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PUPIL ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND, AUTUMN TERM 2012 AND SPRING TERM 2013

INTRODUCTION

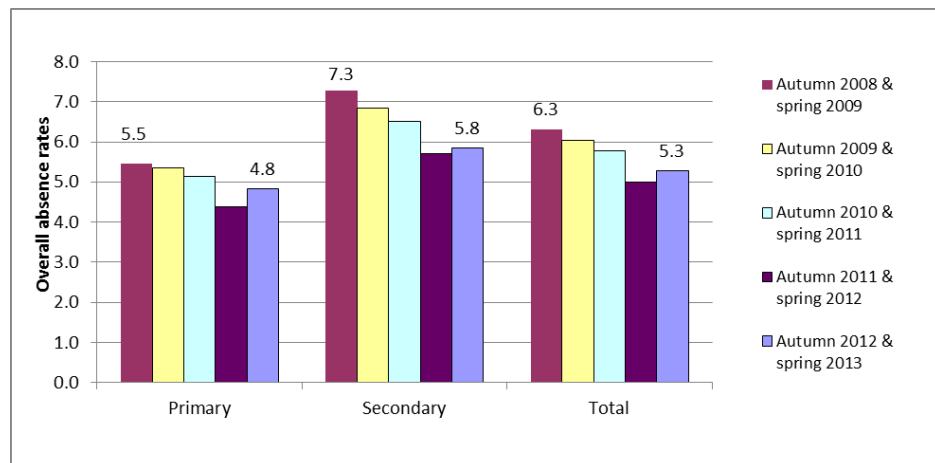
This Statistical First Release reports on absence in state-funded primary and state-funded secondary schools during autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013, including information on absence by reason and by pupil characteristics. The main tables relate to pupils of compulsory school age. A new local authority level table is included providing information on absence for four year olds.

SUMMARY

The latest figures (chart 1) show an increase in overall absence levels in autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013 compared to autumn term 2011 and spring term 2012.

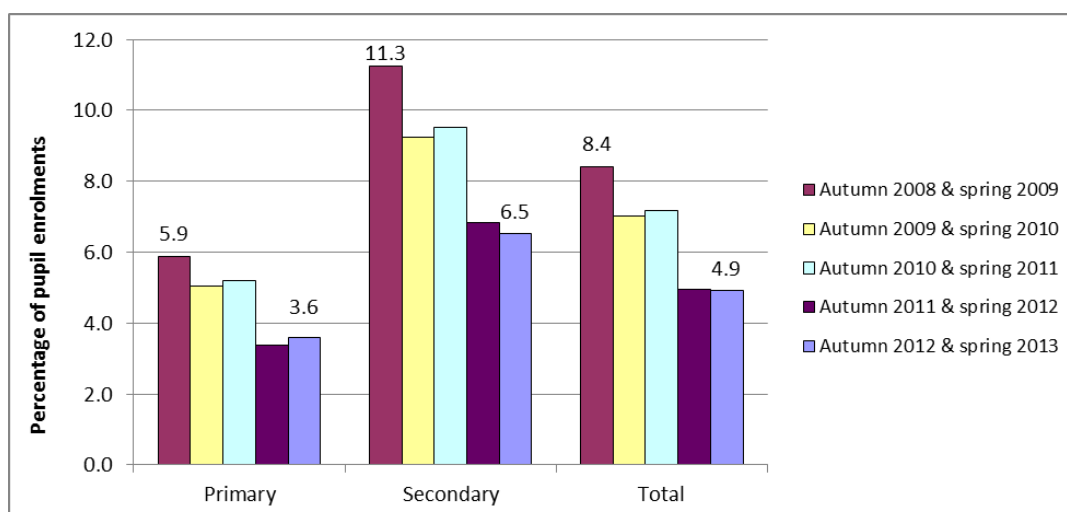
Absence levels in autumn term 2011 were, however, exceptionally low (largely because of low sickness absence). Absence levels in autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013 remain lower than in autumn term 2010 and spring term 2011 and previous years and the general trend is downwards. The increase shown in the latest figures is mainly explained by a return to more usual levels of sickness absence.

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



As shown in chart 2, the percentage of pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees (PA) remained at 4.9 per cent, but is on a general downward trend. A persistent absentee is a pupil who has missed 38 or more possible sessions (around 15 per cent) through absence. Persistent absence figures are however affected by fluctuations in term length (see technical notes 7 and 19). Whole year results, usually published in March, provide the definitive view of PA.

Chart 2: Percentage of pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees (missed 38 or more sessions)



Absence levels are substantially higher for pupils with special educational needs compared to those with no special educational needs and the gap has changed little over recent years. Similarly, absence levels are substantially higher for those known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals and the gap has changed little.

KEY POINTS

Absence rates (*the percentage of possible sessions missed through absence*) (Table 1)

Overall absence

- The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools increased, from a low point of 5.0 per cent in autumn term 2011 and spring term 2012 to 5.3 per cent in autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013, having been 6.3 per cent in autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009.
- The overall absence rate in state-funded primary schools increased, from 4.4 per cent in autumn term 2011 and spring term 2012 to 4.8 per cent in autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013, having been 5.5 per cent in autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009.
- The overall absence rate in state-funded secondary schools increased, from 5.7 per cent in autumn term 2011 and spring term 2012 to 5.8 per cent in autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013, having been 7.3 per cent in autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009.

Persistent Absentees (Table 2)

As mentioned above, term lengths vary from year to year whereas, for simplicity, the PA threshold is based on a fixed number of sessions. This means that, for periods of just one or two terms, the time available for a pupil to reach the PA threshold varies from year to year.

The latest figures show that, compared to autumn term 2011 and spring term 2012:

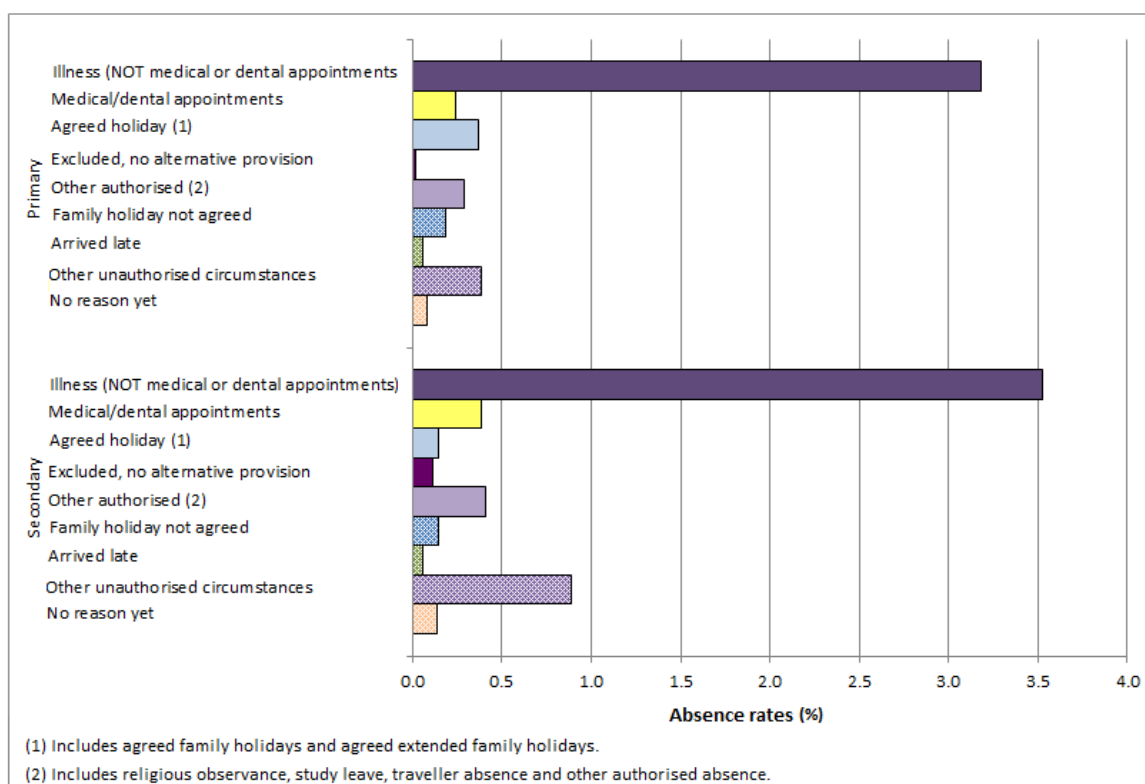
- In state-funded primary schools, the percentage of pupils who were PA increased, from 3.4 per cent of pupils to 3.6 per cent of pupils.
- In state-funded secondary schools, the percentage of pupils who were PA decreased, from 6.8 per cent of pupils to 6.5 per cent of pupils, the lowest level in recent years.

- In state-funded primary and secondary schools as a whole, the percentage of pupils who were PA was 4.9 per cent, the same as the previous year.
- In state-funded primary schools, the rate of overall absence (the percentage of sessions missed through authorised or unauthorised absence) for persistent absentees was 21.9 per cent, nearly five times higher than the rate for all pupils.
- Similarly, in state-funded secondary schools, the rate of overall absence for persistent absentees was 26.9 per cent, nearly five times higher than the rate for all pupils.

Reason for absence (Table 3)

- As in previous years, the most commonly reported reason for absence was “**illness (not medical or dental appointments)**”, which accounted for 63.3 per cent of all absences. Looking at it another way, 3.3 per cent of all possible sessions were missed through illness, compared to 3.0 per cent the previous year. As noted above, sickness absence was particularly low in autumn 2011 and the latest figures reflect a return to more usual levels across autumn 2012 and spring 2013.
- Absence for all family holidays accounted for 8.3 per cent of all absence. Similar to the previous year, 0.3 per cent of possible sessions were missed through authorised family holidays and 0.2 per cent were missed through unauthorised family holidays.
- There is some variation between school phases, as shown in chart 3.

Chart 3: Absence rates by reason



Absence by pupil characteristics (Tables 4a, 4b, 5a and 5b)

As in previous years, pupils with certain characteristics, e.g. special educational needs, tend to have higher levels of absence.

- The rate of overall absence for those pupils who are eligible for and claiming free school meals (7.5 per cent) was 1.6 times higher than that for those pupils not eligible for and claiming free school meals (4.8 per cent). (Table 4a)
- Pupils who were known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals were more likely to be persistent absentees, 10.6 per cent of those pupils eligible and claiming compared with 3.7 per cent for those pupils not eligible for and claiming free school meals. (Table 4b)
- For pupils with special educational needs, the highest rate of overall absence was amongst those pupils at *School Action Plus* (7.7 per cent). This is 1.6 times that for those pupils with no identified special educational needs (4.8 per cent). The overall absence rate for pupils with a statement of special educational needs was 7.5 per cent and for pupils at *School Action* it was 6.6 per cent. (Table 4a)
- Of all pupils with a statement of special educational needs, 10.7 per cent were persistent absentees, compared to 3.8 per cent of those pupils with no identified special educational need. Of pupils at *School Action* 8.1 per cent were persistent absentees and of pupils at *School Action Plus* 11.2 per cent were persistent absentees. (Table 4b)
- Absence rates start to increase at secondary school age. The rate of overall absence for pupils in national curriculum year group 11 (6.7 per cent) was 1.4 times the rate of overall absence for those pupils in national curriculum year group 7 (4.7 per cent). (Table 4a)
- Absence rates were highest for Traveller of Irish Heritage (20.7 per cent overall absence) and Gypsy /Roma (14.9 per cent overall absence) ethnic groups. The rates of overall absence for pupils of Mixed and White ethnic origin were above the national average (5.6 per cent and 5.4 per cent, respectively); for pupils of Black and Chinese ethnic origin the rates were well below the national average (3.8 per cent and 3.1 per cent, respectively). The overall absence rate for all pupils was 5.3 per cent. Caution is recommended in interpreting the data for Traveller of Irish Heritage children and Gypsy/Roma children due to potential under-reporting for these ethnic classifications. (Table 5a)

Absence for four year olds (Table 7 - 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 6.4 per cent.

Full year data

Final absence statistics relating to the full 2012/13 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in March 2014. This release will present whole year findings (cumulative results from the three termly collections) and provide more detailed analyses of absence by pupil characteristics and persistent absence. Also, for the first time, this will incorporate absence in the second half of the summer term – the first such data to be collected is for the second half of summer term 2013. Adjustments to the content will be made to retain year on year comparability, and to account for year 11 absence eg study leave.

CHARTS

- Chart 1** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Overall absence rates in England, autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009 to autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013
- Chart 2** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Percentage of pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees in England, autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009 to autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013

TABLES

- Table 1** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Rates of absence in England, autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009 to autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013
- Table 2** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Persistent absentees in England, autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009 to autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013
- Table 3** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Absence by reason and gender in England, autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013
- Table 4a** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by characteristics in England, autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013
- Table 4b** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Characteristics of persistent absentees in England, autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013
- Table 5a** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by ethnic group in England, autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013
- Table 5b** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Persistent absentees by ethnic group in England, autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013

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 6** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence by type of school, by local authority area and region in England, autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013
- Table 7** State-funded primary and secondary schools: Pupil absence for four year olds, by local authority area and region in England, autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013

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 15 October 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 Schools in England - Autumn Term 2012
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2012>

DfE: A profile of pupil absence in England
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-profile-of-pupil-absence-in-england>

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 less than 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. Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is less than 3, this has been replaced by an 'x'. 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, and study trends on pupil attendance. Absence impacts on children's educational outcomes. There is a clear link between absence and attainment, as levels of pupil absence increase the proportion of pupils reaching the expected levels of attainment at key stage 2 and key stage 4 decrease.

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 combined autumn term and spring term figures, the persistent absence threshold is based on 38 or more sessions. 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:

$$\frac{\text{Total overall absence sessions}}{\text{Total Sessions Possible}} \times 100$$

Percentage of sessions missed due to authorised absence:

$$\frac{\text{Total authorised absence sessions}}{\text{Total Sessions Possible}} \times 100$$

Percentage of sessions missed due to unauthorised absence:

$$\frac{\text{Total unauthorised absence sessions}}{\text{Total Sessions Possible}} \times 100$$

Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees:

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

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 schools in a category labelled “state-funded secondary”, and local authority maintained 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. For the 2006/07 school year the scope of collection of the School Census was extended to 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, some 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. 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 the autumn term, data for the autumn term will not be collected. Seven sponsor-led academies opened at the beginning of January 2013 and incorrectly returned absence data for the previous term. The autumn term data for these schools has been excluded from this analysis. Also, nineteen sponsor-led academies opened half way through the spring term and incorrectly returned absence data for the previous term. As the absence data related to both the academy and their predecessor school it has been removed from this analysis. Year on year comparisons of local authority data may be affected by schools converting to academies.
14. 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

15. Schools have provided, via the School Census, individual level attendance data relating to the autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013 for pupils aged 4 to 15 (at the start of the school year), who are non-boarders at the time of the census. In each term, the School Census has collected the number of possible sessions of attendance; and the number of sessions missed, broken down by reason for absence, and overall totals of sessions missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence.
16. The School Census collects information for a pupil's attendance in the term prior to the census. Absence data for the autumn term 2012 and spring term 2013 have been derived by linking pupil records collected in the spring 2013 census and summer 2013 census to derive overall two-term 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 two-term absence totals have been linked to a pupil's characteristic data at the time of the absence.

Where characteristic data are missing, information collected in the following census has been used, except for ethnicity which is only collected in the spring School Census.

17. Information relating to pupil absence counts the number of pupil enrolments rather than the number of pupils. Where a pupil has moved school during the year, they will be counted more than once as they have recorded attendance data in more than one school. Pupil absence is recorded for the period a pupil is enrolled at a school.
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 authorised and unauthorised absence, or if the total number of possible sessions exceeds the limit for the term, then the absence variables have been set to zero for that term only, and that term's information has been discounted from this release. If the total number of possible sessions for each and every term equals zero, then the enrolment has not been included.
19. Termly data can be affected by changes in term length. Lower numbers of possible sessions provide less opportunity for pupils to become persistent absentees based on the fixed threshold of 38 sessions, no adjustments have been made to account for this. Whole year results provide the definitive view of persistent absence. The autumn 2012/ spring 2013 period was on average marginally shorter than the same period the year before, whereas the autumn 2010/spring11 period was unusually long.
20. 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.
21. 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.

22. In autumn term 2011 there was a very substantial decrease in absence levels which we believe was due to a combination of factors, including:
 - A large decrease in absence rates for illness reasons – illness being by far the most common reason for pupil absence. Figures from the Health Protection Agency suggest that lower levels of flu-like illness may be a factor;
 - Eid fell out of term time and explains some of the relatively large fall in absence for religious observance;

- There was also a relatively large decrease in absence for agreed family holidays and for “other authorised” reasons. This may reflect a growing reluctance for absence to be approved.
23. The information shown for attendance and absence is for two terms of the 2012/13 academic year. Data for schools which have since closed is included for the reporting period prior to their closure.
 24. 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 data collection.
 25. The data presented here are based on the 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 effectively 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.
 26. The data contained in this release relates only to those pupils on the roll of a state-funded primary or secondary school. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school or who attend special schools.

ENQUIRIES

27. Enquiries (non-media) or feedback about information contained in this document should be addressed to Absence and Exclusions team, Room 1F Area H, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, Co Durham, DL3 9BG or e-mail schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk
28. 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