Understanding the impact of attendance and family liaison officers (AFLOs)

Evaluation report

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This project is part of a joint funding round with the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF). The YEF and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) are partnering to find, fund, and evaluate programmes and practices in England and Wales that could keep children safe from involvement in violence and/or improve academic attainment, by increasing school presence.

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About the evaluator

This report illustrates the results of the research carried out by ICF Consulting Services Ltd in collaboration with Robert Wishart and Triin Edovald (both ICF associates) and Matteo Sandi (London School of Economics and Political Science).

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This work was undertaken in the ONS SRS using data from ONS and other owners and does not imply the endorsement of the ONS or other data owners.

Executive summary

The project

This evaluation examines the effectiveness of attendance and family liaison officers (AFLOs) in English secondary schools as a strategy to improve pupil attendance. AFLOs are non-teaching staff members whose primary responsibility is supporting school attendance through monitoring data, engaging with pupils and families, and addressing barriers to attendance. This research addresses a significant policy concern as over one in five pupils are classified as persistently absent (missing 10% or more of all possible sessions, defined as half-days at school), with pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds nearly twice as likely to be persistently absent than their classmates (EEF, 2024).

The trial was co-funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) in 'A Safe, Positive Place to Learn' funding round. The impact evaluation used a difference-in-differences (DiD) design to estimate the impact of introducing AFLOs both in the pre- and post-COVID periods on the likelihood of a pupil being persistently absent (primary outcome), overall absence rate, unauthorised absence rate, and the likelihood of a pupil receiving one/more fixed-term exclusions[1] (secondary outcomes). The pre-COVID analysis used data on over 500,000 pupils across 621 (198 treated and 423 untreated) schools to assess impact at the end of the academic year in which AFLOs were introduced, and one and two years after. The post-COVID analysis tracked 150,300 pupils across 298 (51 treated and 247 untreated) schools to assess impact at the end of the academic year of AFLO introduction only.

The implementation and process evaluation (IPE) involved case studies and interviews across 23 state secondary schools (19 with AFLOs and four without), including interviews with 102 school staff members and discussions with 46 pupils or their parents. This qualitative work explored how AFLOs are used in practice, their perceived effectiveness, and factors that moderate their impact, such as whole-school approaches to attendance and senior leadership support.

The evaluation was undertaken during the period from August 2024 to August 2025.

Table 1: Key conclusions

Key conclusions	
1.	Employing an AFLO in and of itself did not lead to a meaningful impact on persistent absence overall. Across the pre-COVID period, persistent absence reduced in the same academic year that AFLOs were employed, but increased after one year, before reducing again after two years. These changes in persistent absence were all small at 0.1 percentage points (ppts), which, in a school of 1,000 pupils, is equivalent to the number of pupils being persistently absent increasing or reducing by one pupil. Introducing AFLOs in the post-COVID period was found to have a small detrimental effect, increasing persistent absence by a small amount. These results have a moderate to high security rating.
2.	There was evidence of a small reduction in persistent absence for free school meals pupils in the pre-COVID period, and of a larger reduction in the post-COVID period. However, there is uncertainty around these findings as the possible impact estimates included both a reduction and increase in persistent absence, and the results may have a lower security rating than the overall findings because of the smaller number of pupils in the samples.
3.	There was some evidence of a reduction in persistent absence among pupils of Black and Asian ethnicity in the pre-COVID period. These impacts were not replicated for any ethnicity groups in the post-COVID period, however, with only small and ambiguous estimates, where the possible impact was consistent with both a reduction and increase in persistent absence.
4.	Interviews with schools highlighted considerable variation in the role and responsibilities of AFLOs which may have diluted their overall impact. AFLOs were perceived by schools to have the greatest impact when providing tailored support addressing individual barriers for those pupils who were, or were at risk of becoming, persistently absent with the aim of re-integrating them back into school.
5.	Schools perceived AFLOs to be most effective when they worked within a coordinated whole-school approach to managing attendance, with support from teachers, welfare staff and heads of year. This was seen to enhance the support that AFLOs provided pupils through a good understanding of pupils' personal circumstances, which was key to tackling the factors that resulted in poor attendance.

[1] Since 01 September 2024, fixed-term exclusions are called suspensions. They are temporary removals of pupils from school for disciplinary reasons, and last from part of a day up to a maximum of 45 school days in an academic year.

EEF security rating

These findings have a moderate to high security rating. The design employed a quasi-experimental DiD methodology, which made use of administrative data to track historical trends in absence data. The design started with high security. Although some data from the National Pupil Database [NPD] could not be matched to the School Workforce Census [SWC], this attrition was small and the trial was moderately well-powered.

However, the following factors weakened the reliability of the findings. The study design assumes that before AFLOs were introduced in intervention schools, the schools being compared were following similar trajectories (parallel trends) in persistent absence so that any differences in outcomes could be attributed to AFLOs. However, in one of six school cohorts that make up the main analysis, this assumption did not hold which reduces the confidence in results reflecting a true causal effect of AFLOs. There was also some qualitative evidence suggesting that schools may have been categorised into the incorrect group due to schools using different job titles for AFLOs.

Additional findings

In the main, the impact evaluation findings suggest that the effectiveness of introducing an AFLO in of itself was very limited. There is also uncertainty surrounding impact at given points in time in that possible estimates include null, positive, and negative effects. However, it is worth noting that average impacts were calculated across school cohorts, defined by academic year of AFLO introduction, which masks variation. The impact's sign and magnitude, and its trajectory over time, were often found to vary depending on the cohort observed.

The impact evaluation found no conclusive evidence of impact on the secondary outcomes of overall absence rate, unauthorised absence rate, and fixed-term exclusions in either the pre- or post-COVID period.

The analysis of the determinants of hiring AFLOs showed that they were more likely to be introduced in schools which had fewer teachers relative to the number of pupils, were larger, had more serious attendance issues, and/or higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils.

The IPE identified considerable variation in the role and responsibilities of AFLOs, but core functions were typically monitoring attendance, providing tailored support to pupils, and supporting the development of policies on attendance. Some AFLOs also provided referrals to internal and external support, delivered training and support for all pupils to encourage attendance, and provided incentives for good attendance. AFLOs were perceived by schools to have the greatest impact when providing tailored support to pupils.

Exploratory analysis conducted on a small sub-sample of schools suggest that the effectiveness of AFLOs may be moderated by the specific tasks they do within the school that hired them. Schools with AFLOs that conducted more executive and strategic tasks, such as undertaking home visits, addressing barriers to attendance and designing strategies to manage attendance, had lower rates of persistence absence and higher attendance than those with AFLOs that conducted administrative tasks (such as attendance monitoring) only. Schools also emphasised that AFLO effectiveness depended on senior leadership support, quality attendance data systems, and integration with other staff. These conditions, as well as AFLO responsibilities, likely varied across both individual schools and cohort years, potentially explaining why some cohorts showed positive impacts while others did not, as well as the limited impact of AFLOs overall.

The IPE findings align with broader evidence on attendance interventions suggesting that relationship-based, individualised approaches can be effective for reducing absenteeism, particularly for pupils with complex needs. The importance of trust and non-punitive engagement, emphasised by AFLOs in the case studies, is consistent with evidence on trauma-informed and restorative approaches to attendance. However, the modest and inconsistent impacts observed raise questions about whether dedicated attendance officers alone are sufficient to address persistent absence without broader systemic changes within schools.

Cost

The cost evaluation produced an annual cost range for employing an attendance and family liaison officer through analysis of 61 job adverts from across the UK and interviews with 12 case study school. The indicative costs in employing an AFLO are a first-year cost of £40,500 to £54,500 (covering recruitment and equipment) and subsequent annual costs of £33,500 to £45,000 (primarily covering salary and attendance interventions). In the four case study schools that did not employ AFLOs, this funding was instead used for pastoral staff (average costs £28,000 to £38,000) or teacher assistant staff (average costs £23,000 to £27,000). Additionally, some schools invested AFLO costs into incentives for good attendance, such as enrichment or sports activities.

Impact

Table 2: Summary of impact on the primary outcome

Outcome / group	Effect size in percentage points (95% confidence interval)	Effect interpretation	EEF security rating	No. of pupils	P-value
Persistent absence across all pupils in the pre-COVID period (same academic year)	-0.11 (-0.21, <-0.01) ppts	In a school of 1,000 pupils, this equates to one less pupil being persistently absent at the end of the same academic year	🔒🔒🔒	The number of pupils varied depending on the cross section used, ranging from 529,940 (in the academic year 2013/2014) to 553,480 (2018/2019)	0.043
Persistent absence across all pupils in the pre-COVID period (after one year)	0.06 (-0.08, 0.20) ppts	In a school of 1,000 pupils, this equates to one more pupil being persistently absent (if rounded up to 0.1) after one year	🔒🔒🔒		0.376
Persistent absence across all pupils in the pre-COVID period (after two years)	-0.12 (-0.27, 0.03) ppts	In a school of 1,000 pupils, this equates to one less pupil being persistently absent after two years	🔒🔒🔒		0.131
Persistent absence across all pupils in the post-COVID period	0.06 (-1.63, 1.75) ppts	In a school of 1,000 pupils, this equates to one more pupil being persistently absent (if rounded up to 0.1) at the end of the same academic year	🔒🔒🔒	150,300	0.946

Introduction

Background

Developing a school culture that encourages attendance is a critical precursor for pupil achievement. Every year, over 1% of school sessions are missed due to unauthorised absences, and this percentage rose in the four years prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (DfE, 2022). In the academic year 2018/2019, the unauthorised absence rate in state-funded secondary schools was 1.5%, increasing to 3.2% in the academic year 2023/2024 (DfE, 2024a). In the academic year 2022/2023, over one in five pupils were classified as persistently absent, and this is an issue that disproportionately affects pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who were nearly twice as likely to be persistently absent than their classmates (EEF, 2024). According to the Department for Education (DfE) (DfE, 2022), absence and persistence absence rates are highest in secondary education, particularly for pupils in Years 10–11 (Key Stage 4, concerning pupils aged 14 to 16).

Absence rates also vary considerably by ethnicity. For example, in 2023/2024, pupils from Gypsy, Roma, and Irish Traveller Heritage minority ethnic groups had the highest overall absence rates at 22.1% and 17.6%, respectively, compared to a national average of 7.1%. Persistent absence rates for these groups were particularly stark at 70.2% and 62.7%, respectively. In contrast, pupils from Chinese and Black African minority ethnic groups had the lowest overall absence rates at 3.3% and 4.0%, and the lowest persistent absence rates at around 6% and 12%, respectively (DfE, 2025a). Analysis by the Education Policy Institute has highlighted that absence rates for pupils from Gypsy, Roma, and Irish Traveller Heritage ethnic minorities were high before the pandemic and have increased further, driven predominantly by unauthorised absences (GOV.UK, 2024).

The intersections between education and criminal justice systems create a ‘school-to-prison pipeline’ where excluded pupils are four times more likely to be jailed as adults, and, for example, 78% of Gypsy, Roma, and Irish Traveller Heritage boys in Young Offender Institutions previously experienced school exclusion (The Traveller Movement, 2022). These patterns reflect not individual deficits but structural racism operating through resource allocation, disciplinary practices, curriculum design, and decision-making at every institutional level.

Absenteeism is associated with a range of life-course problems, with multiple risk factors contributing to absenteeism and dropout. According to a meta-analytic review of 75 studies by Gubbles, van der Put, and Assink (2019), significant risk factors for absenteeism include negative attitudes toward school, substance abuse, emotional and behavioural problems, and limited parent–school engagement. Furthermore, absenteeism itself can lead to long-term social and economic consequences such as lower educational attainment, which is strongly associated with employment instability and lower earnings (Belfield and Levin, 2007; Oreopoulos and Salvanes, 2011; Chetty, Friedman, and Rockoff, 2014), increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system (Harlow, 2003; Gottfredson and Soule, 2005; Henry and Huizinga, 2007; Kearney and Graczyk, 2020), and poorer health outcomes (Forrest *et al.,* 2013; Basch, 2011; Lester and Michelson, 2024). High absenteeism can also have generational consequences, as children of parents with low educational attainment or economic instability are more likely to face similar challenges, creating a cycle of economic and educational disadvantage (Alexander, Entwiste, and Horsey, 1997; Chang and Romero, 2008; Gershenson, Jacknowitz, and Brannegan, 2017).

Improving school attendance and reducing absenteeism has increasingly become a policy priority for successive Governments in England since COVID-19. In 2024 (after this study commenced), new regulations were introduced to require state schools to share daily attendance registers to enable better monitoring of attendance across England. A national framework on fines for unauthorised absences was introduced, increasing the fine to parents whose children missed five days of school for unauthorised absences from £60 to £80 (DfE, 2025b). Statutory Guidance on ‘Working together to improve school attendance’ was issued in August 2024, ahead of the 2024/2025 academic year, to clarify expectations of schools, governing bodies, academy trust boards, and local authorities on the matter (DfE, 2024b). In discussing the members of the school staff who may be responsible for attendance or an Education Supervision Order, the Statutory Guidance mentions the term ‘attendance officer’ twice, although the role is not explained or defined further.

Strategies to monitor and manage attendance vary substantially across schools. A Rapid Evidence Assessment[2] conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in 2022 to examine interventions aimed at increasing school attendance identified a range of approaches to tackling barriers to attendance, such as teaching socio-emotional skills, meal provision, parental engagement, and responsive/targeted approaches (see Patel *et al.,* 2022). However, the EEF's systematic assessment revealed a significant gap in research on strategies commonly employed in English schools to tackle absenteeism, including the use of attendance and family liaison officers (AFLOs).

In addition to a lack of evidence on the impact of AFLOs, there is limited information on how AFLOs are used in practice (i.e. their specific tasks and responsibilities), the reasons schools hire them, and their prevalence in English secondary schools. The limited information that is available on this topic predominantly comes from smaller scale projects, with most examples originating outside the UK.

This study employs an integrated evaluation design, combining a quasi-experimental impact evaluation with an implementation and process evaluation (IPE). The quasi-experimental design provided evidence on the extent to which the intervention influences attendance outcomes, drawing on comparison groups to estimate impact in the absence of randomisation. While not as strong in internal validity as a randomised controlled trial, quasi-experimental methods represent the most rigorous and feasible approach in this context, given the ethical and practical constraints of educational settings.

Alongside this, the IPE examined how the intervention is enacted in practice, assessing fidelity of delivery, variation between schools, and the contextual factors that enable or constrain effectiveness. Integrating both components ensures that the study can go beyond establishing whether the intervention is associated with improvements in attendance to also understand the mechanisms of change, the conditions under which it is most successful, and the reasons that effects may differ across groups.

This combined design is particularly well-suited to addressing the current evidence gap surrounding attendance interventions in English secondary schools. It balances the need for credible causal inference with the generation of practical insights for policy and practice, providing the strongest possible basis for assessing both the impact and the implementation of the intervention.

Choice

The intervention being evaluated is the introduction of AFLOs in English state secondary schools. AFLOs are expected to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour in that they are specialised staff dedicated to attendance management and family engagement. A Theory of Change (ToC) and logic model for the intervention is presented in Figure 1.

The logic model includes the following elements:

- **Inputs.** Resources needed for AFLOs to be hired and able to operate (e.g. financial resources to hire AFLOs, support from other school staff, attendance data, and a system to monitor these data).
- **Activities.** What AFLOs do to tackle absenteeism, which includes core activities (monitoring and analysing attendance data, and liaising with pupils, pupils' families/carers, other school staff, and other stakeholders) and optional activities, which vary across schools (e.g. signposting suitable support, designing attendance interventions, and providing pastoral care to pupils).
- **Outcomes.** We can distinguish between immediate- and longer-term outcomes:

[2] The review considered impact evaluations published since the year 2000 that employed either a randomised controlled trial or quasi-experimental design methodology.

- The **immediate outcomes** that AFLOs are expected to help achieve are as follows:
    - **Increased pupils' motivation.** The key mechanism through which motivation can be increased is *connectedness* (connectedness is the state achieved by pupils when they feel that adults and peers care about their learning, feel supported, and have a sense of belonging to the school).
    - **Increased family engagement** with the education system. The mechanism here is *trust*. Family trust may, in turn, increase (and act as a mediator for) pupils' motivation. AFLOs may gain pupils' trust directly, without having to gain their family's trust first. Therefore, trust can be seen either as an enabler of pupils' motivation or a separate mechanism (unmotivated pupils can still have trust in AFLOs).
    - **Reduced workload for other staff**. This may happen if AFLOs take over some of the tasks that were (prior to the AFLOs' introduction) delivered by other school staff. This outcome would not apply to schools who hired AFLOs for other reasons than staff workload management.
- The **longer-term outcomes** expected to be achieved thanks to AFLOs, and which are affected by the immediate outcomes, are:
    - **Reduced absenteeism** (specifically, this evaluation explores the extent to which introducing AFLOs reduces a pupil's overall or unauthorised absence rate, and lowers the proportion of pupils defined as persistently absent from schools).
    - **Improved behaviour** (the evaluation focuses on the proportion of pupils receiving fixed-term exclusions).

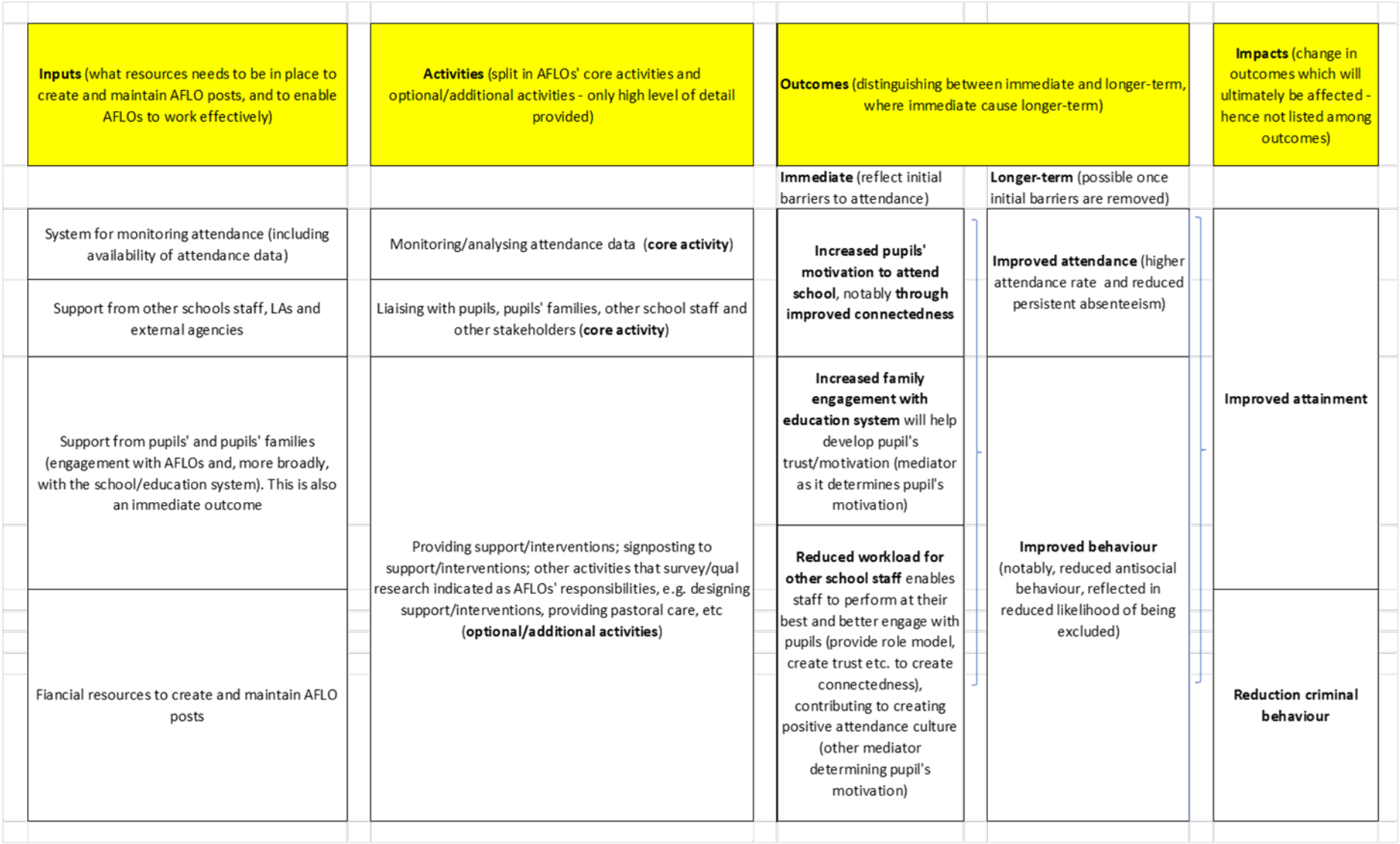
- The ultimate goal **(impact)** of AFLOs is improving pupils' attainment and reducing pupils' anti-social behaviour (however, exploring this is out of scope for this evaluation).
- **Mechanisms enabling AFLOs' impact.** The key impact mechanisms involve the possible ways in which AFLOs create and improve pupils' **connectedness** and **motivation**, and create **trust** between pupils and their families. The extent of pupils' connectedness crucially depends, among other things, on the pupil's family's engagement with the education system/school, which in turn depends on the family and pupil trust in AFLOs. If AFLOs serve as life or role models for, and build strong relationship with pupils, this should motivate pupils, thereby triggering connectedness.

The ToC also identified two potential **impact moderators**:

- other school attendance policies, practices, and culture; and
- extent of support that AFLOs receive from, or AFLOs' interaction with, school leadership/other staff.

These moderators can be seen as the basic conditions for an impact from AFLOs to materialise (e.g. AFLOs are successful in addressing school absenteeism only when schools adopt other attendance policies). Alternatively, they represent the determinants of the magnitude of this impact. For example, an AFLO may be effective in engaging pupils and families, but other critical aspects that contribute to pupil attendance and behaviour (e.g. developing trust towards schools) may require involvement from teachers and/or other school staff. This means that while AFLOs may exert a positive impact on attendance, this impact would be limited without the support of school colleagues.

Figure 1: AFLO ToC



Evaluation objectives

This study aims to address the following evidence gaps:

- **Existence and effectiveness of key AFLO models**. There is a need to identify the breadth of distinct AFLO models (i.e. different ways of using AFLOs in schools, as reflected by different combinations of tasks assigned to AFLOs), and determine whether some of these models are more effective than others in reducing absenteeism.

- **The reasons for employing AFLOs**. The decision to use or introduce AFLOs is likely to be determined by specific school characteristics and contextual factors. These determinants need to be explored in more depth, as understanding selection bias (and taking it into account in the estimation process) is key for achieving unbiased estimates of the impact of AFLOs.

- **Prevalence and trends on the usage of AFLOs**. There is a need to accurately determine the prevalence of AFLOs in English secondary schools and how this has evolved over time.

- **The impact of employing AFLOs**. The chief aim of this study is establishing the causal effect of introducing AFLOs on pupils' attendance and behaviour. Aspects of interest around impact concern:

    - **Impact size**. Extent to which AFLOs improve attendance and behaviour.

    - **Impact timing**. How long it takes for the impact to materialise.

    - **Impact variation over time**. Whether AFLOs were more effective prior to the COVID-19 pandemic or after it.

    - **Impact heterogeneity**. Understand whether AFLOs are more effective in addressing absenteeism for some pupil subgroups compared to others, notably, those eligible for free school meals (FSM) compared to those not eligible for FSM, and those from a minority ethnic group compared to those of White ethnicity.

- **Impact moderators.** Factors that enable the AFLO impact to materialise or be amplified. These include other school policies or practices to tackle absenteeism, and support from and interactions with other members of school staff.

- At a broad level, the **costs incurred** by schools in employing AFLOs.

Nine research questions (RQs) were developed to meet the evaluation objectives, and the complementary information gathered from the impact evaluation and IPE are presented in the analytical framework illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Analytical framework

RQ	Evidence sources
RQ1: What is the impact of a school introducing one or more AFLOs on pupil attendance and behaviour?	<u>Impact evaluation</u> Estimate impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre- and post-COVID period on: • likelihood of a pupil being persistently absent (primary outcome) • overall absence rate (secondary outcome) • unauthorised absence rate (secondary outcome) • likelihood of a pupil receiving one/more fixed-term exclusions (secondary outcome) <u>IPE</u> We will explore the following questions: • What are the perceived effects of AFLO activities in reducing absenteeism? • What activities do AFLOs deliver? • What do school leaders want AFLOs to do? • perceptions of teachers and support staff on the quality of AFLO activities • pupil and parent/carer views on the quality of AFLO activities • How do AFLOs reduce absenteeism?

RQ	Evidence sources
	By collecting: • pupil views on how AFLO activities affect aspects of their connectedness with schools • AFLO views on why they deliver certain activities and the benefits they bring • senior leader views on what they did prior to having AFLOs/what they would do if they did not have AFLOs • teachers' and support staff's views on the effectiveness of alternatives to AFLOs
RQ2 (Time for impact to materialise): When is impact (if any) observed after AFLOs are introduced?	Impact evaluation Estimate impact zero, one, and two years after AFLO introduction (pre-COVID period) Estimate impact zero years after (post-COVID period) By 'impact zero years after' we mean an impact experienced in the same academic year AFLOs are introduced in the school. As we do not know when exactly in a given academic year AFLOs are introduced in a school (this information is not available), and as different schools introduce their AFLOs at different points in time, an 'immediate impact' represents an impact experienced after a period of between 0 and 190 school days (or between 0 and 365 calendar days). IPE • AFLO, senior leader, teacher, and support staff views on the time required to successfully manage attendance issues, i.e. time to establish trust, connect, motivate, etc. • pupil and parent/carer views on the length of interventions to address absenteeism • AFLO, senior leader, teacher, and support view on the differing levels of support required to address absenteeism among pupils with differing levels of needs
RQ3 (Time effects): Does impact vary depending on the academic year in which attendance officers were introduced?	Impact evaluation Estimate impact of hiring AFLOs in academic year 2012/2013 to 2018/2019; and 2022/2023 IPE • AFLO, senior leader, teacher, and support staff views on the effect of COVID on the effectiveness of AFLO activities • pupil and parent/carer views on factors affecting attendance during the pandemic, and how easy they are to resolve
RQ4: Does impact on primary outcome (persistent absence) vary depending on the pupil's FSM status?	Impact evaluation Estimate and compare impacts on the primary outcome (persistent absence) for pupils eligible and non-eligible for FSM IPE • triangulated AFLO, senior leader, teacher, and support staff views on the factors that result in absenteeism for particular groups of pupils, and how this differs for FSM and non-FSM-eligible pupils • pupil and parent/carer views on the factors that influence absenteeism, and how this varies by families' circumstances
RQ5: Does impact for the primary outcome (persistent absence) vary depending on the pupil's ethnicity?	Impact evaluation Estimate and compare impacts on the primary outcome (persistent absence) for different ethnic subgroups (White, Asian, Black, Mixed, and Other) IPE Triangulated AFLO, senior leader, teacher, and support staff views on how factors affecting absenteeism varies by ethnicity, and the reasons why
RQ6: What are the AFLO models that are most effective in tackling absenteeism?	Impact evaluation Descriptive analysis (outcome trajectories) for key AFLO models, based on survey data linked to admin (National Pupil Database [NPD] and School Workforce Census [SWC]) data. Indicative of differential impacts. IPE • AFLO and senior leader descriptions of the activities that AFLOs deliver • comparative analysis of the similarities and differences in AFLO roles and responsibilities across the case study schools, including how they interact with other school staff • triangulated AFLO, school leader, teacher, support staff, pupils, and parent/carer views on the effectiveness of particular activities and trigger points • triangulated AFLO, school leader, teacher, and support staff view on how AFLOs work with other school staff • triangulated school leader, AFLO, teacher, support staff, pupil, and parent/carer views on the effect of AFLO models have on the prioritisation/leadership/visibility of attendance policies and procedures within an institution • triangulated school leader, AFLO, teacher, support staff, pupil, and parent/carer views on the effect AFLOs have on the breadth of at-risk pupils that can be supported

RQ	Evidence sources
RQ7: What are the determinants of hiring AFLOs?	Impact evaluation Logit/probit regressions to explore determinants of hiring AFLOs (focus on determinants considered as impact confounders, i.e. also affect outcomes). These include past values of outcomes (school-level attendance indicators) IPE • explored unobservable determinants, i.e. those not captured by existing data (notably, how schools attendance policies/strategies affect decision to hire AFLOs) • senior leader, teacher, and support staff view on how the policies they have in place to support attendance affect the decision to hire/do not hire AFLOs
RQ8: Are there factors which enhance (allow for or increase) AFLO's impact?	Impact evaluation Explore whether data exist to capture two key impact moderators: i) interactions of AFLOs with other school staff; and ii) other attendance policies implemented by schools IPE • explore aspects around interactions of AFLOs with other school staff and other attendance policies used by schools (likely not captured by existing quantitative data) • AFLO, senior leader, teacher, and support staff views on the contextual factors that can influence the effectiveness of AFLO actions (notably, their view on how/whether the policies schools have in place to support attendance are better handled by AFLOs than other staff and/or whether AFLOs are more effective when such policies are already in place)
RQ9: What are the costs incurred in employing (recruiting and using) AFLOs?	Cost evaluation Explore both monetary costs (e.g. salaries and on-costs) and in-kind costs (time and cost for other school staff) incurred by schools to using AFLOs. Opportunity costs are examined by identifying what schools without AFLOs have done instead of employing AFLOs

Ethics and evaluation registration

The project was conducted in accordance with the ICF Europe and Asia Research Ethics Policy. Due diligence assessed the project safeguarding risk to be high since data collection involves potentially sensitive topics with children at risk of exclusion. To mitigate against these safeguarding risks, the ICF research staff who undertook research with children and on sensitive topics had Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service clearance and had completed training in safeguarding, research ethics, and undertaking qualitative research with children and vulnerable adults.

For this project, specific researcher briefing was held prior to commencement of fieldwork, where researchers were briefed on expectations and processes to mitigate safeguarding risks discussed here. The ICF qualitative lead also conducted frequent team meetings during the fieldwork stage to review safeguarding risks and mitigations.

For each school selected, the school and local authority safeguarding lead contacts were identified and included in the researcher briefing material. ICF researchers also discussed with the school arrangements for research with pupils to ensure that these are held in supervised environments minimising safeguarding risks.

Informed consent was gathered from all interviewees, including pupils, AFLOs, headteachers, deputy heads, or another member of the senior leadership team (SLT) with responsibility for attendance. Informed consent is the voluntary agreement to participate in research, based upon a full understanding of the nature and purpose of the research and of the ways in which the findings of the research overall and from individuals' contributions will be used.

The study plan for this evaluation (Salis *et al.,* 2024) was registered on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/3ug9c).

Data protection

ICF and the EEF were both independent data controllers for the project. ICF and Robert Wishart Consultancy were also the data processors.

The legal basis for processing personal data was covered by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Article 6 (1) (f):

> 'Processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party except where such interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection of the personal data.' (GDPR, 2016)

An assessment of legitimate interests conducted by ICF identified that the research reflected ICF's core function of research and consultancy services. The study was also found to provide substantial societal benefits in improving the lives of individuals by increasing attendance in schools, which in turn increases educational outcomes. The need to improve attendance is also a substantial policy priority for the DfE. The potential risk to the rights and freedoms of the data subjects was assessed to be low, since the research is not being used in ways that have a negative impact on data subjects.

No interviewee names or school names were published as part of the research. Any personal data collected from the research will not be shared with any other third parties.

Data used during analysis was anonymised, and in most cases aggregated. All data was secured securely on ICF surveys with access only granted to approved team members through UserID/Password that have the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research Service (SRS) status.

At the end of the study the data will be stored in the EEF data archive. This data will be pseudo-anonymised to preserve data subject to privacy.

Data on ICF will remain on ICF servers until the results have been completely analysed. Then the collected personal data and all information related to the interviews will be erased, in agreement with the EEF.

Project team

The project team is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Project team

Name	Institution	Staff responsible/ leading
Ali Zaidi	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Project director
Sergio Salis	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Project manager and impact evaluation lead
Steph Charalambous	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	IPE lead
Jorge Alejandro Corti	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Data analyst
Hadisa Awan	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	IPE coordinator
Aisha Ahmad	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Qualitative research
Evelyn Jager	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Qualitative research
Lauren Oddy	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Qualitative research
Amy Doan	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Qualitative research
Izabela Jamrozik	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Qualitative research
Ugne Litvinaite	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Qualitative research
Ellie Kettle	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Qualitative research
Sukey Robertson-Shore	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	Qualitative research
Calvin Ho	ICF Consulting Services Ltd	School recruitment
Robert Wishart	ICF Associate	Data analyst
Triin Edovald	ICF Associate	Expert advisor
Matteo Sandi	London School of Economics and Political Science	Expert advisor

Methods

Scoping phase

Between November 2022 and March 2024, the research team conducted a scoping phase to understand how AFLOs are used in English secondary schools, and to assess whether a robust impact evaluation would be feasible. The scoping phase employed a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research.

The following methods were used in this phase:

- The team analysed 61 job advertisements for 'attendance officer' and similar positions collected in December 2022 from various recruitment websites (including TES, Jooble, and Glassdoor) to identify the range of AFLO tasks and responsibilities.

- A short online survey was distributed to 2,363 randomly selected English secondary schools. The survey targeted headteachers or SLT members responsible for attendance policy. Out of 2,363 schools contacted, 253 completed the survey, with 200 providing information about AFLO use. To encourage participation, a £100 voucher was offered to five schools, randomly extracted among all the schools which responded to the survey. Analysis confirmed that responding schools were representative of the broader school population across key characteristics including school type, Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) ratings, location, size, FSM-eligibility rates, and absence rates.

- The team conducted interviews with headteachers and SLT members to explore decision-making processes around AFLO employment, intervention triggers, and how attendance responsibilities are distributed among staff.

- The team analysed data from the SWC and NPD covering 2,860 English secondary schools over eight years (2014/2015 to 2021/2022). This analysis examined trends in AFLO employment, identified school characteristics associated with AFLO use, and tested the key assumptions required for a difference-in-differences (DiD) impact evaluation approach.

The job advertisement analysis revealed both common patterns and significant variation in AFLO roles. Core tasks appearing in nearly all positions included monitoring attendance data and liaising with pupils, families, and school staff. However, additional responsibilities varied considerably. Some AFLOs conducted home visits or issued penalty notices, while others promoted attendance school-wide, provided pastoral support, or designed attendance strategies. This variation suggested AFLOs could serve in administrative, delivery, or strategic capacities or combinations thereof. However, ambiguous terms like 'liaison' made it difficult to develop a precise typology of AFLO models.

AFLOs typically began working with pupils when attendance fell below a specific threshold or when staff, parents/carers, or guardians requested intervention. These reactive rather than proactive triggers raised concerns: for most schools, the threshold was set at 'less than 90% attendance', meaning pupils were already classified as persistently absent (having missed 10% or more of sessions) before AFLO intervention began.

Interviews revealed that many schools operated tiered intervention systems. Initial attendance drops triggered teacher involvement, further declines prompted head of year conversations, and only severe problems, often below the persistent absence threshold, escalated to AFLOs. This meant AFLOs often addressed issues that were already serious, suggesting some schools might benefit from earlier AFLO intervention.

The scoping phase produced two different prevalence estimates. The school survey suggested 88.5% of English secondary schools employed AFLOs in 2022/2023. However, administrative data from the SWC indicated 52.3% of schools used AFLOs in 2021/2022 (the most recent year available). The research team concluded the survey likely overestimated prevalence due to response bias—schools with AFLOs may have been more likely to respond to an AFLO-focused survey. Based on the more reliable census data, the team estimated approximately 85 schools would have introduced AFLOs for

the first time in 2022/2023, while around 740 schools would never have used AFLOs throughout the study period. These figures provided sufficient sample sizes for a robust impact evaluation.

Survey findings suggested schools employed AFLOs primarily to address attendance issues caused by school anxiety and health problems. Schools with higher proportions of FSM-eligible pupils were more likely to use AFLOs. The administrative data confirmed that schools serving more disadvantaged populations (with larger numbers of FSM-eligible pupils, pupils from minority ethnic groups, Children in Need, or Looked After Children) were more likely to introduce AFLOs.

Notably, pre-existing absence rates did not predict AFLO introduction, suggesting schools used different criteria when deciding whether to employ AFLOs rather than simply responding to high absence rates.

The scoping phase's most critical output was confirming that a rigorous impact evaluation was feasible. The research team identified a DiD as the most appropriate methodology. A randomised controlled trial was impractical because many schools already employed AFLOs and staffing randomisation raised operational and ethical concerns. Other quasi-experimental approaches lacked suitable instruments or arbitrary cut-off rules. Crucially, the administrative data analysis demonstrated that the parallel trends assumption—the key requirement for DiD—was plausible. Schools introducing AFLOs for the first time in 2021/2022 and schools, which never used AFLOs up to the same academic year exhibited similar historical attendance patterns before AFLO introduction, providing evidence that the approach would produce valid causal estimates.

Based on these findings, the research team concluded that proceeding to a full evaluation phase was warranted, combining an impact evaluation using administrative data with an IPE using school case studies to provide robust evidence on whether AFLOs improve pupil outcomes and how they work most effectively.

Impact evaluation design

Overview

The intervention being evaluated concerns the introduction of AFLOs by English state secondary schools as a strategy for managing attendance. The treatment of interest (introduction of AFLOs for the first time) is therefore, defined at the school level. As such, we distinguish between:

- **Treated schools.** A school is said to be treated in a given academic year if, in that year, it hired one or more AFLOs, having never used AFLOs in previous academic years.

- **Untreated schools**. A school is said to be untreated if, in a given academic year, it did not hire one or more AFLOs, having never used AFLOs in previous academic years.

More formally, regarding the data used to define a school's AFLO status, we classify a school as an AFLO school in a given academic year if, according to SWC data, at least one member of its staff is recorded as having had an 'attendance officer' or 'home-school liaison officer' role. If, according to SWC data, no member of the school staff covers such a role in that year, then we classify that school as non-AFLO school.

The IPE research indicated that some schools had been given the authority by their local authority to initiate penalty notice procedures themselves (rather than referring cases to the local authority). In these schools, the AFLO function was assigned to education and welfare officers (EWOs). The sample sizes (number of schools) available for analysis after redefining schools' AFLO status by including also their members of staff who were classified as 'EWOs' in the SWC is discussed in the 'Robustness checks and sensitivity analysis' section, alongside the implications for the impact estimates.

We refer to **treated pupils** as those pupils who are enrolled in a treated school, and to **untreated pupils** as those pupils who are enrolled in an untreated school. The impact analysis explored whether a pupil enrolled in a school that starts using one or more AFLOs in a given academic year experiences any attendance improvement as a direct result of introducing AFLOs.

The impact of introducing AFLOs is estimated, separately, for the **pre- and post-COVID periods**. The pre-COVID impact analysis explores the impact of introducing AFLOs in any academic year between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019 while the post-COVID impact analysis explores the impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023. Exploring the impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period is important in that it may provide an indication of the size and timing of the impact that should be expected in the post-COVID period.

A **DiD approach** was used to estimate one Average Treatment effect on the Treated (ATT) **parameter** for the post-COVID analysis (which relied on data for the academic years 2020/2021 to 2022/2023), and a set of ATT parameters for the pre-COVID analysis (which used data for the academic years 2012/2013 to 2018/2019). Each ATT denotes the impact of introducing AFLOs for the first time (the 'treatment') in a given academic year (by-cohort impact), or aggregated across all the academic years considered (average impact across multiple cohorts), on a primary outcome or any of the secondary outcomes for pupils in schools that introduced AFLOs (pupils are the unit being 'treated'). The school-level characteristics to be controlled for in the DiD analysis were identified through probit regression analysis, which explored the selection mechanism.

The impact evaluation designs for the pre- and post-COVID period are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Impact evaluation design

Evaluation design		**Pre-COVID analysis:** Staggered DiD (repeated cross-sections of pupils) **Post-COVID analysis:** Non-staggered DiD (balanced panel of pupils)
Unit of analysis		Pupil, aged between 11 and 16 (in Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4)
Number of units included in analysis		**Pre-COVID analysis:** The number of pupils varies depending on the cross section used: it ranges from 529,940 (in the academic year 2013/2014) to 553,480 (2018/2019) **Post-COVID analysis:** 150,300 pupils
Primary outcome	Variable	Whether a pupil was persistently absent from school in a given academic year between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019 (pre-COVID analysis) or in 2022/2023 (post-COVID analysis)
	Measure (instrument, scale, source)	Coded as 1 if a pupil missed 10% or more of all possible school sessions in the academic year, or 0 otherwise; *Source:* NPD
Secondary outcome(s)	Variable(s)	Pupil's overall absence rate, unauthorised absence rate, and whether they received one/more fixed-term exclusions in a given academic year between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019 (pre-COVID analysis) or in 2022/2023 (post-COVID analysis)
	Measure(s) (instrument, scale, source)	Overall absence rate: Percentage of sessions missed (authorised or unauthorised) by a pupil in the academic year Unauthorised absence rate: Percentage of sessions missed through unauthorised absences only by a pupil in the academic year Whether pupil received one/more fixed-term exclusions: Coded as 1 if the pupil received one/more fixed-term exclusions in the academic year, or 0 otherwise; *Source:* NPD
Baseline for primary outcome	Variable	**Pre-COVID analysis:** Whether a pupil was persistently absent in the academic year prior to the academic year in which AFLOs are introduced in their school (six AFLO introduction years: 2013/2014 to 2018/2019) **Post-COVID analysis:** Whether a pupil was persistently absent in the academic year 2021/2022
	Measure (instrument, scale, source)	**Pre-COVID analysis:** Coded as 1 if a pupil was persistently absent in the academic year prior to the academic year in which AFLOs are introduced in their school, or 0 otherwise **Post-COVID analysis:** Coded as 1 if a pupil was persistently absent in the academic year 2021/2022, or 0 otherwise

		Source: NPD
Baseline for secondary outcome(s)	Variable	**Pre-COVID analysis:** Pupil's overall absence rate, unauthorised absence rate, and whether they received one/more fixed-term exclusions in the academic year prior to the academic year in which AFLOs are introduced in their school (six AFLO introduction years: 2013/2014 to 2018/2019) **Post-COVID analysis:** Pupil's overall absence rate, unauthorised absence rate, and whether they received one/more fixed-term exclusions in the academic year 2021/2022
	Measure (instrument, scale, source)	**Pre-COVID analysis:** Overall absence rate: Percentage of sessions missed (authorised or unauthorised) by a pupil in the academic year prior to the academic year in which AFLOs are introduced in their school Unauthorised absence rate: Percentage of sessions missed (unauthorised only) by a pupil in the academic year prior to the academic year in which AFLOs are introduced in their school Whether pupil received one/more fixed-term exclusions: Coded as 1 if the pupil received one/more fixed-term exclusions in the academic year prior to the academic year in which AFLOs are introduced in their school, or 0 otherwise **Post-COVID analysis:** Overall absence rate: Percentage of sessions missed (authorised or unauthorised) by a pupil in the academic year 2021/2022 Unauthorised absence rate: Percentage of sessions missed (unauthorised only) by a pupil in the academic year 2021/2022 Whether pupil received one/more fixed-term exclusions: Coded as 1 if the pupil received one/more fixed-term exclusions in the academic year 2021/2022, or 0 otherwise *Source:* NPD

Key design features

The pupils included in the impact analysis are those enrolled in treated or untreated English state secondary schools during the study period, which includes the academic years 2012/2013 to 2018/2019 for the pre-COVID analysis, and the academic years 2020/2021 to 2022/2023 for the post-COVID analysis.

The age of pupils in the pre- and post-COVID period varies, as explained below:

- **For the pre-COVID analysis** (which uses a **repeated cross section of pupils**), all pupils aged 11–16 (in school Years 7 to 11) are included in **each** academic year. Consequently, some pupils will be observed in different cross-sections or academic years (e.g. a pupil aged 15 in the academic year 2015/2016 may also be observed in the academic year 2016/2017 when they are 16 years old).

- **The post-COVID analysis** (which uses a **balanced panel of pupils**) includes pupils who are in Years 7, 8, and 9 (aged 11–12 to 13–14) in the academic year 2020/2021. These pupils will be tracked longitudinally for two more academic years (in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023). Therefore, the same pupils will be observed over time (e.g. a pupil aged 11 in the first year will be aged 13 in the third year).

Regardless of whether the analysis was balanced or not (repeated cross-sections) in terms of pupils, the number of treated and untreated schools observed over the study period remained constant.

Special schools have been excluded from the analysis because the cohort of pupils that study at these institutions (pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities [SEND] that require substantial support) are not comparable to the cohort of pupils in mainstream schools. Information about whether a school introduced one or more AFLOs or not was available from the SWC, and data on pupils were sourced from the NPD. These datasets were accessed by Accredited Researchers in the project team via the SRS of the ONS.

Parallel trends assumption

The DiD approach provides unbiased estimates of the impact of a treatment only if the parallel trends assumption holds. This assumption postulates that, in the post-treatment period (i.e. in the period after AFLOs are introduced by schools), outcomes for treated and untreated schools would develop in a parallel fashion if AFLOs were not introduced. This assumption is untestable as the post-treatment outcome trend for treated schools in the absence of AFLO introduction is not observed. However, if parallel trends for the outcomes of treated and untreated schools are observed in the pre-treatment period, it is plausible to assume that the same trends would have continued in the post-treatment period in the absence of the AFLO introduction. The longer the pre-treatment period over which parallel trends are observed, the more credible the parallel trends assumption.

For the post-COVID analysis, the plausibility of the parallel trends test assumption was assessed by comparing the outcome trajectories of pupils in treated and untreated schools in the period prior to the academic year 2022/2023 (academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022; data for the academic year 2019/2020 were not available from the NPD to explore this assumption over a longer pre-treatment period).[3] For the pre-COVID analysis, the parallel trends were assessed, when possible, using three pre-treatment academic years (for some school cohorts only two pre-treatment academic years were used, and for the 2013/2014 cohort the assessment was not possible).

Selection mechanism

Identifying the school-level determinants of introducing AFLOs is important for two reasons. First, there is no empirical evidence about the reasons and circumstances that lead schools to introduce AFLOs. A general need to address pupil absenteeism is the most obvious reason, but it is not clear how schools assess this need in practice (i.e. what aspects they look at and/or which indicators they use) for the purpose of deciding whether they should hire AFLOs or not. Second, identifying the school-level determinants of introducing AFLOs is a necessary step to understand which covariates need to be controlled for in the DiD estimation to assess whether the parallel trends assumption is plausible. Only those covariates that differ between treated and untreated schools and are associated with outcome trends can be defined as impact confounders (Zeldow and Hatfield, 2021).

Since there is no past evidence to guide the selection of potential confounders, a data-driven approach was employed. To examine the factors influencing schools' decisions to hire AFLOs for the first time, we used a **probit model** in which the dependent variable is a binary indicator denoting whether a school started using AFLOs in a given academic year, after ascertaining that they never used AFLOs in the past. The independent variables are observed in the academic year prior to AFLO introduction for treated schools (for the post-COVID analysis this is the academic year 2021/2022) and in the same academic year (2021/2022), for untreated schools. They capture the following school features:

- school size (total number of pupils);
- school type (whether selective intake; and whether single academy trust or multi-academy trust [MAT]);
- school quality (Ofsted grades were not used due to limited variance—over the period, around 60–70% were graded good); however, we included two measures of financial resources: pupil to teacher ratio (all teachers where included) and pupil to qualified teacher ratio;
- school composition (headteacher tenure; ratio of the number of the school's Full Time Equivalent (FTE) members of staff who have a behaviour manager/specialist support, educational psychologist, learning

[3] Outcomes for the academic year 2019/2020 were not available from the NPD because the DfE suspended routine attendance data collection following school closures in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With schools physically closed to most pupils for the Spring Term and Summer Term, normal attendance recording was not possible, and any partial data collected would be incomparable to other academic years. The impact evaluation focused on this time span because it was sufficiently long to estimate impacts before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and provide historical data to ascertain the plausibility of the parallel trends assumption underpinning the estimation methodology.

mentor, pastoral support, therapist or welfare assistant role to the number of pupils—proxying the extent of other attendance policies);

- proportion of the school's pupils from White, Black, Asian, Mixed, and Other ethnicities;
- proportion of the school's pupils who are female;
- proportion of the school's pupils who were eligible for FSM in the last six years;
- proportion of the school's pupils defined as either Children in Need or Looked After Children; and
- proportions of the school's pupils in each of the ten mean Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) deciles.

We explored an alternative probit specification, which in addition to the aforementioned variables, also included the proportion of the school's pupils who were persistently absent, the average overall absence rate across all pupils in the school (the average pupil unauthorised absence rate was not used as it was highly correlated with the overall absence rate variable), and the proportion of the school's pupils who received one or more exclusions.

For the pre-COVID probit analysis, we also included a set of dummy variables denoting the academic year in which the school introduced/did not introduce AFLOs.

Outcome measures

The impact evaluation aims to assess the impact of a school introducing one or more AFLOs on the following pupil-level outcomes:

- **Likelihood of a pupil being persistently absent (primary outcome).** Having missed 10% or more of all possible sessions, with a session being a half-day in most schools (NPD variables used: Sessions_Possible3Ter; and Overall_Absence3Term).
- **Overall absence rate (secondary outcome).** Total number of sessions missed by a pupil (including both authorised or unauthorised absences) as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions available (NPD variables used: Sessions_Possible3Ter; and Overall_Absence3Term).[4]
- **Unauthorised absence rate (secondary outcome).** Total number of sessions missed by a pupil (unauthorised absence only) as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions available (NPD variables used: Sessions_Possible3Term; and Unauthorised_Absence3Term).
- **Likelihood of a pupil receiving one or more fixed-term exclusions (secondary outcome).** (NPD variable used Sessions_Tot).

As noted above, impact on these outcomes was assessed both in the pre-COVID (i.e. in any academic year between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019) and post-COVID (academic year 2022/2023) periods. The pre-COVID analysis assessed impact at the end of the same academic year AFLOs were introduced, after one year, and after two years. The post-COVID analysis assessed impact at the end of the same academic year only.

Statistical analysis

Implementation of the DiD estimation approach

The DiD designs for the pre- and post-COVID analyses used the same approach. The c*sdid* Stata programme was used to implement the doubly robust DiD estimator developed by Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021) and Sant'Anna and Zhao (2020).

[4] See DfE (2017) for the definition of pupil's overall absence rate.

The only difference between the two analyses was that the pre-COVID analysis reflected a staggered treatment adoption, whereas the post-COVID analysis focused on a single treatment period and two pre-treatment periods.

The Callaway and Sant'Anna's (2021) DiD estimator retrieves the following parameter:

$$ATT(g,t) = E[Yt(g) - Yt(0)|Gg = 1],$$

where g defines the time at which a school becomes treated (i.e. the academic year in which it introduces AFLOs for the first time), t defines the time in which the outcome is observed, and the term $E[Yt(g) - Yt(0)|Gg = 1]$ denotes the ATT, calculated at time t, for pupils who are enrolled in schools that introduced AFLOs in the time period g.

For example, for the **pre-COVID analysis**, for schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016 the three following impacts were estimated:

- $E[Y0(2015/16) - Y0(0)|G2015/16 = 1]$ denotes the impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/16 at t=0, that is, in the same year AFLO were hired.
- $E[Y1(2015/16) - Y1(0)|G2015/16 = 1]$ denotes the impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/16 at t=1 (one year later, i.e. in the academic year 2016/2017).
- $E[Y2(2015/16) - Y2(0)|G2015/16 = 1]$ denotes the impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/16 at t=2 (two years later, i.e. in the academic year 2017/2018).

The same logic applies to impacts estimated for schools that introduced AFLOs in an academic year other than 2015/2016.

The Callaway and Sant'Anna's (2021) DiD approach used for the **post-COVID analysis** more simply calculated the following impact:

$$E[Y0(2022/23) - Y0(0)|G2022/23 = 1],$$

which denotes the impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 at t=0 (i.e. in the same academic year 2022/2023, when AFLOs were first introduced in the schools).

In implementing the impact estimates we **clustered the standard errors at the level of schools** using cluster-robust standard errors. While the number of clusters was smaller than anticipated in the study plan (Salis *et al.,* 2024), it is still sufficiently large to provide valid inference.

Impacts on the **primary outcome** were evaluated using a **significance level (alpha) of 0.05**, with uncertainty in the estimates reported through 95% confidence intervals (CIs) and p-values.

When impacts on **secondary outcomes** were estimated, the **Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) step-up procedure** was applied to account for family-wise error rates (adding three secondary outcomes is equivalent to considering four outcomes in total). This procedure consists in sorting the impact estimates for the secondary outcomes in ascending p-value order, assigning an adjusted statistical significance level (the adjusted level for the first outcome is given by the standard significance level, 0.05, divided by 4, which is the total number of outcomes explored; the adjusted level for the second outcome is given by the standard significance level, 0.05, divided by 3 (4 minus 1, i.e. the remaining number of outcomes); and the adjusted level for the third outcome is given by the standard significance level, 0.05, divided by 2 (the remaining number of outcomes, i.e. 4 minus 2), and assessing whether the p-value for an estimate is lower than the adjusted statistical significance level (if it is, then the estimate is considered as statistically significant using the correction).

When the impact analysis was conducted on specific **subgroups** (pupils eligible/non-eligible for FSM or from a particular ethnicity), we only considered the primary outcome, and therefore the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) step-up procedure was not required.

IPE

Research methods

The IPE data collection aims to uncover the different mechanisms leading to impact and tests our ToC. It specifically provides more detail on the activities that AFLOs deliver and a more robust assessment of 'what works' through triangulating the views of AFLOs with those of senior school leaders, teachers, support staff, pupils, and parents/carers. It will also provide depth and detail of the AFLO job roles to test whether there are any distinct AFLO models. The RQs that the IPE is designed to answer are reported in Table 3.

Data for the IPE was collected through school case studies and insight interviews. Overall, we collected data from 23 state secondary schools in England. This comprised:

- Ten case studies with schools with AFLOs. In each case study we conducted between 4 and 17 interviews with a mix of school staff, parents/carers, and pupils.
- Two case studies with schools that did not have AFLO. In these case studies we conducted between 13 and 22 interviews.
- Nine insight interviews with one or two key staff responsible for attendance in schools with AFLOs. Here we conducted interviews with AFLOs and senior leaders in the school.
- Two insight interviews with schools without AFLOs. These interviews were conducted with a senior leader in the school with responsibility for attendance.

The study had originally aimed to conduct five case studies with schools that did not have AFLOs, However, there was a lack of interest among these schools for participating in the research and consequently only two were recruited. As a consequence, bilateral interviews were conducted with an additional two schools without AFLOs and nine schools with AFLOs.

In total, 174 school staff, parents/carers, and pupils were interviewed in the IPE. Pupils were engaged in small group discussions. A breakdown of the number of interviews conducted in AFLO and non-AFLO schools is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Number of interviews conducted in AFLO and non-AFLO schools

Stakeholder	AFLO school	Non-AFLO school
Senior leader	19	5
AFLO	27	–
Heads of year	14	6
Teaching staff	5	8
Pastoral/SEND/safeguarding staff	16	6
Administrative and support staff	2	2
Pupils	40	13
Parents/carers	6	5

Interview guides were developed for each stakeholder group, tailored to their roles and responsibilities. These include, AFLOs, SLTs, other supporting staff, and the pupils. Each were aligned to answer the IPE RQs identified from the scoping phase, with a particular focus of testing the causal mechanisms explaining the logic model and exploring moderators.

Pupils and parents/carers were selected that had recent experiences of the support delivered by AFLOs. This included those that had a sustained period of absence that required AFLO support, or those that were felt to be at risk of being persistently absent. Pupils and parents/carers were selected against these criteria by the case study schools. Given the limited sample size per case study, schools were not asked to select pupils by other characteristics, such as FSM-eligibility or ethnicity.

Researchers carried out the interviews in-person at the school or by telephone/Microsoft Teams, depending on the preference of the interviewee. With participants' permission, qualitative interviews conducted online were audio recorded.

Case study schools were initially identified from those that expressed an interest in participating in the research from the scoping stage school survey. Purposeful sampling was used to gather a wide range of school perspectives using against a range of criteria. A mix of schools were engaged, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Selection of case study schools by characteristic

School characteristic	School selection
School type, based on whether they were local authority-maintained, academies of part of a MAT	11 Academies/MATs, and one local authority-maintained school
Local area level of deprivation is defined using the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) IDACI	Seven from IDACI quintiles 1–2 (least deprived), three from quintile 3, and two from quintiles 4–5
Levels of persistent absence, measured as the proportion of pupils with 10% or more absences during the 2022/2023 school year	Five with 10–19% of pupils persistently absent, three with 20–29% of pupils persistently absent, and four where over 30% of pupils were persistently absent
School size, in terms of number of pupils	Eight small schools (<1,000 pupils), three medium schools (between 1,000 and 1,499 pupils), and one large school (over 1,500 pupils)

Following intensive recruitment efforts using the available sample, it was decided to use opportunistic sampling to supplement school engagement, while still ensuring that the achieved sample displayed variety in composition on the above criteria.

However, the school selection has not been randomly sampled so there may be selection bias and the possibility that the schools who partook in the scoping phase survey and provided consent to be contacted for participation in the IPE are more positive about the use of AFLOs than those who decided not to participate. Non-AFLO school engagement was particularly challenging as there were not many non-AFLO schools available and even fewer willing to participate.

These limitations were considered in the analysis and stated in reporting.

Analysis

Since absenteeism is a school-level issue, interviews were conducted with a variety of staff across the school, which allowed school to be treated as the unit of analysis.

The collected data was managed using the Framework approach (Richie *et al.,* 2013). Within this approach, the data gathered from the interviews were summarised into a framework, subdivided into main themes and subthemes where columns represent themes, with each row being an individual case. This means the data is arranged in a systematic way that is grounded in the accounts of the participants while closely tied to the research objectives and allows comparative analysis to take place both between and within cases.

The final stage of analysis involved working through the framework in detail, drawing out the range of experiences and views, identifying similarities and differences, developing and testing hypotheses, and interrogating the data to seek to explain emergent patterns and findings. The aim of this analysis is to develop categories and explanations that are comprehensive in the sense of capturing the full range of views and experiences. Following the Framework tradition, a balance between induction and deduction were used during the analytical process. Early on, the focus was inductive in the sense of aiming to understand participants from their point of view and only later as the process moves up the 'analytical ladder' with existing concepts and the ToC brought in to deductively help organise and contextualise the findings.

The findings will reflect three broad types of analysis (Ritchie *et al.,* 2013):

- **Thematic analysis.** This provides the foundation of the findings through detailing the different types of processes and approaches used.

- **The identification of typologies.** Though these do not always exist, where they do they can be powerful tools for understanding the nature of the phenomena by combining multiple elements identified through the thematic analysis at a case level.

- **Explanatory analysis.** Aims to understand the connections between different parts of the process and how they contribute to the outcomes and impact and is developed through in-depth intra- and inter-case exploration.

Within each case study (school), data was combined and triangulated to test the intervention's logic model and interrogate the causal mechanisms underlying it, which will allow for a detailed exploration of how AFLOs may work to reduce absenteeism.

Table 8: IPE methods overview

Research methods	Data collection methods	Participants / data sources	Data analysis methods	RQs addressed	Implementation / logic model relevance
Programme differentiation	Case studies and insight interviews	Semi-structured qualitative interviews	Twelve case study schools (ten with AFLOs, two without), comprising six to eight interviews with school staff per school and three to five interviews with pupils and parents per school Eleven insight interviews with schools (nine with AFLOs, two without)	Deductive coding; Thematic analysis	Inputs, Activities. Examine extent to which AFLO practice can be distinguished from existing practice in schools with no AFLOs
Perceived impact	Case studies and insight interviews	Semi-structured qualitative interviews	Ten case study schools with AFLOs, comprising six to eight interviews with school staff per school and three to five interviews with pupils and parents per school Nine insight interviews with schools with AFLOs	Deductive coding; Thematic analysis	Examine perceptions of outcomes, impacts, mechanisms of change, and moderators
Context / moderators	Case studies	Semi-structured qualitative interviews	Ten case study schools with AFLOs, comprising six to eight interviews with school staff per school and three to five interviews with pupils and parents per school Nine insight interviews with schools with AFLOs	Deductive coding; Thematic analysis	Examine perceptions of factors that may influence inputs/activities and outcomes (who does it work for, under what circumstances)
Mediators	Case studies	Semi-structured qualitative interviews	Ten case study schools with AFLOs, comprising six to eight interviews with school staff per school and three to five interviews with pupils and parents per school Nine insight interviews with schools with AFLOs	Deductive coding; Thematic analysis	Semi-structured qualitative interviews

Costs evaluation

The study collected some data related to the costs that schools incur by employing AFLOs. There was no intention to undertake a full cost evaluation or cost-benefit analysis. However, we estimated an annual cost range for using an AFLO (one FTE), which includes both monetary costs (e.g. salaries and on-costs) and in-kind costs (time and cost for other school staff), and any one-off costs.

We had already collected data on salaries of AFLOs through the job advert analysis task conducted in the scoping phase. Through the 12 case study schools, we collected the following additional cost data:

- AFLO salary;
- AFLO training costs;
- AFLO recruitment cost;
- additional resources that AFLOs may need;
- lost output from parent's time out of work (number of hours engaging with school per pupil who received AFLO support in a year);
- percentage of administrator time spent on attendance issues; and
- timeline.

Information on what schools have done instead of allocating resources for employing AFLOs was explored qualitatively through the interviews with schools without AFLOs.

Impact evaluation results

Sample sizes

Pre-COVID analysis

Table 9 illustrates the number of pupils enrolled either in treated or untreated schools and used for the pre-COVID analysis, with breakdowns by academic year and FSM-eligibility status. Similarly, Table 10 shows the number of pupils by academic year and ethnicity. As shown in the tables, the number of pupils varies by academic year. Note that some of the pupils which are included in the count for a given academic year may also feature in another academic year due to the cross-sectional nature of the data. This means that the figures relative to the total number of pupils reported in Tables 9 and 10 includes 'duplicate' pupils (the same applies to all other totals calculated across multiple academic years for the pre-COVID analysis). For all pupils and schools included in the analysis, all variables (outcomes and confounders) had non-missing values. Counts and percentages of pupils have been rounded as per SRS guidance, in line with DfE data reporting restrictions in the presence of Looked After Children and Children in Need.

Table 9: Number of pupils used for the pre-COVID analysis, by academic year and FSM-eligibility status

Academic year	No. of pupils	No. of pupils eligible for FSM (%)	No. of pupils not eligible for FSM (%)
2012/2013	535,680	114,220 (21.3)	421,460 (78.7)
2013/2014	529,940	113,440 (21.4)	416,500 (78.6)
2014/2015	530,180	114,850 (21.7)	415,330 (78.3)
2015/2016	532,470	115,280 (21.7)	417,190 (78.3)
2016/2017	536,600	114,290 (21.3)	422,310 (78.7)
2017/2018	544,560	113,720 (20.9)	430,840 (79.1)
2018/2019	553,480	111,570 (20.2)	441,910 (79.8)

Table 10: Number of pupils used for the pre-COVID analysis, by academic year and ethnicity

Academic year	No. of pupils	No. of pupils of White ethnicity (%)	No. of pupils of Asian ethnicity (%)	No. of pupils of Black ethnicity (%)	No. of pupils of Other / Mixed ethnicity (%)
2012/2013	535,680	437,430 (81.7)	47,710 (8.9)	23,160 (4.3)	27,390 (5.1)
2013/2014	529,940	428,970 (80.9)	49,280 (9.3)	23,490 (4.4)	28,200 (5.3)
2014/2015	530,180	425,030 (80.2)	51,390 (9.7)	24,210 (4.6)	29,560 (5.6)
2015/2016	532,470	422,680 (79.4)	53,720 (10.1)	24,930 (4.7)	31,130 (5.8)
2016/2017	536,600	421,900 (78.6)	56,210 (10.5)	25,800 (4.8)	32,700 (6.1)
2017/2018	544,560	424,560 (78.0)	58,560 (10.8)	26,710 (4.9)	34,640 (6.4)
2018/2019	553,480	427,760 (77.3)	60,730 (11.0)	27,720 (5.0)	37,270 (6.7)

The pre-COVID analysis used **423 untreated (never-AFLO) schools and 198 treated schools**. The number of schools which were treated in each academic year is reported in Table 11.

Table 11: Number of treated schools used for the pre-COVID analysis, by academic year

Academic year	No. of treated schools (introduced AFLOs for the first time)	Percentage (%)
2013/2014	31	15.7
2014/2015	39	19.7
2015/2016	23	11.6
2016/2017	37	18.7
2017/2018	40	20.2
2018/2019	28	14.1
Total	198	100.0

Table 12 reports the number of pupils used for the pre-COVID analysis by academic year of treatment and FSM-eligibility status. Each of the six academic years of treatment identifies a specific treatment cohort (i.e. the set of schools which introduced AFLOs in that academic year). Note that the number of pupils and percentages in the two subsets (FSM eligible and non-FSM eligible) do not sum to the totals (figures in the first column) because of the cross-sectional nature of the dataset and the fact that FSM-eligibility status can change over time for the same pupil.

Table 12: Number of pupils in treated schools used for the pre-COVID analysis, by academic year and FSM-eligibility status

Academic year	No. of pupils in schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year	No. of pupils eligible for FSM in schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year (%)	No. of pupils not eligible for FSM in schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year (%)
2013/2014	70,080	18,950 (27.0)	53,940 (77.0)
2014/2015	86,870	24,700 (28.4)	65,660 (75.6)
2015/2016	49,350	14,120 (28.6)	37,290 (75.6)
2016/2017	80,550	22,420 (27.8)	61,260 (76.1)
2017/2018	89,070	22,150 (24.9)	70,430 (79.1)
2018/2019	58,800	14,330 (24.4)	46,580 (79.2)

Similarly, Table 13 shows the number of pupils used for the pre-COVID analysis by academic year and ethnicity.

Table 13: Number of pupils in treated schools used for the pre-COVID analysis, by academic year of treatment and ethnicity

Academic year	No. of pupils in schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year	No. of pupils of White ethnicity in schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year (%)	No. of pupils of Asian ethnicity in schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year (%)	No. of pupils of Black ethnicity in schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year (%)	No. of pupils of Other / Mixed ethnicity in schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year (%)
2013/2014	70,080	58,320 (83.2)	5,800 (8.3)	2,330 (3.3)	3,760 (5.4)
2014/2015	86,870	67,790 (78.0)	10,580 (12.2)	3,620 (4.2)	5,050 (5.8)
2015/2016	49,350	34,770 (70.5)	8,870 (18.0)	2,500 (5.1)	3,430 (7.0)
2016/2017	80,550	61,760 (76.7)	6,730 (8.4)	6,230 (7.7)	6,260 (7.8)
2017/2018	89,070	76,580 (86.0)	6,250 (7.0)	2,470 (2.8)	3,950 (4.4)
2018/2019	58,800	49,490 (84.2)	4,020 (6.8)	2,200 (3.7)	3,230 (5.5)

Post-COVID analysis

Table 14 illustrates the number of pupils used for the post-COVID analyses based on the full sample and the subsamples defined by FSM-eligibility status and ethnicity. The analysis for the full sample included 150,300 pupils**. Of these, 26,320 were enrolled in 51 treated schools (schools which introduced AFLOs for the first time in the academic year 2022/2023), and 123,980 were enrolled in 247 untreated schools (schools which never introduced AFLOs over the study period, i.e. between 2012/2013 and 2022/2023)**. The same pupils and schools were tracked over the three academic years considered. For all the pupils and schools included in the analysis, all the variables (outcomes and confounders) had non-missing values. The number of pupils and schools used for the subgroup analyses are smaller than those observed for the full sample for different reasons. For example, not all of the 51 treated and 247 untreated schools had pupils from all the subgroups considered. Pupils whose ethnicity or FSM-eligibility status changed over time were also removed from the analysis (ethnicity changes are data entry errors; changes in FSM-eligibility status are legitimate but the individuals affected were discarded to avoid potential analysis complications).

Table 14: Number of pupils used for the post-COVID analysis, full sample and subgroups, by FSM-eligibility status and ethnicity

Sample	No. of pupils	No. of pupils in treated schools (schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023) (%)	No. of pupils in untreated schools (schools that never introduced AFLOs between the academic years 2012/2013 and 2022/2023) (%)
Full sample	150,300	26,320 (17.5)	123,980 (82.5)
Eligible for FSM	22,000	4,100 (18.6)	17,900 (81.4)
Not eligible for FSM	122,220	21,080 (17.2)	101,140 (82.8)
White ethnicity	111,680	20,600 (18.4)	91,080 (81.6)
Asian ethnicity	19,180	2,470 (12.9)	16,710 (87.1)
Black ethnicity	7,650	1,150 (15.0)	6,500 (85.0)
Mixed / Other ethnicity	11,490	2,050 (17.8)	9,440 (82.2)

Power calculations

While the minimum detectable effect size (MDES) is presented as a Hedge's g effect size for consistency with the EEF other evaluations, it is important to note that the outcome is binary. Therefore, the effect size is reported as a percentage point difference, in line with the EEF Statistical Analysis Guidance (EEF, 2022a).

The primary outcome (persistent absence) and three of the secondary outcomes (overall absenteeism, unauthorised absenteeism, and fixed-term exclusions) can be seen as a 'family' of outcomes. If multiple hypotheses are tested for the same family of outcomes without adjusting for multiple hypothesis testing, the type I error rate will be inflated. In other words, there will be a greater likelihood of finding a false-positive result. However, the four outcomes are not equally important.

In consultation with the EEF, persistent absence was chosen as the primary outcome of this evaluation because it is currently the most policy-relevant outcome (the proportion of pupils recorded as being persistently absent is large and much greater than in the past). Although the other three outcomes are of interest, they can be considered as 'additional' to persistent absence. Therefore, the impact analysis on the primary outcome for the entire sample (all pupils) and by subgroup (defined by FSM-eligibility status and ethnicity) will be conducted first, assuming that no family of impacts exists.

When conducting the analysis on the secondary outcomes, multiple hypothesis testing (as the impact on four outcomes, including the primary outcome, will be estimated) will be addressed using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) step-up procedure. Note that, while the primary outcome will be considered to calculate the total number of tests for the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) procedure, this procedure will be used to assess statistical significance only for the secondary outcomes. This is because the primary outcome analysis, using alpha=0.05 to judge statistical significance, will have already been implemented. Therefore, we will disregard any Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) result suggesting that the primary outcome is statistically significant (if any). When the impact analysis is conducted on specific subgroups (pupils eligible/non-eligible for FSM or from a particular ethnicity), we will only consider the primary outcome, and therefore, the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) step-up procedure is not required.

Power calculations were conducted following the approach outlined in Schochet (2022). The assumptions were:

- A type I (false positive) error rate of 0.05.
- A type II (false negative) error rate of 0.20 (synonymous with a power of 0.80).
- Two-tailed statistical significance testing.

- Autocorrelation of 0.1, following an Autoregressive (1) process.[5]
- Variance explained (R^2) of 0.23, increasing precision, but a correlation between model treatment indicators and covariates that reduced precision by 0.1.
- Pupils are clustered within schools, with an intracluster correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.20. There is relatively little evidence about the extent of clustering to be expected for absence outcomes, and therefore, we make this (conservative) assumption.[6]

The pre-COVID analyses had notable differences:

- Cross-sectional rather than longitudinal DiD design.
- Staggered treatment timing. The number of schools varies by year, following the sample sizes outlined in the 'Sample size' section for the pre-COVID analysis.

As the post-COVID analyses is a non-staggered DiD design, the number of treatment timing periods is set to one, which simplifies the formula. The estimation used the power_panel script provided as supplementary material to the article (Schochet, 2022).

Tables 15 and 16 below outlines the MDES at study plan and analysis stage for the pre-COVID and post-COVID analysis respectively. The sample size used in both analyses was lower than identified at study plan stage. This is predominantly because the study plan stage was only able to use academic years 2014/15 to 2018/19 to estimate the number of schools which introduced AFLOs in earlier and later years. For the pre-COVID analysis, discrepancies arose as some schools that were originally observed as introducing an AFLO for the first time in later academic years, actually first introduced an AFLO in earlier years (2012/13-2013/14) which meant the sample size for treated schools in later years was smaller than previously thought. For the post-COVID analysis, it became clear that the number of schools which introduced AFLOs in 2014/15-2018/19 was, on average, much higher than the number observed in the post-COVID years. Additionally, for both analyses, there were a small number of schools in the NPD dataset that could not be linked to SWC data because their personnel did not feature in the SWC (this impacted 3.9% and 1.2% of schools in the pre- and post-COVID period respectively).

Table 15: MDES at different stages, by pre-COVID analysis

		Study plan		Analysis	
		Overall	FSM	Overall	FSM
MDES		0.05	0.06	0.11	0.11
Pre- / post-test correlations	Level 1 (pupil)	0.20	0.20	0.23	0.23
	Level 2 (class)	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Level 3 (school)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
ICCs	Level 2 (class)	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Level 3 (school)	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20

[5] There was no empirical information available to inform this parameter, likely due to the Schochet's (2022) approach being relatively new and therefore, only recently adopted by evaluators.
[6] Other studies have assumed much lower ICCs. For example, Cornel *et al.* (2024) assume an ICC of 0.0598 for secondary school attendance.

Alpha		0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
Power		0.80	0.80	0.80	0.80
One-sided or two-sided?		Two-sided	Two-sided	Two-sided	Two-sided
Average cluster size		170	40	865	183
No. of schools	Introduced AFLOs	1,100	1,100	198	198
	Never introduced AFLOs	825	825	423	423
	Total:	1,925	1,925	621	621
No. of pupils	Introduced AFLOs	187,000	43,150	434,720	116,670
	Never introduced AFLOs	140,250	32,350	3,328,190	680,700
	Total:	327,250	75,500	3,762,910	797,370

NA=not applicable.

The MDES at study plan stage of 0.05 can be considered equivalent to an impact of 1.7ppts, while the MDES at analysis stage of 0.11 can be considered equivalent to an impact of 3.4ppts. Impacts below this level should therefore, be interpreted with caution.

Table 16: MDES at different stages, by post-COVID analysis

		Study plan		Analysis	
		Overall	FSM	Overall	FSM
MDES		0.16	0.17	0.20	0.22
Pre- / post-test correlations	Level 1 (pupil)	0.20	0.20	0.23	0.23
	Level 2 (class)	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Level 3 (school)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
ICCs	Level 2 (class)	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Level 3 (school)	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20
Alpha		0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
Power		0.80	0.80	0.80	0.80
One-sided or two-sided?		Two-sided	Two-sided	Two-sided	Two-sided
Average cluster size		182 intervention; 157 comparison	42 intervention; 35 comparison	509	74
No. of schools	Introduced AFLOs	85	85	51	51
	Never introduced AFLOs	740	740	247	247
	Total:	825	825	298	298
No. of pupils	Introduced AFLOs	15,470	3,570	26,320	4,100
	Never introduced AFLOs	129,525	25,900	123,980	17,900

	Total:	144,995	29,470	150,300	22,000

NA=not applicable.

The MDES of 0.16 at study plan stage can be considered equivalent to a ppt impact of 7.1ppts. At analysis stage, the MDES of 0.20 can be considered equivalent to an 8.9ppt impact. Impacts below this level should therefore, be interpreted with caution.

Power calculations were not provided for subgroup analyses in the study plan, except for analysis for the FSM subgroup. For information purposes, post-hoc power calculations are presented below for the pre-COVID and post-COVID analyses by ethnic subgroup. The assumptions for each set of power calculations are the same as those presented in this section. The only assumption that is varied for each set of power calculations is the number of pupils in each subgroup. The sample sizes for these subgroups were presented for each subgroup by academic year for the pre-COVID and post-COVID analyses earlier in the report. For brevity, Table 17 reports just the MDES for each subgroup.

Table 17: Ethnic subgroup post-hoc power calculations, by pre- and post-COVID

	MDES			
	White	Asian	Black	Mixed / Other
Pre-COVID	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11
Post-COVID	0.24	0.24	0.26	0.25

Selection mechanism: The determinants of introducing AFLOs

The results of the **pre-COVID probit analysis aimed at identifying the determinants of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period** are illustrated in Appendix H Table H1. The pre-COVID probit analysis estimated the probability of hiring AFLOs for the first time in any of the academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/19 (note that the academic year 2013/2014 was omitted to allow for the inclusion of academic year dummies). The dependent variable was a binary indicator coded as 1 for a school that introduced AFLOs for the first time in a given academic year, and 0 for a school that did not introduce AFLOs up to and including that year.

The results suggest that AFLOs were more likely to be introduced for the first time by schools that were either single academy trust or multi-academy trust (MAT) or had a selective intake. The likelihood of introducing AFLOs was also found to be positively associated with the school's pupil to teacher ratio, number of pupils, proportion of pupils who were eligible for FSM in the last six years, and average pupil overall absence rate. It was found to be negatively associated with the school's proportion of pupils of Black ethnicity. The probability of introducing AFLOs was lower in the academic year 2018/2019 compared to later academic years.

The covariates to be included in the DiD estimation were selected based on a goodness-of-fit criterion. We ran multiple probit regressions to explore how well alternative combinations of independent variables explained the probability of introducing AFLOs, and the specification with the lowest Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) was chosen. For the pre-COVID analysis, the confounders in the specification with the lowest AIC (lower than the specifications reported in Appendix H Table H1) included the following variables:

- whether the school was an academy trust (single or MAT);
- whether it was a selective intake school;
- the school's pupil to teacher ratio;
- the number of pupils in the school;

- the proportion of the school's pupils who were eligible for FSM in the last six years;
- the proportions of the school's pupils who were of White, Black, Asian, and Other/Mixed ethnicity;
- the proportion of the school's pupils who were persistently absent from school; and
- the average overall absence rate among the pupils in the school.

The above variables were therefore, included as covariates in the DiD model used for the pre-COVID impact analysis.

The **post-COVID probit analysis** included only those schools that hired AFLOs for the first time in 2022/2023 and schools that did not hire AFLOs up to 2022/2023. The results of the analysis are reported in Appendix H Table H2. They indicate that single or MATs were more likely to introduce AFLOs than non-academy schools in the academic year 2022/2023. The probability of hiring AFLOs for the first time was found to be negatively associated with the proportion of the school's pupils of Black or Asian ethnicity, and the proportion of pupils in the school who live in the first decile of the IDACI ranking (i.e. most deprived areas). It was found to be positively associated with the proportion of the school's pupils who were eligible for FSM, and with the proportion of pupils who were defined as either Children in Need or Looked After Children.

The covariates to be included in the post-COVID DiD impact analysis were selected based on a goodness-of-fit criterion (specification with the lowest AIC). They included the following variables:

- whether the school was an academy trust (single or MAT);
- the number of pupils in the school who were defined as either Children in Need or Looked After Children;
- the proportions of the school's pupils who were of White, Black, Asian and Other/Mixed ethnicity;
- the proportion of the school's pupils who were persistently absent from school; and
- the average overall absence rate among the pupils in the school.

The above variables were therefore, included as covariates in the DiD model used for the post-COVID impact analysis.

Outcomes and analysis

Primary analysis

Impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period

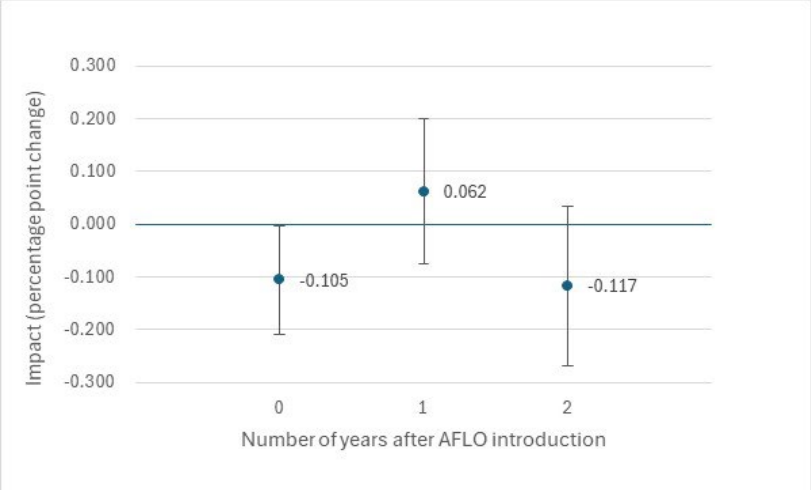
The primary analysis assessed the impact of schools introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period (i.e. in any of the academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019) on the percentage of pupils persistently absent. We estimated the impact in the same academic year AFLOs were introduced (impact measured 'zero years after') and up to two years after. Figure 2 illustrates the impact dynamics by connecting the three dots which represent the estimated impacts zero, one, and two years after AFLO introduction.

Each impact estimate is obtained by averaging the impacts estimated separately for a specific set of cohorts. The impact 'zero years after' is an average across the 'zero years after' impacts estimated for each of the six cohorts considered (schools which introduced AFLOs in the academic years 2013/2014, 2014/2015, 2015/2016, 2016/2017, 2017/2018, and 2018/2019). The 'one year after' impact is an average across the 'one year after' impacts estimated for five cohorts (schools which introduced AFLOs in the academic years 2013/2014, 2014/2015, 2015/2016, 2016/2017, and 2017/2018). The 'two years after' impact is an average across the 'two years after' impacts estimated for four cohorts (schools which introduced AFLOs in the academic years 2013/2014, 2014/2015, 2015/2016, and 2016/2017).

When the CI for an impact estimate (i.e. the segment crossing the dot, which represents an impact estimate) includes the zero, this means that the estimate was not found to be statistically significant at the 5% level.

As shown in Figure 2, on average, **introducing AFLOs in any academic year between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019 was found to have reduced the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent by 0.105ppts by the end of the same academic year**. As the CIs (-02.08 to -0.003) do not cross zero, we can be more confident that AFLOs did have an effect in the same year they were introduced.

Figure 2: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (average across school cohorts)

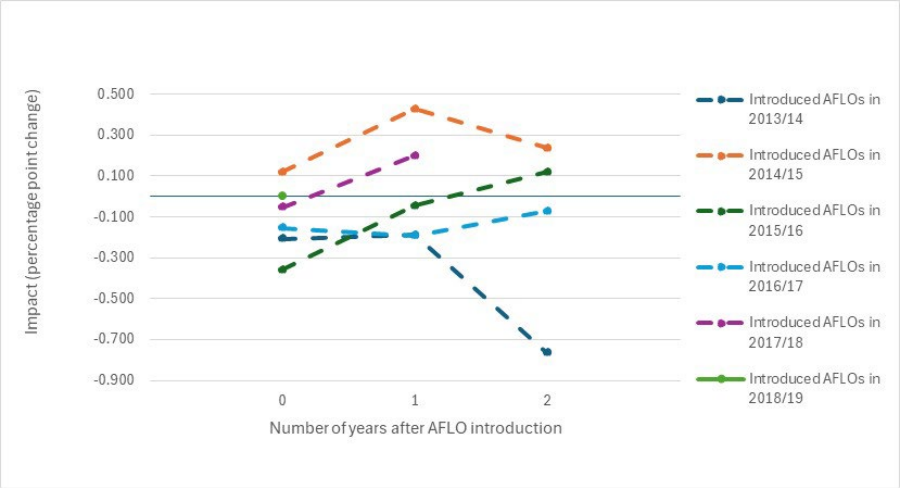


This impact figure can be best understood with a simple example. If we observed a school with 1,000 pupils, of whom 18% (180 pupils) were persistently absent, a reduction of around 0.1ppts in this percentage means that the AFLO introduction prevented one more pupil from becoming persistently absent, that is, it prevented the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent becoming 18.1% (a move from 180 to 181 persistently absent pupils) by the end of the academic year AFLOs were introduced.

The impact estimates one and two years after AFLOs were introduced vary in sign (0.062ppts and -0.117ppts denote an increase and a decrease in the percentage of persistently absent pupils, respectively). However, the CIs cross zero indicating results consistent with negative, null and positive impacts and therefore providing weaker evidence of a longer-term impact.

The impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of pupils persistently absent, estimated separately for each cohort of schools, is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (by school cohort defined by academic year of AFLO introduction)



More comprehensive statistics for the impacts observed zero, one, and two years after AFLO introduction are reported in Tables 18, 19, and 20, respectively. These tables include estimates for both average impacts (calculated across cohorts) and by-cohort impacts (calculated separately for each cohort).

The tables also indicate whether, for any impact estimate, the parallel trends assumption (which underpins the validity of the DiD estimation approach) was considered plausible. The parallel trends assumption is considered as plausible when no statistical evidence (at the 5% significance level) of an impact is found in the periods between one and two years and one and three years before the AFLO introduction year; not applicable means that the outcome trend in the pre-AFLO introduction period could not be assessed because an insufficient number of academic years prior to AFLO introduction were available for the school cohorts included in the impact estimation. See technical appendix for the figures used to assess the parallel trend assumption for each estimate.

The results are heterogeneous in that they vary depending on the cohort observed. They can be summarised as follows:

- **In schools, which introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014, the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent reduced by 0.8ppts two years after the AFLO introduction, however, the plausibility of the parallel trends assumption could not be assessed** for this cohort.

- On the contrary, **in schools, which introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015, the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent increased by 0.4ppts one year after the AFLO introduction and 0.2ppts two years after** (the parallel trends assumption looks plausible).

- **In schools, which introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016, the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent reduced by 0.4ppts in the same academic year that AFLOs were introduced** (the parallel trends assumption looks plausible).

- In schools, which introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017, the proportion of pupils that were persistently absent reduced by 0.2ppts in the same academic year that AFLOs were introduced (however, the parallel trends assumption was not found to be plausible). No impact was detected for schools which introduced AFLOs in either the academic year 2017/2018 or 2018/2019 (the parallel trends assumption was found to be plausible for both cohorts).

Table 18: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-0.105 (-0.208, -0.003)	0.043	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0. 209 (-0.435; 0. 018)	0.071	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.119 (-0.053; 0. 291)	0.175	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.358 (-0. 623; -0.093)	0.008	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-0.154 (-0.307; -0.001)	0.048	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-0.053 (-0.391; 0.285)	0.758	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	-0.108 (-0.357; 0.142)	0.399	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 19: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018	0.062 (-0.076; 0.201)	0.376	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.189 (-0.488; 0.111)	0.216	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.428 (0.164; 0.692)	0.001	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.045 (-0.325; 0.235)	0.752	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-0.192 (-0.410; 0.026)	0.085	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	0.199 (-0.156; 0.554)	0.273	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 20: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils two years after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017	-0.117 (-0.268; 0.035)	0.131	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.765 (-1.077; -0.453)	0.000	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.236 (0.028; 0.444)	0.026	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	0.118 (-0.245; 0.482)	0.523	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-0.073 (-0.312; 0.165)	0.546	No

NA=not applicable.

Impact of introducing AFLOs in the post-COVID period

The primary post-COVID analysis assessed the immediate (zero years after) impact of introducing AFLOs, namely, the impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 on the proportion of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year. As shown in Table 21, the DiD estimate using outcomes for pupils observed in the academic years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 found **no evidence that introducing AFLOs for the first time in the academic year 2022/2023 affected the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent from school. This is due to the uncertainty of the results; while the impact was 0.06ppts, indicating a small increase in persistent absenteeism, the possible impacts also include -1.6ppts (a larger reduction in persistent absenteeism) and 1.7ppts (a larger increase in persistent absenteeism).** The parallel trends assumption was found to be plausible in that the outcomes of pupils in treated and untreated schools developed in a parallel fashion over the two academic years prior to the academic year in which AFLOs were introduced.

Table 21: Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same year of AFLO introduction (zero years after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023	0.059 (-1. 628; 1. 745)	0.946	Yes

Secondary analysis

Impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period

The secondary analysis assessed the impact of schools introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period (i.e. in any of the academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019) on pupil overall and unauthorised absence rates, and the percentage of pupils who received one or more fixed-term exclusions. Also in this case, impacts were estimated in the same academic year AFLOs were introduced and up to two years after, and both by school cohort and as an average impact (across cohorts).

Impact on pupil overall absence rate

The estimates of the **average impact** of introducing AFLOs on a pupil's **overall absence rate** zero, one, or two years after AFLOs' introduction were found to be very small (less than 0.001) with CIs crossing zero. The parallel trends assumption was considered plausible for this outcome and therefore, there was **no evidence of an impact on overall absence rate**.

The **by-cohort impact** estimates for the same outcome were all very close to zero (and therefore, are not shown graphically), as shown in Tables 22, 23, and 24 which report the key statistics (impact estimates, CIs, and p-values) for the average and by-cohort estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period on pupil overall absence rate in the periods zero, one, and two years after the academic year in which AFLOs were introduced, respectively. The tables also indicate whether the parallel trends assumption was found to be plausible for a specific impact estimate.

Table 22: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on pupil overall absence rate in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI)	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	0.000000000763 (-0.0000000276; 0.0000000292)	0.958	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.0000000564 (-0.000000125; 0.000000012)	0.106	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.0000000469 (-0.0000000254; 0.000000119)	0.204	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	0.0000000216 (-0.0000000654; 0.000000109)	0.626	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-0.000000000323 (-0.0000000668; 0.0000000661)	0.992	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	0.00000000392 (-0.000000056; 0.0000000638)	0.898	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	-0.0000000186 (-0.0000001; 0.0000000631)	0.655	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 23: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on pupil overall absence rate one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI)	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018	-0.0000000225 (-0.0000000562; 0.0000000111)	0.189	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.0000000426 (-0.000000126; 0.0000000407)	0.316	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.0000000748 (-0.000000154; 0.00000000427)	0.064	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	0.0000000108 (-0.0000000939; 0.000000115)	0.840	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.0000000275 (-0.0000000277; 0.0000000828)	0.329	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-0.0000000216 (-0.0000000848; 0.0000000417)	0.504	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 24: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on pupil overall absence rate two years after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after)

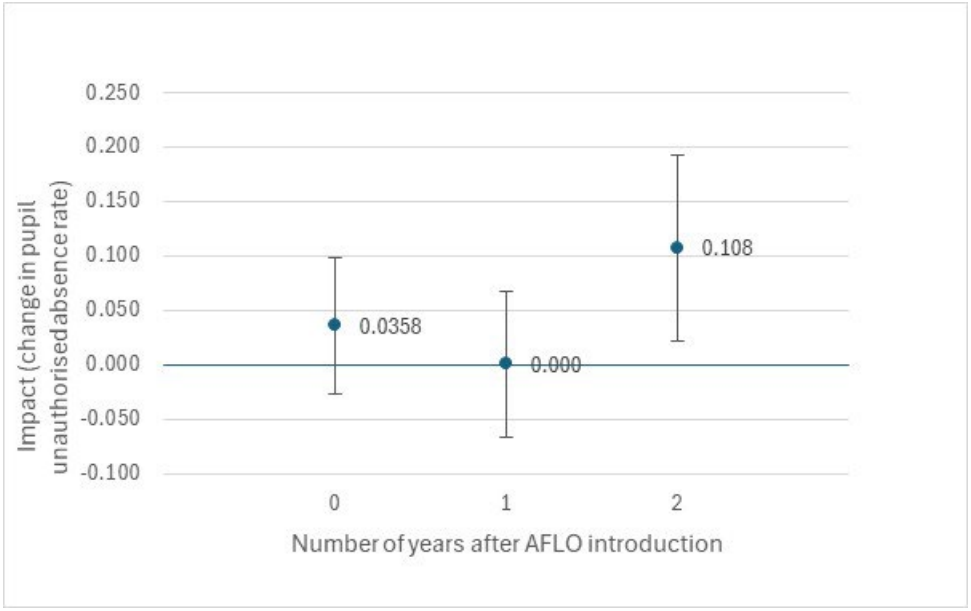
	Estimated impact (95% CI)	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017	0.00000000539 (-0.0000000308; 0.0000000416)	0.770	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	0.000000057 (-0.0000000139; 0.000000128)	0.115	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.0000000142 (-0.0000000594; 0.0000000878)	0.705	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.000000012 (-0.000000097; 0.0000000729)	0.782	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-0.000000037 (-0.0000000969; 0.0000000229)	0.226	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Impact on pupil unauthorised absence rate

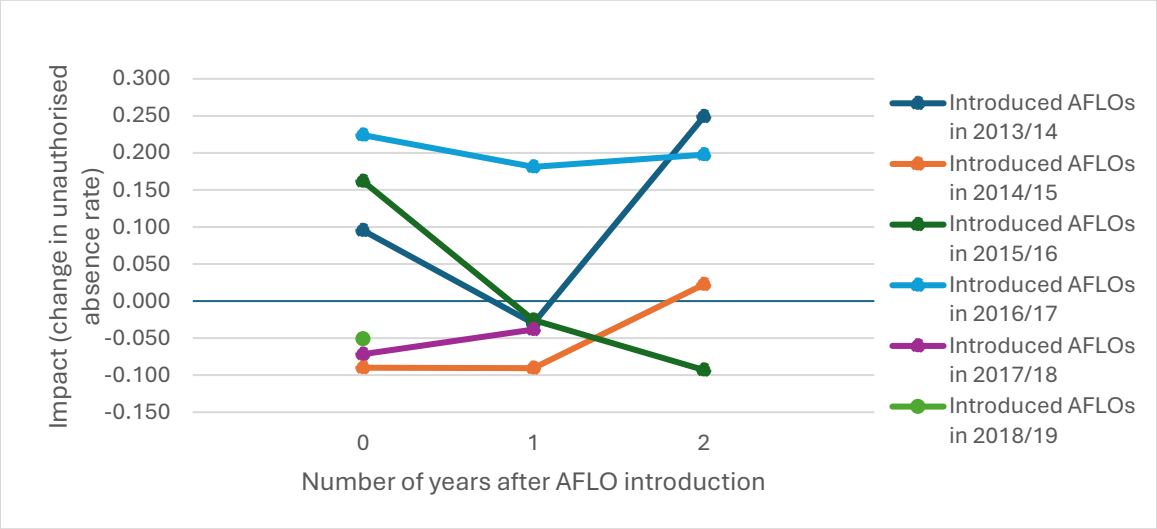
The estimates of the **average impact** of introducing AFLOs on a pupil's **unauthorised absence rate** zero and one years after AFLOs' introduction were found to be very small, with CIs crossing zero (see Figure 4). However, the slightly larger estimate for the period 'two years after' with CIs not spanning zero suggests that **introducing AFLOs increased the pupil unauthorised absence rate by 0.11ppts two years after AFLOs were introduced** (the parallel trends assumption was found to be credible).

Figure 4: Impact of introducing AFLOs on pupil unauthorised absence rate, up to two years after AFLO introduction (average across school cohorts which introduced AFLOs between academic years 2013/2014 and 2018/2019)



The **by-cohort impact** estimates are illustrated in Figure 5. Similarly to what we found for the pupil overall absence rate outcome, impact on the pupil unauthorised absence rate was found to be heterogeneous in terms of sign across the different cohorts and at different time points. This means that also in this case it is not possible to find a common pattern across the different cohorts. We note that, compared to the pupil overall absence rate impact estimates, the estimates of the impacts on pupil unauthorised absence rate are of a much larger size.

Figure 5: Impact of introducing AFLOs on pupil unauthorised absence rate, up to two years after AFLO introduction (by school cohort defined by academic year of AFLO introduction)



Tables 25, 26, and 27 show the key statistics for the average and by-cohort estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period on pupil unauthorised absence rate in the periods zero, one, and two years after the academic year in which AFLOs were introduced, respectively. The results suggest that **AFLOs exerted a detrimental impact on a pupil's unauthorised absence rate in that they have been found to have caused an increase in this rate for pupils in schools which introduced AFLOs in the academic years 2013/2014** (in the period two years after), **2015/2016 (zero years after) and 2016/2017 (zero, one, and two years after).** The parallel trends assumption was found to be credible for the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 cohorts.

Table 25: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on pupil unauthorised absence rate in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI)	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	0.036 (-0.027; 0.099)	0.264	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	0.095 (-0.015; 0.206)	0.091	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.090 (-0.210; 0.030)	0.141	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	0.162 (0.048; 0.276)	0.005	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.224 (0.064; 0.384)	0.006	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-0.072 (-0.245; 0.101)	0.417	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	-0.051 (-0.222; 0.120)	0.558	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 26: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on pupil unauthorised absence rate one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI)	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018	0.000 (-0.067; 0.068)	0.989	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.030 (-0.149; 0.089)	0.620	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.091 (-0.226; 0.045)	0.190	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.026	0.771	Yes

	(-0.198; 0.147)		
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.181 (0.047; 0.316)	0.008	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-0.038 (-0.191; 0.115)	0.623	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 27: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on pupil unauthorised absence rate two years after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after)

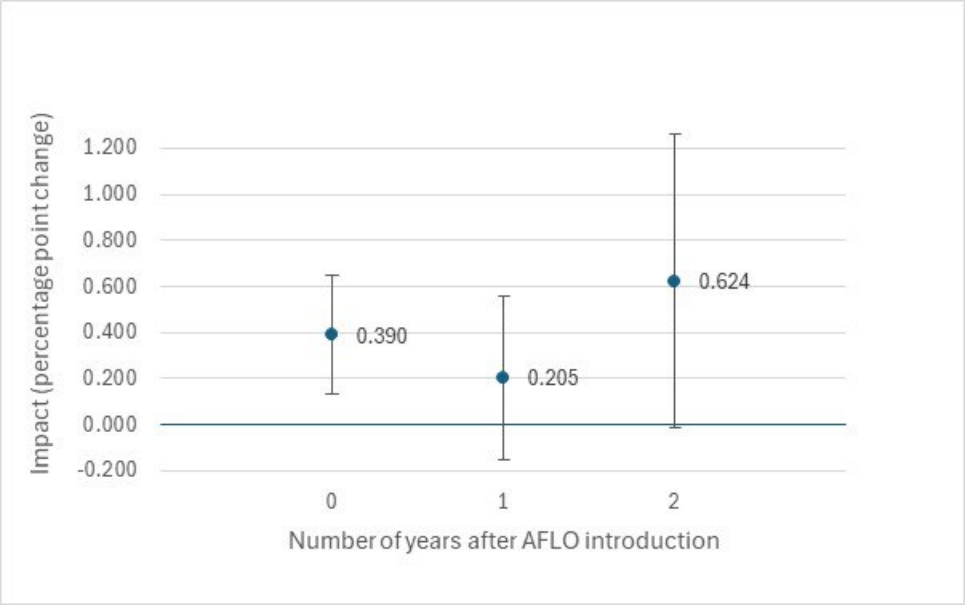
	Estimated impact (95% CI)	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017	0.108 (0.022; 0.193)	0.013	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	0.249 (0.120; 0.378)	0.000	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.022 (-0.112; 0.157)	0.744	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.093 (-0.296; 0.109)	0.368	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.198 (0.045; 0.350)	0.011	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Impact on the percentage of pupils with fixed-term exclusions

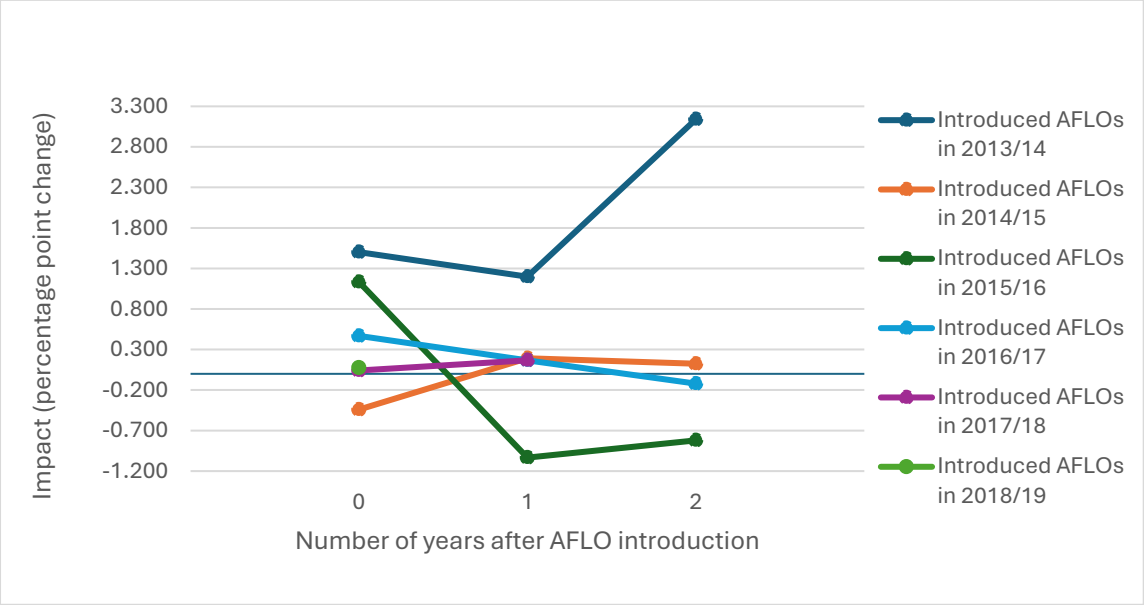
Figure 6 shows the estimates of the **average impact** of introducing AFLOs on the **percentage of pupils with fixed-term exclusions**. Introducing AFLOs was found to have also exerted a 'negative' impact on (i.e. it increased) the percentage of pupils who received one or more fixed-term exclusions in the same year AFLOs were introduced (average impact 'zero years after' calculated across all the school cohorts) by 0.4ppts. (However, for this outcome the parallel trends assumption was not found to be plausible.)

Figure 6: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of pupils with one or more fixed-term exclusions, up to two years after AFLO introduction (average across school cohorts which introduced AFLOs between academic years 2013/2014 and 2018/2019)



The by-cohort impacts on the fixed-term exclusion outcome are illustrated in Figure 7. Also in this case, we observe a high level of heterogeneity, which makes it difficult to find common patterns across subsets of cohorts.

Figure 7: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of pupils with one or more fixed-term exclusions, up to two years after AFLO introduction (by school cohort defined by academic year of AFLO introduction)



Tables 28, 29, and 30 show the key statistics for the average and by-cohort estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period on the percentage of pupils with fixed-term exclusions in the periods zero, one, and two years after the academic year in which AFLOs were introduced, respectively. The estimates point to a detrimental impact on a pupil's likelihood of receiving fixed-term exclusions: positive impact estimates are found for **schools which introduced AFLOs in the academic years 2013/2014 (zero, one, and two years after); 2015/2016 (zero years after); and 2016/2017 (zero years after)**, suggesting that **introducing AFLOs increased the percentage of pupils with behavioural issues**. However, the **parallel trends assumption was found to be credible only for schools that introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017 (it could not be assessed for the 2013/2014 cohort).**

Table 28: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of pupils with one or more fixed-term exclusions in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	0.390 (0.134; 0.645)	0.003	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	1.502 (0.827; 2.177)	0.000	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.441 (-1.109; 0.137)	0.135	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	1.133 (0.467; 1.799)	0.001	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.468 (0.017; 0.919)	0.042	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	0.041 (-0.501; 0.583)	0.881	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	0.076 (-0.700; 0.851)	0.848	No

NA=not applicable.

Table 29: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of pupils with one or more fixed-term exclusions one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018	0.205 (-0.152; 0.561)	0.260	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	1.199 (0.200; 2.198)	0.019	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.192 (-0.406; 0.790)	0.529	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-1.034 (-2.133; 0.066)	0.066	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.166 (-0.546; 0.878)	0.647	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	0.167 (-0.477; 0.781)	0.594	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 30: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of pupils with one or more fixed-term exclusions one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after)

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018	0.624 (-0.012; 1.260)	0.055	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	3.140 (1.822; 4.459)	0.000	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.125 (-0.526; 0.775)	0.707	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.821 (-2.149; 0.508)	0.226	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-0.121 (-1.442; 1.200)	0.858	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Impact of introducing AFLOs in the post-COVID period

The secondary analysis assessed the immediate (zero years after) impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 (post-COVID period) on the three secondary outcomes. The impact estimates on pupil overall absence rate, pupil unauthorised absence rate, and the percentage of pupils who received fixed-term exclusions are shown in Table 30. Introducing AFLOs for the first time in the academic year 2022/2023 was found to have led to a small reduction in overall absence rate, a very small increase in the unauthorised absence rate, and a small increase in the likelihood of receiving one/more fixed-term exclusions. However, as all CIs are wide and cross zero, the results for all three outcomes are consistent with negative, null and positive impacts, likely indicating no meaningful impact overall.

The pre-treatment outcome trends for treated and untreated schools (based on academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022) indicated that the parallel trend test assumption was plausible for these three outcomes.

Table 31: Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 on pupil overall absence rate, unauthorised absence rate and the percentage of pupils with one or more fixed-term exclusions in the same academic year of AFLO introduction

	Estimated impact (95% CI)	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Impact on pupil overall absence rate	-0.127 (-0.399; 0.144)	0.358	Yes
Impact on pupil unauthorised absence rate	0.040 (-0.197; 0.277)	0.740	Yes
Impact on the percentage of pupils with one or more fixed-term exclusions (in ppts)	0.129 (-0. 728; 0.987)	0.768	Yes

After applying the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) step-up procedure to address the family-wise error rates, the adjusted significance level thresholds for the outcomes percentage of pupils with one/more exclusions (which ranks first), unauthorised absence rate (second), and overall absence rate (third) are 0.013, 0.017, and 0.025, respectively.

By subgroup impact analysis

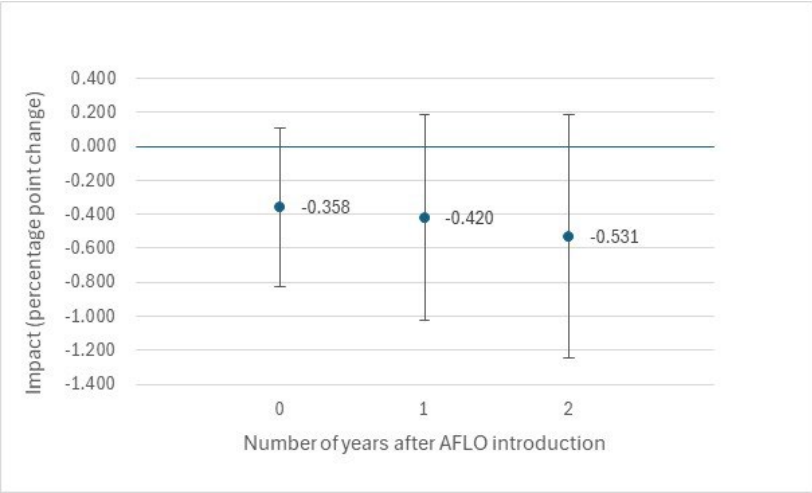
The impact analysis was re-implemented on sample subsets defined by pupils' FSM-eligibility status or ethnicity. Two separate analyses were implemented for each subset, one for the pre-COVID period and another one for the post-COVID period. The by subgroup impact analysis was conducted only for the primary outcome (persistent absence).

Impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period

Impact analysis by FSM-eligibility status

The estimates of the (average) impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent for the subset of pupils who were eligible for FSM in the last six years are illustrated in Figure 8. This suggests that AFLOs progressively reduced absenteeism over time for FSM-eligible pupils.

Figure 8: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (average across school cohorts), pupils eligible for FSM



The impacts estimated for each individual cohort (including only FSM-eligible pupils) are shown in Figure 9.

The statistics for these impacts are provided in Tables 32, 33, and 34. In the same academic year that AFLOs were introduced, persistent absence for FSM pupils reduced by 0.358ppts, and reduced further by 0.420ppts and 0.531 ppts after one and two years respectively. However, the CIs for these estimates cross zero which indicate that results are also consistent with AFLOs having no impact or increasing persistent absence for this subgroup. Impact magnitude and direction vary across the individual cohort years.

Figure 9: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (by school cohort), pupils eligible for FSM

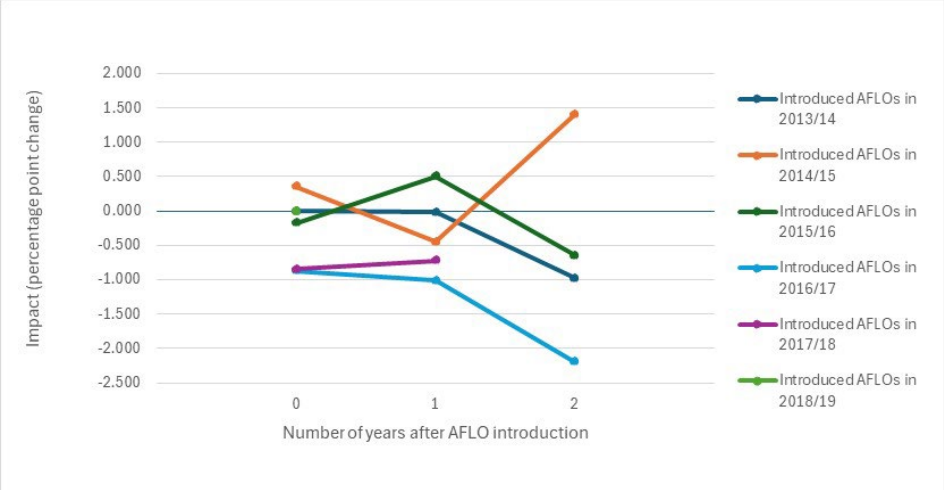


Table 32: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after), pupils eligible for FSM

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-0.358 (-0. 828; 0. 112)	0.135	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.003 (-1.034; 1.029)	0.996	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.354 (-0.398; 1. 106)	0.356	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.174 (-1.997; 1.649)	0.852	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-0.876 (-1. 819; 0.068)	0.069	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-0.850 (-2.268; 0.568)	0.240	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	-0.692 (-1.772; 0.387)	0.209	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 33: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after), pupils eligible for FSM

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018	-0.420 (-1.025; 0.185)	0.174	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.019 (-1.189; 1.151)	0.975	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.454 (-1.343; 0.436)	0.317	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	0.505 (-2.141; 3.150)	0.709	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-1.013 (-2.161; 0.136)	0.084	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-0.724 (-2.188; 0. 739)	0.332	No

NA=not applicable.

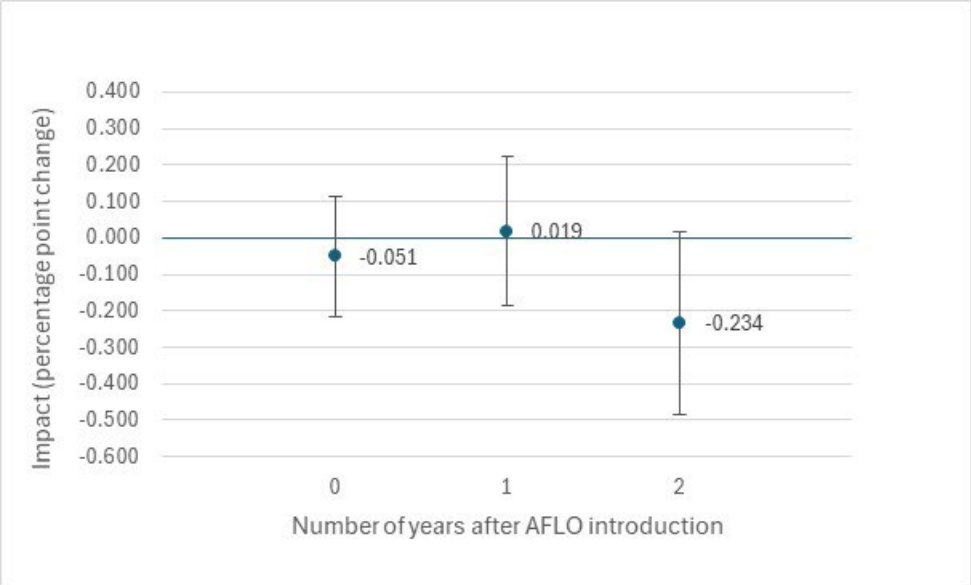
Table 34: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after), pupils eligible for FSM

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017	-0. 531 (-1. 249; 0.187)	0.147	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.983 (-2.005; 0.040)	0.060	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	1.402 (0.100; 2. 705)	0.035	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.649 (-2.727; 1.430)	0.541	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-2. 220 (-3.162; -1. 239)	0.000	No

NA=not applicable.

The estimates of the (average) impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent for the subset of pupils who were not eligible for FSM in the last six years are illustrated in Figure 10. These indicate a very small reduction in persistent absent initially, followed by a minimal increase in persistent absence after one year, before reducing again at two years. However, the CIs for these estimates cross zero which indicate that results are also consistent with AFLOs having no impact, or a positive or negative impact.

Figure 10: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (average across school cohorts), pupils not eligible for FSM



The impacts estimated for each individual cohort (including only pupils who have not been eligible for FSM in the last six years) are shown in Figure 11. The statistics associated with all the impact estimates are provided in Tables 35, 36, and 37. **Introducing AFLOs was found to have reduced the percentage of persistently absent pupils by 0.4ppts and 1.1ppts zero and two years after AFLO introduction, respectively, for the 2013/2014 cohort** (for which the **plausibility of the parallel trends assumption could not be assessed**) and by 0.9ppts zero years after for the 2015/2016 cohort (but the parallel trends assumption was not found to be plausible for this cohort).

Figure 11: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (by school cohort), pupils not eligible for FSM

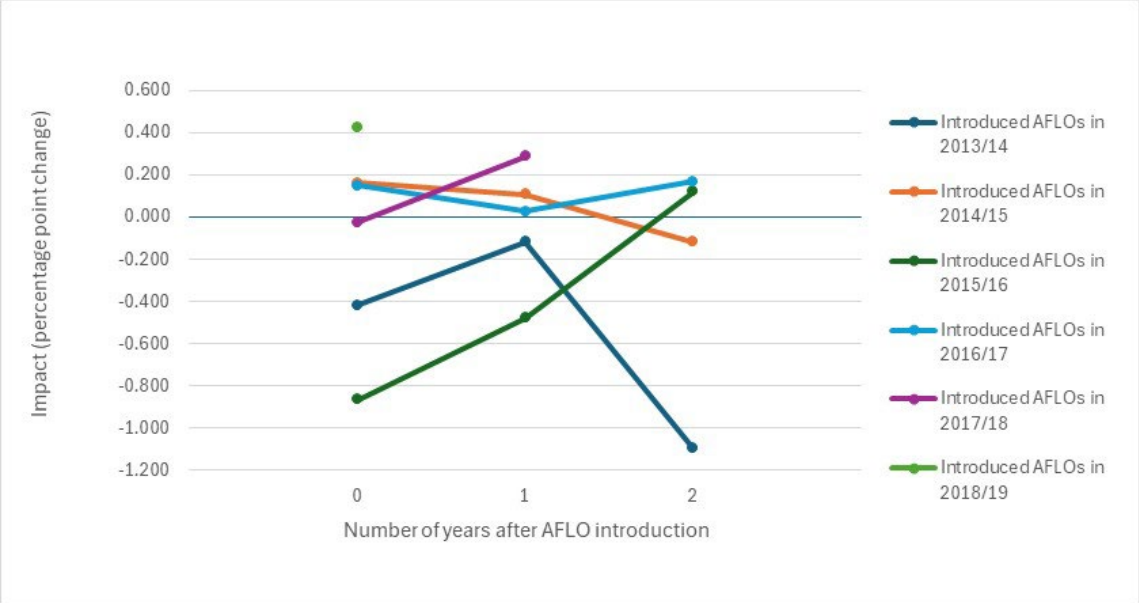


Table 35: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after), pupils not eligible for FSM

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-0.051 (-0.216; 0.114)	0.547	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0. 418 (-0.781; -0.054)	0.024	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.161 (-0.187; 0.509)	0.365	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.863 (-1.231; -0.496)	0.000	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.150 (-0.233; 0.533)	0.442	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-0.026 (-0.417; 0.366)	0.897	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	0.424 (-0.071; 0.919)	0.093	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 36: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after), pupils not eligible for FSM

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018	0.019 (-0.185; 0.222)	0.857	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.118 (-0.560; 0.323)	0.599	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.107 (-0.281; 0.495)	0.589	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.477 (-0.958; 0.003)	0.052	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.027 (-0.433; 0.487)	0.908	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	0.286 (-0.157; 0. 729)	0.206	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 37: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after), pupils not eligible for FSM

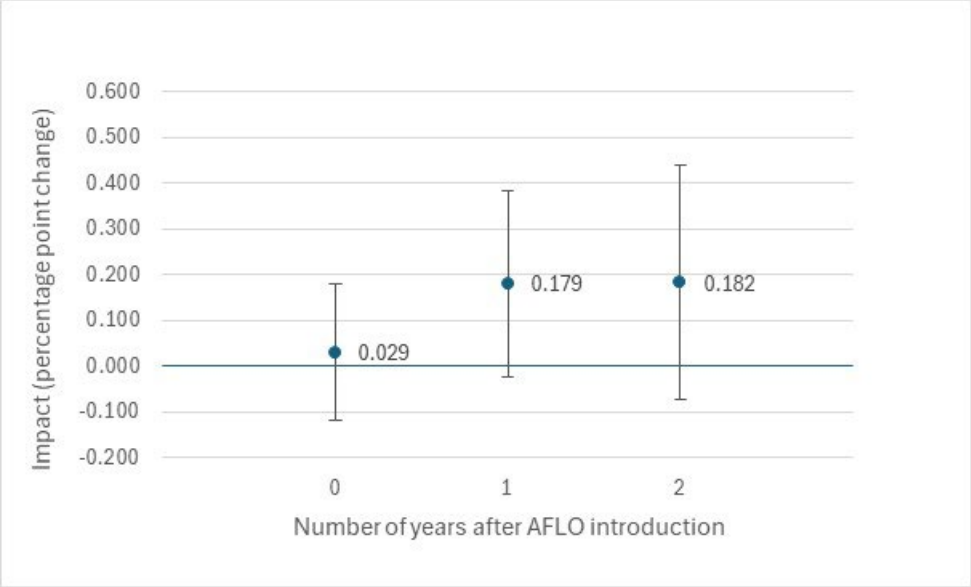
	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017	-0.234 (-0.485; 0.018)	0.068	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-1.095 (-1.530; -0.661)	0.000	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.118 (-0.554; 0.319)	0.598	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	0.121 (-0.437; 0.678)	0.672	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.168 (-0.291; 0.627)	0.473	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Impact analysis by ethnicity

The estimates of the (average) impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period on the percentage of persistently absent pupils for the subset of pupils who were of White ethnicity are illustrated in Figure 12. The graph suggests that AFLO progressively increased absenteeism over time for pupils of White ethnicity, though the CIs are wide and cross zero.

Figure 12: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (average across school cohorts), pupils of White ethnicity



The impacts estimated for each individual cohort (including only pupils of White ethnicity) are shown in Figure 13. The statistics for all the impacts are provided in Tables 38, 39, and 40.

The findings vary across the school cohorts observed. Introducing AFLOs was found to have reduced the percentage of pupils of White ethnicity who were persistently absent by 0.8ppts for the 2013/2014 cohort in the same year of AFLO introduction (however, the plausibility of the parallel trends assumption could not be assessed), and increased the percentage of White pupils who were persistently absent by 0.4ppts, 0.8ppts, and 0.6ppts for the 2016/2017 cohort zero, one, and two years after, respectively (the parallel trend was found to be credible). It was found to have reduced the percentage of White pupils who were persistently absent by 0.6ppts for the 2015/2016 cohort zero years after but increased it by 0.9ppts for the same cohort two years after (the parallel trend was found to be credible).

Figure 13: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (by school cohort), pupils of White ethnicity

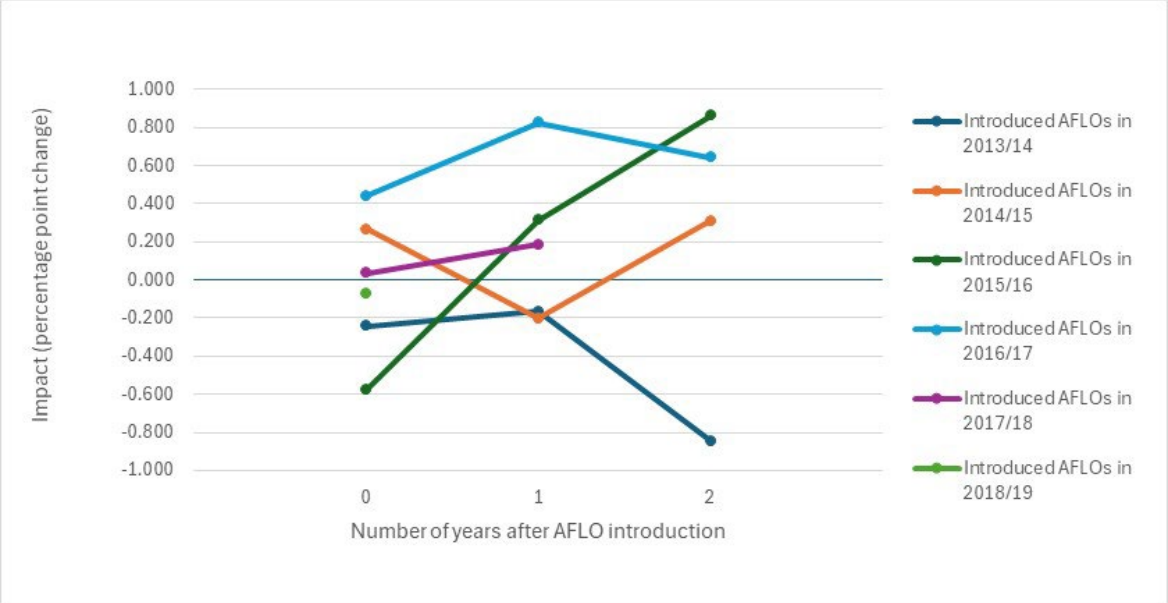


Table 38: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after), pupils of White ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	0.029 (-0.120; 0.178)	0.701	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.242 (-0.577; 0.093)	0.156	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.266 (-0.029; 0. 560)	0.078	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.575 (-0.944; -0.206)	0.002	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.442 (0.056; 0.828)	0.025	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	0.035 (-0.327; 0.398)	0.848	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	-0.071 (-0.417; 0.275)	0.688	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 39: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after), pupils of White ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018	0.179 (-0.024; 0.382)	0.084	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.165 (-0.536; 0.205)	0.382	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.201 (-0.538; 0.136)	0.243	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	0.315 (-0.148; 0.778)	0.183	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0. 825 (0.269; 1.381)	0.004	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	0.187 (-0.214; 0.589)	0.848	Yes

NA=not applicable.

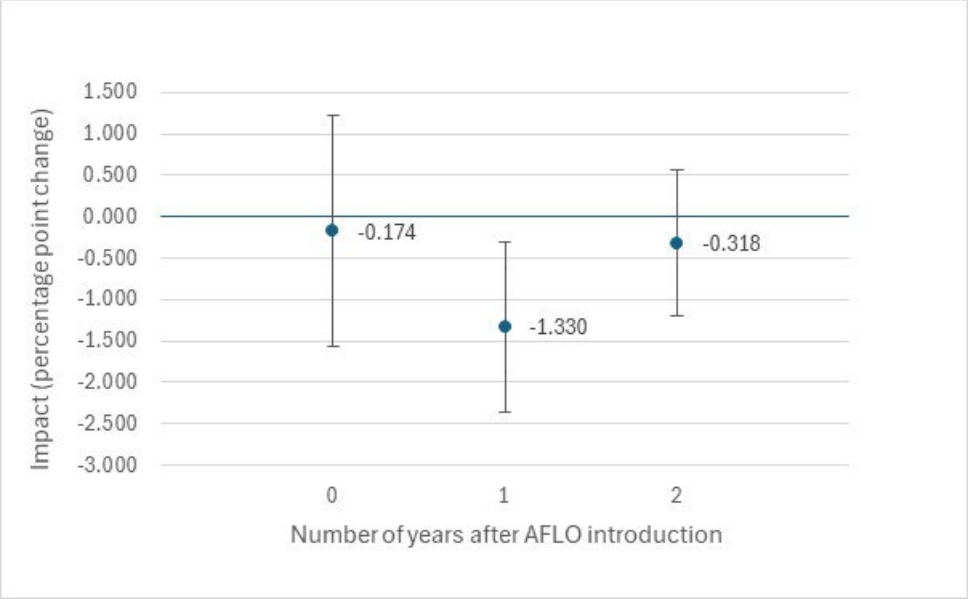
Table 40: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after), pupils of White ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017	0.182 (-0.075; 0. 439)	0.165	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0. 846 (-1.250; -0.442)	0.000	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.308 (-0.040; 0.656)	0.082	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	0.862 (0.090; 1.635)	0.029	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	0.643 (0.222; 1.063)	0.003	Yes

NA=not applicable.

The estimates of the (average) impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils for the subset of Asian ethnicity are illustrated in Figure 14. **Introducing AFLOs was found to have reduced the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent by 1.3ppts among pupils from Asian minority ethnic groups after one year** (the parallel trends assumption was considered credible) and by a smaller amount after zero and two years, though the CIs cross zero for these two outcomes so we have less confidence in these findings.

Figure 14: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (average across school cohorts), pupils of Asian ethnicity



The impacts estimated for each individual cohort for pupils of Asian ethnicity are shown in Figure 15. The statistics associated with all the impact estimates are provided in Tables 41, 42, and 43. Beneficial impacts are found for the **2016/2017 cohort** (for which **introducing AFLOs was found to have reduced the percentage of pupils from Asian minority ethnic groups who were persistently absent by 3ppts and 2ppts one and two years after, respectively**) and the **2017/2018 cohort** (**introducing AFLOs was found to have reduced the percentage of pupils from Asian minority ethnic groups who were persistently absent by 2.6ppts and 3.6ppts zero and one years after, respectively**). Detrimental effects were found to have been experienced by the **2015/2016 cohort** (**introducing AFLOs was found to have increased the percentage of pupils from Asian minority ethnic groups who were persistently absent by 0.3ppts in the same year**) and the **2014/2015 cohort** (**introducing AFLOs was found to have increased the percentage of pupils from Asian minority ethnic groups who were persistently absent by 1.3ppts two years after**). The parallel trends assumption was found to be credible for all these courts.

Figure 15: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (by school cohort), pupils of Asian ethnicity

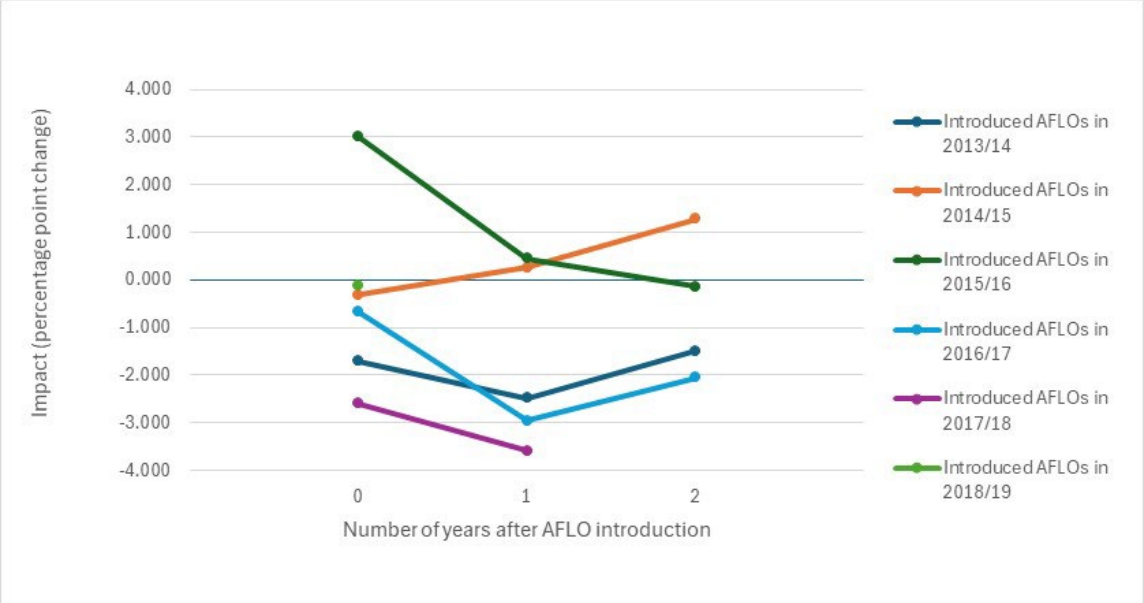


Table 41: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after), pupils of Asian ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-0.174 (-1.573; 1.225)	0.807	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-1.710 (-5.482; 2.062)	0.374	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.308 (-4.325; 3.710)	0.881	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	3.010 (1.656; 4.364)	0.000	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-0.679 (-2.470; 1.113)	0.458	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-2.602 (-4.278; -0.926)	0.002	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	-0.114 (-3.157; 2.929)	0.941	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 42: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after), pupils of Asian ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018	-1.330 (-2.358; -0.301)	0.011	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-2.482 (-5.931; 0.967)	0.158	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	0.268 (-1.863; 2.398)	0.806	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	0.449 (-1.161; 2.060)	0.584	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-2.958 (-4.087; -1.830)	0.000	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-3.588 (-4.983; -2.194)	0.000	Yes

NA=not applicable.

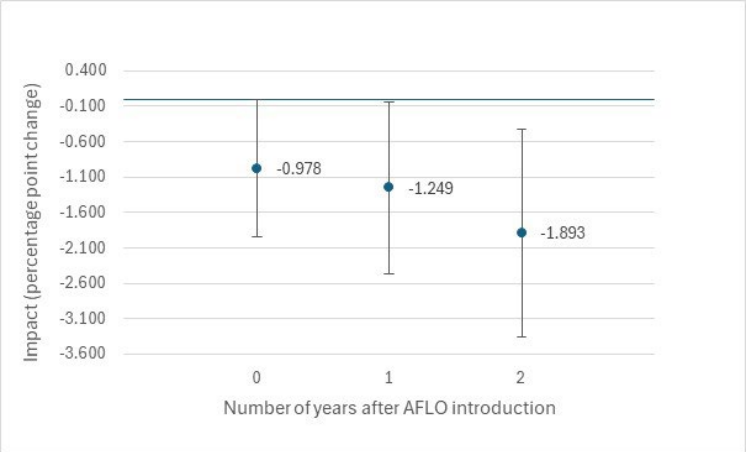
Table 43: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after), pupils of Asian ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017	-0.318 (-1.201; 0.565)	0.480	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-1.495 (-3.497; 0.506)	0.143	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	1.289 (0.019; 2.559)	0.047	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.134 (-1.535; 1.267)	0.851	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-2.049 (-3.780; -0.319)	0.020	Yes

The estimates of the (average) impact of introducing AFLOs in the pre-COVID period on the percentage of persistently absent pupils for the subset of pupils who were of Black ethnicity are illustrated in Figure 16.

Introducing AFLOs was found to have progressively reduced the likelihood of a pupil of Black ethnicity being persistently absent by 1ppt in the same year AFLOs were hired, 1.2ppts one year after, and 1.9ppts two years after (the parallel trends assumption was found plausible).

Figure 16: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (average across school cohorts), pupils of Black ethnicity



The impacts estimated for each individual cohort (including only pupils of Black ethnicity) are shown in Figure 17. The statistics for all the impacts are provided in Tables 44, 45, and 46.

Evidence of a **beneficial impact from introducing AFLOs** was found for the following cohorts:

- Schools **which introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015** experienced a **2.9ppt reduction in the percentage of persistently absent pupils two years after**.
- Schools **which introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016** experienced a **3.9ppt reduction in the percentage of persistently absent pupils two years after**.
- Schools **which introduced AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017** experienced **reductions of 1.7ppts, 3.2ppts, and 2.4ppts in the percentage of persistently absent pupils zero, one, and two years after**, **respectively**.

For the three cohorts above the parallel trends assumption was found to be plausible.

Introducing AFLOs was found to have increased the percentage of persistently absent pupils by 3.6ppts for the 2013/2014 cohort (for which the parallel trends assumption could not be tested).

Figure 17: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (by school cohort), pupils of Black ethnicity

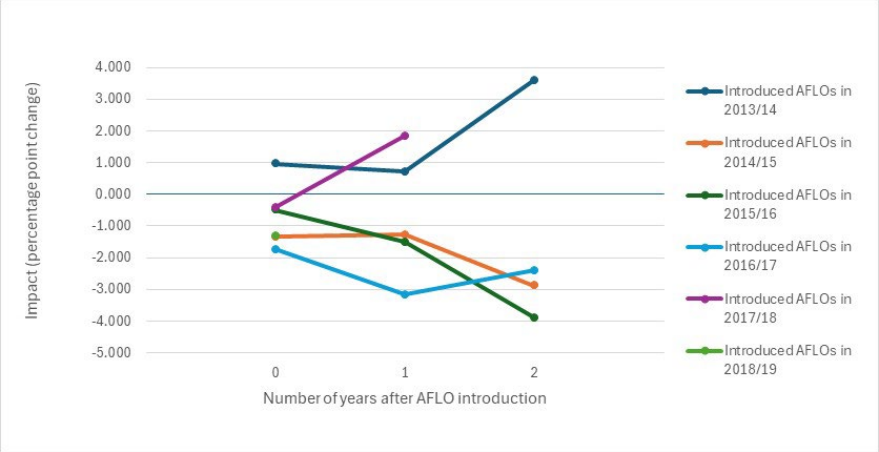


Table 44: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after), pupils of Black ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-0.978 (-1.943; -0.013)	0.047	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	0.958 (-1.891; 3.807)	0.510	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-1.342 (-3.800; 1.115)	0.284	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-0.502 (-2.718; 1.715)	0.657	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-1.739 (-3.087; -0.0391)	0.011	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	-0.407 (-2.663; 1.848)	0.723	No
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	-1.320 (-5.123; 2.483)	0.496	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 45: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after), pupils of Black ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-1.249 (-2.463; -0.034)	0.044	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	0.722 (-2.203; 3.647)	0.629	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-1.267 (-4.639; 2.105)	0.461	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-1.507 (-4.022; 1.007)	0.240	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-3.162 (-4.641; -1.682)	0.000	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	1.840 (-0.520; 4.199)	0.126	No

NA=not applicable.

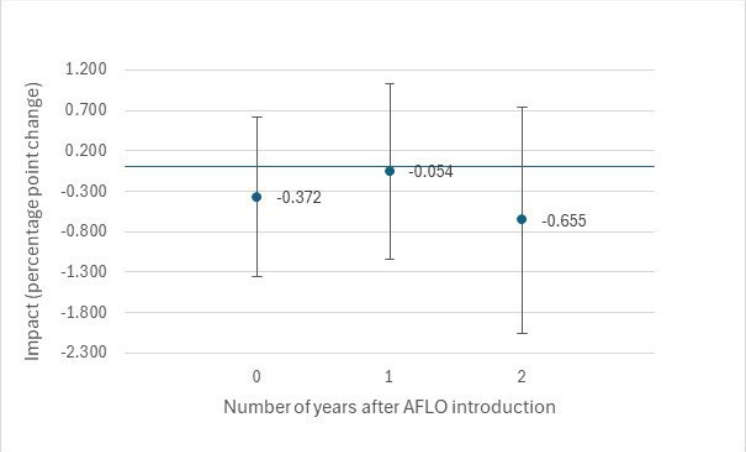
Table 46: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after), pupils of Black ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-1.893 (-3.358; -0.427)	0.011	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	3.607 (0.635; 6.578)	0.017	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-2.883 (-6.936; 1.170)	0.163	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	-3.90 (-6.890; -0.909)	0.011	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-2.401 (-3.953; -0.850)	0.002	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Introducing AFLOs was not found to have affected the likelihood of a pupil from Other or Mixed ethnicity being persistently absent (see Figure 18). The parallel trends assumption was found to be credible.

Figure 18: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (average across school cohorts), pupils of Other or Mixed ethnicity



The impacts estimated for each individual cohort (including only pupils of Other or Mixed ethnicity) are shown in Figure 19. The statistics for all the impacts are provided in Tables 47, 48, and 49.

No evidence of an impact from introducing AFLOs was found for any of the cohorts explored.

Figure 19: Impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils, up to two years after AFLO introduction (by school cohort), pupils of Other or Mixed ethnicity

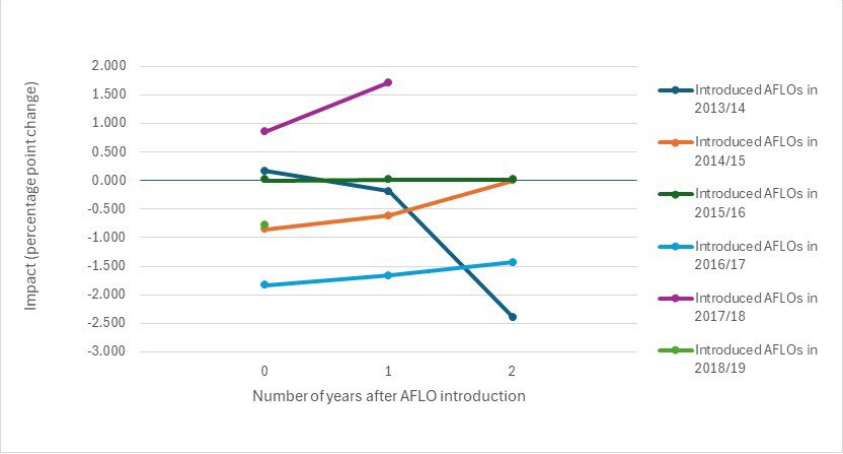


Table 47: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year of AFLO introduction (impact zero years after), pupils of Other or Mixed ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-0.372 (-1.355; 0.611)	0.458	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	0.170 (-2.313; 2.653)	0.893	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.855 (-2.901; 1.190)	0.412	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	1.267 (-1.309; 3.861)	0.333	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-1.833 (-3.737; 0.070)	0.059	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	0.851 (-1.170; 2.873)	0.409	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2018/2019	-0.771 (-4.148; 2.607)	0.655	No

NA=not applicable.

Table 48: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact one year after), pupils of Other or Mixed ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-0.054 (-1.144; 1.036)	0.922	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-0.185 (-3.508; 3.139)	0.913	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.615 (-2.645; 1.414)	0.552	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	1.433 (-1.234; 4.101)	0.292	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-1.661 (-3.329; 0.007)	0.051	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2017/2018	1.718 (-0.869; 4.305)	0.193	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Table 49: Estimates of the impact of introducing AFLOs on the percentage of persistently absent pupils one year after the academic year of AFLO introduction (impact two years after), pupils of Other or Mixed ethnicity

	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Average impact of introducing AFLOs across all academic years between 2013/2014 and 2018/2019	-0.655 (-2.055; 0.744)	0.359	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2013/2014	-2.396 (-6.019; 1.228)	0.195	NA
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2014/2015	-0.001 (-2.569; 2.568)	1.000	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2015/2016	1.721 (-1.101; 4.543)	0.232	Yes
Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2016/2017	-1.432 (-3.519; 0.655)	0.179	Yes

NA=not applicable.

Impact of introducing AFLOs in the post-COVID period

Impact analysis by FSM-eligibility status

Table 50 shows the immediate impact (same academic year) of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 on the percentage of persistently absent pupils among pupils who were eligible and not eligible for FSM in the last six years,

respectively. We found no conclusive evidence of an impact on either subgroup, however, there is some evidence of a reduction in persistent absence for FSM pupils by 1.96ppts, and although CIs could demonstrate both an increase and a reduction, the range of values points more strongly towards a reduction (-4.17 to 0.24). The parallel trends assumption was found to be plausible for both subgroups.

Table 50: Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year of AFLO introduction, by pupils' FSM-eligibility status

FSM-eligibility status	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Pupils eligible for FSM	-1.961 (-4.166; 0.244)	0.081	Yes
Pupils not eligible for FSM	0.421 (-1.399; 2.242)	0.650	Yes

Impact analysis by ethnicity

Table 51 show the immediate impact (zero years after) of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 on the percentage of persistently absent pupils of White, Asian, Black, and Other/Mixed ethnicity, respectively. We found no evidence of an impact on any of the ethnic group explored. The parallel trends assumption was plausible for all the ethnic subgroups.

Table 51: Impact of introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 on the percentage of persistently absent pupils in the same academic year of AFLO introduction, by pupils' ethnicity

Pupils' ethnicity	Estimated impact (95% CI) in ppts	P-value	Is the parallel trends assumption plausible?
Pupils of White ethnicity	-0.017 (-1.747; 1.713)	0.984	Yes
Pupils of Asian ethnicity	-0.526 (-3.993; 2.940)	0.766	Yes
Pupils of Black ethnicity	0.912 (-2.898; 4.722)	0.639	Yes
Pupils of Other or Mixed ethnicity	-0.055 (-2.817; 2.707)	0.969	Yes

Robustness checks and sensitivity analysis

The impacts obtained using the staggered DiD approach were re-estimated **using yet-to-be treated (rather than never-treated) schools as the comparator schools**. The findings are illustrated in Appendix I Tables I1 to I7. They can be summarised as follows:

- The impact estimated for the entire sample was found to be similar to the impact estimated using never-treated schools as comparators, as indicated by a 0.1ppt reduction in the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent from school. However, in this case this estimate is not statistically significant at the 5% level.
- No statistically significant impacts were found for the FSM eligible and non-FSM-eligible pupil subsets.
- Introducing AFLOs was found to have reduced the percentage of pupils from Asian minority ethnic groups who were persistently absent from school by 1.4ppts one year after the academic year AFLOs were introduced. For pupils of Black ethnicity, introducing AFLOs was found to have caused a 0.9ppt reduction in the percentage who were persistently absent in the academic year of introduction, and this impact increased over time as this percentage was found to have been reduced by 1.1ppt one year after and 1.7ppts two years after
- No impacts were found for pupils of White ethnicity and pupils of Mixed/Other ethnicities

We also explored the **implications that including the EWO role in the AFLO definition has on the analysis**. Considering EWOs as equivalent to AFLOs (i.e. considering a school as having AFLOs if their staff have roles that in the SWC are coded as either attendance officers/home-school liaison officers, or EWOs) resulted in the following sample size changes:

- **Post-COVID analysis.** The number of treated schools reduced to 46 (from 51 when EWOs are not included).
- **Pre-COVID analysis.** The number of treated schools increased to 212 (from 198 when EWOs are not included).

More detailed findings are reported in Appendix I Tables I8 and I9.

We did not re-estimate impacts for the post- and pre-COVID periods based on these new sample sizes as doing so was not thought to add any value due to the power calculations conducted. The power calculations based on the sample actually used for the post-COVID analysis (51 treated schools) suggested that the current study is powered to detect an MDES of 0.20, which is equivalent to an 8.9ppt reduction in persistent absence (see Table 15), which denotes a relatively large impact. Re-estimating impacts for the post-COVID period after including EWOs (i.e. relying on a smaller sample of 46 treated schools) would mean that the analysis is powered to detect impacts greater than 8.9ppts.
To appreciate the extent to which the larger sample sizes observed for the pre-COVID analysis (212 schools) can improve statistical power, it is helpful to consider that a power calculation, which assumes a number of treated schools twice as large as that actually used (i.e. 396 instead of 198 schools) and keeps all the assumptions and parameters unchanged (see the 'Power calculations' section) would achieve an MDES of 0.086, which is equivalent to a reduction in persistent absence of 2.7ppts. By comparison, the power calculation for the actual sample (198 schools) suggested that the current study is powered to detect MDES of 0.11, which is equivalent to a 3.4ppt reduction (see Table 16). From this, we concluded that even if we were to re-estimate impacts for the pre-COVID period after changing the definition of AFLOs to include also the EWO role, the increase in the sample size generated by this change would not provide a sufficiently large increase in statistical power to be able to detect the effect sizes illustrated in this report, which are generally smaller than 1pp in magnitude and close to 0 (the highest estimate observed was 1.9).

Additional analysis

Additional exploratory analysis has been conducted to investigate the relationship between AFLO roles and outcomes, namely, to ascertain whether AFLO doing specific tasks were associated to higher/lower levels of pupil absenteeism. In the scoping phase of this project, a short online survey (taking around five to ten minutes to complete) was sent to a random sample of 2,363 English secondary schools (Alternate Provision and Pupil Referral Unit schools were excluded) drawn from Edubase. Out of these 2,363 schools, 253 successfully completed the survey, although only 200 of them provided information about whether they currently used AFLOs. The survey also collected information about the types of activities that the AFLOs performed. The survey data collected in the scoping phase were linked to the NPD data and re-analysed to descriptively explore the relationship between the AFLO roles and the outcomes. This analysis, therefore, focuses on the subsample of schools that reported in the survey that they introduced one or more AFLOs for the first time in 2022/2023 (i.e. aligned with the post-COVID analysis). Based on findings from the scoping phase, the 16 schools which introduced AFLOs were defined according to the roles their AFLOs implemented, which were as follows:

- **Administrative.** These are core tasks, such as ensuring registers are collected and accurate and monitoring attendance data.
- **Administrative and executive.** This includes all the tasks of the administrative role, but also includes undertaking proactive and reactive interventions, such as home visits, meetings with parents, etc.
- **Administrative, executive, and strategic.** This includes all the tasks of the administrative and executive roles but also includes responsibilities for designing policy and strategies to manage attendance.

There were two schools with AFLOs in an administrative role, six schools with AFLOs in an administrative and executive role, and eight schools with AFLOs in an administrative, executive, and strategic role. As the sample of schools is relatively small, these findings are considered exploratory and may have limited generalisability.

Table 52: Persistent absence in 2022/2023 by AFLO roles

AFLO roles in the schools	Number of pupils (missing)	Mean (95% CI)	P-value
Administrative	2,242 (0)	0.30 (0.28; 0.32)	NA (reference group)
Administrative and executive	6,442 (0)	0.23 (0.22; 0.24)	<0.001
Administrative, executive, and strategic	8,617 (0)	0.26 (0.25; 0.27)	<0.001

NA=not applicable.

As shown in Table 52, the analysis of pupil-level data within these schools indicated that schools with an AFLO in an 'administrative and executive' or 'administrative, executive, and strategic' role had lower levels of persistent absence relative to schools with AFLOs in an administrative role. This association was found for both overall absence and unauthorised absences. However, it did not hold for the proportion of pupils with at least one fixed-term exclusion.

Further exploration indicated that there is no consistent association between AFLO roles and these outcomes when analysing the subsample of pupils who have ever been FSM-eligible. Furthermore, the association holds for White pupils but does not follow a consistent pattern when analysing other ethnic groups.

Overall, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of AFLOs is moderated by the specific tasks they do within the school that hired them. However, this may not be true for pupils with different characteristics (which was not explored). Based on the limited evidence generated, the findings cannot conclude whether AFLOs are likely to close the gap between FSM-eligible pupils and their non-eligible peers.

IPE results

This section presents the findings from the IPE. The IPE data collection aims to uncover the different mechanisms leading to impact and tests our ToC. While it aims to provide evidence for all the RQs, it specifically aims to address RQ6 to RQ9, which are:

- RQ6: What are the AFLO models that are most effective in tackling absenteeism?
- RQ7: What are the determinants of hiring AFLOs?
- RQ8: Are there factors which enhance (allow for or increase) AFLO's impact?
- RQ9: What are the costs incurred in employing (recruiting and using) AFLOs?

To do this, the IPE examined four dimensions: i) programme differentiation; ii) perceived impacts; iii) mediators; and iv) context/moderators.

The IPE drew on deductive coding and thematic analysis of case studies and insight interviews with schools in England. The case studies include ten schools with AFLOs and two schools without AFLOs. Data for each case study was collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews with school staff in range of roles (including senior leaders, AFLOs, pastoral staff, administrative staff, and teaching staff) triangulated with interviews and small group discussions with students and parents/carers. The insight interviews were in contrast only conducted with AFLOs and/or senior leaders in selected schools. Nine insight interviews were conducted with schools with AFLOs and two with schools without AFLOs.

Schools were the unit of analysis for the research.

Programme differentiation

This concerns AFLO role and responsibilities, how practice among schools with AFLOs is distinguished from practice in schools with no AFLOs, and the extent to which this is in line with the programme ToC.

Why schools employed AFLOs

In the case studies, the most common trigger for schools to appoint AFLO was felt to be an increased focus on addressing absenteeism in the school. This was due to a range of factors. In some schools it was due to schools seeing recent increases in absenteeism, which most schools had observed following the COVID-19 pandemic. In others it was reported to be due to changes in school leadership, with staff in post that increasingly prioritised attendance.

> *We appointed the AFLO as part of a real big push on trying to get the students to understand that being in school is the best place for them to learn, and because they just can't get the same level of expertise at home.* (Senior leader)

Financial and governance factors also played a significant role in the appointment of AFLOs. Additional funding received from a local authority or MAT, sometimes specifically designated to hire AFLOs, was a clear factor for some schools. Some of the case study schools in disadvantaged areas reported that they funded the AFLO role through Pupil Premium funding, which is additional funding provided to schools based on the number of their pupils eligible for FSM. These schools felt that this was the best use of this resource since AFLOs could improve attendance, which was important for increasing attainment, and also address some of the social barriers (e.g. anxiety, emotionally based school avoidance [EBSA]) that led to absenteeism. One school went into an informal partnership with another better performing school in order to share best practice, which led to them deciding to appoint an AFLO.

In the case studies with schools that did not appoint AFLOs, some stated that the funding could be better used for other ways of improving attendance, including training for teachers on dealing with pupils' emotional well-being, appointing heads of years to monitor attendance and contact pupils, or in providing rewards for good attendance. One school also reported that they did not wish to appoint an AFLO because they felt that form teachers were better based to address

absenteeism as they have a closer relationship with the pupils. They stated: *'teachers see students every day so they understand best the reasons why they are absent'* (Senior leader)

In the case study schools, a high level of deprivation/FSM was not found to drive schools to hire AFLOs. Schools that had high attendance still employed AFLOs, which was attributed to the school striving for excellent attendance, which required sustained effort, and because they felt improving attendance would improve other pupil outcomes. Likewise, some schools that had high absenteeism did not employ AFLOs. This was because they believed the resources could be used better elsewhere (e.g. to provide pastoral support, employing more teaching assistants) and some stated they had more competing priorities for funding. However, this finding should however, be viewed with caution because the number of non-AFLO schools participating in the IPE research was low.

All the interviewed schools stated that they experienced an increase in absences since the COVID pandemic, which they attributed to pupils finding it more difficult to *'get back into the habit'* of coming to school and finding it more difficult to deal with the school environment after the intermittent breaks during lockdowns. This was common among pupils that previously had attendance issues, and particularly those with neurodivergence or EBSA. Some schools felt that addressing this required a nuanced approach based on individual pupil needs, which schools felt would be most effectively addressed through having a dedicated staff member responsible for attendance.

> *[During COVID pandemic restrictions] Everybody's routine completely changed. So, they were up all night and in bed during the day. There was a massive change in how people were working and how people were functioning because there were a lot of people that weren't working.* (Home and family liaison officer)

> *COVID-19 had a big impact on pupil's mental health, socialisation, and anxiety around schoolwork. Our referrals to CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] have skyrocketed.* (School senior leader)

<u>AFLO roles and responsibilities</u>

Within the case study schools, AFLOs were non-teaching members of staff whose primary responsibility was in supporting attendance. There was a substantial variety of job titles given to these individuals, despite similar roles and responsibilities. AFLOs were given titles such as attendance officer, attendance lead, family liaison officer, EWO, EBSA, emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA), and lead and home liaison officer.

There is diversity in the number of AFLOs that schools employ. In our case studies of schools employing AFLOs, six schools employed one AFLO, six schools employed two AFLOs, three schools employed three AFLOs, three schools employed four AFLOs, and one school employed six AFLOs.[7] The characteristics of schools, such as pupil body composition and size, did not seem to explain the variation in number of AFLOs. However, schools with a high proportion of pupils with high needs (including pupils eligible for FSM, speaking English as an Additional Language [EAL], with SEND, living in a deprived area, or additional challenges such as catering to newly arrived refugees or migrants) tended to employ more AFLOs, especially if their attendance figures were already low. For these pupils, AFLOs were felt to be able to provide personalised support that could help overcome some of the engrained barriers these pupils experience that negatively affect their attendance.

In one case study it was noted that the AFLO was required to have the job title of EWO. This is because it was needed in order to recommend or initiate the process of issuing a penalty notice for non-attendance. However, in all the other schools participating in the case studies and insight interviews this was not necessary because the EWO was in the Local Authority Education and Welfare Services team.

> *I was the attendance officer last year, but had to change my job title last year so I had the authority to issue fines. We now have another attendance officer, and we share the workload between us.* (EWO)

[7] AFLOs with identical functions (job sharing model) working part-time counted as 0.5. AFLOs working part-time were counted as 1.

Overall, the role of AFLOs were generally diverse, in that in nearly all the case studies they covered a mix of administrative and executive tasks, while a few also undertook strategic tasks. The nature of these activities are presented below:

- **Administrative tasks.** Most AFLOs undertook a role in analysing data and identifying pupils with high absenteeism. This included reviewing and sharing attendance data, and in some cases sending letters to pupils that have been frequently absent.

- **Executive tasks.** Nearly all AFLOs in the case study/interviewed schools undertake executive tasks, predominantly in undertaking interventions with a reasonable degree of autonomy with pupils and families, and this was largely regarded as the core component of their role. This included home visits, running activities with pupils at risk of persistent absence, and activities that overcome individual pupils' barriers to attendance.

- **Strategic tasks.** A few AFLOs took on responsibility for designing strategies in relation to attendance. However, this role was more commonly taken by a member of SLT. This included developing attendance strategies and processes to be employed by staff within the school to tackle absenteeism.

In the case studies and interviews, the role of AFLOs was largely determined by how they work with others in the school. In some case study schools, the AFLO was the only staff member working solely on attendance and therefore, would be required to do all the administrative tasks, which significantly limited the time they had available to undertake executive tasks and strategic tasks. However, in most case study schools, AFLOs worked as part of a team where the administrative tasks and first-level communication with families was covered by a primarily administrative AFLO, tutors, or administrative heads of year while more complex cases were passed on to an executive AFLO who was in some cases supported by large pastoral care and SEND teams able to deliver tailored support.

While administrative tasks were a crucial foundation for other interventions, it was generally the executive tasks where AFLOs were felt to add the most value. The AFLOs that were interviewed felt the most impactful part of their role was in undertaking in-depth interventions with individuals that are regularly absent in order to address the underlying reasons for it. Teachers and support staff in the case studies reported that this was the area of the AFLO role that it would be difficult for their school to do without an AFLO, since teachers did not feel they had the capacity to do pupil visits and other staff were felt to not have the pupil relationship nor skills to do this role. Most of the senior leaders also stated that the main reason they chose to employ an AFLO was to provide more targeted support to individuals that were persistently absent or at risk of being persistently absent.

Schools without AFLOs generally conducted the same tasks as schools that had AFLOs, although with less resource allocated for executive tasks. The AFLO roles and responsibilities divided among other members of staff instead. The case studies with schools without AFLOs identified:

- Administrative tasks were generally shared by teachers, reception staff, and senior leaders.

- Executive tasks were commonly carried out by a mix of teachers, pupil welfare officers, or other staff that supported pupil well-being.

- Strategic tasks were conducted by a nominated senior leader, who led on attendance strategy and in some cases regularly monitored attendance to identify persistently absent pupils.

The executive tasks were most difficult to replicate in schools without AFLOs. In the case study schools, teachers acknowledged that it was difficult to find the time to make contact with families, given their other responsibilities. Welfare staff also had other responsibilities, which limited the amount of time they could spend on this function.

In the case studies, parents/carers generally perceived the AFLO role as being the lead person on issues related to attendance. As such, they were regarded as the person within school that they could come to if they had any concerns about their child's attendance, or who would inform them of their child's absence.

Pupils in the case studies similarly understood the AFLO role to be the school lead on attendance. In most schools the AFLO was visible to pupils as they presented in assemblies and would follow-up with pupils if they had been absent for an extended period of time.

Support for disadvantaged pupils

In all the case studies and interviews, AFLOs and senior leaders did not report providing support targeted for particular groups of pupils. Most identified needs through objective measures such as attendance rates to trigger interventions. However, some reported specific attendance issues related to particular groups:

- **Minority ethnic groups.** AFLOs generally felt that attendance among minority ethnic pupils was typically high, but there were exceptions when the pupil's parents themselves had not attended schools for long periods and therefore, did not see the value in education. A few AFLOs also noted that some pupils from minority ethnic communities had higher absences because their family took holidays during term time to visit relatives or attend family events such as weddings abroad. As one AFLO stated:

  The issues with some pupils from ethnic minorities can differ. Some parents want their children to be doctors or pharmacists so make sure they go to school. Others have little education themselves so do not see the value in it. (AFLO)

- **Pupils with SEND.** A few AFLOs reported that some pupils with SEND have slightly higher rates of absence because they were more likely to experience EBSA. They noted that this was particularly common among pupils that had undiagnosed needs and were awaiting referrals to CAMHS. As one AFLO stated:

  Mental health is a big reason for non-attendance, particularly since COVID-19. Social media means students are bombarded with messages, and for some it can all get too much. (AFLO)

- **Pupils eligible for FSM.** A few AFLOs reported examples of some pupils eligible for FSM that were not being encouraged by parents to attend schools because they did not consider education very important. As a result, they did not encourage pupils to go to school if they did not want to or felt slightly unwell, and in some cases were not always willing to drop the child to the school or bus stop. One AFLO cited an example where: *'we knew that if the parents had gone out drinking on Thursday, the child would not be in on Friday'* (AFLO). A few also noted that: *'some parents did not require much convincing from the child that they are too ill to attend school'* (AFLO). In some cases, pupils also felt that: *'my parents did not do well in school, and they turned out alright'* (Pupil) as a reason for non-attendance.

It should be noted however, that these issues were only reported by a few AFLOs within our small number of case studies and therefore, should be viewed with a degree of caution. Indeed, many AFLOs and school leaders highlighted that these issues were not specific to certain groups of pupils. It was noted in particular that parents not valuing education was a common feature of pupils that were persistently absent. Similarly, holidays during school time remained a common issue for many schools, despite the introduction of fixed penalty notices. As one AFLO stated: *'if a parent saved £1,800 from going on holiday during term-time, then a £180 fine is not going to make much of a difference'* (AFLO).

Some AFLOs did however, feel that for disadvantaged groups, attendance issues were more difficult to address. This was because many in these groups had multiple factors that affected their attendance, including parents not valuing education, EBSA, difficulties being in large groups, financial barriers to getting to and from school, and in some cases, drug and alcohol dependency issues. These issues require more time to resolve and commonly require support from external agencies as well as school staff.

Practice in schools with and without AFLOs to tackle absenteeism

For each of the following key activities included in the ToC:

- monitoring behaviour/attendance issues to identify need;

- universal support provided to all pupils in the school; and

- targeted/tailored support.

We set out the 'triggers' for intervention and describe the range of activities delivered.

Monitoring behaviour and attendance issues

In the case studies, all schools had a set of procedures for monitoring attendance data, which informed decisions about when and how to intervene. The most common approaches:

- **Daily collation and review of register data.** This includes combining and reviewing register data across all classes to identify pupils that have been absent or late during the morning and afternoon register. Most AFLOs at this point would also clarify with teachers any anomalies in the data, such as whether there are any gaps, whether a pupil that has been consistently absent has returned to class, or whether a pupil that normally has good attendance is not in.

- **A *'morning routine'*.** Where the school would follow-up with pupils that were absent to confirm the reason for this absence. In most schools this covered both cases when a pupil/family member had contacted them to give a reason for absence and when no reason was given. For the former, the call is made to confirm the reason of absence and, in the case of illness, to identify how long the pupil is likely to be off school and what support the school may offer. Some AFLOs also reported that it was also used to gauge whether the reason for absence is reasonable—whether the parent/carer was aware of the absence and whether the illness is genuine, as one AFLO stated: *'to make sure it is not just that they were up late playing games so were tired and didn't fancy coming in'* (AFLO). When contact is unsuccessful, parents/carers are contacted until a reason is given for the absence. Some schools repeated this despite the reason being given, to monitor the situation and encourage return as soon as possible. In some cases this is undertaken by AFLOs but it can also be done by heads of year or form tutors.

- **Regular analysis of register data.** This is used to identify trends in school-wide and individual pupil attendance over a term or year. All the case study schools reported that the aim of this analysis was to identify attendance issues at an early stage, where it is easier to undertake actions to *'nip issues in the bud before they become bigger'* (AFLO). When AFLOs have identified at-risk pupils, most of those that were interviewed in the case studies stated that they confirmed their assertions with the pupil's head of year or tutor. In some cases, AFLOs reported that they were given justification for absences that the teacher knew from their conversation with pupils, which meant they did not have to intervene.

- **Regular meetings to discuss attendance.** This was undertaken to some extent in most case study schools that employed AFLOs. The purpose of these meetings was to raise the profile of attendance issues and also to gain buy-in and support from other staff members to support attendance. The regularity of these meetings varied from weekly, fortnightly, monthly, or half-termly. In some cases, they were chaired by a member of the SLT to emphasise the importance of attendance, in other cases by the AFLO. They generally comprised teachers, support staff, and pastoral support staff.

This scrupulous data monitoring was largely perceived by AFLOs and other school staff as the foundation of the AFLO role, as it informed what future interventions they would need to make with pupils. This is in line with the AFLO ToC, which identifies robust attendance monitoring systems as a key input enabling AFLOs to operate effectively.

The case study schools without AFLOs generally had similar processes in place that were led by other members of staff. In these schools, reception staff mainly undertook the collation and review of attendance data and made contact with absent pupils and their families. In other schools this was conducted by heads of year or administrative staff divided to support particular year groups. This also took place in a few schools with AFLOs, to free AFLO time to conduct executive/strategic tasks.

In the absence of AFLOs, teachers were often required to play a more active role in identifying pupils at risk of persistent absenteeism. This involved being proactive in informing other staff of pupils that had attendance issues or where they felt attendance would be an issue in future.

We hired that role this year and the difference has been incredible. To have attendance properly tracked and monitored. …before we were picking up patterns and picking up conversations and stuff, but now there's one person that is like a fountain of knowledge when it comes to attendance. So it's been really, really great for us as a pastoral team for [the AFLO] to delegate those issues to us and then we can tie it into behavioural issues and things like that as well. And then also just firming up the systems, making sure that we are all using the same language, have the same expectations, delivering the same message to everyone. And [AFLO]'s role has been central to that. (Head of year)

Universal support provided to all pupils in the school

All the AFLOs in the case study schools provided universal support for attendance that were applicable to all pupils in school. However, in most cases these activities employed a 'whole-school approach' and consequently were very similar to activities undertaken in the schools interviewed that did not have AFLOs. They included:

- **Rewarding or incentivising good attendance.** Schools did this through various ways, including providing prizes or treats for high attendance (e.g. vouchers, special school trips to fun parks), providing certificates or badges in whole-school assemblies and/or contacting parents to celebrate 100% attendance for a term. This was felt to be valuable in both encouraging pupils to avoid taking the occasional day off and also in demonstrating to the school community that attendance is important at the school. These incentives were sometimes organised by AFLOs. However, in both schools that had and did not have an AFLO then it still commonly took place but was instead organised by a senior leader.

- **Creating a supportive school culture**. In some of the case studies AFLOs and senior leaders reported that a substantial barrier for pupils to return to school after a long period of unauthorised absence is the fear of being 'told off' when they return. To address this issue, AFLO or a senior leader in a few schools would greet pupils as they enter school, which they felt fostered trust. Another school held induction meetings for Year 7 parents/carers to highlight how missing days translates to lost learning hours and lower grades.

- **Providing informal pastoral support** for pupils that may need to discuss any school issues. Most of the AFLOs that were interviewed reported that problems with friends at school was a key reason why some pupils chose not to attend school. In a few cases this was due to bullying, but in most cases it was due to small disagreements or arguments. Likewise, another common reason was due to personal problems, such as illness in the family or a family member losing a job. To address this, most AFLOs said that they tried to make sure they were visible and encouraged pupils to talk of them if they had any problems, without judgement. This was also commonly offered in schools that did not have AFLOs, through welfare officers.

- **Establishing and supporting a team of peer mentors/pupil attendance champions.** These peer mentors offered support by listening to concerns and providing advice to pupils at risk of persistent absence, as some pupils feel more comfortable sharing personal issues with peers rather than staff. Some schools found this helpful for creating a sense of belonging at school, providing emotional support and building positive relationships. One school found this approach especially helpful for pupils who feel isolated or struggle with friendships.

- **Training for teacher around mental health and EBSA to better support pupils.** This was undertaken by a few schools in the case studies. In a couple of schools, this training was delivered by AFLOs. In schools without AFLOs, the training was delivered by external experts. For example, one school adopted a school-wide trauma-informed approach and provided training for all staff to help pupils regulate their emotions and prevent mental health crises.

The provision of universal support is in line with the expectations in the ToC. However, in the case studies the level and scale of universal support varies substantially by school. In the interviews, senior leaders commonly reported that the initiatives undertaken were what they felt 'worked' for their group of learners. Additionally, some initiatives such as training and rewards were also reported to be due to the financial resources available to the school. The initiatives were relatively consistent by type of school (local authority-maintained or academy) and also irrespective of the level of absenteeism in the school.

As shown above, universal support took place in nearly all case study schools, regardless of whether the school employed an AFLO. However, some school staff posited that having an AFLO helped them organise, target, and set-up these initiatives at a quicker pace or at a wider scale than they would have done otherwise. This is because the school had in place a dedicated person leading on attendance issues, rather than this role being part of the remit of other staff members that had other responsibilities. Schools without AFLOs that in the case studies were found to have extensive universal support systems available generally did so because they had a senior leader that drove forward the implementation of attendance policies.

Targeted/tailored support

All the case study schools that had AFLOs reported providing targeted interventions for those that were absent or at risk of absenteeism, which is in line with the programme ToC. The trigger for targeted intervention varied substantially across case study schools, but most had a tiered approach and aimed to meaningfully engage with pupils before they reached the threshold for being persistently absent (missing over 10% of sessions). In some case study schools, intervention was based on overall attendance percentages (e.g. below 95%), while others focused on the number of absences within a defined period (e.g. five days off within ten weeks). In other schools, attendance data was reviewed collaboratively by staff to identify patterns and determine which pupils might benefit from additional support. For instance, in one case study, the AFLO and heads of year met regularly to discuss pupils at risk of persistent absence and used their personal judgement to decide on the most appropriate interventions.

The targeted interventions undertaken by AFLOs included:

- **Contact with parents/carers to explain the importance of attendance.** This was undertaken by all schools regardless of whether they employed AFLOs. If a pupil has an unauthorised absence, then staff within the schools (which in the case studies included AFLOs, reception staff, heads of year, and tutors) contacted parents/carers by telephone to inform them that their pupil was absent. This was aimed to ensure that parents/carers would also encourage their children to attend school.

- **Formal letter sent to parents/carers.** Most schools would follow-up with pupils that continued to be absent after their parents/carers had been contacted. The trigger for this intervention varied by school. In some it was if the pupil conducted another unauthorised absence in the term or month. The purpose of the letter was to communicate to parents/carers that absences were too common and therefore, they should further support their child to attend school. In most cases, the letter was signed by a headteacher or deputy headteacher. Again, this took place in all the case study schools, regardless of whether the school employed an AFLO.

- **One to one engagement with pupils and their families.** The nature of this intervention varied depending on the school and the stage of absenteeism. In many schools, parents/carers and the child were invited for meetings with the AFLO at the school after a certain threshold was passed. In some of the case studies, the school invited parents/carers and the child to attend a meeting with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. This similarly took place both in case study schools that employed AFLOs and those that did not. As required by law, all schools carried out a home visit after three days of unauthorised absence. Many schools had a policy of visiting children with known safeguarding issues or concerns on the first day of unauthorised absence. Having an AFLO (or a pastoral member of staff) designated to family liaison (usually in addition to the administrative type of AFLO) allowed the schools more flexibility as to which pupils they thought would benefit from a visit.

- **Developing action plans for pupils that are commonly absent**. This included attendance contracts and attendance support plans that detailed and formalised, or rather symbolically reinforced, the responsibilities of all parties involved (child, parents/carers, and the school) to improve attendance. This included the agreement on attendance targets as well as the steps all parties will take to reach those targets. For example, one head of year recalled how it was agreed *'that the child will not be playing Xbox after 8pm'* (Head of year), as their inability to get up in the morning was causing poor attendance.

- **Ad hoc engagement with pupils and families.** This is where pupils that were deemed to be persistently absent or at risk of being persistently absent were contacted outside of school to understand why they were not attending school and to try and address any barriers they may have to attending. This was

undertaken at a far larger scale in schools that employed AFLOs. The activities that AFLOs reported undertaking included:

  - visiting the homes of pupils that were absent;
  - visiting areas near the school to identify pupils that were not attending; and
  - running sessions with pupils that were persistently absent in school time.

- **Overcoming barriers to non-attendance.** This activity also occurred far more in schools with AFLOs than those that did not. AFLOs aimed to provide bespoke support to pupils that were persistently absent, addressing the underlying reasons for their absenteeism. Some examples reported in the case studies included:
  - identifying pupil problems and then referring them to specialist support, such as CAMHS, or internal pastoral support teams that some schools had in place to help address pupils' EBSA;
  - providing one to one pastoral support;
  - providing school pick up from pupil homes or funding bus tickets;
  - buying pupils alarm clocks to help them wake up on time;
  - helping pupils develop morning routines; and
  - providing adjustments to learning in severe cases, such as change of class or set, provisions to study in quiet areas, or undertake lessons virtually.
- **Arranging punitive measures**. These comprise of starting the process for issuing of fines to families. These were typically seen as last resort as most schools did not see those as effective for a variety of reasons.

In the case studies, schools without AFLOs provided less targeted support than schools with AFLOs. This was generally limited by staff capacity—in schools without AFLOs, targeted interventions need to be delivered by support staff such as welfare officers and form tutors, who have other responsibilities. This limited the range of activities that schools were able to do. Additionally, it also affected the trigger points for intervention, with schools with AFLOs stating that having an AFLO allowed them to support pupils at risk of persistent absence, rather than just those that were persistently absent.

The scale and level of targeted interventions delivered by AFLOs did however, vary substantially across all the case study schools. This reflected the nature and role of AFLOs. In some schools, other staff were allocated time to support AFLO's administrative function, which allowed them greater time to conduct targeted interventions. However, in schools with fewer AFLOs or staff to support attendance, AFLOs frequently had to spend more time on administrative tasks and less on providing targeted support.

<u>Other activities to be included in ToC</u>

Alongside the activities described above, pupils and parent/carers also frequently mentioned that a key role of AFLOs in raising awareness of the importance of attendance. This was commonly done in collaboration with a member of the SLT. Pupils and parents/carers both noted that a considerable part of their engagement with AFLOs was the AFLO helping them understand why attending school regularly helps their achievement was seen as important in reducing the number of days missed by pupils.

> *Attendance is a big deal here. As a school, we're really determined to get the best grades possible, and the school enforces this from Year 7…it's important to raise self-esteem and reaffirm we're achieving something in education*. (Year 11 student)

AFLOs in the case studies undertook many interventions to raise awareness of the importance of attendance. This included being a visible presence in school, for example, standing at the front of the school at the start of the school day, as well as giving talks in school assemblies, displaying posters, and providing 'drop-in' services so pupils can come to them if they have any problems.

In some case studies, AFLOs also provided leadership on school attendance issues. This included mobilising other staff members to undertake activities to address absenteeism, including teachers, pupil welfare staff, and administrative staff. It also includes providing referrals for pupils to other internal support and in liaising with school staff to negotiate allowances to help improve pupil attendance and to provide rewards/activities for pupils that encourage good attendance.

> *Our Attendance Officer gives us a pack every week which tell us the attendance of our pupils, colour coded as red, amber or green. We then have weekly meetings to discuss particular pupils, including why they are absent and what additional support they need.* (Teacher in AFLO school)

What difference having an AFLO makes to schools

As shown above, schools with or without AFLOs generally employed a similar approach to tackling absenteeism. The roles and responsibilities of AFLOs are in most cases devolved to other staff members:

> *We have pastoral leads that deal with the attendance on the front-line in terms of making calls and chasing things up. If a boy in [Y]ear 7 who has had particularly bad attendance, his pastoral lead is like his dad in school, he's got such a lovely way about him. Even though he's challenging attendance on the phone to parents, he's doing it in a really supportive way.* (Senior leader in non-AFLO school).

However, in the case studies and interviews, it was identified that having an AFLO increases the resources available for delivering personalised attendance interventions (executive tasks). This allowed schools to target more pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and to provide more one-on-one interventions and developing strong relationships with pupils and families to address the root causes of absence. It also allowed schools to provide support to a wider range of pupils, including more proactive interventions for pupils at risk of being persistently absent.

> *There are some pupils that I speak to nearly every week. I go around to their houses, I speak with their parents, sometimes I am talking to them through outside the door of their bedroom. We try to understand what stops them from going to school and also what they like to encourage them back.* (AFLO)

The AFLOs did not lead to a major change in how schools deal with administrative tasks. In the case studies, there was relatively little difference in how schools with or without AFLOs monitor school attendance and make initial contact with pupils and families that have missed a day or a few days of school. Schools with AFLOs felt that having an AFLO meant that attendance was monitored more frequently, but in many schools, they were supported by other members of staff (e.g. reception staff, heads of year) in undertaking their administrative tasks, and these staff members also did similar tasks in non-AFLO schools. One school without AFLOs also employed an automated approach to performing these functions, which they felt was effective.

The primary benefit of not having an AFLO for schools was perceived to be the saved cost. This allowed staff to invest in other members of staff to provide support to pupils, including in providing pastoral support. This was perceived by interviewees in the case studies as being linked to addressing absenteeism, as it removed barriers for pupils to attend school. However, it is not targeted specifically at those that are frequently absent.

Perceived impacts

We examined the perceived impact of AFLOs against the following outcomes identified in the ToC:

- increasing pupil motivation to attend school, notably through improved connectedness;
- increased family engagement with the education system;
- reduced workload for other school staff, which provides in-kind benefits; and

- improved attendance and behaviours.

We examined impacts overall and variation by pupil characteristics.

Increasing pupil motivation to attend school

Most staff within the case study schools that employed AFLOs did feel that they had a significant effect on increasing pupil motivation to attend school. This was as a result of increasing pupil awareness of the importance of good attendance for their future careers and addressing barriers, at a pupil level, that discourage pupils to attend school.

> *The trust the AFLO builds with families is essential in helping them to see the value of education and the impact of not attending school. These are marginal gains, but can be noticeable in the GCSE years. (*AFLO school senior leader)

Most of the pupils in the case studies were able to provide tangible examples of where AFLOs have motivated them to attend school. One Year 9 pupil reported attending due to new lunchtime sport activities that the AFLO had organised. A Year 7 pupil reported that the AFLO had *'helped them see that being in school was important for my future'* (Year 7 pupil). AFLOs also cited examples of helping pupils overcome barriers related to disagreement among their friends, or when they have been anxious about exams.

> *I enjoy coming to school now because [the AFLO] arranged so I can play football every day.* (Pupil)

> *[Our AFLO] makes clear that attendance is important if we want to get good grades.* (Pupil)

Among disadvantaged learners with multiple barriers to attendance, including those eligible for FSM, from ethnic minorities and with SEND needs, this personalised approach delivered by AFLOs was felt to be particularly effective for improving motivation. For these groups, standardised interventions had previously failed to produce change or it was known that the pupil needed more support due to complex or high needs. As such, AFLOs address attendance issues among pupils where the schools existing mechanisms delivered to improve attendance have been ineffective (e.g. speaking with parents, issuing standard letters, developing action plans, and then issuing fines).

> *We try to understand why pupils do not attend, and this varies considerably. It could be exam anxiety, fights with friends, homelife problems, not liking a teacher, anything. Then we try to understand what they enjoy about school and to use that to encourage them to attend. This could be treats, it could be allowing them to play football at lunchtime, it could be getting them involved in organising school events. It depends on the person.* (AFLO)

> *Because [the AFLO has] not necessarily got that educational background, she's able to find ways in with students and parents that we would not necessarily have.* (AFLO school senior leader)

Bespoke interventions helped reduce the emotional and practical obstacles that contributed to absence, particularly in cases involving anxiety, SEND, or difficult home environments. The support was felt by pupils and parents/carers in the case studies to be more credible and fairer, which in turn increased their connectedness with the school. Where pupils had previously withdrawn in response to punitive or impersonal systems, school staff in the case studies reported that personalised approaches helped rebuild a sense of agency and connection to school life.

Increasing family engagement with the education system

In the case studies, parents/carers were generally positive about their relationship with AFLOs. As one parent/carer stated, the AFLO is *'really good'* and *'has a great rapport'* with the pupils. Parents/carers generally felt that the strength of the AFLO was that they were seen as *'trying to help us, rather than punish us'*. They felt this made them feel more supported by the school and therefore, part of the school community.

Most pupils in the case studies similarly reported positive relationships with AFLOs. They were felt to be *'someone we could talk to without being judged'*. For many pupils, this opportunity to engage with school staff without the risk of punishment did make them believe they were a valued part of the school community.

Senior leaders within case studies generally felt that AFLOs were effective in increasing family engagement within the education system. This reflects that for pupils that are persistently absent, AFLOs are the key family facing staff member. As one senior leader in a case study stated: *'They are the bridge between school and the family'* (Senior leader). AFLOs were felt to be effective in undertaking this role because they had the time to build relationships with families, and their meetings with families were in most cases informal without being about disciplinary actions, which allowed them to build better relationships.

Most AFLOs similarly felt that a key outcome of their role was in building relationships with families, particularly where there was historical disengagement that had created barriers to cooperation. This was regarded as contributing to improved attendance by enabling families and pupils to be more open about the underlying reasons for absence. When a strong relationship had been established, parents/carers were more likely to accept the legitimacy of school attendance expectations and to cooperate with the interventions offered. Several schools described this shift as one of reframing education as a shared priority, especially in households where school had not previously been seen as essential.

> *It is all about getting to know the child and family so you can understand why they are not attending.* (AFLO)

Parents/carers and pupils that were interviewed in the case studies felt the presence of an approachable AFLO was instrumental in getting them to attend school as they reframed attendance as a pastoral concern rather than a disciplinary one. They were particularly complementary when AFLOs did not treat attendance issues as breaches of conduct warranting punishment, but as signals of underlying difficulties that needed support. Staff similarly noted that this shift helped reduce defensiveness or fear among pupils and families, particularly those already facing complex challenges. This allowed conversations about absence to became more open and constructive, as pupils felt less like they were being *'caught out'* and more like they were being listened to.

> *[Our AFLO] is very friendly and helpful. She always listens to our point of view.* (Parent/carer)

All the AFLOs in the case studies were able to give examples where they had built relationships with families, which helped address attendance issues. In one case, regular home visits by the AFLO led to a previously uncontactable parent/carer beginning to engage in conversation and ultimately agreeing to a school support plan for their child. Another AFLO described a situation in which they held weekly calls to a family where the pupil was refusing to attend due to anxiety. Over time, the parent/carer began to view school as a partner rather than a threat, which resulted in the pupil's gradual return. In a further example, the school reported that the AFLO's involvement allowed a pupil to express concerns about noise and crowds in the school environment, information that was then used to implement adjustments that improved attendance.

> *I think having that good relationship with the student and building on that relationship with the parent are fundamental to [attendance] at the minute.* (Tutor)

> *The [AFLO] is our extension into the community.* (Deputy headteacher)

<u>Reduced workload for other school staff, which provides in-kind benefits</u>

The introduction of AFLOs was felt to lead to some efficiency for other staff. The AFLOs that were interviewed but not part of the ten case studies reported that the tasks that are typically undertaken by AFLOs in terms of monitoring of attendance, universal support, and targeted support are undertaken by other staff members including form teachers, welfare teams, and reception. However, the impact of AFLOs in this area may not always be that substantial. This is because in the AFLO case studies, it was reported that the AFLOs played a role in mobilising other staff in their school to support attendance.

> *It is great that we can rely on AFLOs to help with the follow up with students. We would not be able to do it at the same scale. They are so tenacious too when contacting students!* (Form tutor)

AFLOs do, however, appear to generate some efficiency and greater consistency in the work that schools do in supporting attendance. Some form teachers in the case studies reported that AFLOs had provided them with data that helped them identify pupils that were at risk of persistent absence that they could speak to. Additionally, some AFLOs reported that by holding meetings and discussions with form teachers they were able to ensure that all understood their responsibilities for monitoring attendance. Many senior leaders also reported that AFLOs helped other staff as they had a person working specifically on attendance that they could seek support from or signpost pupils to.

Improving attendance and behaviours

Overall, senior leaders in all the case study schools felt that having an AFLO has helped them reduce absenteeism. This was thought to be through providing one to one support to pupils to help them overcome barriers to attending school, and through providing sympathetic engagement with pupils to increase motivation to attend school and family engagement in the education system. Additionally, it was perceived that they also raise the profile of attendance, which helps ensure even those that attend regularly are less inclined to take ad hoc days off.

> *Hand on heart, I do not believe we would have achieved anyway near the same [attendance figure] without the AFLO.* (Senior leader)

Most school leaders in the case studies also, however, reported that AFLOs were not a *'quick fix'* in terms of addressing attendance issues. They noted that regardless of the support provided, there are some children that are not motivated to attend school and cannot be convinced otherwise. Additionally, some may have personal issues, such as carer responsibilities, substance use, and/or mental health issues, and a lack of parental support for attending schools, which cannot be addressed by AFLOs and require specialist support.

Given the complex nature of these pupil needs, most AFLOs felt that these individuals required ongoing support. When AFLOs have been able to describe notable successes in terms of improving the attendance of some pupils, they also note that these pupils still miss school days, just not at the same scale as before. Consequently, as one AFLO reported: *'there is a need to still be on them as they often fall off the wagon'* (AFLO). Some pupils that received support from the AFLOs and subsequently improved their attendance also reported having episodes where their attendance dropped again afterwards. This limits their impact on overall school attendance. However, it should be recognised that in many case study schools, the pupils the impact include those with the greatest disadvantage.

Impacts on disadvantaged groups

In some case study schools, disadvantaged groups such as pupils eligible for FSM, ethnic minorities, and pupils with SEND benefited more from AFLO activities, since they were more likely to have multiple barriers to attendance, such as financial barriers, EBSA, and parents placing a low value on education. These groups were also most likely to see improvements, since AFLO support was most valuable to those that were least likely to benefit from standard school approaches to addressing absenteeism.

For other outcomes, such as on reducing staff workload and in family engagement with the education system, the benefit of AFLOs on pupils eligible for FSM, ethnic minorities, and pupils with SEND was perceived to be the same as for other pupils. This was because the needs in relation to these outcomes were consistent among all pupils that were persistently absent, irrespective of whether they were from particular disadvantaged groups.

Mediators

Mediators are intermediate steps in the causal chain of an intervention that show how an intervention works, by identifying the underlying processes, which lead to outcomes.

One key mediator identified in the case study research was **building trust with pupils and families**. Most AFLOs felt that a critical factor that enabled them to motivate pupils to attend school and increasing family engagement in the education system was in building trust. They felt that in order to change pupil behaviour and to understand their barriers to attending school they needed them to feel that *'they were on their side'*. To do this, AFLOs reported the importance of non-judgemental

communication, in active listening, and in avoiding punishments or the threat of punishment when pupils returned to school.

> *What our Attendance Officer does that is so important is develop a relationship with the pupil and family and make them feel supported. When pupils have been off school for a while they are worried they will be punished if they return, or not be able to catch up. Addressing these issues require a personal touch. It is important because many parents can have negative experience of schools or do not see the value in it, so do not always trust school communication.* (AFLO school senior leader)

Pupils and parents/carers in the case studied generally indicated a sense of trust with AFLOs. Pupils commonly reported they felt they could *'talk openly*' with AFLOs. Some also talked about having negative experiences of some teachers and senior leaders, feeling they were *'unfair'* and *'picking on them'*. Hence, they welcomed speaking to AFLOs who were felt to be independent.

Similarly, another key moderator was **effective communication between AFLOs and other school staff**. In the case studies and interviews, AFLOs frequently stated they required up-to-date information on pupil circumstances to identify if they are at risk of becoming persistently absent and to deliver targeted interventions that improve student connectedness and family engagement in the education system. Form teachers and pastoral teams are best placed to provide this information and therefore, AFLOs need to work effectively with these teams in order to achieve positive outcomes.

> *To do our job properly we need the support of the teachers. They are the ones that see the students every day. They can say whether someone is ill, or whether they had a big fight in school, or whether there has been a death in the family. They also let us know if it is a one-off thing or regular. This knowledge of the student is what we need before we start making contact.* (AFLO)

Context/Moderators

Moderators are factors that influence the relationship between an intervention and its outcome, including how strong or for whom an intervention works. It helps identify when and for whom something is effective.

<u>School-level moderators</u>

A key moderator affecting the impact of AFLOs on attendance is the school having a **'whole-school approach' to supporting attendance**. In all the case studies and interviews, all senior leaders and AFLOs felt that the effectiveness of their role depended on support from other staff. This included identifying from form teachers which pupils were at risk of persistent absence and barriers that affect their attendance, as well as being able to signpost pupils to other support from pupil welfare teams. They noted that without wider organisational support, AFLOs could be isolated, which limited their ability to engage one to one with pupils and be able to organise interventions that can encourage pupil attendance. This in turn limits the impact they have on pupil attendance and behaviours.

> *Critically important is the strategic element to what we are trying to do. We are making clear all the staff understand that attendance is everyone's responsibility, it's our school culture and everyone has an element of that. Then we all look specifically what they're doing and how can adapt practise to sort of support the aims of the attendance improvement.* (AFLO)

> *[In our school] it's very clear that attendance is everyone's business. There's nobody who works in the school that has no role associated with attendance.* (Senior leader)

Relatedly**, senior leader support** was also regarded as a key moderator. Most AFLOs felt this was essential to help them address absenteeism. It was felt to be critical to enable them to mobilise other staff in the school to support attendance. Additionally, it was also felt to 'signal' to pupils that attendance is important in the school, which helped AFLOs re-engage the pupils in learning.

> *A big change in the way we tackle attendance is when the Vice-Principal came in two years ago. He was very big on attendance. He brings the teaching and support staff together every few weeks to discuss attendance, so everyone understands how important it is*. (AFLO).

Another key moderator was **school capacity**. While some schools could not offer much support and relied on external referrals, others had a lot of in-house resources, including pastoral staff members, internally run specialised interventions and ring-fenced budgets, to help pupils overcome variety of barriers to attendance. For example, to address the most cited reason for absence across all case studies—social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH)—one school could call upon an in-house counsellor, while another had a number of pastoral staff trained to provide mental health first aid and deliver SEMH interventions, such as art therapy, Lego therapy, emotional literacy support assistance, and friendship programmes. Similarly, to alleviate some of the financial barriers, some schools seemed to be more resourced and resourceful in terms of being able to directly provide or organise funding for transport to school, uniforms, etc. The wide-ranging, readily available, good quality support with various challenges pupils may be going through allowed schools to try and address both the root causes for absenteeism but also prevent it from occurring.

> *I cannot do it all, so need the help of pastoral staff and external agencies for some attendance problems, particularly around mental health*. (AFLO)

In-house capacity was regarded by various staff in the case studies as being important. In part this was due to limitations in externally support. Many services were reported to have high waiting lists and case study schools also reported receiving limited information on the progress that pupils were making. However, it was also noted that pupils benefited from having a 'safe' contact at school whom they trusted and could rely on as a friend or a counsellor. For example, a Year 11 boy with SEMH concerns/issues and broader SEND needs dramatically improved his attendance by going through the schools' emotional school avoidance programme. Of the wide-ranging support he received, he felt that what helped the most were conversations about his feelings and emotions with pastoral support teams in the school, the check-ins with them during the school day, combined with the possibility for him to take some time out of class to study in a quiet space.

The availability of **high-quality school data** was also an important moderator. Data was instrumental in enabling AFLOs to identify pupils that are at risk of being persistently absent so that early intervention can be taken. This requires records being collated accurately. Most schools did have accurate data and a few invested in digital systems to enable information to be collated quickly. However, some AFLOs did experience challenges in accessing accurate data.

> *It's about following up absolutely everything, chasing every missing register. Any pupils with any conflict in marks. It's following those conflicting marks or making sure that we've got the right information [...] so you've got to be meticulous in every single thing that you do*. (AFLO)

The **number of pupils within a school** was also perceived to impact the effectiveness of AFLOs. Within the case studies, a single AFLO was perceived as being most effective in a small school with 500 pupils. In medium-sized and large schools AFLOs did not feel they could provide the necessary tailored support to all pupils. In medium and larger case study schools, this was addressed by employing more AFLOs or allocating additional staff to support AFLO functions, particularly in terms of the administrative functions.

Other policies and initiatives undertaken by schools were also reported in the case studies as having a large impact on attendance and the effectiveness of AFLOs. An AFLO in one school for example reported that although they have been in post for over five years, it was only in the last year when a new SLT implemented new policies related to absence that absenteeism decreased. However, it was not possible to distinguish this from support provided by AFLOs. This is because in the case studies AFLOs are often embedded as part of a wider team of individuals within a school that deal with attendance issues. As such, it is difficult to identify what policies would have taken place without an AFLO and which would not. Other school factors, including the level of disadvantage of the school area, was not felt to have had a major effect on the impact of AFLOs.

Pupil-level moderators

Pupil background was thought to be a moderating effect of attendance intervention effectiveness, both through its relationship with reasons for absenteeism and response to the intervention itself. AFLOs and form teachers in the case studies generally reported that pupils where parents/carers had not achieved high grades at school but led successful careers were less likely to promote the positive benefits of attending school. Additionally, financial factors, such as the cost of bus travel, could also be a barrier for some pupils to attend schools. Pupils in disadvantaged areas were also more likely to experience chaotic home lives, which similarly affected pupil ability to attend classes. This means that supporting pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds is likely to be more challenging and may impact the effectiveness of interventions, though, as noted earlier, the bespoke support that some AFLOs offer may work better for some of these pupils as a result.
Interventions targeted at specific groups of pupils were generally rare, as most provision was either targeted at the pupil level or through universal preventative action. This did not mean that the schools ignored pupil background—quite the opposite, AFLOs and staff members were very considerate of variety of factors that could affect pupil lives and engagement with the school. However, for staff, each pupil they provided support to was on an individual basis. While there was an implicit agreement that schools must have inclusive processes in place so that all pupils get access to support they need, and that pupil background and even whole-family situation needs to be considered in addressing absenteeism, there was a push against the notion that there is one recipe for the whole group of pupils sharing one characteristic.

Cost evaluation results

This section provides a high-level cost assessment of schools employing AFLOs. It examines in turn:

- salary and related on-costs of AFLOs;
- AFLO training and induction costs;
- AFLO recruitment costs;
- additional resources that AFLOs may need;
- percentage of other staff time spent on attendance issues; and
- lost output from parent's time out of work (number of hours engaging with school per pupil who received AFLO support in a year).

These costs are described below.

AFLO salary costs

In the case studies, AFLO salary costs typically ranged from £30,000 to £40,000, which includes on-costs such as national insurance contributions and pensions contributions. Similar findings were identified in the scoping stage following a review of AFLO job adverts.

The variation in salaries were largely due to variation in AFLO roles and remits. AFLOs that spent a higher proportion of their time undertaking executive or strategic responsibilities were more likely in the case studies to command higher salaries.

AFLO training costs

In the case studies and interviews, most AFLOs reported undertaking training in the last year, but this was mainly short courses, including some internal courses. Topics covered included child protection, Prevent training, safeguarding and parental engagement, alongside staff-wide training such as data security.

AFLOs and senior leaders were not able to provide a cost estimate for AFLO training costs, as the costs come from a central staff development budget. However, they were reported to be relatively low (less than £1,000) per year.

AFLO recruitment and induction costs

In the case studies the recruitment costs for employing AFLOs were generally low. In around a third of the case studies and interviews, the AFLO had previously worked in another role in the school, which commonly were pupil welfare or pastoral support roles. When employing externally, costs were reported to be typically low (£1,000 to £2,000), although in over half the case studies the interviewees were unable to provide an estimate of recruitment costs.

Staff induction costs were also generally regarded as low. In most case study schools, this equated to two to four weeks for AFLOs to become aware of school systems and to build relationships with other staff and pupils. These costs are lower when staff were employed internally.

Additional AFLO resources

In the case studies and interviews, most AFLOs stated that the additional resources they required to undertake their role were low. Senior leaders similarly felt that the overall additional costs of AFLO activities were low, with the main costs being for office equipment, computer, and travel costs for undertaking pupil visits.

There were some initiatives that AFLOs undertook that required some school investment. This included the organisation of rewards for students with high attendance, such as trips to theme parks, alongside activities to encourage pupils to attend schools, such as staff costs for organising sport sessions during lunch times. However, most AFLOs classed these activities as wider school interventions for tackling absenteeism, rather than costs specific to AFLO activities.

Cost savings on staff time

To a limited extent, case study schools also identified some savings in time from other members of staff, such as from teachers, other admin staff, and welfare teams. These were generally reported by school leaders as providing in-kind rather than financial benefits. For example, it enabled form teachers to spend more time on lesson planning and welfare teams to spend more time running sessions to address behaviour issues in school, These in-kind savings were not felt to be substantial (generally less than one to two hours a week for form teachers and around half a day for welfare staff) as it was noted that these staff also had to contribute to supporting attendance even if an AFLO was in post.

Savings on lost output of parent time

As presented in the impact assessment, the overall impact on employing AFLOs during the pre- and post-COVID periods is small and therefore the savings on lost output of parent time can be considered negligible.

Overall costs

The indicative costs identified from the case studies and desk research in employing AFLOs is presented below. The costs are for schools employing only one FTE AFLO (which is most common for those with under 500 pupils). Larger schools employing more than one AFLO would see a proportional increase in costs.

The cost analysis presented below should be viewed with caution. This is because there was considerable diversity in AFLO roles and responsibilities, as well as difficulties in distinguishing what activities delivered by AFLOs would have been delivered anyway through other members of staff.

Table 531: Breakdown of the costs incurred when introducing AFLOs

Category	Item
AFLO costs	Salary including on-costs (recurring): £30,000 to £40,000 per year per AFLO
	Staff recruitment and induction costs (one-off): £5,000 to £6,000
AFLO associated costs	Office equipment (one-off): £2.000 to £3,000
	Other costs (e.g. travel and subsistence: Less than £500)
Programme costs	Cost of interventions: £2,000 to £3,000
	Cost of staff training/capacity building: £1,000 to £2,000
Overall costs for first year (per AFLO)	**£40,500 to £54,500**
Costs for subsequent years	**£33,500 to £45,500**

Opportunity costs

Costs for employing AFLOs could be spent elsewhere. In the non-AFLO schools that were spoken to, it has been used to fund pastoral staff (average FTE costs £28,000 to £38,000) or teacher assistant staff (average FTE costs £23,000 to £27,000). Additionally, some schools invested AFLO costs into incentives for good attendance, such as enrichment activities or sports activities.

Conclusion

Table 54: Key conclusions

Key conclusions	
1.	Employing an AFLO in and of itself did not lead to a meaningful impact on persistent absence overall. Across the pre-COVID period, persistent absence reduced in the same academic year that AFLOs were employed, but increased after one year, before reducing again after two years. These changes in persistent absence were all small at 0.1 percentage points (ppts), which, in a school of 1,000 pupils, is equivalent to the number of pupils being persistently absent increasing or reducing by one pupil. Introducing AFLOs in the post-COVID period was found to have a small detrimental effect, increasing persistent absence by a small amount. These results have a moderate to high security rating.
2.	There was evidence of a small reduction in persistent absence for free school meals pupils in the pre-COVID period, and of a larger reduction in the post-COVID period. However, there is uncertainty around these findings as the possible impact estimates included both a reduction and increase in persistent absence, and the results may have a lower security rating than the overall findings because of the smaller number of pupils in the samples.
3.	There was some evidence of a reduction in persistent absence among pupils of Black and Asian ethnicity in the pre-COVID period. These impacts were not replicated for any ethnicity groups in the post-COVID period, however, with only small and ambiguous estimates, where the possible impact was consistent with both a reduction and increase in persistent absence.
4.	Interviews with schools highlighted considerable variation in the role and responsibilities of AFLOs which may have diluted their overall impact. AFLOs were perceived by schools to have the greatest impact when providing tailored support addressing individual barriers for those pupils who were, or were at risk of becoming, persistently absent with the aim of re-integrating them back into school.
5.	Schools perceived AFLOs to be most effective when they worked within a coordinated whole-school approach to managing attendance, with support from teachers, welfare staff and heads of year. This was seen to enhance the support that AFLOs provided pupils through a good understanding of pupils' personal circumstances, which was key to tackling the factors that resulted in poor attendance.

Impact evaluation and IPE integration

Evidence to support the logic model

The evaluation findings provide partial and conditional support for the AFLO logic model, with several critical assumptions proving weaker than anticipated:

- The IPE confirmed that AFLOs deliver the **anticipated activities**, that is, monitoring attendance data to identify at-risk pupils, providing universal support through awareness-raising and incentives, and delivering targeted interventions including home visits, meetings with families, and bespoke support addressing individual barriers. Case study evidence demonstrated that these activities operate largely as theorised, with AFLOs successfully positioning themselves as bridges between school and family, and building trust through non-judgemental engagement. However, despite overlap, there was **significant variation in roles and responsibilities** across the schools interviewed.

- The **activity-to-immediate outcome pathways** proposed in the logic model received reasonable empirical support by the IPE in that:

    - The immediate outcome of **increased family engagement** was substantiated through qualitative evidence. Multiple case studies documented AFLOs successfully engaging previously uncontactable families, with examples of parents shifting from viewing schools as threats to seeing them as partners.

    - Similarly, **increased pupil motivation and connectedness** received support, particularly the emphasis on trust-building and belonging. Pupils and parents/carers explicitly identified the non-punitive, pastoral approach as instrumental in reframing attendance concerns.

    - However, the **'reduced workload for other staff'** outcome received weak support from the IPE. While some efficiency gains were reported, AFLOs were largely found to work alongside rather than instead of other staff, mobilising form teachers, heads of year, and pastoral teams rather than replacing their functions. This challenges the logic model's framing of AFLOs as workforce substitutes and suggests they function more as coordinators within a distributed attendance

support system (while also delivering activities that other staff would unlikely do in their absence).

- Evidence from the impact evaluation on the **pathway from immediate outcomes to reduced absenteeism (the long-term outcome)** was limited:
    - The pre-COVID impact analysis found a small effect (0.1ppt reduction in persistent absence in the same academic year and two years after AFLOs were introduced: in a school with 1,000 pupils, a 0.1ppt reduction would mean that AFLOs reduced the number of persistently absent pupils by one).
    - Similarly, the post-COVID pathway received no empirical support as introducing AFLOs in the academic year 2022/2023 was not found to have affected any outcome for the full sample (there is a lack of certainty in the 0.06ppt reduction in the proportion of persistently absent pupils as the possible impact of AFLOs on this period also include a reduction in persistent absence up to 1.6ppts and an increase in persistent absence up to 1.7ppts).

Although some aspects around the impact magnitude, persistence over time, and universality were not explicitly theorised by the ToC, our findings suggest the following:

- **Impact for some subgroups but not others.** We found evidence of a positive impact from introducing AFLOs for pupil subgroups from Asian and Black minority ethnic groups. Additionally, the analysis of the selection mechanism shows that schools with higher proportions of pupils from Black and Asian minority ethnic groups were less likely to employ AFLOs (despite these pupils benefiting most). Impact mechanisms may only work, or work more effectively, for certain groups.
- **Impact heterogeneity across schools** could be substantial. Effects varied dramatically by school cohort, with some years showing beneficial impacts (2015/2016: -0.4ppts), others showing detrimental effects (2014/2015: +0.4ppts at one year), and still others showing null effects (2017/2018, 2018/2019). The logic model did not satisfactorily explain why/how organisational context or external factors that vary across schools can alter intervention effectiveness.
- The IPE identified **additional moderating factors** that could be critical to explain the existence of an impact from AFLO and its heterogeneity across schools, notably, whether the school adopted a whole-school approach and organisational capacity. The IPE consistently emphasised that AFLO effectiveness depends on their ability to mobilise other staff, access high-quality data systems, and secure senior leadership support. Schools with lone AFLOs handling all tasks were perceived to have limited impact compared to those where AFLOs operated within teams with clear divisions of labour. The logic model identified 'support from school leadership/other staff' as a moderator but substantially underestimated its centrality.

Interpretation

The evaluation findings suggest that introducing an AFLO, in of itself, did not meaningfully impact persistent absence or attendance overall. The modest 0.1ppt reduction in persistent absence observed in the year of AFLO introduction (pre-COVID period, full sample) and after two years translates to approximately one fewer persistently absent pupil per 1,000 students.

Arguably the initial impact was not sustained as persistent absence increased by the same amount after one year before reducing again after two years. The impact estimates in these years were also consistent with null, negative and positive impacts, suggesting a minor impact overall. The qualitative evidence that AFLOs work with pupils requiring 'ongoing support' who 'often fall off the wagon' provides a plausible explanation: it is possible that, while still being present in treated schools, the extent and quality of support initially provided by AFLOs was not sustained over time, or the mechanisms that enabled AFLO effectiveness were short-lived.

The **cost of employing AFLOs** (£40,000 to £60,000 per FTE including associated costs) must be weighed against alternative uses of resources, particularly given the absence of sustained effects. Although the costs of employing AFLOs are low, these

costs could be invested on other school staff, such as pastoral staff or teaching assistants, who both support pupils overcome barriers affecting attendance.

Impacts in the pre-COVID period were found to be **inconsistent** in that they **varied across school cohorts** (defined by time of AFLO introduction). Despite identifying a small positive impact overall (full sample), several school cohorts showed no immediate effects, while others showed negative effects (increased absence). These heterogeneous impacts are, therefore, difficult to interpret conclusively. They may stem from schools having different characteristics which affect AFLO effectiveness, such as the level of senior leadership support, quality attendance data systems, and integration with other staff, as well as the variation observed in the role itself. This is supported by the exploratory analysis conducted on a small sub-sample of schools which suggests that the effectiveness of AFLOs may be moderated by the specific tasks they do within the school that hired them. There was also some evidence that schools that had not employed an AFLO were carrying out similar tasks (particularly those of a more administrative nature) through other staff.

The finding that pupils from Black and Asian minority ethnic groups had 1–2ppt reductions in absenteeism while White pupils showed no impact or even a detrimental impact represented the study's most striking pattern. Explanations for this differential impact may include unobserved selection processes operating differently across ethnic group or differences in baseline attendance trajectories. Moreover, the finding that schools serving higher proportions of pupils from Black and Asian minority ethnic groups are less likely to employ AFLOs requires careful interpretation.

The post-COVID findings (no evidence of an impact from introducing AFLOs) suggest that even if AFLOs showed small pre-pandemic effectiveness, their value in current circumstances remains uncertain. Schools considering AFLO adoption should not assume pre-COVID evidence (itself weak) transfers to present contexts. Our findings could reflect: i) genuine collapse of effectiveness due to changed attendance dynamics post-pandemic; ii) the pre-COVID findings are false positives now revealed through replication failure; or iii) temporary disruption during an exceptional year.

Overall, the finding show that the nature of the activity carried out may be more important in improving attendance than specific roles or structures, and therefore schools should not make decisions about whether to employ an AFLO on the basis of this evidence alone. However, where schools do employ AFLOs they should ensure the role is well-supported by senior leadership, that staff have access to quality attendance data systems, and that they are well integrated with the wider team.

Limitations and lessons learned

The impact evaluation has limitations that must be acknowledged when interpreting findings and drawing conclusions for policy and practice. The key constraints are as follows:

- **Methodological assumptions.** To provide reliable (unbiased) estimates of the AFLO impact, the DiD approach requires that treated and untreated schools would have followed parallel attendance trajectories prior to AFLO introduction. However, for the post-COVID analysis, only two pre-treatment years (2020/2021 and 2021/2022) were available due to pandemic data collection disruptions, providing only partial evidence to assess the plausibility of this critical assumption. In the pre-COVID analysis, the plausibility of this assumption could not be assessed for the 2013/2014 cohort, and the 2014/2015 cohort had an insufficient pre-treatment period for rigorous testing. ln some cases, (for some impacts) the assumption was not deemed as plausible.

- **Selection bias.** The probit analysis identified some of the factors that caused schools to introduce AFLOs for the first time (e.g. insufficient resources, as measured by a low school's pupil to teacher ratio, a large proportion of pupils who were eligible for FSM, and a high pupil overall absence rate in the period prior to introducing AFLOs), and these factors were accounted for when estimating impacts. However, schools may have introduced AFLOs based on other factors (e.g. adoption/lack of adoption of other attendance practices and policies), which were not observable due to data limitations, and were therefore, not accounted for in the impact analysis. This could have resulted in the impact estimates illustrated in this report being biased.

- **AFLO dosage and models.** Defining treatment as simply introducing versus not introducing AFLOs conceals enormous implementation variation. Schools employed 0.5 to 6 FTE AFLOs in roles ranging from purely administrative to strategic leadership. Some had lone officers while others had specialised teams. Impact estimates calculated as averages across different cohorts do not capture this heterogeneity. Unfortunately, we could not explore the effectiveness of different AFLO implementation models, which we identified thanks to our survey of schools because only 16 schools in the survey sample introduced AFLOs in 2022/2023.

- This study could **only measure impact on more distal outcomes (attendance and exclusions) without assessing theorised mechanisms** such as pupil motivation, family engagement, and connectedness. This prevented testing whether the findings of small/no impact from AFLOs reflect mechanism failure (e.g. AFLOs not being able to build positive relationships with pupils mostly affected by attendance issues) or pathway failure (a relationship was built but did not improve attendance). The absence of immediate outcome measurements represents a critical gap in understanding how and when AFLOs can most effectively address absenteeism.

The IPE also has limitations that must be acknowledged. For example:

- Schools volunteering for case studies likely had positive AFLO experiences and strong organisational capacity. Schools with struggling implementations, conflicted relationships, or ambivalent leadership may have declined, meaning our sample probably overrepresents success. The four non-AFLO schools similarly self-selected and may be unusually effective at managing attendance without specialists. Positive participant accounts may not reflect typical experiences.

- All evidence came from interviews rather than observing practice, introducing social desirability bias. Participants may have overstated effectiveness, idealised their work, or selectively recalled successes. We accessed only pupils and parents/carers made available by schools, likely excluding the most disengaged families. The gap between qualitative claims of effectiveness and predominantly null quantitative impacts suggests self-reports may not reflect reality.

- Finally, case studies captured practice in 2023/2024 only, not how AFLO roles evolved over time or whether effectiveness changes with experience. Schools were still adapting to post-pandemic attendance challenges, meaning observed practices may be transitional rather than stable. Therefore, we lack longitudinal perspective on sustainability and development.

The research project highlighted several key lessons learned:

- Future studies should integrate quantitative and qualitative strands earlier and more systematically, with qualitative sampling stratified by quantitative impact patterns to investigate what explains variation. Regular cross-strand meetings would enable iterative hypothesis refinement.

- Implementation constructs identified qualitatively such as organisational capacity, whole-school approaches and leadership support should be measured quantitatively in all treated schools via surveys, enabling moderation. and mediation analysis.

- The retrospective design enabled evaluation across multiple AFLO introduction cohorts using robust administrative data, but precluded baseline measurement of potential mediators or real-time observation of implementation variation. The IPE's qualitative exploration of mechanisms helped compensate for this limitation, though it relied on retrospective stakeholder accounts. Future evaluations should weigh these trade-offs: retrospective designs offer efficiency and breadth, while prospective designs enable more nuanced investigation of how interventions work through planned baseline measurement and direct observation.

Future research and publications

Building on the evaluation findings, several critical aspects require investigation to advance our understanding of AFLO effectiveness and inform policy and practice decisions. The following areas should take precedence in future research as they bear directly on fundamental decisions about whether, when, how, and for whom to implement AFLO models:

- Further research is needed to explore the reasons why AFLOs may benefit FSM eligible pupils and pupils from Black and Asian minority ethnic groups in light of findings from the schools participating in the IPE that these subgroups do not receive targeted support. This has equity implications, especially given that schools with a larger proportion of pupils from Black and Asian minority ethnicity groups are actually *less likely* to hire AFLOs, and those with a larger proportion of FSM eligible pupils *more* likely.

- The absence of strong evidence of impact in the post-COVID period contrasts with some of the pre-COVID findings, while noting the smaller sample, could suggest either fundamental intervention failure or profound misalignment between AFLO practices and changed circumstances. Has the nature of school absenteeism changed fundamentally, requiring different intervention approaches? Have family attitudes toward attendance shifted permanently? Do increased anxiety, reduced social confidence, weakened school-family social contracts overwhelm school-level interventions? These questions have urgent practical relevance given that most current AFLO implementation occurs in the post-pandemic context.

- The finding that immediate impacts fade after one year in the pre-COVID period fundamentally challenges the intervention's value proposition, suggesting attendance improvement requires continuous rather than time-limited intervention. Research priorities include the identification of pupils who maintain attendance improvements from those who relapse, distinguishing between low-intensity of contact with AFLOs (regular check-ins) versus episodic high-intensity intervention (crisis response), and determining the optimal contact frequency and duration.

- The number of AFLOs adopted by a school (rather than the adoption of any number of AFLOs, which is what this research explored) may explain whether AFLOs were effective or not in addressing pupil absenteeism, and the extent of their effectiveness (logically, larger schools with a higher proportion of pupils who are persistently absent would require more AFLOs than smaller schools with a lower proportion of persistently absent pupils). Likewise, differentiation among AFLO roles could determine the existence of an impact and/or its magnitude (our research seems to suggest that AFLOs who have executive roles, which include undertaking interventions like home visits or meetings with parents, in addition to administrative roles are associated with lower level of persistent absence).

- The variation in role definition and responsibilities of AFLOs warrants further investigation to understand where and how AFLOs are working most effectively and their impact on outcomes compared to AFLOs not being well utilised. For instance, the suggested importance of undertaking more executive and strategic tasks, such as home visits, addressing barriers to attendance and designing strategies to manage attendance rather than administrative tasks, in addition to senior leadership buy-in and integration with other staff in the school.

No additional publications arising from this evaluation are currently planned. This report represents the final output from the study.

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Appendix A: Security classification of evaluation findings

Rating	***Criteria for rating***			***Initial score***		***Adjust***		***Final score***
	Design	***MDES***	***Attrition***					
5	*Randomised design*	*<= 0.2*	*0-10%*					
4	*Design for comparison that considers some type of selection on unobservable characteristics (e.g. RDD, Diff-in-Diffs, Matched Diff-in-Diffs)*	*0.21 - 0.29*	*11-20%*					
3	*Design for comparison that considers selection on all relevant observable confounders (e.g. Matching or Regression Analysis with variables descriptive of the selection mechanism)*	*0.30 - 0.39*	*21-30%*			*Adjustment for threats to internal validity* ***[-1]***		*3*
2	*Design for comparison that considers selection only on some relevant confounders*	*0.40 - 0.49*	*31-40%*					
1	*Design for comparison that does not consider selection on any relevant confounders*	*0.50 - 0.59*	*41-50%*					
0	*No comparator*	*>=0.6*	*>50%*					

Threats to validity	**Risk rating**	**Comments**
Threat 1: Confounding	Moderate	Evidence suggestive of parallel trends is presented including in-time and/or in-space placebo tests. The parallel trends assumption did not hold in one of the six school cohorts which make up the primary pre-COVID analysis. For the post-COVID analysis, only two pre-treatment years were available due to pandemic data collection disruptions, providing only partial evidence to assess the plausibility of this critical assumption.
Threat 2: Concurrent Interventions	Low	As research shows, schools often provide multiple overlapping interventions to support attendance alongside employment of AFLOs. These additional programmes/initiatives may be correlated with AFLO employment and pupil outcomes, making it difficult to isolate the effect of AFLOs alone.
Threat 3: Experimental effects	Low / NA	Not directly applicable, as the research is not an experiment. Schools either did or did not employ an AFLO.
Threat 4: Implementation fidelity	Moderate	Some concern that treatment definition does not do a good job of identifying treated schools reliably, given the variable nature of names of this role and that, through the IPE, some are already identified as having been missed due to use of the name 'Education and Welfare Officer'.

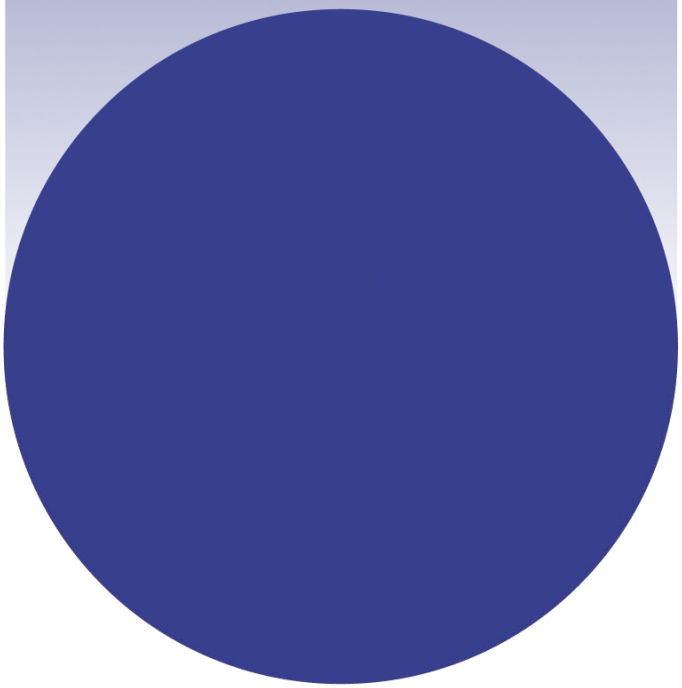
Threat 5: Missing Data	Low	A small number of schools in could not be matched to AFLO status in the SWC (3.9% in the pre-COVID period, and 1.2% in the post-COVID period).
Threat 6: Measurement of Outcomes	Low	Outcome was constructed from administrative data. Both peer reviewers classified it as low.
Threat 7: Selective reporting	Low	The study was preregistered and analysis conducted and reported according to the published study plan.

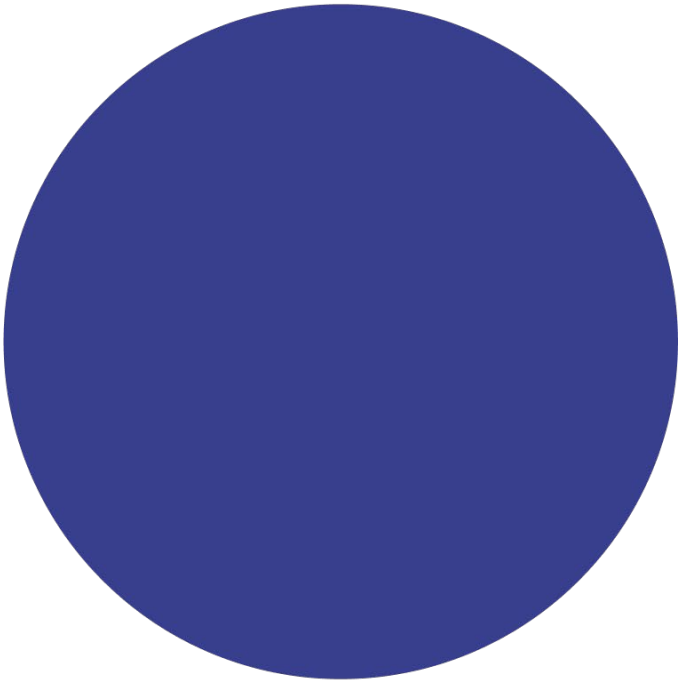
- **Initial padlock score:** [4] Padlocks - design considers some type of selection on unobservable characteristics (DiD)
- **Reason for adjustment for threats to validity**: [-1] Padlocks - two moderate threats to validity as described above, with the same likely direction of bias
- **Final padlock score:** initial score adjusted for threats to validity = [3] Padlocks

Further appendices

Appendices B – I are available as a separate document (Further Appendices) published on the project page.

This document is available for download at https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk





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