



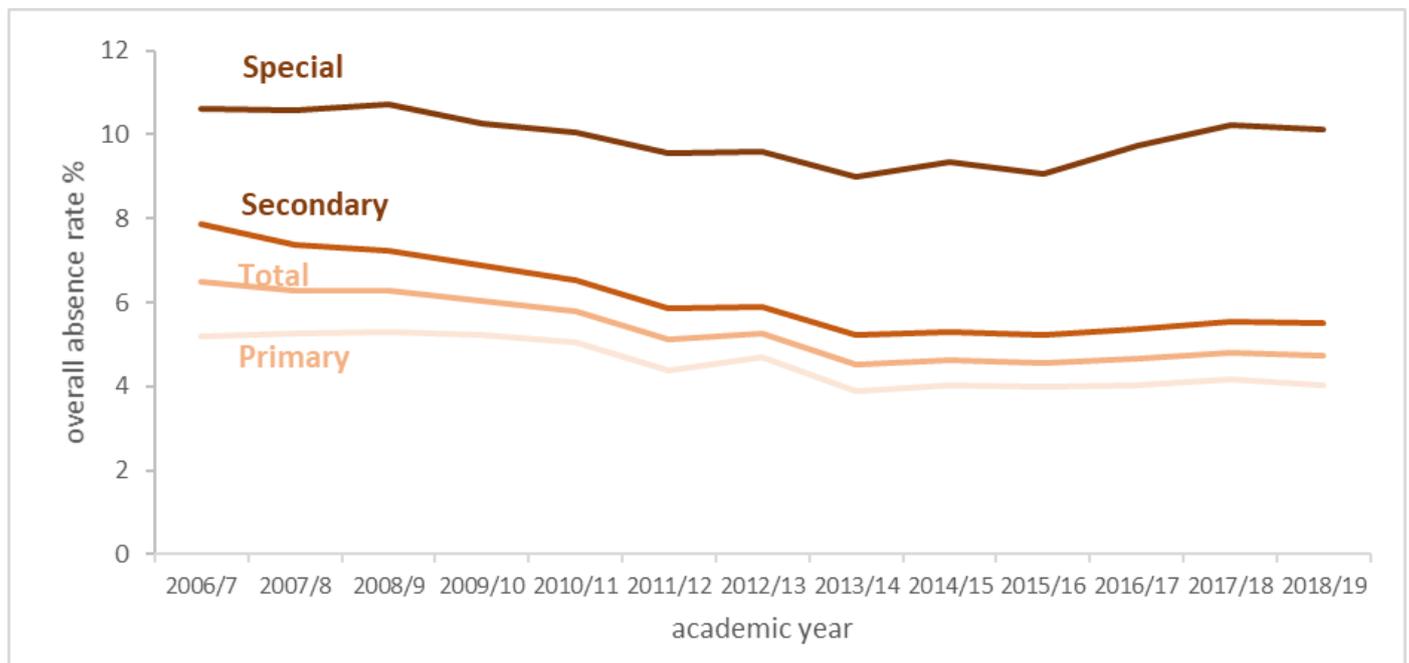
Pupil absence in schools in England: 2018 to 2019

26 March 2020

Headline facts and figures – 2018/19 academic year

Overall absence	The rate for 2018/19 is 4.7% This is down from 4.8% in 2017/18
Authorised absence	The rate for 2018/19 is 3.3% This is down from 3.5% in 2017/18
Unauthorised absence rate	The rate for 2018/19 is 1.4% This is the same as in 2017/18
Persistent absentees	10.9% of all enrolments in 2018/19 were persistent absentees This is down from 11.2% in 2017/18

Overall absence by type of school, England, time series



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About these statistics

Most of the statistics and data cover the absence of pupils aged 5 to 15 in state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools in England during the 2018/19 academic year.

Separate data cover pupil referral units and 4 year old pupils.

The statistics and data are available at national, regional, local authority (LA) and school level and are used for policy development and as key indicators in school attendance policy.

A "[guide to absence statistics](#)", which provides historical information on absence statistics, as well as technical background information on the figures and data collection, is published separately and should be referenced alongside this release.

1. Pupil absence rates (Table 1.1 and underlying data)

Overall absence rate definition

The overall absence rate is the total number of overall absence 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.

$$\text{Overall absence rate} = \frac{\text{Total overall absence sessions}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$$

Overall absence

The overall absence rate has decreased slightly across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools combined between 2017/18 and 2018/19 driven by an decrease in the authorised absence rate. Illness remains the main driver of absence rates.

The overall absence rate decreased in primary schools from 4.2% in 2017/18 to 4.0% in 2018/19. In secondary schools the rate remained steady at 5.5%. In special schools the overall rate decreased slightly from 10.2% to 10.1%

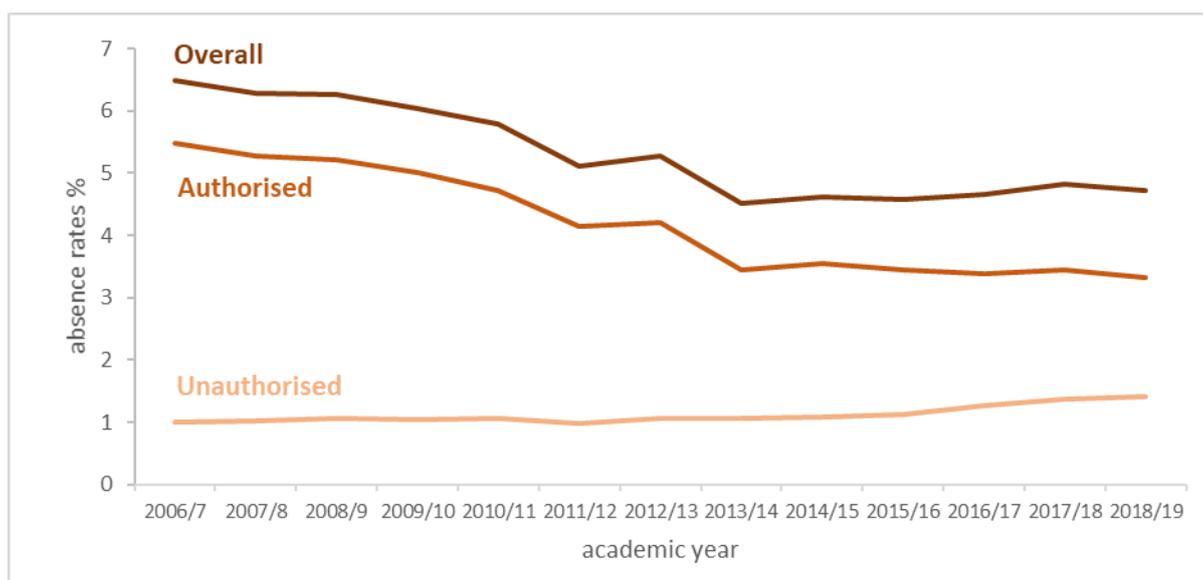
Authorised absence

The authorised absence rate has declined from 3.5% in 2017/18 to 3.3% in 2018/19. This follows a period when the rate remained stable at 3.4% or 3.5% from 2013/14 to 2017/18.

Unauthorised absence

The unauthorised absence rate has remained the same in 2017/18 and 2018/19 at 1.4%. This is the highest rate since consistent data became available in 2006/07.

Overall absence by authorised/unauthorised absence, England, time series



Total number of days missed

The total number of days missed for overall absence across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools has increased from 59.1 million in 2017/18 to 59.6 million in 2018/19.

This reflects a rise in the total number of pupils. The average number of days missed per pupil enrolment has remained steady at 8.4 days in both 2017/18 and 2018/19.

92.1% of primary, secondary and special school pupil enrolments missed at least 1 session in 2017/18, this fell slightly to 91.6% in 2018/19. (A session is a morning or afternoon.)

2. Persistent absence (Table 1.2 and underlying data)

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 [persistent absence rate](#) decreased from 11.2% in 2017/18 to 10.9% in 2018/19.

The [overall absence](#) rate for persistent absentees was 19.1% in 2018/19. The rate for all pupils was 4.7%.

Persistently absent pupils accounted for 39.3% of all absence in 2018/19 (up from 38.5% in 2018/19).

3. Reasons for absence (Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and underlying data)

Reasons for absence definition

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 reported by reason.

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

Illness is the main driver of absence. Illness accounted for 54.7% of all absence in 2017/18, and 52.6% in 2018/19.

The illness absence rate has decreased from 2.6% of all possible sessions in 2017/18 to 2.5% in 2018/19.

Absence due to family holiday

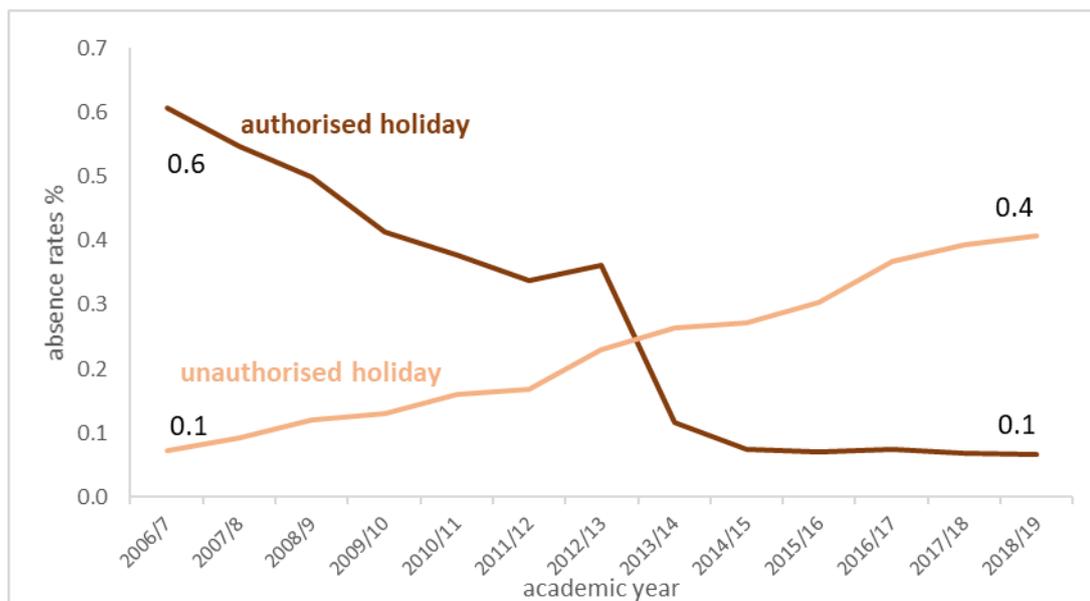
The rate of authorised holiday absence has remained steady at 0.1% in both 2017/18 and 2018/19.

The rate of unauthorised holiday absence has also remained steady, at 0.4% in both 2017/18 and 2018/19.

The unauthorised holiday absence rate has increased gradually since 2006/07 (when it was 0.1%) but has remained at 0.4% since 2016/17 (when rounded to 1 decimal place). In contrast the authorised holiday absence rate dropped substantially between 2006/07 and 2013/14 and has remained steady at 0.1% since then.

A regulation amendment in September 2013 stated that term-time leave could only be granted in exceptional circumstances which explains the sharp fall in authorised holiday absence between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Comparison of authorised and unauthorised family holiday absence rates, England, time series



The main statistics in this release relate to the period after the April 2017 Supreme Court judgment in the Isle of Wight Council v Jon Platt case. The Supreme Court unanimously agreed that no children should be taken out of school without good reason and clarified that 'regularly' attending means 'in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school'.

Absence due to other unauthorised reasons

The absence rate due to other unauthorised circumstances has increased from 0.8% in 2017/18 to 0.9% in 2018/19.

4. Number of days absent (Tables 3.1, 3.2 and underlying data)

Nearly half of all pupil enrolments (49.2%) were absent for 5 days or fewer across primary, secondary and special schools. 8.4% had no absence at all.

4.7% of pupil enrolments had more than 25 days of absence in 2018/19, these pupils accounted for 25.8% of sessions missed.

The average total absence per pupil enrolment was 7.3 days in primary schools, 9.5 days in secondary schools and 17.8 days in special schools. Across primary, secondary and special schools the average was 8.4 days of absence.

5. Absence by pupil characteristics (Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and underlying data)

Summary figures by the various pupil characteristics are provided below and are all for 2018/19.

Ethnic groups

Overall absence rate:

- Traveller of Irish heritage pupils and Gypsy / Roma pupils had the highest overall absence rates at 18.0% and 12.6% respectively
- Chinese and Black African ethnicity pupils had the lowest overall absence rates at 2.3% and 2.9% respectively
- Ethnic groups with higher overall absence also show higher rates of persistent absence.

Free school meals (FSM) eligibility

Overall absence rate:

- pupils known to be eligible for and claiming FSM had an overall absence rate of 7.5%, compared to 4.2% for non-FSM pupils

Persistent absence rate:

- pupils known to be eligible for and claiming FSM had a persistent absence rate of 22.8% - more than double the rate of non-FSM pupils at 8.3%

Gender

Overall absence rate:

- boys and girls - very similar at 4.8% and 4.6% respectively

Persistent absence rate:

- boys and girls - similar at 11.1% and 10.6% respectively

National curriculum year group

Overall absence rate:

- pupils in national curriculum year groups 3 and 4 had the lowest rates at 3.9%
- pupils in national curriculum year groups 10 and 11 had the highest rates at 6.3% and 6.4% respectively (excluding pupils outside the normal year group structure).

This trend is repeated for the persistent absence rate.

Special educational need (SEN)

Overall absence rate:

- pupils with a SEN statement or education healthcare (EHC) plan had an overall absence rate of 8.7%, pupils with SEN support had a rate of 6.5%, pupils with no identified SEN had a rate of 4.3%

Persistent absence rate:

- pupils with a SEN statement or education healthcare (EHC) plan had a persistent absence rate of 24.6% - more than two times higher than rate for pupils with no identified SEN (9.0%)

6. Absence for four year olds (Underlying data)

The overall absence rate for 4 year old pupil enrolments decreased slightly from 5.2% to 5.1%.

Absence recorded for 4-year-olds is not treated as authorised or unauthorised and only reported as overall absence.

7. Pupil referral unit absence (Table 8 and underlying data)

The overall absence rate remained steady at 35.3% in 2017/18 and 2018/19.

The persistent absence rate decreased from 76.1% in 2017/18 to 74.6% in 2018/19.

8. Regional breakdown (Table 9 and underlying data)

Overall absence and persistent absence rates vary across primary, secondary and special schools by region and local authority (LA).

Overall absence

The North East and Yorkshire and Humber regions had the highest rates of overall absence at 5.0%

The lowest rates were Outer London at 4.4% and Inner London at 4.5%.

Persistent absence

The region with the highest persistent absence rate was the North East at 12.1% while Outer London had the lowest rate at 9.9%.

9. Background: Additional information and updates

This National Statistics publication 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](#).

10. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in Excel format on the [department's statistics website](#):

National and local authority tables

Charts

1. Overall absence rates by type of school
2. Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees

Tables

- 1.1 Pupil absence by type of school
- 1.2 Pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees
- 2.1 Pupil absence by reason and gender
- 2.2 Pupil enrolments with one or more session of absence by reason
- 2.3 Pupil absence by reason for persistent absentees
- 3.1 Distribution of enrolments by length of overall absence
- 3.2 Percentage of enrolments by their overall absence rates
- 4 Number of schools by the percentage of persistent absentees
- 5.1 Pupil absence by characteristics
- 5.2 Characteristics of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees
- 5.3 Pupil absence by ethnic group
- 5.4 Pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees by ethnic group
- 5.5 Pupil absence by type of special educational need
- 6 Pupil absence by Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) decile of pupil residence
- 7 Pupil absence for four year olds
- 8 Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for pupil referral units
- 9 Pupil absence by type of school (local authorities)

When reviewing the tables, please note that:

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	For the first time this year we are not routinely suppressing numbers of 1 or 2. This will only be done in files that crosstabulate pupil characteristics with absence figures.

In these cases: 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. Otherwise numbers are shown as they really are.

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

11. 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 or [Welsh Government Statistics and Research](#)

Scotland: school.stats@scotland.gov.uk or [Scottish Government School Education Statistics](#)

Northern Ireland: statistics@deni.gov.uk or [Department of Education Education Statistics](#)

12. 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](#).

13. 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.

14. 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.
- 40 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 special 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, 20 schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

15. Get in touch

Media enquiries

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Other enquiries/feedback

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