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PUPIL ABSENCE – AUTUMN TERM 2009

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) reports on absence during autumn term 2009 in maintained primary, maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies in England. It is based on pupil level absence data collected via the spring 2010 School Census. This release provides local level information on the rates of absence (authorised, unauthorised and overall) by type of school; number of enrolments missing 28 or more, or 64 or more sessions; and the proportion of absence by reason.

The 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.

ABSENCE RATES FOR AUTUMN 2009

The percentages of half days missed due to overall absence in autumn term 2009 were:

- Maintained primary and state-funded secondary schools – 6.13 per cent (a decrease from 6.42 per cent in autumn term 2008) (Table 1)
- Maintained primary schools – 5.43 per cent (a decrease from 5.61 per cent in autumn term 2008) (Table 1)
- State-funded secondary schools – 6.92 per cent (a decrease from 7.34 per cent in autumn term 2008) (Table 1)

PERSISTENT ABSENTEES

A Persistent Absentee (PA) is defined as having 64 or more sessions of absence (authorised and unauthorised) during the year, around 20 per cent overall absence rate. For the autumn term, a pupil who may become a persistent absentee is defined as having 28 or more sessions of absence. See Technical Note 15 for an explanation of how varying term lengths can impact on these figures.

- In the autumn term some 0.5 per cent of enrolments across all maintained primary, secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies missed 64 or more sessions, classifying them as persistent absentees (Table 2).
- Some 4.5 per cent of enrolments across all maintained primary, secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies are persistent absentees, or may become persistent absentees if their absence continues at the same rate (Table 2).

- Some 5.8 per cent of enrolments across state-funded secondary schools are persistent absentees, or may become persistent absentees if their absence continues at the same rate (Table 2).

Data linking pupil absence across the autumn 2009 and spring 2010 terms is expected to be available in October and will provide a rate of persistent absence across both terms, rather than looking at each term in isolation.

REASON FOR ABSENCE

- The most commonly reported reason for absence was “**illness (not medical or dental appointments)**” which accounted for some 3.83 per cent of half days (where reason for absence was provided) (Table 3).
- The second most commonly reported reason for absence was **family holiday** which includes the following reason codes: agreed family holiday; agreed extended family holiday and unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed. Absence for family holidays accounted for 0.59 per cent of half days – this equates to around 2.5 million school days in the autumn term. Some 76 per cent of these days were authorised by the school (Table 3).

LOCAL AUTHORITY ANALYSIS

Local authority level data are provided in tables 4 and 5. Table 5 covers the maintained sector only as it is designed to help authorities monitor, compare and improve absence levels.

TABLES

- Table 1** Maintained Primary and State-funded Secondary Schools: Rates of absence, England, Autumn Term: 2006 to 2009
- Table 2** Maintained Primary and State-funded Secondary Schools: Number and rates of enrolments who are, *OR* may become, persistent absentees, England, Autumn Term: 2006 to 2009
- Table 3** Maintained Primary and State-funded Secondary Schools: Reason for absence, England, Autumn Term 2009
- Table 4** Maintained Primary and State-funded Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence, by Local Authority area, Autumn Term 2009
- Table 5** Maintained Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence, by Local Authority area, Autumn Term 2009

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

DFE: Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics: 2008/09
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000918/index.shtml>

DFE: Pupil Absence in Autumn Term 2008
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000853/index.shtml>

TECHNICAL NOTES

Definitions

1. The more reliable measures of absence are deemed to be rates of overall absence, persistent absentees and reason for absence rather than rates of authorised and unauthorised absence. The decision to authorise an absence is a local decision leading to unmeasured variation both between and within schools. In addition, some 2.9 per cent of all possible sessions missed were due to “unauthorised absence – no reason yet”. Until the reason for absence is known, schools should record a pupil as “unauthorised absence – no reason yet”. So 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 the reason for absence is supplied to the school after the School Census database has closed, the absence will still be recorded as “unauthorised absence – no reason yet”. Using overall absence rates and the rate of persistent absentees removes variation and gives more suitable data for performance reporting. Both sets of measures are given in this release, although limitations in comparing rates of authorised and unauthorised absence should be noted.
2. The Department 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.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/attendance/pupilregis/>
3. 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. LAs are responsible in law for making sure that pupils attend school.
4. 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.
5. 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).
6. 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.
7. The Department's key measure of PA relates to the school year and is defined in terms of those missing 64 or more sessions, around 20 per cent overall absence. For autumn term, figures show how many enrolments have already become PA, based on missing 64 or more sessions and how many are classed as being on track to becoming PAs, based on the standard threshold of 28 or more sessions used for the autumn term. To aid transparency and simplicity our termly PA thresholds don't tend to change from year to year (unless there are exceptional circumstances).
8. These statistics inform the previous (Labour) government's national indicator to reduce the percentage of persistently absent maintained secondary school pupils so that by 2011 no Local Authority will have more than 5 per cent of its maintained secondary school pupils as persistent absentees. Data for the school year 2010/11 will not be available until 2012.

Data Collection

9. To account for the growth in the academies sector, the majority of tables include city technology colleges and academies along with Local Authority (LA) maintained schools in a category labelled "state-funded". However, in cases where there is expected to be continued interest, the figures for LA maintained schools only have also been provided. Figures for academies and city technology colleges are not shown separately. Specific analyses of absence in academies were published in SFR 07/2010 (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000918/index.shtml>).

10. In 2006 the School Census (SC) 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.

11. 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. It was not expected that schools would use both. However, one software supplier enabled both absences by reason and total authorised and unauthorised absence to be returned. 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

12. Schools have provided, via the SC, individual level attendance data relating to autumn term 2009 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 sessions of attendance; the number of sessions missed, broken down by reason for absence, and overall totals of 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. For a pupil enrolment, if the number of possible sessions in a term is zero/missing or is less than the total number of sessions missed due to overall absence, then the enrolment has not been included in this SFR.

15. Termly data can be affected by changes in term length and this appears to be the case for autumn term 2009 when compared to autumn term 2008. Our data shows variability in the number of possible sessions in autumn term 2009 when compared to autumn term 2008 - school closures caused by extreme weather and swine flu may have contributed to this variability. Fewer possible sessions provide less opportunity for pupils to become PAs based on the fixed threshold of 28 sessions. Consequently, comparisons between terms should be treated with caution. A longer term next autumn could reverse the apparent improvement shown in these latest figures. Also, the improvement shown in autumn 2009 won't necessarily translate into similar improvement when data for the school year become available. End year results provide the definitive view of PA.

16. 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.

17. 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.

18. The data contained in this SFR relates only to those pupils on the roll of a LA 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.

General

19. For all tables enrolment numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10. Enrolment numbers from 1 to 4 inclusive 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 from 1 to 4 inclusive, this has been replaced by an 'x'.

20. All percentages have been rounded to two decimal places, except where they refer to persistent absentees, where one decimal place has been used.

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

0	– zero
x	– small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality (see Technical Note 19)
.	– not applicable

22. Absence data for 2005/06 were not released on a termly basis as this was the first year of collection.

23. Information based on absence data linked across the autumn 2009 and spring 2010 terms will be published in October 2010 in a Statistical First Release (SFR). This will include rates of absence (authorised, unauthorised and overall) and persistent absence in the first two terms of the 2009/10 school year. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2009/10 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in March 2011. 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.

24. Under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, the UK Statistics Authority has a statutory function to assess sets of statistics against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, with a view to determining whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated, or to retain their designation, as National Statistics. Following a recent assessment of absence statistics, the Statistics Authority confirmed that the following reports should be redesignated as National Statistics.

- Pupil Absence in schools in England: Autumn term; and

- Pupil Absence in schools in England: Spring term

This is now a National Statistics publication. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

25. Further information, including local authority level analyses are available through the following link:- <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000928/index.shtml>

26. 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.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/nat-stats.shtml>.

27. 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

28. 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 7925 6789.

Table 1
MAINTAINED PRIMARY AND STATE-FUNDED SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)
RATES OF ABSENCE
Autumn Term: 2006 - 2009
England

	Autumn Term 2006	Autumn Term 2007	Autumn Term 2008	Autumn Term 2009
Maintained Primary and State-funded Secondary Schools (1)(2)				
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	6,351,820	6,268,130	6,197,070	6,174,080
Percentage of half days missed due to: (4)				
Authorised absence	5.04	5.32	5.44	5.20
Unauthorised absence	0.90	0.94	0.98	0.93
Overall absence	5.94	6.26	6.42	6.13
Maintained Primary Schools (1)				
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	3,364,390	3,320,510	3,285,080	3,285,640
Percentage of half days missed due to: (4)				
Authorised absence	4.27	4.80	4.98	4.81
Unauthorised absence	0.48	0.56	0.63	0.62
Overall absence	4.75	5.36	5.61	5.43
State-funded Secondary Schools (1)(2)				
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	2,987,430	2,947,630	2,911,990	2,888,450
Percentage of half days missed due to: (4)				
Authorised absence	5.91	5.89	5.97	5.65
Unauthorised absence	1.37	1.38	1.37	1.28
Overall absence	7.28	7.27	7.34	6.92

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies (including all through academies).

(3) Includes pupils age 5 to 15 who were on roll for at least one session during the autumn 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.

(4) The number of sessions of authorised/unauthorised/overall 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 10.

Table 2

**MAINTAINED PRIMARY AND STATE-FUNDED SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2):
NUMBER AND RATES OF ENROLMENTS WHO ARE, OR MAY BECOME, PERSISTENT ABSENTEES (3) (4)**

Autumn Term: 2006 - 2009

England

	Autumn Term 2006	Autumn Term 2007	Autumn Term 2008	Autumn Term 2009
Maintained Primary (1) and State-funded Secondary Schools (1)(2)				
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	6,351,820	6,268,130	6,197,070	6,174,080
Number of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentee) (4)	48,080	43,920	37,930	29,200
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (4)	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5
Number of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentee) (4) (5)	336,940	348,950	339,690	275,230
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (4) (5)	5.3	5.6	5.5	4.5
Maintained Primary Schools (1)				
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	3,364,390	3,320,510	3,285,080	3,285,640
Number of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentee) (4)	7,180	7,100	6,460	5,170
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (4)	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Number of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentee) (4) (5)	103,830	125,100	128,070	106,320
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (4) (5)	3.1	3.8	3.9	3.2
State-funded Secondary Schools (1)(2)				
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	2,987,430	2,947,630	2,911,990	2,888,450
Number of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentee) (4)	40,900	36,820	31,480	24,030
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (4)	1.4	1.2	1.1	0.8
Number of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentee) (4) (5)	233,100	223,850	211,620	168,910
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (4) (5)	7.8	7.6	7.3	5.8

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies (including all through academies).

(3) Includes pupils age 5 to 15 who were on roll for at least one session during the autumn 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.

(4) For the definition of a Persistent Absentee see Technical Note 7. See Technical Note 15 for an explanation of how varying term lengths can impact on these figures.

(5) Including those enrolments already defined as being a Persistent Absentee (missing 64 or more sessions).

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts because numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Table 3

MAINTAINED PRIMARY AND STATE-FUNDED SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)**REASON FOR ABSENCE**

Autumn Term 2009

England

	Maintained Primary (1)	State-funded Secondary (1)(2)	Total (1)(2)
<u>DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE</u>			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (3):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	64.58	61.09	62.74
Medical/dental appointments	4.65	5.80	5.26
Religious observance	2.95	1.52	2.20
Study leave	0.01	0.54	0.29
Traveller absence	0.35	0.12	0.23
Agreed family holiday	10.68	4.17	7.25
Agreed extended family holiday	0.29	0.07	0.17
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.28	1.99	1.18
Other authorised circumstances	4.70	6.25	5.52
Total Authorised Absence	88.49	81.55	84.83
Percentage of absent sessions due to (3):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	2.52	2.13	2.32
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	1.05	0.93	0.99
Unauthorised absence, not covered	5.75	11.86	8.97
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	2.20	3.52	2.90
Total Unauthorised Absence	11.51	18.45	15.17
Total Overall Absence	100.00	100.00	100.00
<u>ABSENCE RATES BY REASON</u>			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (3):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	3.50	4.22	3.83
Medical/dental appointments	0.25	0.40	0.32
Religious observance	0.16	0.11	0.13
Study leave	0.00	0.04	0.02
Traveller absence	0.02	0.01	0.01
Agreed family holiday	0.58	0.29	0.44
Agreed extended family holiday	0.02	0.00	0.01
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.01	0.14	0.07
Other authorised circumstances	0.25	0.43	0.34
Unclassified (4)	0.02	0.02	0.02
Total Authorised Absence	4.81	5.65	5.20
Percentage of absent sessions due to (3):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	0.14	0.15	0.14
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	0.06	0.06	0.06
Unauthorised absence, not covered	0.31	0.82	0.55
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	0.12	0.24	0.18
Unclassified (4)	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total Unauthorised Absence	0.62	1.28	0.93
Total Overall Absence	5.43	6.92	6.13

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies (including all through academies).

(3) Percentages are based on absence totals as reported by reason (not overall totals). See Technical Notes 11 and 12.

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

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts because numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.