



Department  
for Education



## Statistical First Release

# Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2013 and spring 2014

---

Reference	SFR 38/2014
Date	15 October 2014
Coverage	England
Theme	Children, Education and Skills
Issued by	Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT
Press office	020 7925 6789
Public enquiries	037 0000 2288
Statistician	Eleanor Cotzias
Phone	020 7340 7510
Email	<a href="mailto:Schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk">Schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk</a>
Internet	<a href="#">Statistics: pupil absence</a>

---

Overall absence rates for the autumn and spring terms are at their lowest since 2006

Overall absence rates have decreased from 5.3 per cent in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 4.4 per cent in autumn 2013 and spring 2014. This rate is the lowest since termly absence data was first collected in 2006. In autumn 2006 and spring 2007 the overall absence rate was 6.4 per cent.

The number of pupil enrolments classified as persistent absentees has also decreased

The percentage of pupils classified as persistent absentees (missing 38 or more sessions) has decreased by 0.8 percentage points from 4.9 per cent in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 4.1 per cent in autumn 2013 and spring 2014. This is at its lowest since termly absence data was first collected in 2006.

The fall in overall absence rates is largely due to a fall in levels of illness

Absence due to illness decreased from 3.3 per cent of all possible sessions in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 2.7 per cent of all possible sessions in autumn 2013 and spring 2014. Illness is the most common reason for absence, accounting for 61.3 per cent of all absences.

---

### A National Statistics publication

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

## 1. Background and context

This Statistical First Release reports on absence in state-funded primary and secondary schools during autumn term 2013 and spring term 2014. Information on absence in pupil referral units and absence for four year olds is also included.

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

Only full year absence figures give a complete view of pupil absence, so year on year comparisons in this release should be treated with caution, see technical note 12.9. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2013/14 school year are intended for publication in March 2015.

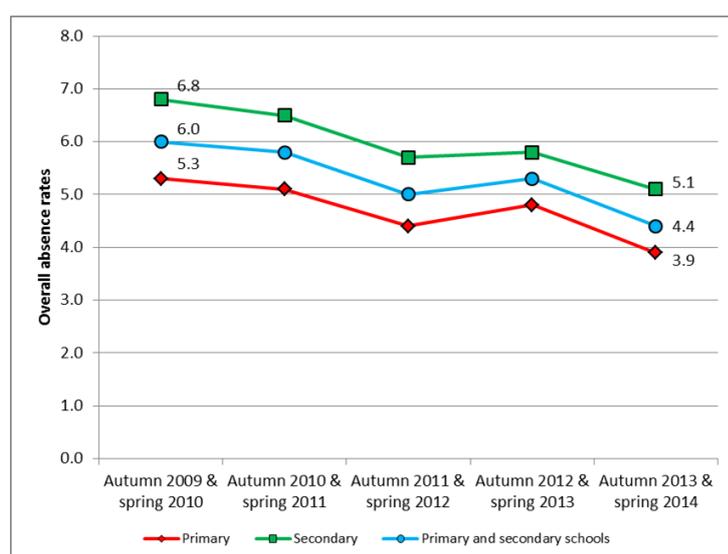
Figures held in this release are used as key indicators in behaviour and attendance policy, high levels of attendance are essential in ensuring that all pupils can benefit from the opportunities provided by education.

## 2. Changes since last publication

Included within this publication is a consultation on proposed changes to the structure of future absence Statistical First Releases and the current persistent absentee (PA) methodology. See section 9 and technical note 12.29 for more details.

## 3. Absence rates (Table 1)

Figure 1: Overall absence rates have decreased



Overall absence rates have decreased

The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools fell from 5.3 per cent in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 4.4 per cent in autumn 2013 and spring 2014.

The decrease in overall absence rates is due to a fall in authorised absence

Authorised absence rates have fallen from 4.3 per cent in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 3.5 per cent in autumn 2013 and spring 2014 across state-funded primary and secondary schools. This is largely due to a decrease in illness and agreed family holidays. Unauthorised absence has remained relatively unchanged at 0.9 per cent.

Less days are being missed due to absence

The number of days missed due to overall absence has fallen from 39.9 million in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 35.7 million in autumn 2013 and spring 2014.

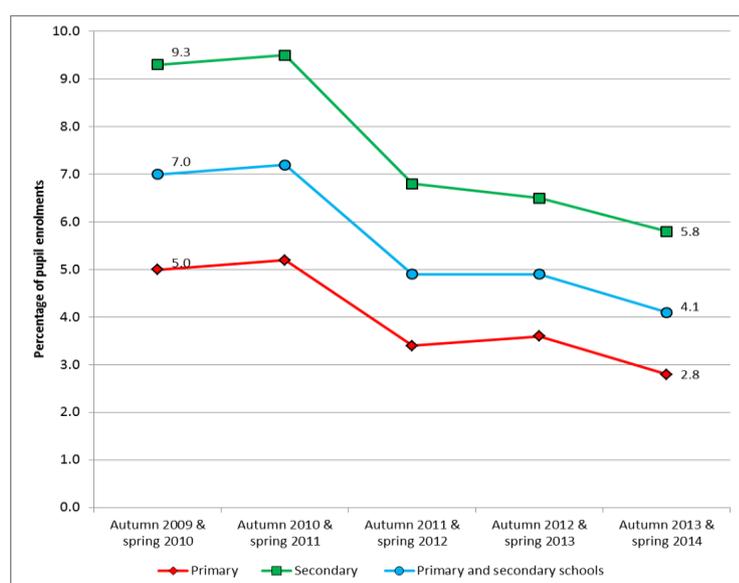
#### 4. Persistent absentees (Table 2)

Trends in termly persistent absentee figures are for indicative purposes only and should be treated with caution. Only full year figures provide a definitive view of persistent absence (see technical note 12.9).

Persistent absentees are defined as missing around 15 per cent of possible sessions. The persistent absentee threshold is identified as 15 per cent of the typical amount of possible sessions across the given period. This threshold is reviewed every year to account for any changes to the typical amount of possible sessions for all pupils, however, the thresholds do not tend to change from year to year. This threshold equates to 56 or more sessions of absence (authorised or unauthorised) during the full academic year or 46 or more sessions during the first five half terms.

For the autumn and spring terms a pupil may become persistently absent or in some cases is already persistently absent if they have 38 or more sessions of absence (authorised or unauthorised), throughout this release such pupils will be referred to as persistent absentees.

Figure 2: The percentage of pupil enrolments that are classified as persistent absentees (missing 38 or more sessions)

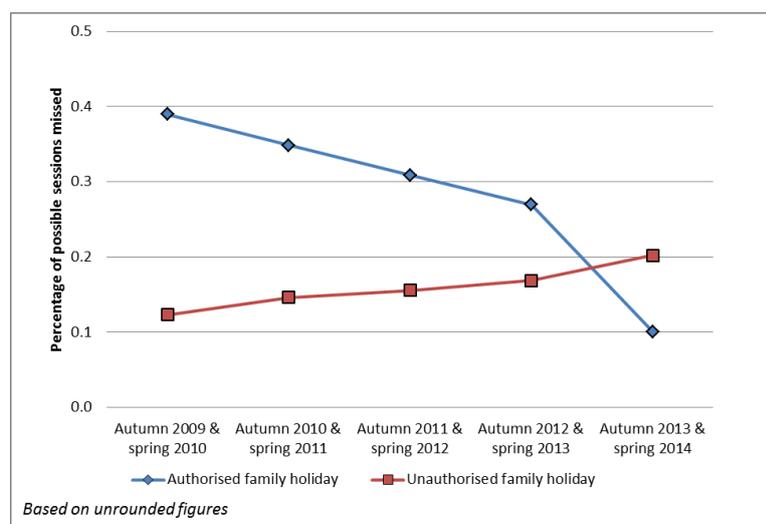


The percentage of enrolments who are classified as persistent absentees has decreased	The percentage of pupils across state-funded primary and secondary schools that missed 38 or more sessions fell by 0.8 percentage points from 4.9 per cent in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 4.1 per cent in autumn 2013 and spring 2014. Both primary and secondary schools showed a similar decrease.
The number of pupil enrolments classified as persistent absentees has also decreased	The number of persistent absentees across state-funded primary and secondary schools fell from 310,580 enrolments in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 262,255 enrolments in autumn 2013 and spring 2014. A difference of 48,325.
Absence rates for persistent absentees are considerably higher than for all pupils	The overall absence rate for persistent absentees (missing 38 or more sessions) across state-funded primary and secondary schools was 24.4 per cent, over five times higher than the rate for all pupils.
The percentage of pupil enrolments classified as persistent absentees using the full year threshold has decreased	Over autumn 2013 and spring 2014, 1.5 per cent of pupil enrolments were classified as persistent absentees using the full year measure (missing 56 or more sessions). However, this is still a decrease of 0.2 percentage points since autumn 2012 and spring 2013.

## 5. Reasons for absence (Table 3)

Illness remains the most common reason for absence	Illness accounted for 61.3 per cent of all absences and 2.7 per cent of possible sessions missed - the lowest percentage of possible sessions missed since reason data was first collected in 2006
Family holiday is also a common reason for absence	<p>Family holidays accounted for 6.9 per cent of all absences.</p> <p>The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to family holidays decreased from 0.4 per cent in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 0.3 per cent in autumn 2013 and spring 2014.</p> <p>This decrease is due to a fall in authorised family holidays, unauthorised family holidays have seen a small increase, see figure 3.</p>

Figure 3: The fall in overall family holiday absence is due to a decrease in authorised family holidays



## 6. Absence by pupil characteristics (Table 4a - 5b)

Absence levels for FSM pupils are higher than the national average

The overall absence rate for pupils who are known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals (FSM) was 6.6 per cent compared to 3.9 per cent for non FSM pupils.

The percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees and FSM eligible was 9.3 per cent, compared to 3.0 per cent of pupil enrolments that were persistent absentees and not eligible for FSM.

Overall absence and persistent absentee rates for FSM eligible pupils have fallen compared to recent years, the difference in rates between those FSM eligible and not FSM eligible has also narrowed slightly.

Absence levels for SEN pupils are above the national average

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) had an overall absence rate of 6.6 per cent compared to 4.0 per cent for those with no identified SEN.

The percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN that are persistent absentees is approximately three times higher than the percentage for pupils with no identified SEN.

Overall and persistent absentee rates for pupils with a statement of SEN have fallen compared to recent years.

Absence rates are higher later in school

Pupils in national curriculum year group 11 had an overall absence rate that was 1.5 times higher than the rate for pupils in national curriculum year group 7, 5.9 and 3.9 per cent respectively. Pupils in national curriculum year 1 and below had an overall absence rate of 4.4 per cent.

---

Absence rates for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils are higher than any other pupil characteristics	<p>The overall absence rates for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma were 17.9 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively (see technical note 12.3).</p> <p>The overall absence rates for pupils of a Chinese and Black-African ethnicity were 2.4 per cent and 2.8 per cent respectively, substantially lower than the national average of 4.4 per cent.</p>
---	---

---

## 7. Absence for four year olds (Table 7)

Absence data for four year olds (who are not of compulsory school age) was collected for the first time for autumn term 2012.

The overall absence rate for four year olds dropped from 6.4 per cent in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 to 5.3 per cent in autumn 2013 and spring 2014.

## 8. Pupil referral unit absence (Table 8)

Absence data for pupil referral units (PRUs), including alternative provision academies, was collected for the first time in the spring 2014 School Census, previously this information was only collected annually (see technical note 12.18).

The overall absence rate for pupil referral units in autumn 2013 and spring 2014 was 31.4 per cent.

The percentage of pupil enrolments in pupil referral units classified as persistent absentees (missing 38 or more sessions) in autumn 2013 and spring 2014 was 38.3 per cent.

## 9. Consultation on improvements to pupil absence statistics

This section details a user consultation on changes to the way the Department for Education publishes pupil absence statistics and the way persistent absence is measured. We would welcome responses from users on the changes proposed and in particular responses to the set of questions at the end of this chapter.

The changes that we are proposing are designed to make the absence statistics clearer and more useful:

---

Distinction between provisional and final data...	The difference between the indicative termly statistics published in May and October and the final statistics in March will be clear and the limitations of each publication will be better documented.
More usable format...	The data will be published in a machine readable format making it easier for our users to carry our further analysis.
A more transparent persistent absence measure...	The new measure will take better account of the differing length of school terms between schools, meaning the measure is more reliable and fair for all. The measure will be easier to understand.

---

## Proposed changes to the format of absence SFRs

### Background

There are currently three separate and distinct statistical publications on pupil absence each academic year:

**May SFR that covers pupil absence for the autumn term.** This provides a very early indication of absence and is often used to monitor absence due to illness over the winter months. These statistics are indicative and the least robust as a measure of long term trends in pupil absence.

**October SFR that covers pupil absence for the autumn and spring terms.** This information is used by Ofsted during their school inspections, full year information is not used due to the timeliness of the release.

**March SFR that covers pupil absence for the full academic year.** This SFR contains the full year data and includes breakdowns by a range of pupil characteristics. The data are robust and provide a full and final picture of pupil absence.

In July, we consulted with some key users to propose that we discontinue the autumn and spring term SFR published in October. Following user feedback, we decided that we will not discontinue the SFR as our users require the data to inform policy decisions and to monitor absence trends during the school year.

### Proposal

Instead, we are proposing to publish one National Statistics publication with three parts. The publication would have the following schedule.

**May – part 1: Interim autumn term absence** – this part will include the same information that is currently published in the autumn term SFR, however the information will be published in a machine readable CSV format rather than in data tables. This will provide users with a greater range of breakdowns. This part will also have a short commentary on the headline figures.

**October – part 2: Interim combined autumn and spring term absence** – this part will include the same information that is currently published in the autumn and spring term SFR. It will be published in the same format as outlined in part 1.

**March – part 3: Full year results** – the same information will be published with a focus on commentary and understanding the underlying trends.

There will be no loss of information within the interim releases; we intend to make it easier for users to find all of our data in one place, including time series information to allow users to compare data over time. An example of how absence by reason will be presented in the interim SFR tables can be found in ‘additional table 7’ as part of the ‘additional tables’ attachment or in the ‘proposed SFR restructure’ document as a machine readable CSV format of the ‘SFR38\_2014\_UD’ attachment.

We will also publish a “Guide to absence statistics” which will contain detailed information on the background, methodology and data quality covering all three parts.

## **Persistent absence methodology**

### Background

A pupil enrolment is currently defined as being a persistent absentee if they miss around 15 per cent or more of all possible sessions. However, historically this 15 per cent has not been calculated at enrolment level, but is instead based on the distributional mode of the total number of sessions for all pupil enrolments. Thus, the threshold (usually 46 sessions for five half terms and 56 sessions for six half terms) does not reflect an actual 15 per cent of the total number of sessions each pupil enrolment may have.

### Proposal

We are proposing that persistent absence is now reported using a pupil level distribution, where a pupil enrolment is defined as a persistent absentee only if they miss 15 per cent or more of the actual total number of sessions available to them individually (please see additional tables 1 to 5 and technical note 12.29 for more information). This change has three main advantages:

1. The measure will be more robust to differences in the length of the academic year (or terms) either between years or within the same year but between different schools.
2. It will be a more transparent and fair measure where pupils can only be persistently absent if they miss 15 per cent of their own total number of sessions.
3. Persistent absentee figures will be calculated in a similar way to overall absence, comparing levels of absence against a pupil’s individual possible sessions.

Data on both the current and proposed persistent absence will also be published in the full year SFR in March and the interim autumn term absence in May 2015, so users can fully understand the differences.

### Impact

The proportion of pupil enrolments that are persistently absent under the proposed methodology increases when compared to the current methodology.

The overall persistent absentee trend remains the same for both methodologies. There is still a clear downward trend in the proportion of pupil enrolments that are persistently absent under the proposed method, with a notable reduction during recent years.

The table below shows the difference in persistent absentee levels when applying the proposed methodology. There is variable change between the two methodologies each year; this reflects changes in term lengths which is shown by the possible sessions (mode) values in Figure 4 (below). Years with a lower typical number of possible sessions will generally see larger changes between the two methodologies. This is because shorter term lengths give less opportunity for pupils to hit the required threshold and become persistent absentees, leading to a lower persistent absentee rate under the current measure. When comparing this to the proposed, more consistent measure you see higher differences where these term lengths occur.

This change has no impact on overall absence levels, as overall absence is based on whether a pupil misses at least one session in a given period.

Figure 4: State-funded primary and secondary schools, differences between persistent absentee (PA) methodologies.

	Autumn 2006 and spring 2007	Autumn 2007 and spring 2008	Autumn 2008 and spring 2009	Autumn 2009 and spring 2010	Autumn 2010 and spring 2011	Autumn 2011 and spring 2012	Autumn 2012 and spring 2013	Autumn 2013 and spring 2014
Number of enrolments	6,444,625	6,352,355	6,287,410	6,265,000	6,267,410	6,278,520	6,330,390	6,417,375
<b>Current methodology:</b>								
Number of PA	566,115	532,185	528,095	439,105	450,330	310,435	310,580	262,255
Percentage PA	8.8	8.4	8.4	7.0	7.2	4.9	4.9	4.1
<b>Proposed methodology:</b>								
Number of PA	611,740	575,130	549,075	498,450	452,830	361,870	377,175	287,320
Percentage PA	9.5	9.1	8.7	8.0	7.2	5.8	6.0	4.5
<b>Difference:</b>								
Number of PA	45,625	42,945	20,980	59,345	2,500	51,430	66,595	25,065
Percentage PA	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.9	0.0	0.8	1.1	0.4
Possible sessions (mode)	254	242	258	250	264	250	250	260

*Based on unrounded figures*

The typical possible sessions for pupils vary considerably when looking at termly data each year, see figure 4. This difference makes it difficult to maintain a standard and consistent approach when using the current persistent absentee methodology. Historically, even where the mode possible sessions may have suggested it, we have rarely altered our thresholds, see technical note 12.9. The proposed methodology resolves this issue by taking into account each pupils' individual possible sessions.

## Your views

We would like to collect views on the following:

Whether the proposal to publish absence statistics in the format outlined above from May 2015 meets your needs.

1. Are there any aspects which users feel should not be taken forward.
2. Are there any developments which are not included in the proposed plan that users feel would be essential.
3. Whether the proposed changes to the persistent absence methodology are an improvement.

The Department would be grateful if you could respond to this consultation by submitting your comments to [schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk) by 28<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

## 10. List of tables

The following tables are available in excel format on the Department's statistics website: [Pupil absence in schools in England](#).

### **Main tables**

#### **Figures**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Overall absence rates                                       | 5a State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by ethnic group                       |
| 2 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Percentage of pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees | 5b State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by ethnic group: persistent absentees |

#### **National Tables**

- 1 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Rates of absence
- 2 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Persistent absentees
- 3 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Absence by reason and gender
- 4a State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by characteristics
- 4b State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by characteristics: persistent absentees

#### **Local authority tables**

- 6 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by type of school
- 7 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence for four year olds

#### **Pupil referral unit table**

- 8 Pupil referral units: Pupil absence

### **Additional tables**

#### **Figure**

Additional figure  
State-funded primary and secondary schools: Percentage of pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees, methodology comparison

#### **National tables**

- Additional table 1  
State-funded primary and secondary schools: Persistent absentees, proposed methodology
- Additional table 2  
State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by characteristics: persistent absentees, proposed methodology
- Additional table 3  
State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by ethnic group: persistent absentees, proposed methodology

#### **Local authority table**

Additional table 4  
State-funded primary and secondary schools: Proposed persistent absence methodology

#### **Pupil referral unit table**

Additional table 5  
Pupil referral units: Proposed persistent absence methodology

#### **School level table**

Additional table 6  
State-funded primary and secondary schools: Proposed persistent absence methodology, school level underlying data

#### **Proposed restructure table**

Additional table 7  
State-funded primary and secondary schools: Proposed SFR restructure, absence by reason

When reviewing the tables, please note the following:

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 protects confidentiality.
So 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 pupil 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 which can be found at <a href="http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/policy%20statement%20on%20confidentiality.pdf">http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/policy%20statement%20on%20confidentiality.pdf</a> .
And adopt symbols to help identify this	<p>Symbols are used in the tables as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>0 zero</li> <li>x small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality</li> <li>. not applicable</li> </ul>
Persistent absentee figures should be treated with caution	Termly data can be affected by the term length. Longer terms have a greater number of possible sessions which provide more opportunity for pupils to become persistent absentees based on fixed thresholds. Only full year absence figures give a definitive view of persistent absence. The persistent absentee information in this release should be used with care.

## 11. Background: Underlying/transparency data

This SFR is accompanied by underlying data, including national, local authority and school level information. The accompanying file includes a 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](#).

## 12. Technical notes

- 12.1 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.

### Definitions

- 12.2 The measures of absence used here are rates of overall, authorised and unauthorised absence and persistent absentees. 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 this is supplied to the school after the School Census database has closed, the absence will still be recorded as “no reason yet”. In this respect, using overall absence rates and the rate of persistent absentees gives more suitable data for performance reporting.
- 12.3 Caution is recommended when interpreting the data for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma children due to potential under-reporting for these ethnic classifications.
- 12.4 The Department has published “Advice on School Attendance which explains how schools should apply the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 and subsequent amendment and the use of the national codes to record pupil attendance and absence in schools. This advice is available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/attendance/a00216341/school-attendance>.
- 12.5 In law, parents of children of compulsory school age (aged 5 to 15 at the start of the schools year) are required to ensure that they receive a suitable education by either regular attendance at school or otherwise. Failure of a parent to secure regular attendance of their school registered child of compulsory school age can lead to prosecution. Local authorities (LAs) and schools are responsible in law to address poor attendance.
- 12.6 Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day: once at the beginning of a 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.
- 12.7 Authorised absence is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the schools. This includes instances of absence for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided e.g. illness. Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences and late arrivals. The Department’s view is that any absence can harm a pupil’s educational progress, whether authorised or not.

- 12.8 Absence data for the second half of the summer term (the 6<sup>th</sup> half term) was collected by the Department for the first time in the Autumn 2013 School Census; previously absence data had been collected for autumn term, spring term and the first half of the summer term. A persistent absentee threshold for the full year has also been introduced. Whilst six half term data is more indicative of the school year five half term data is still being published alongside six half term data until meaningful time series can be published.
- 12.9 The Department's key measure of persistent absence relates to the academic year and is defined as those having 56 or more sessions of absence (authorised or unauthorised) during the full academic year or 46 or more sessions during the first five half terms, around 15 per cent of possible sessions. For autumn and spring terms, figures show how many enrolments have already become persistent absentees, as well as those who are, or may become, persistent absentees based on the standard threshold of 38 or more sessions of absence. Our termly persistent absence thresholds are reviewed each term to account for any changes to the mode possible sessions for all pupils, however these thresholds do not tend to change from year to year. See table below for standard thresholds.

	Persistent absence threshold (around 15 per cent of possible sessions)
Autumn term	22 sessions
Spring term	16 sessions
Autumn and Spring terms	38 sessions
First five half terms	46 sessions
Full year – six half terms	56 sessions

Only full year figures provide a definitive view of persistent absence. Autumn term only changes can be more strongly influenced by illness than any long term change in absence, whilst two term absence data lessens this effect it can still be affected by the length of the spring term (i.e. when Easter falls). Termly data can be affected by the term length. Longer terms have a greater number of possible sessions which provide more opportunity for pupils to become persistent absentees based on fixed thresholds. No adjustments have been made to account for this; trends are for indicative purposes only.

### Calculation of absence rates

- 12.10 The methodology used to calculate absence rates is shown below. Further calculations, including absence rates by reason, can be found in the metadata specification document in the Underlying Data section of this release at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-pupils-absence>.

Percentage of sessions missed due to overall absence:

$$\frac{\textit{Total overall absence sessions}}{\textit{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$$

Percentage of sessions missed due to authorised absence:

$$\frac{\textit{Total authorised absence sessions}}{\textit{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$$

Percentage of sessions missed due to unauthorised absence:

$$\frac{\textit{Total unauthorised absence sessions}}{\textit{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$$

Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees:

$$\frac{\textit{Number of enrolments classed as persistent absentees}}{\textit{Number of enrolments}} \times 100$$

## Presentation

- 12.11 Within this release schools are categorised into three phases; state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and pupil referral units. “State-funded primary” refers to local authority maintained primary schools, primary sponsor-led and converter academies including free schools. “State-funded secondary” includes city technology colleges, all-through schools and all secondary academies, including free schools, university technical colleges and studio schools. “Pupil referral units” covers alternative provision academies as well as pupil referral units.
- 12.12 In the Spring 2014 School Census, the Department introduced a new “all-through” school phase. Schools with a statutory low age of below seven and a statutory high age of above 14 have been flagged as all-through schools. We are currently considering and developing a methodology for the possible introduction of the new phase into the main tables of future releases. For this release an approximation of all-through absence can be found using the school level underlying data.

## Data Collection

- 12.13 In 2006 the School Census started to collect pupil level absence data, relating to the 2005/06 school year, on a termly basis (spring, summer and autumn collections) for maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies. Absence data for 2005/06 were not released on a termly basis as this was the first year of collection. For the 2006/07 school year the scope of collection was extended to also include maintained primary schools and special schools. For the 2013/14 school year the scope of the collection was extended again to collect termly pupil referral unit absence information. The School Census collects information for a pupil’s attendance in the term prior to the census. For example, the spring School Census collects information on absence during the autumn term. Special schools provide annual absence data in the Autumn School Census and are therefore not included in this release.

12.14 Reason for absence was collected for the first time for the autumn term 2006. Schools are 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. Some schools do not have the required software to provide absence data by reason, and therefore are only able to provide overall totals. In such instances absence is categorised as “unclassified” reason for absence. To derive absence levels for each enrolment, the sum of their absence by reason has been used, if this is missing or is less than the total provided, their overall totals have been used.

12.15 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.

109 sponsor-led academies opened on or after the beginning of the spring 2014 term and incorrectly returned absence data for the autumn term. The autumn term data for these schools has been excluded from this analysis.

Also, 64 sponsor-led academies opened part way through the spring term and incorrectly returned absence data for their predecessor school. As the combined absence data would then related to both the academy and their predecessor school these academies have been completely removed from this analysis.

Year on year comparisons of local authority data may be affected by schools converting to academies.

12.16 Schools with fewer than 6 pupil enrolments aged between five and fifteen are removed from our analysis. For this release, 13 such schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

12.17 Absence data for four year olds was collected for the first time for the autumn term 2012. The Department’s view is children as young as 4 should have good attendance as part of their education. It is important that schools are able to work with parents of 4 year olds to develop good patterns of school attendance before they reach compulsory school age, and avoid it becoming a problem later on in their schooling career. This will ensure that good attendance habits are embedded in children as soon as they reach compulsory school age.

12.18 In spring 2014, the Department collected termly absence data for pupil referral units (PRUs) for the first time via the School Census; previously absence data for PRUs had been collected annually via the PRU Census. This Census has been discontinued. This is the first year that autumn and spring term absence figures for PRUs have been included in this release.

12.19 Guidance on the School Census, including absence, is available on the DfE statistics website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/school-census>

The technical specification for the School Census can be found at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/251488/2014\\_spring\\_summer\\_school\\_census\\_business\\_tech\\_spec\\_v1-1.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/251488/2014_spring_summer_school_census_business_tech_spec_v1-1.pdf). This explains what data are collected and what data validation is in place.

## Data Coverage and Quality

12.20 Schools have provided, via the School Census, individual level attendance data relating to autumn term 2013 and spring term 2014 for pupils aged 4 to 15 (at the start of the school year) who are non-boarders. The School Census 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.

12.21 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. This allows for schools to be held accountable for pupil absences, as the absence is attached to enrolments at a particular school, not the pupil.

12.22 Absence data for autumn 2013 and spring 2014 terms have been derived by linking pupil records collected in the spring 2014 and summer 2014 School Census to derive overall totals for the number of possible sessions; the number of sessions missed by reason for absence and the number of sessions missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence for each enrolment. Derived absence totals have been linked to a pupil's characteristics data at the time of the absence. Where characteristics data are missing, information collected in the following census have been used, except for ethnicity which is only collected in the spring School Census.

12.23 From September 2011, the way schools record attendance and absence for dually registered pupils changed. Attendance code D (Dual registered at another educational establishment) is no longer counted in the School Census as an attendance. Each school now only records the attendance and absence for the sessions a pupil is required to attend at their school, previously each school recorded all absence. This change affects a relatively small number of pupils and has only a marginal effect on absence rates.

12.24 Following changes to attendance regulations and procedures, from 2012 the School Census collects attendance information about pupils unable to attend school due to exceptional circumstances using attendance code Y. Schools use code Y to record the sessions where a pupil is unable to attend because:

- The school site, or part of it, is closed due to an unavoidable cause;
- The transport provided by the school or local authority is not available, and their home is not within walking distance; or
- A local or national emergency has resulted in widespread disruption to travel which has prevented the pupil from attending school.

These sessions, however, are not counted as possible attendance and account for a relatively small proportion of sessions in autumn 2013 and spring 2014.

12.25 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.

12.26 The information in this release 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.

12.27 The information presented here 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.

12.28 The information contained in this release relates only to those pupils on roll of a maintained primary school or maintained secondary school, city technology college, pupil referral unit, or academy. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school.

### **Proposed Persistent Absentee Methodology**

12.29 Previously, persistent absentees have been identified using a threshold measure, this threshold is calculated by taking 15 per cent of the mode total number of possible sessions for all pupil enrolments. Since the number of sessions for individual pupils varies between schools, and pupils, we are proposing a new measure which will take this into account. Rather than using a standardised threshold measure, the proposed methodology uses a pupil’s actual possible sessions to calculate whether they are persistently absent. Formally, if a pupil’s individual overall absence rate is greater than or equal to 15 per cent they will be classified as a persistent absentee:

$$\frac{A \text{ pupils individual overall absence}}{A \text{ pupils individual possible sessions}} \times 100 \geq 15.0$$

This new measure will give a variety of advantages:

- Be more sensitive to differences in the length of the academic year, either between years or within the same year but between different schools;
- Be a more transparent and fair measure;
- Be consistent with calculations for overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates;
- Allow the link between absence and attainment to be properly investigated as both will be derived at enrolment level.

A small minority of pupils, those with small numbers of possible sessions (eg. due to moving schools) could be classified as persistently absent when missing relatively few sessions. We are not adjusting our data to account for these pupils and will identify all enrolments, regardless of their possible sessions, with an overall absence rate of 15 per cent or higher as a persistent absentee.

The calculation for persistent absentee rate (the percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistently absent from a given group) will remain unchanged.

## 13. Want more?

---

Want previously published figures?

For recent pupil absence figures visit: [Pupil absence in schools in England](#)

---

Want Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland?

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.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.stats@wales.gsi.gov.uk) or [Welsh Government – Statistics and Research](#)

Scotland: [school.stats@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.stats@wales.gsi.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](#)

---

For related publications

For the latest full year absence figures, visit [Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics 2012/13](#)

---

Revisions?

There are no planned revision to this Statistical First Release, however, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the Departmental revision policy

---

## 14. Got a query? Like to give feedback?

---

If from the media

Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. 020 7925 6789

If non-media

Education Standards Evidence and Dissemination Division, Level 2, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. 020 7925 6789  
[schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk)

---



Department  
for Education



© Crown copyright 2014

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [Open Government Licence](#) or e-mail: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at [schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk).

This document is also available from our website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-pupil-absence>.