



Statistical Bulletin

Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland - 2013/14: Summary statistics

29 January 2015

Coverage: Northern Ireland

Frequency: Annual

Theme: Children,
Education and Skills

Issued by:
Statistics & Research Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR BT19 7PR

Telephone
Press Office:
028 9127 9701
Statistics & Research
Team:
028 9127 9816

Statistician: Helen Irwin

Email:
statistics@deni.gov.uk

Internet
<http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new.htm>

The purpose of this statistical bulletin is to present basic, final attendance figures for schools for the 2013/14 academic year. It includes information on the levels of absence, type of absence and reason for absence.

A further release containing a more detailed set of tables, including absence by pupil characteristics (e.g. gender, year group, ethnicity etc.) will be published on 19 February 2015.

Attendance data for the 2013/14 academic year was collected from all grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland via the school census which was conducted in October 2014.

KEY FINDINGS - ALL SCHOOLS

Absence is reported by schools in half day sessions and recorded as authorised or unauthorised.

- The overall attendance rate for primary, post-primary and special schools in 2013/14 was 94.6% of the total half days.
- 5.4% of the total half days in primary, post-primary and special schools were missed due to absence. This comprised:
 - 3.5 % authorised absence
 - 1.9% unauthorised absence
- In 2013/14, the overall absence rate was 0.7 percentage points lower than in 2012/13, when overall absence accounted for 6.0% of the total half days. (Note: percentage point difference calculated using unrounded figures).



Contents

Section	Title	Page
	Introduction	3
1	Key Findings	3
2	Reasons for absence	5
3	Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales	6
	Notes for readers	7

Introduction

Attendance data are collected annually via the school census and are required by a range of organisations and individuals for a variety of purposes. Members of the NI Assembly, the Department of Education, Education and Library Boards and the Education and Training Inspectorate use the data for benchmarking, policy making and performance monitoring. Responsibility for attendance policy lies with Additional Educational Needs Team in DE which monitors non-attendance and provides guidance to schools in relation to attendance. Attendance data are used for monitoring other Departmental policies, for example, Achieving Belfast and Derry Bright Futures. The statistics are also used by other departments when developing and monitoring cross-departmental policies, for example, attendance is an indicator in the Education Domain of the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure as well as OFMDFM's 10 Year Strategy for Children and Young People. The data are also used by researchers, academics and students, as well as the general public for informing choices about service providers.

Section 1: Key Findings

Absence rates

While there does not tend to be large variation in absence levels year on year, overall absence was slightly lower in all phases in 2013/14 than in the previous year.

- In primary schools in 2013/14, 4.4% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 3.0% authorised and 1.4% unauthorised absence. See Table 1 overleaf. In 2012/13, overall absence accounted for 5.1% of the total half days (3.7% authorised and 1.4% unauthorised)¹. The figures show a slight decrease in absence levels on the previous year for authorised absence, while unauthorised absence has remained the same.
- In post-primary schools in 2013/14, 6.5% of all half days were missed due to absence, 4.0% was authorised absence and 2.5% was unauthorised absence. See Table 1 overleaf. As with primary schools, this represents a decrease on 2012/13, when overall absence accounted for 7.1% of the total half days (4.5% authorised and 2.6% unauthorised).

¹ http://www.deni.gov.uk/attendance_at_grant-aided_primary_post-primary_and_special_schools_2012_13_summary_statistics.pdf

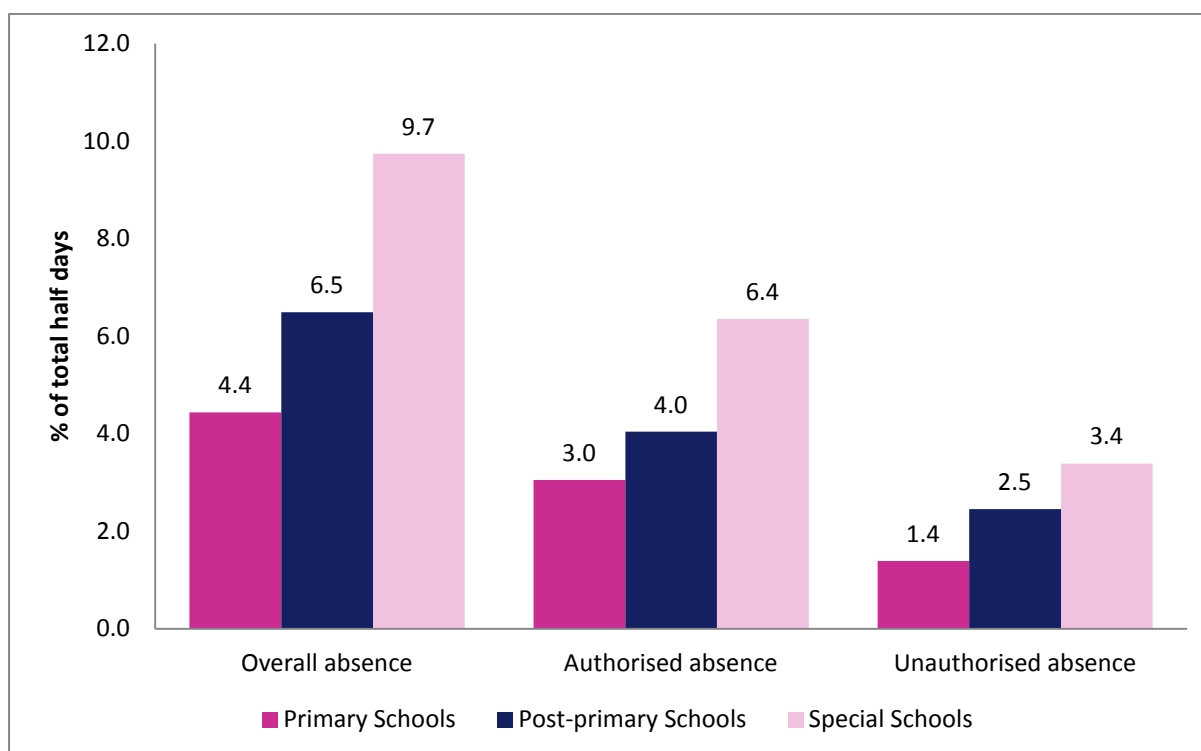
- In special schools, 9.7% of all half days were missed due to absence in 2013/14, comprising 6.4% authorised and 3.4% unauthorised absence. See Table 1 below. These figures show a decrease in authorised absence since 2012/13² (7.4%), while unauthorised absence has remained the same.

Table 1: Attendance and absence at school by school type, 2013/14

	% of total half days		
	Primary Schools	Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
Attended	95.6	93.5	90.3
Overall absence	4.4	6.5	9.7
Authorised absence	3.0	4.0	6.4
Unauthorised absence	1.4	2.5	3.4

Note: In some cases, percentages may not sum due to rounding

Chart 1: Absence from primary, post-primary and special schools, 2013/14



² http://www.deni.gov.uk/attendance_at_grant-aided_primary_post-primary_and_special_schools_2012_13_summary_statistics.pdf

Section 2: Reasons for absence

The most common reason for absence in all schools was illness, which is an authorised absence. Illness accounted for 58.6% of all absent half days in primary schools, 48.4% in post-primary schools and 45.2% in special schools. This equates to 2.6%, 3.1% and 4.4% of the total half days respectively. See Table 2 below.

The level of absence attributable to each reason tends to remain fairly consistent year on year, however, the proportion of absent half days attributable to 'Illness' has decreased in comparison to 2012/13, when it was 61.8% in primary schools, 49.2% in post-primary schools and 45.7% in special schools³. In 2012/13, this was 3.1%, 3.5% and 4.9% of the total half days respectively.

An increase in 'Other exceptional circumstances' was noted in 2012/13. By 2013/14, the proportion of absent half days attributed to this reason had decreased across all phases, most likely due to less severe weather conditions than in the previous year.

This decrease in absent half days attributable to 'Illness' and 'Other exceptional circumstances' accounts for the overall decrease in absence levels demonstrated in 2013/14, in comparison to 2012/13.

Table 2: Absence from schools by reason, 2013/14

	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools		Special Schools	
	% of absent half days	% of total half days	% of absent half days	% of total half days	% of absent half days	% of total half days
Authorised absence						
Illness	58.6	2.6	48.4	3.1	45.2	4.4
Medical / dental appointments	3.2	0.1	5.8	0.4	8.6	0.8
Other exceptional circumstances	3.1	0.1	4.0	0.3	7.7	0.7
Family holiday agreed	2.2	0.1	0.6	*	2.3	0.2
Bereavement	1.1	*	1.6	0.1	0.6	0.1
Artistic endeavour	0.3	*	0.4	*	0.0	*
Suspended	0.1	*	1.3	0.1	0.7	0.1
Religious observance	0.1	*	0.1	*	0.1	*
Total authorised absence	68.7	3.0	62.2	4.0	65.2	6.4
Unauthorised absence						
No reason yet provided	19.1	0.8	30.3	2.0	28.2	2.7
Family holiday not agreed	7.5	0.3	2.3	0.2	2.3	0.2
Other	3.9	0.2	4.9	0.3	3.9	0.4
Late after registration closed	0.8	*	0.3	*	0.4	*
Total unauthorised absence	31.3	1.4	37.8	2.5	34.8	3.4
Total overall absence	100	4.4	100	6.5	100	9.7

Note: * denotes a figure greater than zero but less than 0.1. In some cases, percentages may not sum due to rounding

³ http://www.deni.gov.uk/attendance_at_grant-aided_primary_post-primary_and_special_schools_2012_13_summary_statistics.pdf

Section 3: Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales

Data for Scotland for 2013/14 is not available since it is now produced on a biennial basis.

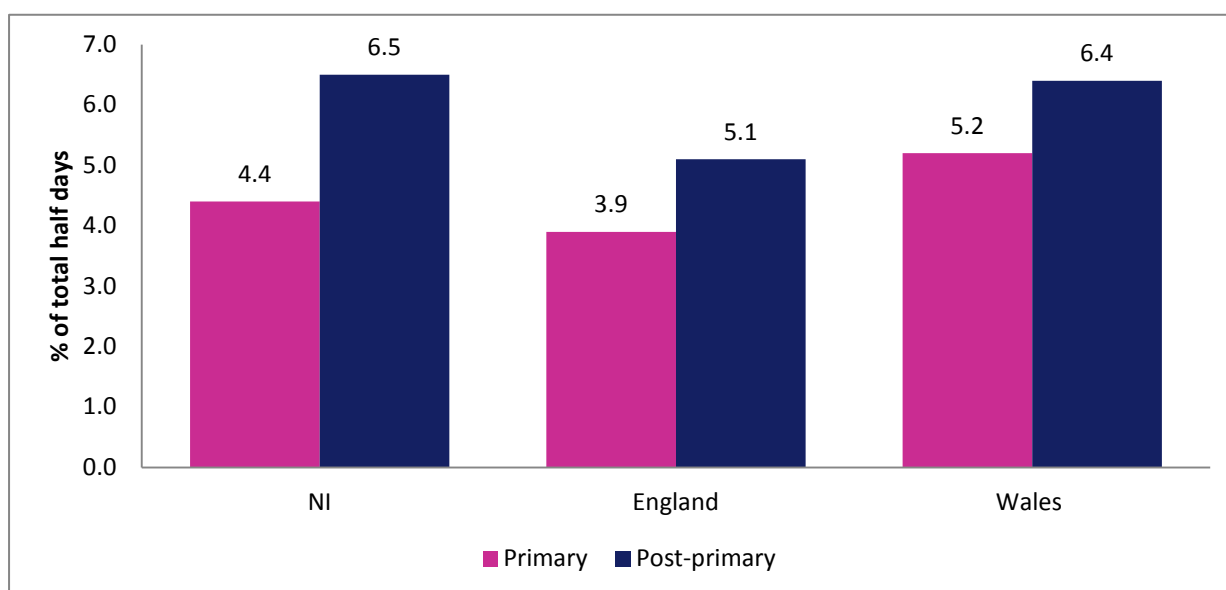
- The highest overall absence rates in primary schools were recorded in Wales – 5.2% of the total half days, compared with 4.4% in Northern Ireland and 3.9% in England. However, at 1.4% of the total half days, unauthorised absence was notably higher in NI primary schools than in any other region (1.0% in Wales and 0.7% in England). See Table 3 below.
- In post-primary schools, overall absence levels are very similar in Northern Ireland and Wales (6.5% and 6.4%, respectively), while, overall absence in England, at 5.1% is considerably lower. As with primary schools, unauthorised absence is notably higher in Northern Ireland post-primary schools than in England and Wales (2.5% in NI; 1.2% in England and 1.3% in Wales). See Table 3 below.

Table 3: Absence rates for Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, 2013/14

	% of total half days			
	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools	
	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence
NI	1.4	4.4	2.5	6.5
England	0.7	3.9	1.2	5.1
Scotland	N/A [#]	N/A [#]	N/A [#]	N/A [#]
Wales	1.0	5.2	1.3	6.4

[#]: Data for Scotland not available for 2013/14

Chart 2: Comparisons with England and Wales – overall absence, 2013/14



Notes for readers

Background information

National Statistics

1. 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.

2. For general enquiries about National Statistics, contact the National Statistics Public Enquiry Service on 0845 601 3034
minicom: 01633 812399
E-mail: info@statistics.gov.uk
Fax: 01633 652747
Letters: Customer Contact Centre, Office for National Statistics, Rm 1.101, Government Buildings, Cardiff Road, Newport, NP10 8XG
3. You can also find National Statistics on the Internet: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>
4. The statistics in this release have been derived from the annual School Census. More information about the collection of school attendance data can be found at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/updated_data_collection_procedures_1415.doc
5. The 2013/14 figures in this statistical release are based on school census information as at 10 October 2014. They may be subject to minor revision and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy. This can be accessed at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/de_statement_on_statistical_revisions_r1.doc
6. The data is produced at aggregate level only, therefore individual pupils cannot be identified. More information on confidentiality can be found in the DE Confidentiality and Access Statement at the following link: http://www.deni.gov.uk/de_statement_on_data_confidentiality_and_access_r1.doc

Definitions

7. Attendance or absence is measured for every pupil in half day sessions (am and pm). Absence can be either authorised or unauthorised.

Attendance

In addition to actual attendance within the school premises, the following are also considered as attendance at school:

- Late (before registration closed)
- Approved sporting activities
- Study leave
- Educational visits
- Work experience
- Alternative education provision (organised by the ELB)*
- Home/hospital tuition (organised by the ELB)*
- Pupil referral unit*
- Another mainstream school (under Entitlement Framework)*
- Training Organisation (under Entitlement Framework)*
- FE College (under Entitlement Framework)*
- Intensive Support Learning Unit*
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)*

Authorised absence

An authorised absence is absence with permission from an authorised school representative on provision of a satisfactory explanation. This includes:

- Artistic endeavour**
- Bereavement
- Suspension
- Agreed family holiday (in very exceptional circumstances)
- Illness
- Medical / dental appointments
- Other exceptional circumstances (includes an exceptional event outside control of the school, for example, travelling children, court appearance)
- Religious observance

Unauthorised absence

An unauthorised absence is absence without permission from an authorised school representative due to unexplained or unjustified absence. This includes:

- Family holiday not agreed
- Other absence (includes absence not covered by any other code or a reason which is not acceptable to the school, for example, pupil's / parent's or sibling's birthday).
- No reason provided for absence
- Late (after registration closed)

Notes

The code 'T – Traveller absence' was removed prior to the 2010/11 academic year.

* In 2010/11, the code 'E – Educated offsite' was removed and broken down into 8 new codes, providing more detail on the type of alternative educational provision.

** New code added in 2010/11.

See http://www.deni.gov.uk/attendance_circular_2010_07_-_3rd_issue_-_september_2011-2.pdf for further information.

Data quality and coverage

8. Overall absence is considered to be a more reliable measure of absence than authorised and unauthorised absence. Both figures have been provided, however limitations in comparing rates of unauthorised and authorised absence should be noted - for those absences which are not covered by a specific code, the decision to allocate the absence as authorised or unauthorised is taken by the school.
9. Prior to September 2009, schools were advised to record unexplained absence initially as 'no reason yet provided', however, if a reason was not provided within a specified period of time, these should be changed to 'other'. From September 2009 onwards, schools were instructed that, if a reason was never provided, the code should remain as 'no reason yet provided'. This has resulted in higher levels of unauthorised absence being recorded as 'no reason yet provided' and lower figures for 'other' than in previous years.
10. Primary and post-primary data refer to pupils in Years 1 to 12 only, which aligns with the compulsory school age in Northern Ireland. Figures for special schools include all pupils attending special schools in 2013/14.
11. Attendance information was not available for five primary schools, two post-primary schools and two special schools which had closed prior to the data being collected. This accounts for 0.6%, 1.0% and 5.0% of the total primary schools, post-primary schools and special schools, respectively, and 0.5% of all pupils in Years 1 to 7 of primary school, 0.2% of all pupils in Years 8 to 12 of post-primary school, and 5.2% all pupils in special schools.
12. Comparative data was obtained from the following sources:
Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Autumn Term 2013 and Spring Term 2014:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-2013-and-spring-2014>
Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2013/14 (Wales):
<http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-primary-schools/?lang=en>
Absenteeism from Secondary Schools, 2013/14 (Wales):
<http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-secondary-schools/?lang=en>

There are slight differences in definitions between the regions, for example, statistics for England include study leave in authorised absence while the DE statistics categorise it as present. Figures for England do not include Summer Term 2014 (when the majority of study leave is recorded), meaning it is still possible to compare their data with NI with appropriate caveats. There are also methodological differences in collecting the information. For example, the statistics for England are reported on a term by term basis. Overall absence is considered to be a better measure of comparison, rather than authorised or unauthorised absence.
13. In some cases, percentages may not sum due to rounding.

Users and uses of the data

14. The statistics are widely used by a range of groups including members of the NI Assembly, the Department of Education, other government departments, Education and Library Boards, schools, the Education and Training Inspectorate, researchers, students and the public. The data are used for benchmarking, performance indicators, policy development and monitoring, cross-departmental indicators e.g. NI Multiple Deprivation Measure, OFMDFM 10 Year Strategy for Children and Young People and research studies.

15. Requests for further information should be addressed to:

Helen Irwin
Statistics and Research Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Bangor
Co. Down
BT19 7PR
Telephone: 028 9127 9816
Fax: 028 9127 9594
Email: helen.irwin@deni.gov.uk

Special analyses of the attendance information can be undertaken on request.

DE Statistical Releases can be accessed on the DE website:

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new.htm>

Feedback on this publication can be provided directly to Helen Irwin (contact details above) or via the feedback section on our website:

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/feedback.htm>