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## **PUPIL ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND, AUTUMN TERM 2011**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This Statistical First Release (SFR) reports on absence in state-funded primary and secondary schools during autumn term 2011. It provides information on the levels of absence (overall, authorised and unauthorised) by type of school, on persistent absence and on absence by reason.

### **KEY POINTS**

The latest figures show that in autumn term 2011 there was a substantial decrease in absence levels compared to autumn term 2010. See the background section below for an explanation of factors that may have affected these figures.

#### **Persistent Absence (Table 2)**

A persistent absentee is defined as having 46 or more half day sessions of absence during the year, around 15 per cent of possible half day sessions.

- in state-funded primary schools, the proportion of pupils who were persistent absentees (had already missed 46 or more sessions during autumn term) decreased, from 0.5 per cent of pupils to 0.3 per cent of pupils, the lowest level over the last five years.
- in state-funded secondary schools, the proportion of pupils who were persistent absentees decreased, from 1.6 per cent of pupils to 1.3 per cent of pupils, the lowest level over the last five years.

Pupils missing 22 or more half day sessions in the autumn term, around 15 per cent of possible half day sessions, are potentially on track to become persistent absentees.

- in state-funded primary schools, the proportion of pupils who were on track to become persistent absentees (had already missed 22 or more sessions during autumn term) decreased, from 6.7 per cent of pupils to 4.1 per cent of pupils, the lowest level over the last five years.
- in state-funded secondary schools, the proportion of pupils who were on track to become persistent absentees decreased, from 9.5 per cent of pupils to 6.8 per cent of pupils, the lowest level over the last five years.

See Technical Note 18 for an explanation of how varying term lengths affect these figures.

## **Absence rates (Table 1)**

*Absence rates (the percentage of all possible half day sessions that were missed through absence)*

The figures show that for autumn term 2011, compared to autumn term 2010:

### *Overall absence*

- The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools decreased, from 6.1 per cent to 4.7 per cent, the lowest level over the last five years.
- The overall absence rate in state-funded primary schools decreased, from 5.6 per cent to 4.1 per cent, the lowest level over the last five years.
- The overall absence rate in state-funded secondary schools decreased, from 6.7 per cent to 5.5 per cent, the lowest level over the last five years.

### *Authorised absence*

- The authorised absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools decreased, from 5.1 per cent to 3.9 per cent, the lowest level over the last five years.
- The authorised absence rate in state-funded primary schools decreased, from 4.8 per cent to 3.5 per cent, the lowest level over the last five years.
- The authorised absence rate in state-funded secondary schools decreased, from 5.3 per cent to 4.3 per cent, the lowest level over the last five years.

### *Unauthorised absence*

- The unauthorised absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools was 0.9 per cent, there has been marginal change in recent years.
- The unauthorised absence rate in state-funded primary schools was 0.6 per cent, very similar to the previous two years.
- The unauthorised absence rate in state-funded secondary schools was 1.2 per cent. The rate has changed little in recent years.

## **Reason for absence (Table 3)**

- The most commonly reported reason for absence was “illness (not medical or dental appointments)”, the same as in the previous year, which accounted for 58 per cent of all absence. This accounts for 2.8 per cent of all possible sessions, compared to 3.7 per cent in the previous autumn term.
- Absence for family holidays accounted for 11 per cent of all absence, similar to the previous year.

## **LOCAL AUTHORITY ANALYSIS**

Local authority level data are provided in table 4. See Technical Note 9.

## **BACKGROUND**

Illness remains the most common reason for pupil absence and the latest figures show a substantial decrease in absence rates for illness between autumn term 2010 and autumn term 2011 (down 24 per cent). Figures from the Health Protection Agency show substantially lower levels of flu-like illness than in previous years. Similarly, the proportion of calls to NHS Direct relating to colds/flu and fever was very low last winter compared with the previous year. Such changes may be reflected in the absence figures. Data from the Health Protection Agency is available at ([http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb\\_C/1284475036543](http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1284475036543)).

There has also been a large fall in absence for religious observance (down 77 per cent but the levels involved are low). Eid fell out of term time and this will explain some of the relatively large fall in absence for religious observance.

There has been a relatively large decrease in absence for agreed family holidays (down 14 per cent) and for "other authorised" reasons (down 26 per cent). This may reflect a growing reluctance for absence to be approved.

It is also possible that the move to a 15 per cent persistent absence threshold, which was introduced last summer, has had an impact. The intention behind the change was for schools to focus on and tackle absence at an early stage.

## **TABLES**

- Table 1** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Rates of absence, England, Autumn Term: 2007 to 2011
- Table 2** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Number and percentage of enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees, England, Autumn Term: 2007 to 2011
- Table 3** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Absence by reason, England, Autumn Term 2011
- Table 4** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil Absence by type of school, by Local Authority area and region, England, Autumn Term 2011

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

In order to improve data accessibility, underlying data will be published at <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001066/index.shtml> on 14 June 2012 in the 'Publication's Underlying Data' section.

## **RELATED PUBLICATIONS**

DfE: Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics: 2010/11  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001060/index.shtml>

DfE: Pupil Absence in Autumn Term 2010  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001003/index.shtml>

Guidance on school and pupil characteristics collected via the School Census is available on the DfE Statistics website: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/schoolcensus.shtml>

## TECHNICAL NOTES

1. The 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

2. The measures of absence used here are rates of overall, authorised and unauthorised absence and persistent absentees. The Department for Education's policy is to focus on all forms of absence, measured through the overall absence rate and its persistent absence rate. 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 (SC) 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.
3. The Department for Education (DfE) has published specific guidance 'Keeping Pupil Registers', which provides guidance on applying the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006; and 'Absence and Attendance Codes' which provides guidance on the use of codes to record pupil attendance and absence in schools." Both are available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/attendance/schoolattendancedata/a0010008/pupil-registration-regulations-and-guidance>.
4. In law, parents of children of compulsory school age (aged 5 to 15 at the start of the school year) are required to ensure that they receive a suitable education by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Failure to comply with this statutory duty can lead to prosecution. Local authorities (LAs) are responsible in law for making sure that pupils attend school.
5. Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day: once at the beginning of the 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.
6. Authorised absence is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes instances of absences for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided (for example, illness).
7. Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences. Arriving late for school, after the register has closed, is recorded as unauthorised absence.
8. As from summer 2011, the Department's key measure of persistent absence (PA) relates to the school year and is defined in terms of those missing 46 or more half day sessions, around 15 per cent of possible sessions. For autumn term, figures show how many enrolments have already become PA, based on missing 46 or more half day sessions and how many are classed as being on track to becoming PAs, based on the standard threshold of 22 or more half day sessions used for the autumn term. To aid transparency and simplicity our termly PA thresholds don't tend to change from year to year (unless there are exceptional circumstances). See technical note 18 for further information.

## Data Collection

9. To account for the growth in the academies sector, the tables include city technology colleges, secondary sponsor-led and converter academies, secondary free schools along with LA maintained secondary schools in a category labelled “state-funded secondary”, and LA maintained primary schools, primary sponsor-led and converter academies and primary free schools in a category labelled “state-funded primary”. Due to the large numbers of schools converting to academies, tables showing maintained schools only are not included in this release. Figures for academies and city technology colleges are not shown separately.
10. In 2006 the School Census started to collect pupil level absence data on a termly basis (spring, summer and autumn collections) from maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies relating to absence during the 2005/06 school year. 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. The SC collects information for a pupil’s attendance in the term prior to the census. For example, the spring SC collects information on absence during the autumn term. Special schools provide annual absence data in the autumn SC and are therefore not included in this release.
11. 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 half day sessions missed due to authorised or unauthorised absence. A small proportion of schools have provided both a breakdown of absence by reason and totals. In addition, a small number of schools do not have the required software to provide absence data by reason, and therefore are only able to provide overall totals. To derive absence rates, the sum of absence by reason has been used unless this is missing or is less than the total provided, in which case overall totals have been used.

## Data Coverage and Quality

12. Schools have provided, via the SC, individual level attendance data relating to autumn term 2011 for pupils aged 5 to 15 (at the start of the school year) who are non-boarders. The SC has collected the number of possible half day sessions of attendance; the number of half day sessions missed, broken down by reason for absence, and overall totals of half day sessions missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence.
13. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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 a 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 2011.

16. For a pupil enrolment, if the number of possible half day sessions in a term is zero/missing or is less than the total number of half day sessions missed due to overall absence, then the enrolment has not been included in this SFR.
17. The changes seen this year are substantial therefore additional quality checks were carried out to confirm the reliability of source data. These quality checks included liaising with a number of schools to ensure data was being captured accurately and detailed exploratory analysis of the data to ensure no systematic issues were affecting the data. No such issues were identified.
18. Termly data can be affected by changes in term length and this appears to be the case for autumn term 2011 when compared to autumn term 2010. Data shows lower numbers of possible sessions across autumn term 2011 compared to the previous autumn. Lower numbers of possible sessions provide less opportunity for pupils to become persistent absentees based on fixed thresholds. No adjustments have been made to account for this. Consequently, comparisons between termly data should be treated with caution. Whole year figures provide the definitive view of persistent absence.
19. The information in this SFR 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 collection.
20. The data presented here are based on attendance registers which are taken twice a day: once at the beginning of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. It therefore 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.
21. The data contained in this SFR relates only to those pupils on the roll of a maintained primary school or maintained secondary school, city technology college, academy or free school. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school.

## **General**

22. Further information, including local authority level analyses are available through the following link:- <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001066/index.shtml>
23. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2011/12 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in March 2013.

## Confidentiality

24. For national tables (tables 1 to 3), enrolment numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5.
25. For the local authority table (table 4), national and regional enrolment numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5. Enrolment numbers of 1 or 2 have been suppressed, being replaced in the table by an 'x'. Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure was also zero. Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is 1 or 2, this has been replaced by an 'x'. 'x' has also been used for secondary suppression to prevent disclosure.
26. The following symbols have been used within this publication:

0	– zero
x	– small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality (see Technical Note 25)
.	– not applicable

## National Statistics Publication

27. 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.

28. There are no 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 which is published at <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/nat-stats.shtml>.

## Enquiries

29. Enquiries (non-media) or feedback about information contained in this document should be addressed to Schools Data Unit, Room 1F Area H, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, Co Durham, DL3 9BG or e-mail [schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk)
30. Media enquiries about information contained in this Statistical First Release should be made to the Department's Press Office at DFE, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT or telephone 020 7783 8300.



Table 1  
**STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):**  
**RATES OF ABSENCE**  
Autumn Term: 2007 - 2011  
England

	Autumn Term 2007	Autumn Term 2008	Autumn Term 2009	Autumn Term 2010	Autumn Term 2011
<b>State-funded primary and secondary schools (1)(2)(3)</b>					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	6,268,135	6,197,070	6,174,080	6,168,270	6,181,045
Percentage of half days missed due to: (5)					
Overall absence	6.3	6.4	6.1	6.1	4.7
Authorised absence	5.3	5.4	5.2	5.1	3.9
Unauthorised absence	0.9	1.0	0.9	1.0	0.9
<b>State-funded primary schools (1)(2)</b>					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	3,320,505	3,285,085	3,285,635	3,304,095	3,360,190
Percentage of half days missed due to: (5)					
Overall absence	5.4	5.6	5.4	5.6	4.1
Authorised absence	4.8	5.0	4.8	4.8	3.5
Unauthorised absence	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.6
<b>State-funded secondary schools (1)(3)</b>					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	2,947,625	2,911,990	2,888,445	2,864,175	2,820,860
Percentage of half days missed due to: (5)					
Overall absence	7.3	7.3	6.9	6.7	5.5
Authorised absence	5.9	6.0	5.6	5.3	4.3
Unauthorised absence	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.2

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes all primary academies, including free schools.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and all secondary academies, including free schools.

(4) Number of pupil enrolments in schools in autumn term 2011. Includes pupils on the school roll for at least one session who are aged between 5 and 15. Excludes boarders. Some pupils may be counted more than once (if they moved schools during the autumn term or are registered in more than one school). See Technical Notes 13, 14 and 16.

(5) The number of sessions missed due to overall/authorised/unauthorised absence expressed as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions.

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts because numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5.

Table 2  
**STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):**  
**NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF ENROLMENTS WHO ARE, OR MAY BECOME, PERSISTENT ABSENTEES (4)(5)**  
Autumn Term: 2007 - 2011  
England

	Autumn Term 2007	Autumn Term 2008	Autumn Term 2009	Autumn Term 2010	Autumn Term 2011
<b>State-funded primary and secondary schools (1)(2)(3)</b>					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	6,268,135	6,197,070	6,174,080	6,168,270	6,181,045
Number of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (5)	99,575	89,020	69,375	64,415	48,025
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees)	1.6	1.4	1.1	1.0	0.8
Number of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (5)(6)	608,455	611,475	514,845	494,490	328,195
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees)	9.7	9.9	8.3	8.0	5.3
<b>State-funded primary schools (1)(2)</b>					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	3,320,505	3,285,085	3,285,635	3,304,095	3,360,190
Number of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (5)	23,160	21,860	17,620	17,210	11,210
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees)	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.3
Number of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (5)(6)	245,240	255,635	218,545	222,470	136,455
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees)	7.4	7.8	6.7	6.7	4.1
<b>State-funded secondary schools (1)(3)</b>					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	2,947,625	2,911,990	2,888,445	2,864,175	2,820,860
Number of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (5)	76,415	67,160	51,755	47,205	36,810
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees)	2.6	2.3	1.8	1.6	1.3
Number of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (5)(6)	363,215	355,840	296,300	272,020	191,740
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees)	12.3	12.2	10.3	9.5	6.8

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes all primary academies, including free schools.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and all secondary academies, including free schools.

(4) Number of pupil enrolments in schools in autumn term 2011. Includes pupils on the school roll for at least one session who are aged between 5 and 15. Excludes boarders. Some pupils may be counted more than once (if they moved schools during the autumn term or are registered in more than one school). See Technical Notes 13, 14 and 16.

(5) Persistent Absentees are defined as having an overall absence rate of around 15 per cent or more. This equates to 46 or more sessions of absence (authorised and unauthorised) during the year. See Technical Notes 8 and 18.

(6) Including those enrolments already defined as being a Persistent Absentee.

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts because numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5.

Table 3  
**STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):**

**ABSENCE BY REASON**

Autumn Term 2011

England

	State-funded primary (1)(2)	State-funded secondary (1)(3)	Total (1)(2)(3)
<b><u>DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE</u></b>			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	59.9	57.2	58.5
Medical/dental appointments	5.9	7.2	6.6
Religious observance	1.2	0.7	1.0
Study leave	0.0	0.4	0.2
Traveller absence	0.4	0.1	0.3
Agreed family holiday	11.3	3.8	7.4
Agreed extended family holiday	0.2	0.1	0.1
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.4	2.3	1.4
Other authorised circumstances	5.1	6.6	5.9
<b>Total Authorised Absence</b>	<b>84.6</b>	<b>78.3</b>	<b>81.3</b>
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Family holiday not agreed	4.5	3.2	3.8
Arrived late	1.3	1.1	1.2
Other unauthorised circumstances	7.8	14.5	11.3
No reason yet	1.8	2.9	2.4
<b>Total Unauthorised Absence</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>18.7</b>
<b>Total Overall Absence</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b><u>ABSENCE RATES BY REASON</u></b>			
Percentage of possible sessions missed due to (5):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	2.5	3.1	2.8
Medical/dental appointments	0.2	0.4	0.3
Religious observance	0.1	0.0	0.0
Study leave	0.0	0.0	0.0
Traveller absence	0.0	0.0	0.0
Agreed family holiday	0.5	0.2	0.3
Agreed extended family holiday	0.0	0.0	0.0
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.0	0.1	0.1
Other authorised circumstances	0.2	0.4	0.3
Unclassified (6)	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Total Authorised Absence</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>3.9</b>
Percentage of possible sessions missed due to (5):			
Family holiday not agreed	0.2	0.2	0.2
Arrived late	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other unauthorised circumstances	0.3	0.8	0.5
No reason yet	0.1	0.2	0.1
Unclassified (6)	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Total Unauthorised Absence</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>Total Overall Absence</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>4.7</b>

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes all primary academies, including free schools.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and all secondary academies, including free schools.

(4) The number of sessions absent by reason expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions absent as reported by reason (not overall totals). See Technical Notes 11 and 12.

(5) The number of sessions absent by reason expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions possible. See Technical Notes 11 and 12.

(6) Includes absence returned as either authorised or unauthorised totals but not broken down by reason. See Technical Note 11.