

Estimating the prevalence of young people absent from school due to bullying

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Red Balloon Learner Centre Group

Red Balloon Learner Centre Group is the only charity in the UK set up specifically to recover severely bullied children who are out of school and missing education. Red Balloon Learner Centres provide short-term educational and therapeutic programmes.

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The ABA brings together over 100 organisations working to stop bullying and create a safe environment in which children and young people can grow, learn and play.

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Executive Summary

Background and context

In 2010, Red Balloon Learner Centres commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to explore the feasibility and, if the outcome of this exploration was favourable, to undertake a study to produce an estimate of the number of young people of secondary school age (aged 11-15) absent from state school because of severe experiences of bullying.

Prior to this research, no accurate estimate existed of the proportion or number of young people who do not attend school due to severe experiences of bullying. The focus of research on bullying to date has been on estimating the prevalence of bullying in schools – most notably in the TellUs survey – with little work being undertaken to measure its impact in terms of school absence.

Therefore, it was envisaged that this research would broaden the evidence base in relation to school-based bullying. It was also intended that the estimate of the number of young people absent from secondary school due to severe experiences of bullying would inform Red Balloon Learner Centres' campaigning activities and development of provision.

Methodology

In early 2010, NatCen undertook a feasibility study involving desk research including the review of existing data sources. Its purpose was to explore the possibility of and practicalities involved in conducting a survey to generate an estimate of the number of young people absent from secondary school due to severe experiences of bullying.

It was concluded that such a study would be feasible, focussing on two of the three sub-populations of secondary school pupils among whom absence due to bullying would be most likely to occur – those identified as frequently absent from school and those who are electively home educated¹.

Samples of these two populations were selected – from the National Pupil Database (NPD) for those frequently absent from school² and by making contact with a sample of Local Authorities, who are legally required to keep a register of those who are EHE. A two-page postal questionnaire was developed for each

¹ It was concluded that the third sub-population among which absence from school due to bullying is likely to be high – those missing from school – was by definition impossible to access for the purpose of survey research.

² Frequent absence from school was defined as 28 or more half sessions missed during the school year 2009/2010

sample and was posted directly to parents of young people identified as frequently absent in the NPD, and of those identified as home educated by local authorities. The questionnaires asked the parents for all of the reasons and the main reason why their child was absent from school or being home educated, as well as some demographic details.

The questionnaires were mailed in early January 2011, with the fieldwork period lasting until mid February. Overall, a response rates of 16.8% was achieved; this breaks down as 16.5% for the frequently absent and 21.5% for the EHE samples.

The data was weighted to take account of the unequal chances of being selected which those with different characteristics had.

Reasons for school absence and being home educated

Parents of the sample of young people who were frequently absent from school primarily identified reasons relating to health as the cause of this; health was selected by 87% of parents, with the second most popular explanation being holidays, selected by just 27%. Bullying was the fifth most common reason provided for school absence – identified by **18%** of parents. The picture remained similar when parents were asked to select the **main reason** for school absence, with health continuing to dominate. 67% identified reasons relating to health as the main reason for school absence, with bullying being the fourth most common main reason, chosen by **3.4%**.

For young people who are EHE, the picture in relation to reasons for this is much less clear, with no one reason standing out as the main explanation for the decision to home educate. 54% identified the fact that the child does not like or is not suited to school teaching, while 52% pointed to the academic or social limitations of schools. Bullying was the third most common explanation provided by parents for the decision to electively home educate, identified by **43.8%**. When it came to the main reason for the young person being home educated, bullying was the most common, selected by **18.4%** - just less than one in five. Overall, the main reasons for choosing home education were far more mixed than those for pupils' school absence.

How many young people are absent from secondary school due to severe experiences of bullying?

The proportion of parents who identified bullying as *the main* reason for school absence or the decision to home educate was inevitably lower than the proportion who identified this as one of a number of reasons. It is therefore possible to calculate two estimates of the number of young people absent from secondary school due to severe experiences of bullying:

- **We estimate 16,493 young people aged 11-15 are absent from state school, where bullying is the main reason for absence. We can say with 95% confidence that the true population estimate lies within the following bounds (13,364, 19,640).**
- We estimate 77,950 young people aged 11-15 are absent from state school, where bullying is a reason given for absence. We can say with 95% confidence that the true population estimate lies within the following bounds (71,405, 84,496).

Further analysis of the data suggests that the first estimate is likely to be the most accurate, for Red Balloon Learner Centres' purposes, due to their interest in school absence due to severe experiences of bullying:

- Parents provided 2.38 reasons on average for their child's absence from school or the decision to home-educate. This figure rose to 4.12 among those who cited bullying as a reason – suggesting the estimate for school absence where bullying was a reason above includes many cases where it would have been secondary or only have explained a minority of absences.
- Inevitably, some reasons for absence are linked and might interact or have a cause and effect relationship. It is particularly interesting to note that 83% of parents who cited bullying as a reason for their children's frequent school absence also identified reasons relating to health (although this proportion was just 26% for the EHE sample). Health problems could result from bullying or be a factor targeted by bullies – therefore, the estimate of the main reasons for school absence and home education take account of parents' identifications of the primary or over-riding reason.

The estimate is higher than we anticipated based on existing assumptions within the field and the findings of the feasibility study. The study was designed on the basis that 3% of young people were frequently absent from school and 10% of young people were home educated due to severe experiences of bullying. While the proportion in relation to young people who are frequently absent from school is reasonably accurate, a much higher proportion of young people are home educated because of bullying than anticipated.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations it is important to bear in mind when considering the findings of this research and their application to the development of policy and provision:

- **Response** - the overall response rate of 16.8% is lower than for which we had hoped. Low response rates are a limitation in any study as the proportion of the population of interest that has been captured is reduced. This reduces the precision of any survey estimates which means that any associated confidence intervals (as set out above) are wider. Response bias is a particular concern when response rates are low, it may be that respondents with particular characteristics or attitudes are more likely to respond than others. Some analysis of data for the selected and responding samples was possible; this indicated that our responding sample was not unduly biased.
- **Questionnaire design considerations** – our questions about reasons for school absence and for the decision to home-educate used a self-defined interpretation of “bullying”, meaning parents and guardians would be likely to have interpreted this differently. Parents and guardians rather than young people provided the data, and they may have had different

interpretations to the reasons behind their children's absence than they themselves would have had.

- **Sample design considerations** – the feasibility study hypothesised that three distinct populations of young people were more likely to be absent from school because of experiences of bullying - young people who are electively home educated, missing from education or persistently absent. The survey design identified sample frame sources for the first and third group but not for those who are missing from education. It was not possible to represent their views in this survey estimate.

Conclusions

The findings of this study make an important contribution to a little researched or documented field of enquiry. The number of young people aged 11-15 absent from state secondary school because of severe experiences of bullying is considerable higher than it was previously thought – with our best estimate being 16,493 (+/- 3,147). This is partly because bullying is a much more common reason for choosing home education than was previously envisaged. Inevitably, reasons for school absence and choosing home education are not straight-forward, with different reasons having the potential to interact with one and other. There is a particularly close relationship between experiences of bullying and health, which would warrant further investigation in furthering our understanding of the links between bullying and school absence.

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of Red Balloon Learner Centres. Its aim was to generate an estimate of the number of young people of secondary school age eligible to attend state schools (excluding special schools) in England that are not in school due to severe experiences of bullying. The survey was conducted with parents of young people who have been absent from school and parents of young people who are electively home educated. To place bullying in these contexts, this report also looks at all of the reasons reported for choosing home education and for school absence.

Chapter 1 of the report outlines the aims and objectives of the research, as well as the research context in which it was undertaken. Chapter 2 presents the findings of the research in terms of the reasons given by parents and guardians for their children's absences from school, and for choosing elective home education. Having outlined the necessary background, Chapter 3 addresses the main research question of interest – by seeking to estimate the number of young people of secondary school age in England that are not in school due to experiences of bullying. Chapter 4 highlights the methodological issues and limitations to be borne in mind when considering the research findings and their application to policy-making and provision. The fifth and final chapter summarises the conclusions to be drawn from the research. The technical appendices include a detailed description of the methodology of the research and a collection of the survey documents used.

1.1 Research aims and objectives

NatCen was commissioned by the charity Red Balloon Learner Centres to conduct a survey with the following aim:

"To estimate the number of children in England who do not attend secondary school due to severe experiences of bullying"

This research was commissioned following a feasibility study conducted by NatCen to explore the possibility of and practicalities involved in conducting such a survey.

This group of young people is the main target group for support by Red Balloon. The purpose of conducting the research will be to provide the charity with data to inform its campaigning activities. Red Balloon Learner Centres aim to recover children who have been severely bullied to the extent that they no longer attend mainstream education. They then provide a safe environment in which children can continue their studies, with a view to being supported to return to mainstream schooling, further education or employment.

The feasibility study hypothesised that three distinct populations of young people aged 11-15 were more likely to be absent from school because of experiences of bullying when compared to the general school population. These were young people who are elective home educated, missing from education or frequently absent. The survey design identified sample frame sources for the first and third group but not for those who are missing from education – this survey therefore involved contacting young people who are elective home educated or who are frequently absent from school.

Red Balloon accepts young people aged between 10 and 17 years but the research conducted with the frequently absent sample was restricted to a core group comprising years 7 to 10 in secondary school (aged 11 to 15), since most of the young people supported by the charity would be found in this age group and gathering administrative information was thought to be more straight forward if one school phase was the focus. The sample frame focused on pupils recorded as absent from school for 28 or more sessions. It was concluded that students in their final year of compulsory study were likely to differ from years 7 to 10 in their absence patterns and explanations for absence, so they were not included in the sample frame.

1.2 Research context

Prior to this research, there has been no accurate estimate of how many young people do not attend school due to severe experiences of bullying. Figures do exist estimating the prevalence of bullying in schools – most notably from the TellUs survey (which was cancelled by the Government in July 2010) – however these are of limited use when considering the prevalence of young people who do not attend mainstream education because of experiences of bullying.

2 Findings – Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the research in relation to the reasons given by parents and guardians for their children's absences from school, and for their and their children's choice of elective home education. It also presents the figures collected in the questionnaire about the demographics and backgrounds of the selected young people.

2.1 Demographics and background

2.1.1 Age

All respondents were asked to report their current age and the month in which they were born. The focus of this particular study is young people who were aged 11-15 as of 1st September 2010 and are attending secondary school (for the frequently absent from school sample), or who are of secondary school age and are home educated – any young people who are outside of this age range are considered ineligible for any subsequent analysis.

The 'frequently absent from school sample' was based on the summer 2010 Census results, and the criteria for age was for pupils to be aged 11-15 on 1st September 2010.

For the 'electively home educated' sample, local authorities were requested to distribute questionnaires to all young people who were recorded as electively home educated who were of secondary school age. Some local authorities reported that it was not possible to identify young people who were of secondary school age from their records; therefore they distributed the survey to all young people who were EHE.

The questionnaires were distributed in January 2011, therefore anybody who reported that their child was aged 10 or under were considered to be ineligible. If respondents were aged 11 and their birthday was after 1st September 2010 they were also considered ineligible, as they would be most likely to be in their final year of primary school.

For respondents whose age is recorded as 16, if their birthday falls between September 2010 and February 2011 they are considered to be eligible as they were 15 on 1st September 2010. Respondents recorded as aged 16 with a birthday between March and August were considered ineligible as it is unlikely that they were 15 on 1st September 2010.

Table 2.1 displays the age of respondents once the above ineligibility criteria have been taken into account.

Table 2.1 Age of respondents						
	Sample type				Overall	
	Absent From School		Electively Home Educated			
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Age 5-10	4	0.1	34	10.5	38	0.9
Age 11-15 1st Sept 2010	3,977	99.8	287	88.6	4,264	99.0
Age 16+	4	0.1	3	0.9	7	0.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>3,985</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>324</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>4,309</i>	<i>100</i>

2.1.2 Gender

Figures for the number and proportion of the sample that were male and female are presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Gender of respondents				
	Sample type			
	Absent From School		Electively Home Educated	
	Count	%	Count	%
Male	1,999	50.1	142	49.3
Female	1,986	49.8	143	49.7
Prefer not to say	6	0.2	3	1.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>3,991</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>288</i>	<i>100</i>

2.1.3 Background of the 'electively home educated' sample

The EHE questionnaire asked respondents whether their child had ever attended school in the past, and if so at which stage. Table 2.3 presents the number and proportion of young people in the 'electively home educated' sample that had never attended school, had attended school but not at secondary school level (i.e. had attended nursery, pre-school or primary school only), and that had attended secondary school.

Table 2.3 Previous school attendance		
	Electively Home Educated	
	Count	%
Has never attended school	20	7
Attended non-secondary school	120	42
Attended secondary school	148	51
<i>Total</i>	<i>288</i>	<i>100</i>

Due to the relatively low level of information available regarding how often the Elective Home Education Registers are updated and the consistency of these records across different local authorities, we also included a question in the EHE questionnaire asking whether respondents' children were currently home educated, had been home educated in the past, or had never been home educated.

Only one respondent said that their child had never been home educated, and this respondent was therefore removed from the dataset used for this analysis. The responses given to this question by the remaining respondents are presented in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4 Home education status		
	Electively home educated	
	Count	%
Currently home educated	276	96
Has been home educated since Sept 2009 but not currently	7	2
Home educated in the past but not since Sept 2009	4	1
Prefer not to say	1	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>288</i>	<i>100</i>

2.1.4 Level of absence from school

Respondents in the 'frequently absent from school' sample were asked whether their child had been absent from school since September 2009 (i.e. since the beginning of the last full school year) and, if so, were asked for how many days this was. The number of days respondents said their child had been absent from school has not been used to determine the eligibility of respondents to answer the question about reasons for absence, as it is quite possible that the number of days pupils are

recorded as absent in the National Pupil Database (which was included in the selection criteria for this sample) are more accurate in some cases than parents' awareness of school absences. Where respondents said that their child had had no absences since September 2009, they were routed straight to the end of the questionnaire. However, where respondents gave this answer but also answered the questions on reasons for school absence, their answers were included in the analysis. Responses given to the questions about level of school absence are presented in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 Number of days absent from school		
Number of days absent from school	Absent from school	
	Count	%
None	45	1
1 to 5	567	15
6 to 10	760	20
11 to 15	640	17
16 to 20	536	14
More than 20	1,324	34
<i>Total</i>	<i>3,872</i>	<i>100</i>

2.2 Reasons for absence from school

Table 2.6 presents the number and proportion of respondents in the 'frequently absent from school' sample that selected each of the possible reasons for absence from school given as options on the questionnaire. Respondents could select as many answers as were applicable to their child.

Table 2.6 Reasons for absence from school*		
	Absent from school	
	Count	%**
Health reasons	3,456	86.6
Holiday	1,064	26.7
Does not like / is not suited to school - teaching	815	20.4
Home factors	771	19.3
Experienced bullying	697	17.5
Other reason	550	13.8
Does not like / is not suited to school - pupils	441	11.0
Misbehaviour	391	9.8
Child's SENs not adequately met by school	273	6.9
Peer pressure	261	6.5
Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)	159	4.0
Moral or religious values / reasons	154	3.9
Cost / lack of appropriate equipment / uniform	128	3.2
<i>Total</i>	3,991	100

* These reasons have been sorted in order of percentage. For the order in which they appeared on the questionnaire, see Technical Appendix B.1.

** Percentages sum to >100% because respondents were asked select all applicable options

Respondents were then asked to identify which of the reasons given they considered to be the main reason for their child's absence from school. Table 2.7 presents the number and proportion of respondents that said each reason was the main reason for their child's absence.

Table 2.7 Main reason for absence from school*		
	Absent from school	
	Count	%
Health reasons	2,688	67.3
Not like / not suited to school - teaching	242	6.1
Holiday	190	4.8
Other reason	174	4.4
Experienced bullying	134	3.4
Home factors	84	2.1
SEN not adequately met	45	1.1
Misbehaviour	34	0.9
Not like / not suited to school - pupils	21	0.5
Peer pressure	22	0.5
Moral or religious reasons	11	0.3
Family caring responsibilities	11	0.3
Cost or lack of equipment/uniform	6	0.2
Don't know/refuse/left blank	329	8.3
Total	3,991	100

* These reasons have been sorted in order of percentage. For the order in which they appeared on the questionnaire, see Technical Appendix B.1.

The most commonly cited reason for absence from school, as well as the reason most commonly said to be the main reason for absence, was “health reasons.” Eighty-seven per cent of respondents said that health reasons contributed to absence from school since September 2009, while 67 per cent said that health reasons were the main reason for absence from school. Other commonly cited reasons include holidays (27%), that the respondents child does not like or is not suited to school because of teaching (20%), home factors (19%), and experiences of bullying (18%). However, these reasons were given as the main reason for absence from school by fewer respondents.

2.3 Reasons for choosing home education

Table 2.8 presents the number and proportion of respondents selecting each of the possible reasons for choosing home education. Respondents could select as many answers as were applicable to their child.

Table 2.8 Reasons for choosing home education*		
	Absent from school	
	Count	%**
Does not like / is not suited to school - teaching	156	54.2
Academic / social limitations of schools / local schools	150	52.1
Experienced bullying	126	43.8
Child's SENs not adequately met by school	65	22.6
Does not like / is not suited to school - pupils	60	20.8
Moral or religious values / reasons	60	20.8
Health reasons	54	18.8
Other reason	54	18.8
My other children had bad experiences in school	49	17.0
My other children were already home educated	47	16.3
Misbehaviour	28	9.7
Peer pressure	22	7.6
Home factors	19	6.6
Family or child moves area frequently	8	2.8
Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)	3	1.0
Cost / lack of appropriate equipment / uniform	3	1.0
<i>Base</i>	288	100

* These reasons have been sorted in order of percentage. For the order in which they appeared on the questionnaire, see Technical Appendix B.2.

** Percentages sum to >100% because respondents were asked select all applicable options

Respondents were then asked to identify which of the reasons given they considered to be the main reason for choosing home education. Table 2.9 shows the number and proportion of respondents that said each reason was the main reason for choosing home education.

Table 2.9 Main reason for choosing home education*		
	Absent from school	
	Count	%*
Experienced bullying	53	18.4
Does not like/not suited to school - teaching	50	17.4
Academic/social limitations of schools	49	17.0
SEN not adequately met	32	11.1
Other reason	21	7.3
Moral or religious reasons	17	5.9
Health reasons	12	4.2
My other children were already home educated	12	4.2
Not like/not suited to school - pupils	5	1.7
Misbehaviour	4	1.4
Peer pressure	2	0.7
Family or child moves area frequently	2	0.7
Home factors	1	0.3
My other children had bad experiences in school	1	0.3
Don't know/refuse/left blank	27	9.4
Total	288	100

* These reasons have been sorted in order of percentage. For the order in which they appeared on the questionnaire, see Technical Appendix B.2.

Over half of respondents in the 'electively home educated' sample said that one of the reasons for their or their child's decision to choose home education was that their child does not like or is not suited to school because of teaching (54%) and because of academic or social limitations of schools (generally) or of schools in their area (52%). Forty-three per cent of respondents said that one of the reasons for choosing home education was that their child had experienced bullying. However, when looking at the main reason for choosing home education, experiences of bullying was the most commonly cited answer, with 18 per cent of respondents saying that this was the main reason for choosing home education.

Twenty-three per cent of respondents said that one of the reasons for choosing home education was that their child's special educational needs were not adequately met by schools, while 11 per cent of respondents gave this as the main reason.

3 Findings – Bullying

In this chapter we will focus specifically on those who have identified bullying as a reason why they have chosen to electively home educate or their child is absent from school.

3.1 Estimates of the prevalence of 11-15 year olds who are absent from state school because of bullying

There are two different conclusions with respect to the proportion of young people aged 11-15 who are absent from school because of bullying. Table 3.1 summarises the findings so far. The proportion of respondents who have identified bullying as a reason is much larger than the proportion that identifies it as the *main* reason. As the Red Balloon target population is those who experience severe bullying, it is likely that the majority fall into the latter category.

The purpose of the research was to estimate the number of young people aged 11-15 who are absent from school because of severe experiences of bullying. The feasibility study identified young people who were registered to attend state school but absent and young people who were EHE as the groups most likely to include our target population. Therefore in estimating the prevalence of young people absent from school because of bullying both populations need to be considered. The final row in Table 3.1 provides an overall estimate of the prevalence in the population of 11-15 year olds, and the associated confidence intervals.

Confidence intervals are a measure of sample precision and show the interval in which the true population value is likely to fall. A 95% confidence interval is constructed in such a way that 95 times out of 100 it captures the true population value that we are trying to estimate, and therefore the interval demonstrates the likely range of the true population measure. A narrow interval suggests a better level of precision. The level of precision is determined by the sample size and the size of the survey estimate.

In summary, we estimate that 16,493 young people aged 11-15 are absent from state school because of bullying. We can say with 95% confidence that the true population estimate lies within the following bounds (13,346, 19,640)³.

³ It is not possible to give an accurate estimate of the confidence interval without having a measure of the impact of clustering the EHE sample within LAs. Clustering the EHE sample within LAs would generate a sample of children that are ‘more similar’ to each other than a sample selected from all the LAs, and this results in a loss of precision. We have used an estimate of $\rho = 0.01$ to calculate the confidence intervals.

Table 3.1 Estimated number of 11-15 year olds absent because of bullying						
	Bullying as:	Count	%	Estimated Population Size	Bullying as:	
					Lower	Upper
Absent From School	A reason	697	17.5	71,980	67,136	76,823
	Main reason	134	3.4	13,985	11,675	16,295
	Total base	3,991		411,312		
Electively Home Educated	A reason	126	43.8	5,971	4,963	6,979
	Main reason	53	18.4	2,508	1,721	3,296
	Total base	288		13,632		
All respondents	A reason	823	19.2	77,950	71,405	84,496
	Main reason	187	4.4	16,493	13,346	19,640
	Total base	4,279		2,811,472		

Table 3.2 demonstrates how the estimate of prevalence has been constructed. In designing the study we used the population estimate provided by Red Balloon as a guide in terms of the likely survey estimate size (3%). The feasibility study hypothesised that the EHE population were likely to have a higher proportion of young people not in state education due to bullying when compared to frequently absent pupils. As there is very limited research available with respect to EHE young people it was estimated that 10% of this population would be absent due to bullying.

Table 3.2 shows that the estimates used to design the study were reasonably accurate in terms of the proportion of respondents who stated that the *main* reason their child is frequently absent from school is because of bullying. However the proportion of EHE young people who stated that the *main* reason they do not attend state school is because of bullying was nearly double our sample design estimate. Coupled with a low response rate this has the effect of increasing the width of the confidence interval.

Table 3.2 Estimated number of 11-15 year olds absent because of bullying				
Main reason for bullying	11-15 yr olds attending secondary school	In school, but absent for 28+ days in 2009/2010	EHE in LAs - Primary & Secondary	Total
Population (n)	2,797,840 ⁴	411,312 ⁵⁶	13,632 ⁷	2,811,472
Population (%)	99.5%	14.6%	0.5%	
Issued sample	0	24,252	1,518	25,770
Response rate to questionnaire	n/a	16.5%	21.5%	
Responding sample	0	4000	326	4,326
Estimate of % badly bullied	0	3.4%	18.4%	
Estimate of number badly bullied	2,797,840 x 0%	411,312 x 3.4%	13,632 x 18.4%	16,493
	0	13,985	2,508	

3.2 Analysis of the bullied population

When thinking about only the respondents who identified that bullying was either a main reason or a contributory reason for their decision to not attend school, the following tables detail any other reasons that were identified.

⁴ January 2010 figures, only includes those attending state maintained schools. Available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000925/index.shtml>

⁵ Autumn 2009 / Spring 2010 figures only includes those attending state maintained schools. Provided by National Pupil Database

⁶ This definition is no longer used by DfE, absence is now defined in terms of authorised and unauthorised total sessions missed. Therefore previous publications have been revised to reflect this.

⁷ The Badman review provided an estimate of the total number of EHE pupils for 71 English local authorities. This was used to estimate the total EHE population; this has been adjusted to account for secondary school pupils only. The figure has also been adjusted to account for variations in the number of 11-15 year olds per local authority (using 2009 mid-year population estimates).

Table 3.3 Reasons for absence: Bullying as a reason		
	Absent from school	
	Count	%*
Health reasons	577	82.8
Does not like / is not suited to school - teaching	327	47.0
Does not like / is not suited to school - pupils	308	44.3
Home factors	226	32.4
Holiday	163	23.4
Misbehaviour	154	22.0
Peer pressure	130	18.6
Child's SENs not adequately met by school	119	17.0
Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)	44	6.4
Cost / lack of appropriate equipment / uniform	38	5.5
Moral or religious values / reasons	17	2.5

Table 3.3 shows that 83% of respondents who identified bullying as a reason for their child's school absence also selected 'health reasons'.

Table 3.4 Reasons for home education: Bullying as a reason		
	Electively Home Educated	
	Count	%*
Does not like / is not suited to school - teaching	70	55.6
Academic / social limitations of schools / local schools	60	47.6
Does not like / is not suited to school - pupils	40	31.7
Child's SENs not adequately met by school	33	26.2
Health reasons	33	26.2
My other children had bad experiences in school	26	20.6
My other children were already home educated	17	13.5
Moral or religious values / reasons	16	12.7
Misbehaviour	13	10.3
Peer pressure	13	10.3
Other reason	12	9.5
Home factors	7	5.6
Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)	3	2.4
Family or child moves area frequently	2	1.6
Cost / lack of appropriate equipment / uniform	1	0.8

Table 3.4 demonstrates that the young people who are elective home educated and who are bullied differ from the absence sample in terms of the other reasons given for not attending state school. Approximately 56% of the EHE respondents who identified bullying as a reason for their absence from school also identified 'does not like / is not suited to school – teaching' as a contributory reason.

Table 3.5 Reasons for absence: Bullying as the main reason		
	Absent from school	
	Count	%*
Health reasons	90	67.0
Does not like / is not suited to school - pupils	75	55.7
Does not like / is not suited to school - teaching	50	37.5
Home factors	31	23.1
Peer pressure	21	15.8
Other reason	20	14.8
Child's SENs not adequately met by school	20	14.7
Holiday	19	14.3
Misbehaviour	13	10.1
Cost / lack of appropriate equipment / uniform	4	3.3
Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)	2	1.5
Moral or religious values / reasons	1	0.5

When looking at the school absence respondents who identified bullying as the *main* reason for their absence from school, health reasons are still the most prevalent in terms of other reasons ticked. The tables are ordered by the proportion of respondents who selected each option, Table 3.5 is fairly similar to Table 3.3 with the exception of 'holiday'. This reason features higher up the list when bullying is a reason for absence when compared to respondents who selected bullying as the main reason.

Table 3.6 Reasons for home education: Bullying as the main reason		
	Electively Home Educated	
	Count	%*
Does not like / is not suited to school - pupils	18	34.0
Does not like / is not suited to school - teaching	17	32.1
Academic / social limitations of schools / local schools	15	28.3
My other children had bad experiences in school	10	18.9
Health reasons	8	15.1
Child's SENs not adequately met by school	7	13.2
Peer pressure	5	9.4
Moral or religious values / reasons	4	7.5
Other reason	4	7.5
My other children were already home educated	4	7.5
Misbehaviour	4	7.5
Home factors	1	1.9
Cost / lack of appropriate equipment / uniform	1	1.9
Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)	0	0.0
Family or child moves area frequently	0	0.0

Finally, the EHE respondents who identified bullying as a main reason for not attending state school were most likely to identify 'does not like / is not suited to school – pupils' as another reason. When compared to the respondents who selected bullying as a reason, 'my other children had bad experiences in school' is more prevalent.

The following tables display the characteristics of the respondents who identified bullying as a reason for absence compared to those who did not.

Table 3.7 Bullying by Age				
	Bullying Not mentioned		Bullying Mentioned	
	Count	Average	Count	Average
Bullying identified as a reason for EHE or absence	3,445	13.68	818	13.73
Bullying identified as main reason	4,078	13.68	185	13.81

Table 3.7 shows that the average age of those who identified bullying as a reason or main reason for absence is slightly higher than those who did not. This difference is not statistically significant when considering bullying as a contributory or main reason for absence.

Table 3.8 Bullying by year group							
		Bullying Not mentioned		Bullying Mentioned		Total	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Year 7	A reason	504	86.9	75	12.9	580	100
	Main reason	565	97.4	15	2.6		100
Year 8	A reason	547	79.3	144	20.9	690	100
	Main reason	666	96.5	24	3.5		100
Year 9	A reason	660	76.3	204	23.6	865	100
	Main reason	811	93.8	54	6.2		100
Year 10	A reason	784	79.9	198	20.2	981	100
	Main reason	932	95.0	49	5.0		100
Year 11	A reason	949	82.8	197	17.2	1,146	100
	Main reason	1,103	96.2	43	3.8		100
Total	A reason	3,444	80.8	818	19.2	4,262	100
	Main reason	4,077	95.7	185	4.3		100

* A reason is statistically significant $p < 0.01$ Chi-Square 30.176

** Main reason is statistically significant $p < 0.05$ Chi-Square 15.040

Table 3.8 shows the relationship between respondents who identified bullying as a reason or main reason and the respondents academic year group. The year group with the highest proportion of respondents identifying bullying as a reason for absence using both definitions is Year 9. Years 7 and 8 have the lowest proportion of respondents identifying bullying as a reason for absence using the main reasons definition, and Years 7 and 11 are lowest when using bullying as a reason.

Table 3.9 shows that girls are more likely than boys to have identified bullying as a reason for absence using both definitions; this difference is statistically significant suggesting that this finding is likely to be prevalent in the general school population.

Table 3.9 Bullying by gender							
		Bullying Not mentioned		Bullying Mentioned		Total	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Female	A reason	1,686	79.2	443	20.8	2,129	100
	Main reason	2,021	94.9	108	5.1		100
Male	A reason	1,765	82.4	377	17.6	2,141	100
	Main reason	2,063	96.4	78	3.6		100
Prefer not to say	A reason	6	66.7	3	33.3	9	100
	Main reason	8	88.9	1	11.1		100
Total	A reason	3,457	80.8	823	19.2	4,279	100
	Main reason	4,092	95.6	187	4.4		100

* A reason is statistically significant $p < 0.05$ Chi-Square 8.228

** Main reason is statistically significant $p < 0.05$ Chi-Square 6.201

EHE respondents were also asked to identify whether or not their children had ever attended school. Table 3.10 shows that young people who have attended secondary school are much more likely to identify bullying as a reason or a main reason for absence when compared to those who haven't. This difference is statistically significant when using both definitions of bullying.

Table 3.10 Bullying by school attendance (EHE only)							
		Bullying Not mentioned		Bullying Mentioned		Total	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Has never attended school	A reason	20	100.0	0	0.0	20	100
	Main reason	20	100.0	0	0.0		100
Attended nursery/pre-school or primary school but not secondary school	A reason	73	60.8	47	39.2	120	100
	Main reason	109	90.8	11	9.2		100
Attended secondary school	A reason	69	46.6	79	53.4	148	100
	Main reason	106	71.6	42	28.4		100
Total	A reason	162	56.3	126	43.8	288	100
	Main reason	235	81.6	53	18.4		100

* A reason is statistically significant $p < 0.01$ Chi-Square 31.32

** Main reason is statistically significant $p < 0.01$ Chi-Square 16.24

Respondents to the absence questionnaire were asked to record the number of days their child was absent from school since September 2009. All pupils included in the sample were recorded on the NPD as having 28 or more half sessions of absence during the same time period. Table 3.11 shows that parents who think their child had more than 20 days absences were most likely to cite bullying as a reason or main reason for absence. This supports the theory that pupils with large amounts of school absence are most likely to fall into the Red Balloon target population.

Table 3.11 Bullying by number of days absence (FA only)							
		Bullying Not mentioned		Bullying Mentioned		Total	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
1 to 5 days	A reason	511	90.0	57	10.0	568	100
	Main reason	558	98.2	9	1.6		100
6 to 10 days	A reason	664	87.3	95	12.5	761	100
	Main reason	744	97.8	17	2.2		100
11 to 15 days	A reason	532	83.0	108	16.8	641	100
	Main reason	622	97.0	19	3.0		100
16 to 20 days	A reason	452	84.3	84	15.7	536	100
	Main reason	521	97.2	15	2.8		100
More than 20 days	A reason	987	74.5	337	25.5	1,324	100
	Main reason	1,252	94.6	71	5.4		100
Total	A reason	3,146	82.2	681	17.8	3,828	100
	Main reason	3,697	96.6	131	3.4		100

* A reason is statistically significant $p < 0.01$ Chi-Square 92.942

** Main reason is statistically significant $p < 0.01$ Chi-Square 25.199

The feasibility study identified that when schools record reasons for absence there is currently no indicator assigned to bullying. This means that where bullying is known to be the reason for absence, alternative codes must be assigned. A large proportion of respondents cited health reasons as contributory or the main reason for absence from school. Bullying is a complex concept and is very likely to be associated with a number of physical and mental health symptoms, which means that parents may not necessarily identify bullying as a main reason for absence. Additionally parents may find it difficult to assign the label of 'bullying' to their child's situation so another explanation may be more palatable. Therefore it is hypothesised that 'health reasons' may be a category that includes young people who are absent because of bullying and therefore should be included in our definition.

Table 3.12 looks at the average number of reasons identified by a number of different sub-groups. Home educated respondents selected significantly more reasons when compared to the frequently absent respondents ($p < 0.01$). Respondents who

identified bullying as a reason or a main reason for their absence selected significantly more reasons when compared to respondents who did not identify bullying as a reason, or a main reason respectively ($p < 0.01$).

When bullying and health have been cited as a reason for absence from school in the total population, the average number of reasons cited is 4.33. This is higher than any of the other sub-groups, highlighting the complex nature of bullying as a phenomenon. It is possible that the number of parents who identify bullying as a main reason for absence is an underestimate of the true value, as some of the more complex cases may also be include in the health category.

Table 3.12 Average number of reasons specified		
	All respondents	
	Count	Average
Absent From School	3949	2.33
Electively Home Educated	287	3.15
Bullying identified as a reason for EHE or absence	823	4.12
Bullying identified as main reason	187	3.37
Bullying & health identified as a reason for EHE or absence	610	4.33
All respondents	4,236	2.38

Table 3.13 displays the relationship between respondents who identified bullying as a reason for absence and those who identified bullying and health reasons as an explanation for absence. 70% of frequently absent respondents who mentioned bullying as a reason for absence also identified health reasons. Table 3.8 suggests that this may be more of an issue when considering the frequently absent population rather than the EHE population. However, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups when considering respondents who selected bullying and health.

Table 3.13 Respondents who mentioned health & bullying as a reason						
	Bullying Not mentioned		Bullying Mentioned		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Not mentioned health	557	16.1	213	25.9	770	18.0
Health identified as a reason FA	2,879	83.3	577	70.1	3,456	80.7
Health identified as a reason EHE	21	0.6	33	4.0	54	1.3
Total	3,457	100	823	100	4,280	100

Table 3.14 looks at the bullying and health group by year group. When health is included in the definition Year 9 is still the group who have the highest proportion of young people identifying bullying as a reason for absence, closely followed by Year 8.

Table 3.14 Respondents who mentioned health & bullying as a reason by year group

	Bullying Not mentioned		Bullying Mentioned		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Year 7	518	89.5	61	10.5	579	100
Year 8	573	83.0	117	17.0	690	100
Year 9	713	82.4	152	17.6	865	100
Year 10	839	85.5	142	14.5	981	100
Year 11	1,011	88.1	136	11.9	1,147	100
Total	3,654	85.7	608	14.3	4,262	100

* This is statistically significant relationship $p < 0.01$ Chi-Square 23.881

In summary, it is likely that respondents who have not identified bullying as the main reason for absence but have cited bullying and health as contributory reasons should be considered as part of our definition. However, it is not possible to quantify the degree to which this hypothesis is accurate and therefore how many of our responding population should be included.

4 Interpreting the findings: limitations

There are a number of limitations that it is important to bear in mind when considering the findings of this research and their application to the development of policy and educational provision. These are outlined in detail below.

4.1 Response considerations

The overall response rate obtained was 16.8% (see Technical Appendix A.4 for response calculations), which is lower than we would have hoped. As no prior research has been conducted with this particular population, estimating the probable or 'normal' response rate is problematic, as we have no precedent with which to compare. Nevertheless, there are a number of elements of the selected survey design, chosen due to cost considerations, that are known to limit the potential to achieve a high response rate. The mode chosen for this survey was a paper questionnaire; this method notoriously has lower response rates than telephone or face to face interviews. This method was chosen as the size of the sample (26,273) meant that any other method would have been prohibitively expensive. Similarly there was no reminder strategy as the cost of distributing a reminder letter or a reminder letter and another questionnaire to a sample of at least half of this size (excluding those who had already responded) would be prohibitive. It may also be that problems associated with postal delivery in the January period, which appeared to reduce the speed of coverage for this study (with the majority of responses being returned within four, rather than more typically two, weeks of delivery) also in some way affected response.

Low response rates are a limitation in any study as the proportion of the population of interest that has been captured is reduced. This in turn reduces the precision of any survey estimates which means that any associated confidence intervals are wider. Response bias is a particular concern when response rates are low, it may be that respondents with particular characteristics or attitudes are more likely to respond than others. This is problematic because it could increase or decrease the survey estimate of interest and undermine extrapolation of the estimate to the general population. If demographic data is available in terms of the sampled and responding population, then it is possible to compare their characteristics and model the propensity to respond accounting for any differences. However, no central register is available in terms of the 'electively home educated' population, and local authorities reported that they had very limited information available in terms of the demographics of electively home educated young people in their areas. For the persistently absent

sample, the NPD has a wealth of demographic data available for both the sample frame and the responding population - which could allow quantification of any potential response bias and the calculation of a non-response weight to account for this. The NPD provided NatCen with demographic information for the selected sample and the responding sample. Technical Appendix A.5 provides comparison tables for a number of key demographics and demonstrates that despite the low response rate there do not appear to be any substantial biases in the responding sample. However, a more robust assessment of non-response bias would compare the sample frame characteristics with those of the responding population and then post survey adjustments could account for any differences. This data was not available to us at the time of reporting. Thus it is not possible to fully assess whether we have captured a representative sample of attitudes and characteristics in terms of parents whose children are absent from state school.

4.2 Questionnaire design considerations

While the questions used to assess whether bullying was a) a reason and b) the main reason for a child being absent from school or for being home educated were in NatCen's view well suited to this use, there are some considerations that need to be kept in mind when interpreting the figures that are based on these questions.

The first of these questions asked respondents to consider each possible reason for absence from school or for choosing elective home education separately and to indicate, by ticking "yes" or "no," whether or not each applied to their child. The second question asked respondents to select which one of all of the possible reasons they considered to be the *main* reason for their child's absence from school or for choosing elective home education.

Firstly, these questions used a self-defined interpretation of "bullying." This means that any parent or guardian who considered their child to have been absent from school, or to have chosen elective home education, as a result of what they interpreted as "bullying" was recorded as such. This is arguably appropriate, given that a decision to miss school or to choose home education based on experiences of bullying would be of concern regardless of whether or not a child's experiences satisfied a more rigid definition of "bullying." However, it is worth bearing in mind this self-definition when considering the findings of this research, especially when considering them alongside findings from other research that use more rigid definitions of bullying (for example, surveys such as TellUs that aim to measure bullying as defined by the National Indicator 69, which includes a reference to "bullying" being a *repeated* activity).

Secondly, it is possible that the questions outlined above – and in particular the first question that looks at whether or not bullying was a reason at all – may over-estimate the number for whom bullying was a reason. Although the question wording asks

whether or not a respondent's child had *been absent from school* for any of the listed reasons (rather than simply asking whether or not their child had been bullied), it is possible that the parent or guardian of a child who had both missed school and had experienced bullying would select this option regardless of whether or not they believed the experience of bullying to be causally related to the absence from school. It is for this reason that the measure looking at the prevalence of young people for whom bullying was the *main* reason for missing school or choosing home education is thought to be the more reliable measure.

Conversely, it is possible that the questions outlined above may under-estimate the number for whom bullying was a reason (and for whom bullying was the main reason) for their child's absence from school or for choosing elective home education. The fact that the question is asked of parents and guardians rather than of young people directly means that a child whose parent or guardian was not aware of their experience of bullying (or of the relationship between their experience of bullying and their missing school or choosing home education) would not be reported as such. Also, the relationship between bullying and other reasons given for absence from school or for choosing home education (see section 3.2) means that it is possible that some reasons given may mask further underlying reasons. Similarly, the fact that the codes used by schools to record the reasons for school absence do not include a code for bullying may mean that some parents or guardians either are not aware of the true reasons for their child's absence or are inclined to simply give the "official" reason as recorded by the school when answering these questions.

4.3 Sample design considerations

One consideration to bear in mind with the figures for the 'persistently absent from school' sample is who exactly was included in this sample. The sample drawn included any young people whose absence was recorded as 28 half-day sessions or more in the previous school year. The question used to determine the reason(s) for absence did not ask how many sessions had been missed for each reason, and so it is possible that the sample includes young people that had missed only one or two sessions due to bullying and had missed many more for another reason (for example, a long family holiday). The parents of these young people may rightfully record bullying as a reason for absence, yet these young people may not be considered to be "absent from school due to experiences of bullying" in the way that would – for example – make them obvious candidates to attend a Red Balloon Learner Centre. This consideration is another reason that the measure looking at the prevalence of young people for whom bullying was the *main* reason for missing school is thought to be the more reliable measure.

The feasibility study identified that young people in care and those with non-physical special educational needs (SEN) were more likely to be at risk of bullying. Therefore these groups were over sampled to ensure that their views were represented. The

intention was that a selection weight would be calculated and applied to the survey estimates accounting for any groups who were disproportionately represented in the responding sample; however, the data made available from the NPD does not make such an analysis possible at the time of reporting. As the Red Balloon population has not been researched previously, it is unknown whether the over sampled groups are more or less likely to respond or to be absent from school because of experiences of bullying. The sample design could have resulted in an over representation of the views of parents or guardians of young people in care or with non-physical SEN with respect to the survey estimate. This is a limitation of the survey as it is not possible to quantify the effect or adjust for the survey design without the strata data from the NPD.

The feasibility study hypothesised that three distinct populations of young people aged 11-15 were more likely to be absent from school because of experiences of bullying when compared to the general school population. These were young people who are electively home educated, missing from education or persistently absent. The survey design identified sample frame sources for the first and third group but not for those who are missing from education. It is likely that young people who fall into this category are part of the Red Balloon target population, but it was not possible to represent their views in this survey estimate.

5 Conclusions

The findings of this study make an important contribution to a little researched or documented field of enquiry. Comparatively little is known about the impact of bullying on the various forms of non-attendance at school including frequent school absence and elective home education.

The number of young people aged 11-15 absent from state secondary school because of bullying is considerable higher than it was previously thought – with our best estimate being 16,493 (+/- 3,147). Specifically, we would estimate that this number of young people are frequently absent from school primarily because of bullying. The number who are absent for a range of reasons, of which bullying is one but not the most important, is much higher.

While the proportion of young people for whom the main reason for school absence is bullying is about what we expected (3.4%, whereas our sample design assumed this would be in the region of 3%), for electively home educated young people, it is considerably larger (18.4%, whereas our sampling assumptions placed this in the 10% range).

Inevitably, reasons for school absence and choosing home education are not straight-forward, with different reasons having the potential to interact with one and other. This is highlighted by the fact that the average number of reasons selected by those parents who identified bullying as a reason for school absence or home education was more than four. For young people who are frequently absent from school, there is a particularly close relationship between experiences of bullying and health, which would warrant further investigation in furthering our understanding of the links between bullying and school absence.

Technical Appendix A - Methodology

This section presents an outline of the methodology used in the survey, including sections on designing and piloting the questionnaires, sampling, data collection, response rates and weighting.

A.1 Questionnaire design

A.1.1 Designing questions

In order to make the questionnaire as relevant as possible to the two different sample groups (parents of young people who are absent from school for 28 or more half-day sessions in the last full school year and parents of young people who are electively home educated), it was decided that two separate questionnaires should be developed. In order to maximise response and minimise cost, and in view of the fact that only limited information was required to make the estimates of interest, these questionnaires were limited to two sides of A4. The topics covered in the questionnaires were therefore necessarily limited to cover the main areas of interest of this survey. The topics covered in each of the questionnaires are outlined in Table A.1. Full questionnaires are included in Technical Appendices B.1 and B.2.

Table A.1 Topics covered in two questionnaires	
Questionnaire for 'frequently absent from school' sample	Questionnaire for 'electively home educated' sample
Demographics (age, month of birth)	Demographics (age, month of birth, gender)
Absence from school (whether been absent from school since September 2009, how many days of absence)	Home Education (whether currently/previously home educated, whether attended school in the past)
Reasons for absence from school (all reasons for absence, main reason for absence)	Reasons for choosing home education (all reasons for choosing home education, main reason for choosing home education)

Questions for the two questionnaires were designed in consultation with colleagues in NatCen's Questionnaire Design and Testing Hub and were informed by a stage of desk research looking at questions used to measure bullying in previous surveys and at research into reasons for school absence and reasons for choosing home education. The surveys and articles included in this desk research are listed below. As no questions were found that were deemed to be suitable for the survey

methodology used in this survey, the main questions in the questionnaire were designed by NatCen.

Questionnaires and previous research reviewed during the questionnaire development process

Anti-Bullying Alliance Questionnaire

Arora, Dr Tiny, *Research Report on Home Education in Kirklees* (University of Sheffield, 2002)

Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (CHPRC, Edith Cowan University, May 2009)

Bowen, Rhodri; Holtom, Dr Duncan, *A Survey into the Prevalence and Incidence of School Bullying in Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010)

Green, Rosie; Collingwood, Aleks; Ross, Andy, *Characteristics of Bullying Victims in Schools* (DfE, 2010)

Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire – Secondary version 23 (Schools and Students Health Education Unit)

Evaluation of the National Healthy Schools Programme – Secondary Questionnaire 2007 (NatCen)

Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England (LSYPE)

Malcolm, Heather; Wilson, Valerie; Davidson, Julia; Kirk, Susan, *Absence from School: A study of its causes and effects in seven LEAs* (DfES, 2003)

National Household Education Survey (NHES)

Rothermel, Paula, *Home Education: Rationales, Practices and Outcomes* (PhD dissertation, University of Durham, 2002)
<http://www.pjrothermel.com/phd/Home.htm>

School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS)

TellUs 2007 Survey – Secondary school questionnaire

Thomas, Alan, *Educating Children at home* (Continuum, 2000)

A.1.1 Piloting the questionnaire

The questionnaire for the 'frequently absent' sample was piloted with parents whose children attended or had previously attended Red Balloon Learner Centres. Parents were sent a copy of the questionnaire to complete, along with a short feedback form that asked about their experiences of completing the questionnaire and their opinions of its content. The aim of the pilot was to assess the suitability of the questions themselves – the methodology used in the pilot, whereby parents were contacted by a member of staff from Red Balloon and asked to take part, was sufficiently different to that used in the main survey that no conclusions regarding the level of response could be drawn from this pilot. It was not thought necessary to test the questionnaire for the 'electively home educated' sample separately, due to its similarity with this questionnaire. The pilot version of the questionnaire and the feedback form are included in Technical Appendices B.7 and B.8.

We received seven responses to our pilot of the questionnaire. No respondents experienced any major problems with answering any of the questions in the questionnaire. While respondents appeared to have found the questionnaire straightforward, observation of how some questions were answered and feedback given through the feedback form suggested some minor alterations, which are discussed below along with the findings from the pilot study. (Question number references refer to the pilot version of the questionnaire in Technical Appendix B.7). In addition to the changes highlighted below, the final version of the questionnaire was formatted to include questions 5 and 6 on the same page.

Findings from the pilot study

Time period

There was a general consensus amongst respondents that it was clear what time period was being referred to in the questionnaire and that it was easy to remember what happened inside and outside of this time period in relation to the child's absence from school. This was one of the key areas that the research team were hoping to test in the pilot, as it is key to the validity of the responses given. This feedback suggests that the time period used in the pilot questionnaire was satisfactory and need not be altered.

Days absent from school

The feedback form asked respondents how they decided what days or part days of absence they included in their estimate of how many days their child had been absent from school since September 2009. The responses to this question indicate that respondents calculated this in the broad way we intended, and that this question did not therefore need any alteration.

Reasons for absence

The feedback form asked respondents whether the answer options presented in Q5 covered all reasons that they could think of for absence from school, and whether any of the answer categories were problematic or difficult to understand. The general consensus was that the answer categories presented covered the range of reasons that respondents had faced or could think of, and that none of the categories were problematic.

However, one important problem was highlighted by a respondent, which the questionnaire was amended to address. This respondent highlighted that the answer category for 'experienced bullying' did not make it clear whether or not this included bullying **before** the specified time period that was still resulting in absence within the time period itself. In order to clarify this point, the wording of this answer category was changed to:

“Experienced bullying

Including bullying that occurred before September 2009”

Instructions for Q5 – reasons for absence from school

On the actual questionnaire, one respondent elaborated on some of the answers given to Q5 by writing more information on the page next to the tick boxes. It was thought that this should be avoided, as it is possible that this would be problematic during the scanning process. Therefore, it was decided to expand on the instructions to this question, to highlight that this is not necessary, and that there is a box at the bottom of the page for any more information to be entered.

The wording for Q5 was amended to read:

“Since September 2009, has your child been absent from school for any of the following reasons?

Please tick **ONE** box on **EACH** line.

Please include all reasons that had an influence on any days your child was absent from school

Please only select either 'Yes' or 'No' for each reason, we do not need any more information than this.”

Q6 – main reason for absence from school

All respondents that answered Q6 did so in the desired way, with only one box being ticked to indicate the main reason for their child's absence. One respondent did not answer this question. This was another key aspect of the questionnaire that was being tested in the pilot.

A.2 Sampling

The feasibility study identified three groups within which the Red Balloon target population was likely to be found, pupils who are absent from school, young people missing from education and those who choose to electively home educate. For the purposes of estimating the number of young people aged 11-15 who are absent from state school because of experiences of severe bullying, it is assumed that the prevalence in the remaining 11-15 population is zero.

Pupils who are absent from school are recorded as such on the national state school census which means that the National Pupil Database can provide an accessible sample frame. Absence is recorded in terms of the number of half days missed and authorised or unauthorised, a number of indicators are then used to categorise the absence population. Persistent absentees are defined as pupils who have 64 or more sessions of authorised or unauthorised absence within a year. As the feasibility study identified, there is currently no reason for absence code allocated to bullying, therefore it is possible that pupils in the target population may be classified under authorised or unauthorised codes. When thinking about the number of sessions missed, it is likely that the Red Balloon target population would fall under the persistent absence definition. However, as this group is un-researched it wasn't possible to quantify the amount of absence that could lead to a pupil being classified as being within the Red Balloon target population. Therefore a broader classification was specified for the sampling frame of pupils with 28 or more authorised or unauthorised sessions of absence in the school year 2009/2010.

Focusing on the absence population pupils in Year 11 reaching the end of compulsory schooling are most likely to be recorded as persistently absent (DfE 2010:2). It was felt that this year group is likely to have particularly complex absence patterns, the explanations and issues for which are potentially different from other year groups. This coupled with Red Balloon identifying that the majority of young people that they deal with are aged 11-15, helped to define the specific age range of the sample.

The feasibility study highlighted that a number of groups were more at risk of bullying when compared to their peers. It is possible to identify pupils who have non-physical Special Educational Needs and those who are looked after, therefore these groups were over sampled to ensure that they were represented in the responding sample. It is possible that these groups may have a lower response rate when compared to other pupils, which is an additional reason for over sampling them. It is intended that the responding population is weighted to reflect the proportion of pupils in care and with a non-physical SEN in the target population.

A request was submitted to the National Pupil Database dissemination unit specifying that a stratified random sample be selected of pupils who were aged 11-15 on 1st September 2010 and were recorded as having 28 or more sessions or authorised or

unauthorised absence during the 2009/2010 school year. Table A.2 shows the sample frame totals and required sample size for each of the following strata: In care & no non-physical SEN, in care & non-physical SEN, not in care & non non-physical SEN, not in care & non-physical SEN.

Table A.2 Stratifications				
Strata Group	Sample frame		% Sample Frame	% Sample
	Total	Sample		
Looked after as at 31/03/09 and do not have a non-physical SEN	1,030	200	0.3	0.8
Not looked after as at 31/03/09 and have a non-physical SEN	67,721	6,000	16.5	24.3
Looked after as at 31/03/09 and do have a non-physical SEN	1,240	150	0.3	0.6
Not looked after as at 31/03/09 and do not have a non-physical SEN	341,220	18,368	83.0	74.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>411,211</i>	<i>24,718</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Young people who are missing from education are those who are not registered on any school roll. This can occur for the following reasons:

- Fail to start appropriate provision and hence never enter the system;
- Cease to attend, due to illegal exclusion or withdrawal; or
- Fail to complete a transition between providers (e.g. being unable to find a suitable school place after moving to a new local authority area, or after leaving a custodial establishment). (Essex Count Council 2009)

The feasibility study investigated the possibility of sampling this group and concluded that it was not possible to identify an appropriate sample frame.

The final group of interest is those who choose to electively home educate. Badman, conducted a review of elective home education in 2009 and reported the total estimated number of young people in 75 of the 152 English local authorities. For the purposes of the study 30 local authorities were randomly selected from 152 available, of those selected 16 did not have estimates in the Badman review. It was assumed that 20% of the local authorities selected would refuse to take part, therefore the sample was designed to yield responses from 24 local authorities – this was considered to be nationally representative. It was requested that local authorities issue questionnaires to a census of young people who were of secondary school age on their records; therefore no sampling at local authority level was required.

In order to estimate the prevalence of young people aged 11-15 who are absent from state school because of experiences of severe bullying the total number of young people who electively home educate is required. All local authorities who were contacted and asked to take part in the study were also asked to provide the total number of young people of secondary school age on their records. 14 local authorities also had Badman review estimates of the *total* number (primary and secondary) of young people electively home educating, it was assumed that the mean difference between the Badman estimate and that provided by the local authority was a good proxy for the proportion of young people of secondary school age only.

Therefore in order to estimate the total number of young people of secondary school age who electively home educate the Badman review estimates were multiplied by this proportion. The number of young people who are EHE varies considerably across local authorities, therefore when estimating the national total it is necessary to adjust for the number of 11-15 year old young people within local authorities. The combined Badman review and local authority figures provide information for 82 of the 152 local authorities. It is assumed that the proportion of local authorities with information is equal in the EHE and total 11-15 population. In figure F.1 three of the four pieces of information required are available. So to estimate the total EHE population 2009 mid year population estimates were used to: divide the number of 11-15 year olds in *all* local authorities by the total number within the sampled local authorities, this figure was then multiplied by the EHE total in the sampled local authorities.

Figure F.1

$$\frac{X}{[\textit{Badman estimates} + \textit{LA estimates}]} = \frac{\textit{Total 11 to 15 population}}{\textit{11 to 15 population in sampled LAs}}$$

A.3 Data collection

Data collection was carried out using different methodologies for the two different samples, due to the level of information available for each sample and the research team's access to it. A broad outline of the timetable for the fieldwork process for each of the two samples is presented in Table A.3.

Table A.3 Fieldwork timetable		
Week commencing	'Frequently absent from school' sample	'Electively home educated' sample
04/01/2011		Survey materials sent to local authorities to be forwarded to sample
10/01/2011	Survey materials sent directly to sample	Emails sent to local authorities to confirm letters had been forwarded to sample and to confirm numbers sent
17/01/2011 to 07/01/2011		Continue to encourage local authorities to forward letters to sample
14/02/2011	Deadline for fieldwork period	Deadline for fieldwork period
23/02/2011	End of period of accepting late-returns	End of period of accepting late-returns

A.3.1 'Frequently absent from school' sample

The sample attained from the National Pupil Database contained a name and address for each pupil. It was therefore possible to send the questionnaires and covering letters directly to the parents of the selected sample.

Survey materials were addressed to "Parent of " followed by the child's name and address. The envelopes sent to parents contained:

- The "Questionnaire on school absence" (see Technical Appendix B.1)
- The covering letter (see Technical Appendix B.3)
- A pre-paid, addressed return envelope

Parents were informed in the letter that there was a deadline of February 14th 2011 for returning the questionnaires, giving just over a month for the fieldwork period. Response was reviewed at the end of this period, and as some questionnaires were still being returned it was decided to extend the period of accepting returns to February 23rd.

A.3.2 'Electively home educated' sample

Unlike the 'frequently absent from school' sample, no single sample frame could be sourced that contained names or contact details for young people who are electively home educated. It was therefore decided to recruit respondents through local

authorities, which are required to maintain a voluntary list of young people who are electively home educated in their local authority, known as the Elective Home Education Register (EHER).

It was therefore necessary to contact local authorities in order to recruit around 22 that were willing to forward our survey materials to the parents of young people included on their EHERs. Before we could select which local authorities to contact for this, it was necessary to contact a number of local authorities to determine how many young people were included on their EHERs. (This was necessary only for local authorities for which an estimate of this number was not included in the Badman report.⁸) This was carried out in October 2010.

We then wrote to thirty local authorities in early December 2010 asking for their help with the research project, and wrote to an additional 10 local authorities later in that month. These letters were followed by telephone calls by a member of the research team. Of these, 22 local authorities agreed to participate in the research. The contacts in these local authorities were then sent an email to thank them for agreeing to take part and informing them of the next steps.

During the phonecall with contacts in local authorities after the advance letters were sent, contacts were asked how many young people were on their EHER, so that we could send the appropriate number of letters. Local authorities were asked to include only young people of secondary-school age, however in local authorities where this was not possible an overall number was asked for.

In the first week of January 2011 we sent each local authority that had agreed to take part a pack of pre-packed envelopes and a covering letter (see Technical Appendix B.6). The pre-packed envelopes contained:

- The “Questionnaire on home education” (see Appendix B.2)
- The covering letter (see Appendix B.4)
- A pre-paid, addressed return envelope

Contacts in local authorities were asked to email the research team to confirm that the letters had been sent and to confirm how many had been sent. Where emails had not been received, the research team contacted local authorities regularly throughout the fieldwork period until all local authorities had given confirmation.⁹

⁸ Badman, G. (2009) *Report to the Secretary of State on the Review of Elective Home Education in England Norwich*: The Stationary Office

⁹ It was not possible to confirm the number sent for one LA – for this LA, the number of pupils in the EHER cited in the Badman report was used as the number of letters sent.

A.4 Response rates

Table A.4 presents the response rates for each sample separately and an overall response rate, as well as the figures used in the response rate calculation.

Table A.4 Response rates			
	Sample type		Overall
	'Frequently absent from school'	'Electively home educated'	
Sample sent questionnaire	24,704	1,569	26273
Questionnaire returned (not blank)	4,000	326	4326
Questionnaire returned blank	14	1	15
Out of age range (returned) [deadwood]	-*	39	39
Undelivered [deadwood]	452	12	464
Sample - deadwood	24,252	1,518	25770
Response rate	16.5%	21.5%	16.8%

* All cases in the 'Frequently absent from school' sample were assumed to be within the eligible age range, as only young people within the age range were selected from the National Pupil Database.

The overall response rate was calculated as:

$$\frac{\text{No. of (non-blank) responses received (that were within eligible age range)}}{\text{No. of questionnaires sent out} \text{ minus } \text{No. of questionnaires that were undelivered (i.e. were received as 'return to sender' mail) \& \text{ No. of out of age range responses received.}}$$

This calculation gives an overall response rate of 16.8%. The response rate for the Frequently absent from school sample was 16.5%, and the response rate for the Electively home educated sample was 21.5%.

The implications of this response rate are discussed in section 4.1.

A.5 Non-Response Bias

The National Pupil database team provided aggregate data for the sample that they selected in terms of demographic characteristics; they also provided this information for the responding sample. The provision of this data means that it is possible to compare the characteristics of the sample and the responding population to assess the degree to which there are any potential non-response biases in the data.

Tables A.5, A.7 and A.8 demonstrate that the responding population and the sample are very similar in terms of gender, age and first language profile. Table A.6 suggests that the responding sample is slightly biased towards families with White British absent pupils.

Table A.5 Gender				
Gender	Sample		Responding Sample	
	Count	%	Count	%
Male	12,012	48.6	1,941	48.6
Female	12,706	51.4	2,053	51.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>24,718</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3,994</i>	<i>100</i>

Table A.6 Major Ethnic Group				
Ethnic Group	Sample		Responding Sample	
	Count	%	Count	%
Asian	1,646	6.7	226	5.7
Black	644	2.6	60	1.5
Mixed	1,086	4.4	155	3.9
White –British	19,497	78.9	3,289	82.3
White – Other	1,297	5.2	188	4.7
Any other ethnic group	238	1.0	37	0.9
No information	310	1.3	39	1.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>24,718</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3,994</i>	<i>100</i>

Table A.7 Major Language Group				
Language	Sample		Responding Sample	
	Count	%	Count	%
English	22,129	89.5	3,632	90.9
Other than English	2,520	10.2	353	8.8
No information	69	0.3	9	0.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>24,718</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3,994</i>	<i>100</i>

Table A.8 Age				
Age	Sample		Responding Sample	
	Count	%	Count	%
11	3,485	14.1	587	14.7
12	3,866	15.6	650	16.3
13	5,145	20.8	825	20.7
14	5,674	23.0	900	22.5
15	6,548	26.5	1,032	25.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>24,718</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3,994</i>	<i>100</i>

Table A.9 suggests that the responding sample is biased towards families with absent children who do not have a SEN. However, the responding sample also has a slightly higher proportion of pupils with a statement when compared to the selected sample.

Table A.9 SEN Provision				
SEN Provision	Sample		Responding Sample	
	Count	%	Count	%
No Special Educational Need	13,529	54.7	2,425	60.7
School Action or Early Years Action	4,683	18.9	676	16.9
School Action Plus or Early Years Action Plus	5,239	21.2	681	17.1
Statement	1,267	5.1	212	5.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>24,718</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3,994</i>	<i>100</i>

Table A.10 details the un-weighted counts for the SEN groups in terms of the strata variables that were used. Again this table suggests that families with children who are absent from school and do not have an SEN are over represented in the responding sample. Pupils with a non-physical SEN are under represented in the responding sample. We over sampled this group in the sample design so had this not been the case the under representation could have been worse.

Table A.10 Primary SEN - Strata group				
SEN Type	Sample		Responding Sample	
	Count	%	Count	%
Non-Physical SEN	6,150	24.9	820	20.5
Physical SEN	275	1.1	65	1.6
No SEN	18,293	74.0	3,109	77.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>24,718</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3,994</i>	<i>100</i>

A.6 Weighting

Pupils who were categorised as 'looked after' as at 31/03/2009 and pupils with a non-physical disability were intentionally over sampled as displayed in table A.2.

Selection weights

Table A.11 shows that the proportion of respondents who fall into strata groups 1-3 are over represented in the responding sample, when compared to their relative proportions in the sample frame (table A.2). For example 17% of pupils aged 11-15 on 01/09/2010 who were recorded as absent for 28 days or more sessions during 2009/2010 are not in care but do have a non-physical SEN. In our responding sample 20% of families are categorised in this group, this means that our responding sample is slightly biased towards the views of this group.

In order to correct for this bias an individual selection weight is needed, this is calculated by dividing the number of pupils selected by the total number pupils within each strata group. This weight is then scaled to the final responding sample size. Table A.11 displays the final selection weight applied to the responding sample by strata group.

Table A.11 Selection Weights					
Strata Group	Sample frame		Responding sample	% Sample	Selection weight
	Total	Sample			
Looked after as at 31/03/09 and do not have a non-physical SEN	1,030	200	31	0.8	0.30
Not looked after as at 31/03/09 and have a non-physical SEN	67,721	6,000	801	20.1	0.49
Looked after as at 31/03/09 and do have a non-physical SEN	1,240	150	19	0.5	0.67
Not looked after as at 31/03/09 and do not have a non-physical SEN	341,220	18,368	3,143	78.7	1.10
Total	411,211	24,718	3,994*	100	

* A further 6 families responded to the Frequently Absence survey, however, they removed their unique identifier so it is not possible to weight them.

It is possible that particular types of families were more likely to respond than others which provides a further source of potential bias. In order to correct for this a non-response model could be built which would predict survey response based on a number of household characteristics. It was not possible to match household

characteristics to the non-responding sample in this instance so a non-response weight could not be calculated.

Effective sample size

The effect of the sample design on the precision of survey estimates is indicated by the effective sample size (n_{eff}). The effective sample size measures the size of an (unweighted) simple random sample needed to provide the same precision (standard error) as the design being implemented. If the effective sample size is close to the actual sample size then we have an efficient design with a good level of precision. The lower the effective sample size is the lower the level of precision. The efficiency of a sample is given by the ratio of the effective sample size to the actual sample size. The effective sample size of this sample is 3,852 with an efficiency of 97%.

Technical Appendix B – Survey documents

B.1 Questionnaire for 'frequently absent from school' sample

Questionnaire on School Absence

This survey is designed to find out about the wide range of reasons why children are absent from school.

When thinking about reasons for absence we are interested in all explanations, so please include common reasons as well those that are less common.

When answering the questions please only think about the child named on the letter accompanying this questionnaire.

Q1

How old is your child?

Please write your answer in the boxes below, using one box per digit

Years old

Q2

In which month is your child's birthday?

Please write your answer in the box below in numeric form, e.g. for January write in '01'.

Q3

Since September 2009, has your child been absent from school for any reason?

Please include all absences, including absences of less than a day.

*Tick one
box*

- Yes ➔ GO TO Q4
- No ➔ GO TO END
- Don't know ➔ GO TO Q5
- I don't want to say ➔ GO TO Q5

Q4

Since September 2009, approximately how many days has your child been absent from school?

*Tick one
box*

- 1-5 days
- 6-10 days
- 11-15 days
- 16-20 days
- More than 20 days

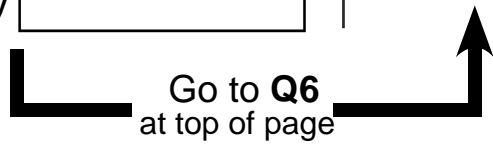
Q5 Since September 2009, has your child been absent from school for any of the following reasons?

Please tick **ONE** box on **EACH** line.

Please include all reasons that had an influence on any days your child was absent from school

Please respond by ticking boxes, do not write comments on the questionnaire, except where requested.

	Yes	No	Don't Know/ Prefer not to say	Tick one box
Does not like/is not suited to school – teaching <i>Including dislikes teachers, is bored in school, not challenged in school, finds school difficult, to avoid specific classes/tests</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does not like/is not suited to school – pupils <i>Including dislikes other pupils, does not get on well with other pupils</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moral or religious values/reasons <i>Including religious holidays</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced bullying <i>Including bullying that occurred before September 2009</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Misbehaviour <i>Including misbehaviour at school or at home because of school, has bullied other children</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child's Special Educational Needs not adequately met by school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer pressure <i>For example, truanting because other children did or to be with friends</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home factors <i>Including being upset by events or circumstances at home</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Holiday <i>Including attending family or social occasions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cost/lack of appropriate equipment/uniform	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other reason	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please specify	<input type="text"/>			



Q6 And what is the **main** reason your child has been absent from school (thinking about absences since September 2009)?

Please tick **ONE** box **ONLY**

Q7 If at some future date we wanted to ask you to take part in a further education-related study, may we contact you to see if you are willing to help again?

Yes No

If you have any comments you would like to make about the topics raised in this questionnaire please write them in the box below.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Now please return it to us in the pre-paid envelope provided.

B.2 Questionnaire for 'elective home education' sample

Questionnaire on Home Education

This questionnaire is designed to explore the wide range of reasons why parents and children choose home education.

When answering the questions please only think about the child named on the envelope which this questionnaire was sent in.

Q1 How old is your child?
 Please write your answer in the boxes below, using one box per digit

Years old

Q2 In which month is your child's birthday?
 Please write your answer in the box below in numeric form, e.g. for January write in '01'.

Q3 Is your child a girl or a boy?

Tick **one**
 box

Girl

Boy

Prefer not to say

Q4 Has your child ever attended school at any of the stages below, even if only for a short period?
 Please tick all boxes that apply.

Tick **all**
 that apply

Has never attended school

Attended nursery/pre-school

Attended primary school

Attended secondary school

Don't know/prefer not to answer

Q5 Which of the statements below is true for your child?

Tick **one**
 box

Currently home educated → GO TO Q6

Not currently home educated but has been home educated since Sept. 2009 → GO TO Q6

Has been home educated in the past but not since Sept. 2009 → GO TO Q6

Has never been home educated → GO TO END

Prefer not to say → GO TO Q6

Q6 Did you or your child choose home education for any of the following reasons?

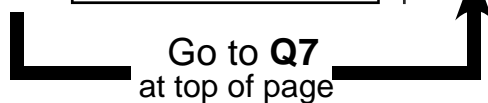
Please tick **ONE** box on **EACH** line.

Please include all reasons that had an influence on choosing home education.

Please respond by ticking boxes, do not write comments on the questionnaire, except where requested.

	Yes	No	Don't Know/ Prefer not to say	Tick one box
Does not like/is not suited to school – teaching <i>Including dislikes teachers, is bored in school, not challenged in school, finds school difficult, to avoid specific classes/tests</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does not like/is not suited to school – pupils <i>Including dislikes other pupils, does not get on well with other pupils</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic/social limitations of schools/ local schools <i>Including discipline/safety concerns, believe Home Education is better than school</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moral or religious values/reasons <i>Including religious holidays</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced bullying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Misbehaviour <i>Including misbehaviour at school or at home because of school, has bullied other children</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child's Special Educational Needs not adequately met by school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer pressure <i>For example, truanting because other children did or to be with friends</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home factors <i>Including being upset by events or circumstances at home</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cost/lack of appropriate equipment/uniform	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family or child moves area frequently	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My other children had bad experiences in school <i>Including bullying, poor academic or social provision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My other children were already home educated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other reason	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify



Q7 And what is the **main** reason you or your child chose home education?

Please tick **ONE** box **ONLY**

If you have any comments you would like to make about the topics raised in this questionnaire please write them in the box below.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Now please return it to us in the pre-paid envelope provided.

B.3 Covering letter for 'frequently absent from school' sample

Parent/guardian of «ForeName» «SurName»
«Address1»
«Address2»
«Address3»
«Address4»
«Address5»
«Postcode»

Dear parent/guardian of «ForeName» «SurName»,

I am writing to ask for your help with a survey we are carrying out examining the reasons why children and young people are ever absent from school. The survey is being carried out by the National Centre for Social Research, an independent social research organisation. The study has been commissioned by Red Balloon Learner Centres, a registered charity.

We would really appreciate your help in completing the short questionnaire included with this letter, and returning it to us by 14th February using the pre-paid envelope provided.

It is vital to the success of the study that as many people as possible complete the questionnaire, in order that we gain an accurate picture of the reasons for absence from school. We would like to hear from everyone, however short the absence(s) and whatever the reasons for them.

Your child was chosen for the study by random selection from the National Pupil Database. **Please only think about this child when completing the questionnaire.**

All data collected will be analysed at a national level only and in line with the Data Protection Act. Your child's personal details will be kept strictly confidential and no-one looking at the study findings will be able to identify your child or you in any way.

If you have any questions at all about the survey, please visit our study website at <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/school-absence-survey> .

We hope you'll be willing to take part – with your help we can gain a better understanding of this important educational issue.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Ferguson,
Researcher

Registered Office 35 Northampton Square London EC1V 0AX

Tel: 020 7250 1866 Fax: 020 7250 1524
Email: info@natcen.ac.uk www.natcen.ac.uk

Who are NatCen?

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is Britain's largest independent research organisation studying social policy. Our aim is to make society better informed through high quality social research. We carry out many important national research studies for government departments, research councils and charitable foundations. More details can be found at www.natcen.ac.uk.

Who are Red Balloon?

Red Balloon are a registered charity, charity number 1109606. More information can be found at their website at www.redballoonlearner.co.uk.

When is the deadline for returning the questionnaire?

Please return the questionnaire by 14th February - unfortunately we will not be able to look at any questionnaires returned after this time.

What if my child has not been absent from school

If your child has not been absent from school, please indicate this at Q3 of the questionnaire – this information will be important to us during analysis.

What if I have more than one child of school age?

Please only complete the questionnaire for the child named on the letter that came with the questionnaire – if more than one child has been selected for the study, you will receive more than one questionnaire. If this is the case, please complete and return all questionnaires.

Who will have access to my answers?

Only the research team at NatCen and our approved contractors will have access to your answers. All data will be completely confidential and treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Results will only be published in aggregate form as percentages of all the answers given by all participants.

How do I complete the questionnaire?

Please respond to the questionnaire by placing ticks in the boxes, except where asked to specify an other answer or to answer in numeric form. At the end there is a box for you to write any additional information you would like to give. If you write any comments outside the boxes it may interfere with the scanning of data. Thank you for your help.

What should I do if I want to find out more about the issues covered in the questionnaire?

The following organisations may be able to provide further information about the issues covered by the questionnaire:

Childline – 0800 1111, www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC – 0808 800 5000, www.nspcc.org.uk

Parentline plus – 0808 800 2222, <http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk>

Parents Advice Centre – 0808 8010 722, www.parentsadvicecentre.org

B.4 Covering letter for 'electively home educated' sample

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to ask for your help with a survey we are carrying out which will examine the reasons behind the decision to choose home education. The survey is being carried out by the National Centre for Social Research, an independent social research organisation. The study has been commissioned by Red Balloon Learner Centres, a registered charity.

We would really appreciate your help in completing the short questionnaire included with this letter, and returning it to us by 14th February using the pre-paid envelope provided.

It is vital to the success of the study that as many people as possible complete the questionnaire, in order that we gain an accurate picture of the varied reasons that children and parents have for choosing home education. We would like to hear from everyone, whatever the reasons for choosing home education and however long or short the time the child has been home educated.

Your child was selected for the study because he/she is named on the Electively Home Educated register, maintained by your Local Authority. Your local authority was one of thirty to be randomly selected for this research. **Please only think of the child named on the envelope of this letter when completing the questionnaire.** If you have more than one child named on the Electively Home Educated register you may receive several invitations to participate in this research. If this is the case, please complete and return each questionnaire separately.

As this letter was forwarded to you by your local authority, all information you provide us will be anonymous. We do not have access to the names or addresses of anyone invited to participate in this way and the data will not be shared with the local authority. Your child's data will be kept strictly confidential and no-one looking at the study findings will be able to identify your child or you in any way.

If you have any questions at all about the survey, please visit our study website at <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/home-education-survey> .

We hope you'll be willing to take part – with your help we can gain a better understanding of the reasons for home education.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Ferguson,
Researcher

Registered Office 35 Northampton Square London EC1V 0AX

Tel: 020 7250 1866 Fax: 020 7250 1524
Email: info@natcen.ac.uk www.natcen.ac.uk

Who are NatCen?

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is Britain's largest independent research organisation studying social policy. Our aim is to make society better informed through high quality social research. We carry out many important national research studies for government departments, research councils and charitable foundations. More details can be found at www.natcen.ac.uk.

Who are Red Balloon?

Red Balloon are a registered charity, charity number 1109606. More information can be found at their website at www.redballoonlearner.co.uk.

When is the deadline for returning the questionnaire?

Please return the questionnaire by 14th February - unfortunately we will not be able to look at any questionnaires returned after this time.

What if my child is not/is no longer home educated?

If your child has not been or is no longer home educated, please indicate this at Q5 of the questionnaire – this information will be important to us during analysis.

What if I have more than one child that is home educated?

Please only complete the questionnaire for the child named on the envelope that the questionnaire came in – if more than one child has been selected for the study, you will receive more than one questionnaire. If this is the case, please complete and return all questionnaires.

Who will have access to my answers?

Only the research team at NatCen and our approved contractors will have access to your answers. Nobody with access to your answers will know who was invited to take part. All data will be completely confidential and treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act. The local authority that forwarded this letter on our behalf will not have access to any answers, and any results will only be published in aggregate form as percentages of all the answers given by all participants.

How do I complete the questionnaire?

Please respond to the questionnaire by placing ticks in the boxes, except where asked to specify an other answer or to answer in numeric form. At the end there is a box for you to write any additional information you would like to give. If you write any comments outside the boxes it may interfere with the scanning of data. Thank you for your help.

What should I do if I want to find out more about the issues covered in the questionnaire?

The following organisations may be able to provide further information about the issues covered by the questionnaire:

Education Otherwise – 0845 478 6345, www.education-otherwise.org

Childline – 0800 1111, www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC – 0808 800 5000, www.nspcc.org.uk

Parentline plus – 0808 800 2222, <http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk>

Parents Advice Centre – 0808 8010 722, www.parentsadvicecentre.org

B.5 Initial letter to local authorities

«FullName»
«Job_title»
«Address1»
«Address2»
«Address3»
«Address4»
«Postcode»

Dear «ShortName»,

Estimating the prevalence of children not in school because of bullying

I am writing to ask for your help with a study that we are conducting to obtain an estimate of the number of children in the United Kingdom who are not in school because of experiences of bullying. No robust estimate of this figure exists and this research will therefore inform the work of those working with children who have been bullied, as well as policy-makers in this area. This research has been commissioned by Red Balloon Learner Centres, a registered charity, and is funded by the Anti-Bullying Alliance and the Foyle Foundation. **We have written to you because we believe that you have responsibility for Elective Home Education in your local authority.** If this is not correct, please let my colleague Matthew Hall know (details below) so that he can contact someone else from your local authority instead.

The research comprises two questionnaires to be completed by parents and carers of children and young people from two groups: those who are electively home educated and those who are listed as having relatively high levels of absence from school. We would like to request your help with forwarding our questionnaires – pre-packed by us in pre-paid envelopes – to the parents and carers of all of the children of secondary school-age named on the Electively Home Educated register for your local authority. **We do not foresee this taking a significant amount of work.**

The questionnaires will not require parents to provide any data that will enable us to identify them. All data collected will be analysed at a national level only and in line with the Data Protection Act.

My colleague Matthew Hall will be contacting you shortly to discuss this research and to give you more details about what it will involve. If there are any times when it would be particularly convenient or inconvenient for him to call or if you have any questions, please contact him on 020 75497118 or Matthew.Hall@natcen.ac.uk. More information about what will be involved in this project and about the National Centre for Social Research and Red Balloon Learner Centres can be found on the reverse of this letter.

We hope you will be willing to help us with this research – with your help we can gain a better understanding of the impacts of bullying on children's education.

Yours «Sincerely»,



Chris Ferguson,
Researcher

Who are NatCen?

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is Britain's largest independent research organisation studying social policy. Our aim is to make society better informed through high quality social research. We carry out many important national research studies for government departments, research councils and charitable foundations. More details can be found at www.natcen.ac.uk.

Who are Red Balloon Learner Centres?

Red Balloon Learner Centres provide a safe full-time learning environment for children and young people who are unable to attend mainstream schools because of experiences of bullying. They are a registered charity. More details can be found at www.redballoonlearner.co.uk/.

When will the research be carried out?

We hope to send questionnaires to the parents of children and young people listed on Electively Home Educated registers in 24 local authorities in early January 2011, with a fieldwork period of a month to six weeks. We would also like to discuss the possibility of reserving the option of sending reminder letters in early February (in the same way as the original questionnaires were sent) should the response rate be lower than anticipated, although the possibility of these being needed is low.

How many people will be involved in the research?

The number of people listed on the Electively Home Educated register is believed to vary greatly by local authority. We would like to send questionnaires to parents and guardians of all secondary school-aged children listed on the Electively Home Educated register in each selected local authority. Across the 24 local authorities that we hope to conduct this strand of the research in, we expect to send questionnaires to approximately 3,200 households.

In a separate strand of the research, we will be sending questionnaires to the parents of 26,600 children and young people across the UK who are listed as having relatively high levels of absence from school. These households will be sampled from the National Pupil Database, and this strand of the research will not involve any work for you.

What will the questionnaire involve?

Parents and carers of children and young people listed on the Electively Home Educated register will be asked about the reasons behind their or their child's decision to choose home education, as well as a few basic demographic questions. In order not to bias the responses given or encourage parents of children that have been bullied to respond more than other parents, the questionnaire and accompanying material will not explicitly mention bullying as the specific area of interest of the research, but will instead be described as looking at the reasons for choosing home education.

B.6 Letter accompanying envelopes to be sent to 'electively home educated' sample¹⁰

«Contact_MrMs» «Contact_FirstName» «Contact_Surname»
«Contact_Job_title»
«Contact_Address1»
«Contact_Address2»
«Contact_Address3»
«Contact_Address4»
«Contact_Address5»
«Contact_Address6»
«Contact_Postcode»

Dear «Contact_MrMs» «Contact_Surname»,

NatCen research into Prevalence of Bullying

Thank you very much for agreeing to help us with this study. Please find in this pack the envelopes we would like sent to the parents or guardians of all secondary school-aged children listed on the Electively Home Educated (EHE) register for your local authority (or all children on the register, if it is not possible to separate the register in this way).

We have included the number of letters you requested when we spoke to you before Christmas. Please do get in touch if you need any further letters.

We would really appreciate it if you could email me at christopher.ferguson@natcen.ac.uk when these letters have been sent out. Please include in this email the exact number of letters you sent, so that we can keep an accurate record of the total number of parents included in our survey.

Many thanks for agreeing to assist with this research and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Ferguson,
Researcher

Direct number: 020 7549 7060

¹⁰ A slightly different version of this letter was sent to some local authorities

B.7 Pilot questionnaire

This survey is designed to find out about the wide range of reasons why children are absent from school.

When thinking about reasons for absence we are interested in all explanations, so please include common reasons as well those that are less common.

When answering the questions please only think about the child named in the letter which came with this questionnaire.

Q 1 How old is your child?

Please write your answer in the boxes below, using one box per digit

Please note that this refers to the child named on the letter accompanying this questionnaire.

Years old

Q 2 In which month is your child's birthday?

Please write your answer in the box below in numeric form, e.g. for January write in '01'.

Please note that this refers to the child named on the letter accompanying this questionnaire.

Q 3 Since September 2009, has your child been absent from school for any reason?

Please include all absences, including absences of less than a day.

Please note that this refers to the child named on the letter accompanying this questionnaire.

Yes → GO TO Q4

No → GO TO END

Don't know → GO TO Q4

I don't want to say → GO TO Q4

Q 4 Since September 2009, approximately how many days has your child been absent from school for?

Please note that this refers to the child named on the letter accompanying this questionnaire.

*Tick one
box*

1-5 days

6-10 days

11-15 days

16-20 days

More than 20 days

Q 5

Since September 2009, has your child been absent from school for any of the following reasons?

Please tick **ONE** box on **EACH** line.

Please include all reasons that had an influence on any days your child was absent from school

Please note that this refers to the child named on the letter accompanying this questionnaire.

	Yes	No	Don't Know/ Prefer not to say
Does not like/is not suited to school – teaching <i>Including dislikes teachers, is bored in school, is not challenged in school, finds school difficult, feels has better things to do, wants to avoid specific classes or tests</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does not like/is not suited to school – pupils <i>Including dislikes other pupils, does not get on well with other pupils</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moral or religious values/reasons <i>Including religious holidays</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced bullying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Misbehaviour <i>Including misbehaviour at school or at home because of school, has bullied other children</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child's Special Educational Needs not adequately met by school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer pressure <i>For example, truanting because other children did or to be with friends</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home factors <i>Including being upset by events or circumstances at home</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Holiday <i>Including attending family or social occasions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cost/lack of appropriate equipment/uniform	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other reason	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please specify	<input type="text"/>		

Q6

What is the **main** reason your child been absent from school since September 2009?

Please tick **one** box only

Please note that this refers to the child named on the letter accompanying this questionnaire.

Tick **one**
box

Does not like/is not suited to school – teaching

*Including dislikes teachers, is bored in school, is not **challenged** in school, finds school difficult, feels has better things to do, wants to avoid specific classes or tests*

Does not like/is not suited to school – pupils

Including dislikes other pupils, does not get on well with other pupils

Moral or religious values/reasons

Including religious holidays

Experienced bullying

Misbehaviour

Including misbehaviour at school or at home because of school, has bullied other children

Child's Special Educational Needs not adequately met by school

Health reasons

Peer pressure

For example, truanting because other children did or to be with friends

Home factors

Including being upset by events or circumstances at home

Caring responsibilities (e.g. for siblings or other family members)

Holiday

Including attending family or social occasions

Cost/lack of appropriate equipment/uniform

Other reason

Please specify

If you have any comments you would like to make about the topics raised in this questionnaire please write them in the box below.

B.8 Pilot feedback form

FEEDBACK FORM

Thank you very much for completing the attached questionnaire. Please now answer the questions below about your experiences of completing the questionnaire and any problems encountered.

When answering the questionnaire were you clear about which **child** you should be thinking about. Did you always think just about that child?

Some questions refer to the time-period “Since September 2009.”

Was it always clear what time period was being referred to in the questionnaire?

Was it easy to remember what happened inside and outside this time period?
How accurate do you think your answers were?

Would a different time-period be easier to think about? Which one?

Questions 3-6 ask about the times when your child has been absent from school. Were there any absences which you were unsure whether to include when answering the questions about number of days of absence and reasons for absence? How did you decide what to include?

Question 5 asked about **reasons** for your child's absence from school.

Did the **answer options** in this question cover all reasons that you can think of? If not, what other reasons would you suggest including?

Were any of the answer options unclear or difficult to understand? Did you have any problems answering "yes", "no" or "don't know" for each answer category?

GENERAL FEEDBACK

If, prior to your child being enrolled in a Red Balloon Learner Centre, you had received this questionnaire, how likely would you have been to take part? What would have motivated or encouraged you to take part? What would have discouraged you from taking part?

Are there any other ways in which you think the questionnaire could be improved?

Thank you for your feedback.
Please return the completed questionnaire and feedback form to Chris Ferguson at NatCen in the pre-paid envelope provided.