reproduced as scientific evidence, and the project’s outputs do not replace assessed learning progress.

DISCUSSION

What the Case Supports, and What it cannot Show

The attendance pattern is both substantial and constrained. It is substantial because the corrected average change is 8.2 percentage points and every complete pair moves in the same direction. It is constrained because changes in short-window percentages are not equivalent to a comparison-adjusted effect and because no equivalent data for pupils receiving ordinary provision have been presented. The most defensible statement is that **attendance improved during the period in which the programme was delivered for the 13 children with complete records**. The timing and narratives make it plausible that U Can Shine contributed, particularly where parents describe actionable contact or a pupil describes re-entering school after worry. They do not show how much of the change was caused by the programme, what would have happened under usual care, or how much survived for the full cohort.

Several rival explanations deserve equal prominence. Selecting children at a low point creates scope for an ordinary rebound. The intervention took place in an Autumn Term, when illness and weather patterns may differ from the baseline or later window, but exact dates were not available to examine this possibility. Attendance monitoring, classroom adjustments, a new breakfast arrangement, changes in peer relationships or changes at home could occur at the same time. A visible coach may encourage engagement through attention alone, independent of the programme’s particular content. Conversely, a useful combination of these elements might be the mechanism rather than a confounder: a complex intervention can work by organising existing and new actions coherently. Only a better comparative design, alongside process evidence, can distinguish added value from coincident change.

The qualitative material suggests a trajectory from emotional safety to meaningful action. Pupils spoke of friendship and diminished fear; families spoke of being heard; the Principal saw increased readiness; and pupils participated in a presentation for an audience. These are not merely decorative stories. They help specify mechanisms for a future test and reveal outcomes that a register cannot measure. Their evidential weight nonetheless varies. Attendance is directly counted in the supplied percentages but weakly attributed; selected testimony is rich about experience but vulnerable to recall and social-desirability bias; artefacts demonstrate that work occurred but not how competence changed. Bringing these

distinct claims together is more informative than treating all observations as interchangeable proof of "impact".

A particularly important theoretical implication concerns **presence-to-learning conversion**. Re-entry into school creates an opportunity for literacy, numeracy, relationships and specialist support. It does not guarantee access to suitably adapted teaching. Improved attendance may even expose previously hidden learning gaps or anxiety. For a pupil with SEMH needs, the correct organisational response may include classroom adjustment, a SEND review or mental-health support rather than more attendance-focused messaging. Thus, the case does not justify a universal claim that relationship work will resolve absence. Its stronger lesson is that leaders need a system that notices when relational support has opened a door and then ensures there is something educationally worthwhile and safe on the other side.

Opportunity Cost and the Limits of Financial Return Claims

The supplied manuscript identifies £4,800 for the core programme and £2,000 for the Bio Carton extension, a combined **£6,800**; invoices or contract terms were not provided for audit. Relative to the school's reported Pupil Premium allocation of £65,942, this equals **10.31%**; dividing total spend by all 14 participants gives approximately **£486 per pupil**. Dividing by the 12 pupils described as Pupil Premium-eligible yields **£567 per eligible participant**, not a cost allocated only to those pupils, because all 14 received the programme. These are expenditure ratios, not returns on investment. They exclude the opportunity cost of school staff time, rooms, planning, breakfast support, safeguarding oversight and evaluation unless already included in the contract. A complete economic appraisal requires those costs and the costs of the realistic alternative.

The corrected hypothetical 60-day conversion would imply £6,800/64.14, or roughly **£106 per scenario-equivalent pupil-day**. This figure should not be called a cost per additional day *caused* by the programme: its denominator is neither observed realised days nor an adjusted treatment effect. Similarly, a comparison with an indicative teaching-assistant salary is not a like-for-like counterfactual without duties, employer costs, training, time on task and equivalent pupil outcomes. Teaching assistants can support learning effectively when trained and deployed in structured ways; buying "a day of specialist coaching" and "a fraction of an annual post" are different packages, not directly exchangeable units (Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.). The programme's potential strategic value lies in a capability—joint barrier diagnosis, family-facing work, consistent adult contact and transfer into classroom practice—that must be compared with a plausible internally delivered package, not with an arbitrary salary headline.

The source manuscript also offered an illustrative lifetime-earnings multiplication based on a secondary-school absence study. Transferring such an estimate to primary pupils and multiplying it by hypothetical short-window days would compound age mismatch, causal uncertainty and unobserved denominators. It is therefore omitted as a return claim. The 2025/26 grant conditions establish the funding purpose, while current school-leader guidance emphasises diagnosis, implementation and review across high-quality teaching, targeted support and wider strategies; neither document validates this purchase (Department for Education, 2025b, 2026c). Pupil Premium governance is stronger when

expenditure is justified through observed educational outcomes, expected additionality, equitable reach and a transparent counterfactual.

Leadership as an Organisational Rather than Personal Asset

The case describes a Principal–coach partnership capable of bringing family information, pastoral judgement and accountability into a common conversation. Such integration matters because information often sits in separate systems: a register identifies a pattern, a teacher observes participation, a parent knows the morning routine, and a child understands the peer or emotional barrier. A leader creates value when these sources can safely inform a proportionate response and when responsibility for acting is explicit. The trust developed by one person may be a catalyst, but it is not a durable organisational asset unless staff can maintain the routines after that person leaves.

The managerial challenge is to preserve responsiveness while specifying non-negotiable functions. Accurate eligibility and barrier assessment, a named trusted adult, regular pupil contact, family communication, coordination with class teaching and scheduled review should be documented. The precise physical challenge or creative project may vary, provided it offers achievable success, reflection and a credible bridge to learning. A fidelity measure should record not only whether a session happened but whether the mechanism was present—for example, whether a pupil set a meaningful goal, reflected on a setback and received consistent follow-up (Carroll et al., 2007). At the same time, excessive proceduralisation can convert a relationship into a tick-box exercise. The school should specify principles and decision rights, then protect staff discretion with supervision and audit.

Distinguishing Connected but Different Mechanisms

The programme's strengths-based language can conceal important differences between **belonging**, **self-efficacy** and **agency** unless they are defined and observed separately. A pupil who reports that a particular teacher notices them may have stronger relational belonging without yet believing they can complete difficult work. A pupil who runs a faster time may experience task-specific efficacy without feeling safe among peers. A child who chooses a message for a school presentation exercises a form of agency, but the choice may have been strongly framed by adults. In the present evidence, each construct has a suggestive indicator rather than a direct, repeated measure. Calling them all "confidence" would make the theory unfalsifiable and diminish the specific voice in children's accounts. A stronger follow-up would ask each child what happened at the moment of school entry, whom they could approach for help, whether they could influence how they participated, and what they learned once present.

The intervention also contains **multiple plausible routes to the same attendance result**. A family could gain a workable morning routine through breakfast provision; a pupil could feel safer because of altered peer contact; or a new trusted adult could make setbacks less catastrophic. Those routes need not operate together for every child. This means a future study should collect a short, individualised barrier formulation at entry and revisit it during review. The aim is not to sort children into permanent types, but to ask whether the chosen help plausibly addresses the current barrier. Where attendance improves yet a pupil

remains frightened, the register can falsely suggest that the relational mechanism has worked. Where wellbeing improves yet attendance does not, leaders should look for structural constraints before concluding that a child lacks motivation. These contrasting patterns are diagnostically useful and should be preserved in case-level analysis rather than averaged away.

The small cohort provides an additional warning about **threshold-based celebration**. Moving from just under 90% to just over it may change a status label while representing only a few sessions, especially when periods are short. Conversely, the child who improved from 78.0% to 87.9% did not cross the threshold yet had a 9.9-point gain. A decision system that rewards only "exiting persistent absence" could overlook this progress while prematurely discharging another child whose apparent success is unstable. Leaders need a trajectory, the pupil's experience and the remaining reasons for absence. This is why the outcome framework combines continuous attendance change, sustained follow-up, participation and individual need rather than reducing children to a red–amber–green score.

There is a conceptual tension between courage-building and the risk of individualising a systemic problem. Asking a child to take a manageable step can be humane when the school has already addressed a barrier and the child retains control. It can be harmful if it frames an inaccessible environment, bullying or a safeguarding concern as a personal failure of bravery. The sequence therefore matters: adults must investigate and act on environmental and family-facing conditions before treating persistence as the child's sole responsibility. The Run Challenge is an illustration of supported practice, not a diagnostic test of character. For some children, an accessible creative, conversational or classroom-based challenge may be the better way to practise the same skill. High expectations and reasonable adjustments are complementary only when the school shares responsibility for making success possible.

Finally, the organisational thesis should be tested against a deliberately modest alternative explanation: perhaps what mattered was **regular, individual attention from any skilled adult**, not a distinctive programme architecture. This would still be a valuable finding, but it would change the investment decision. A fair comparator should therefore have an explicit dose and quality of pastoral or teaching-assistant contact rather than an ill-defined "no treatment" group. Process interviews could ask pupils and families which encounters mattered and why, while avoiding leading questions about a particular coach. If a lower-cost internally delivered approach produces similar attendance, belonging and learning outcomes with equivalent safeguards, the distinctive external package may not justify continued purchase. If the integrated package outperforms that comparator and can be replicated without exceptional personal dependence, the strategic capability claim becomes much stronger.

The most serious scaling risk is practitioner dependence. If another school cannot reproduce trust, safeguarding judgement or family engagement under ordinary workload, copying the branded sessions will not reproduce the case. A smaller Trust pilot should therefore test **transportability**: whether the same core functions reach pupils with similar barriers in more than one setting, whether delivery is acceptable to families, and whether the cost and staff time remain manageable. Evidence of improved attendance at one school is a reason to investigate those questions, not an answer to them.

AN EVALUABLE PATHWAY FOR CONTINUATION

Establishing a Credible Comparator

A next phase should be designed before another favourable outcome is known. The primary question would be whether the integrated U Can Shine package improves attendance **more than a clearly described, credible version of usual school support** for pupils with similar baseline barriers. “Usual support” might involve existing attendance contact, pastoral work, classroom adjustment and SEND processes; it should not mean withholding legally required help. Several small Trust schools could identify eligible pupils using common criteria, specify the nature of ordinary provision and start the new intervention in phases. If allocation by a transparent, ethically acceptable method were possible, a randomised staggered roll-out could reduce some allocation bias while ensuring every pupil eventually has access, but time trends and insufficient independent school clusters remain serious threats (Hemming, Haines, Chilton, Girling, & Lilford, 2015). Where random allocation is impractical, a prospectively identified matched comparison group with similar starting attendance, year group, disadvantage, SEND profile and prior trajectory would be preferable to an unstructured historical comparison. Even a matched design requires explicit caution about unmeasured differences.

The primary outcome should be the **proportion of possible sessions attended in a pre-specified 12-week period**, compared with an equivalent baseline window, with each window’s dates and denominators recorded. Report authorised and unauthorised absence separately, alongside punctuality and reasons where lawful and informative. Follow-up at 12 and 24 weeks after the core programme would test whether gains persist when intensive contact changes. An intention-to-support analysis should retain everyone offered the intervention rather than selecting only those with complete or successful participation; missing outcomes and transfers should be reported with reasons. A trajectory plot extending well before enrolment would help expose transient low points and seasonal patterns. Calendar-matched comparison periods matter because illness and holidays can change attendance regardless of intervention content.

An analysis plan should be written before viewing outcomes. At a minimum, it should specify a primary attendance measure, eligibility rules, handling of missingness, baseline adjustment, subgroup definitions and uncertainty estimates. A multi-school design could compare change in attendance between groups using school-level clustering and sensitivity analyses for prior trajectory. With few schools, conventional asymptotic confidence intervals may be unreliable; the analysis method should match the actual cluster count and sample size. The sign test in this paper is not a substitute for such a design. Future subgroup comparisons for disadvantage, SEMH and SEND should be planned only if numbers support stable estimates; otherwise, case-based equity review may be more honest than noisy significance testing. A trial registration or publicly dated protocol would discourage post hoc selection of the most favourable window or outcome.

Measuring the Educational Benefit Beyond Presence

Attendance should remain the primary operational outcome because the source demonstrates that it can be recorded. It should not become the only success criterion. A short age-appropriate belonging measure, administered before and after the intervention

and at follow-up, could test the proposed relatedness pathway. Its psychometric properties and accessibility for younger pupils and those with SEND need checking before adoption. A parallel teacher-rated participation measure should define observable behaviours—joining a task, sustaining effort, seeking help and collaborating—without penalising disability-related differences in expression. Recorded reading and mathematics progress should be interpreted from individual starting points with the same assessment schedule in both groups. Children and families should be offered a safe opportunity to describe beneficial, neutral or adverse experiences, including whether contact felt supportive or intrusive.

The Bio Carton extension should be evaluated separately from the core attendance programme. If the same pupils join both stages, any later improvement cannot be assigned to the extension alone. A simple rubric could assess project completion, evidence use, collaborative decisions and presentation in a way that is accessible across ability levels. Outputs may then test whether participation has become more purposeful. They should not be used to infer that AI itself improved learning or that a pupil-designed material meets environmental-performance claims. This distinction preserves the pedagogical value of a creative project while preventing enthusiasm for its display from substituting for independently assessed outcomes.

Table 4: Prospective measurement and governance for a multi-school test

Domain / source	Timing and operational definition	Decision rule / owner
Attendance; MIS register	Two matched 12-week windows; authorised and unauthorised sessions; weekly trend and punctuality.	Half-termly review by attendance lead; inspect deterioration without penalty-first assumptions.
Belonging and SEMH; validated short measure	Pre, post, 12 and 24 weeks; age-appropriate administration and response rate.	SEND/SEMH lead checks acceptability and meaningful change.
Curriculum and participation; teacher records	Reading/mathematics progress plus prespecified classroom engagement rubric.	Class teacher checks whether presence becomes learning.
Fidelity and safety; delivery log	Session dose, family contact, referrals, adverse experience, safeguarding route.	Senior owner adapts or pauses where harms or missed delivery emerge.
Equity and cost; finance/MIS	Reach, missingness, subgroup trends and full cost incl. staff time.	Trust board compares with existing support before expansion.

Note: MIS = management information system; SEND = special educational needs and disabilities; SEMH = social, emotional and mental health. Thresholds should be pre-registered, not inferred from this case.

Implementation, Decision Gates and Costs

Leaders should review *reach* and *fidelity* alongside outcomes. Reach asks who was referred, offered support, enrolled, attended sessions and completed measurement, and who was excluded. Fidelity asks whether core functions were actually delivered: initial joint formulation, a stable adult relationship, meaningful challenge and reflection, family contact where appropriate, classroom connection and timely review. These processes should be

recorded prospectively but in a proportionate form that does not displace child-facing time. Dose alone is insufficient; twelve sessions of uncertain quality are not the same as twelve sessions in which a pupil actively practised a transferable skill.

A named senior leader should own a half-termly review involving the attendance lead, SEND or SEMH expertise, the class teacher and safeguarding lead as relevant. The review should begin with each child's current safety, participation and progress, then examine attendance and the suitability of provision. When attendance deteriorates or a child reports distress, the first action is renewed diagnosis and protection, not a presumption of low motivation. When a child attends but does not participate or learn, the response is curricular and relational adjustment, not premature celebration of the register. If sessions are repeatedly missed, leaders should ask whether the delivery model is accessible. Decision rules for continuation, adaptation and cessation should be agreed in advance but leave room for individual safeguarding judgement.

Financial appraisal should measure total incremental cost, including coaching fees, school liaison, preparation, rooms, staff release, training, specialist referral and any administrative burden. The comparator's full cost should be measured on the same basis. Leaders can then report cost per enrolled child and, only after a credible comparative analysis, cost per **additional attendance session attributable to the intervention**. A cost-effectiveness ratio without a defensible causal denominator may appear precise while giving the wrong investment signal. Academic and wellbeing consequences should sit alongside financial ratios; a cheap increase in attendance that worsens distress or narrows access for pupils with SEND would not constitute value. Pupil Premium spending should also be judged against the school's existing strategy, not treated as a licence to displace high-quality teaching.

Safeguarding, Equity and Responsible Digital Practice

A relational model gains legitimacy only if it protects children whose circumstances differ from the assumed pathway. For some children, entry anxiety may respond to predictable welcome and gradual challenge. For others, a medical condition, disability, bullying or family safeguarding concern will require a different response. The programme should not reward disclosure to an external adult without clear routes for recording, supervision and escalation. It must avoid turning a child's absence into a public story of personal failure. The original presentations' positive motto is preferable to a shame-based comparison of peers, but even positive messaging should be checked with pupils who cannot safely attend at the expected rate because of illness or unmet provision.

Consent for research use of testimony must be distinct from consent to receive school support. Children need understandable explanations of how words and creative work may be used, a real opportunity to decline, and a means to withdraw non-essential publication material where feasible (British Educational Research Association, 2024). A Trust-level data-protection assessment should specify whether an external provider processes pupil data, where records are stored, how long they are retained and who can access them. Department for Education guidance requires supervised, age-appropriate safeguards and caution over inaccurate outputs and personal data in generative AI; schools should also consult their data-protection officer, approve tools and fact-check outputs (Department for Education, n.d., 2025a). AI-assisted materials should be produced without

entering identifiable pupil information into unsuitable services. Where pupils present to a wider audience, staff should assess whether the experience is chosen, accessible and supportive rather than assuming that every pupil benefits from public performance.

Equity monitoring should examine who receives and benefits from the intervention without inferring "subgroup effects" from tiny cells. The present cohort includes 12 Pupil Premium-eligible pupils and six described as having SEMH needs, but no case-level cross-tabulation. That prevents a calculation of how many pupils belong to both groups or whether either group responded differently. A future programme should also document children whose support needs make a running task inaccessible and offer an equivalent route to personal challenge. Individualised adaptation is not a deviation from fidelity if the core mechanism—manageable effort, feedback and reflection—is preserved. The appropriate standard is equitable access to the hypothesised benefit, not identical participation in a single physical activity.

Limitations and Interpretation of Generalisability

This case is unusually informative in one respect: the source provides the thirteen individual attendance pairs, permitting its central calculation to be checked rather than accepted on authority. It is less informative in several others. The denominator and dates of the underlying registers are unknown; the missing pupil's result is unreported; the intervention was delivered and interpreted by a person with a stake in its success; selected testimony does not reveal negative or unchanged experiences; and no independent attainment, prospective belonging or full-cohort follow-up data were supplied. A large within-person change in these conditions establishes a signal worth pursuing, not a reliable estimate of what the programme would achieve in a new school.

The external literature also has boundaries. School belonging and self-determination theory illuminate plausible mechanisms, but they do not validate this exact package. Studies of older adolescents or whole-school SEL differ in age, setting and dose. A review of school interventions for persistently absent secondary pupils found variable effects in a limited, largely non-UK evidence base; it cannot supply a primary-programme effect estimate (Middleton, Watson, & Anderson, 2026). Organisational theory can guide the design of replicable routines, but it cannot transform a small uncontrolled comparison into causal evidence. National absence rates explain public significance, not local programme effectiveness. A citation should support the claim for which it is offered and no more.

Transferability should be assessed through *analytic* rather than statistical generalisation. Other schools may recognise a similar configuration of absence, anxiety, family pressure and fragmented support; they can then test whether the proposed mechanisms fit their context. They should not assume that an 8.2-point gain will recur, especially where baseline attendance, local services or practitioner expertise differ. A model becomes scalable when its essential work is specified, staff can perform it sustainably, families judge it acceptable, outcomes remain favourable after follow-up and comparative evidence shows worthwhile additionality. Until then, a modest, independently evaluated continuation is more defensible than either uncritical roll-out or dismissal of the case's encouraging signal.

CONCLUSION

The reanalysis changes a central factual claim. The 13 paired percentages supplied in the original manuscript show mean attendance increasing from **88.1% to 96.3%**, an **8.2-percentage-point** mean gain, and all 13 recorded pupils improved. The previously reported 89.0% baseline and 7.3-point gain are arithmetically inconsistent with the listed cases. The corrected pattern is still striking, but it remains a within-person association in a purposively selected group with one missing record and no contemporaneous comparator. Hypothetical days, lessons and earnings cannot be converted into observed or attributable impact.

Pupil, family and Principal accounts add a credible explanation for why the programme may have helped: children described reduced worry and stronger friendship; families described being understood rather than judged; and pupil-created work demonstrated participation beyond mere school entry. Those accounts are selected, retrospective and partly dependent on the practitioner who delivered the programme. The integrated explanation—diagnose barriers, build trusted relationships, practise manageable challenge, coordinate with families and teachers, and turn presence into accessible learning—is therefore a **testable theory of educational reconnection**, not a proven intervention effect.

The appropriate leadership decision is disciplined continuation subject to independent testing. Great Heights Academy Trust should preserve the relational and inclusive core while recording matched attendance windows, pupil experience, classroom participation, attainment, implementation and full costs across more than one school. A credible comparison with ordinary support, pre-agreed decision criteria and 12- and 24-week follow-up would establish whether the capability can be sustained and whether it adds educational value for the pupils who most need it. Attendance is the gateway to this judgement; genuine success is achieved only when children can enter school safely, participate with purpose and make progress in learning.

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APPENDIX A: ATTENDANCE-DATA AUDIT AND REPRODUCIBLE DERIVATION

The original manuscript supplied the 13 paired percentages shown in Table 5 but not the underlying school register, dates or number of possible sessions in either window. The individual values have been transcribed without alteration and anonymised as P01–P13. This appendix makes the arithmetic independently inspectable; it does not supply missing data for the fourteenth enrolled pupil.

Table 5: Individual rounded percentages transcribed from the supplied manuscript

Case	Baseline	Post	Paired change
P01	88.4%	90.9%	+2.5 pp
P02	86.0%	97.0%	+11.0 pp
P03	91.5%	98.5%	+7.0 pp
P04	87.3%	97.0%	+9.7 pp
P05	92.9%	97.0%	+4.1 pp
P06	79.5%	100.0%	+20.5 pp
P07	89.3%	93.9%	+4.6 pp
P08	91.5%	100.0%	+8.5 pp
P09	91.2%	97.0%	+5.8 pp
P10	78.0%	87.9%	+9.9 pp
P11	91.6%	97.0%	+5.4 pp
P12	90.3%	98.9%	+8.6 pp
P13	87.5%	96.8%	+9.3 pp
Unweighted mean	88.1%	96.3%	+8.2 pp

Note. All case labels are anonymised. Percentages are copied from source Table 2; means and differences are independently calculated from them. No dates or session-level denominators were supplied.

For each complete case, the paired percentage-point difference is post-programme attendance minus baseline attendance. The sum of the 13 listed differences is 106.9 percentage points, giving an unweighted mean of 106.9 ÷ 13 = 8.2231 percentage points, or 8.2 points to one decimal place. The unweighted baseline and post means are 88.0769% and 96.3000%, respectively. The original text's baseline of 89.0% and change of 7.3 points cannot be reproduced from its own case table. The exact two-sided sign-test probability for 13 changes in the same direction is $2 \div 2^{13} = 0.000244$; this probability describes a stylised no-direction model and has no causal interpretation for a purposively selected uncontrolled sample.

A hypothetical conversion to a common 60-day window would be 13 × 60 × 0.0822308 = 64.14 scenario-equivalent pupil-days. It must not be reported as an observed count or attributed treatment effect. No child-level lesson timetable or register extract was available to calculate verified lesson exposure. All calculations in the paper use percentages rounded to one decimal place in the user-supplied manuscript; any undisclosed precision in the original attendance system could change the last decimal of a result.