



Department
for Education

Year-on-year change in pupil attendance

Research Report

May 2025

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Introduction

The Department has published data on the number and proportion of pupils in 5% absence bands¹. This report investigates how pupils transition between these bands as they progress through year groups using data from pupils in state-funded mainstream schools in 2021/22 and 2022/23 – and therefore focuses on one years' worth of transitions.

This analysis uses pupil-level data to track movement and therefore cannot be reproduced solely from published statistics.

¹ [Monitor your school attendance: how to use the absence bandings report - GOV.UK](#)

Key Findings

Our analysis shows that as pupils get older their year-on-year change in attendance (transition) worsens. Children with poor attendance in primary school are more likely to recover to a higher level of attendance the next year compared to secondary school pupils.

- Across all year groups, pupils with 0-5% absence in 2021/22 are highly likely to have strong attendance the next academic year – with between 93% and 96% of this group having below 10% absence in 22/23, depending on year group
- Pupils with 5-10% absence in 2021/22 are less likely to have strong attendance the next academic year (compared with those with 0-5% absence). 86% of year 1s in this group have 0-10% attendance in 22/23, but this drops as low as 75% for year 7s.
- Combining these groups, over 80% pupils with 0-10% absence in 2021/22 have between 0-10% absence in 2022/23.
- Over 80% pupils with 0-10% absence in 2021/22 have between 0-10% absence in 2022/23.
- Over 60% of primary school pupils with greater than 15% absence in 2021/22 remained persistently (greater than 10% absence) or severely (greater than 50% absence) absent in 2022/23.
- Over 70% of year 6 pupils with greater than 15% absence in 2021/22 remained persistently or severely absent in year 7 in 2022/23.
- Over 80% of secondary school pupils with greater than 15% absence in 2021/22 remain persistently or severely absent in 2022/23.

These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions during the critical transition from primary to secondary school, particularly for pupils with 10-15% absence. They imply that there may be absence ‘tipping points’ during a pupil’s time at school where improved attendance could lead to improved future attendance – however more analysis is required to establish the long-term effects of attendance interventions.

Methodology

Methods used within this report are summarised below.

Source of data

Parents of children of compulsory school age (aged between 5 and 15 at the start of the academic year) are, by law, required to ensure that their children receive a suitable education through regular attendance at school or otherwise. The Department for Education collects each enrolled pupil's overall sessions missed and number of possible sessions available to them, where a session is equivalent to half a day of school.

The absence data collected via the school census is as reported by the individual schools and therefore the data provider (i.e. the individual schools) are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the data returned. At the point of submission to the Department, the data collected is deemed to have been checked and signed off by the school head teacher. The data collected from local authority maintained schools also undergoes further approval by the responsible local authority before use by the Department.

Absence data is then matched into the National Pupil Database (NPD) – a longitudinal database which holds a wide range of pupil level data for schools across England. Note that as with any matching exercise there is an accepted margin of error, and some mismatches may occur.

Absence Bands

A school records if a pupil attends each half day session at school. Over the school year the number of sessions a pupil attends is calculated as a percentage of the possible sessions they could have attended at the school. For this report these absence percentages have been grouped into 5% bandings. Table 1 below shows the range of days and weeks missed by a pupil in selected bandings if the pupil had been registered for a full school year of 380 sessions.

Table 1: Range of possible days and weeks of school missed in selected absence bands over a full school year

Absence Band	Range of possible days missed	Range of possible weeks missed
0-5%	0 - 9.5	0 - 1.9
5-10%	9.5 - 19	1.9 - 3.8
10-15%	19 - 28.5	3.8 - 5.7
15-20%	28.5 - 38	5.7 - 7.6 (approx. half a term)
20-25%	38 - 47.5	7.6 - 9.5
25-30%	47.5 - 57	9.5 - 11.4
30-35%	57 - 66.5	11.4 - 13.3
35-40%	66.5 - 76	13.3 - 15.2 (approx. full term)
40-45%	76 - 85.5	15.2 - 17.1
45-50%	85.5 - 95	17.1 - 19
>50%	>95	>19

Stochastic Matrices

Stochastic matrices are used to model the likelihood of pupils transitioning between different absence bands as they progress through the school system. This approach provides valuable insights into attendance patterns and trends. For example, it enables the identification of the proportion of Year 1 pupils with 0-5% absence who remain in that band in Year 2, as well as those who move into higher absence bands.

This methodology is instrumental in understanding how attendance behaviours develop over time and identifying critical points where interventions may be required. By tracking these transitions, it is possible to pinpoint specific cohorts at risk of increased absences and develop targeted strategies to improve attendance.

The data in this publication pertains to one year's worth of transition. Some caution must be applied in generalising these results to the future, as these transition rates may change year on year.

Results

Pupil absence increases as pupils get older

Whilst most pupils remain in the 0-10% absence bands for the entirety of their education, the overall absence of pupils across all absence bands tends to increase linearly with school year group once pupils begin secondary school.

Pupil absences can be driven by various factors, including personal, familial, academic, and environmental influences. While some absence is short-term and improves in subsequent years, the majority of pupils experience progressively worsening attendance over time. For example, in the academic year 2022/23, average Year 1 pupil absence is 6.6%, however, for Year 11 pupils it is 10.7%. This trend leads some pupils to become persistently absent, missing 10% or more possible sessions, and eventually, they may become severely absent, missing 50% or more possible sessions.

Primary Pupils

In primary schools, around 60% of pupils who become 10-15% persistently absent in 2021/22 improve to being less than 10% absent in the following year – with the remaining 40% maintaining absence rate of more than 10% in the following year. Over 60% of primary school pupils with greater than 15% absence will remain persistently or severely absent the following year.

Secondary Pupils

In secondary schools, only 45% of pupils who become 10-15% persistently absent improve to being less than 10% absent in the following year. Over 80% of secondary school pupils with greater than 15% absence will remain persistently or severely absent the following year.

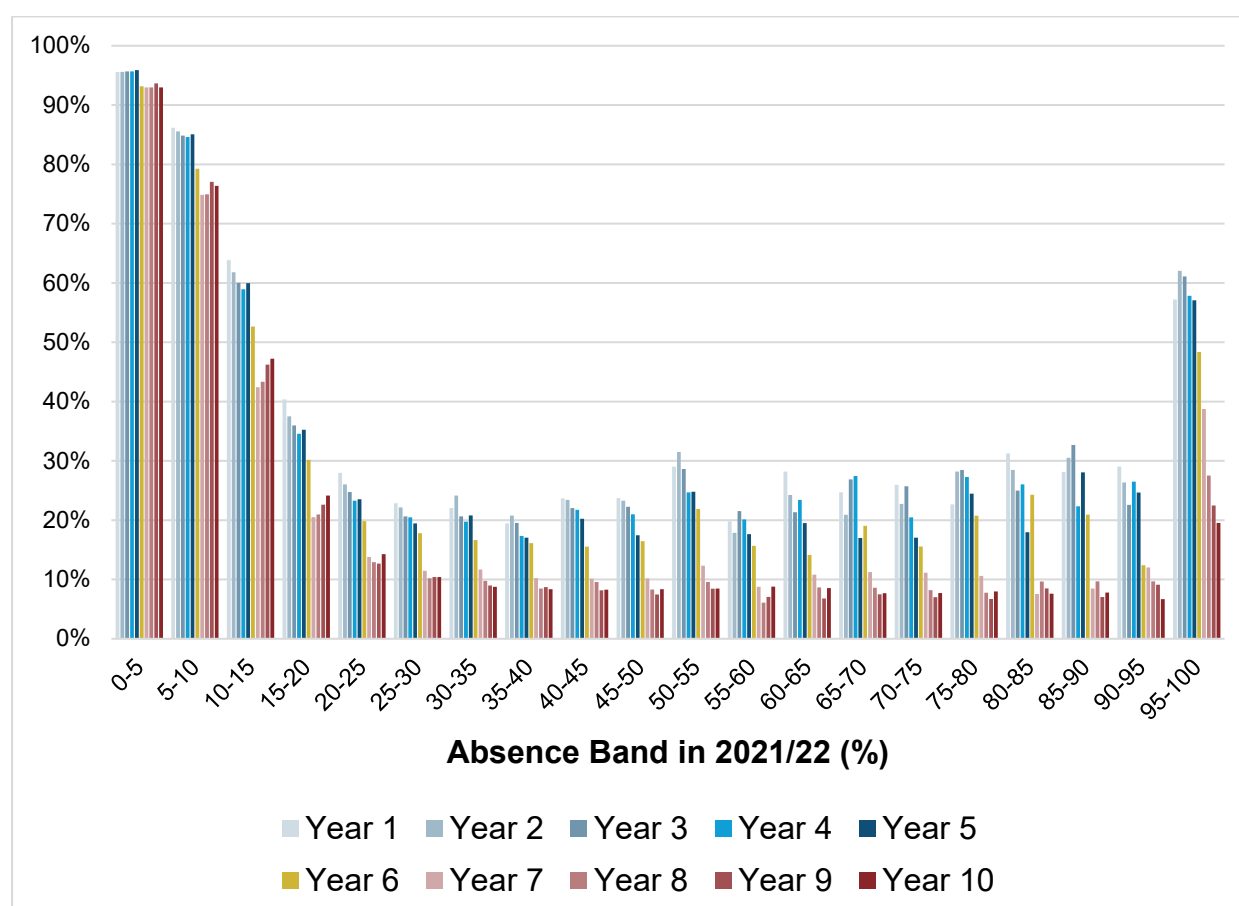
Pupils transitioning from primary to secondary

For year 6 pupils, 53% of pupils who become 10-15% persistently absent improve to being less than 10% absent in year 7. Over 70% of year 6 pupils with greater than 15% absence will remain persistently or severely absent in year 7.

Tracking the likelihood of returning to 0-10% by year group

In every year group, as absence levels increase, the likelihood of returning to 0-10% absence rates in the following year decreases. This effect begins to increase for year 6 pupils transitioning into year 7 and increases again for all secondary transitions (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of pupils in each year group and absence band transitioning to 0-10% absence in 2022/23

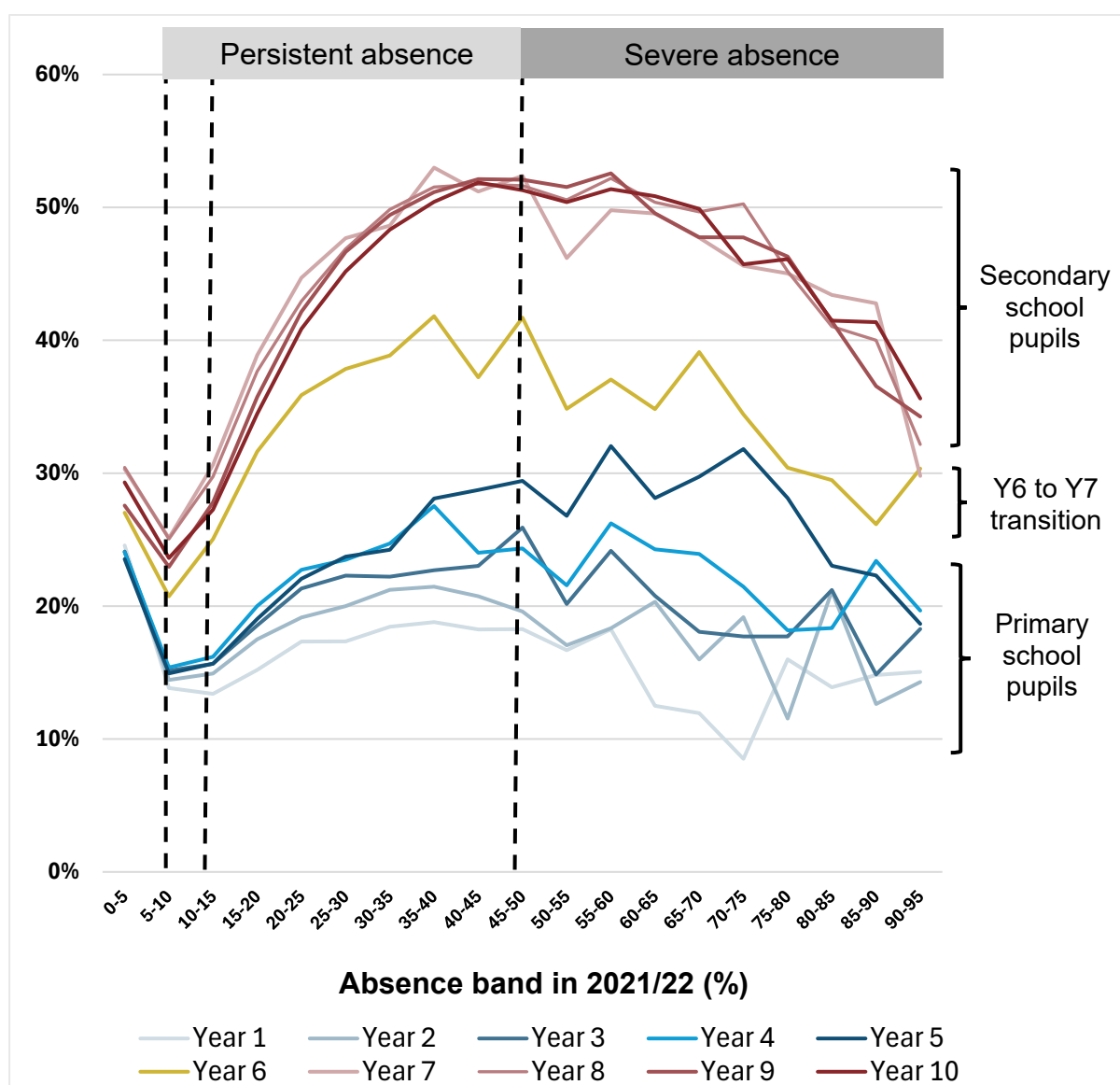


Tracking the likelihood of pupils' absence improving by year group

The proportion of pupils remaining in the same absence band or improving declines as they advance through the school system. A significant tipping point is observed in the 10-15% absence band, particularly at the transition to secondary school (Figure 2). In Year 7, the percentage of pupils with increasing absence rates is twice as high as in Year 1. By Year 8, this percentage rises to nearly three times the Year 1 level. This suggests that the transition to secondary school is a critical period, with a steep and sustained rise in absence rates from Year 7 onwards.

In secondary year groups, as pupil absence goes above 70% there is a decrease in the proportion of pupils whose attendance gets worse the next year. This may be the result of a ceiling effect but may also indicate the positive impact of local authority interventions or other mitigating factors at extremely high levels of absence.

Figure 2: Percentage of pupils in each absence band with worsening attendance from 2021/22 to 2022/23 by year group

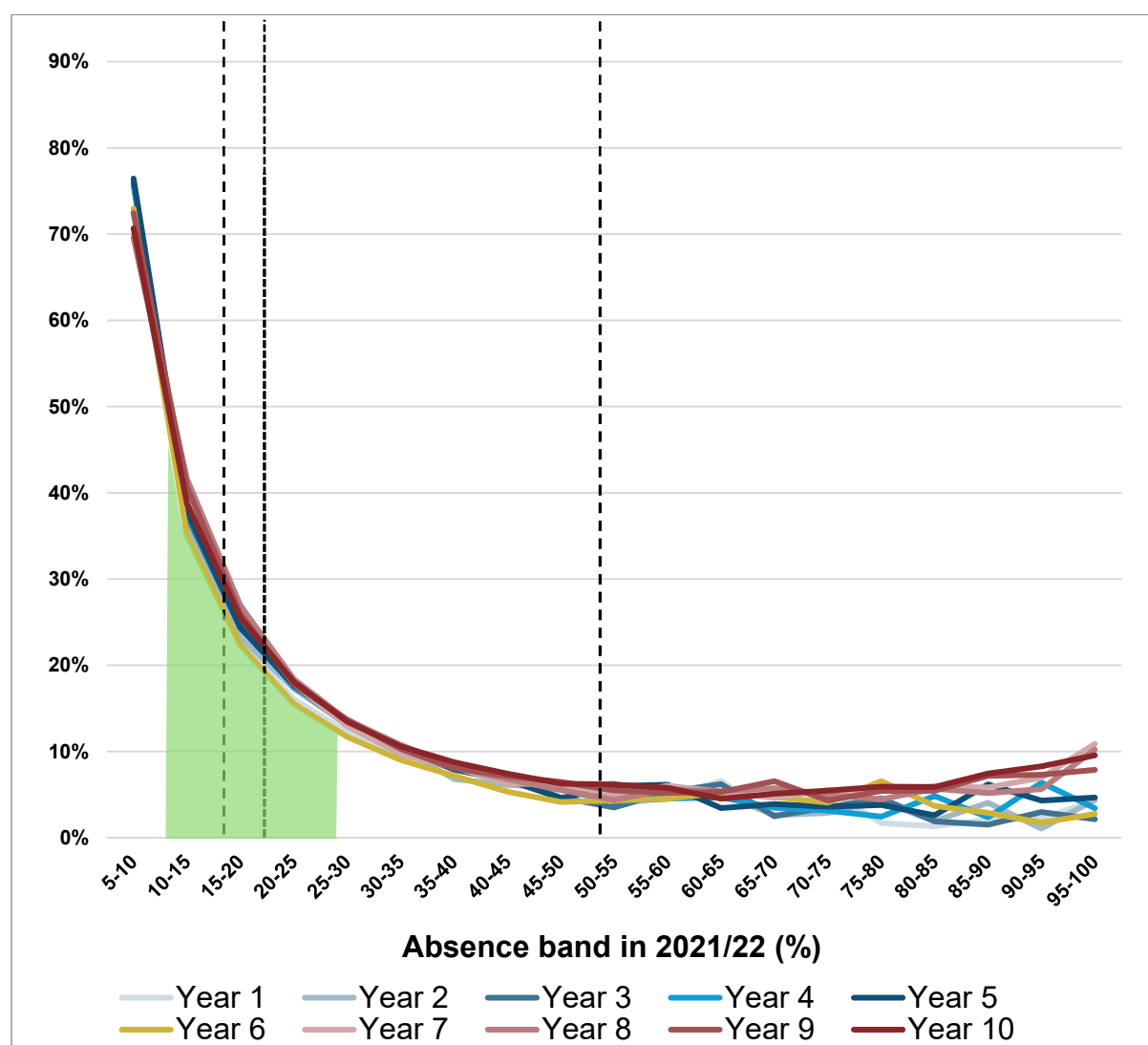


Tracking the proportion of pupils who stay in the same absence band the next year

Whilst most secondary school pupils with 10-30% absence do not improve the following academic year, there are a significant number of pupils in these absence bands having the same absence the following year. Across all year groups, between

10% and 40% of pupils in these bands remain in the same absence bands the following year (Figure 3). Their continued presence in the same band suggests a consistent pattern of persistent absence, indicating potential for improvement with targeted interventions.

Figure 3: Percentage of pupils remaining in each absence band from 2021/22 to 2022/23 year by year group



Annex

Table 2: Percentage of pupils in each year group and absence band transitioning to 0-10% absence in 2022/23

Absence band in 2021/22	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
0-5%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	93%	93%	93%	94%	93%
5-10%	86%	86%	85%	85%	85%	79%	75%	75%	77%	76%
10-15%	64%	62%	60%	59%	60%	53%	42%	43%	46%	47%
15-20%	40%	37%	36%	35%	35%	30%	20%	21%	23%	24%
20-25%	28%	26%	25%	23%	24%	20%	14%	13%	13%	14%
25-30%	23%	22%	21%	20%	19%	18%	11%	10%	10%	10%
30-35%	22%	24%	21%	20%	21%	17%	12%	10%	9%	9%
35-40%	19%	21%	20%	17%	17%	16%	10%	8%	9%	8%
40-45%	24%	23%	22%	22%	20%	16%	10%	10%	8%	8%
45-50%	24%	23%	22%	21%	17%	16%	10%	8%	7%	8%
50-55%	29%	31%	29%	25%	25%	22%	12%	10%	8%	8%
55-60%	20%	18%	22%	20%	18%	16%	9%	6%	7%	9%
60-65%	28%	24%	21%	23%	19%	14%	11%	9%	7%	9%
65-70%	25%	21%	27%	27%	17%	19%	11%	9%	7%	8%
70-75%	26%	23%	26%	20%	17%	16%	11%	8%	7%	8%
75-80%	23%	28%	28%	27%	24%	21%	11%	8%	7%	8%
80-85%	31%	28%	25%	26%	18%	24%	8%	10%	8%	8%
85-90%	28%	31%	33%	22%	28%	21%	8%	10%	7%	8%
90-95%	29%	26%	23%	26%	25%	12%	12%	10%	9%	7%
95-100%	57%	62%	61%	58%	57%	48%	39%	28%	22%	20%

Table 3: Percentage of pupils in each absence band with worsening attendance the following year from 2021/22 to 2022/23 by year group

Absence band in 2021/22	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
0-5%	25%	24%	24%	24%	24%	27%	30%	30%	28%	29%
5-10%	14%	14%	15%	15%	15%	21%	25%	25%	23%	24%
10-15%	13%	15%	16%	16%	16%	25%	31%	30%	28%	27%
15-20%	15%	18%	19%	20%	19%	32%	39%	38%	36%	34%
20-25%	17%	19%	21%	23%	22%	36%	45%	43%	42%	41%
25-30%	17%	20%	22%	23%	24%	38%	48%	47%	47%	45%

Absence band in 2021/22	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
30-35%	18%	21%	22%	25%	24%	39%	49%	50%	49%	48%
35-40%	19%	21%	23%	28%	28%	42%	53%	52%	51%	50%
40-45%	18%	21%	23%	24%	29%	37%	51%	52%	52%	52%
45-50%	18%	20%	26%	24%	29%	42%	52%	52%	52%	51%
50-55%	17%	17%	20%	22%	27%	35%	46%	51%	52%	50%
55-60%	18%	18%	24%	26%	32%	37%	50%	52%	53%	51%
60-65%	13%	20%	21%	24%	28%	35%	50%	50%	50%	51%
65-70%	12%	16%	18%	24%	30%	39%	48%	50%	48%	50%
70-75%	9%	19%	18%	21%	32%	34%	46%	50%	48%	46%
75-80%	16%	12%	18%	18%	28%	30%	45%	45%	46%	46%
80-85%	14%	21%	21%	18%	23%	29%	43%	41%	41%	41%
85-90%	15%	13%	15%	23%	22%	26%	43%	40%	37%	41%
90-95%	15%	14%	18%	20%	19%	30%	30%	32%	34%	36%

Table 4: Percentage of pupils remaining in each absence band from 2021/22 to 2022/23 year by year group

Absence band in 2021/22	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
5-10%	75%	76%	76%	76%	76%	73%	70%	70%	72%	71%
10-15%	37%	37%	37%	38%	38%	35%	40%	42%	41%	39%
15-20%	23%	23%	24%	25%	24%	22%	27%	27%	26%	26%
20-25%	16%	17%	18%	17%	18%	16%	18%	18%	18%	18%
25-30%	12%	13%	13%	14%	13%	12%	13%	14%	14%	13%
30-35%	10%	10%	11%	11%	10%	9%	10%	11%	10%	11%
35-40%	8%	7%	8%	8%	8%	7%	8%	8%	8%	9%
40-45%	7%	6%	7%	6%	7%	5%	6%	7%	7%	7%
45-50%	6%	6%	5%	6%	5%	4%	6%	6%	6%	6%
50-55%	4%	6%	4%	4%	6%	4%	5%	4%	5%	6%
55-60%	4%	5%	5%	5%	6%	5%	6%	6%	5%	6%
60-65%	7%	5%	6%	5%	3%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
65-70%	2%	3%	2%	3%	4%	5%	5%	6%	7%	5%
70-75%	6%	3%	4%	3%	4%	4%	5%	5%	4%	5%
75-80%	2%	4%	5%	2%	4%	7%	5%	4%	5%	6%
80-85%	1%	2%	2%	5%	3%	4%	6%	6%	5%	6%

Absence band in 2021/22	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
85-90%	2%	4%	2%	2%	6%	3%	6%	5%	7%	7%
90-95%	2%	1%	3%	6%	4%	2%	7%	6%	7%	8%
95-100%	4%	4%	2%	3%	5%	3%	11%	10%	8%	10%



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