

Renaissance

A young woman with dark hair, wearing a light pink sweater and a purple backpack, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is in a school hallway with rows of black lockers in the background. Other students are visible: a woman with long dark hair and a blue backpack walking away, a man in a blue sweater standing near lockers, and a woman in a red jacket partially visible on the right.

Non-academic factors that impact student learning

Addressing barriers to student learning with
9 attitudinal factors

Introduction



Research has consistently highlighted the impact of non-academic factors on student wellbeing and academic outcomes. Organisations such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and Ofsted emphasise the importance of a whole-child approach in supporting students' success. By understanding non-academic barriers, educators can tailor interventions and promote positive outcomes for all learners.

PASS (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School) identifies nine attitudinal factors influencing academic progress and wellbeing. These insights help schools understand how pupils feel about their school experience and themselves as learners.

The nine factors are grouped into three key areas:

1. How the learner feels about themselves – self-efficacy, confidence and perceived capability.
2. How the learner feels about school – connectedness, relationships, work ethic and attendance
3. How the learner feels about learning – readiness and response.

How the learner feels about themselves



What?

Self-efficacy refers to a students' belief in their ability to complete tasks and achieve goals. It shapes how learners approach challenges, respond to setbacks, and feel about their potential. It also includes their confidence in taking on new or difficult tasks and their perceived capability to succeed—both of which are essential in shaping learning behaviours, resilience, and long-term outcomes.

Why?

Studies from the Sutton Trust confirm that self-belief has a strong influence on academic achievement—sometimes even more than prior attainment. Pupils who believe they can improve are more resilient, better at problem solving, and more engaged.

Factor 2. Perceived learning capability

This measures how capable students feel in the present moment. It highlights how enjoyable and achievable learning feels.



Low scores may reflect low confidence or fear of failure and may lead to a reduction in engagement and motivation.



High scores suggest students enjoy learning and are confident in their ability to succeed. These learners are likely to regularly contribute to class discussions and often have a growth mindset.

Factor 3. Self-regard as a learner

This factor captures a student’s long-term view of themselves as a learner.



Low scores may indicate a belief that they are destined to fail or struggle in school. These learners may avoid challenges, have low aspirations and may be absent more often than their peers.



High scores reflect confidence, a sense of agency, and belief in their academic potential

Factor 7. Confidence in learning

This reflects how students handle setbacks and challenges in learning. It draws on concepts such as growth mindset and perseverance.



Low scores may suggest fear of failure or difficulty coping with academic demands. These learners often give up easily and may be pessimistic in their outlook.



High scores indicate a willingness to try, view mistakes as learning opportunities, and persist through difficulty.

How the learner feels about school



What?

School connectedness reflects students' belief that peers and adults in their school care about their learning, progress and wellbeing. It also includes feelings about their social environment, such as relationships with peers and adults and their general sense of inclusion in school life.

Why?

Research from Public Health England and the Department for Education shows that strong relationships at school are linked with better mental health, improved attendance, and stronger academic outcomes. When pupils feel connected and part of their school community, they are more likely to be engaged and achieve well.

Factor 1. Feelings about school

This measures students' feelings of inclusion in, or alienation from, the school community. It assesses whether they see school as friendly, welcoming, and safe.



Low scores may indicate a lack of belonging or a negative school climate. These learners may appear socially isolated, disengaged and often experience higher levels of absenteeism.



High scores suggest pupils feel valued, proud of their school, and socially accepted.

Factor 5. Attitudes to teachers

This evaluates students' perceptions of their relationships with the adults at school which can be an important influence on motivation. Research from the EEF highlights the importance of strong teacher-student relationships in raising attainment and improving behaviour.



Low scores may show mistrust or a lack of positive connection with teachers. These learners may demonstrate challenging behaviours, scepticism and defiance.



High scores reflect feelings of support, admiration and trust in staff. These students are typically eager to engage with adults and trust in the relationships.

Factor 6. General work ethic

This measures students' overall motivation to succeed. It looks at their drive, aspirations, and sense of purpose, not just at school but also out in the real world.



Low scores may reflect apathy, lack of autonomy in goal setting, or feeling school has little relevance. These students appear disinclined and can be labelled as 'lazy'.



High scores suggest students see school as meaningful and linked to their future. They will often be actively engaged in the wider school life, choosing to adopt leadership positions and involving themselves in extra-curricular activities.

Factor 8. Attitudes to attendance

This reflects how students view the importance of attending school. Around the world, there is growing recognition of the strong link between regular attendance and educational outcomes. Repeated absence—whether due to illness, disengagement, anxiety, or social circumstances—can quickly lead to learning gaps, reduced confidence, and a sense of disconnection from the school community.



Low scores may signal risk of persistent absence or disengagement.



High scores indicate a belief in the value of education and regular attendance.

How the learner feels about learning



What?

Self-regulation is an essential aspect of education; it is the key to empowering students to take ownership of their learning and set meaningful goals in their school life and beyond. Students with strong metacognition skills and behaviour regulation strategies will likely learn more effectively.

Why?

Research from OECD and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) shows that students who can regulate their emotions, attention, and behaviours are more likely to achieve academic success and develop positive social relationships. Self-regulation is a key component of metacognition and one of the most effective, evidence-based approaches to improving attainment.

Factor 4. Preparedness for learning

This looks at how well students feel they manage their learning, including organisation, attention, and emotional readiness.



Low scores may indicate poor study habits, test anxiety, or lack of self-regulation. These students may appear disorganised, forgetful and limited in their approach to new tasks.



High scores suggest strong independent learning skills and emotional resilience.

Factor 9. Response to curriculum demands

This assesses how students respond to the tasks and challenges within the curriculum.

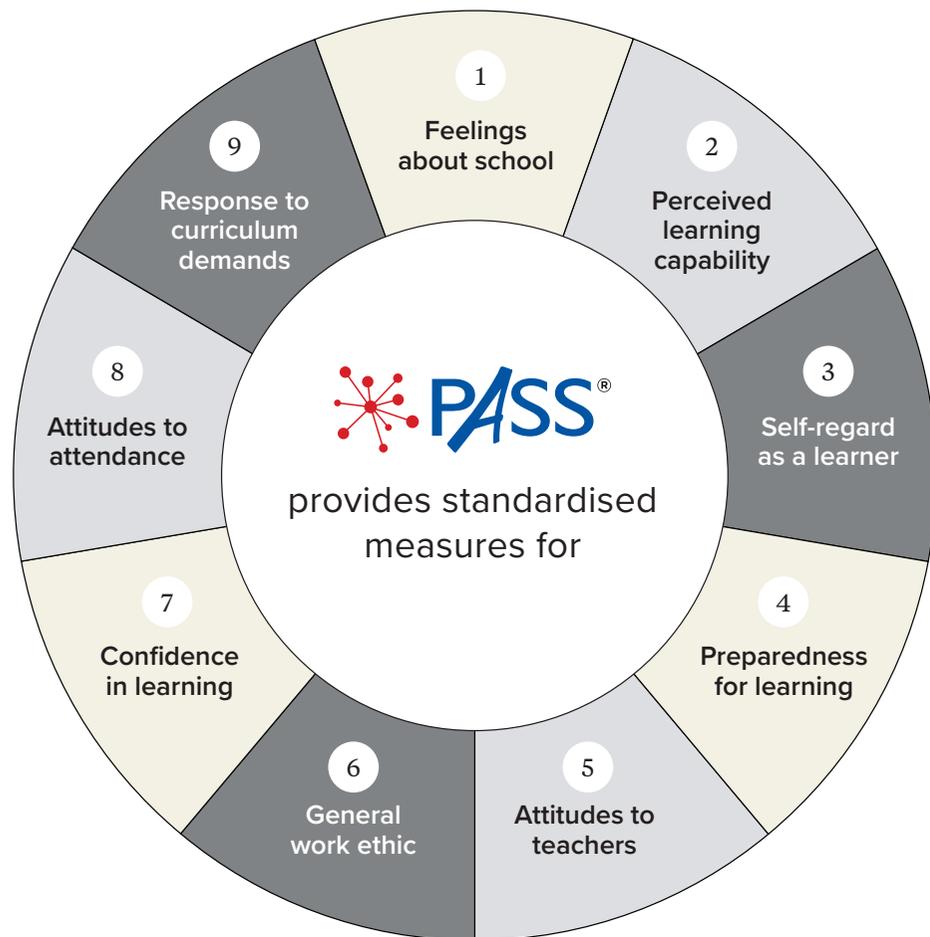


Low scores may indicate disengagement, boredom, or a lack of understanding of the curriculum's purpose. These students will often fulfill the minimum expectations and choose the easiest task to complete.



High scores suggest active participation, willingness to try, and belief in their ability to meet academic challenges.

Conclusion: The importance of assessing these 9 factors



Understanding these attitudinal factors helps schools uncover hidden barriers to learning. PASS provides insightful data that supports pastoral care, informs targeted interventions, and contributes to a whole-school approach to wellbeing and achievement.

Whether used as part of an early identification strategy, to evaluate the impact of interventions, or as a core component of a graduated approach, PASS enables schools to better understand how students feel about learning—and act on what they find.

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