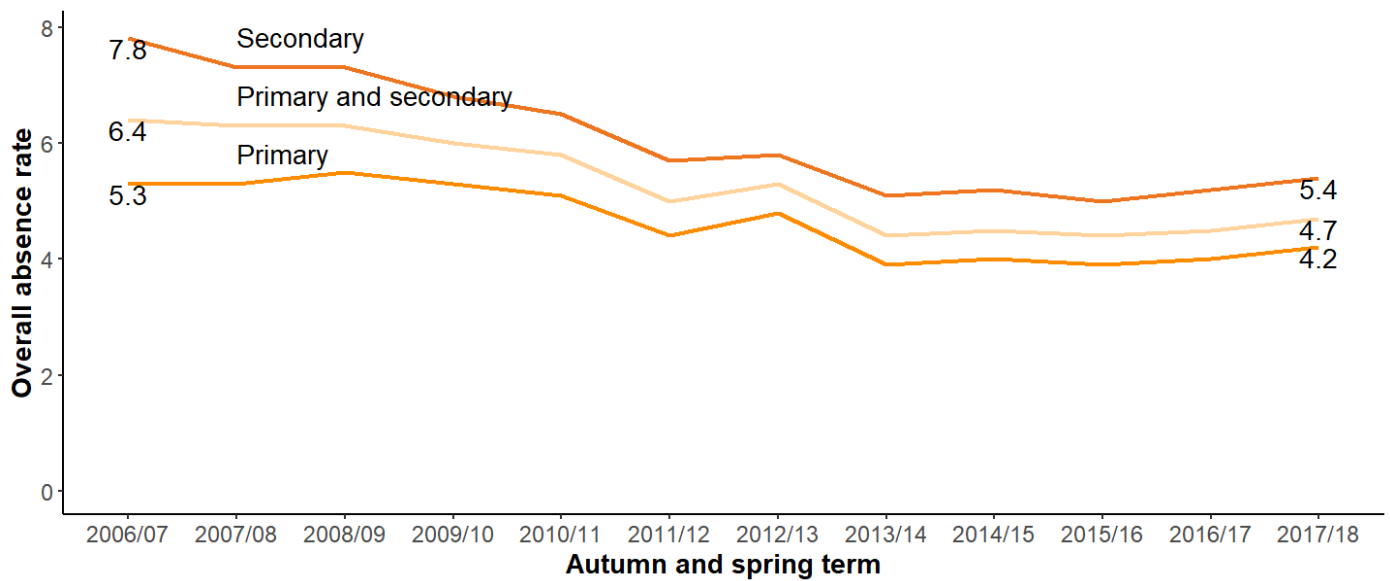




Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2017 and spring 2018

18 October 2018

The overall absence rate has increased since last year



The overall absence rate has increased from 4.5 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17 to 4.7 per cent in autumn/spring 2017/18.

The overall absence rate has remained fairly stable across recent years after following a downward trend since 2006/07, and despite the recent rise is 1.7 percentage points lower since absence data was first collected at pupil level in autumn/spring 2006/07 when it was 6.4 per cent.

Both authorised and unauthorised absence rates have increased since last year

The rate of authorised absence has increased from 3.4 per cent to 3.5 per cent in autumn/spring 2017/18. This is due to the percentage of possible sessions missed due to illness increasing since last year from 2.7 to 2.8 per cent, and “other” authorised absence has also increased. Illness remains the most common reason for absence, accounting for 60.0 per cent of all absences.

The unauthorised absence rate has also increased across primary and secondary schools since last year, from 1.1 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17 to 1.2 per cent in autumn/spring 2017/18. This is due to increased levels of unauthorised family holiday and “other” unauthorised absence.

The rate of persistent absence has increased since last year

The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary and state-funded secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees in autumn/spring 2017/18 was 11.3 per cent.

This is higher than the equivalent figure of 10.4 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17.

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This National Statistics release reports on absence in state-funded primary, state-funded secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units during the autumn term 2017 and spring term 2018. Only full year absence figures give a complete view of pupil absence. Two term absence figures are useful as they give an indication of the full year position at a much earlier time. However, the figures can be volatile as the length of the two academic terms varies according to the timing of Easter. In 2018, Easter Sunday was on 1 April, compared with 16 April in 2017, meaning that the autumn/spring term covered a two-week shorter period in 2017/18.

Final absence statistics relating to the full 2017/18 school year are intended for publication in March 2019. The Department uses two key measures to monitor pupil absence - overall and persistent absence. Absence by reason and by pupil characteristics is also included in this release. Figures held in this release are used as key indicators in behaviour and attendance policy. High levels of attendance are essential in ensuring that all pupils can benefit from the opportunities provided by education.

A "[guide to absence statistics](#)", which provides historical information on absence statistics, as well as technical background information on the figures and data collection, should be referenced alongside this release.

Changes to this release

This is the second academic year where termly absence data has been collected from special schools; previously only annual data was collected and special school absence rates could not be included within this publication. Absence information for special schools is available in chapter 5 of this document and table 7 of the accompanying national tables. We will continue to publish termly special school absence rates separately in this way until we have a three year time series for special schools, upon which we will then include this data within the other published tables and headline commentary.

In this publication

The following tables are included in the release:

- Absence_2term_201718_National_tables.xls and .ods
- Underlying data (open format .csv and metadata .txt)

This includes local authority level information and is accompanied by a metadata document that describes underlying data files.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at schools.statistics@education.gov.uk.

1. Absence rates (Table 1)

Overall absence rate definition

The overall absence rate is the total number of overall absence sessions for all pupils as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions for all pupils, where overall absence is the sum of authorised and unauthorised absence and one session is equal to half a day.

$$\text{Overall absence rate} = \frac{\text{Total overall absence sessions}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$$

The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools increased from 4.5 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17 to 4.7 per cent in autumn/spring 2017/18. In primary schools the overall absence rate increased from 4.0 per cent to 4.2 per cent and the rate in secondary schools increased from 5.2 per cent to 5.4 per cent.

The increase in overall absence rate has been driven by an increase in both the authorised and unauthorised absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools. The authorised rate increased by 0.1 percentage points from 3.4 to 3.5 per cent, while the unauthorised rate increased from 1.1 to 1.2 per cent between autumn/spring 2016/17 and autumn/spring 2017/18 (see Figure 1).

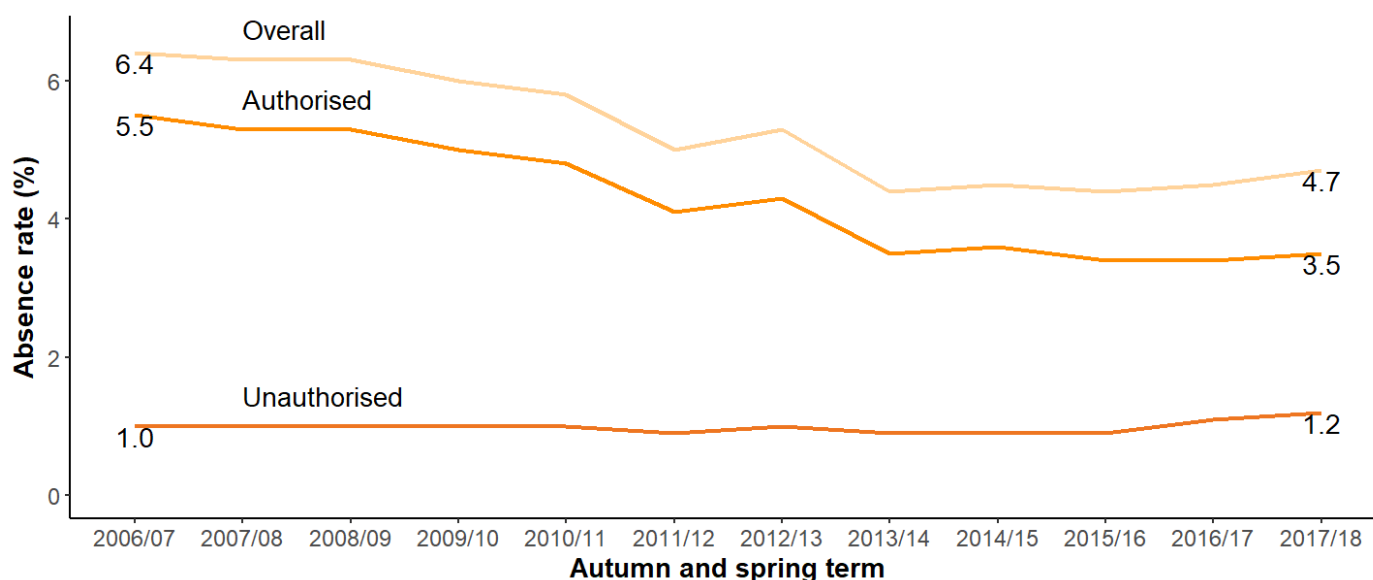
The total number of days missed due to overall absence across state-funded primary and secondary schools has increased slightly since last year, from 37.4 million in autumn/spring 2016/17 to 37.8 million in autumn/spring 2017/18. However, the average number of days missed per enrolment has stayed the same at 5.5 in autumn/spring 2016/17 as it was in autumn/spring 2017/18.

Autumn/spring 2017/18 has a higher overall absence rate than 2016/17 while the average number of days lost is the same. This is because Easter was two weeks earlier in 2018 than in 2017 and while there was only a slightly higher number of days lost over the 2 terms, this was for a period two weeks shorter than 2016/17.

Figure 1: Comparison of the trend in overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates

England, Autumn term 2006 and spring term 2007 to autumn term 2017 and spring term 2018

Source: School Census



2. Persistent absence (Table 1)

Persistent absence definition

A pupil enrolment is identified as a persistent absentee if they miss 10% or more of their possible sessions.

$$\text{Persistent absence rate} = \frac{\text{Number of enrolments classed as persistent absentees}}{\text{Number of enrolments}} \times 100$$

The persistent absentee measure changed as of the start of the 2015/16 academic year. Time series data in this release has been recalculated using the new methodology but caution should be used when interpreting these series as they may be impacted by the change in the measure itself. For more information on this and on the methodologies used in previous years, please see the ["guide to absence statistics"](#).

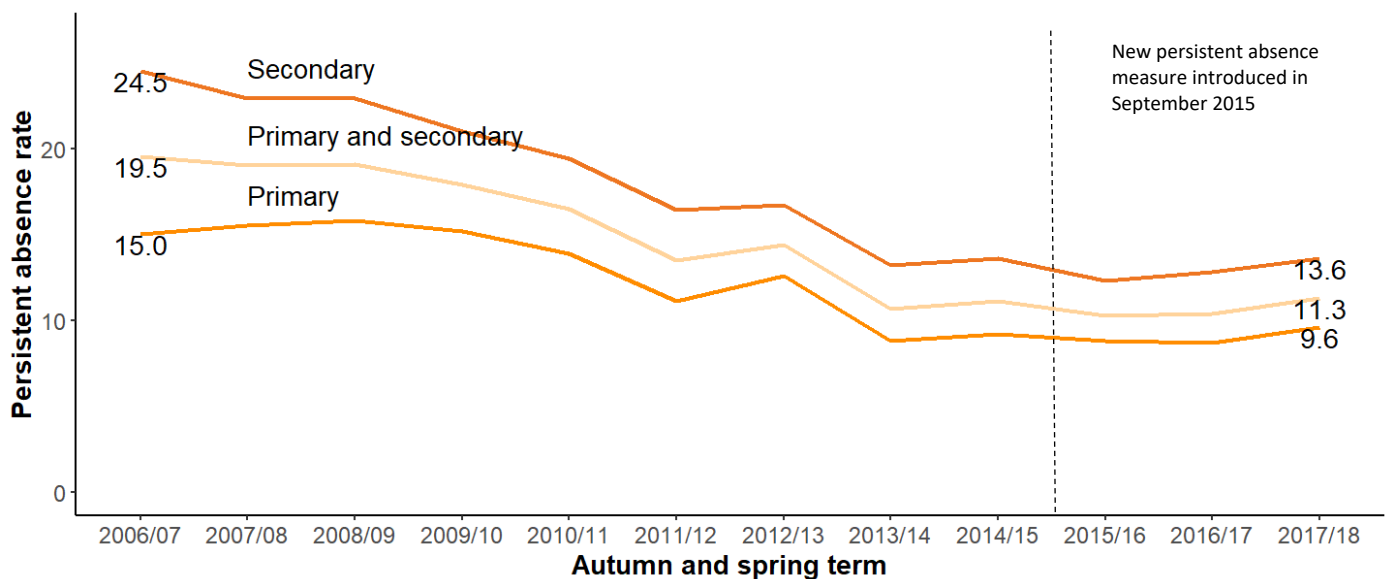
The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary and state-funded secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees in autumn/spring 2017/18 was 11.3 per cent. This is up from the equivalent figure of 10.4 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17.

Secondary schools have the higher rate of persistent absence, 13.6 per cent of enrolments, compared to 9.6 per cent of enrolments in primary schools. The rate of persistent absence has increased in both since last year, when the rate was 12.8 per cent in secondary schools and 8.7 per cent in primary schools (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of enrolments who are persistent absentees

England, Autumn term 2006 and spring term 2007 to autumn term 2017 and spring term 2018

Source: School Census



3. Reasons for absence (Tables 2 & 3)

Reason for absence definition

Within this release absence by reason is broken down in three different ways:

Distribution of absence by reason

The proportion of absence for each reason, calculated by taking the number of absences for a specific reason as a percentage of the total number of absences reported by reason.

Rate of absence by reason

The rate of absence for each reason, calculated by taking the number of absences for a specific reason as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions.

One or more sessions missed due to each reason

The number of pupil enrolments missing at least one session due to each reason.

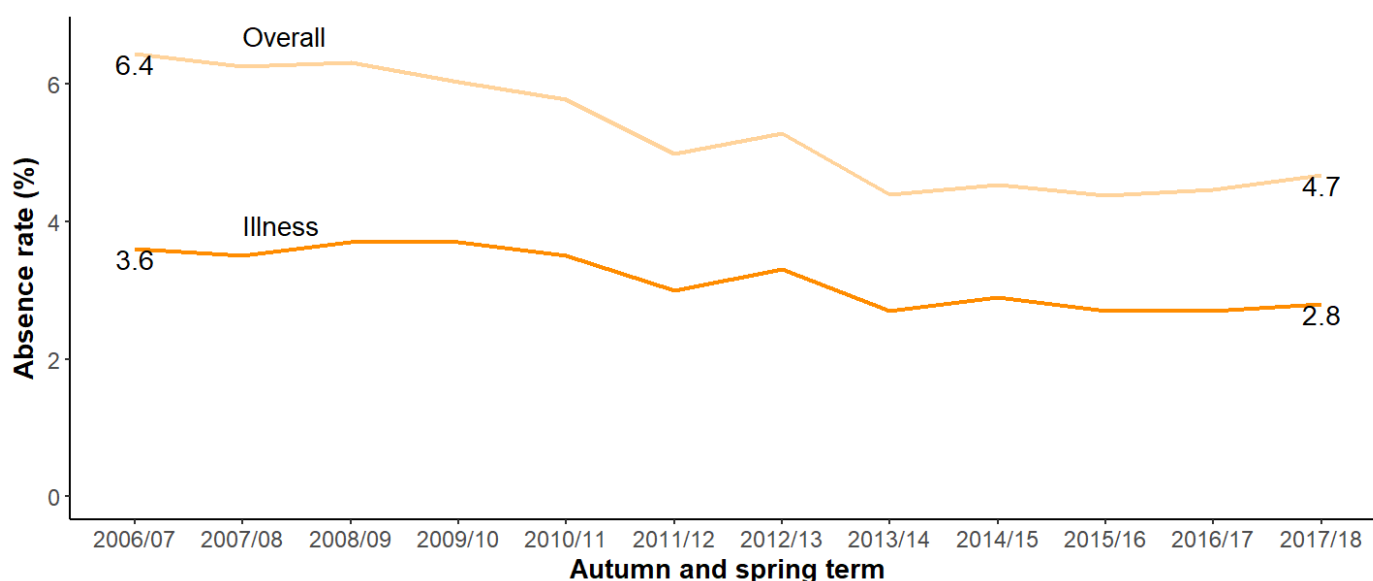
Illness is the main driver for overall absence rates; illness absence accounted for 60 per cent of all absence in autumn/spring 2017/18. However, this is a lower proportion than seen in previous years, 60.1 in autumn/spring 2016/17 and 62.2 in autumn/spring 2015/16.

Overall absence rates have increased slightly since autumn/spring 2016/17, and illness rates have also increased from 2.7 per cent last year to 2.8 per cent (see Figure 3). “Other” authorised absence has also increased from 0.2 per cent to 0.3 per cent this year.

Figure 3: Comparison of the trend in overall and illness absence

England, Autumn term 2006 and spring term 2007 to autumn term 2017 and spring term 2018

Source: School Census



Although the overall and authorised rates have increased, the rate of absence due to religious observance has decreased in autumn/spring 2017/18 to a negligible amount from 0.1 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17. Religious absence varies a lot from year to year, depending on when religious observance days fall in the calendar. In the latest year, the low rate may be due to the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha not falling on school days.

The increase in the unauthorised absence rate since last year is due to increases in unauthorised holidays (seen when looking to 2 decimal places) and “other” unauthorised circumstances. The rate of absence due to “other” unauthorised circumstances has increased to 0.8 per cent in 2017/18, from 0.7 per cent in 2016/17. After being fairly steady, it has risen in the last two years.

In autumn/spring 2017/18, 86.1 per cent of pupils had at least one session of overall absence, a lower percentage than in the same period last year where 86.6 per cent of pupils had at least one session of overall absence.

Absence due to family holiday

When rounded to one decimal place, the percentage of all possible sessions missed due to family holidays (authorised and unauthorised) has remained unchanged from the previous year 0.3 at per cent; the authorised holiday rate is 0.1 per cent in both years and the unauthorised holiday rate is 0.3 per cent.

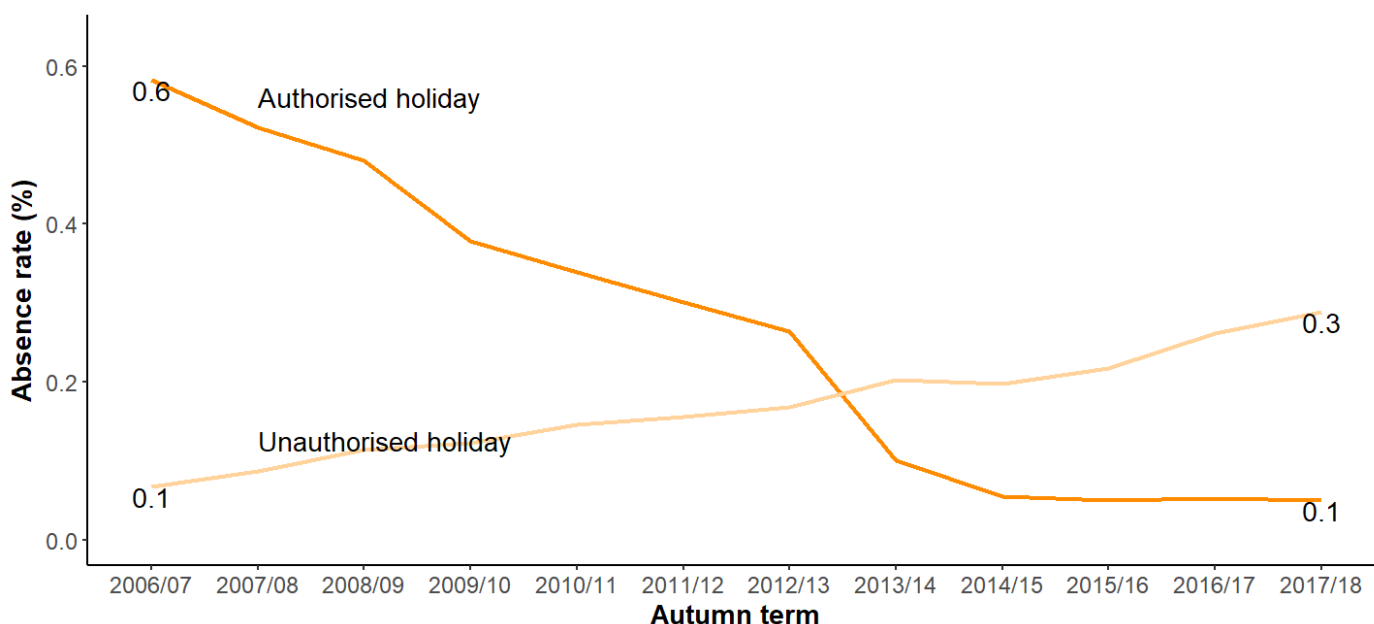
However, when looking at unrounded rates unauthorised holiday absence has been increasing gradually since 2006/07 whilst authorised holiday absence is much lower now than in 2006/07 but has remained steady over recent years (see Figure 4). From September 2013 a regulations amendment stated that term time leave may only be granted in exceptional circumstances, which explains the sharp fall in authorised holiday absence between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Figure 4: Comparison of the trend in authorised and unauthorised holiday absence rates:

England, Autumn term 2006 and spring term 2007 to autumn term 2017 and spring term 2018

(based on unrounded absence rates)

Source: School Census



The percentage of pupils who missed at least one session due to a family holiday in autumn/spring 2017/18 was 9.6 per cent, compared with 9.4 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17.

4. Absence by pupil characteristics (Tables 4.1, 4.2, 5.1 & 5.2)

The patterns of absence rates for pupils with different characteristics have been consistent across recent years.

Gender

The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools were very similar for boys and girls, at 4.7 per cent and 4.6 per cent respectively. The persistent absence rate was also similar, at 11.5 per cent for boys and 11.1 per cent for girls.

Free school meals (FSM) eligibility

Absence rates are higher for pupils who are known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals. The overall absence rate for these pupils was 7.3 per cent, compared to 4.2 per cent for non-FSM pupils. The persistent absence rate for pupils who were eligible for FSM (at 23.0 per cent) was more than twice the rate for those pupils not eligible for FSM (at 9.1 per cent).

National curriculum year group

Pupils in national curriculum year groups 3 and 4 had the lowest overall absence rates at 3.9 and 4.0 per cent respectively. Pupils in national curriculum year groups 10 and 11 had the highest overall absence rate at 6.0 per cent.

This trend is repeated for persistent absence, where the persistent absence rate for national curriculum year group 3 pupils had the lowest rate at 8.6 per cent while year 10 pupils had the highest rate - 15.9 per cent.

Special educational need (SEN)

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or education, health and care plan (EHC) had an overall absence rate of 7.5 per cent compared to 4.4 per cent for those with no identified SEN.

The percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN or an EHC plan that are persistent absentees is more than two times higher (21.9 per cent) than the rate for pupils with no identified SEN (9.8 per cent).

Ethnic group

The highest overall absence rates were for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/ Roma pupils at 17.6 per cent and 12.3 per cent respectively.

Overall absence rates for pupils of a Chinese and Black African ethnicity were substantially lower than the national average of 4.7 per cent at 2.5 per cent and 2.8 per cent respectively.

A similar pattern is seen in persistent absence rates; Traveller of Irish heritage pupils had the highest rate at 60.7 per cent and Chinese pupils had the lowest rate at 3.7 per cent.

5. Special schools (Table 7)

This is the second year that absence data has been collected from special schools on a termly basis, it was previously only collected on an annual basis. The overall absence rate in special schools was 10.3 per cent, which is higher than the rate in state-funded primary and secondary schools. It is also an increase on the rate seen last year in special schools in autumn and spring (9.7 per cent).

Persistent absence was higher than in primary and secondary schools at 30.1 per cent, and was also higher than last year when it was 28.2 per cent.

6. Absence for four year olds (Underlying data)

The overall absence rate for four year olds in autumn/spring 2017/18 was 5.3 per cent. This had been steady at 5.1 per cent for the previous three years.

Absence recorded for four year olds is not treated as 'authorised' or 'unauthorised' and is therefore reported as overall absence only.

7. Pupil referral unit absence (Table 6)

The overall absence rate for pupil referral units in autumn/spring 2017/18 was 34.6 per cent, an increase from 33.2 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17. The increase is largely due to increased absence for "other" authorised circumstances and "other" unauthorised circumstances.

The percentage of enrolments in pupil referral units who were persistent absentees was 74.3 per cent in autumn/spring 2017/18, compared to 71.8 per cent in autumn/spring 2016/17.

8. Background: Additional information and updates

This release is accompanied by underlying data, including national, local authority and school level information. The accompanying file includes a metadata document which provides further information on the contents of these files. This data is released under the terms of the [Open Government License](#) and is intended to meet at least 3 stars for [Open Data](#).

9. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in Excel format on the [department's statistics website](#):

National tables

Charts

1. Overall absence rates by type of school
2. Percentage of pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees

Tables

3. Pupil absence and pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees by type of school
4. Pupil absence by reason and gender
5. Pupil enrolments with one or more sessions of absence by reason
 - 4.1 Pupil absence by characteristics
 - 4.2 Characteristics of pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees
- 5.1 Pupil absence by ethnic group
- 5.2 Pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees by ethnic group
6. Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for pupil referral units
7. Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for special schools

10. Revisions

There are no further planned revisions to this publication. However, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the [Departmental revisions policy](#).

When reviewing the tables, please note that:

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.
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 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.
We adopt symbols to help identify suppression	Symbols are used in the tables as follows: 0 zero x small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality . not applicable .. not available

11. Further information is available

For recent pupil absence statistics visit: [Statistics: pupil absence](#)

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.gov.uk or [Welsh Government Statistics and Research](#)

Scotland: school.stats@scotland.gov.uk or [Scottish Government School Education Statistics](#)

Northern Ireland: statistics@deni.gov.uk or [Department of Education Statistics](#)

12. National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

The Department has a set of [statistical policies](#) in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

13. Technical information

These 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. A [guide to absence statistics](#), which provides historical information on absence statistics, technical background information on the figures and data collection, and definitions of key terms should be referred to alongside this release.

The following technical notes are specific to this publication.

- Data are collected a term in arrears, meaning that where a school closes, data are not collected for the last term the school was open. For schools which close at the end of a term, data for that term will not be collected.
- 30 sponsor-led academies opened part way through the year and incorrectly returned absence data for their predecessor school. As the combined absence data would then be related to both the academy and the predecessor school these academies have been completely removed from this analysis. One independent school that became a free school was also removed.
- Year on year comparisons of local authority data may be affected by schools converting to academies.
- Schools with fewer than 6 enrolments aged between five and fifteen are removed from our analysis. For this release, 21 schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

14. Get in touch

Media enquiries

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Other enquiries/feedback

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