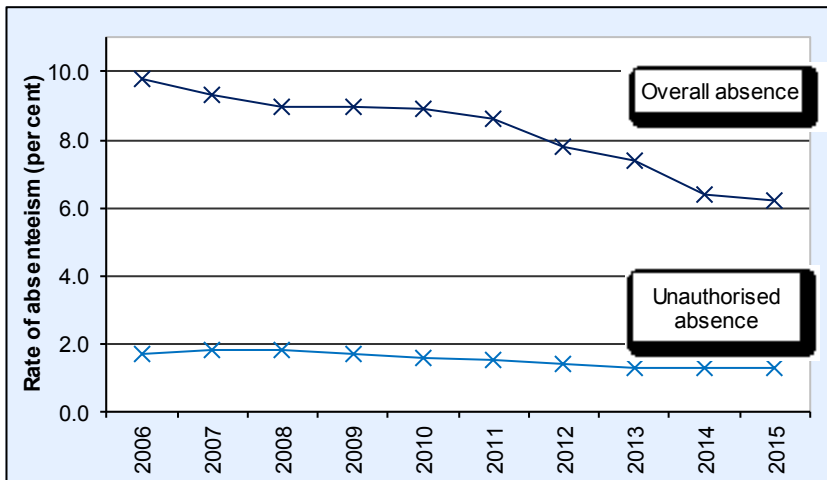


Absenteeism from secondary schools, 2014/15

This annual Statistical First Release reports on absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in maintained secondary, special and independent schools in Wales. Information relates to the period from the start of the academic year to the late May bank holiday, from 2005/06 to 2014/15.

Chart 1: Absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age, 2005/06 to 2014/15



In 2014/15:

6.2% overall absence from secondary schools.

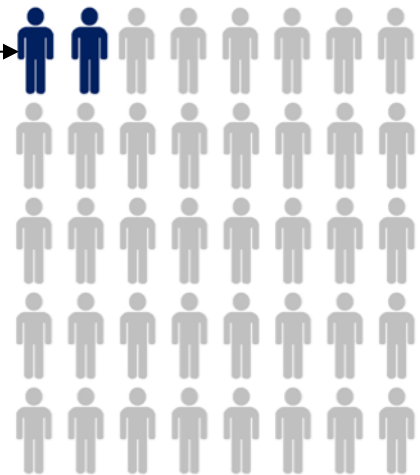
1.3% unauthorised absence from secondary schools.

↓ Overall absenteeism decreased in 2014/15.

↓ In general, overall absenteeism has been falling since 2005/06.

Just under **2 in 40** pupils were persistent absentees in secondary schools (or 4.5%).

Persistent absenteeism ([Table 5](#))



Other key points ([Tables 1, 5](#) and [6](#))

In 2014/15:

- ✓ **Overall absence** was the lowest ever recorded.
- ↓ **Persistent absenteeism** continued to decrease.
- Over **60%** of absenteeism was due to illness.

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Introduction

[Tables 1](#) to [4](#) break down the percentage of half-day sessions missed due to absenteeism by school type, local authority and free school meal entitlement. [Table 5](#) informs on the number of pupils who are considered persistent absentees (a definition of persistent absenteeism can be found in the [Notes](#) section). [Tables 6](#) and [7](#) report on the reasons for absence from 2011/12 to 2014/15.

[Chart 1](#) displays the percentage of half-day sessions missed due to overall and unauthorised absenteeism from maintained secondary, special and independent schools from 2005/06. [Chart 2](#) plots schools' free school meal entitlement against their overall absenteeism rates to show the correlation between the two types of data. [Charts 3](#) and [4](#) order local authorities by their overall and unauthorised absenteeism rates, showing how local authorities compare with each other.

Some of the tables and charts available last year are not included in this year's edition of this statistical first release. They will be made available as supplementary tables after publication.

Table 1: Overall absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age, by sector (a)

School type	Percentage of half-day sessions missed									
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
All maintained schools	9.9	9.4	9.1	9.0	8.9	8.7	7.9	7.4	6.4	6.2
Secondary schools	9.9	9.4	9.1	9.0	8.9	8.6	7.9	7.4	6.4	6.2
Middle schools	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7.1	6.4	5.6
Special schools	13.7	13.9	12.2	12.3	10.8	11.6	11.0	11.3	10.3	10.2
Independent schools	5.6	5.5	5.8	6.0	6.3	5.5	5.3	5.3	4.1	4.5
Total	9.8	9.3	9.0	9.0	8.9	8.6	7.8	7.4	6.4	6.2

Source: Pupils' Attendance Record, Welsh Government

(a) Figures do not include data for 22 independent schools that did not respond to the survey.

Table 2: Unauthorised absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age, by sector (a)

School type	Percentage of half-day sessions missed									
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
All maintained schools	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3
Secondary schools	1.7	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3
Middle schools	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1.0	1.2	1.0
Special schools	3.1	3.3	2.5	2.3	1.9	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.4	2.6
Independent schools	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2
Total	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3

Source: Pupils' Attendance Record, Welsh Government

(a) Figures do not include data for 22 independent schools that did not respond to the survey.

- In 2014/15, 6.2 per cent of half-day sessions were missed due to overall absence from all secondary, middle, special schools and independent schools. Overall absence includes authorised and unauthorised absences. The [Notes](#) section explains the difference between the types of absence.
- 1.3 per cent of half-day sessions were missed because of unauthorised absence from maintained secondary, middle, special schools and independent schools in 2014/15.
- Overall absenteeism has been falling since 2005/06. The only exception to this trend was between 2007/08 and 2008/09, when the rate of overall absenteeism did not change.
- Unauthorised absence fell between 2007/08 and 2012/13, but has not changed since.
- In 2014/15, as in other years, independent schools had the lowest rates of overall and unauthorised absenteeism.
- Middle schools had the lowest rates of overall and unauthorised absenteeism out of all maintained schools in 2014/15.

Table 3: Absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in all maintained secondary and middle schools, by proportion entitled to free school meals, 2014/15 (a)

Percentage entitled to free school meals	Percentage of half-day sessions missed		Number of schools
	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence	
10% or less	4.9	0.5	48
15% or less, but over 10%	5.7	0.9	51
20% or less, but over 15%	6.1	0.9	35
30% or less, but over 20%	6.8	1.7	55
Over 30%	8.6	3.5	24
All maintained secondary schools	6.1	1.3	213

Source: Pupils' Attendance Record and PLASC, Welsh Government

(a) Free school meal data are based on a three year average.

- [Table 3](#) suggests that there is a relationship between the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals and the rate of absenteeism. It suggests that in general schools with a higher proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals have higher absenteeism rates.
- It may be easier to spot this pattern in [Chart 2](#). Each of the dots on this chart represents 1 of the 213 maintained secondary schools that submitted attendance data to the Welsh Government in 2014/15. The schools' rates of overall absenteeism have been plotted against the percentage of their pupils entitled to free school meals.
- The pattern formed by the schools' dots in [Chart 2](#) looks like an upward slope. The chart shows that schools with similar percentages of pupils entitled to free school meals can have very different rates of overall absence. But the upward slope pattern suggests that schools with a higher percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals in general have higher absence rates.

Chart 2: Overall absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age, by maintained secondary and middle school and free school meal percentage, 2014/15

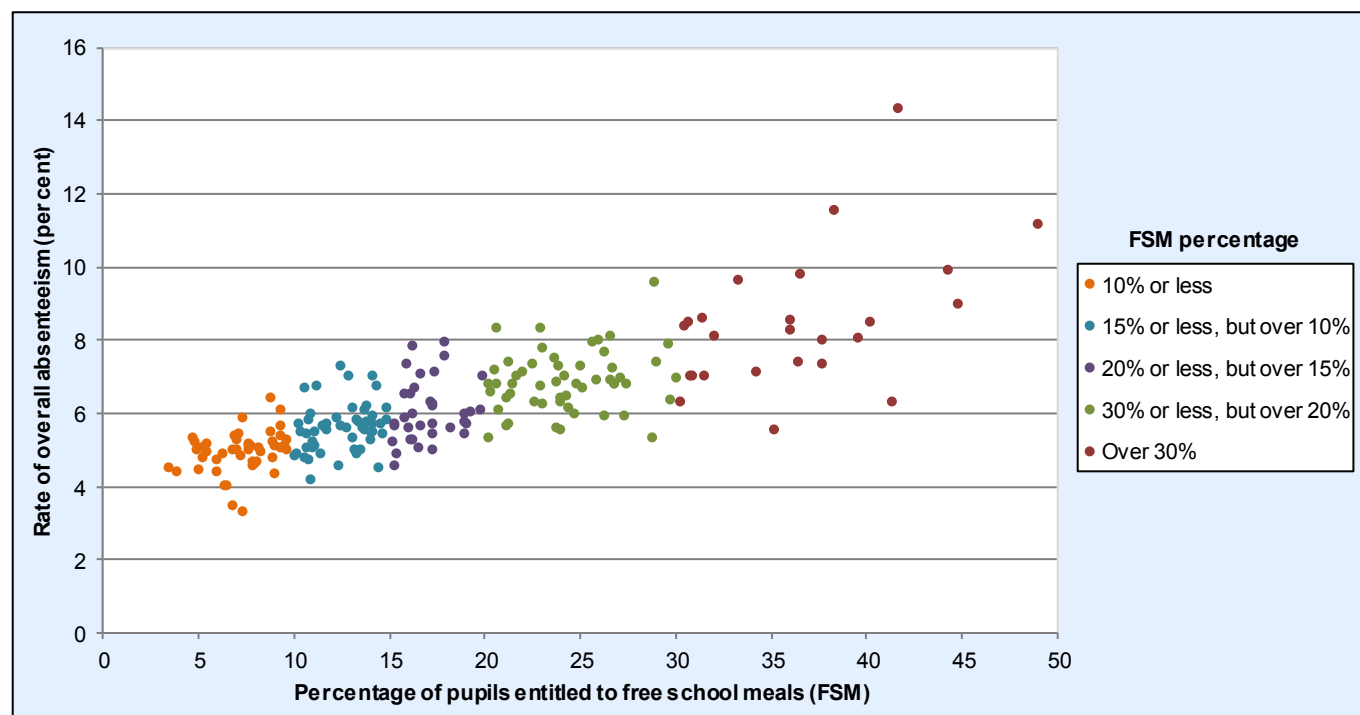


Table 4: Absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in all maintained secondary, middle and special schools, by local authority and consortium

Local Authority	Percentage of half-day sessions missed due to:							
	Overall absence				Unauthorised absence			
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
North Wales	7.3	7.0	6.3	6.1	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.9
Isle of Anglesey	7.8	6.8	6.6	6.4	0.7	0.7	0.9	1.1
Gwynedd	7.9	6.6	5.8	5.4	0.9	0.7	0.6	0.5
Conwy	7.3	7.1	6.1	5.8	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.4
Denbighshire	7.1	7.6	7.0	7.0	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.4
Flintshire	7.0	6.7	6.2	5.8	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.3
Wrexham	7.2	7.3	6.4	6.3	1.7	1.8	1.1	1.1
South West and Mid Wales	7.7	7.5	6.3	6.0	0.8	0.7	0.9	1.0
Powys	7.1	6.8	5.7	5.4	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.7
Ceredigion	6.3	6.4	5.5	5.5	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.2
Pembrokeshire	7.4	7.8	6.6	6.8	0.5	0.7	1.1	1.2
Carmarthenshire	8.6	8.0	6.2	5.9	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.8
Swansea	8.0	7.7	6.7	6.0	1.4	1.1	1.2	1.1
Neath Port Talbot	7.7	7.4	6.5	6.4	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.9
Central South Wales	8.4	7.4	6.4	6.1	2.0	1.8	1.7	1.8
Bridgend	8.1	7.7	6.2	5.8	1.6	1.3	1.1	0.9
The Vale of Glamorgan	7.3	6.7	5.8	5.3	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.2
Rhondda Cynon Taf	9.4	8.1	6.9	6.4	2.1	2.0	1.7	1.7
Merthyr Tydfil	7.6	6.7	7.1	6.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2
Cardiff	8.3	7.1	6.2	6.2	2.7	2.5	2.3	2.5
South East Wales	8.1	7.8	6.9	6.7	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.5
Caerphilly	8.3	8.0	7.1	7.3	1.8	1.6	1.4	1.7
Blaenau Gwent	9.6	9.0	7.8	6.8	2.4	2.3	2.3	1.5
Torfaen	7.7	7.5	6.5	6.3	1.2	1.0	0.8	0.7
Monmouthshire	7.0	6.6	5.5	5.4	0.6	0.5	0.8	0.8
Newport	8.1	7.9	7.1	6.9	2.1	2.1	2.4	2.2
Wales (a) (b)	7.8	7.4	6.4	6.2	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3

Source: Pupils' Attendance Record, Welsh Government

(a) Figures do not include data for 22 independent schools that did not respond to the survey.

(b) Includes independent schools.

- The Vale of Glamorgan had the lowest rate of overall absence from all maintained secondary and special schools in 2014/15. Pupils in this local authority missed 5.3 per cent of half day sessions. This is the lowest rate of overall absence that a local authority has had over the past four years.
- Caerphilly had the highest rate of overall absence from all maintained secondary and special schools in 2014/15 (7.3 per cent).
- Maintained secondary and special schools in Flintshire had the lowest rate of unauthorised absence in 2014/15 (0.3 per cent). Cardiff had the highest rate of unauthorised absence (2.5 per cent).

Chart 3: Overall absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in all maintained secondary, middle and special schools, by local authority, 2014/15

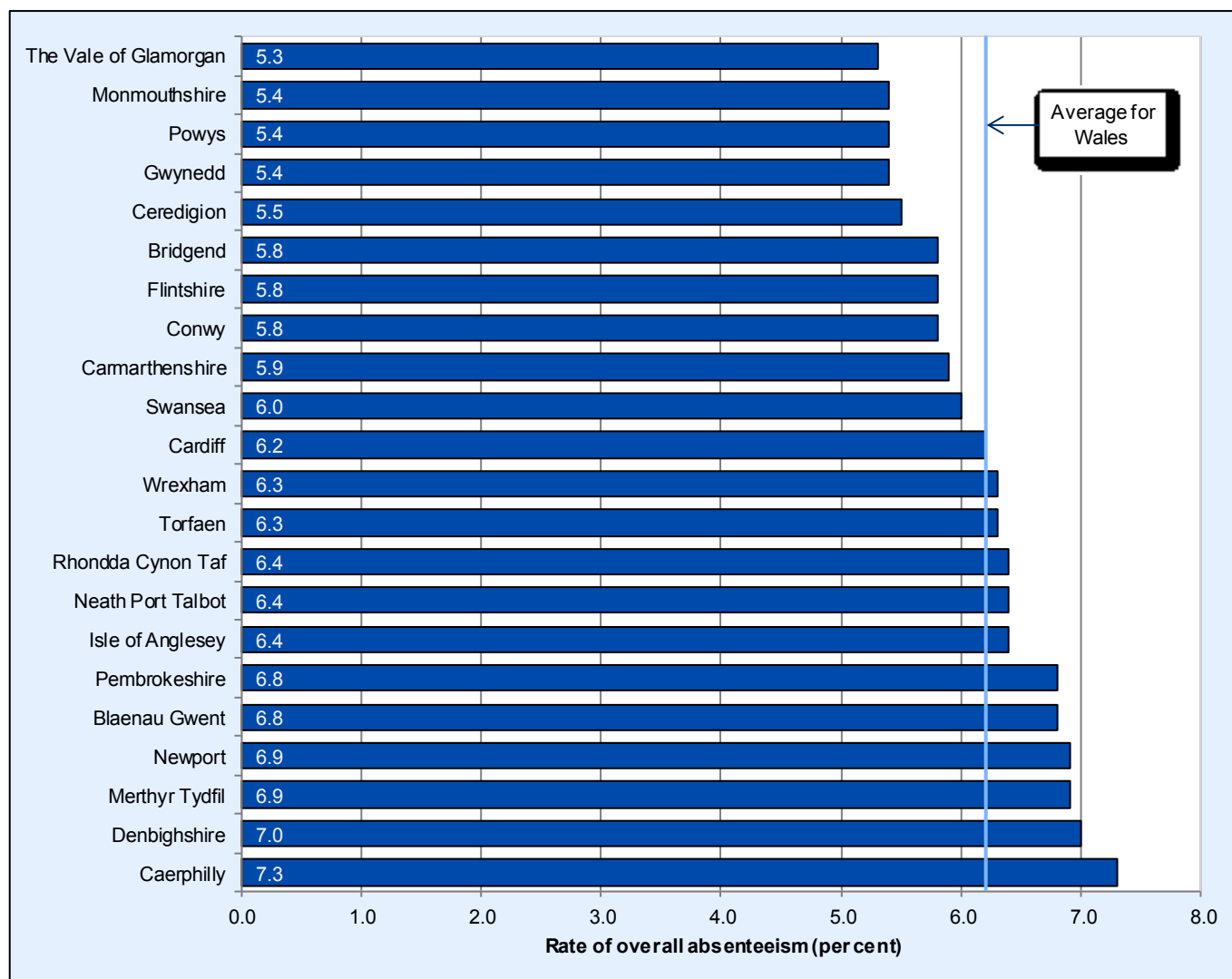


Chart 4: Unauthorised absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in all maintained secondary, middle and special schools, by local authority, 2014/15

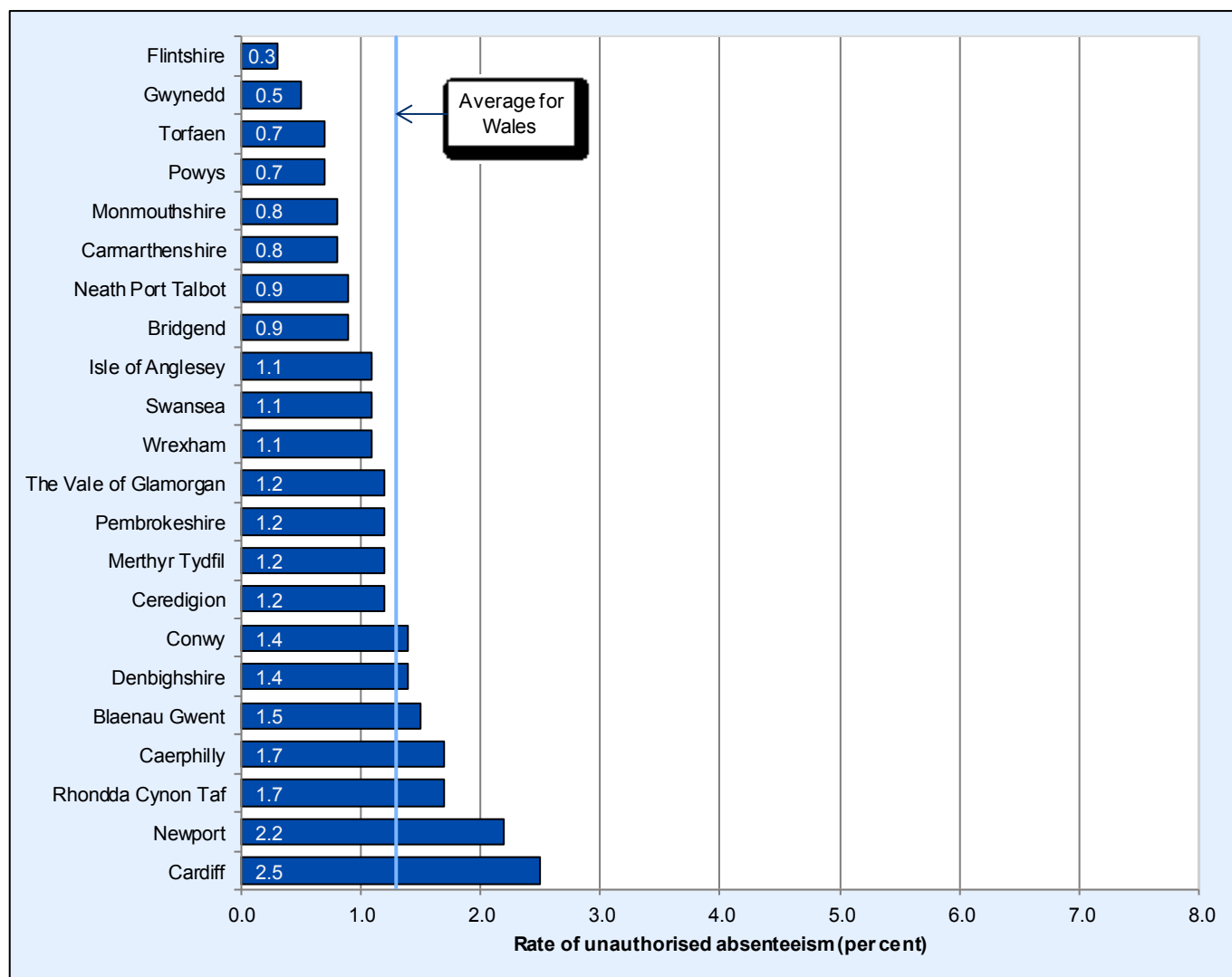


Table 5: Pupils of compulsory school age who were persistent absentees from maintained secondary and middle schools (a)

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of pupils who are persistent absentees	17,984	16,584	15,619	14,971	12,293	10,399	8,061	7,094
Total number of pupils	180,213	178,004	175,559	172,886	170,081	166,996	161,829	159,041
Percentage of pupils who are persistent absentees	10.0	9.3	8.9	8.7	7.2	6.2	5.0	4.5
Percentage of half days missed by persistent absentees due to:								
Authorised absence	21.7	21.6	21.9	22.0	21.4	20.6	19.5	18.8
Unauthorised absence	10.7	10.9	10.6	10.2	11.2	11.2	12.6	13.8
Overall absence	32.5	32.5	32.6	32.2	32.6	31.8	32.1	32.6
Percentage of all pupils' absence for which persistent absentees were responsible:								
Authorised absence	29.7	27.6	26.6	26.5	23.8	21.1	19.0	17.3
Unauthorised absence	59.9	58.5	58.9	59.8	58.3	54.0	48.8	48.4
Overall absence	35.6	33.6	32.4	32.2	29.9	26.8	25.0	23.7

Source: Pupils' Attendance Record, Welsh Government

(a) Persistent absentees are pupils who were absent for at least 20 per cent of half-day sessions. For 2014/15 this means that persistent absentees in secondary schools missed at least 62 half-day sessions. See the Notes section for a more detailed description.

- The percentage of pupils who were persistent absentees from maintained secondary schools continues to fall. In 2014/15, 4.5 per cent of pupils in maintained secondary schools were persistent absentees. This percentage is less than half what it was in 2007/08, when it was first able to be calculated.
- The rate of unauthorised absence has been rising among persistent absentees since 2012/13, while authorised absence has been falling.
- Since the percentage of persistent absentees has been falling since 2007/08, they are having less of an impact on absence rates in secondary schools. In 2007/08, persistent absentees were responsible for 35.6 per cent of the overall absence in maintained secondary schools. By 2014/15 they were only responsible for 23.7 per cent of overall absence. The remaining 76.3 per cent of overall absence was missed by pupils who were not persistent absentees.

Table 6: Distribution of reasons for absence by pupils of compulsory school age in maintained secondary and middle schools, by reason for absence

Type of absence	Code	Reason for absence	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Authorised	I	Illness	53.9	59.0	59.5	61.4
	M	Medical or dental appointments	9.7	8.2	7.8	7.3
	R	Religious observance	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1
	S	Study leave	3.1	0.8	0.5	0.3
	T	Traveller absence	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1
	H	Agreed family holiday	5.9	5.4	3.3	2.0
	F	Agreed extended family holiday	0.1	-	-	-
	E	Excluded, but no alternative provision made	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.6
	C	Other authorised (not covered by other codes or descriptions)	7.8	7.4	6.9	6.3
			Total authorised absence	82.4	82.6	79.9	79.2
Unauthorised	G	Family holiday (not agreed or sessions in excess of agreement)	0.8	1.4	2.8	3.0
	U	Late (arrived after the register closed)	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5
	O	Other unauthorised (not covered by other codes or descriptions)	11.5	12.3	15.3	16.7
	N	No reason for the absence provided yet	4.9	3.4	1.5	0.5
		Total unauthorised absence	17.6	17.4	20.1	20.8
Overall		Total overall absence	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Pupils' Attendance Record, Welsh Government

- In 2014/15 61.4 per cent of half-day sessions were missed from maintained secondary schools because of illness. This has been the most common reason for absence since 2011/12.
- The second most common reason for absence was 'Other unauthorised'. This is used when an unauthorised absence does not fit into one of the other three categories.

Table 7: Percentage of sessions missed by pupils of compulsory school age in maintained secondary and middle schools, by reason for absence

Type of absence	Code	Reason for absence	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Authorised	I	Illness	4.2	4.3	3.8	3.8
	M	Medical or dental appointments	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.5
	R	Religious observance	-	-	-	-
	S	Study leave	0.2	0.1	-	-
	T	Traveller absence	-	-	-	-
	H	Agreed family holiday	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.1
	F	Agreed extended family holiday	-	-	-	-
	E	Excluded, but no alternative provision made	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
	C	Other authorised (not covered by other codes or descriptions)	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.4
			Total authorised absence	6.5	6.1	5.1	4.9
Unauthorised	G	Family holiday (not agreed or sessions in excess of agreement)	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
	U	Late (arrived after the register closed)	-	-	-	-
	O	Other unauthorised (not covered by other codes or descriptions)	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0
	N	No reason for the absence provided yet	0.4	0.2	0.1	-
		Total unauthorised absence	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3
Overall		Total overall absence	7.9	7.4	6.4	6.1

Source: Pupils' Attendance Record, Welsh Government

- The percentage of sessions missed due to agreed family holiday fell from 0.2 per cent in 2013/14 to 0.1 per cent in 2014/15.
- Although it looks like none of the percentages of sessions missed for other reasons changed, many of them did. The changes in the other reasons were so small that they could not be seen in [Table 7](#), which only displays numbers to 1 decimal place. However, when added together, they caused the rate of total authorised absence to fall by 0.2 percentage points and the rate of overall absence to fall by 0.3 percentage points.



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Notes

1 Context

1.1 Policy/Operational

All children who are receiving an education at school during the normal school day must be placed on the attendance register. An attendance register records every pupil's attendance at every session the school is open to pupils and must be called twice a day: at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. The register must show whether each pupil is present, engaged in an approved educational activity off-site (treated as present if they attend that provision), or absent. In addition, where a pupil of compulsory school age is absent, the register must also show whether the absence was authorised or unauthorised.

Improving attendance continues to be a key Ministerial priority. Data suggest that absence impacts on an individual learner's attainment. Therefore, attendance needs to remain a priority for schools to ensure that children and young people are given the chance to achieve their potential. The development of the Attendance Analysis Framework has played an important role in raising the profile of attendance in the context of school improvement.

The Attendance Analysis Framework sets out a standardised and robust approach to data analysis. The Framework was developed in consultation with LA data, Education Welfare and school improvement officers and is intended to identify systematic problems in schools and local authorities, and identify ways that these might be addressed.

Using the Framework as a basis an extensive analysis is carried out on each local authority's attendance data. The Framework, along with an analysis report highlights areas which the Welsh Government feel there are weaknesses or strengths are sent to each local authority.

1.2 Related Publications

A similar release relating to absenteeism from maintained primary, special and independent schools in Wales during the 2013/14 academic year entitled 'Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2013/14' was released on 3 December 2014 and can be found here: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-primary-schools>.

England publishes absenteeism data for primary and secondary schools in the statistical release entitled 'Pupil absence in schools in England: 2013 to 2014'. The latest available statistics can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-pupil-absence>.

Scotland publishes absenteeism data for primary and secondary schools in supplementary dataset tables. The latest available statistics can be found on their website: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/AttendanceAbsenceDatasets>.

Northern Ireland publish primary and post-primary (secondary) school absenteeism data and their latest statistics can be found here: http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new/education-statistics/32_statistics_and_research_-_statistics_on_education-pupil_attendance.htm.

2 Data Source

The Pupils' Attendance Record is made up of pupil-level attendance data collected electronically from maintained schools, care of their local authority (LA). School-level attendance data from independent schools are collected via a voluntary, paper-based survey. The same form is sent to maintained special schools via their local authorities and it is mandatory for special schools to respond. All collections are carried out by Knowledge and Analytical Services within the Welsh Government.

3 Definitions

3.1 Coverage

The absenteeism information in this Statistical First Release relates to the percentage of half-day sessions missed by pupils due to unauthorised and overall absence from the start of the academic year to the late May bank holiday. Pupils of compulsory school age (5-15) registered at maintained secondary schools and pupils aged 11-15 registered at special and independent schools are included in the data (ages as on 31st August before the start of the academic year). Attendance data were received from 280 schools with pupils within these age groups in the 2014/15 academic year.

A new type of schools was created during the 2012/13 academic year, middle schools. These schools provide education for pupils of both primary and secondary school age. Data from middle schools are categorised as 'maintained schools' in this Statistical First Release, but only include data for pupils aged 11-15 (as on 31st August before the start of the academic year). As with data for other schools, secondary attendance data for middle schools cover the period from the start of the academic year to the late May bank holiday.

The free school meal data are collected through the January Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) and is based on a 3-year average. Where schools have merged, the 3-year average for the new school includes free school meal data for the previous schools for the year or years that they were open prior to merging.

Although attendance data were requested from all independent schools with pupils aged 11 to 15 (on 31st August before the start of the academic year), fewer independent schools responded to the survey than in previous years. Independent schools provide information about their pupils' attendance on a voluntary basis. 22 independent schools did not respond to the survey this year, compared to 7 schools in 2013/14 and 9 schools in 2012/13.

3.2 Types of Absence

All (or '**overall**') absences comprise those which are authorised and unauthorised:

- an **authorised absence** is an 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 (e.g. illness, family bereavement or religious observance).
- an **unauthorised absence** is an absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences.

Note that pupils undertaking approved and supervised educational activities conducted away from the school (e.g. work experience or educational visits) are deemed to be present at the school.

3.3 Term dates

Attendance and absence data were collected on the days that schools were open to pupils between the following dates:

- Autumn term – from 1 September 2014 to 25 December 2014.
- Spring term – from 26 December 2014 to 5 April 2015.

- Summer term – from 6 April 2015 to 22 May 2015.

3.4 Persistent Absentees

Persistent absentees are pupils who were absent for at least 20 per cent of the mode number of half-day sessions that schools were open to pupils (which does not include INSET days). The following example of how persistent absentees were evaluated for 2014/15 will help to explain what this means:

- The mode is the number which appears most often, so the mode number of half-day sessions that schools were open to pupils is the most frequent number of sessions that they were open to pupils. For 2014/15, most maintained secondary schools were open to pupils for 310 half-day sessions from the start of the academic year to the late May bank holiday.
- Twenty per cent of that figure equals 62 ($310 * 0.2 = 62$) half-day sessions.
- So a persistent absentee in 2014/15 was someone who was absent for at least 62 half-day sessions.

Because the mode number of sessions that schools were open to pupils changes from year to year the figure used to determine whether a pupil is a persistent absentee or not also changes. The following table shows the values used to evaluate persistent absenteeism from 2007/08 to 2014/15.

Values used to calculate persistent absenteeism

Academic year	Mode of sessions possible	Number of sessions missed to be a persistent absentee
2007/08	304	61
2008/09	304	61
2009/10	308	62
2010/11	308	62
2011/12	306	62
2012/13	304	61
2013/14	310	62
2014/15	310	62

4 Key Quality Information

This section provides a summary of information on this output against five dimensions of quality: Relevance, Accuracy, Timeliness and Punctuality, Accessibility and Clarity, and Comparability. Between September and November 2010 we conducted a public consultation on our Education Statistics outputs in which we asked for feedback on the quality of the outputs.

4.1 Relevance

The statistics are used both within and outside the Welsh Government to monitor educational trends and as a baseline for further analysis of the underlying data. Some of the key users are:

- Ministers and the Members Research Service in the National Assembly for Wales.
- The Department for Education and Skills in the Welsh Government.
- Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales.
- other areas of the Welsh Government.
- My Local School.
- The Department for Education in England.
- other government departments.
- local authorities and schools.
- Wales Audit Office.
- the research community.
- students, academics and universities.
- individual citizens and private companies and the media.

These statistics are used in a variety of ways. Some examples of these are:

- advice to Ministers.
- the all-Wales education core data packs (the replacement for the National Pupil Database).
- LA and school comparisons and benchmarks.
- to inform the education policy decision-making process in Wales.
- contributing to the national school categorisation system for Wales.
- to inform Estyn during school inspections.
- contributing to the National Performance Indicators.
- international benchmarking.
- the education domain of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- to assist in research in educational attainment.

4.2 Accuracy

The Welsh Government works closely with schools and local authorities to ensure all data are validated before tables are published. Data are collated into an electronic return and submitted to the Welsh Government through DEWi, a secure online data transfer system developed by the Welsh Government. Various stages of automated validation and sense-checking are built into the process to ensure a high quality of data.

With the aim of further improving the accuracy of the data a new stage in the validation process was implemented for the first time when collecting the 2011/12 data. A table was sent to each local authority containing a summary of the data for all of their maintained secondary schools which they were asked to check. A similar table was sent to local authorities for the first time in the 2013/14 data collection for local authorities to check their special schools' data. In the past a letter was sent to special schools directly to ask them to check a summary of their data. The same letter is still sent to independent schools.

During the 2009/10 academic year extreme weather conditions forced a large number of schools to close to protect the welfare of their students. Some schools were able to remain open for pupils who could safely attend. Those who were unable to attend on these days were recorded as having authorised absence, thereby inflating the schools' overall absence percentages. Since not all schools had partial closures due to the inclement weather, and those that did close for a varying number of days and had a varying percentage of pupils absent, the scale of the effect of these partial closures on local authorities' absence rates could not be measured.

A new statistical category 'Not required to attend' was introduced to the Welsh Government's attendance data collection in 2010/11. Half-day sessions are recorded in this category in situations when individual pupils' attendance is not possible but the school remains open, such as when pupils are not able to safely attend school, and will not be counted towards the total number of sessions that they could attend in a year. This means that extreme weather conditions no longer adversely affect either schools' or local authorities' attendance percentages.

4.3 Timeliness and Punctuality

DEWi was available for uploading files on 26 May 2015, with maintained secondary schools asked to submit attendance data for every pupil aged between 5 and 15 on roll at the school from the start of September 2014 to the late May bank holiday in 2015. Special and independent schools were asked to submit attendance data for pupils aged between 11 and 15 on roll from the start of the 2014/15 academic year to the late May bank holiday. Schools and local authorities were then asked to validate their data within a validation period.

4.4 Accessibility and Clarity

This statistical first release is pre-announced and then published on the Statistics section of the Welsh Government website. It is accompanied by more detailed tables on StatsWales, a free-to-use service that allows visitors to view, manipulate and download data.

4.5 Comparability

Pupil-level absence data were collected from maintained secondary schools for the first time in 2007/08. However, the definitions and calculations involved in the collection have not changed, so comparability over time has not been affected.

Since 1999/2000 secondary schools have been asked to provide, on a voluntary basis, their attendance information broken down by gender. In 2007/08 it became compulsory for maintained secondary schools to provide gender information whilst remaining voluntary for special and independent schools. 273 schools (97.5 per cent) supplied gender data in 2014/15, compared to 285 schools (96.0 per cent) in 2013/14. It is not advisable to compare year on year changes prior to 2007/08 in absenteeism by gender as different schools responded each year.

Due to the effect that partial closures of schools due to extreme weather conditions during the 2009/10 academic year had on schools' attendance rates caution should be used when comparing year-on-year changes.

During the 2012/13 academic year outbreaks of illnesses such as Measles may have had an adverse affect on local authorities' attendance. Caution should be taken when comparing local authority-level data for this year.

In previous years absence rates for special and independent schools were calculated by dividing the number of half-day sessions absent by the number of half-day sessions that the school was open multiplied by the number of pupils on roll in the January Pupil-Level Annual School Census (PLASC) and multiplying this number by 100. In 2013/14 it was decided to use a more accurate calculation of absence percentages, dividing the number of half-day sessions absent by the total number of sessions that pupils were on roll in the school and multiplying by 100. Although schools were asked to provide the total number of sessions that pupils were on roll in the school in 2014/15, some still only provided the number of half-day sessions that the school was open. For this reason, although 59 special and independent schools' absence percentages were calculated using the new method, 8 schools were calculated using the old method. In future data collections the Welsh Government will endeavour to make sure that all special and independent schools' absence percentages are calculated using the new, more accurate method. Because of the change in methodology, care should be taken when comparing special and independent schools' data between years.

Fewer independent schools responded to the survey in 2014/15 than in previous years. 22 independent schools did not respond to the survey this year, compared to 7 schools in 2013/14 and 9 schools in 2012/13.