



Autistic adolescent girls & persistent absenteeism:

Lessons along the way

DR RUTH MOYSE

Assumptions about *why absent* and *what now*?



Autistic girls
should go
back to school

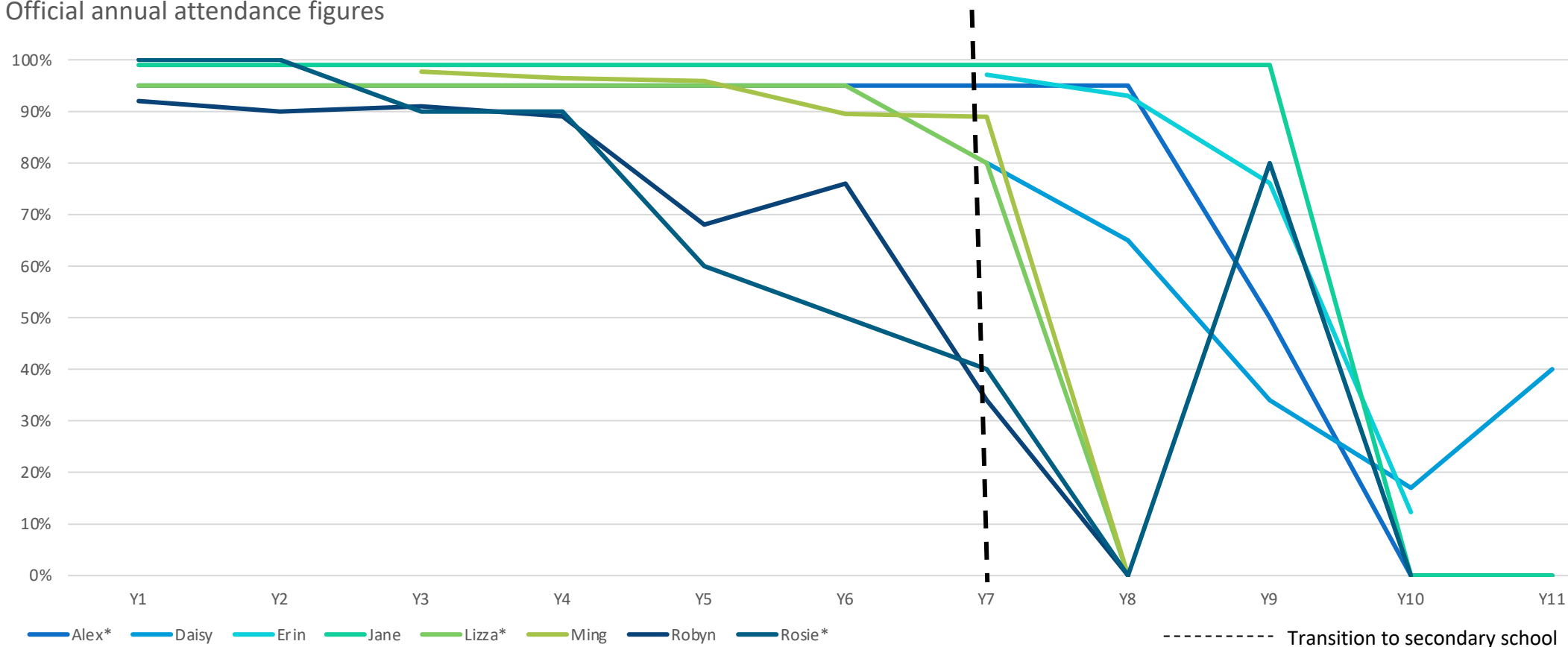
Force girls to return



Autistic girls
are absent
from school

A problem for secondary schools?

Official annual attendance figures



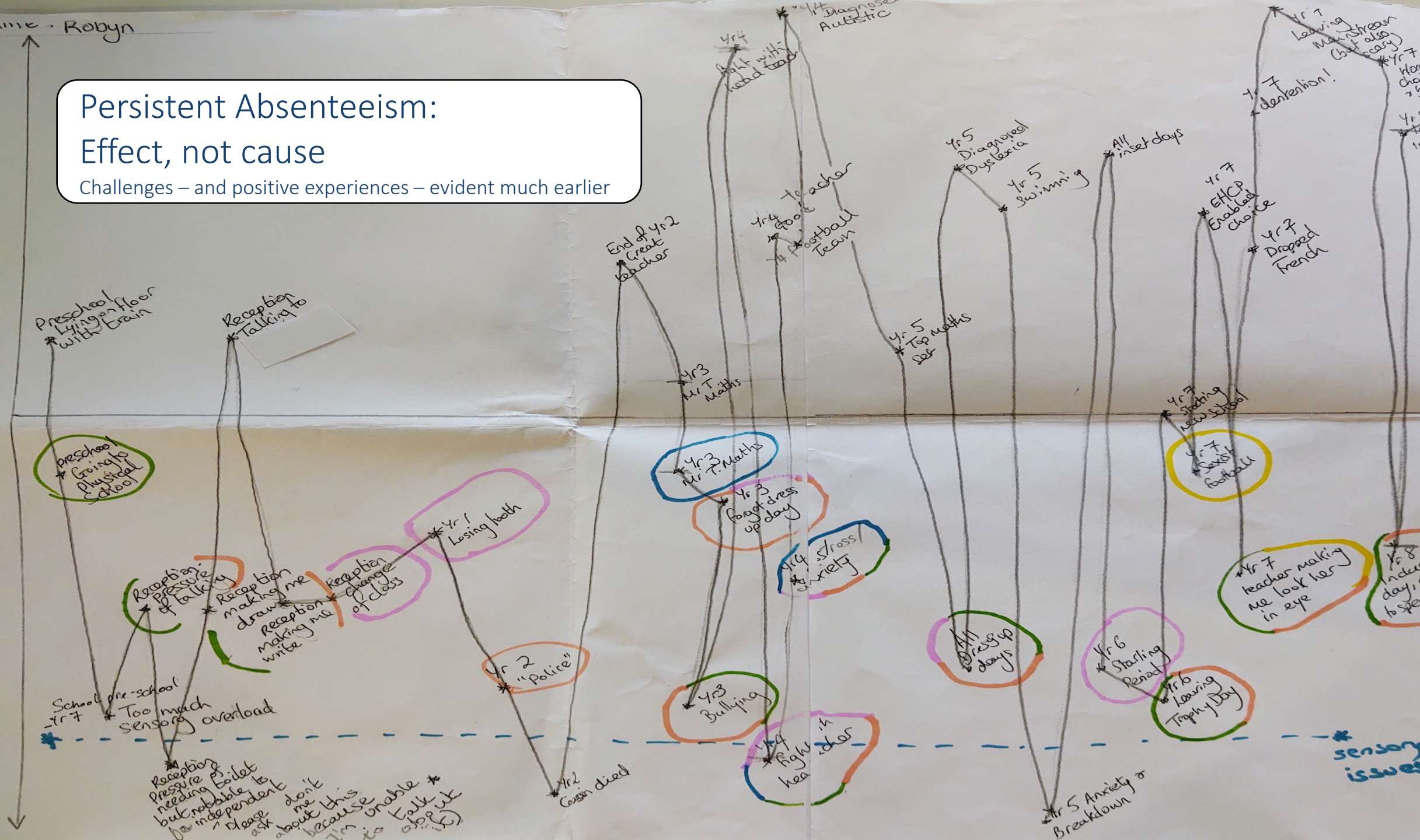
name - Robyn

Persistent Absenteeism: Effect, not cause

Challenges – and positive experiences – evident much earlier

Good Experiences

Not Good Experiences



Daisy

	Positive Event	Why did you choose this?	Why was this such a positive experience? What worked well?
1	Starting music lessons	"Led to me falling in love with music which became a way for me to cope and escape from reality."	"Given the same opportunity as other children...felt like I was good at something."
2	Meeting a teacher who believed in me	"Made me able to stay and cope in mainstream for as long as I did."	"She understood my difficulties but didn't ignore my strengths, and she gave me a safe space to hide and express my feelings and feel valued."
3	Dropping French and PE	"Removing majorly overwhelming events from my week made me feel like I could go to school."	"I dreaded these lessons as they caused sensory overload, so I didn't fear school as much when I didn't have to go to them."

Absence as strategy



Teachers use
absence as a
strategy

Exit pass; miss a lesson.

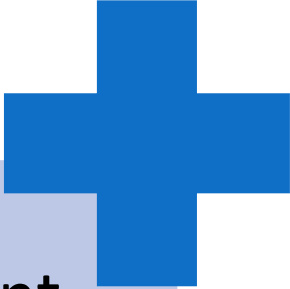
Girls criticised
for using
absence as a
strategy



Overlooked, underestimated needs

- “I defy anyone to pick her out in five minutes.”
- “There is nothing. I see nothing.”
- “I don’t have to cope with anything.”
- “We have children who have more needs.”

Not rejecting learning: rejecting harm



Autistic girls
should be forced
to attend school

Autistic girls absent
from an environment
& ethos they
perceived were
damaging them

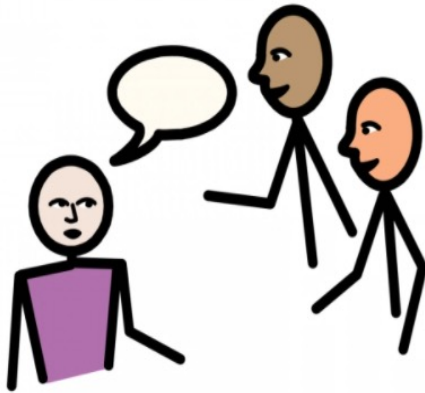
Being out of a setting may be
positive for some girls

In my ideal school I would be...



If you don't meet their needs, don't be surprised if they stop coming!

Policy imperative: Intercede early



 UNCRC Article 12

I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously

<https://cypcs.org.uk/rights/uncrc/articles/article-12/>

- Follow up *informal* absences such as:
 - Leaving a lesson with an exit pass
 - Not on the playground at breaks
 - Missing from a trip
- Ask the young person why they are absent – don't assume.
 - “Just listen. It's not rocket science.”
- Act quickly to resolve the cause
 - Demonstrate concern and commitment to help

Thanks for listening

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