



Girl's In School Initiative (GISI) Sierra Leone

Overcoming intersectional barriers: Evaluating a social protection approach to efficient retention of vulnerable learners

Preliminary findings

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Motivation: Multiple crises creating urgent need for innovation in education

Challenges facing education

Growing Population

Global out-of-school population increased by 20m to 272m in 2023 (UNESCO).

International Funding Reductions

Education aid projected to fall by 25% between 2023 and 2027 (GMRE, 2025).

Increased Crises across Sub-Saharan Africa

With disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable, particularly those at intersections.

Proliferation of Siloed Systems

One-off, disconnected programming and services, leading to gaps and duplication.



Addressing holistic needs: Innovation that leverages existing systems to reach the most vulnerable more efficiently, effectively, sustainably

National Government

Social registries



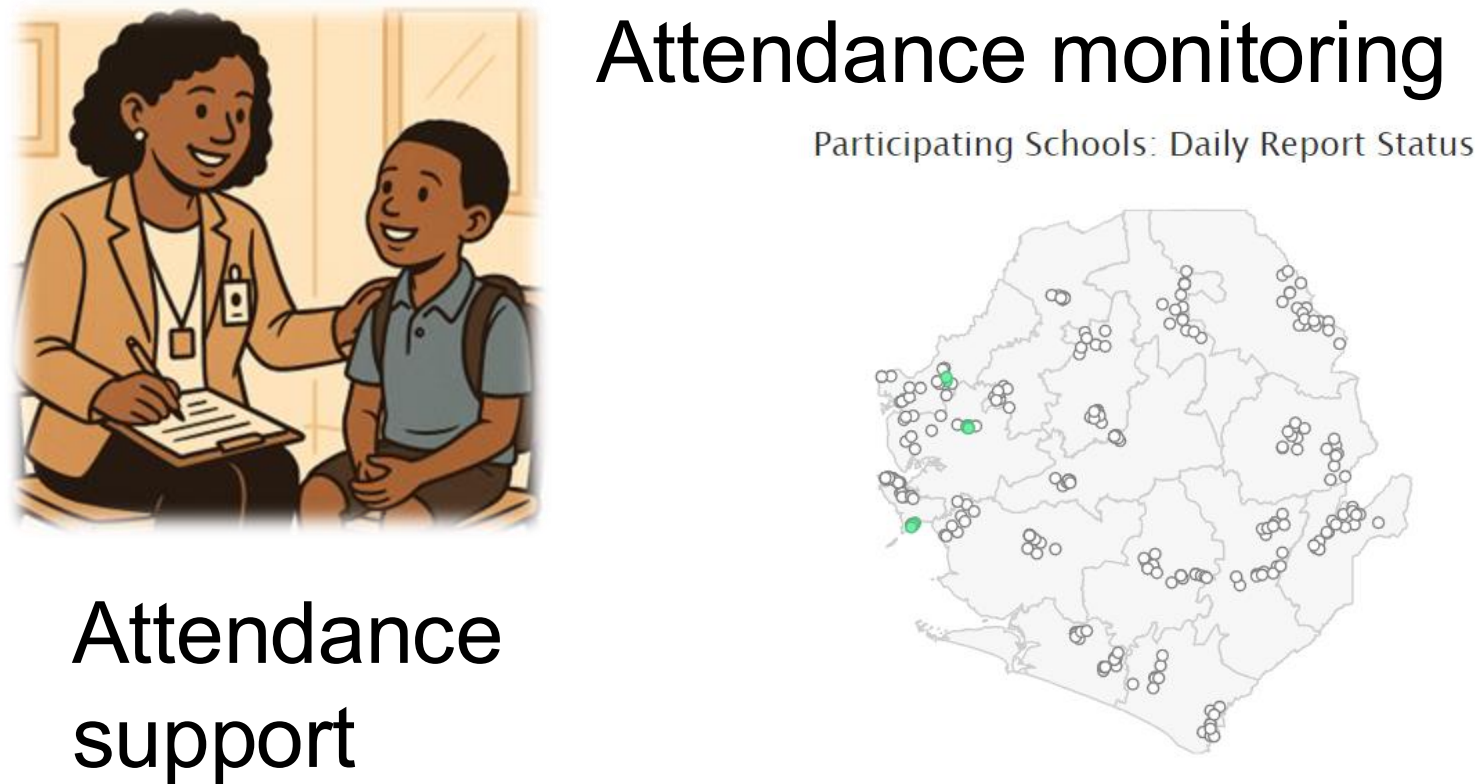
Wi De Ya
Sierra Leone Education Attendance Monitoring System

Learner profiling

Schools and communities

Attendance monitoring

Participating Schools: Daily Report Status



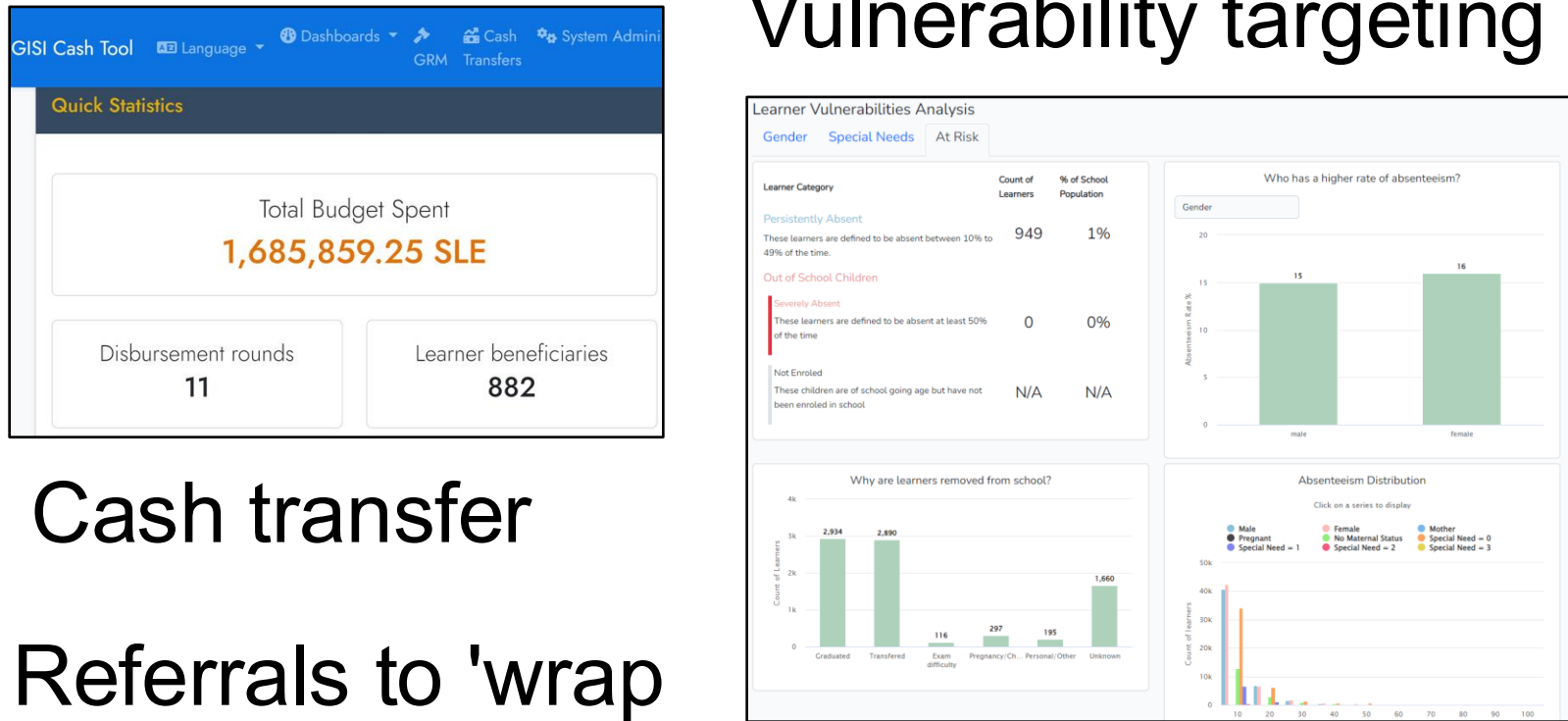
Attendance support

NGOs and social services

Cash transfer

Referrals to 'wrap around' services

Vulnerability targeting



Private sector

Mobile money

Banking

Access to the internet



Girls In School Initiative objective: Get and keep vulnerable children in school – efficiently and at scale

Academic Year: 2024/25

Target: 1,000 girls

- Vulnerable in-School (primary)
- Former Out of School

Targeting criteria:

- Guardian status
- Over age girls
- Girls with a maternal status
- Disabilities (WGSS)
- Former out-of-school girls.

Interventions:

- Monthly cash transfer (~\$10)
- Daily digital attendance monitoring (Gov't's *Wi De Ya*)
- Case management for those with reduced attendance
- Referrals to wraparound services



Research objectives: Generate proof of concept for data-driven Cash+ education programming

Research question:

What is the impact on girls' school attendance by providing vulnerability-targeted cash transfers and case management, leveraging national systems and services?

Data collection:

- Quantitative: Wi De Ya analysis of millions of daily attendance records, across 14,900 learners in AY 24/25.
- Qualitative: Consulted 93 stakeholders in 14 FGDs & 12 KIIs.
- 24 treatment vs 4 control schools of which 1,107 met the targeting criteria.

Data Analysis: Findings presented are draft, with the full analysis to follow.

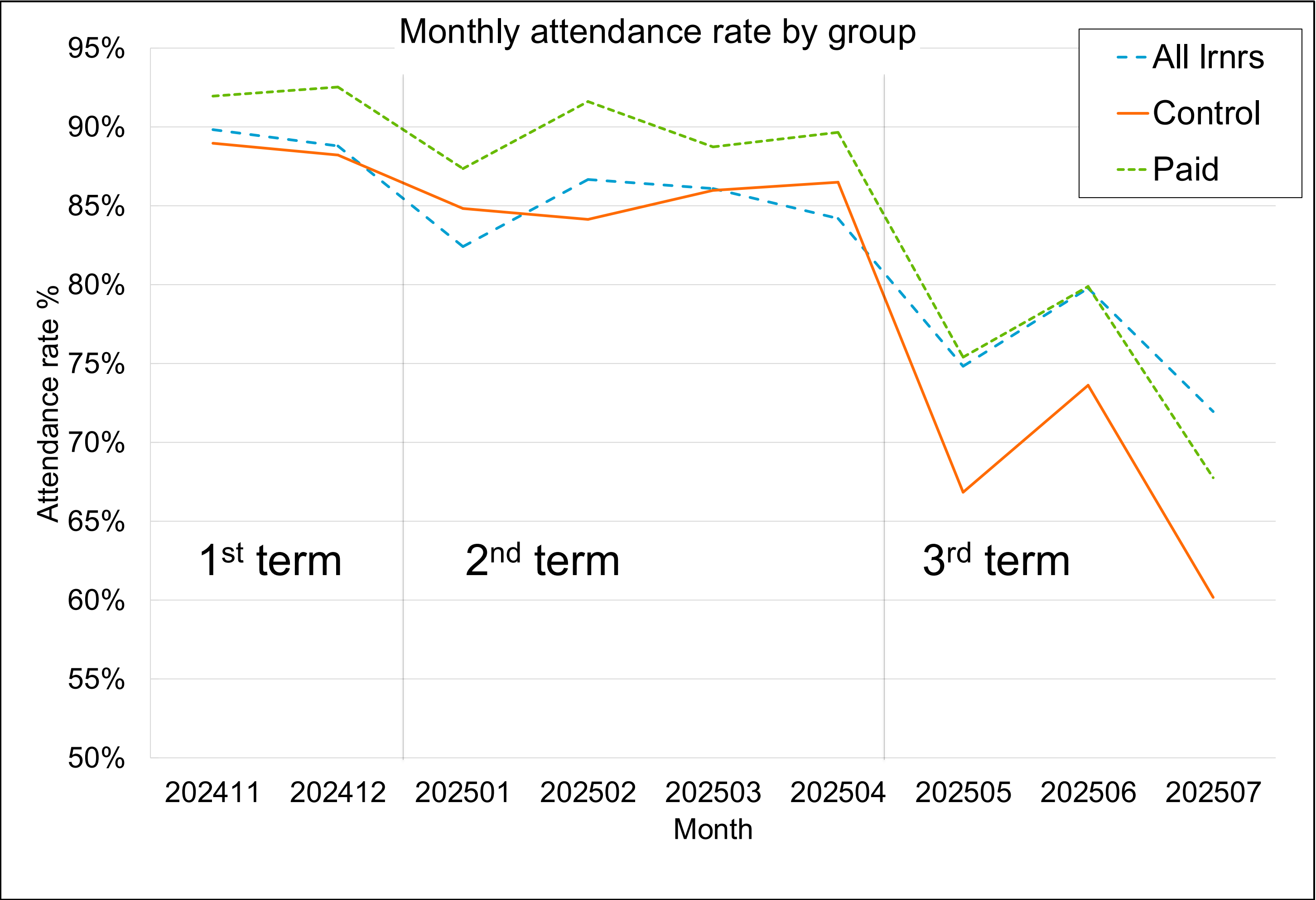
Findings: Attendance was less volatile for GSI participants

Attendance of treated group increased – and was consistently 4% higher than all learners and the control group Jan-Apr. (4% = ca. 8 additional days of school if maintained throughout year.)

Cash transfers appear to **prevent the collapse of attendance** in 3rd term relative to control group. Instead, the treatment group fall in line within a 99% confidence interval of all learner average.

Control and 'all learners' groups follow similar trend with lower attendance rates than project participants, **until the final term of the year where the most vulnerable see a far larger decline in attendance** around exams.

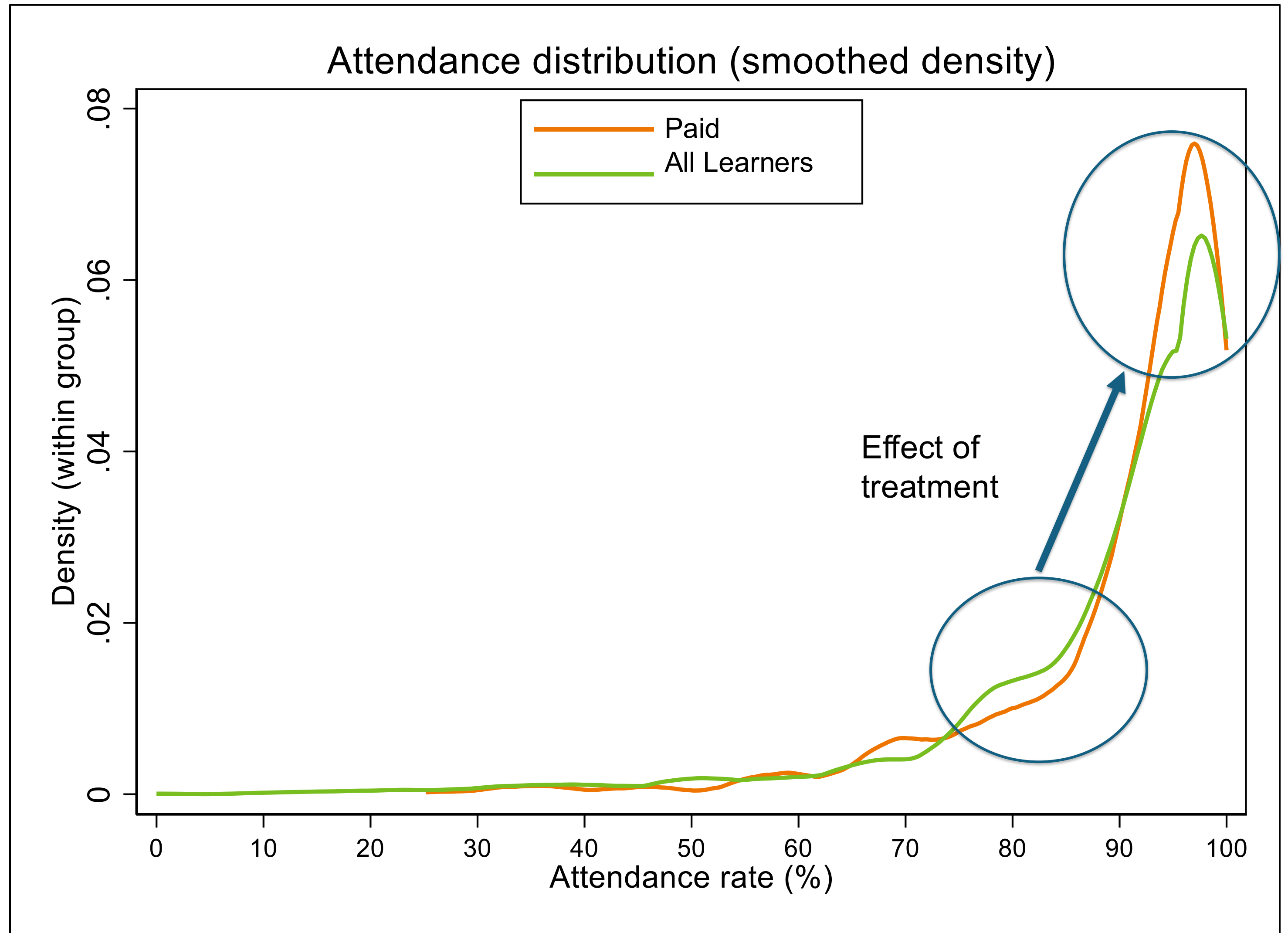
All learners: n = 14,938; Control learners: n = 225;
Participating learners: n = 882



Findings: Treatment reduced outliers, in a more vulnerable group

The 4% higher attendance of paid girls is shown here by the taller peak at around 90% attendance - fewer learners had poor attendance when paid.

There is less variance in the attendance rates in the treatment group of 882 learners, compared to all other learners.



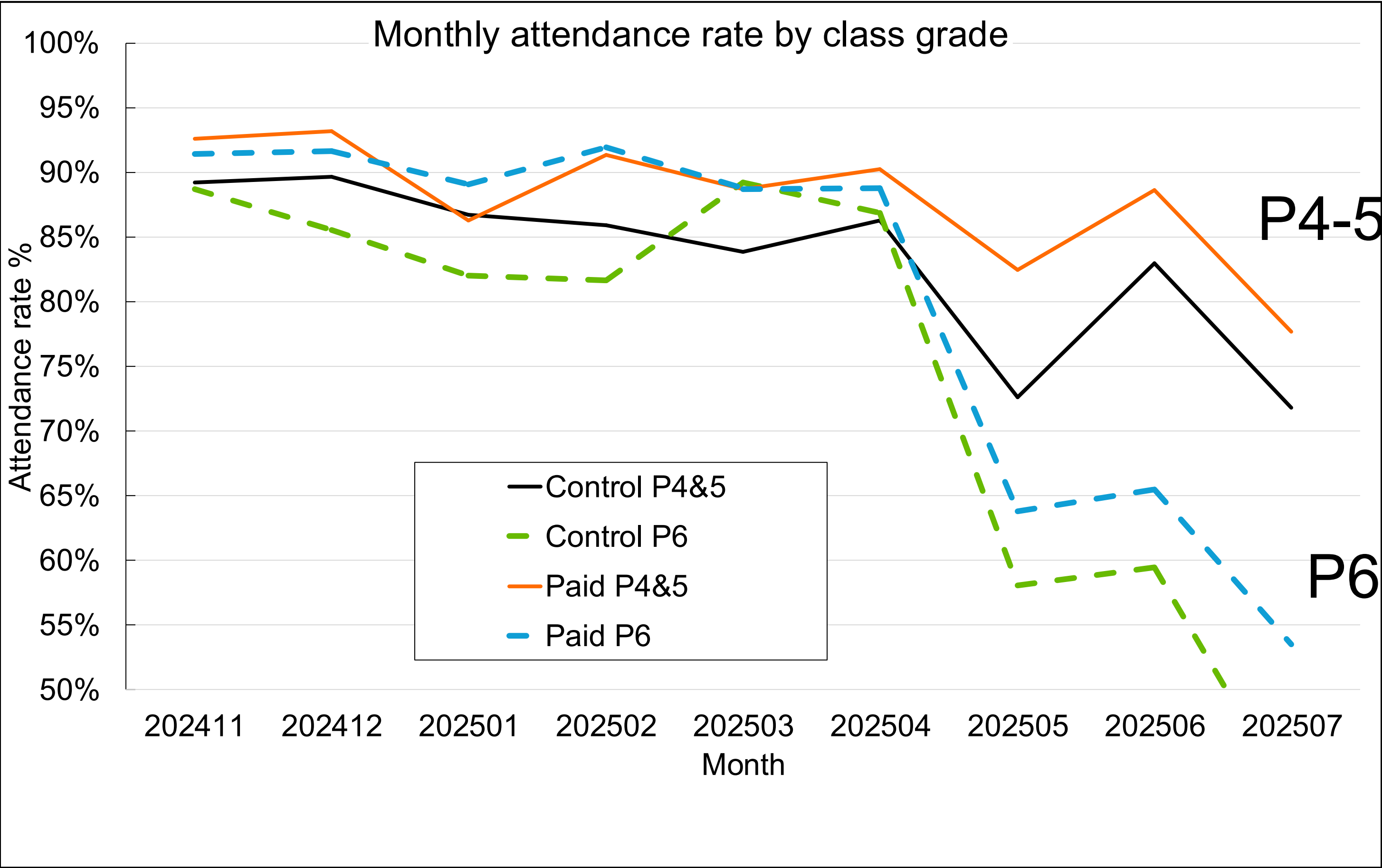
Findings: Attendance change in 3rd term most pronounced for P6

Primary class 6 (P6) attendance heavily falls in the 3rd term. *NB. National Primary School Exams are generally held in June.*

P4-5 attendance also becomes more volatile in the final term, but to a lesser degree.

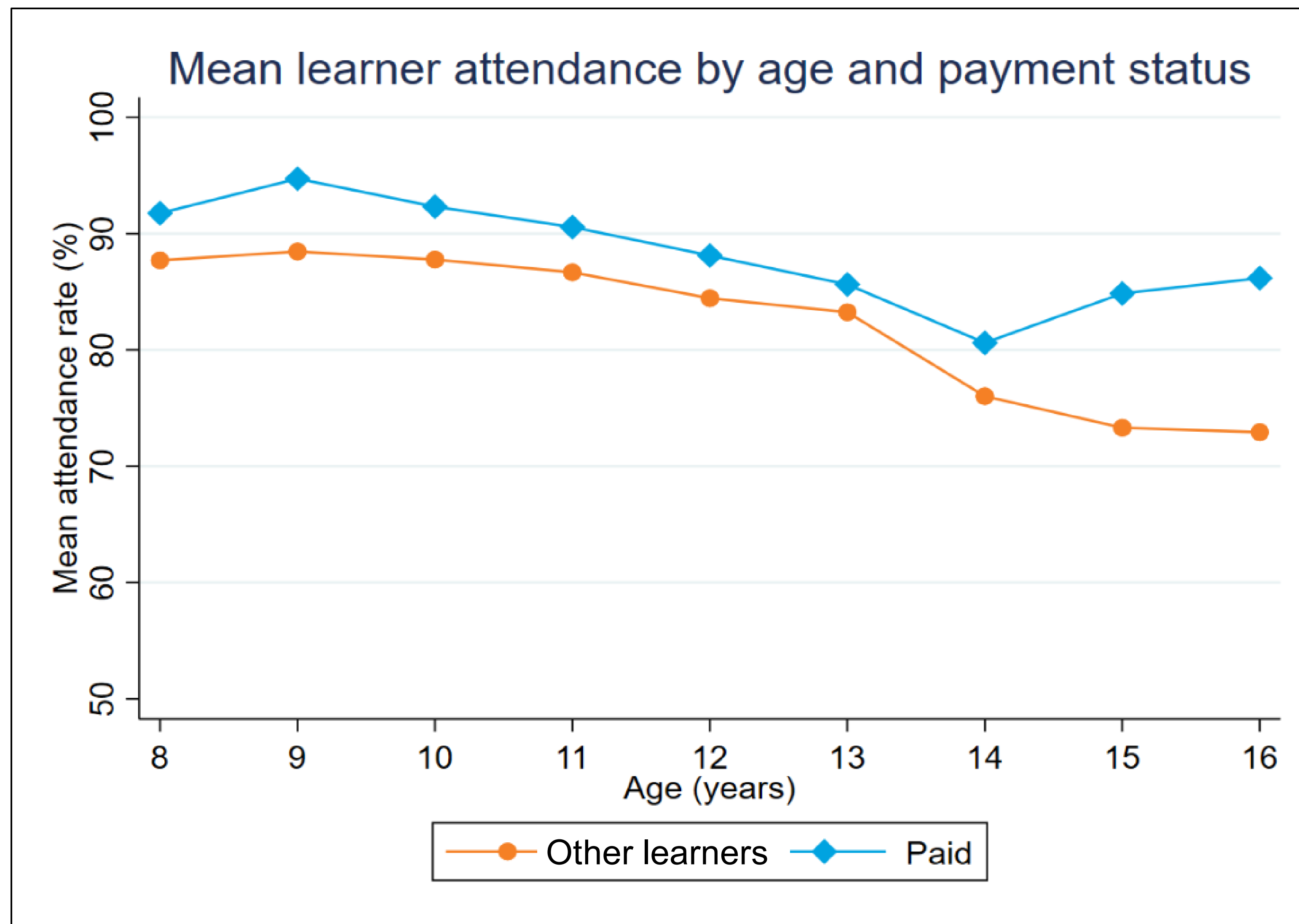
Nonetheless, attendance of paid learners remains higher than the control.

P6 = Final year of primary school

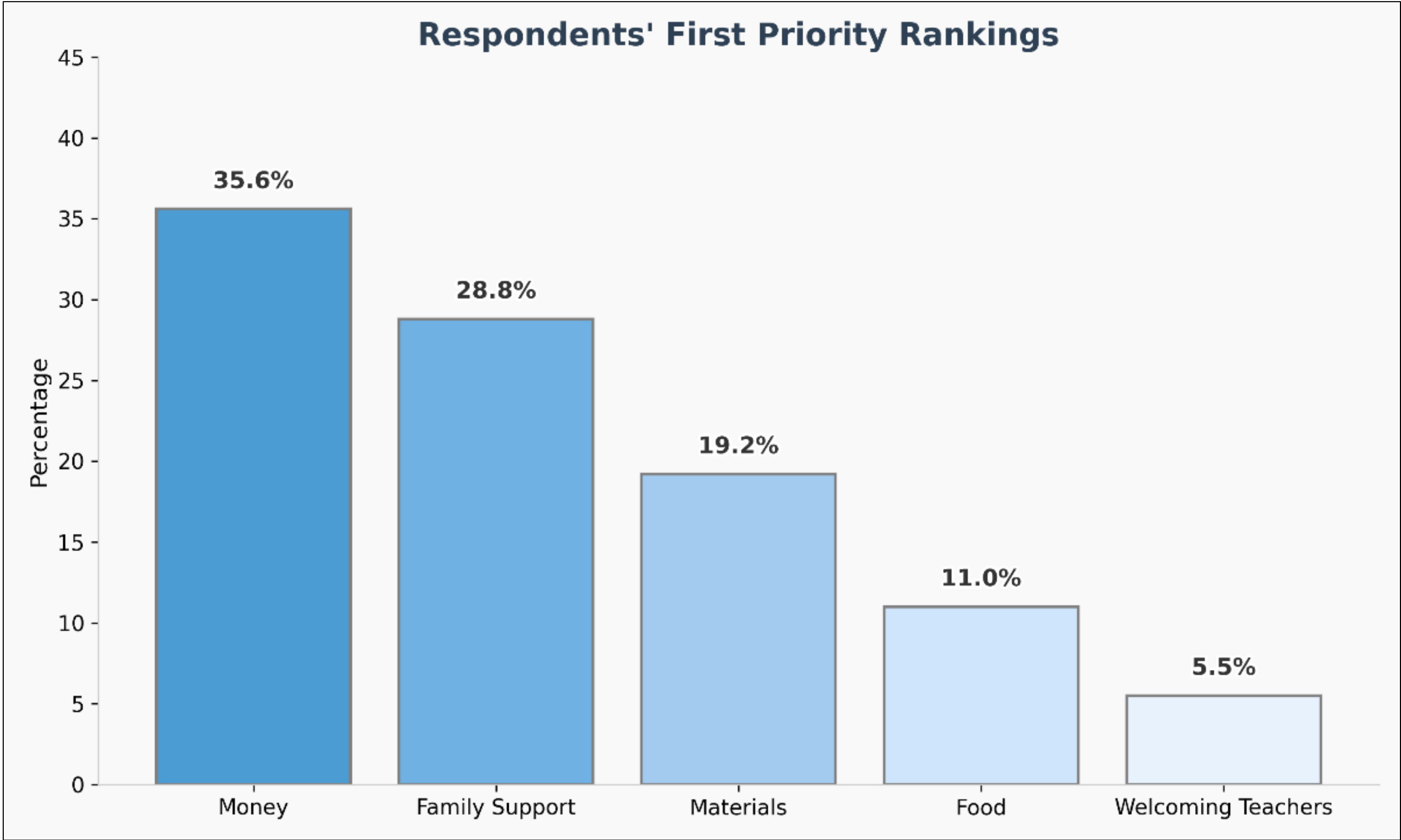


Findings: Overage learners were more responsive to intervention

Using this learning, adapting
programme criteria to target
older learners would be likely to
increase impact.



Findings: Cash improves attendance through access to resources, affecting the whole household



Results of a prioritisation exercise where FGD participants ranked barriers to education by order of importance to them

“Before the cash, my daughter missed school often. Now she goes every day and even helps her younger siblings.”
- Caregiver, Kambia

*“The cash transfer makes me feel more **confident** to be in school.”*
- Learner, Port Loko

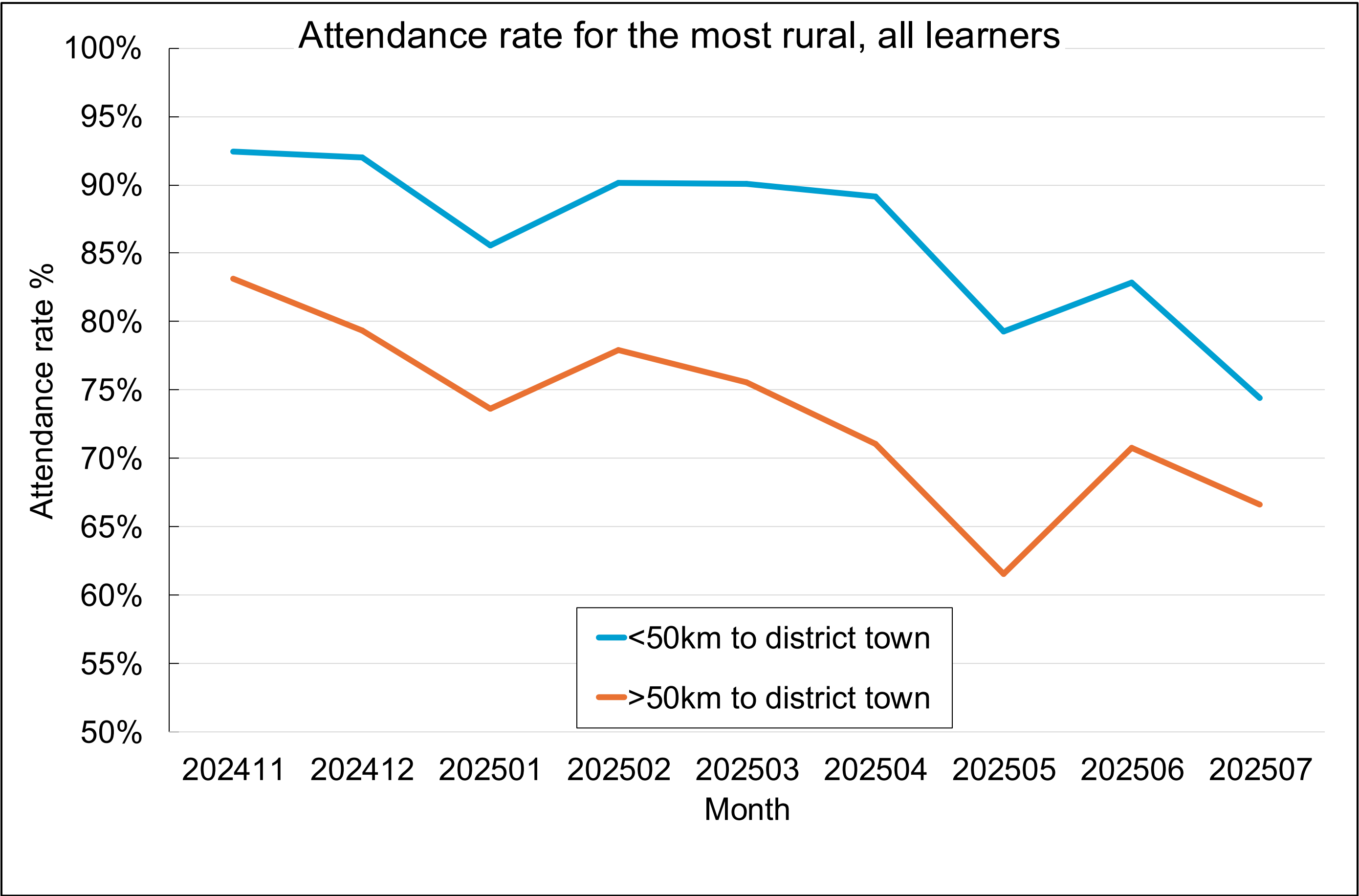
*“I am a **single mother**. I **made all the decisions** on how to spend the cash transfer.”*
- Caregiver, Port Loko

*“Having the basic **school materials** gives me joy and **confidence** to be in school.”*
- Learner, Kambia

Findings: Attendance was poorer in rural areas, though the month-by-month trajectory was similar

Attendance in the most rural schools was consistently 10% below schools closer to urban centres.

(Rural according to MBSSE, 2024, Annual School Census data)



What works: Lessons learnt on approach

Data-driven targeting

- Reported disabilities were fewer than expected
- More overage-for-grade children were included as result of targeting than any other criteria
- There is no proxy for poverty/ income/ assets used in the Wi De Ya system or data

Leveraging existing national systems/ structures

- Working through school leaders & gov't structures improved ownership, sustainability & cost
- Positive GoSL collaboration: willingly shared their data, and oversee school leaders, upon whom the programme depends for the data and reporting

Cash value amount

- School management expressed preference for maintaining value amount over reducing it to reach more learners (horizontal expansion)
- Beneficiaries prefer mobile money, but digital literacy training is required
- Cost of secondary school is higher for all learners, flagged as a concern by participants in P6

Case Management

- Case management is labour intensive - needs to be systematic and very targeted to ensure efficiency. Team was able to be much more targeted.
- Many but not all girls requiring case management demonstrated low attendance first

Referrals (wraparound services)

- Limited referral services available – a key dependency

Using existing systems, cash and targeted interventions, vulnerable learners do not have to be left behind.

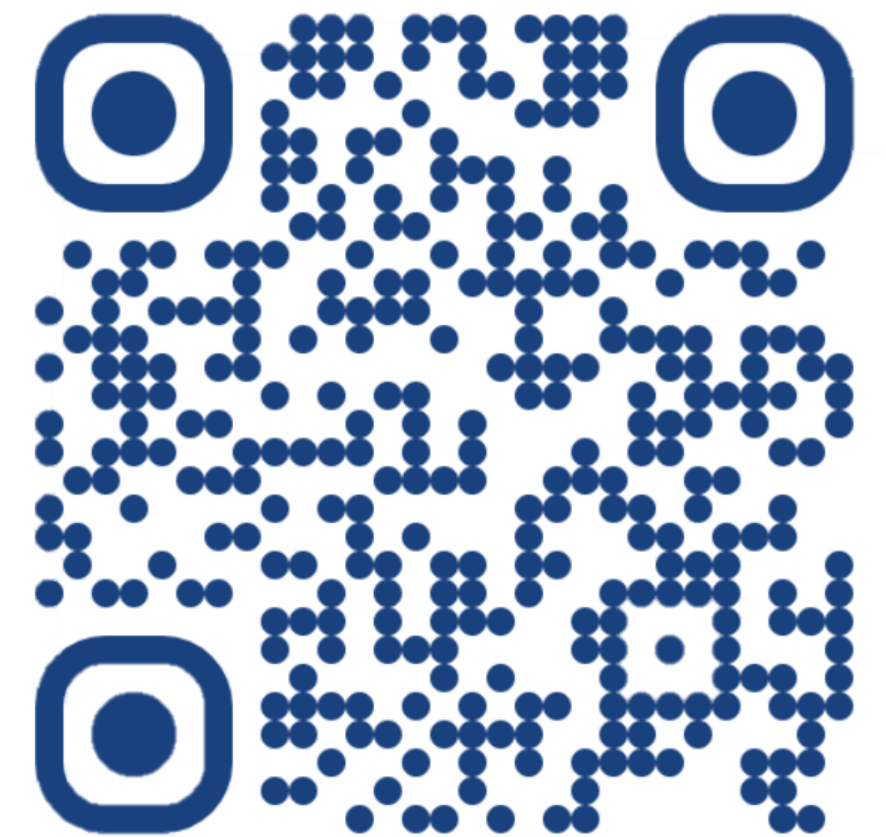
- This AY 25/26 we are:
- producing a more detailed analytical report
 - doubling the size of the project



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