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PUPIL ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND – SPRING TERM 2011

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) reports on absence during spring term 2011 in maintained primary and secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies in England. It is based on pupil level absence data collected via the summer 2011 School Census. This release provides local level information on the rates of absence (authorised, unauthorised and overall) by type of school and the proportion of absence by reason. Information on persistent absentees is not included in this report (see Technical Note 10).

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

KEY POINTS

ABSENCE RATES

- The percentages of half days missed due to absence in primary and secondary schools, in spring term 2011, were as follows (figures in brackets refers to spring term 2010):

Authorised Absence 4.41 per cent (4.81 per cent)

Unauthorised Absence 1.01 per cent (1.12 per cent)

Overall Absence 5.42 per cent (5.92 per cent)

- Overall absence rates decreased in both state-funded primary and secondary schools (compared to spring term 2010).
- Authorised absence rates decreased in both state-funded primary and secondary schools.
- Unauthorised absence rates decreased in both state-funded primary and secondary schools.

REASON FOR ABSENCE

- Within the 5.42 per cent overall absence, 3.36 per cent of days (where reason for absence was provided) were recorded as illness (not medical or dental appointments). This was the most commonly reported reason for absence (Table 2).

- Absence due to family holidays includes the following reason codes: agreed family holiday; agreed extended family holiday and family holiday not agreed. This accounted for 0.39 per cent of days. Around 71 per cent of these days were authorised by the school (Table 2).

LOCAL AUTHORITY ANALYSIS

Local authority level data are provided in table 3. Local authority level data for maintained secondary schools is not available. See Technical Note 7.

TABLES

Table 1	State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools: Rates of absence, England, Spring Term: 2007 to 2011
Table 2	State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools: Reason for absence, England, Spring Term 2011
Table 3	State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence, by Local Authority area, Spring Term 2011

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/s001003/index.shtml> on 24 August 2011 in the 'Publication's Underlying Data' section.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

DfE: Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics: 2009/10
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001012/index.shtml>

DfE: Pupil Absence in Spring Term 2010
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000946/index.shtml>

DfE: Pupil Absence in Autumn Term 2010
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001003/index.shtml>

DfE: Pupil Absence in Autumn Term 2009 and Spring Term 2010
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000962/index.shtml>

TECHNICAL NOTES

Definitions

1. The measures of absence used here are rates of authorised, unauthorised and overall absence. 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”. In this respect, using overall absence rates removes variation and gives more suitable data for performance reporting.
2. 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>.
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 have responsibility for prosecutions for non-attendance at 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.

Data Collection

7. To account for the growth in the academies sector, the tables include city technology colleges, sponsor-led academies and secondary converter academies along with Local Authority (LA) maintained schools in a category labelled “state-funded secondary”, and LA maintained primary schools and primary converter academies in a category labelled “state-funded primary”. Due to large numbers of schools converting to academies during the spring term 2011, tables showing maintained schools only are not included in this release. Figures for academies and city technology colleges are not shown separately. Specific analyses of absence in academies were published in SFR 03/2011 (<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000994/index.shtml>).

8. 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.
9. 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

10. Information relating to persistent absence (PA) is not included in this report 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 to date has been defined in terms of those missing 64 or more sessions, around 20 per cent overall absence. In future publications, PA will be based on a new threshold equating to around 15 per cent overall absence.
11. Schools have provided, via the SC, individual level attendance data relating to spring term 2011 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.
12. 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. Where a pupil has a dual registration, their absence may be returned from both schools, if both schools return absence data via the School Census.
13. 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.
14. Some school closures were reported in spring 2011, as a result of bad weather. Where a school closes, neither the sessions missed or the possible sessions during the affected period are reported on the SC, therefore absence rates are largely unaffected. Where a school remains open and pupils cannot make it to school they are reported as absent in these statistics. In future, partial closures will be treated the same as full closures.
15. 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.

16. 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.
17. 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.

General

18. For national tables (tables 1 and 2) enrolment numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5.
19. 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.
20. All percentages have been rounded to two decimal places.
21. The following symbols have been used within this publication:
- | | |
|---|---|
| 0 | – zero |
| x | – small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality (see Technical Notes 18 and 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 2010 and spring 2011 terms will be published in October 2011 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 2010/11 school year, as well as some pupil characteristics analysis. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2010/11 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in March 2012. 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. 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.

25. Further information, including local authority level analyses are available through the following link:- <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001020/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.education.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
STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):
RATES OF ABSENCE
Spring Term: 2007 - 2011
England

	Spring Term 2007	Spring Term 2008	Spring Term 2009	Spring Term 2010	Spring Term 2011
State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools (1)(2)(3)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	6,320,720	6,171,330	6,173,695	6,154,555	6,157,425
Percentage of half days missed due to: (5)					
Authorised absence	6.00	5.25	5.08	4.81	4.41
Unauthorised absence	1.06	1.00	1.10	1.12	1.01
Overall absence	7.07	6.26	6.18	5.92	5.42
State-funded Primary Schools (1)(2)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	3,348,140	3,291,550	3,271,870	3,271,395	3,299,575
Percentage of half days missed due to: (5)					
Authorised absence	5.32	4.77	4.61	4.48	4.02
Unauthorised absence	0.57	0.56	0.67	0.74	0.63
Overall absence	5.89	5.33	5.28	5.22	4.65
State-funded Secondary Schools (1)(3)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	2,972,580	2,879,780	2,901,825	2,883,160	2,857,855
Percentage of half days missed due to: (5)					
Authorised absence	6.78	5.82	5.60	5.17	4.86
Unauthorised absence	1.62	1.51	1.59	1.56	1.45
Overall absence	8.40	7.32	7.20	6.73	6.31

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes primary academies.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and secondary academies.

(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 11 and 12.

(5) 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 5.

Table 2
STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):
REASON FOR ABSENCE
Spring Term 2011
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)	66.97	57.95	62.07
Medical/dental appointments	5.65	6.76	6.26
Religious observance	0.07	0.06	0.06
Study leave	0.00	0.29	0.16
Traveller absence	0.38	0.09	0.22
Agreed family holiday	7.83	2.43	4.90
Agreed extended family holiday	0.32	0.05	0.17
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.39	2.63	1.61
Other authorised circumstances	4.85	6.77	5.89
Total Authorised Absence	86.46	77.03	81.34
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	2.75	1.56	2.11
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	1.37	1.39	1.38
Unauthorised absence, not covered	7.52	16.76	12.54
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	1.90	3.26	2.64
Total Unauthorised Absence	13.54	22.97	18.66
Total Overall Absence	100.00	100.00	100.00
<u>ABSENCE RATES BY REASON</u>			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (5):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	3.10	3.65	3.36
Medical/dental appointments	0.26	0.43	0.34
Religious observance	0.00	0.00	0.00
Study leave	0.00	0.02	0.01
Traveller absence	0.02	0.01	0.01
Agreed family holiday	0.36	0.15	0.26
Agreed extended family holiday	0.01	0.00	0.01
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.02	0.17	0.09
Other authorised circumstances	0.22	0.43	0.32
Unclassified (6)	0.01	0.01	0.01
Total Authorised Absence	4.02	4.86	4.41
Percentage of absent sessions due to (5):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	0.13	0.10	0.11
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	0.06	0.09	0.07
Unauthorised absence, not covered	0.35	1.06	0.68
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	0.09	0.21	0.14
Unclassified (6)	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total Unauthorised Absence	0.63	1.45	1.01
Total Overall Absence	4.65	6.31	5.42

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes primary academies.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and secondary academies.

(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 9 and 11.

(5) The number of sessions absent by reason expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions possible. See Technical Notes 9 and 11.

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