



Department  
for Education



## Statistical First Release

# PUPIL ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND: AUTUMN TERM 2013

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Coverage	England
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Overall absence rates for autumn are at their lowest since 2006	The overall absence rate decreased from 5.2 per cent in autumn 2012 to 4.3 per cent in autumn 2013. These rates are at their lowest since autumn 2006, when termly absence data was first collected.
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The number of pupil enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees has also fallen	The percentage of pupil enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees fell from 6.4 per cent in autumn 2012 to 4.7 per cent in autumn 2013.
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Absence due to illness has decreased	Absence due to illness decreased from 3.2 per cent of all possible sessions in autumn 2012 to 2.5 per cent in autumn 2013. Illness is the most common reason for absence, accounting for 58.8 per cent.
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Absence due to all family holidays has fallen slightly	The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to family holidays also decreased from 0.5 per cent in autumn 2012 to 0.4 per cent in autumn 2013. This is due to lower levels of agreed family holidays. Absence for family holiday accounts for 8.8 per cent of all absences.
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### A National Statistics publication

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

## 1. Background and context

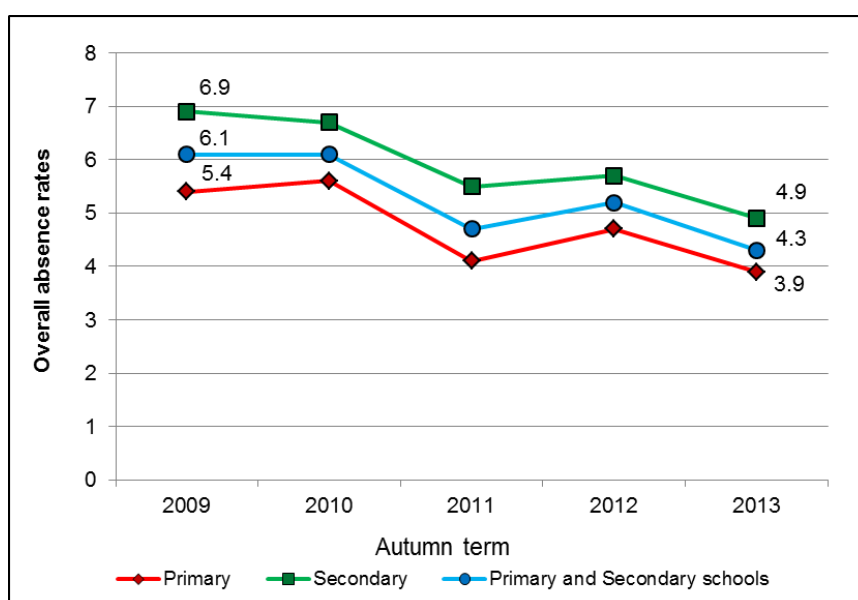
This Statistical First Release reports on absence in state-funded primary and secondary schools during the autumn 2013 term. For the first time, termly information on absence in pupil referral units has also been included.

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

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

## 2. Absence rates (Table 1)

Figure 1: Overall absence rates have decreased



Overall absence rates have decreased

The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools fell from 5.2 per cent in autumn term 2012 to 4.3 per cent in autumn term 2013. This is due to a large decrease in illness and agreed family holidays.

The decrease in absence rates is in authorised absence

Across state-funded primary and secondary schools, the latest figures show a fall in authorised absence from 4.2 per cent in autumn 2012 to 3.4 per cent in autumn 2013. Unauthorised absence rates have remained stable at 0.9 per cent.

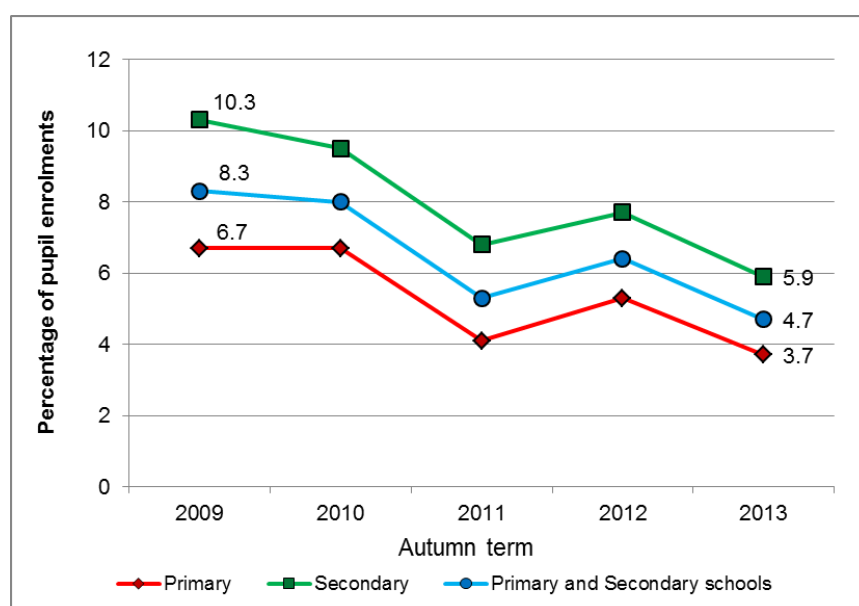
### 3. Persistent absentees (Table 2)

Trends in termly persistent absentee figures are for indicative purposes only and should be treated with caution. Only full year figures provide a definitive view of persistent absence (see technical note 9.8).

Pupils having 22 or more sessions of absence (authorised or unauthorised) in the autumn term may become persistent absentees or in some cases are already persistently absent.

Persistent absentees are defined as having 56 or more sessions of absence (authorised or unauthorised) during the full academic year or 46 or more sessions during the first five half terms, around 15 per cent of possible sessions.

**Figure 2: The percentage of pupil enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees has decreased**



The percentage of enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees has decreased

The percentage of pupils who are, or may become persistent absentees fell from 6.4 per cent in autumn term 2012 to 4.7 per cent in autumn term 2013.

Secondary schools saw a slightly bigger decrease in persistent absentee rates than primary schools

Across state-funded secondary schools, the percentage of pupil enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees fell by 1.8 percentage points. In primary schools this rate fell by 1.5 percentage points.

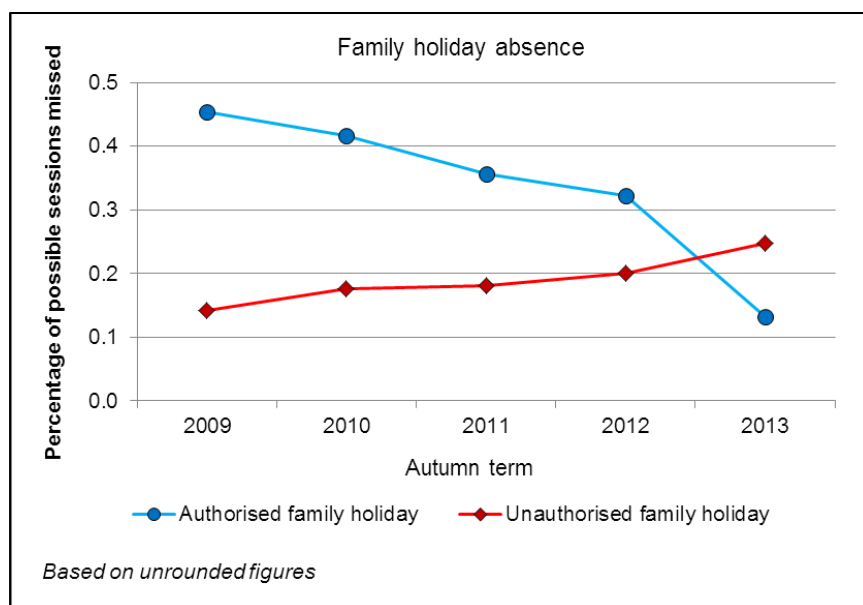
Persistent absentee rates have continued to decrease

In autumn 2013, 0.4 per cent of pupil enrolments had already missed 56 or more sessions. The percentage of pupil enrolments who have already missed 46 or more sessions during autumn term fell by 0.2 percentage points, from 0.9 per cent in autumn term 2012 to 0.7 per cent in autumn term 2013.

#### 4. Reasons for absence (Table 3)

Illness remains the most common reason for absence	Illness (not medical or dental appointments) accounted for 58.8 per cent of all absences compared to 62.5 per cent of absences in autumn 2012. 2.5 per cent of all possible sessions were missed through illness, compared to 3.2 per cent in autumn 2012.
Absence for all family holidays has also decreased	Family holidays accounted for 8.8 per cent of all absences compared to 10.2 per cent in autumn 2012. The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to family holidays also decreased from 0.5 per cent in autumn 2012 to 0.4 per cent in autumn 2013. This is due to lower levels of authorised family holidays (see figure 3).

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



#### 5. Absence for four year olds (Table 5)

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 dropped from 6.1 per cent in autumn 2012 to 5.2 per cent in autumn 2013.

## **6. Pupil referral unit absence** (Table 6)

Absence data for pupil referral units (PRUs) was collected termly for the first time in the spring 2014 School Census, previously this information was only collected annually (see technical note 9.15)

The overall absence rate for pupil referral units in autumn 2013 was 30.8 per cent.

The percentage of enrolments in pupil referral units who are, or may become, persistent absentees (missing 22 or more sessions in the autumn term) was 42.5 per cent with 19.0 per cent of all enrolments already classified as persistent absentees (missing 56 or more sessions in the autumn term).

## 7. List of tables

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

### Figures

- 1 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Overall absence rates
- 2 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Percentage of pupil enrolments, who are, or may become persistent absentees

### National Tables

- 1 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Rates of absence
- 2 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Number and rates of enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees

- 3 State-funded primary and secondary schools: Absence by reason

### Local authority tables

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

### Additional tables

- 6 Pupil referral units: Pupil absence

## 8. Background on the data

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.

So we round numbers

Enrolment numbers at national and regional levels have been rounded to the nearest 5. Enrolment numbers of 1 or 2 have been suppressed to protect pupil confidentiality. Where any number is shown as 0, the original figure was also 0. Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is less than 3, the percentage has been suppressed. This suppression is consistent with the Departmental statistical policy which can be found at <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/policy%20statement%20on%20confidentiality.pdf>.

And adopt symbols to help identify this

Symbols are used in the tables as follows:

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

Persistent absentee figures should be treated with caution

Termly data can be affected by the term length. Longer terms have a greater number of possible sessions which provide more opportunity for pupils to become persistent absentees based on fixed thresholds. Only full year absence figures give a definitive view of persistent absence. The persistent absentee information in this release should be used with care.

## 9. Technical notes

- 9.1 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

- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 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>.
- 9.4 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.
- 9.5 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.
- 9.6 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.
- 9.7 Absence data for the second half of the summer term (the 6th half term) was collected by the Department for the first time in the Autumn 2013 School Census; previously absence data had been collected for autumn term, spring term and the first half of the summer term. A persistent absentee threshold for the full year has also been introduced.

- 9.8 The Department's key measure of persistent absence relates to the academic year and is defined as those having 56 or more sessions of absence (authorised or unauthorised) during the full academic year or 46 or more sessions during the first five half terms, around 15 per cent of possible sessions. For autumn term, figures show how many enrolments have already become persistent absentees, as well as those who are, or may become, persistent absentees based on the standard threshold of 22 or more sessions of absence during the autumn term. Our termly persistent absence thresholds are reviewed each term to account for any changes to the mode possible sessions for all pupils, however these thresholds do not tend to change from year to year. See table below for current thresholds.

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

Only full year figures provide a definitive view of persistent absence. Termly data can be affected by the term length. Longer terms have a greater number of possible sessions which provide more opportunity for pupils to become persistent absentees based on fixed thresholds. No adjustments have been made to account for this; trends are for indicative purposes only.

### Calculation of absence rates

- 9.9 The methodology used to calculate absence rates is shown below. Further calculations, including absence rates by reason, can be found in the metadata specification document in the Underlying Data section of this release at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-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

- 9.10 The tables include local authority maintained primary schools, primary sponsor-led and converter academies including free schools in a category labelled “state-funded primary”. City technology colleges and all secondary academies, including free schools, university technical colleges and studio schools are categorised as “state-funded secondary”. Pupil referral units and alternative provision academies are categorised as “pupil referral units”.
- 9.11 In the Spring 2014 School Census, the Department introduced a new “all-through” school phase. We are currently considering and developing a methodology for the possible introduction of the new phase into the main tables of this release. For this release an approximation of all-through school absence can be found using the school level underlying data. Schools with a statutory low age of below seven and a statutory high age of above 14 have been flagged as all-through schools.

## Data Collection

- 9.12 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.
- 9.13 Reason for absence was collected for the first time for the autumn term 2006. Schools are able to provide absence data using a reason code or by using total figures for the number of sessions missed due to authorised or unauthorised absence. Some schools do not have the required software to provide absence data by reason, and therefore are only able to provide overall totals. In such instances absence is categorised as “unclassified” reason for absence. To derive absence rates, the sum of absence by reason has been used. If this is missing or is less than the total provided, overall totals have been used.
- 9.14 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.
- 9.15 In spring 2014, the Department collected termly absence data for pupil referral units (PRUs) for the first time via the School Census; previously absence data for PRUs had been collected annually via the PRU Census. This census has been discontinued. This is the first year that termly absence figures for PRUs have been included in this release.

9.16 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:

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

### **Data Coverage and Quality**

9.17 Schools have provided, via the School Census, individual level attendance data relating to autumn term 2013 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.

9.18 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.

9.19 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.

9.20 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.

9.21 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.

- 9.22 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.
- 9.23 The information presented here does not include “internal unauthorised absence”. This is defined as unauthorised absence by pupils between the school’s twice-daily registrations, i.e. a pupil is recorded as attending during morning or afternoon registration but is physically not present at another part of the relevant session. The Department’s current data systems are limited insofar as they only record and measure the registrations, not any subsequent absence.
- 9.24 The information contained in this release relates only to those pupils on roll of a maintained primary school or maintained secondary school, city technology college, pupil referral unit, or academy. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school.

## 10. Want more?

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Want previously published figures?

For recent pupil absence figures visit: [Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics: 2012/13](#)

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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.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.stats@wales.gsi.gov.uk) or

[Welsh Government - Statistics and Research](#)

Scotland: [school.stats@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.stats@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or

[Scottish Government - School Education Statistics](#)

Northern Ireland: [statistics@deni.gov.uk](mailto:statistics@deni.gov.uk) or

[Department of Education - Education Statistics](#)

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For related publications

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

Final absence statistics relating to the full 2013/14 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in March 2015.

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Revisions?

This Statistical First Release replaces the “Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn term 2013” publication which was withdrawn on 22 May 2014.

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

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If non-media                              Education Standards Evidence and Dissemination Division, Level 4, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT  
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