

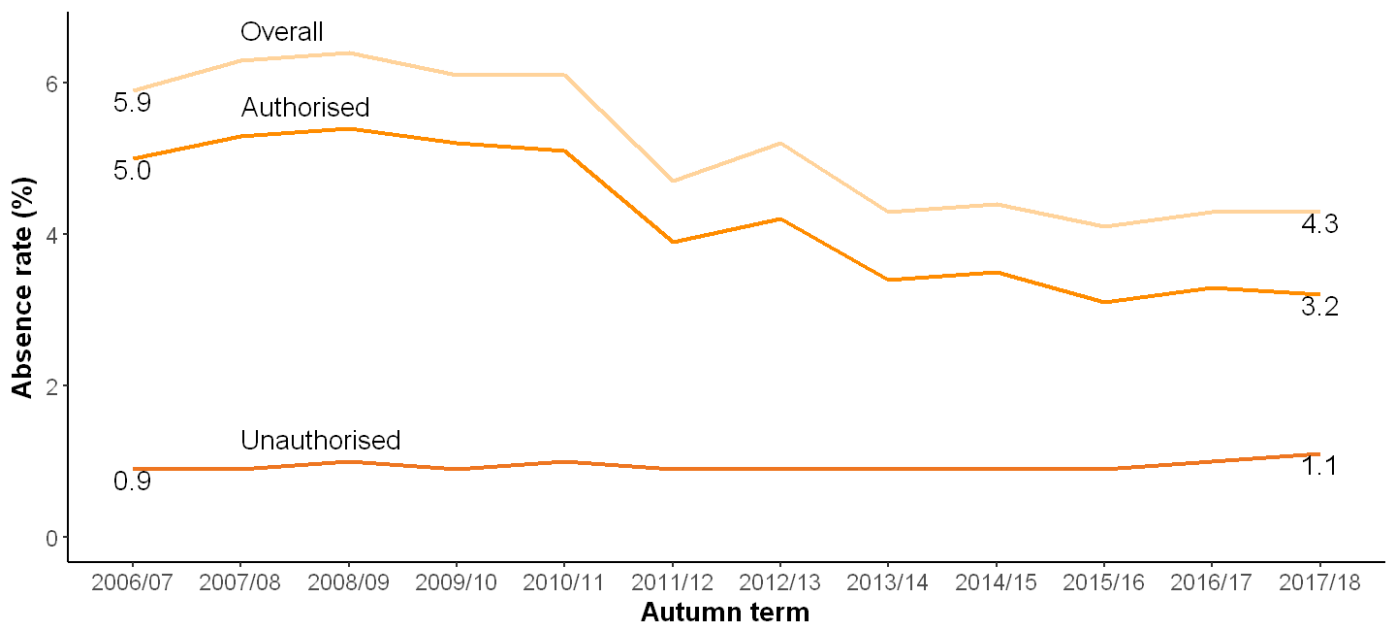


# Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 2017

Published 17 May 2018

The absence information in this publication is for the autumn term only. Due to potential differences in term lengths findings from individual terms can be volatile and therefore the trends in this publication should be treated as indicative only. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2017/18 academic year are intended for publication in March 2019.

## Overall absence rates have stayed the same as last year



The overall absence rate for state-funded primary and secondary schools was 4.3 per cent in autumn 2017, the same in autumn 2016. However, when breaking this down further - levels of authorised absence have decreased and unauthorised absence has increased.

Until recent years, overall absence rates followed a generally downward trend since autumn 2008 when the overall absence rate for state-funded primary and secondary schools was 6.4 per cent.

## More than one in ten pupils were persistently absent during autumn 2017

The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary and secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees during the autumn term rose slightly from 11.4 per cent in autumn 2016 to 11.5 per cent in autumn 2017.

Persistent absentee rates have followed a downward trend since 2008/09, when the persistent absentee rate for state-funded primary and secondary schools was 20.7 per cent, but rates have remained relatively steady in recent years.

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### About this release

This statistical release reports on absence of pupils of compulsory school age in state-funded primary and secondary schools during the autumn 2017 term. Information on absence in special schools, pupil referral units, and for pupils aged four is also included. The Department uses two key measures to monitor pupil absence – overall and persistent absence. Absence by reason is also included in this release. Figures are available at national, regional, local authority and school level. Figures held in this release are used for policy development as key indicators in behaviour and school attendance policy. Schools and local authorities also use the statistics to compare their local absence rates to regional and national averages for different pupil groups.

[A Guide to absence statistics](#), which provides historical information on absence statistics, as well as information on the data sources and technical background information on the figures and data collection, should be referenced alongside this release. It also explains the coverage and quality of the statistics, and explains the methodology used in producing the data.

### Changes to this release

Termly absence data was collected from special schools for the first time in 2016/17; previously only annual data was collected and special school absence rates could not be included within this publication. Absence information for special schools is available in chapter 4 of this document and table 5 of the accompanying national tables. We will continue to publish termly special school absence rates separately in this way (as a stand-alone table) until we have a three year time series for special schools, upon which we will then include this data within the other published tables and headline commentary.

### In this publication

The following tables are included in the publication:

- Main\_tables (autumn\_absence\_2017\_main\_tables.xls)
- Underlying\_data (open format .csv and metadata .txt).

This includes local authority level information and is accompanied by a metadata document that describes underlying data files.

### Feedback

We welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at [schools.statistics@education.gov.uk](mailto:schools.statistics@education.gov.uk)

# 1. Absence rates

## Overall absence rate definition

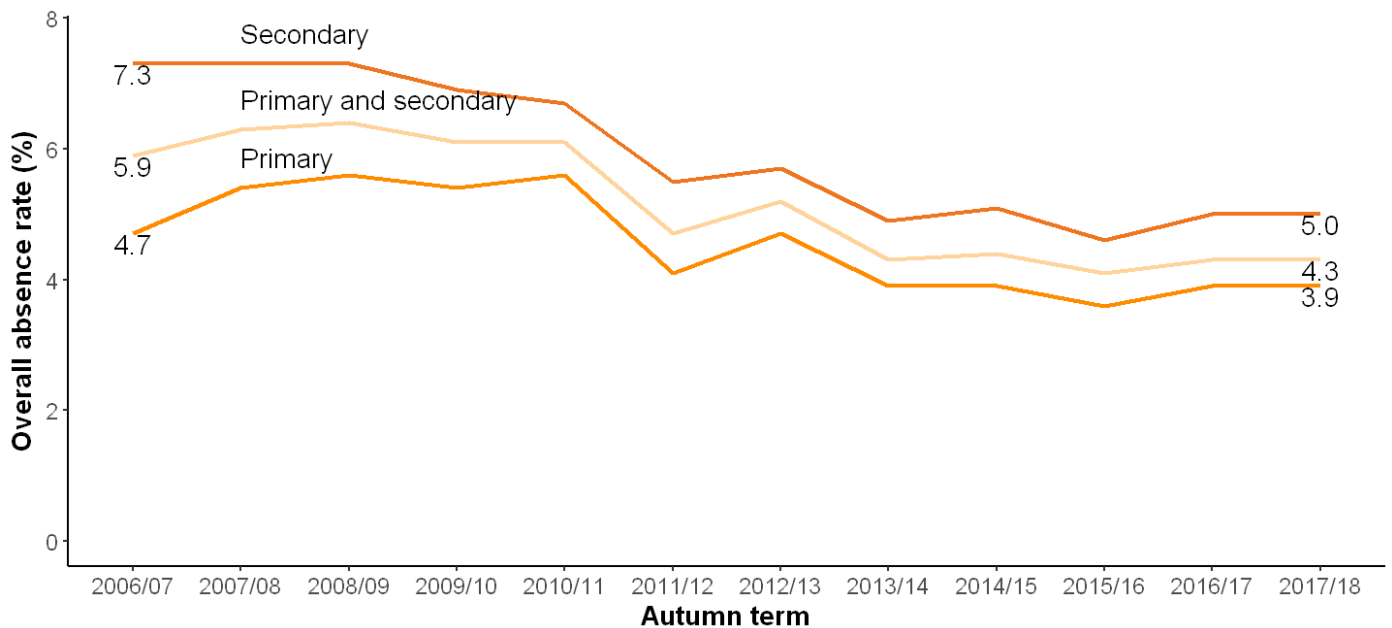
The overall absence rate is the total number of overall absence sessions for all pupils as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions for all pupils, where overall absence is the sum of authorised and unauthorised absence and one session is equal to half a day.

$$\text{Overall absence rate} = \frac{\text{Total overall absence sessions}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$$

The overall absence rate for state-funded primary and secondary schools has remained the same as last autumn, at 4.3 per cent. In primary schools the overall absence rate remained steady at 3.9 in autumn 2017 and in secondary schools also remained the same at 5.0 per cent. For both school types there has been a general downward trend in overall absence rates since autumn 2008.

**Chart 1: Comparison of the trend in overall absence rates**

England, Autumn term 2006 to Autumn term 2017



The total number of days missed due to overall absence across state-funded primary and secondary schools has risen since last year, from 19.6 million in autumn 2016 to 20.1 million in autumn 2017. This reflects the rise in the total number of pupil enrolments, however; the average number of days missed per enrolment has remained the same at 3.0 days.

Authorised absence decreased and unauthorised absence increased, resulting in the overall absence rate remaining the same. For state-funded primary and secondary schools, the authorised absence rate decreased from 3.3 per cent in autumn 2016 to 3.2 per cent in autumn 2017 and the unauthorised absence rate increased from 1 per cent in autumn 2016 to 1.1 per cent in autumn 2017.

## 2. Persistent Absence

### Persistent absence definition

Pupils are identified as persistent absentees if they miss 10% or more of their own possible sessions.

$$\text{Persistent absence rate} = \frac{\text{Number of enrolments classed as persistent absentees}}{\text{Number of enrolments}} \times 100$$

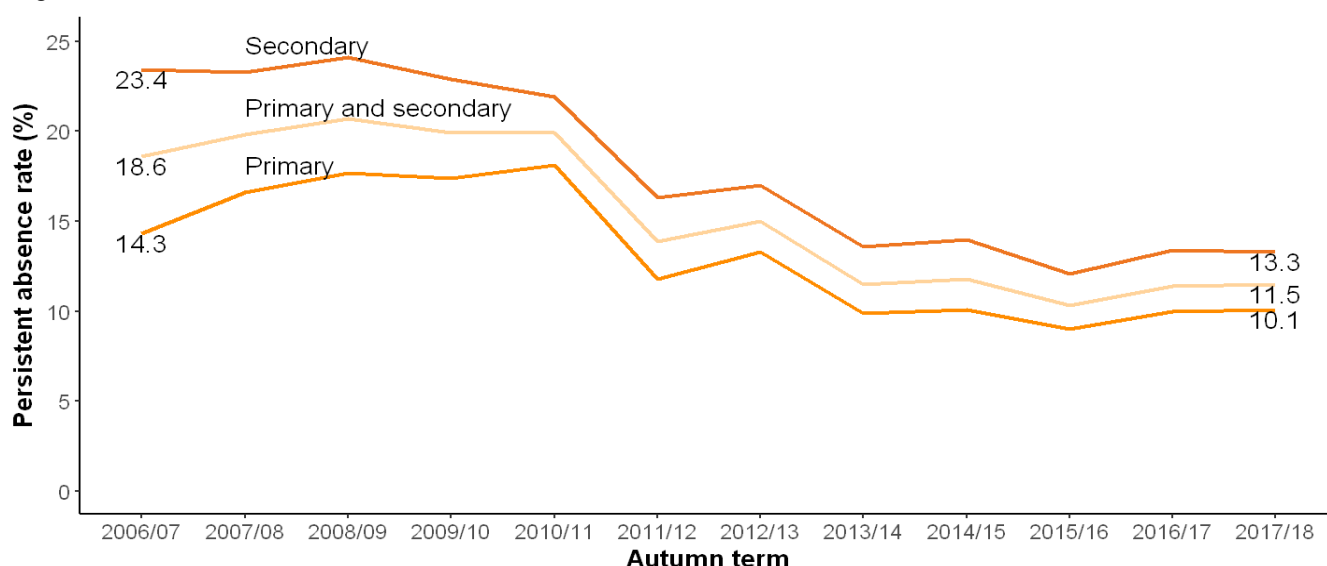
The persistent absentee measure changed as of the start of the 2015/16 academic year. Time series data in this release has been recalculated using the new methodology but caution should be used when interpreting these series as they may be impacted by the change in the measure itself. For more information on this and on the methodologies used in previous years, please see the [guide to absence statistics](#).

The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary and secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees rose slightly from 11.4 per cent in autumn 2016 to 11.5 per cent in autumn 2017.

Secondary schools have the higher rate of persistent absence, however this has decreased slightly from autumn 2016 from 13.4 to 13.3 per cent of enrolments, while the rate has increased from 10.0 per cent in autumn 2016 to 10.1 per cent of enrolments in primary schools.

### Chart 2: Percentage of enrolments that are persistent absentees

England, Autumn term 2006 to Autumn term 2017



## 3. Reasons for absence

Within this release absence by reason is broken down in three different ways:

**Distribution of absence by reason:** The proportion of absence for each reason, calculated by taking the number of absences for a specific reason as a percentage of the total number of absences reported by reason.

**Rate of absence by reason:** The rate of absence for each reason, calculated by taking the number of absences for a specific reason as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions.

**One or more sessions missed due to each reason:** The number of pupil enrolments missing at least one session due to each reason.

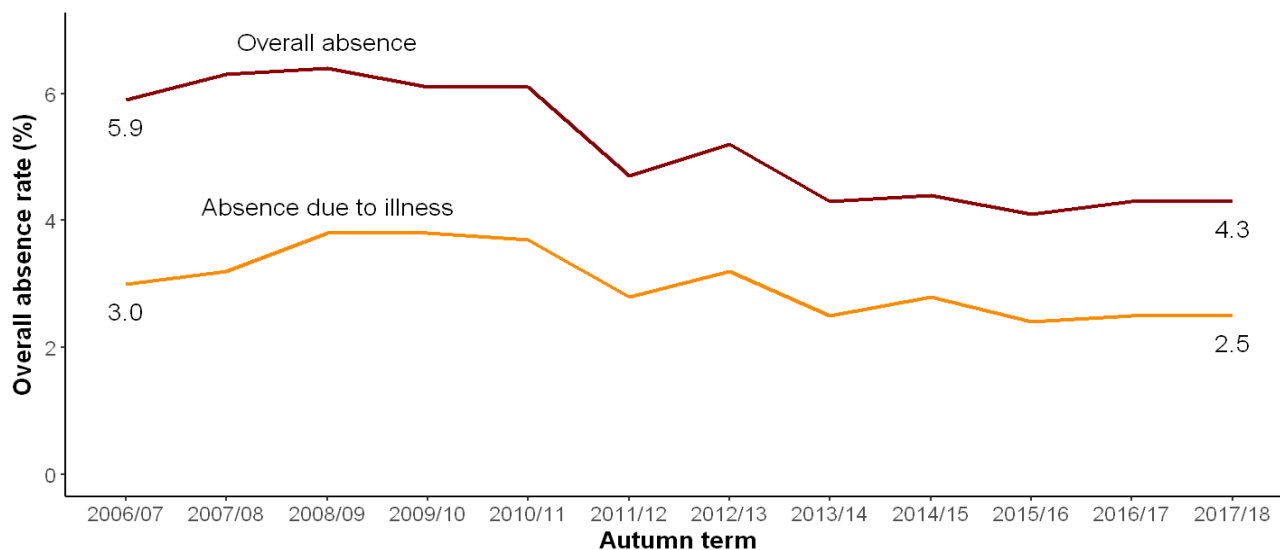
Illness is the most common reason for absence and heavily influences overall absence rates (see chart 3.) It accounted for 58.3 per cent of all absence in autumn 2017, a lower proportion than seen in previous years; it was 58.4 per cent in autumn 2016 and 58.8 per cent in 2015.

The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to illness has remained the same since last year, at 2.5 in autumn 2017.

More than half (58.2 per cent) of all pupils enrolments have had at least one session of absence due to illness, a decrease from 58.4 per cent in autumn 2016.

**Chart 3: Comparison of the trend in overall and illness absence rates:**

England, Autumn term 2006 to Autumn term 2017



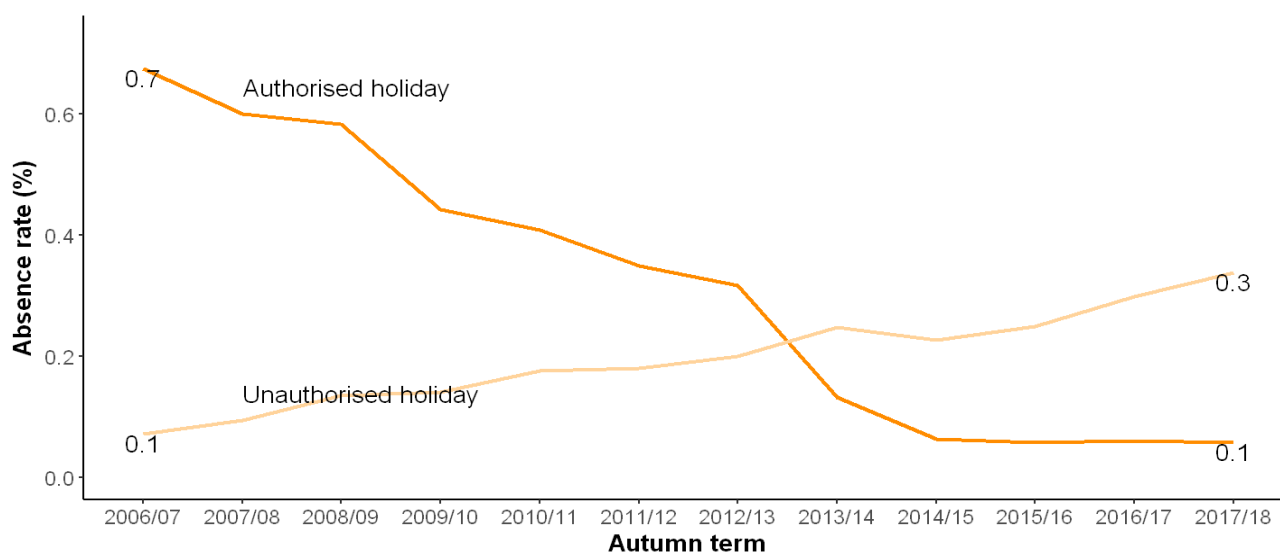
The rate of absence due to religious observance has decreased in autumn 2017 to 0.0 per cent from 0.1 per cent in autumn 2016. Religious absence varies a lot from year to year, depending on when religious observance days fall in the calendar. In autumn 2017, the low rate may be due to the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha not falling on school days. The rate of other unauthorised circumstances has increased since autumn 2016, from 0.6 to 0.7 per cent. After being fairly steady at around 0.5 per cent, it has risen in the last two years.

When rounded to one decimal place, the percentage of all possible sessions missed due to family holidays (authorised and unauthorised) has remained unchanged from the previous year at 0.4 per cent; the authorised holiday rate is 0.1 per cent and the unauthorised holiday rate is 0.3 per cent.

However, when looking at unrounded rates unauthorised holiday absence has been increasing gradually since 2006/07 whilst authorised holiday absence is much lower now than in 2006/07 but has remained steady over recent years. From September 2013 a regulations amendment stated that term time leave may only be granted in exceptional circumstances, which explains the sharp fall in authorised holiday absence between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

**Chart 4: Comparison of the trend in authorised and unauthorised holiday absence rates:**

England, Autumn term 2006 to Autumn term 2017 (based on unrounded absence rates)



The proportion of absence that family holidays (authorised and unauthorised) accounted for has increased, from 8.3 per cent in autumn 2016 to 9.2 per cent of all absences in 2017, though this proportion is driven by changes in the levels of absence for other reasons.

The percentage of pupils who missed at least one session due to an unauthorised family holiday increased from 5.0 per cent in autumn 2016 to 5.6 per cent in autumn 2017, but for authorised holiday this percentage stayed the same at 1.2 per cent.

The figures in this publication relate to the period after the *Isle of Wight Council v Jon Platt* High Court judgment (which was in May 2016) where the High Court supported a local magistrates' ruling that there was no case to answer. They also relate to the period after the judgment in the Supreme Court (which was in April 2017) where the Supreme Court unanimously agreed that no children should be taken out of school without good reason and clarified that 'regularly' means 'in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school'.

## 4. Special schools

Absence information was collected from special schools on a termly basis for the first time in 2016/17, previously being collected on an annual basis only. The overall absence rate in special schools for autumn 2017 was 9.8 per cent. This is higher than in state-funded primary and secondary schools but is similar to the special school absence rate seen for the previous full academic year, 2016/17, which was 9.7 per cent.

Persistent absence was also higher than in primary and secondary schools at 28.6 per cent.

**Table 1: Absence in special schools**

England, Autumn term 2016 and autumn term 2017

	2016/17	2017/18
Percentage of sessions missed due to:		
Overall absence	9.5	9.8
Authorised absence	7.6	7.8
Unauthorised absence	1.9	2.0
Number of enrolments who are persistent absentees	24,945	27,310
Percentage of enrolments who are persistent absentees	27.8	28.6

## 5. Absence for four year olds

The overall absence rate for four year olds (who are not of compulsory school age) has increased from 4.9 in autumn 2016 to 5.0 per cent in 2017. Absence recorded for four year olds is not treated as 'authorised' or 'unauthorised' and is therefore reported as overall absence only.

## 6. Pupil referral unit absence

The overall absence rate for pupils in pupil referral units (PRUs) has increased from 32.2 per cent in autumn 2016 to 33.6 per cent in autumn 2017. Pupil referral units are an alternative provision of education outside of mainstream and special schools, and their absence rate has historically been higher than other types of schools.

Between autumn 2016 and autumn 2017 there was an increase in both the authorised absence rate (from 18.5 to 19.2 per cent) and the unauthorised absence rate (from 13.7 to 14.3 per cent) in pupil referral units. The increase in overall absence is largely due to increases in absence for other authorised circumstances and other unauthorised circumstances.

The percentage of enrolments in pupil referral units who are persistent absentees rose from 70.4 per cent in autumn 2016 to 72.3 per cent in autumn 2017.

## 7. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in Excel format on the Department's statistics website.

### National tables

#### Charts

1. Overall absence rates by type of school
2. Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees

#### Tables

1. Pupil absence and pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees by type of school
2. Pupil absence by reason
3. Pupil enrolments with one or more session of absence by reason
4. Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for pupil referral units
5. Pupil absence and pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees in special schools

When reviewing the tables, please note that:

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We preserve confidentiality	The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that all published or disseminated statistics produced by the Department for Education protect confidentiality.
We round numbers	Enrolment numbers at national and regional levels have been rounded to the nearest 5. Enrolment numbers of 1 or 2 have been suppressed to protect confidentiality. Where any number is shown as 0, the original figure was also 0.  Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is less than 3, the percentage has been suppressed. This suppression is consistent with the Departmental statistical policy.
We adopt symbols to help identify suppression	Symbols are used in the tables as follows: 0 zero x small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality . not applicable .. not available

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### Additional information

This National Statistics publication is accompanied by underlying data, including national, local authority and school level information. The accompanying file includes a metadata document which provides further information on the contents of these files. This data is released under the terms of the [Open Government License](#) and is intended to meet at least 3 stars for [Open Data](#).

## 8. Further information is available

For recent pupil absence statistics visit: [Statistics: pupil absence](#)

The School Census only collects absence information from schools in England.

For information for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, contact the departments below or access their statistics at the following links:

**Wales:** [school.stats@wales.gov.uk](mailto:school.stats@wales.gov.uk) or [Welsh Government Statistics and Research](#)

**Scotland:** [school.stats@scotland.gov.uk](mailto:school.stats@scotland.gov.uk) or [Scottish Government School Education Statistics](#)

**Northern Ireland:** [statistics@deni.gov.uk](mailto:statistics@deni.gov.uk) or [Department of Education Education Statistics](#)

## 9. Revisions

There are no further planned revisions to this National Statistics release. However, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the [Departmental revisions policy](#).

## 10. National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

The Department has a set of [statistical policies](#) in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.



## 11. Technical information

These statistics are presented as emerging findings and have been released to help planning, to study trends and to monitor outcomes of initiatives and interventions on pupil attendance.

A guide to absence statistics, which provides historical information on absence statistics, technical background information on the figures and data collection, and definitions of key terms should be referred to alongside this release.

The information used in this release is sourced from the school census, further information is available in chapter 4 of the [guide to absence statistics](#).

The following technical notes are specific to this publication:

- Data are collected a term in arrears, meaning that where a school closes, data are not collected for the last term the school was open. For schools which close at the end of a term, data for that term will not be collected.
- 13 sponsor-led academies opened part way through the term and incorrectly returned absence data for their predecessor school. As the combined absence data would then be related to both the academy and their predecessor school these academies have been completely removed from this analysis.
- Year on year comparisons of local authority data may be affected by schools converting to academies.
- Schools with fewer than 6 enrolments aged between five and fifteen are removed from our analysis. For this release, 19 schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

## 12. Get in touch

### Media enquiries

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### Other enquiries/feedback

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