

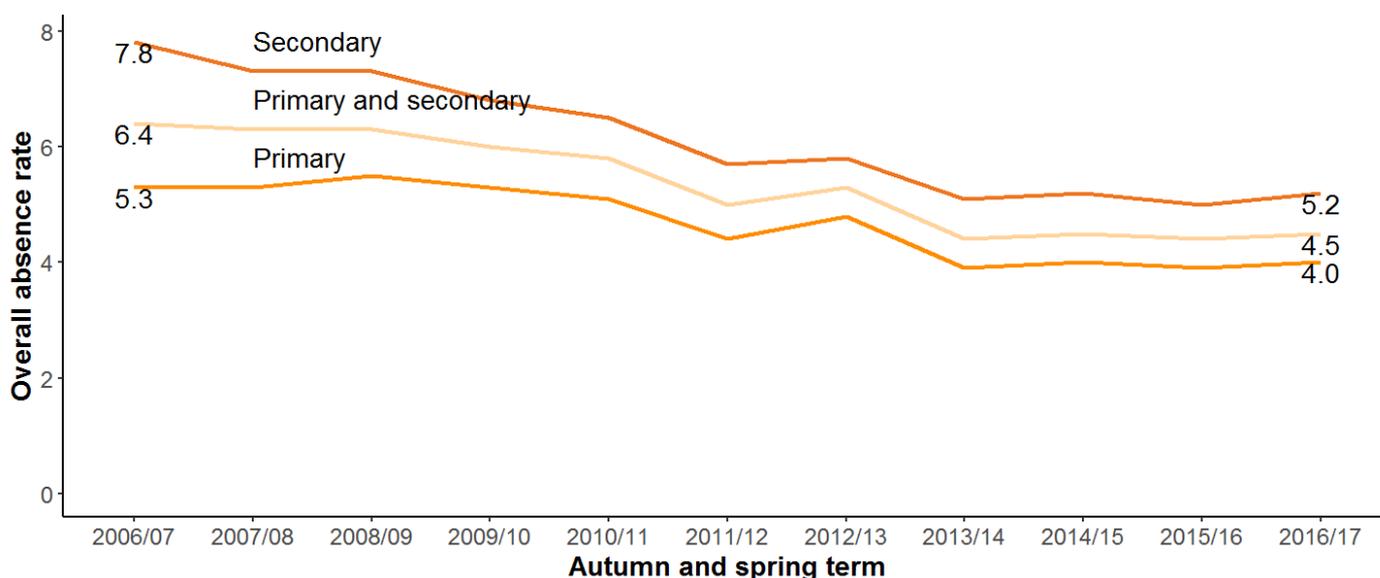


# Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2016 and spring 2017

SFR 55/2017, 19 October 2017

## The overall absence rate has increased since last year

It should be noted that the absence information in this release is for autumn 2016 and spring 2017 terms only. Due to differing term lengths in-year findings can be volatile and therefore figures and trends in this release should be treated as indicative only.



The overall absence rate has increased from 4.4 per cent of possible sessions in autumn/spring 2015/16 to 4.5 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17. Overall absence rates have remained fairly stable across recent years after following a downward trend since 2006/07, when data was first collected at pupil enrolment level and the overall absence rate was 6.4 per cent.

## Unauthorised absence has increased since last year

Unauthorised absence rates have increased across primary and secondary schools since last year, from 0.9 per cent in autumn/spring 2015/16 to 1.1 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17. This is due to increased levels of unauthorised family holiday and other unauthorised absence.

## One in ten pupils were persistently absent in the autumn and spring terms

The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary and state-funded secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees in autumn/spring 2016/17 was 10.4 per cent. This is slightly higher than the equivalent figure of 10.3 per cent in autumn and spring 2015/16.

## Illness is the most common reason for absence

Illness remains the most common reason for absence, accounting for 60.1 per cent of all absences. The percentage of possible sessions missed due to illness has remained the same since last year at 2.7 per cent.

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## About this release

This National Statistics release reports on absence in state-funded primary, state-funded secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units during the autumn term 2016 and spring term 2017.

Only full year absence figures give a complete view of pupil absence. Due to differing term lengths two term absence figures can be volatile so year on year comparisons in this release should be treated with caution. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2016/17 school year are intended for publication in March 2018.

The Department uses two key measures to monitor pupil absence - overall and persistent absence. Absence by reason and by pupil characteristics is also included in this release.

Figures held in this release are used as key indicators in behaviour and attendance policy. High levels of attendance are essential in ensuring that all pupils can benefit from the opportunities provided by education.

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.

## Changes to this release

This is the first academic year where termly absence data has been collected from special schools; 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 6 of this document and table 7 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 SFR:

- SFR55\_2017\_National\_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 absent 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 and secondary schools increased from 4.4 per cent in autumn/spring 2015/16 to 4.5 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17. In primary schools the overall absence rate increased from 3.9 per cent to 4.0 per cent and the rate in secondary schools increased from 5.0 per cent to 5.2 per cent.

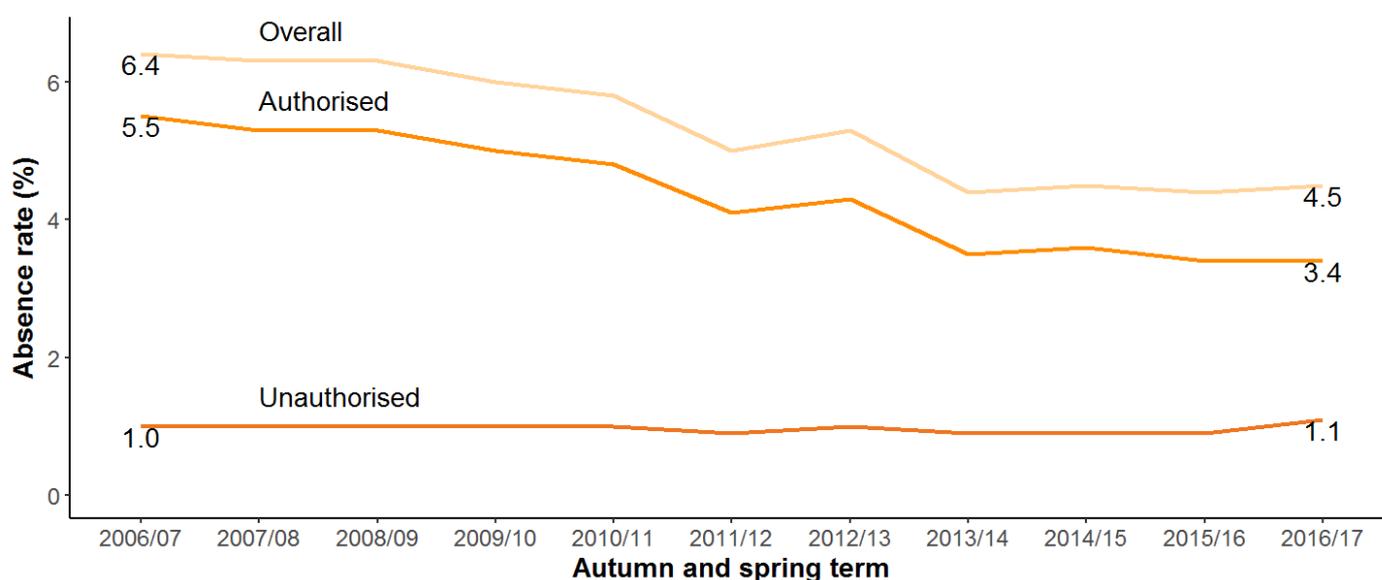
The increase in overall absence has been driven by an increase in the unauthorised absence – which increased from 0.9 per cent to 1.1 per cent between autumn/spring 2015/16 and autumn/spring 2016/17.

This is due to an increase in absence due to family holidays that were not agreed by the school, and other unauthorised absences. The authorised absence rate for primary and secondary schools has not changed since last year, at 3.4 per cent. Though authorised absence rates in primary schools have been decreasing across recent years.

### Figure 1: Comparison of the trend in overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates

England, Autumn term 2006 and spring term 2007 to autumn term 2016 and spring term 2017

Source: School Census



The total number of days missed due to overall absence across state-funded primary and secondary schools has increased since last year, from 34.3 million in autumn/spring 2015/16 to 37.4 million in autumn/spring 2016/17. This partly reflects the rise in the total number of pupil enrolments however the average number of days missed per enrolment has also increased from 5.2 days in autumn/spring 2015/16 to 5.5 days in autumn/spring 2016/17<sup>1</sup>.

In autumn/spring 2016/17, 86.6 per cent of pupils had a least one session of any absence, a higher percentage than in the same period last year when 85.4 per cent of pupils had a least one session of any absence.

<sup>1</sup> Days missed is calculated by dividing the total number of sessions missed by two (as one session is equivalent to half a day). The number of sessions missed due to different types of absence is available in this release's underlying data (.csv) files.

## 2. Persistent absence (Table 1)

### 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](#).

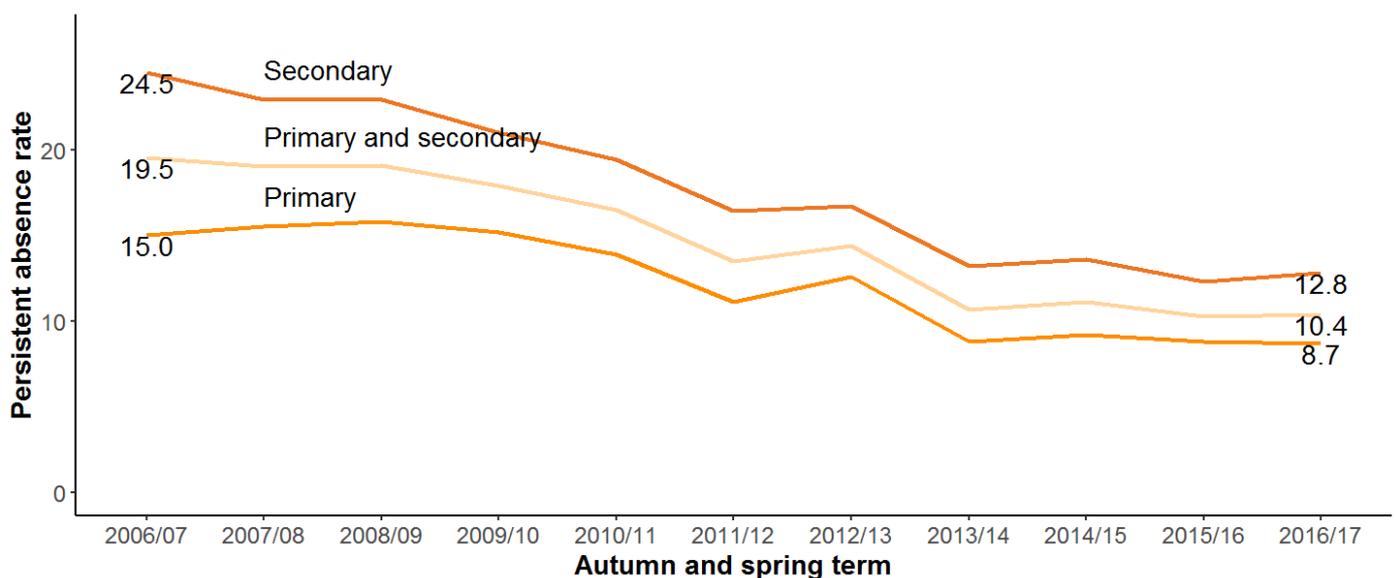
The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary and state-funded secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees in autumn/spring 2016/17 was 10.4 per cent. This is slightly higher than the persistent absentee rate for the equivalent period last year, which was 10.3 per cent (see Figure 2).

Secondary schools have the higher rate of persistent absentees, 12.8 per cent of enrolments, compared to 8.7 per cent of enrolments in primary schools.

### Figure 2: Percentage of enrolments who are persistent absentees

England, Autumn term 2007 and spring term 2007 to autumn term 2016 and spring term 2017

Source: School Census



### 3. Reasons for absence (Tables 2 & 3)

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.

**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.



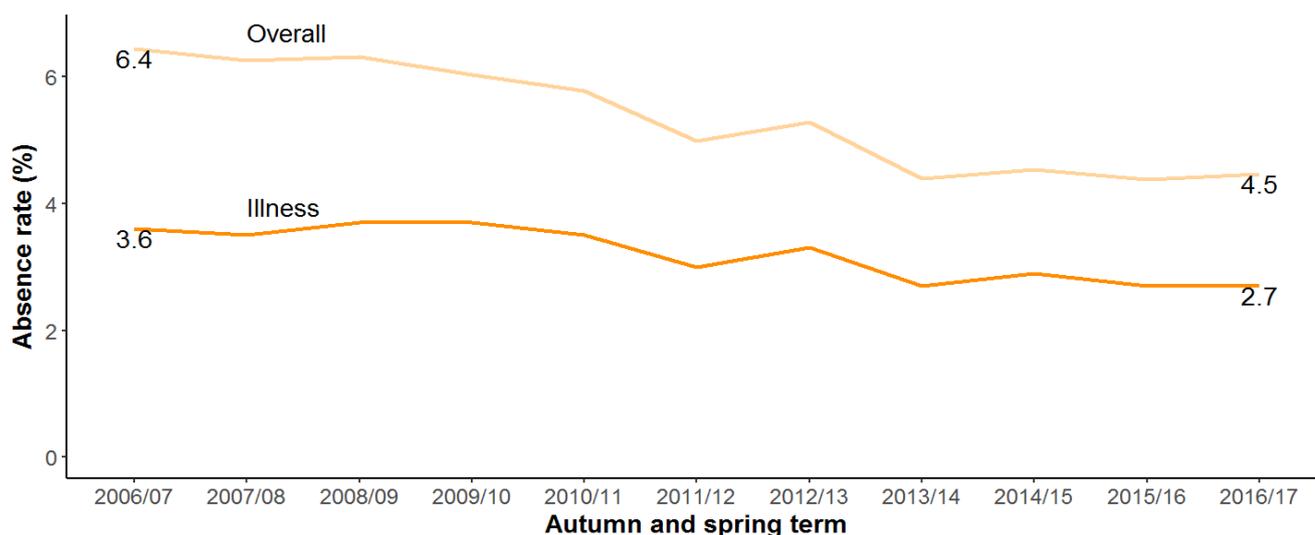
Illness is the main driver for overall absence rates (see Figure 3); however, whilst overall absence rates have increased slightly since autumn/spring 2015/16, illness rates have remained the same at 2.7 per cent.

Illness absence accounted for 60.1 per cent of all absence in autumn/spring 2016/17. This is a lower proportion than seen in previous years, it was 62.2 per cent in autumn/spring 2015/16 and 64.7 per cent in autumn/spring 2014/15.

#### Figure 3: Comparison of the trend in overall and illness absence rates

England, Autumn term 2006 and spring term 2007 to autumn term 2016 and spring term 2017

Source: School Census



The rate of absence due to other unauthorised circumstances has increased to 0.7 per cent in 2016/17, from 0.6 per cent in 2015/16.

#### Absence due to family holiday



The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to unauthorised family holidays has increased since last year, from 0.2 per cent in autumn/spring 2015/16 to 0.3 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17. The absence rate due to authorised family holidays (agreed by the school) remained the same at 0.1 per cent.

The percentage of pupils who missed at least one session due to any family holiday (authorised or unauthorised) increased from 7.6 per cent in autumn/spring 2015/16 to 9.4 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17.

The absence 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). They also relate partially to the period after the judgment in the Supreme Court which was in April 2017. However, interpretation of any trends should be treated with caution due to the volatility of autumn and spring term absence figures. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2016/17 school year are intended for publication in March 2018.

## 4. Absence by pupil characteristics (Tables 4.1, 4.2, 5.1 & 5.2)

The patterns of absence rates for pupils with different characteristics have been consistent across recent years.

### Gender

The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools was the same for boys and girls (at 4.5 per cent). Persistent absence rates were also similar for boys and girls, at 10.5 per cent and 10.4 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 7.0 per cent, compared to 4.0 per cent for non-FSM pupils. The persistent absence rate for pupils who were eligible for FSM was more than twice the rate for pupils not eligible for FSM (21.3 per cent and 8.3 per cent respectively).

### National curriculum year group

Pupils in national curriculum year groups 3 and 4 had the lowest overall absence rates at 3.7 and 3.8 per cent respectively. Pupils in national curriculum year groups 10 and 11 had the highest overall absence rate at 5.8 per cent. This trend is repeated for persistent absence.

### Special educational need (SEN)

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or education healthcare plan (EHC) had an overall absence rate of 7.1 per cent compared to 4.2 per cent for those with no identified SEN. The percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN or an EHC plan that are persistent absentees is more than two times higher than the percentage for pupils with no identified SEN.

### Ethnic group

The highest overall absence rates were for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/ Roma pupils at 16.8 per cent and 12.1 per cent respectively. Overall absence rates for pupils of a Chinese and Black African ethnicity were substantially lower than the national average of 4.5 per cent at 2.3 per cent and 2.7 per cent respectively. A similar pattern is seen in persistent absence rates; Traveller of Irish heritage pupils had the highest rate at 58.5 per cent and Chinese pupils had the lowest rate at 3.6 per cent.

## 5. Special schools (Table 7)

This is first year that absence data has been collected from special schools on a termly basis, previously being collected on an annual basis only. The overall absence rate for autumn/spring 2016/17 in special schools was 9.7 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, 2015/16, which was 9.1 per cent, though note that the figures are not fully comparable, being based on the first two terms and a full academic year respectively.

Persistent absence was also higher than in primary and secondary schools at 28.2 and was also similar to the special school persistent absentee rate for the 2015/16 full academic year (26.9 per cent).

**Table 1: Absence in special schools**

England, Autumn term 2016 and spring term 2017

*Source: School census*

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Percentage of sessions missed due to:	
Overall absence	9.7
Authorised absence	7.8
Unauthorised absence	2.0
Number of enrolments who are persistent absentees	26,150
Percentage of enrolments who are persistent absentee	28.2

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## 6. Absence for four year olds (Underlying data)

The overall absence rate for four year olds in autumn/spring 2016/17 was 5.1 per cent which is lower than the rate of 5.3 per cent which it has been for the last three years.

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 6)

The overall absence rate for pupil referral units in autumn/spring 2016/17 was 33.2 per cent, up from 31.7 per cent in autumn/spring 2015/16.

The percentage of enrolments in pupil referral units who were persistent absentees was 71.8 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17, compared to 70.2 per cent in autumn/spring 2015/16.

## 8. 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 who are persistent absentees

#### Tables

1. Pupil absence and pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees by type of school
2. Pupil absence by reason and gender
3. Pupil enrolments with one or more sessions of absence by reason
- 4.1 Pupil absence by characteristics
- 4.2 Characteristics of pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees
- 5.1 Pupil absence by ethnic group
- 5.2 Pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees by ethnic group
6. Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for pupil referral units
7. Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for 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 SFR 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](#).

## 9. 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](#).

## 10. 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](#)

## 11. 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.

## 12. 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.
- 26 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 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, 29 schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

## **13. 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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