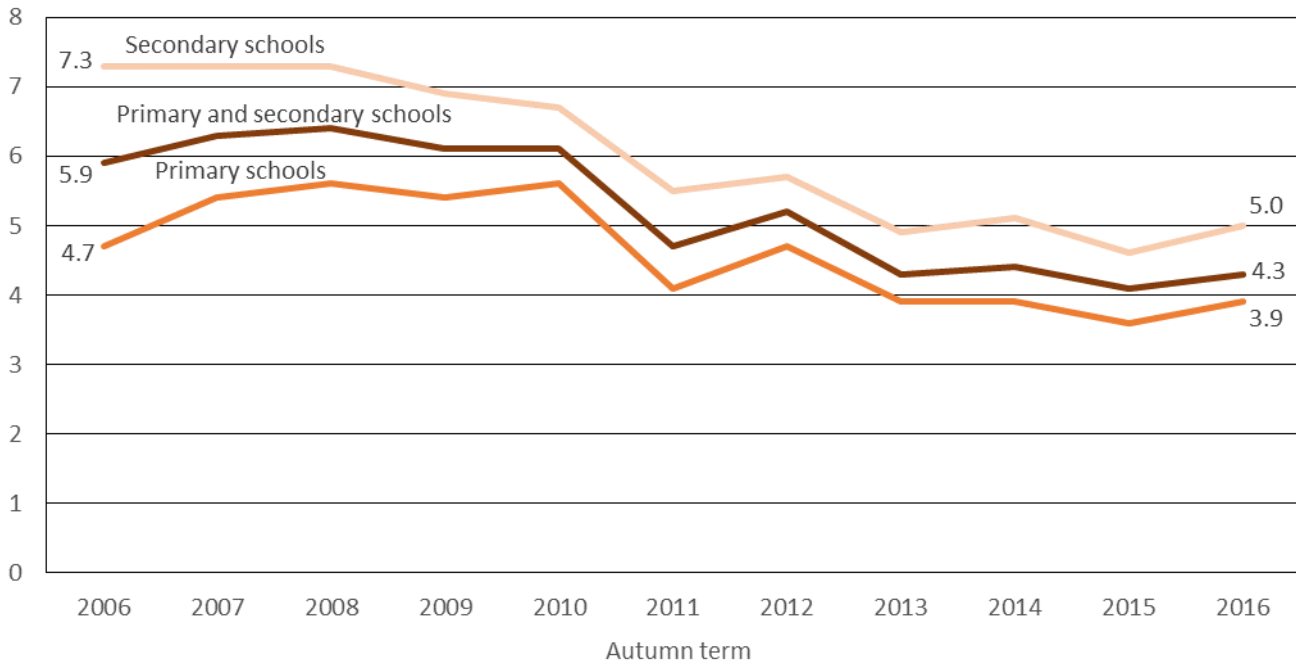




SFR 20/2017, 18 May 2017

**Overall absence rates have increased since last year**



It should be noted that the absence information in this release is for autumn term 2016 only. Findings from individual terms can be volatile and therefore figures and trends in this release should be treated as indicative only.

The overall absence rate for state-funded primary and secondary schools has increased from 4.1 per cent in autumn 2015 to 4.3 per cent in autumn 2016.

Overall absence rates have followed a generally downward trend since autumn 2008 when the overall absence rate for state-funded primary and secondary schools was 6.4 per cent

**Absences due to illness and unauthorised holidays have increased**

Absence due to illness has increased from 2.4 per cent in autumn 2015 to 2.5 per cent in autumn 2016. Illness remains the most common reason for absence, accounting for 58.4 per cent of all absences. Unauthorised holidays have also increased, from 0.2 per cent of possible sessions in autumn 2015 to 0.3 per cent in autumn 2016. Levels of absence for other reasons remain relatively unchanged compared to last year.

**More than one in ten pupils were persistently absent during autumn 2016**

The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary and secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees during the autumn term rose from 10.3 per cent in autumn 2015 to 11.4 per cent in autumn 2016.

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## About this release

This statistical first release (SFR) reports on absence in state-funded primary and secondary schools and pupil referral units during the autumn 2016 term.

The Department uses two key measures to monitor pupil absence – overall and persistent absence. Absence by reason is also included in this release. Figures are available at national, regional, local authority and school level.

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

A '[Guide to absence statistics](#)', which provides historical information on absence statistics, as well as information on the data sources and technical background information on the figures and data collection, should be referenced alongside this release. It also explains the coverage and quality of the statistics, and explains the methodology used in producing the data.

## In this publication

The following tables are included in the SFR:

- SFR20\_2017\_Main\_tables (Excel .xls and open format)
- Underlying data (open format .csv and metadata .txt).

This includes local authority level information and is accompanied by a metadata document that describes underlying data files.

## Feedback

We welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at [schools.statistics@education.gov.uk](mailto:schools.statistics@education.gov.uk)

# 1. Absence rates (Tables 1, 2, 3 & 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.

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

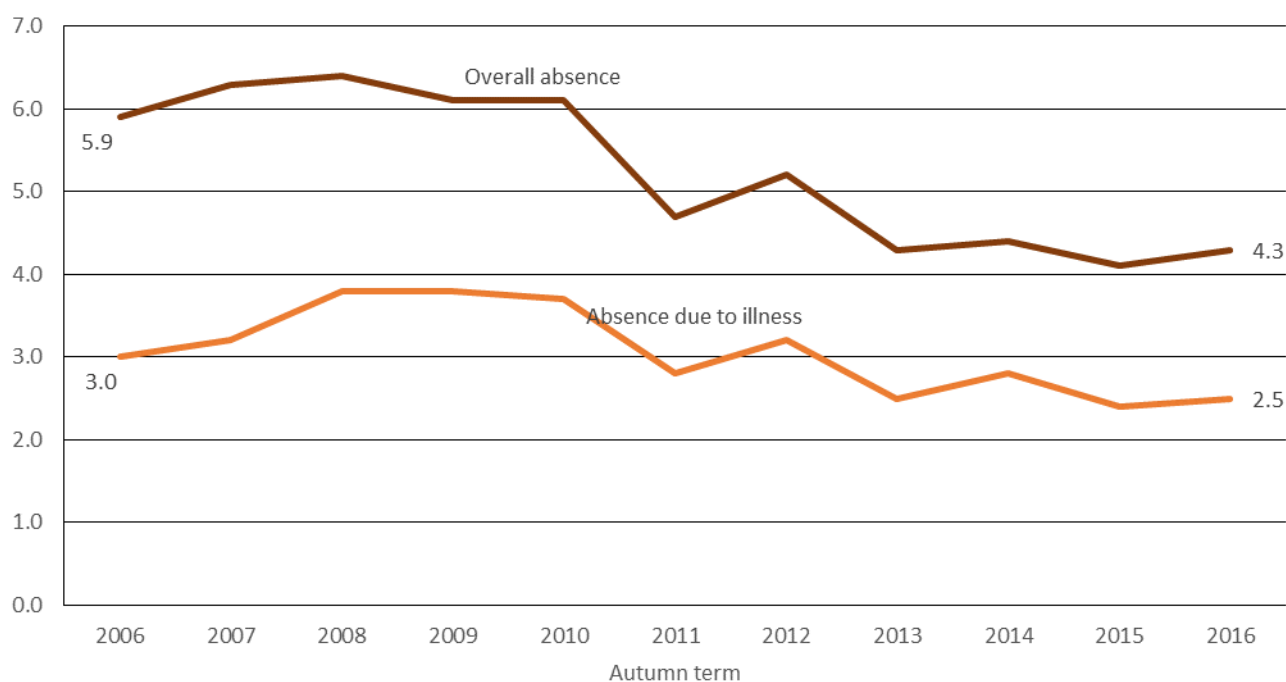
The overall absence rate for state-funded primary and secondary schools has increased since last year, from 4.1 per cent in autumn 2015 to 4.3 per cent in autumn 2016. In primary schools the overall absence rate increased from 3.6 per cent in autumn 2015 to 3.9 in autumn 2016 and in secondary schools increased from 4.6 per cent in autumn 2015 to 5.0 per cent in autumn 2016. For both school types there has been a general downward trend in overall absence rates since autumn 2008.

The total number of days missed due to overall absence across state-funded primary and secondary schools has risen since last year, from 18.1 million in autumn 2015 to 19.6 million in autumn 2016. This partly reflects the rise in the total number of pupil enrolments however the average number of days missed per enrolment has also increased slightly from 2.8 days in autumn 2015 to 3.0 days in autumn 2016.

Both authorised and unauthorised absence increased, resulting in the increase in overall absence. For state-funded primary and secondary schools, the authorised absence rate increased from 3.1 per cent in autumn 2015 to 3.3 per cent in autumn 2016 and the unauthorised absence rate increased from 0.9 per cent in autumn 2015 to 1.0 per cent in autumn 2016.

Illness is the most common reason for absence (accounting for 58.4% of all absences) and heavily influences overall absence rates (see chart 1.) Illness increased from 2.4 per cent of possible sessions in autumn 2015 to 2.5 per cent in autumn 2016; unauthorised holidays rose from 0.2 per cent to 0.3 per cent over the same period. Other reasons remained stable.

**Chart 1: Comparison of the trend in overall and illness absence rates:**  
England, Autumn term 2006 to Autumn term 2016



## 2. Persistent Absence (Table 1 and underlying data)

### Persistent absence definition

Pupils are identified as persistent absentees if they miss 10% or more of their own possible sessions.

$$\text{Persistent absence rate} = \frac{\text{Number of enrolments classed as persistent absentees}}{\text{Number of enrolments}} \times 100$$

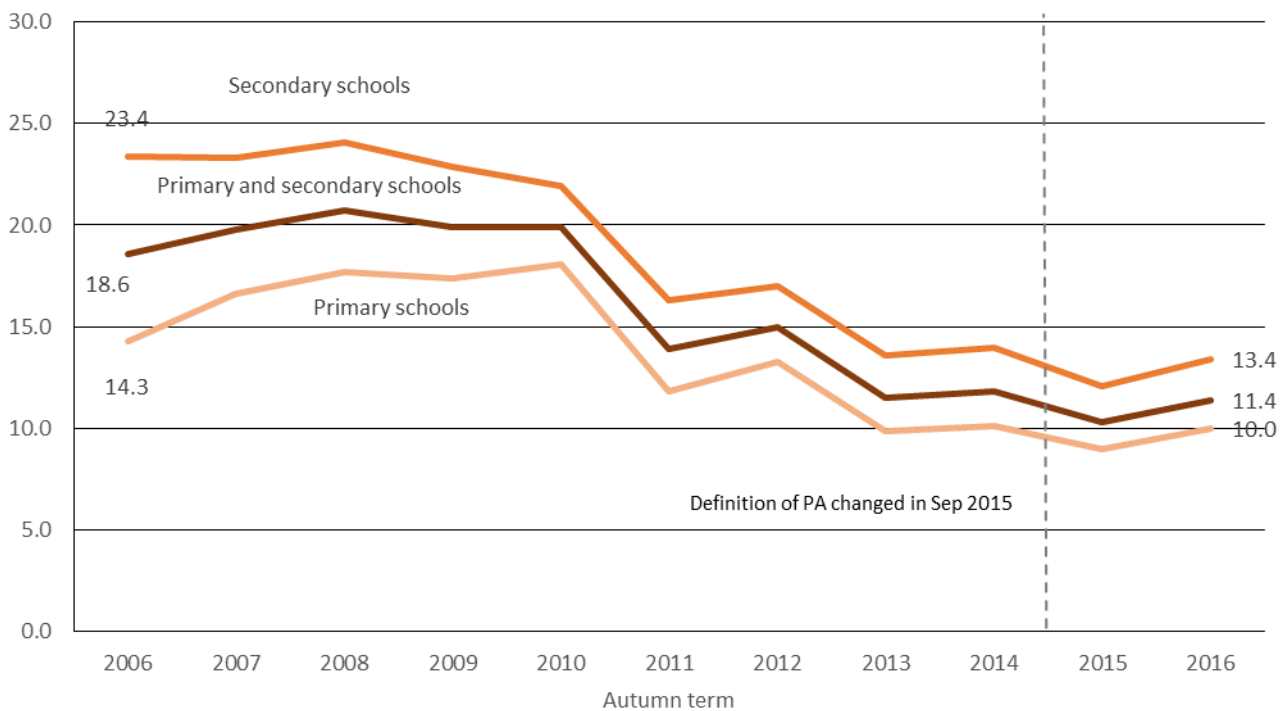
The persistent absentee measure changed as of the start of the 2015/16 academic year. Time series data in this release has been recalculated using the new methodology but caution should be used when interpreting these series as they may be impacted by the change in the measure itself.

For more information on this and on the methodologies used in previous years, please see the [‘Guide to absence statistics’](#).

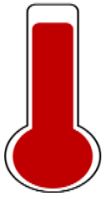
The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary and secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees rose from 10.3 per cent in autumn 2015 to 11.4 per cent in autumn 2016.

Secondary schools have the higher rate of persistent absence, 13.4 per cent of enrolments, compared to 10.0 per cent of enrolments in primary schools.

**Chart 2: Percentage of enrolments that are persistent absentees**  
England, Autumn term 2006 to Autumn term 2016



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



Illness (not medical or dental appointments) remained the most common reason for absence in autumn 2016, accounting for 58.4 per cent of all absence. This is a lower proportion than seen in previous years, 58.8 per cent in autumn 2015 and 64.2 per cent in 2014.

The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to illness has increased since last year, from 2.4 per cent in autumn 2015 to 2.5 in autumn 2016.

More than half (58.4 per cent) of all pupils enrolments have had at least one session of absence due to illness, an increase from 56.4 per cent in autumn 2015.



The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to family holidays (authorised and unauthorised) has increased from 0.3 per cent in autumn 2015 to 0.4 per cent in autumn 2016; the authorised rate is now 0.1 per cent and the unauthorised rate is 0.3 per cent. The rate of authorised holidays has remained stable over the last 3 years, and the rate of unauthorised holidays has increased from 0.2 per cent in Autumn 2015.

The proportion of absence that family holidays (authorised and unauthorised) accounted for has increased, from 7.6 per cent in autumn 2015 to 8.3 per cent of all absences in autumn 2016, though this proportion is driven by changes in the levels of absence for other reasons.

The percentage of pupils who missed at least one session due to a family holiday increased from 1.1 per cent in autumn 2015 to 1.2 per cent in autumn 2016 for authorised holidays and from 4.2 per cent to 5.0 per cent for unauthorised holidays.

The absence figures in this publication are the first that relate fully to the period after the *Isle of Wight Council v Jon Platt* High Court judgment (which was in May 2016). However, interpretation of any trends should be treated with caution due to the volatility of single term absence figures. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2016/17 school year are intended for publication in March 2018.

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

The overall absence rate for four year olds (who are not of compulsory school age) has stayed the same as in autumn 2015 at 4.9 per cent. Absence recorded for four year olds is not treated as 'authorised' or 'unauthorised' and is therefore reported as overall absence only.

### 5. Pupil referral unit absence (Table 4)

The overall absence rate for pupils in pupil referral units (PRUs) has increased from 30.5 per cent in autumn 2015 to 32.2 per cent in autumn 2016. Pupil referral units are an alternative provision of education outside of mainstream and special schools, and their absence rate has historically been higher than other types of schools.

Between autumn 2015 and autumn 2016 there was an increase in both the authorised absence rate (from 17.6 to 18.5 per cent) and the unauthorised absence rate (from 12.9 to 13.7 per cent) in pupil referral units. The increase in overall absence is largely due to increases in authorised and unauthorised absence for 'other circumstances', and for illness.

The percentage of enrolments in pupil referral units who are persistent absentees rose from 68.1 per cent in autumn 2015 to 70.4 per cent in autumn 2016.

## 6. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in Excel format on the Department's statistics website.

### National tables

#### Charts

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

#### Tables

- 1 Pupil absence and pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees by type of school
- 2 Pupil absence by reason
- 3 Pupil enrolments with one or more session of absence by reason
- 4 Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for pupil referral units

When reviewing the tables, please note that:

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We preserve confidentiality	The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that all published or disseminated statistics produced by the Department for Education protect confidentiality.
We round numbers	Enrolment numbers at national and regional levels have been rounded to the nearest 5. Enrolment numbers of 1 or 2 have been suppressed to protect confidentiality. Where any number is shown as 0, the original figure was also 0. Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is less than 3, the percentage has been suppressed. This suppression is consistent with the <a href="#">Departmental statistical policy</a> .
We adopt symbols to help identify suppression	Symbols are used in the tables as follows: 0 zero x small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality . not applicable .. not available

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## 7. Further information is available

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Want previously published figures?

For the previous full year pupil absence figures visit:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2015-to-2016>

For the previous autumn term pupil absence figures visit:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2015>

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

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

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

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For related publications

For related publications, visit [Pupil absence in schools in England](#)

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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](#).

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## 8. 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.

## 9. 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 information used in this release is sourced from the school census, further information is available in chapter 4 of the guide to absence statistics.

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.  
  
9 sponsor-led academies opened part way through the term and incorrectly returned absence data for their predecessor school. As the combined absence data would then be 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.
- Schools with fewer than 6 enrolments aged between five and fifteen are removed from our analysis. For this release, 17 schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

## 10. Get in touch

### Media enquiries

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

Tel: 020 7783 8300

### Other enquiries/feedback

Education Standards Evidence and Dissemination Division, Level 2, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.

Email: [Schools.statistics@education.gov.uk](mailto:Schools.statistics@education.gov.uk)





Department  
for Education



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email [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

write to Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London, TW9 4DU

About this publication:

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This document is also available from our website “statistics: pupil absence”

Reference: [SFR 20/2017]



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