



## Statistical Bulletin 1/2016

### Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland – 2014/15: Summary statistics

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The purpose of this statistical bulletin is to present basic, final attendance figures for schools for the 2014/15 academic year. It includes information on the levels of absence, type of absence and reason for absence.

A further release containing a more detailed set of tables, including absence by pupil characteristics (e.g. gender, year group, ethnicity etc.) will be published on 18 February 2016.

Attendance data for the 2014/15 academic year was collected from all grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland via the school census which was conducted in October 2015.

#### KEY FINDINGS - ALL SCHOOLS

Absence is reported by schools in half day sessions and recorded as authorised or unauthorised.

- The overall attendance rate for primary schools in 2014/15 was 95.4% of the total half days; 4.6% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 3.5% authorised and 1.1% unauthorised absence.
- The overall attendance rate for post-primary schools in 2014/15 was 93.4% of the total half days; 6.6% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 4.5% authorised and 2.1% unauthorised absence.
- The overall attendance rate for special schools in 2014/15 was 90.2% of the total half days; 9.8% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 6.7% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised absence.



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## Introduction

Attendance data are collected annually via the school census and are required by a range of organisations and individuals for a variety of purposes. Members of the NI Assembly, the Department of Education, Education Authority and the Education and Training Inspectorate use the data for benchmarking, policy making and performance monitoring. Responsibility for attendance policy lies with Additional Educational Needs Team in DE which monitors non-attendance and provides guidance to schools in relation to attendance. Attendance data are used for monitoring other Departmental policies, for example, Achieving Belfast and Derry Bright Futures. The statistics are also used by other departments when developing and monitoring cross-departmental policies, for example, attendance is an indicator in the Education Domain of the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure as well as OFMDFM's 10 Year Strategy for Children and Young People. The data are also used by researchers, academics and students, as well as the general public for informing choices about service providers.

## Section 1: Key Findings

### Absence rates

While there does not tend to be large variation in absence levels year on year, overall absence was slightly higher in all phases in 2014/15 than in the previous year.

- In primary schools in 2014/15, 4.6% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 3.5% authorised and 1.1% unauthorised absence. See Table 1 overleaf. In 2013/14, overall absence accounted for 4.4% of the total half days (3.0% authorised and 1.4% unauthorised)<sup>1</sup>. The figures show a slight increase in absence levels on the previous year for overall and authorised absence, while unauthorised absence has decreased.
- In post-primary schools in 2014/15, 6.6% of all half days were missed due to absence, 4.5% was authorised absence and 2.1% was unauthorised absence. See Table 1 overleaf. In 2013/14, overall absence accounted for 6.5% of the total half days (4.0% authorised and 2.5% unauthorised). As with primary schools, the figures show a slight increase in absence levels on the previous year for overall and authorised absence, while unauthorised absence has decreased.
- In special schools, 9.8% of all half days were missed due to absence in 2014/15, comprising 6.7% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised absence. See Table 1 overleaf. In 2013/14, overall absence accounted for 9.7% of the total half days (6.4% authorised and 3.4% unauthorised absence). The figures show a slight increase in overall and authorised absence since 2013/14 while unauthorised absence has decreased.

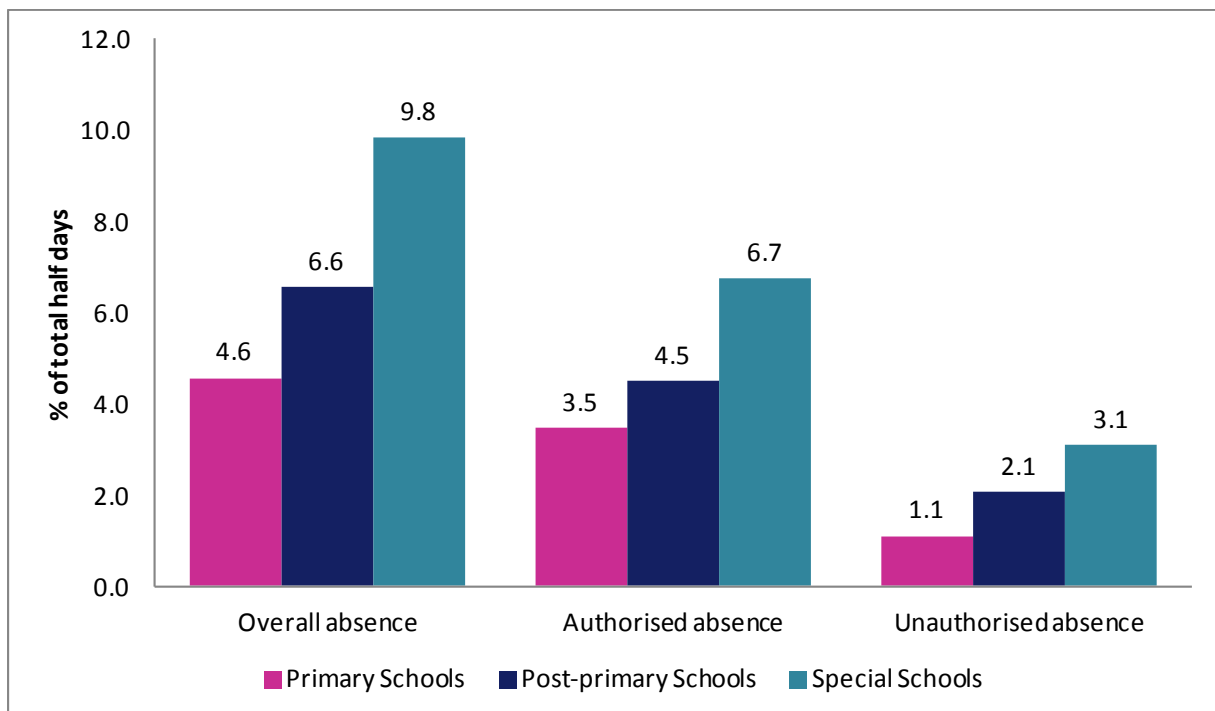
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/statistical-bulletin-attendance-at-grant-aided-primary-post-primary-and-special-schools-1314-summary.pdf>

**Table 1: Attendance and absence at school by school type, 2014/15**

	% of total half days		
	Primary Schools	Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
<b>Attended</b>	<b>95.4</b>	<b>93.4</b>	<b>90.2</b>
<b>Overall absence</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>9.8</b>
Authorised absence	3.5	4.5	6.7
Unauthorised absence	1.1	2.1	3.1

**Chart 1: Absence from primary, post-primary and special schools, 2014/15**



## Section 2: Reasons for absence

The most common reason for absence in all schools was illness, which is an authorised absence. Illness accounted for 63.9% of all absent half days in primary schools, 52.9% in post-primary schools and 46.2% in special schools. This equates to 2.9%, 3.5% and 4.5% of the total half days respectively. See Table 2 below.

The level of absence attributable to each reason tends to remain fairly consistent year on year, however, the proportion of absent half days attributable to 'Illness' has increased in comparison to 2013/14, when it was 58.6% in primary schools, 48.4% in post-primary schools and 45.2% in special schools<sup>2</sup>. In 2013/14, this was 2.6%, 3.1% and 4.4% of the total half days respectively.

With regards to unauthorised absence, the proportion of absent half days attributable to 'No reason yet provided' has decreased in comparison with 2013/14. In primary schools, 10.2% of absent half days were missed for this reason in 2014/15 compared with 19.1% in 2013/14; in post-primary schools, it was 19.7% in 2014/15 compared with 30.3% in 2013/14; and in special schools, it was 24.6% in 2014/15 compared with 28.2% in 2013/14. In 2014/15 this was 0.5%, 1.3% and 2.4% of the total half days, respectively, for primary, post-primary and special schools, compared with 0.8%, 2.0% and 2.7% in 2013/14. One reason for this reported decrease could be because schools which had any pupil absence recorded as 'No reason yet provided' were written to by DE to highlight this as a concern and to seek an assurance that the school will follow up on the reasons for pupil absences.

The increase in absent half days attributable to 'Illness' accounts for the overall increase in absence levels demonstrated in 2014/15. However this increase is counteracted somewhat by a decrease in absent half days attributable to 'No reason yet provided'.

**Table 2: Absence from schools by reason, 2014/15**

	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools		Special Schools	
	% of absent half days	% of total half days	% of absent half days	% of total half days	% of absent half days	% of total half days
<b>Authorised absence</b>						
Illness	63.9	2.9	52.9	3.5	46.2	4.5
Medical / dental appointments	3.1	0.1	5.6	0.4	8.5	0.8
Other exceptional circumstances	4.9	0.2	5.8	0.4	10.5	1.0
Family holiday agreed	2.0	0.1	0.6	*	1.9	0.2
Bereavement	1.1	0.1	1.8	0.1	0.6	0.1
Artistic endeavour	0.4	*	0.4	*	0.0	*
Suspended	0.1	*	1.4	0.1	0.7	0.1
Religious observance	0.1	*	0.0	*	0.2	*
<b>Total authorised absence</b>	<b>75.6</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>68.5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>68.5</b>	<b>6.7</b>
<b>Unauthorised absence</b>						
No reason yet provided	10.2	0.5	19.7	1.3	24.6	2.4
Family holiday not agreed	8.1	0.4	2.6	0.2	2.5	0.2
Other	5.5	0.2	9.0	0.6	4.1	0.4
Late after registration closed	0.7	*	0.3	*	0.3	*
<b>Total unauthorised absence</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>3.1</b>
<b>Total overall absence</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>9.8</b>

Note: \* denotes a figure greater than zero but less than 0.1. In some cases, percentages may not sum due to rounding

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/statistical-bulletin-attendance-at-grant-aided-primary-post-primary-and-special-schools-1314-summary.pdf>

### Section 3: Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales

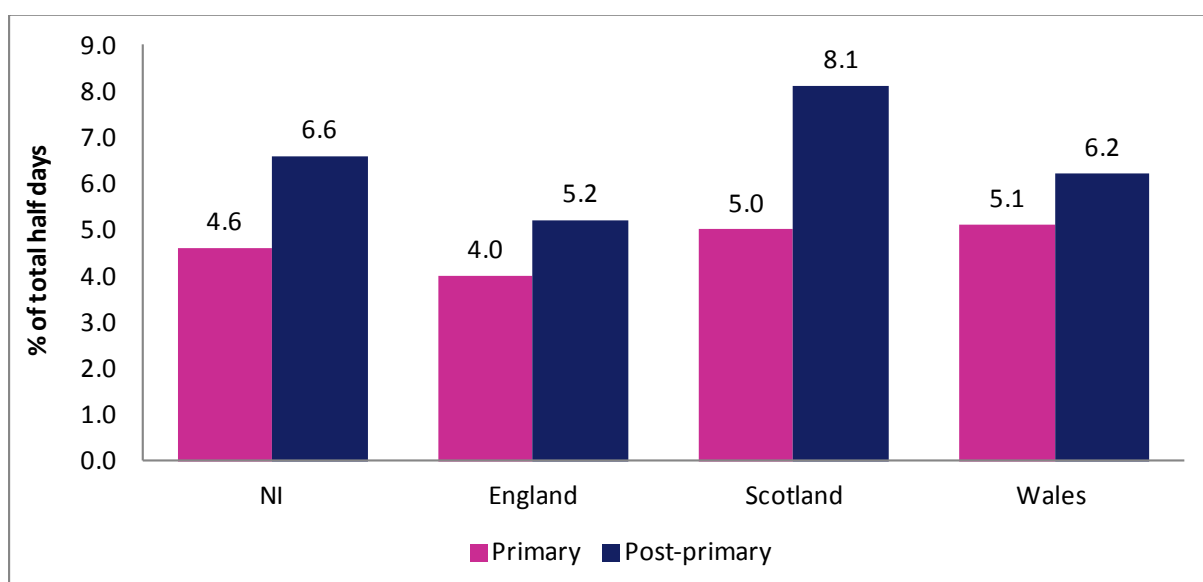
The highest overall absence rates in primary schools were recorded in Wales – 5.1% of the total half days, compared with 5.0% in Scotland, 4.6% in Northern Ireland and 4.0% in England. At 1.4% of the total half days, unauthorised absence was higher in Scotland primary schools than in any other region (1.1% in Northern Ireland, 1.0% in Wales and 0.7% in England). See Table 3 below.

In post-primary schools, the highest overall absence rate was recorded in Scotland (8.1%). The overall absence rates recorded in Northern Ireland and Wales were lower, at 6.6% and 6.2%, respectively, while overall absence in England, at 5.2%, was considerably lower again. As with primary schools, unauthorised absence was higher in Scotland post-primary schools (2.8%), than any other region. The next highest unauthorised absence rate was recorded in Northern Ireland (2.1%), while both England and Wales were considerably lower (1.2% and 1.3%, respectively). See Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Absence rates for Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, 2014/15**

	% of total half days			
	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools	
	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence
Northern Ireland	4.6	1.1	6.6	2.1
England	4.0	0.7	5.2	1.2
Scotland	5.0	1.4	8.1	2.8
Wales	5.1	1.0	6.2	1.3

**Chart 2: Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales – overall absence, 2014/15**



## Notes for readers

### Background information

#### National Statistics

1. 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.

2. For general enquiries about National Statistics, contact the National Statistics Public Enquiry Service on 0845 601 3034  
minicom: 01633 812399  
E-mail: [info@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:info@statistics.gov.uk)  
Fax: 01633 652747  
Letters: Customer Contact Centre, Office for National Statistics, Rm 1.101, Government Buildings, Cardiff Road, Newport, NP10 8XG
3. You can also find National Statistics on the Internet: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>
4. The statistics in this release have been derived from the annual School Census. More information about the collection of school attendance data can be found at:  
<https://www.deni.gov.uk/publications/attendance-statistics-data-collection-and-validation>
5. The 2014/15 figures in this statistical release are based on school census information as at 9 October 2015. They may be subject to minor revision and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy. This can be accessed at:  
<https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Statistical%20Revisions.pdf>
6. The data is produced at aggregate level only, therefore individual pupils cannot be identified. More information on confidentiality can be found in the DE Confidentiality and Access Statement at the following link:  
<https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Confidentiality%20and%20Access.pdf>

#### Definitions

7. Attendance or absence is measured for every pupil in half day sessions (am and pm). Absence can be either authorised or unauthorised.

### Attendance

In addition to actual attendance within the school premises, the following are also considered as attendance at school:

- Late (before registration closed)
- Approved sporting activities
- Study leave
- Educational visits
- Work experience
- Alternative education provision (organised by the ELB)\*
- Home/hospital tuition (organised by the ELB)\*
- Pupil referral unit\*
- Another mainstream school (under Entitlement Framework)\*
- Training Organisation (under Entitlement Framework)\*
- FE College (under Entitlement Framework)\*
- Intensive Support Learning Unit\*
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)\*

### Authorised absence

An authorised absence is absence with permission from an authorised school representative on provision of a satisfactory explanation. This includes:

- Artistic endeavour\*\*
- Bereavement
- Suspension
- Agreed family holiday (in very exceptional circumstances)
- Illness
- Medical / dental appointments
- Other exceptional circumstances (includes an exceptional event outside control of the school, for example, travelling children, court appearance)
- Religious observance

### Unauthorised absence

An unauthorised absence is absence without permission from an authorised school representative due to unexplained or unjustified absence. This includes:

- Family holiday not agreed
- Other absence (includes absence not covered by any other code or a reason which is not acceptable to the school, for example, pupil's / parent's or sibling's birthday).
- No reason provided for absence
- Late (after registration closed)

### Notes

The code 'T – Traveller absence' was removed prior to the 2010/11 academic year.

\* In 2010/11, the code 'E – Educated offsite' was removed and broken down into 8 new codes, providing more detail on the type of alternative educational provision.

\*\* New code added in 2010/11.

See <https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/2015-02-Attendance-Guidance-Absence-Recording-By-Schools.pdf> for further information.



### Data quality and coverage

8. Overall absence is considered to be a more reliable measure of absence than authorised and unauthorised absence. Both figures have been provided, however limitations in comparing rates of unauthorised and authorised absence should be noted - for those absences which are not covered by a specific code, the decision to allocate the absence as authorised or unauthorised is taken by the school.
9. Prior to September 2009, schools were advised to record unexplained absence initially as 'no reason yet provided', however, if a reason was not provided within a specified period of time, these should be changed to 'other'. From September 2009 onwards, schools were instructed that, if a reason was never provided, the code should remain as 'no reason yet provided'. This has resulted in higher levels of unauthorised absence being recorded as 'no reason yet provided' and lower figures for 'other' than in previous years.
10. Primary and post-primary data refer to pupils in Years 1 to 12 only, which aligns with the compulsory school age in Northern Ireland. Figures for special schools include all pupils attending special schools in 2014/15.
11. Attendance information was not available for ten primary schools and 11 post-primary schools which had closed prior to the data being collected. This accounts for 1.2% and 5.3% of the total primary schools and post-primary schools.
12. Comparative data was obtained from the following sources:  
Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Autumn Term 2014 and Spring Term 2015:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-2014-and-spring-2015>  
Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2014/15 (Wales):  
<http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-primary-schools/?lang=en>  
Absenteeism from Secondary Schools, 2014/15 (Wales):  
<http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-secondary-schools/?lang=en>  
Attendance and Absence 2014/15 (Scotland):  
<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/AttendanceAbsenceDatasets/atttab2015>

There are slight differences in definitions between the regions, for example, statistics for England include study leave in authorised absence while the DE statistics categorise it as present. Figures for England do not include Summer Term 2015 (when the majority of study leave is recorded), meaning it is still possible to compare their data with NI with appropriate caveats. There are also methodological differences in collecting the information. For example, the statistics for England are reported on a term by term basis. Overall absence is considered to be a better measure of comparison, rather than authorised or unauthorised absence.

13. In some cases, percentages may not sum due to rounding.

### Users and uses of the data

14. The statistics are widely used by a range of groups including members of the NI Assembly, the Department of Education, other government departments, Education and Library Boards, schools, the Education and Training Inspectorate, researchers, students and the public. The data are used for benchmarking, performance indicators, policy development and monitoring,

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cross-departmental indicators e.g. NI Multiple Deprivation Measure, OFMDFM 10 Year Strategy for Children and Young People and research studies.

15. Requests for further information should be addressed to:

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Special analyses of the attendance information can be undertaken on request.

DE Statistical Releases can be accessed on the DE website:  
<http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new.htm>

Feedback on this publication can be provided directly to Helen Irwin (contact details above) or via the feedback section on our website:  
<http://www.deni.gov.uk/feedback.htm>