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PUPIL ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND, AUTUMN TERM 2012

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) reports on absence in state-funded primary and secondary schools during autumn term 2012, including for four-year olds for the first time.

The main tables of this release relate to pupils of compulsory school age. A new local authority level table is included providing information on absence for four year olds.

SUMMARY

The latest figures show an increase in absence levels in autumn term 2012 compared to autumn term 2011. Absence levels in autumn term 2011 were, however, exceptionally low (largely because of low sickness absence) and absence levels in autumn term 2012 remain lower than in autumn term 2010 and previous years – as shown in Charts 1 and 2 below.

Chart 1: Overall absence rates – the percentage of possible sessions missed

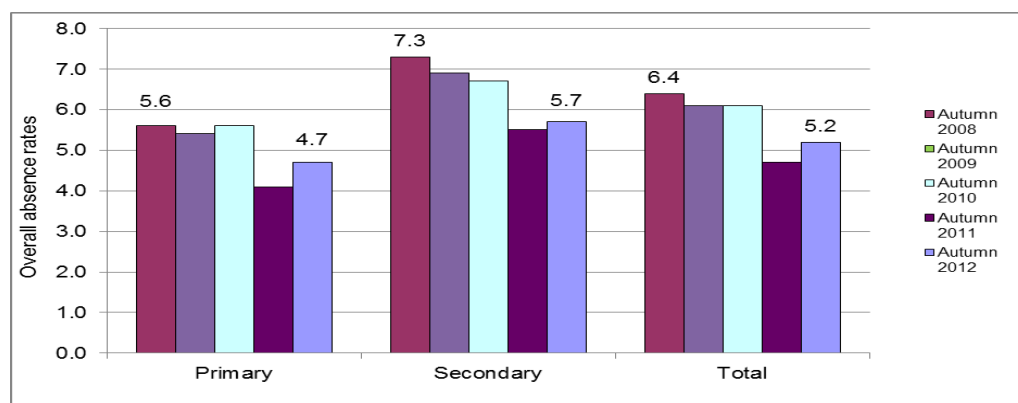
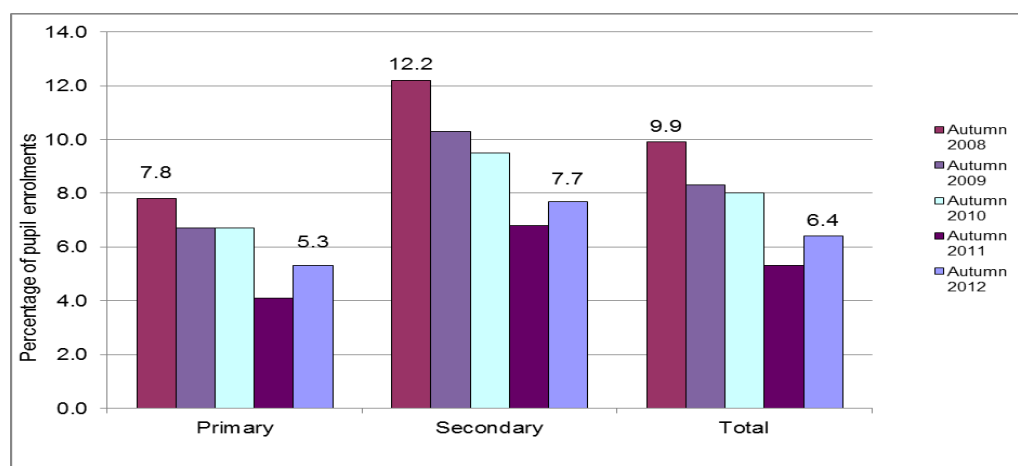


Chart 2: Percentage of pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees or may become persistent absentees (missing 22 or more sessions in autumn term)



KEY POINTS

Absence rates (Table 1)

The percentage of possible sessions missed through absence

Overall absence

- The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools increased, from a low point of 4.7 per cent in autumn term 2011 to 5.2 per cent in autumn term 2012, having been 6.4 per cent in autumn term 2008.
- The overall absence rate in state-funded primary schools increased, from 4.1 per cent to 4.7 per cent, having been 5.6 per cent in autumn term 2008.
- The overall absence rate in state-funded secondary schools increased, from 5.5 per cent to 5.7 per cent, having been 7.3 per cent in autumn term 2008.

Persistent absentees (Table 2)

A persistent absentee is defined as having 46 or more sessions of absence (authorised and unauthorised) during the year, around 15 per cent or higher overall absence rate

The figures show that across state-funded primary and secondary schools:

- The percentage of pupil enrolments classed as persistent absentees (had already missed 46 or more sessions during autumn term) increased, from a low point of 0.8 per cent of pupils in autumn term 2011 to 0.9 per cent in autumn term 2012, having been 1.4 per cent in autumn term 2008.

Pupils missing 22 **or more** sessions in the autumn term, around 15 per cent of possible sessions, are on track to become persistent absentees or in some cases are already persistent absentees.

- The percentage of pupils who were on track to become persistent absentees or were already persistent absentees increased, from a low point of 5.3 per cent in autumn term 2011 to 6.4 per cent in autumn term 2012, having been 9.9 per cent in autumn term 2008.

See Technical Note 19 for an explanation of how varying term lengths affect these figures.

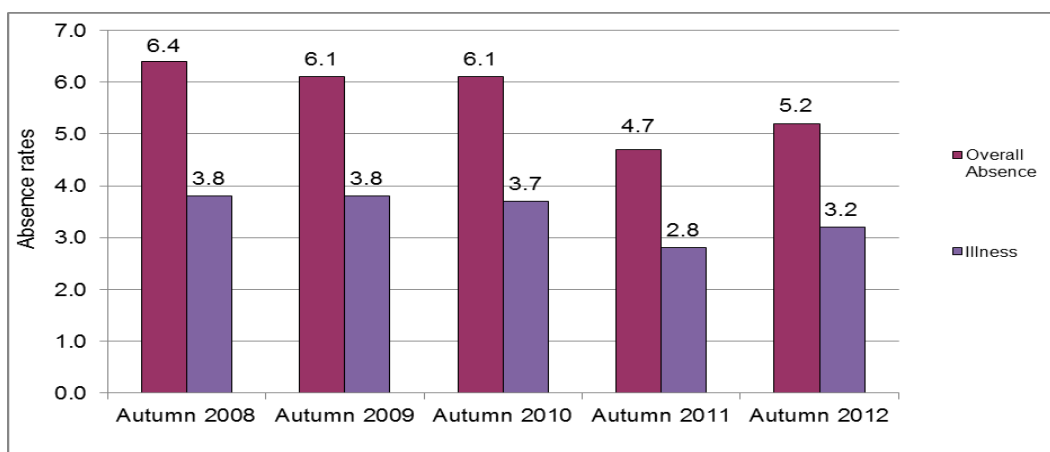
Reason for absence (Table 3)

- The most commonly reported reason for absence was “**illness (not medical or dental appointments)**”, as in previous years, which accounted for 62.5 per cent of all absences. Looking at it another way, 3.2 per cent of all possible sessions were missed through illness, compared with 2.8 per cent in autumn term 2011. This rise in authorised absence due to illness is from a very low point in autumn term 2011 (due in part to unprecedented low levels of flu and flu-like illness). Absence due to illness remains lower in autumn term 2012 than in autumn term 2010 and previous years. See Chart 3 for a comparison of absence overall and absence for illness.
- There was a small increase in authorised absence due to religious observance from 0.0 per cent in autumn term 2011 to 0.1 per cent in autumn term 2012. The timing of the Eid festival affects

these figures. In autumn 2012 Eid fell during term time whereas in autumn 2011, it fell in the half term break so less school time will have been lost.

- These changes provide an increase in authorised absence across state-funded primary and secondary schools, from 3.9 per cent in autumn term 2011 to 4.2 per cent in autumn term 2012. As explained above, the autumn term 2011 rate was particularly low and the autumn term 2012 rate remains lower than in autumn term 2010 and earlier years.
- There was no change in the unauthorised absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools (0.9 per cent), there has been marginal change in recent years. Within this there was a small increase in unauthorised absence in state-funded primary schools, from 0.6 per cent in autumn term 2011 to 0.7 per cent in autumn term 2012.

Chart 3: Overall absence and absence for illness



Absence for four year olds (Table 5 - new)

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

- The overall absence rate for four year olds was 6.1 per cent.

CHARTS

- Chart 1** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Overall absence rates, England, Autumn term: 2008 to 2012
- Chart 2** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Percentage of pupil enrolments who are, or may become persistent absentees, England, Autumn term: 2008 to 2012

TABLES

- Table 1** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Rates of absence, England, Autumn term: 2008 to 2012
- Table 2** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Number and rates of enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees, England, Autumn term: 2008 to 2012
- Table 3** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Absence by reason, England, Autumn term 2012

LOCAL AUTHORITY ANALYSIS

Local authority level data are available on the Government's website at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/series/statistics-pupil-absence>

- Table 4** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by type of school, by local authority area and region, England, Autumn term 2012
- Table 5** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence for four year olds, by local authority area and region, England, Autumn term 2012

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Underlying data (including some school level analyses) will be published at
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/series/statistics-pupil-absence>
on 23 May 2013 in the 'Publication's Underlying Data' section.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

DfE: Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics: 2011/12
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-including-pupil-characteristics>

DfE: Pupil Absence in Autumn Term 2011 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2011>

Final absence statistics relating to the full 2012/13 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in March 2014.

NATIONAL STATISTICS PUBLICATION

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*, these are published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/standards-for-official-statistics-published-by-the-department-for-education>.

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.

Rounding and symbols used

Enrolment numbers at national and regional levels have been rounded to the nearest 5. Enrolment numbers of 1 to 5 have been suppressed, being replaced in the tables by an 'x'. Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure was also zero. For percentages, where the numerator was 1 or 2 or the denominator was 5 or less, they have been suppressed and replaced by an 'x'. All percentages have been rounded to one decimal place. This suppression is consistent with the Departmental statistical policy which can be found at <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/policy%20statement%20on%20confidentiality.pdf>

The following symbols have been used within this publication:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 0 | – zero |
| x | – small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality |
| . | – not applicable |

REVISIONS

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://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/policy%20statement%20on%20revisions.pdf>

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. 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.
3. The Department has published ‘Advice on School Attendance’, which explains how schools should apply the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 and subsequent amendments 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>.
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 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.
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 absence for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided (for example, illness). 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. The Department’s view is that any absence can harm a pupil’s educational progress, whether authorised or not.
7. The Department’s key measure of persistent absence relates to the school year and is defined in terms of those missing 46 or more sessions, around 15 per cent of possible sessions. For autumn term, figures show how many enrolments have already become persistent absentees, based on missing 46 or more sessions and how many are on track to become persistent absentees or in some cases are already persistent absentees, based on the standard threshold of **22 or more** sessions used for the autumn term. To aid transparency and simplicity our termly persistent absence thresholds don’t tend to change from year to year (unless there are exceptional circumstances). See table below.

	Persistent absence threshold (around 15 per cent of possible sessions)
Autumn term	22 sessions
Spring term	16 sessions
Autumn and Spring terms	38 sessions
Full year	46 sessions

Calculation of absence rates

8. 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/organisations/department-for-education/series/statistics-pupil-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

9. The tables include city technology colleges, secondary sponsor-led and converter academies, secondary free schools, university technical colleges and studio schools along with local authority maintained secondary schools in a category labelled “state-funded secondary”, and local authority primary schools, primary sponsor-led and converter academies and primary free schools in a category labelled “state-funded primary”.

Data Collection

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 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.
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 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.
12. 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.
13. Guidance on the School Census, including absence, is available on the DfE statistics website: <http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/stats/schoolcensus/a00208045/school-census-2013>.

The technical specification for the School Census can be found at:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/version%2016%20school%20and%20pru%20census%202013%20technical%20specification.pdf>. This explains what data are collected and what data validation is in place.

Data Coverage and Quality

14. Schools have provided, via the School Census, individual level attendance data relating to autumn term 2012 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.
15. 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.
16. 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.

17. 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 2012.

18. 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.
19. Termly data can be affected by changes in term length and this appears to be the case for autumn term 2012 when compared to autumn term 2011. Data shows higher numbers of possible sessions across autumn term 2012 compared to the previous autumn. Higher numbers of possible sessions provide more 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.
20. 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 collection.
21. 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.
22. The data contained in this release relates only to those pupils on the roll of a maintained primary school or maintained secondary school, city technology college, or academy. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school.

ENQUIRIES

23. 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
24. Media enquiries about this 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: 2008 - 2012

England

	Autumn Term 2008	Autumn Term 2009	Autumn Term 2010	Autumn Term 2011	Autumn Term 2012
State-funded primary and secondary schools (1)(2)(3)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	6,197,070	6,174,080	6,168,270	6,181,045	6,223,740
Percentage of sessions missed due to: (5)					
Overall absence	6.4	6.1	6.1	4.7	5.2
Authorised absence	5.4	5.2	5.1	3.9	4.2
Unauthorised absence	1.0	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9
State-funded primary schools (1)(2)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	3,285,085	3,285,635	3,304,095	3,360,190	3,430,170
Percentage of sessions missed due to: (5)					
Overall absence	5.6	5.4	5.6	4.1	4.7
Authorised absence	5.0	4.8	4.8	3.5	4.0
Unauthorised absence	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.7
State-funded secondary schools (1)(3)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	2,911,990	2,888,445	2,864,175	2,820,860	2,793,575
Percentage of sessions missed due to: (5)					
Overall absence	7.3	6.9	6.7	5.5	5.7
Authorised absence	6.0	5.6	5.3	4.3	4.5
Unauthorised absence	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.2	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 2012. 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 15, 16 and 18.

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

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 RATES OF ENROLMENTS WHO ARE, OR MAY BECOME, PERSISTENT ABSENTEES (4)(5)
Autumn term: 2008 - 2012
England

	Autumn term 2008	Autumn term 2009	Autumn term 2010	Autumn term 2011	Autumn term 2012
State-funded primary and secondary schools (1)(2)(3)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	6,197,070	6,174,080	6,168,270	6,181,045	6,223,740
Number of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (5)	89,020	69,375	64,415	48,025	53,185
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees)	1.4	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.9
Number of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (5)(6)	611,475	514,845	494,490	328,195	396,450
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees)	9.9	8.3	8.0	5.3	6.4
State-funded primary schools (1)(2)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	3,285,085	3,285,635	3,304,095	3,360,190	3,430,170
Number of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (5)	21,860	17,620	17,210	11,210	14,115
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees)	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.4
Number of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (5)(6)	255,635	218,545	222,470	136,455	180,540
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees)	7.8	6.7	6.7	4.1	5.3
State-funded secondary schools (1)(3)					
Number of pupil enrolments (4)	2,911,990	2,888,445	2,864,175	2,820,860	2,793,575
Number of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (5)	67,160	51,755	47,205	36,810	39,065
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 46 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees)	2.3	1.8	1.6	1.3	1.4
Number of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (5)(6)	355,840	296,300	272,020	191,740	215,910
Percentage of enrolments who have missed 22 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees)	12.2	10.3	9.5	6.8	7.7

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 2012. 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 15, 16 and 18.

(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 7 and 19.

(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 2012
 England

	State-funded primary (1)(2)	State-funded secondary (1)(3)	Total (1)(2)(3)
<u>DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE</u>			
Total overall absence	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	64.7	60.3	62.5
Medical/dental appointments	5.1	6.7	5.9
Religious observance	1.3	0.8	1.1
Study leave	0.0	0.3	0.1
Traveller absence	0.3	0.1	0.2
Agreed family holiday	9.1	3.2	6.2
Agreed extended family holiday	0.2	0.0	0.1
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.3	1.9	1.1
Other authorised circumstances	4.3	6.0	5.1
Total authorised absence	85.3	79.3	82.4
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Family holiday not agreed	4.6	3.2	3.9
Arrived late	1.2	1.0	1.1
Other unauthorised circumstances	7.1	14.0	10.5
No reason yet	1.8	2.5	2.1
Total unauthorised absence	14.7	20.7	17.6
<u>ABSENCE RATES BY REASON</u>			
Total overall absence	4.7	5.7	5.2
Percentage of possible sessions missed due to (5):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	3.0	3.4	3.2
Medical/dental appointments	0.2	0.4	0.3
Religious observance	0.1	0.0	0.1
Study leave	0.0	0.0	0.0
Traveller absence	0.0	0.0	0.0
Agreed family holiday	0.4	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	0.3	0.3
Unclassified (6)	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total authorised absence	4.0	4.5	4.2
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	0.1	0.1
Unclassified (6)	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total unauthorised absence	0.7	1.2	0.9

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 14.

(5) The number of sessions absent by reason expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions possible. See Technical Notes 11 and 14.

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