

£38 billion

Amount of capital investment pledged by the government from 2025/26 until 2029/30 for its Education Estates Strategy, aimed at renewing school and college buildings

Source: DfE

Need to know

A new study by the National Foundation for Educational Research has identified a link between lower life satisfaction and higher rates of school absence among pupils in England, especially among girls.

Absence rates are currently higher compared to pre-pandemic levels, averaging at 8.4% in secondary schools in 2024/25 versus 5.5% in 2018/19.

The study's authors analysed linked data from the 2022 PISA outcomes and the National Pupil Database, focusing on relations between the life satisfaction, sense of belonging at school and absence rates among 15-year-olds.

The responses to one specific PISA question from a scale of 0 to 10 – 'Overall, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?' – were used to gauge students' wellbeing, from which it emerged that lower scores coincided with higher absence rates, becoming ever stronger as those absence rates increased.

From this, the study's authors have suggested that student wellbeing could have a key role to play in understanding the reasons for persistent absence.

The seemingly stronger link between the two seen in girls may in turn indicate that other factors might be more responsible for the attendance patterns seen among boys.

The full study can be downloaded via tinyurl.com/ts155-LL3



Hannah Day explores the connections and contrasts between two artworks sharing similar themes – one older and one contemporary...

- Henri Matisse, 'The Parakeet and the Mermaid' (1952)
- Beatriz Milhazes, 'Alem do Horizonte' (2025)

Both Matisse and Milhazes are known for large-scale works which, when placed into rooms, create new environments that envelope and transport you.

In 'The Parakeet and the Mermaid' (above), produced when Matisse was experiencing periods of ill health, he created a garden that was intended to replace another he could no longer access. Covering two walls, the cutouts were simply pinned at first, leaving the paper to move in the breeze.

In 'Alem do Horizonte' (below), Milhazes creates both a chapel-like space and a celebration of Rio de Janeiro, her home city. She talks of feelings being part of the visual experience, in the same way that a religious space can transport us beyond the materials of the space.

In class, it might not be realistic to have the students all individually create comparably large works, but corridor areas can potentially accommodate such pieces – particularly at KS3, where a lack of exam board

requirements can enable students to work collaboratively.

Ask students to list their most precious places and sketch out related ideas, shapes and colours. Newspaper can be painted as part of a colour theory lesson, each student starting with a base colour of their choice before building the pigments bit-by-bit by adding blue, red or yellow, painting a full page each time. Once several sheets are completed, add white or black – again, incrementally – to the growing number of pages.

Start the next lesson with sheets having dried. Shapes can be cut, arranged and pinned, while sharing the different colours with members of the class. The final work will thus be everyone's, and help to create a new immersive space.

If you'd prefer to avoid group work then you could create small-scale pieces, with double pages creating riots of colour and form. Either way, every student can create a new celebratory environment based on what's important to them – be it compact or supersized...



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