



Statistical Bulletin 1/2018

Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland – 2016/17

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Analytical Services Unit
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Rathgill
Bangor BT19 7PR

Telephone

Press Office:
028 9127 9207

Analytical Services Unit:
028 9127 9638

Statistician: John Toogood

Email: statistics@education-ni.gov.uk

Internet:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research-1>

The purpose of this statistical bulletin is to present detailed, final attendance figures for schools for the 2016/17 academic year. It includes information on the rates of absence, type of absence and reason for absence. Absence is reported by schools in half day sessions and recorded as authorised or unauthorised.

KEY FINDINGS

- The overall attendance rate for primary, post-primary and special schools in the 2016/17 academic year was 94.6% of the total half days.
- 5.4% of total half days in primary, post-primary and special schools were missed due to absence. These comprised 3.7% authorised absence and 1.7% unauthorised absence.
- The attendance rate for primary schools in 2016/17 was 95.5% of total half days. 3.1% of half days were missed due to authorised absence and 1.4% due to unauthorised absence.
- The attendance rate for post-primary schools in 2016/17 was 93.3% of total half days. 4.4% of half days were missed due to authorised absence and 2.3% due to unauthorised absence.
- In special schools, the attendance rate in 2016/17 was 90.1% of total half days. This sector continues to have the highest overall absence rates – 6.6% of all half days were missed due to authorised absence and 3.3% due to 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. The data are used by members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Department of Education (DE), the Education Authority (EA) and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) for benchmarking, policy making and performance monitoring.

Responsibility for attendance policy lies with Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team in DE which monitors non-attendance and provides guidance to schools in relation to attendance. In December 2016, the Department launched a new attendance strategy *Miss School = Miss Out*, which aims to reduce school absence levels by 2021.

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. The data are also used by researchers, academics and students for research purposes and by the general public for informing choices about service providers.

Attendance data for the 2016/17 academic year were collected from all grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland via the school census which was conducted in October 2017.

On the 15th September 2017 the Department launched a consultation on the suggested discontinuation of the Attendance at grant aided primary, post primary and special schools in Northern Ireland *Summary* statistics and changes to the Attendance at grant aided primary, post primary and special schools in Northern Ireland *Detailed* statistics. With no objections received the *Summary* publication was discontinued and the remaining *Detailed* publication refined and the format changed to make it more concise for the user.

1. All Schools by Sector

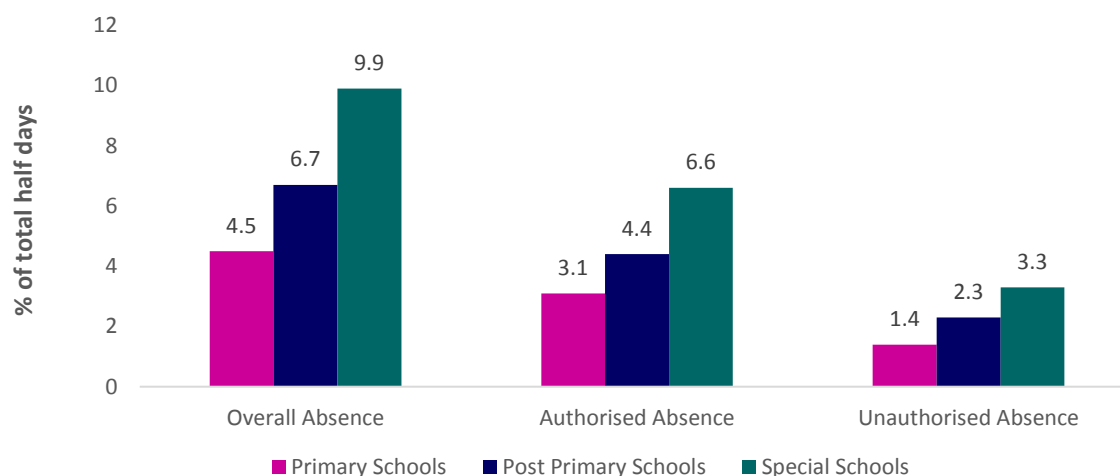
1.1 Key Findings

- In primary schools, 4.5% of all half days were missed, comprising 3.1% authorised and 1.4% unauthorised absence (see Table 1.1 below). In 2015/16, overall absence was also 4.5% of all half days (3.3% authorised and 1.2% unauthorised).
- In post-primary schools, 6.7% of all half days were missed, comprising 4.4% authorised absence and 2.3% unauthorised absence (see Table 1.1 below). In 2015/16, overall absence was 6.5% of the total half days (4.3% authorised and 2.2% unauthorised).
- In special schools, 9.9% of all half days were missed, comprising 6.6% authorised and 3.3% unauthorised absence (see Table 1.1 below). In 2015/16, overall absence was 9.8% of the total half days (6.7% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised).

Table 1.1: Attendance and absence by school type, 2016/17

	% of total half days		
	Primary Schools	Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
Attended	95.5	93.3	90.1
Overall absence	4.5	6.7	9.9
Authorised absence	3.1	4.4	6.6
Unauthorised absence	1.4	2.3	3.3

Chart 1.1: Absence from primary, post-primary and special schools, 2016/17



1.2 Reasons for Absence

The level of absence attributable to any particular reason tends to remain fairly consistent on an annual basis and this pattern continued in 2016/17. A full set of figures is provided overleaf in Table 1.2.

- Illness remains the most common reason for absence in all schools. It accounted for 59.5% of absent half days in primary schools, 51.3% in post-primary schools and 46.6% in special schools. The equivalent figures in 2015/16 were 63.1%, 53.0% and 48.4% respectively. Illness is an authorised absence.
- Absences stemming from medical/dental appointments; an authorised absence, accounted for 3.5% of missed half days in primary schools, 5.6% in post-primary schools and 8.7% in special schools. In 2015/16, these figures were 3.4%, 5.8% and 8.4% respectively.
- In primary schools, non-agreed family holidays represented 10.6% of absent half days in 2016/17, 3.2% in post-primary schools and 3.5% in special schools. The equivalent figures in 2015/16 were 9.2%, 2.9% and 5.0% respectively.
- The proportion of absent half days for which no reason was provided increased across primary and post-primary schools during 2016/17. These absences represented 13.6% of absent half days in primary schools and 21.3% in post-primary schools. The equivalent

figures from 2015/16 were 12.1% and 22.3%. The proportion in special schools was 23.4% in 2015/16 compared to 23.2% in 2016/17.

Table 1.2: Absence from all grant-aided schools by reason, 2016/17

	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools		Special Schools	
	% absent half days	% total half days	% absent half days	% total half days	% absent half days	% total half days
Authorised absence						
Total	69.7	3.1	65.8	4.4	66.6	6.6
Illness	59.5	2.7	51.3	3.4	46.6	4.6
Medical / dental appointments	3.5	0.2	5.6	0.4	8.7	0.9
Other exceptional circumstances	2.9	0.1	4.6	0.3	7.7	0.8
Family holiday agreed	2.0	0.1	0.6	*	2.1	0.2
Bereavement	1.2	0.1	1.8	0.1	0.5	0.1
Artistic endeavour	0.3	*	0.4	*	*	*
Suspended	0.1	*	1.5	0.1	0.7	0.1
Religious observance	0.1	*	0.1	*	0.1	*
Unauthorised absence						
Total	30.3	1.4	34.2	2.3	33.4	3.3
No reason provided	13.6	0.6	21.3	1.4	23.2	2.3
Family holiday not agreed	10.6	0.5	3.2	0.2	3.5	0.3
Other	5.5	0.2	9.5	0.6	6.5	0.6
Late after registration closed	0.7	*	0.3	*	0.3	*
Total overall absence	100	4.5	100	6.7	100	9.9

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

1.3 Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales

There are differences in how attendance is recorded across the countries of the UK, which means that any attempt to compare across the countries of the UK must be accompanied by some caveats. The most notable are:

- Figures for Scotland are prepared on a biennial (every two years) basis. This means that figures are available for 2016/17 but only overall absence figures as the more detailed statistics are not released until March 2018.
- Figures for Wales are not directly comparable as special schools data are contained within figures for primary and post-primary schools.

With these caveats in mind the following comparisons have been made. The highest overall absence rate in primary schools in 2016/17 was recorded in both Wales and Scotland with 5.1% of total half days missed through absence. This compares with 4.5% in Northern Ireland

and 4.0% in England. Northern Ireland had the highest level of unauthorised absences at 1.4% of all half days. The equivalent figures for England and Wales were 0.9% and 1.1% respectively (See Table 1.3 below).

In post-primary schools, the highest overall absence rate in 2016/17 was recorded in Scotland (8.8%). The overall absence rates recorded in Northern Ireland, Wales and England were lower at 6.7%, 5.9% and 5.2% of total half days respectively. The highest level of unauthorised absence was recorded in Northern Ireland, representing 2.3% of all half days. The equivalent figures for Wales and England were 1.4% and 1.3% respectively.

Table 1.3: Absence rates for Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, 2016/17

	% of total half days			
	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools	
	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence
Northern Ireland	4.5	1.4	6.7	2.3
England	4.0	0.9	5.2	1.3
Scotland	5.1	N/A	8.8	N/A
Wales	5.1	1.1	5.9	1.4

Data sources: England - *Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Autumn Term 2016 and Spring Term 2017*; Wales - *Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2016/17 and Absenteeism from Secondary Schools, 2016/17*; Scotland - *Summary statistics for schools in Scotland, No. 8: 2017 Edition*.

2. Pupil Level Analysis

2.1 Gender

Overall absence rates were similar for males and females of primary school age at 4.5% and 4.4% respectively. In post primary schools males (6.8%) had a slightly higher overall absence rate than females (6.6%). In special schools overall absence was higher for females (11.4%) compared with males (9.3%). This difference can be explained by an authorised absence rate of 8.1% for females and 5.9% for males.

Table 2.1: Attendance by gender, 2016/17

Gender		Percentage of total half days			
		Attended	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Primary	Male	95.5	4.5	3.2	1.4
	Female	95.6	4.4	3.1	1.3
	Total	95.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
Post Primary	Male	93.2	6.8	4.4	2.4
	Female	93.4	6.6	4.4	2.1
	Total	93.3	6.7	4.4	2.3
Special	Male	90.7	9.3	5.9	3.4
	Female	88.6	11.4	8.1	3.2
	Total	90.1	9.9	6.6	3.3
All Schools	Male	94.5	5.5	3.7	1.8
	Female	94.7	5.3	3.7	1.7
	Total	94.6	5.4	3.7	1.7

2.2 Religion of Pupil

There is little difference between the attendance rates of each religion category in Table 2.2 below. Overall, Protestant pupils (94.8%) have a higher attendance rate than Catholic pupils (94.5%). In primary schools the authorised absence rate for Catholic pupils (3.4%) was 0.7 of a percentage point higher than the authorised absence rate for Protestant pupils (2.7%).

Table 2.2: Attendance by religion of pupil, 2016/17

Religion		Percentage of total half days			
		Attended	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Primary	Protestant	96.0	4.0	2.7	1.3
	Catholic	95.3	4.7	3.4	1.3
	Other ¹	95.2	4.8	3.1	1.7
	Total	95.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
Post Primary	Protestant	93.4	6.6	4.3	2.3
	Catholic	93.3	6.7	4.5	2.2
	Other ¹	93.0	7.0	4.4	2.5
	Total	93.3	6.7	4.4	2.3
Special	Protestant	90.1	9.9	6.5	3.3
	Catholic	90.2	9.8	6.6	3.2
	Other ¹	89.8	10.2	6.7	3.5
	Total	90.1	9.9	6.6	3.3
All Schools	Protestant	94.8	5.2	3.5	1.8
	Catholic	94.5	5.5	3.8	1.7
	Other ¹	94.4	5.6	3.6	2.0
	Total	94.6	5.4	3.7	1.7

2.3 Ethnicity

Irish Traveller children have a markedly higher absence rate than any other ethnic group (see Table 2.3 below). Across all school types they missed 27.1% of total half days, compared with a rate of 5.9% for children from a Minority Ethnic Background and 5.3% for White pupils.

¹Other religion includes Other Christian, No religion and non-Christian.

Table 2.3: Attendance by ethnicity, 2016/17

Ethnicity		Percentage of total half days			
		Attended	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Primary	White	95.6	4.4	3.1	1.3
	Minority Ethnic Background ¹	94.4	5.6	3.1	2.5
	Irish Traveller	76.2	23.8	13.0	10.8
	Total	95.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
Post Primary	White	93.4	6.6	4.4	2.2
	Minority Ethnic Background ²	93.7	6.3	3.6	2.7
	Irish Traveller	63.9	36.1	12.3	23.8
	Total	93.3	6.7	4.4	2.3
Special	White	90.3	9.7	6.6	3.2
	Minority Ethnic Background ¹	89.6	10.4	6.5	3.9
	Irish Traveller	73.2	26.8	8.9	17.9
	Total	90.1	9.9	6.6	3.3
All Schools	White	94.7	5.3	3.7	1.7
	Minority Ethnic Background ¹	94.1	5.9	3.4	2.6
	Irish Traveller	72.9	27.1	12.6	14.5
	Total	94.6	5.4	3.7	1.7

Note: Ethnicity was not available for 10 primary enrolments, representing 0.005% of the total enrolments.

2.4 Looked After Children²

In 2016/17, Looked After Children in primary schools continued to have a slightly higher attendance rate (96.0%) than those who were not in care (95.5%). The largest difference in attendance rates between Looked After Children and those that are not Looked After was for unauthorised absence in post primary schools, 4.9% and 2.3% respectively (See Table 2.4).

¹ Minority Ethnic Background includes Black African, Black Caribbean, Black Other, Bangladeshi, Chinese/Hong Kong, Indian/Sri Lankan, Korean, Malaysian, Pakistani, Roma, Vietnamese, Mixed, Other

² 'Looked after children' includes children defined in 'The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995', i.e., 'a child who is looked after by an authority is a reference to a child who is: (a) in the care of the authority; or (b) provided with accommodation by the authority.' This includes children who are fostered.

Table 2.4: Attendance of Looked After Children, 2016/17

Looked After Children		Percentage of total half days			
		Attended	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Primary	Looked After Children	96.0	4.0	2.7	1.3
	Other	95.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
	Total	95.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
Post Primary	Looked After Children	90.3	9.7	4.8	4.9
	Other	93.3	6.7	4.4	2.3
	Total	93.3	6.7	4.4	2.3
Special	Looked After Children	91.6	8.4	6.8	1.7
	Other	90.0	10.0	6.6	3.4
	Total	90.1	9.9	6.6	3.3
All Schools	Looked After Children	93.1	6.9	4.1	2.8
	Other	94.6	5.4	3.7	1.7
	Total	94.6	5.4	3.7	1.7

2.5 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas³ (NRAs)

At 7.6%, the overall absence rate for pupils living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas was 2.6 percentage points higher than for pupils who did not live in an NRA (5.0%). When comparing school types the difference in attendance rates between pupils living in NRAs and those that do not was largest in the post primary sector, 9.4% and 6.2% respectively (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5: Attendance rates for primary pupils living in NRAs, 2016/17

NRA		Percentage of total half days			
		Attended	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Primary	NRA	93.6	6.4	4.0	2.4
	Other	95.9	4.1	2.9	1.2
	Total	95.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
Post Primary	NRA	90.6	9.4	5.5	3.9
	Other	93.8	6.2	4.2	2.0
	Total	93.3	6.7	4.4	2.3
Special	NRA	88.3	11.7	6.6	5.1
	Other	90.7	9.3	6.6	2.7
	Total	90.1	9.9	6.6	3.3
All Schools	NRA	92.4	7.6	4.6	3.0
	Other	95.0	5.0	3.5	1.5
	Total	94.6	5.4	3.7	1.7

³ Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) are neighbourhoods identified as experiencing the most severe multiple deprivation and have been chosen to receive support under the Department of Communities' People and Place strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

2.6 Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME)

2.6.1 School Level data – free school meal bands

Pupils who are entitled to free school meals have lower attendance rates than those who do not. This is reflected in the **school level data** which shows that absence rates increase in line with the percentage of enrolled pupils who are entitled for free school meals (See Table 2.6).

The overall absence rate in primary schools where less than 10% of pupils were entitled to free school meals was 3.0% of total half days in 2016/17. By comparison, primary schools where more than 50% of pupils were entitled to free school meals had an absence rate of 6.5%. In the post primary sector the difference is even greater with an absence rate of 3.8% for schools with less than 10% of pupils entitled to free school meals compared with 9.5% for schools with 50% or more of their pupils entitled to free school meals. Since the level of free school meal entitlement is indicative of deprivation levels, the data suggests that absence is higher in more disadvantaged areas.

Table 2.6: Attendance by FSME band, 2016/17

% of pupils entitled to Free School Meals		Percentage of total half days			
		Attended	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Primary	Under 10.00	97.0	3.0	2.2	0.8
	10.00 – 19.99	96.6	3.4	2.6	0.8
	20.00 – 29.99	95.9	4.1	3.0	1.1
	30.00 – 39.99	95.2	4.8	3.3	1.5
	40.00 – 49.99	94.7	5.3	3.5	1.7
	50.00 or more	93.5	6.5	4.0	2.5
	Total	95.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
Post Primary	Under 10.00	96.2	3.8	3.3	0.6
	10.00 – 19.99	95.3	4.7	3.7	1.0
	20.00 – 29.99	94.0	6.0	4.2	1.8
	30.00 – 39.99	91.8	8.2	5.0	3.1
	40.00 – 49.99	91.6	8.4	5.0	3.3
	50.00 or more	90.5	9.5	5.3	4.1
	Total	93.3	6.7	4.4	2.3

2.6.2 Pupil Level data - free school meal entitlement of the pupil

In 2016/17, free school meal entitled pupils were absent for 7.7% of total half days compared with 4.4% for pupil not entitled to free school meals, a difference of 3.3 percentage points. At 4.6 percentage points the difference in the absence rates between FSME pupils (9.9%) and Non FSME pupils (5.3%) was greatest in the post primary sector.

Table 2.7: Attendance by free school meal status, 2016/17

		Percentage of total half days			
		Attended	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Primary	FSME	93.7	6.3	4.2	2.1
	Non FSME	96.3	3.7	2.6	1.0
	Total	95.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
Post Primary	FSME	90.1	9.9	6.0	3.9
	Non FSME	94.7	5.3	3.7	1.6
	Total	93.3	6.7	4.4	2.3
Special	FSME	89.3	10.7	6.8	3.9
	Non FSME	91.0	9.0	6.4	2.6
	Total	90.1	9.9	6.6	3.3
All Schools	FSME	92.3	7.7	4.9	2.8
	Non FSME	95.6	4.4	3.1	1.3
	Total	94.6	5.4	3.7	1.7

2.7 Newcomer Status

In 2016/17, Newcomer pupils had a lower attendance rate (92.0%) than those who were not Newcomer pupils (94.7%). There is also a difference in the rate of unauthorised absence among Newcomer and Non Newcomer pupils with the rate more than double at 3.5% and 1.7% of total half days respectively.

Table 2.8: Attendance by Newcomer status, 2016/17

		Percentage of total half days			
		Attended	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Primary	Newcomer	92.6	7.4	4.3	3.1
	Non Newcomer	95.7	4.3	3.1	1.3
	Total	95.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
Post Primary	Newcomer	89.9	10.1	5.2	4.9
	Non Newcomer	93.4	6.6	4.4	2.2
	Total	93.3	6.7	4.4	2.3
Special	Newcomer	88.4	11.6	6.7	4.9
	Non Newcomer	90.1	9.9	6.6	3.3
	Total	90.1	9.9	6.6	3.3
All Schools	Newcomer	92.0	8.0	4.5	3.5
	Non Newcomer	94.7	5.3	3.6	1.7
	Total	94.6	5.4	3.7	1.7

2.8 Overview

Schools monitor attendance to identify potential concerns at an early stage. When a concern is identified the school will contact parents to seek their assistance. However there are instances when, despite the school using a range of intervention strategies to support them, the pupil will still struggle with attendance. When schools are unable to resolve an attendance issue and the school is concerned or attendance has reduced below 85%, they should refer a pupil to the EA's dedicated Education Welfare Service (EWS). This breakdown in Table 2.9 can help identify characteristics which make a pupil more prone to poor attendance.

At post-primary school level the figures indicate that there are particular attendance issues involving Irish Traveller children – 71.2% of these pupils are absent for at least 15% of total half days. For primary schools the corresponding figure for Irish Travellers was 55.9%.

Table 2.9 provides a detailed breakdown of attendance by pupil characteristics, grouped by categories such as gender, religion and ethnicity.

Table 2.9 Attendance overview by school Type 2016/17

Pupil Characteristic	Primary			Post Primary			Special			Total		
	100%	85.01%-99.99%	85% or below	100%	85.01%-99.99%	85% or below	100%	85.01%-99.99%	85% or below	100%	85.01%-99.99%	85% or below
Gender	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	8.3	87.4	4.3	5.7	84.3	10.0	4.0	79.5	16.5	7.2	86.0	6.8
Female	8.4	87.9	3.7	6.0	84.6	9.4	2.7	75.6	21.6	7.4	86.5	6.1
Free Meal Entitlement	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Entitled	4.5	87.8	7.7	3.5	77.4	19.0	2.9	76.0	21.1	4.1	83.6	12.3
Non-Entitled	10.2	87.5	2.3	6.9	87.5	5.6	4.3	80.9	14.7	8.8	87.5	3.7
Ethnicity	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
White	8.4	88.0	3.6	5.8	84.7	9.5	3.6	78.8	17.6	7.3	86.6	6.1
Minority Ethnic Background	8.2	83.9	7.9	8.4	80.8	10.8	2.9	74.5	22.6	8.2	82.7	9.2
Irish Traveller	1.3	42.8	55.9	3.6	25.2	71.2	*	#	53.1	1.8	38.5	59.6
Religion	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Protestant	10.2	86.4	3.3	7.1	83.0	10.0	4.4	77.5	18.0	8.8	84.8	6.4
Catholic	7.2	88.7	4.1	4.8	86.1	9.1	3.3	78.3	18.4	6.3	87.5	6.2
Other	8.2	86.7	5.1	6.3	82.3	11.4	2.7	80.0	17.3	7.5	85.2	7.3
Total	8.4	87.6	4.0	5.9	84.4	9.7	3.6	78.3	18.1	7.3	86.2	6.4

* Denotes fewer than 5 pupils

figure not provided under rules of statistical disclosure

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.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is the Department of Education's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored

2. For general enquiries about National Statistics, contact the National Statistics Public Enquiry Service:

Customer Contact Centre,
Office for National Statistics,
Rm 1.101,
Government Buildings,
Cardiff Road,
Newport, NP10 8XG

E-mail: info@statistics.gov.uk

Tel: 0845 601 3034

Minicom: 01633 812399 *Fax:* 01633 652747

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.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/updated-data-collection-procedures-1415.pdf>
5. The 2016/17 figures in this statistical release are based on school census information as at 6 October 2017. 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.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Revisions%20policy.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.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Confidentiality%20and%20Access.pdf>

Definitions

- 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 EA)*
- Home/hospital tuition (organised by the EA)*
- 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.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Attendance%20Guidance%20and%20Absence%20Recording%20by%20Schools.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 rates 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 2016/17.
11. Attendance information was not available for four primary schools and four post-primary schools which closed or amalgamated prior to the data being collected. This accounts for 0.5% and 2.0% 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 2016 and Spring Term 2017:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-2016-and-spring-2017>
Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2016/17 (Wales):
<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-primary-schools/?lang=en>
Absenteeism from Secondary Schools, 2016/17 (Wales):
<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-secondary-schools/?lang=en>
Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No. 8: 2017 Edition
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/12/3099/downloads>
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 2017 (when the majority of study leave is recorded), meaning their data can only be compared with DE's data 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.
14. Pupil level information refers to the number of pupil enrolments rather than the number of pupils. A pupil can move schools during the year and will therefore have an attendance record at more than one school.
15. Comparison of the number of looked after children recorded in the school census and the number recorded by the DoH Children Order Statistical Tables suggests some under-

reporting of looked after children in the school census. It is possible that schools are unaware of the child's looked after status. Also, since attendance data is collectively retrospectively from schools and matched with current pupil characteristics, the looked after status may have changed. Despite this, attendance rates for looked after children have been included in this publication since the data are sufficiently robust to produce indicative figures.

16. As stated earlier, attendance is measured for each pupil in half day sessions. In order to provide information on the actual number of school days missed, these totals have been divided by two. While this is useful to provide an indication of school days missed, it is generally more accurate to report in terms of half days.
17. Schools are required to be in operation for 190 days in the school year, less any School Development Days (SDDs). Schools can apply for up to five SDDs, which can produce slight variations between the numbers of days individual schools are open to pupils.

Users and uses of the data

18. Attendance data are collected annually via the school census and are required by a range of organisations and individuals for a variety of purposes. The data are used by members of the NI Assembly, the Department of Education (DE), the Education Authority and the Education and Training Inspectorate for benchmarking, policy making and performance monitoring. Responsibility for attendance policy lies with Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team in DE which monitors non-attendance and provides guidance to schools in relation to attendance. In December 2016, the Department launched a new attendance strategy *Miss School = Miss Out*, which aims to reduce school absence levels by 2021. 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. The data are also used by researchers, academics and students for research purposes and by the general public for informing choices about service providers.
19. Requests for further information should be addressed to:

John Toogood
Analytical Services Unit
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Bangor
Co. Down
BT19 7PR
Telephone: 02891 279638
Fax: 028 9127 9594
Email: john.toogood@education-ni.gov.uk

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

DE Statistical Releases can be accessed on the DE website: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research-1>

Feedback on this publication can be provided directly to John Toogood (contact details above) or via the feedback section on our website: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/forms/feedback>.