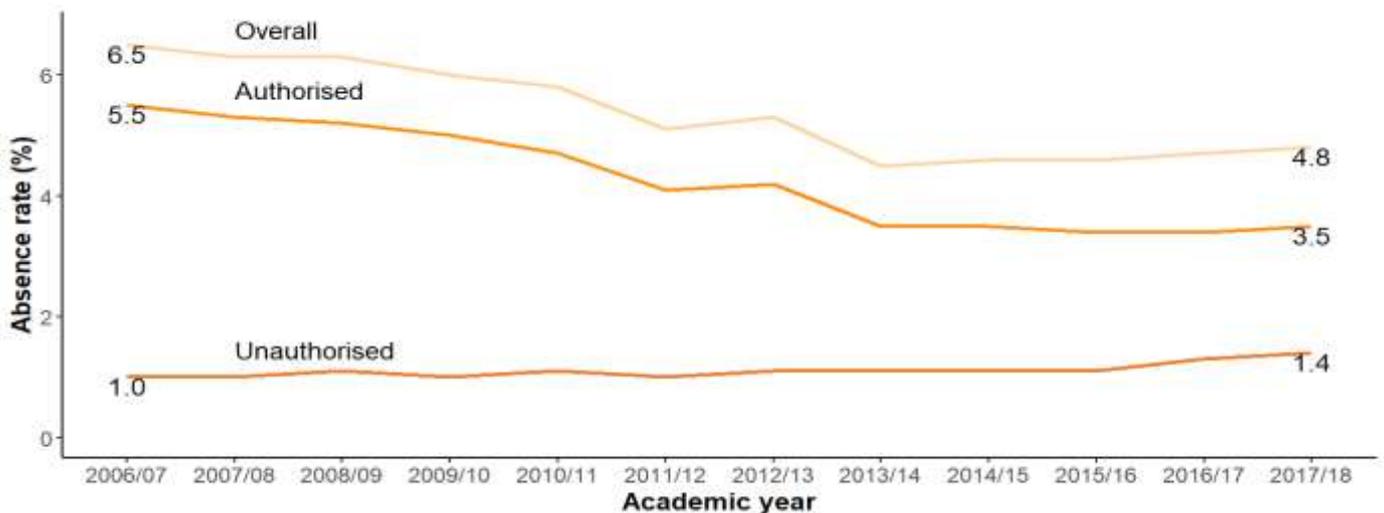




Pupil absence in schools in England: 2017 to 2018

21 March 2019

The overall absence rate has increased since 2016/17

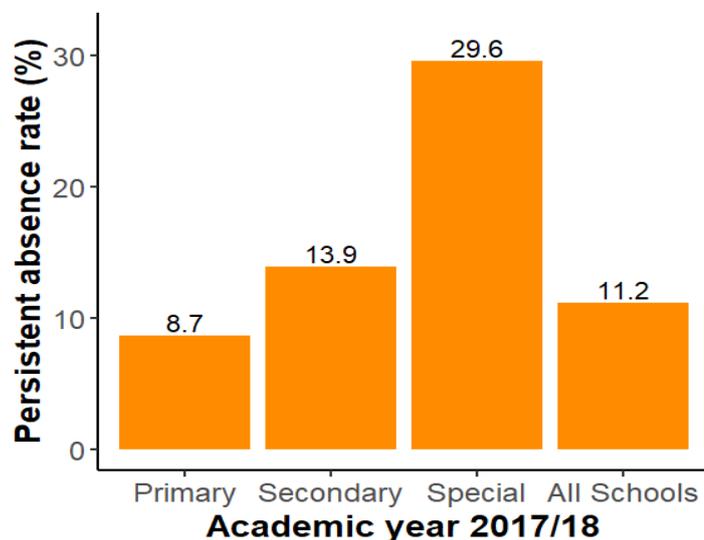


The increase is due to higher rates of both authorised and unauthorised absence

Both authorised and unauthorised absence rates have increased since last year, the rate of the latter now being the highest since records began.

Illness remains the main driver for overall absence rates. However whilst overall absence rates have increased slightly since 2016/17, illness rates have remained about the same at 2.6 per cent, and illness accounts for a slightly lower proportion of absence than in recent years at 54.7 per cent. Unauthorised absence has risen mainly due to 'other' unauthorised circumstances.

One in nine pupils was persistently absent



There has been a small consistent increase across all school types in persistent absence (pupils missing more than 10% of their possible sessions) but persistent absence in special schools is more than double any other school type.

Persistent absentees account for almost a third, 32.4 per cent, of all authorised absence and more than half, 54.1 per cent, of all unauthorised absence.

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About this release

This statistical release reports on absence of pupils of compulsory school age in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools during the 2017/18 academic year. Information on absence in 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 and pupils characteristics 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 technical background information on the figures and data collection, should be referenced alongside this release.

In this publication

The following tables are included in the release:

Absence_3term_201718_National_and_local_authority_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.

1. Absence rates (Table 1.1 and underlying data)

Overall absence rate definition

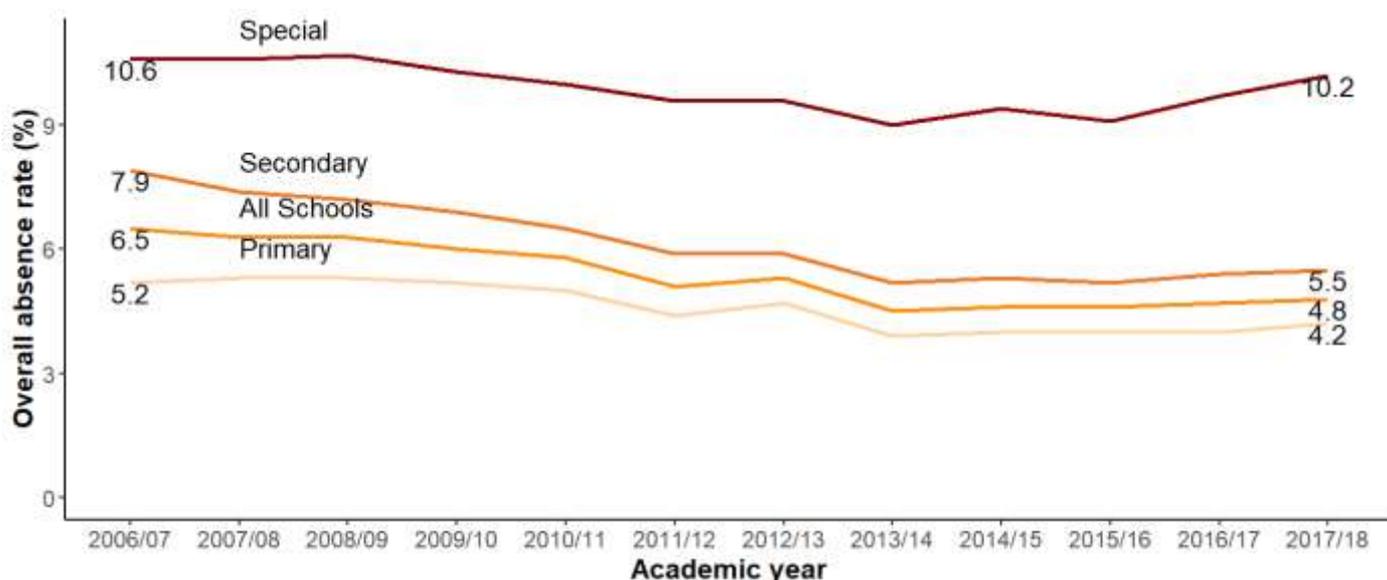
The overall absence rate is the total number of overall absence sessions for all pupils as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions for all pupils, where overall absence is the sum of authorised and unauthorised absence and one session is equal to half a day.

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

The overall absence rate across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools increased from 4.7 per cent in 2016/17 to 4.8 in 2017/18. In primary schools the overall absence rate increased from 4.0 to 4.2 per cent and the rate in secondary schools increased from 5.4 to 5.5 per cent. Absence in special schools is much higher at 10.2 per cent in 2017/18, and has been increasing at a faster rate in recent years than either state-funded primary or secondary schools.

Figure 1: Overall absence rates in state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools (per cent)

England, 2006/07 to 2017/18



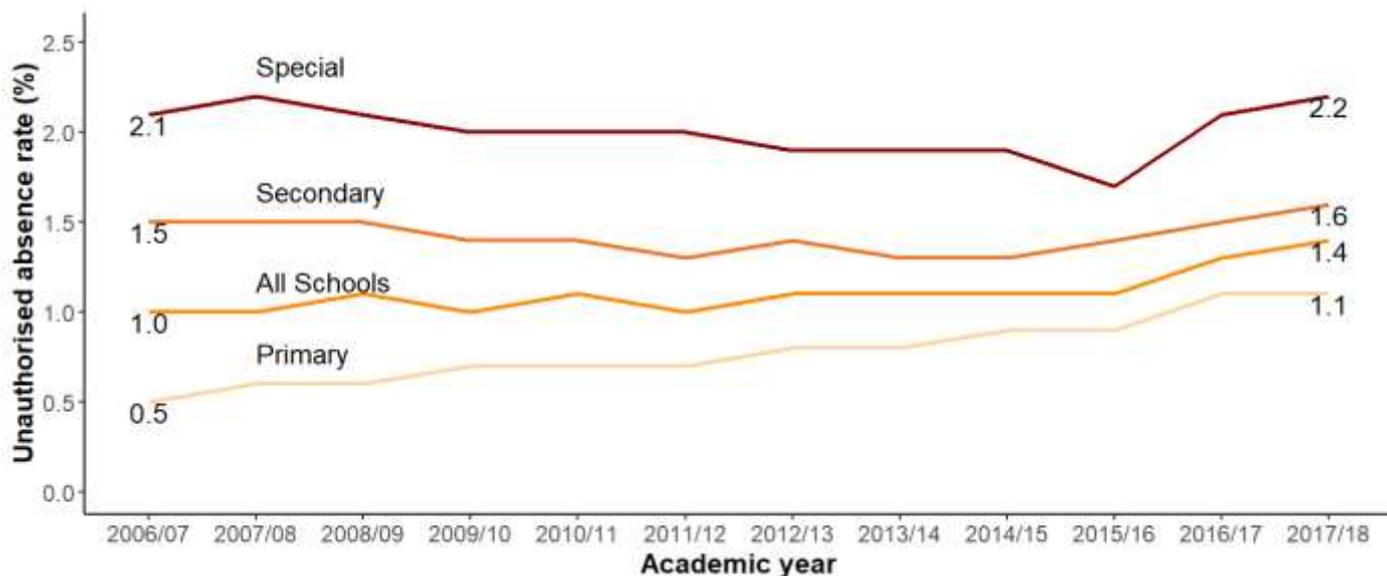
The increase in the overall absence rate has been driven by increases in both in the authorised and unauthorised absence rates. The authorised absence rate increased from 3.4 to 3.5 per cent in 2017/18, while the unauthorised rate increased from 1.3 to 1.4 per cent.

Looking at longer term trends, overall and authorised absence rates have been fairly stable in state-funded primary and secondary schools over recent years after decreasing gradually between 2006/07 and 2013/14. However, both rates have been rising in special schools in recent years.

The unauthorised absence rate in all schools is now at its highest since records began (see Figure 2). The rises in recent years are most marked in special schools and state-funded primary schools. However, while the rise in special schools takes the rate back to around where it was in 2006/07, the rate in primary schools has markedly increased since then. In secondary schools, the rate has been more stable, with increases in the last three years taking the rate to only 0.1 percentage points above the rate in 2006/07.

Figure 2: Unauthorised absence rates in state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools (per cent)

England, 2006/07 to 2017/18



The total number of days missed due to overall absence across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools has increased since last year, from 56.7 million in 2016/17 to 59.1 million in 2017/18.

This partly reflects the rise in the total number of pupil enrolments, but the average number of days missed per enrolment has also increased very slightly from 8.2 days in 2016/17 to 8.4 in 2017/18.

In 2017/18, 92.1 per cent of pupils in state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools missed at least one session during the school year, this is similar to the previous year (91.8 per cent in 2016/17).

2. Persistent absence (Table 1.2 and underlying data)

Persistent absence definition

A pupil enrolment is identified as a persistent absentee if they miss 10% or more of their possible sessions.

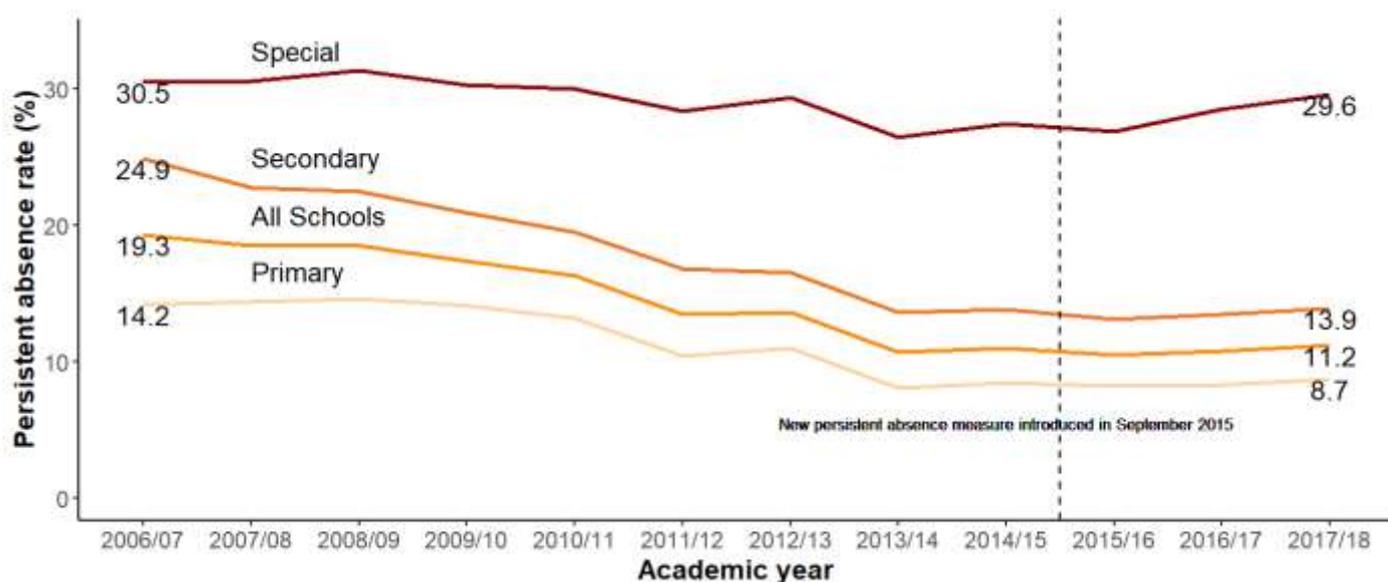
$$\text{Persistent absence rate} = \frac{\text{Number of enrolments classed as persistent absentees}}{\text{Number of enrolments}} \times 100$$

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 pupils in state-funded primary and state-funded secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees in 2017/18 was 11.2 per cent. This is up from the equivalent figure of 10.8 per cent in 2016/17 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of enrolments who are persistent absentees (per cent)

England, 2006/07 to 2017/18, State-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools



In 2017/18, persistent absentees accounted for 38.5 per cent of all absence compared to 37.6 in 2016/17. Longer term, there has been a decrease in the proportion of absence that persistent absentees account for – down from 43.3 per cent in 2011/12.

Persistent absentees account for almost a third, 32.4 per cent, of all authorised absence and more than half, 54.1 per cent, of all unauthorised absence.

3. Reasons for absence (Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and underlying data)

Reasons for absence definition

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

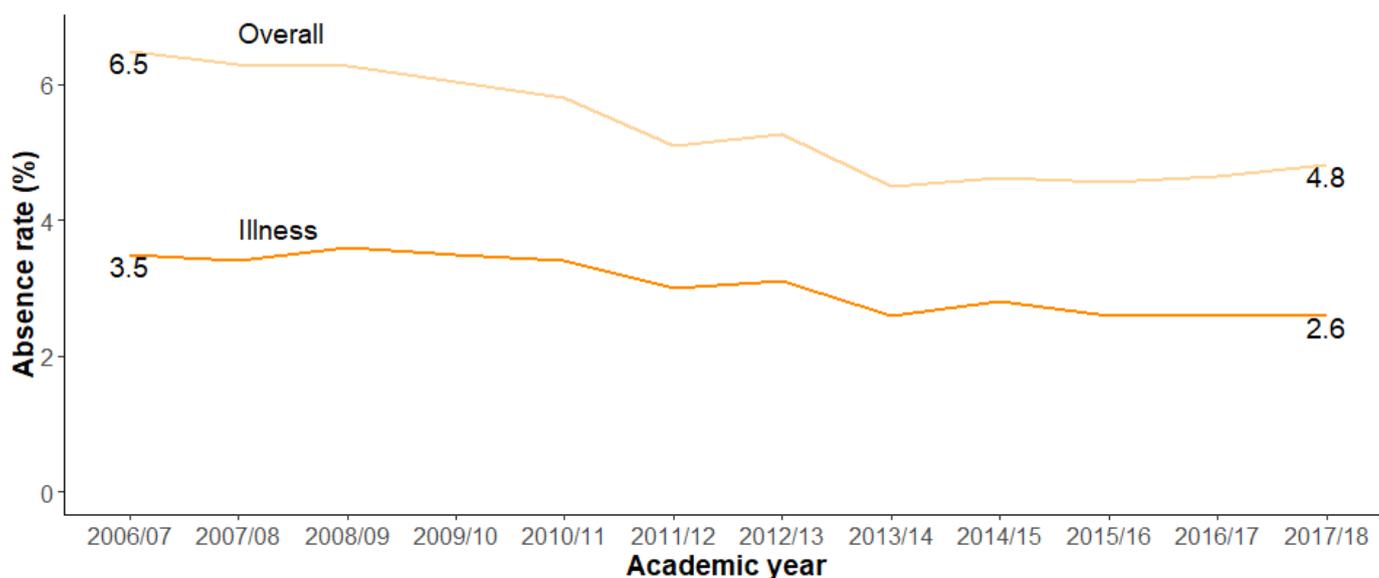
The number of pupil enrolments missing at least one session due to each reason.

Illness is the main driver for overall absence rates, however whilst overall absence rates have increased slightly since 2016/17, illness rates have remained around the same at 2.6 per cent (to one decimal place) (see Figure 4).

Illness accounted for 54.7 per cent of all absences in 2017/18, a lower proportion than seen in previous years - 55.3 in 2016/17 and 57.3 in 2015/16.

Figure 4: Comparison of the trend in overall and illness rates (per cent)

England, 2006/07 to 2017/18, State-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools



Although the overall and authorised rates have increased, the rate of absence due to religious observance has decreased in 2017/18 to a negligible amount from 0.1 per cent in 2016/17. Religious absence varies a lot from year to year, depending on when religious observance days fall in the calendar. In the latest year, the low rate may be due to the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha not falling on school days.

The increase in the rate of authorised absence this year is due to illness and 'other' authorised circumstances having increased slightly.

The increase in unauthorised absence is largely due to an increase in 'other' unauthorised absences to 0.8 per cent in 2017/18, from 0.7 in 2016/17.

Absence due to family holiday

The percentage of pupils who missed at least one session due to a family holiday in 2017/18 was 17.6 per cent, compared with 16.9 in 2016/17.

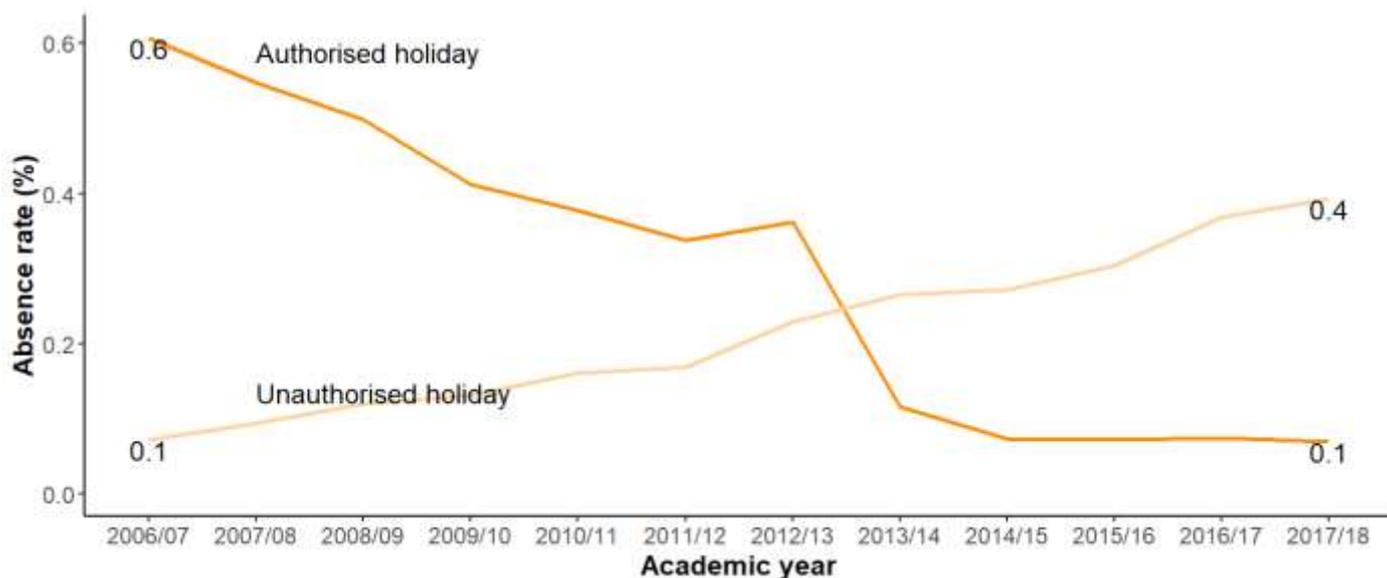
The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to family holidays agreed by the school was 0.1 per cent in 2017/18, which was similar to the figure in 2016/17. The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to unauthorised family holidays remains at 0.4 per cent (to one decimal place).

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 clarified 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 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Comparison of the trend in authorised and unauthorised family holiday absence rates (per cent)

England, 2006/07 to 2017/18, State-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools

Note: these rates are shown to 1 decimal place in the tables, but are unrounded here



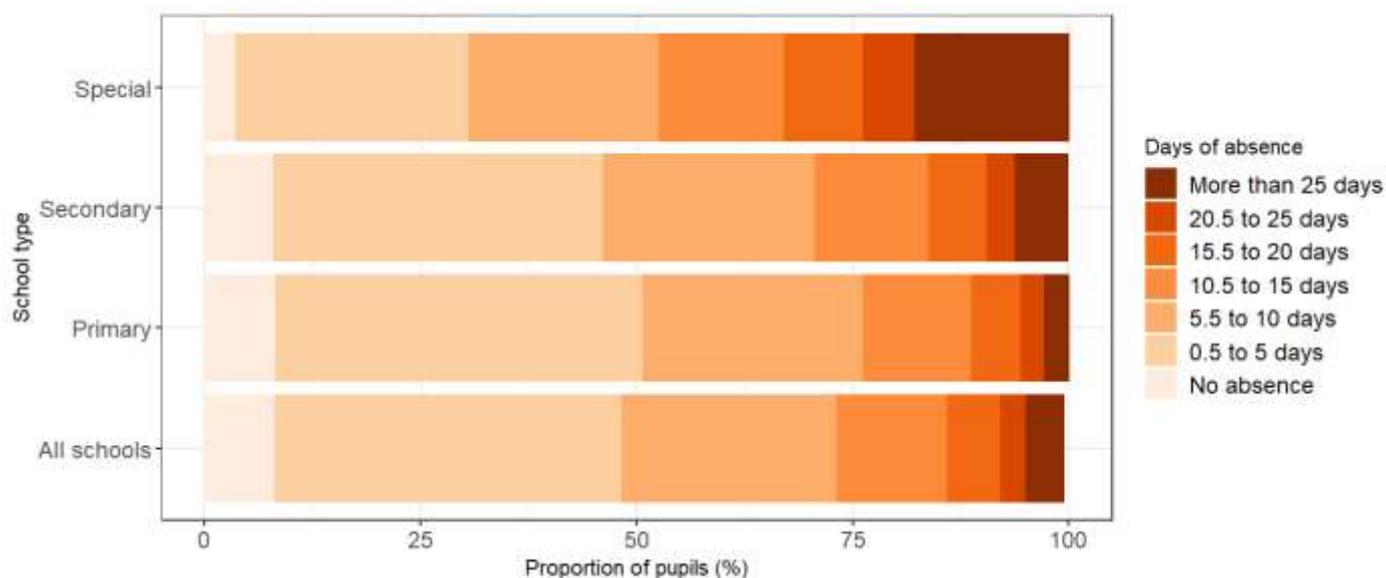
4. Distribution of absence (Tables 3.1, 3.2 and underlying data)

Nearly half (48.0 per cent) of all pupil enrolments were absent for five days or fewer in 2017/18, (see Figure 6). 7.9 per cent of had no absence at all, while 4.6 per cent of pupil enrolments had more than 25 days of absence. These pupil enrolments accounted for 24.3 per cent of days missed in 2017/18.

Per pupil enrolment, the average total absence in primary schools was 7.4 days. This compares to 17.7 days in special schools and 9.5 days in secondary schools.

Figure 6: Distribution of the numbers of days absent

England, 2017/18, State-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools



When looking at absence rates across terms for primary, secondary and special schools, the overall absence rate is lowest in the autumn term and highest in the summer term. The authorised rate is highest in the spring term and lowest in the summer term, which is mainly down to the pattern of illness absence. The unauthorised rate is highest in the summer term, which is impacted by the pattern of unauthorised family holidays and 'other' unauthorised circumstances (see Figure 7). This is similar to the pattern seen in previous years.

Figure 7: Absence rates by term

England, 2017/18, State-funded primary, secondary and special schools

	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Total
Overall	4.4	5.2	4.9	4.8
Authorised	3.3	3.9	3.2	3.5
Unauthorised	1.2	1.2	1.7	1.4

5. Absence by pupil characteristics (Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and underlying data)

The patterns of absence rates for pupils with different characteristics have been consistent over time.

Gender

The overall absence rate and persistent absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools were very similar for boys and girls, at 4.9 and 4.7 per cent respectively.

Free school meals (FSM) eligibility

Absence rates are higher for pupils who are known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals. The overall absence rate for these pupils was 7.6 per cent, compared to 4.3 for non FSM pupils. The persistent absence rate for pupils who were eligible for FSM (23.6 per cent) was more than twice the rate for those pupils not eligible for FSM.

First language

Overall absence rates are higher for pupils who are known or believed to have English as their first language at 4.9 per cent compared with 4.4 for pupils where it is other than English. They were also more likely to be persistently absent (11.5 compared with 9.8 per cent).

National curriculum year group

Pupils in national curriculum year groups 3 and 4 had the lowest overall absence rates at 4.1 per cent. Pupils in national curriculum year groups 10 and 11 had the highest overall absence rate at 6.3 per cent. This trend is repeated for persistent absence.

Special educational need (SEN)

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or Education, Health and Care plan (EHC) had an overall absence rate of 8.7 per cent compared to 4.4 for those with no identified SEN. The percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN or an EHC plan that are persistent absentees was more than two times higher than the percentage for pupils with no identified SEN at 25.1 per cent.

Ethnic group

The highest overall absence rates were for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils at 18.8 and 13.0 per cent respectively. Overall absence rates for pupils of a Chinese and of a Black African ethnicity were substantially lower than the national average of 4.8 per cent at 2.5 and 3 per cent respectively. A similar pattern is seen in persistent absence rates; Traveller of Irish heritage pupils had the highest rate at 65.2 per cent and Chinese pupils had the lowest rate at 3.0 per cent.

6. Absence for four year olds (Underlying data)

The overall absence rate for four year olds in 2017/18 was 5.2 per cent, slightly higher than the rate of 5.1 per cent last year.

Absence recorded for four year olds is not treated as 'authorised' or 'unauthorised' and is therefore reported as overall absence only.

7. Pupil referral unit absence (Table 8 and underlying data)

The overall absence rate for pupil referral units in 2017/18 was 35.3 per cent, compared to 33.9 in 2016/17. The percentage of enrolments in pupil referral units who were persistent absentees was 76.1 per cent in 2017/18, compared to 73.9 in 2016/17.

8. Pupil absence by local authority (Table 9 and underlying data)

There is variation in overall and persistent absence rates across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools by region and local authority ranging from 3.2 to 5.8 per cent. Similarly to last year, the three regions with the highest overall absence rate across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools are the North East (5.1 per cent) and Yorkshire and the Humber and the South West (5.0 per cent), with Inner and outer London having the lowest overall absence rates (4.5 per cent). The region with the highest persistent absence rate is Yorkshire and the Humber, where 12.2 per cent of pupil enrolments are persistent absentees, with Outer London having the lowest rate of persistent absence (at 10.1 per cent).

Absence information at local authority district level is also published within this release, in the accompanying underlying data files.

9. Background: Additional information and updates

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](#).

10. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in Excel format on the [department's statistics website](#):

National and local authority tables

Charts

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

Tables

- 1.1 Pupil absence by type of school
- 1.2 Pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees
- 2.1 Pupil absence by reason and gender
- 2.2 Pupil enrolments with one or more session of absence by reason
- 2.3 Pupil absence by reason for persistent absentees
- 3.1 Distribution of enrolments by length of overall absence

- 3.2 Percentage of enrolments by their overall absence rates
- 4 Number of schools by the percentage of persistent absentees
- 5.1 Pupil absence by characteristics
- 5.2 Characteristics of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees
- 5.3 Pupil absence by ethnic group
- 5.4 Pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees by ethnic group
- 5.5 Pupil absence by type of special educational need
- 6 Pupil absence by Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) decile of pupil residence
- 7 Pupil absence for four year olds
- 8 Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for pupil referral units
- 9 Pupil absence by type of school (local authorities)

When reviewing the tables, please note that:

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	<p>For the first time this year we are not routinely suppressing numbers of 1 or 2. This will only be done in files that crosstabulate pupil characteristics with absence figures.</p> <p>In these cases: 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.</p> <p>Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is less than 3, the percentage has been suppressed.</p> <p>Otherwise numbers are shown as they really are.</p> <p>This suppression is consistent with the Departmental statistical policy.</p>
We adopt symbols to help identify suppression	<p>Symbols are used in the tables as follows:</p> <p>0 zero</p> <p>x small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality</p> <p>. not applicable</p> <p>.. not available</p>

11. 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 or [Welsh Government Statistics and Research](#)

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

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

12. Revisions

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

13. 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.

14. 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 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.
- 40 sponsor-led academies opened part way through the year and incorrectly returned absence data for their predecessor school. As the combined absence data would then be related to both the academy and the predecessor school these academies have been completely removed from this analysis. One independent school that became a special free school was also removed.
- 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, 20 schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

15. Get in touch

Media enquiries

Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. Tel: 020 7783 8300

Other enquiries/feedback

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