

SFR 18/2012

30 August 2012

Coverage: England

**Theme: Children,
Education and
Skills**

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PUPIL ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND – SPRING TERM 2012

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) reports on absence in state-funded primary and secondary schools during spring term 2012. It provides information on the levels of absence (overall, authorised and unauthorised) by type of school and on absence by reason.

SUMMARY

The latest figures show that in spring term 2012 there was a small decrease in overall absence levels compared to spring term 2011. This follows an unusually large fall in overall absence in autumn term 2011 compared to the previous autumn. Combined autumn 2011 and spring 2012 data will be released in October and will be heavily influenced by the large falls in autumn term.

KEY POINTS

Absence rates (table 1)

Absence rates represent the percentage of all possible half day sessions that were missed through absence

The figures show that for spring term 2012, compared to spring term 2011:

Overall absence

- The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools decreased, from 5.4 per cent in spring term 2011 to 5.3 per cent in spring term 2012.
- The overall absence rate in state-funded primary schools increased, from 4.6 per cent to 4.7 per cent.
- The overall absence rate in state-funded secondary schools decreased, from 6.3 per cent to 6.0 per cent.

Authorised absence

- The authorised absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools decreased, from 4.4 per cent to 4.3 per cent.
- The authorised absence rate in state-funded primary schools was unchanged at 4.0 per cent.
- The authorised absence rate in state-funded secondary schools decreased, from 4.9 per cent to 4.7 per cent.

Unauthorised absence

- The unauthorised absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools was unchanged at 1.0 per cent
- The unauthorised absence rate in state-funded primary schools increased from 0.6 per cent to 0.7 per cent. This rate has varied between 0.6 per cent and 0.7 per cent for each of the last five spring terms.
- The unauthorised absence rate in state-funded secondary schools was unchanged at 1.4 per cent.

Reason for absence (table 2)

- The most commonly reported reason for absence was “illness (not medical or dental appointments)”, the same as in the previous year. Illness accounted for over 63 per cent of all absence or 3.3 per cent of all possible school sessions (compared to 3.4 per cent in the previous spring term).
- Absence for family holidays accounted for 7 per cent of all absence, similar to the previous year. Within this, the absence rate for “agreed family holidays” decreased from 0.3 per cent in spring term 2011 to 0.2 per cent in spring term 2012.

LOCAL AUTHORITY ANALYSIS

Local authority level data are provided in table 3.

BACKGROUND

Absence data for autumn term 2011 were published in June and can be found at <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001066/index.shtml>.

There was a large fall in absence levels in autumn 2011 compared to autumn 2010 including a substantial decrease in absence rates for illness (down 24 per cent) and a large fall in absence for religious observance (down 77 per cent but the levels involved are low). The results of combining the autumn term 2011 and spring term 2012 data will be published in October.

TABLES

Table 1	State-funded primary and secondary schools: Rates of absence, England, spring term: 2008 to 2012
Table 2	State-funded primary and secondary schools: Reason for absence, England, spring term 2012
Table 3	State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil Absence, by Local Authority area, spring term 2012

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In line with the Government's agenda to make data more accessible, underlying data will be published at <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001083/index.shtml> on 30 August 2012 in the 'Publication's Underlying Data' section.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

DfE: Pupil absence in schools in England, including pupil characteristics: 2010/11
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001060/index.shtml>

DfE: Pupil absence in spring term 2011
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001020/index.shtml>

DfE: Pupil absence in autumn term 2011
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001066/index.shtml>

DfE: Pupil absence in autumn term 2010 and spring term 2011
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001030/index.shtml>

TECHNICAL NOTES

1. The statistics are presented as emerging findings and have been released to help planning and study trends on pupil attendance.

Definitions

2. The measures of absence used here are rates of overall, authorised and unauthorised absence. The Department for Education's policy is to focus on all forms of absence, measured through the overall absence rate and the persistent absence rate. Some cases of unauthorised absence may change to authorised absence at a later stage (once an explanation has been reported to the school). However, if this is supplied to the school after the School Census (SC) database has closed, the absence will still be recorded as "no reason yet". In this respect, using overall absence rates and the rate of persistent absentees gives more suitable data for performance reporting.
3. The Department for Education (DfE) has published specific guidance 'Keeping Pupil Registers', which provides guidance on applying the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006; and 'Absence and Attendance Codes' which provides guidance on the use of codes to record pupil attendance and absence in schools." Both are available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/attendance/schoolattendancedata/a0010008/pupil-registration-regulations-and-guidance>.
4. In law, parents of children of compulsory school age (aged 5 to 15 at the start of the school year) are required to ensure that they receive a suitable education by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Failure to comply with this statutory duty can lead to prosecution. Local authorities (LAs) are responsible in law for making sure that pupils attend school.
5. Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day: once at the beginning of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. In their register, schools are required to distinguish whether pupils are present, engaged in an approved educational activity or are absent. Where a day pupil of compulsory school age is absent, schools have to indicate in their register whether the absence is authorised by the school or unauthorised.
6. Authorised absence is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes instances of absences for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided (for example, illness).
7. Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences. Arriving late for school, after the register has closed, is recorded as unauthorised absence.

Presentation

8. To account for the growth in the academies sector, the tables include city technology colleges, secondary sponsor-led and converter academies and secondary free schools along with LA maintained secondary schools in a category labelled "state-funded secondary", and LA maintained primary schools, primary sponsor-led and converter academies and primary free schools in a category labelled "state-funded primary".

Data collection

9. In 2006 the School Census started to collect pupil level absence data on a termly basis (spring, summer and autumn collections) from maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies relating to absence during the 2005/06 school year. For the 2006/07 school year the scope of collection was extended to also include maintained primary schools and special schools.

The SC collects information for a pupil's attendance in the term prior to the census. For example, the spring SC collects information on absence during the autumn term. Special schools provide annual absence data in the autumn SC and are therefore not included in this release.

10. Reason for absence was collected for the first time for the autumn term 2006. Schools were able to provide absence data using a reason code or by using total figures for the number of sessions missed due to authorised or unauthorised absence. A small proportion of schools have provided both a breakdown of absence by reason and totals. In addition, some schools do not have the required software to provide absence data by reason, and therefore are only able to provide overall totals. To derive absence rates, the sum of absence by reason has been used unless this is missing or is less than the total provided, in which case overall totals have been used.

Data coverage and quality

11. Information relating to persistent absence (PA) is not included in this Statistical First Release (SFR) as looking at PA for spring term in isolation has little value. To provide a more meaningful measure, the PA indicator is cumulative, tracking pupils throughout the year. The Department's key measure of PA relates to the school year and is defined in terms of those missing 46 or more sessions, around 15 per cent overall absence.
12. Schools have provided, via the SC, individual level attendance data relating to spring term 2012 for pupils aged 5 to 15 (at the start of the school year) who are non-boarders. The SC has collected the number of possible half day sessions of attendance; the number of half day sessions missed, broken down by reason for absence, and overall totals of half day sessions missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence.
13. Information relating to pupil absence counts the number of pupil enrolments rather than the number of pupils. Where a pupil has moved school throughout the year, they will be counted more than once as they have recorded attendance at more than one school. Pupil absence is recorded for the period a pupil is enrolled at a school.
14. From September 2011 the way schools record attendance and absence for dually registered pupils changed. Attendance code D (Dual registered at another educational establishment) is no longer counted in the School Census as an attendance. Each school now only records the attendance and absence for the sessions a pupil is required to attend at their school, previously each school recorded all absence. This change affects a relatively small number of pupils and has only a marginal effect on absence rates.
15. Following changes to attendance regulations and procedures, from 2012 the School Census collects attendance information about pupils unable to attend school due to exceptional circumstances using attendance code Y. Schools use code Y to record the sessions where a pupil is unable to attend because:
 - The school site, or part of it, is closed due to an unavoidable cause;
 - The transport provided by the school or a local authority is not available, and their home is not within walking distance; or
 - A local or national emergency has resulted in widespread disruption to travel which has prevented the pupil from attending school.

These sessions, however, are not counted as possible attendance and account for a relatively small proportion of sessions in spring 2012.

16. For a pupil enrolment, if the number of possible half day sessions in a term is zero/missing or is less than the total number of half day sessions missed due to overall absence, then the enrolment has not been included in this SFR.
17. The information in this SFR is based on data returned by schools as part of the School Census. It does not include data which has been submitted by local authorities or schools outside of the School Census collection.
18. The data presented here are based on attendance registers which are taken twice a day: once at the beginning of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. It therefore does not include "internal unauthorised absence". This is defined as unauthorised absence by pupils between the school's twice-daily registrations, i.e. a pupil is recorded as attending during morning or afternoon registration but is physically not present at another part of the relevant session. The Department's current data systems are limited insofar as they only record and measure the registrations, not any subsequent absence.
19. The data contained in this SFR relates only to those pupils on the roll of a maintained primary school or maintained secondary school, city technology college, or academy. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school.

Further information and forthcoming absence releases

20. Further information, including local authority level analyses are available through the following link:- <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001083/index.shtml>
21. Information based on absence data linked across the autumn 2011 and spring 2012 terms will be published in October 2012 in a Statistical First Release (SFR). This will include rates of absence (overall, authorised and unauthorised) and persistent absence in the first two terms of the 2011/12 school year, as well as some pupil characteristics analysis. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2011/12 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in March 2013. This product will add value to the emerging findings published in termly reports and the October SFR by presenting whole year findings (cumulative results from the three termly collections) and providing more detailed analyses of absence by pupil characteristics and persistent absentees.

Confidentiality

22. For national tables (tables 1 and 2) enrolment numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5.
23. For the local authority table (table 3), national and regional enrolment numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5. Enrolment numbers of 1 and 2 have been suppressed, being replaced in the table by an "x". Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure was also zero. Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is 1 or 2, this has been replaced by an "x". "x" has also been used for secondary suppression to prevent disclosure.
24. All percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.

Symbols used

25. The following symbols have been used within this publication:

0	– zero
x	– small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality (see Technical Note 23)
.	– not applicable

National Statistics publication

26. 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.

27. There are no 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 which is published at <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/nat-stats.shtml>.

Enquiries

28. Enquiries (non-media) about information contained in this document should be addressed to Schools Data Unit, Room 1F Area H, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, Co Durham, DL3 9BG or e-mail schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk
29. Media enquiries about information contained in this Statistical First Release should be made to the Department's Press Office at DfE, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT or telephone 020 7783 8300.

Table 1

STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):**RATES OF ABSENCE**

Spring term: 2008 - 2012

England

	Spring term 2008	Spring term 2009	Spring term 2010	Spring term 2011	Spring term 2012
State-funded primary and secondary schools (1)(2)(3)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	6,171,330	6,173,695	6,154,555	6,157,425	6,162,085
Percentage of half days missed due to: (5)					
Overall absence	6.3	6.2	5.9	5.4	5.3
Authorised absence	5.3	5.1	4.8	4.4	4.3
Unauthorised absence	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0
State-funded primary schools (1)(2)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	3,291,550	3,271,870	3,271,395	3,299,575	3,342,680
Percentage of half days missed due to: (5)					
Overall absence	5.3	5.3	5.2	4.6	4.7
Authorised absence	4.8	4.6	4.5	4.0	4.0
Unauthorised absence	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.7
State-funded secondary schools (1)(3)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	2,879,780	2,901,825	2,883,160	2,857,855	2,819,405
Percentage of half days missed due to: (5)					
Overall absence	7.3	7.2	6.7	6.3	6.0
Authorised absence	5.8	5.6	5.2	4.9	4.7
Unauthorised absence	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.4

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes all primary academies, including free schools.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and all secondary academies, including free schools.

(4) Includes pupils aged 5 to 15 who were on roll for at least one session during the spring term, even if they are no longer on the school roll, excluding boarders. Pupils may be counted more than once, if they were registered at more than one school, or moved schools during the term. See Technical Notes 12 and 13.

(5) The number of sessions of overall/authorised/unauthorised absence expressed as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions.

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts because numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5.

Table 2
STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):
REASON FOR ABSENCE
Spring term 2012
England

	State-funded primary (1)(2)	State-funded secondary (1)(3)	Total (1)(2)(3)
<u>DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE</u>			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	67.8	58.9	63.2
Medical/dental appointments	5.4	6.9	6.2
Religious observance	0.1	0.0	0.1
Study leave	0.0	0.2	0.1
Traveller absence	0.3	0.1	0.2
Agreed family holiday	7.2	2.3	4.6
Agreed extended family holiday	0.2	0.0	0.1
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.4	2.4	1.4
Other authorised circumstances	4.7	6.5	5.6
Total authorised absence	86.0	77.4	81.5
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	3.1	1.7	2.4
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	1.3	1.3	1.3
Unauthorised absence, not covered	7.9	16.9	12.6
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	1.6	2.7	2.2
Total unauthorised absence	14.0	22.6	18.5
Total overall absence	100.0	100.0	100.0
<u>ABSENCE RATES BY REASON</u>			
Percentage of possible sessions due to (5):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	3.2	3.5	3.3
Medical/dental appointments	0.3	0.4	0.3
Religious observance	0.0	0.0	0.0
Study leave	0.0	0.0	0.0
Traveller absence	0.0	0.0	0.0
Agreed family holiday	0.3	0.1	0.2
Agreed extended family holiday	0.0	0.0	0.0
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.0	0.1	0.1
Other authorised circumstances	0.2	0.4	0.3
Unclassified (6)	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total authorised absence	4.0	4.7	4.3
Percentage of possible sessions due to (5):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	0.1	0.1	0.1
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	0.1	0.1	0.1
Unauthorised absence, not covered	0.4	1.0	0.7
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	0.1	0.2	0.1
Unclassified (6)	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total unauthorised absence	0.7	1.4	1.0
Total overall absence	4.7	6.0	5.3

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes all primary academies, including free schools.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and all secondary academies, including free schools.

(4) The number of sessions absent by reason expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions absent as reported by reason (not overall totals). See Technical Notes 10 and 12.

(5) The number of sessions absent by reason expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions possible. See Technical Notes 10 and 12.

(6) Includes absence returned as either authorised or unauthorised totals but not broken down by reason.