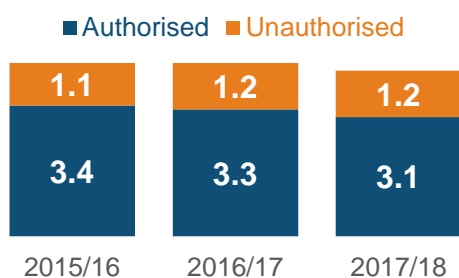


# Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 2018

30 May 2019

## Overall absence has decreased

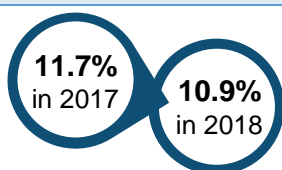


The overall absence rate for state-funded primary, secondary and special schools decreased from 4.4 per cent in Autumn 2017 to 4.3 per cent in Autumn 2018. The decrease occurred across all school types and continues the general downward trend since Autumn 2008.

Authorised absence has decreased (from 3.3 to 3.1 per cent) and unauthorised absence has remained stable (1.2 per cent).

**3 days**  
missed on  
average

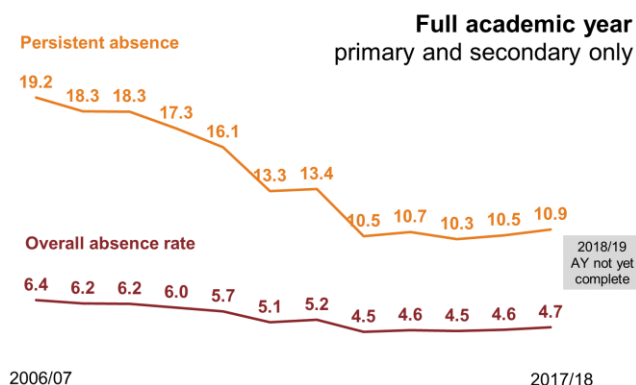
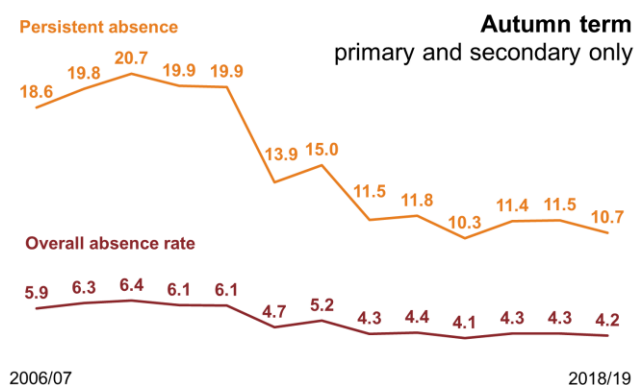
## More than one in ten pupils were persistently absent during Autumn 2018



The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools that were classified as persistent absentees during the Autumn term declined from 11.7 per cent in Autumn 2017 to 10.9 per cent in Autumn 2018.

## These are the first absent rates published for the 2018/19 academic year

This is the first of three planned absence publications relating to the 2018/19 academic year and relates to the Autumn term only. Figures relating to the first two terms will be published in October 2019 and figures relating to the full 2018/19 academic year will be published in March 2020 with more detailed data and commentary. In recent years, Autumn term absence rates have given reasonable indications of trends in the full year data.



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### About this release

This statistical release reports on absence of pupils of compulsory school age in state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools during the Autumn 2018 term. Information on absence in pupil referral units and for pupils aged four is also included. The Department uses two key measures to monitor pupil absence – overall and persistent absence. Absence by reason is also included in this release.

Figures are available at national, regional, local authority and school level. Figures held in this release are used for policy development as key indicators in behaviour and school attendance policy. Schools and local authorities also use the statistics to compare their local absence rates to regional and national averages for different pupil groups.

[A Guide to absence statistics](#), which provides historical information on absence statistics, as well as information on the data sources and technical background information on the figures and data collection, should be referenced alongside this release. It also explains the coverage and quality of the statistics, and explains the methodology used in producing the data.

### In this publication

The following tables are included in the publication:

- Absence\_Autumn\_2018\_Main\_tables (Excel .xls)
- 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](mailto:schools.statistics@education.gov.uk)

# 1. Absence rates

## 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:

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

Similar rates are calculated using authorised and unauthorised absence only.

The latest data shows that:

- The overall absence rate for state-funded primary, secondary and special schools decreased from 4.4 per cent in Autumn 2017 to 4.3 per cent in Autumn 2018. The decrease occurred across all school types and continues the general downward trend since Autumn 2008.
- Absence rates vary by school type: overall absence in primary schools was 3.7 per cent, in secondary schools 4.9 per cent and in special schools 9.7 per cent.
- The total number of days missed due to this absence was 20.8 million and the average number of days missed per enrolment was 3.0 days. Both are the same as last year.
- Authorised absence has decreased (from 3.3 to 3.1 per cent) and unauthorised absence has remained stable (1.2 per cent).
- The overall absence rate for four year olds (who are not of compulsory school age) has decreased from 5.1 in Autumn 2017 to 4.7 per cent in Autumn 2018.
- The overall absence rate for pupils in pupil referral units (including alternative provision academies and free schools), decreased from 33.6 per cent in Autumn 2017 to 33.1 per cent in Autumn 2018. Authorised absence decreased (from 19.2 to 18.4 per cent) and unauthorised absence increased (from 14.3 to 14.7 per cent).

# 2. Persistent Absence

## 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 latest data shows that:

- The persistent absence rate across state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools decreased from 11.7 per cent in Autumn 2017 to 10.9 per cent in Autumn 2018. This has been driven by reductions in the absence taken due to illness (see "Reasons for absence" section).
- The percentage of enrolments in pupil referral units who are persistent absentees decreased from 72.3 per cent in Autumn 2017 to 70.7 per cent in Autumn 2018.

### 3. Reasons for absence

#### Variation across school types

The larger absence rates in special schools is driven by higher rates due to illness (4.2 per cent compared with 2.1 and 2.6 per cent in state-funded primary and secondary schools), medical/dental appointments (1.1 per cent compared with 0.2 and 0.3), other authorised circumstances (1.7 per cent compared with 0.2 and 0.3) and other unauthorised circumstances (1.7 per cent compared with 0.4 and 1.1).

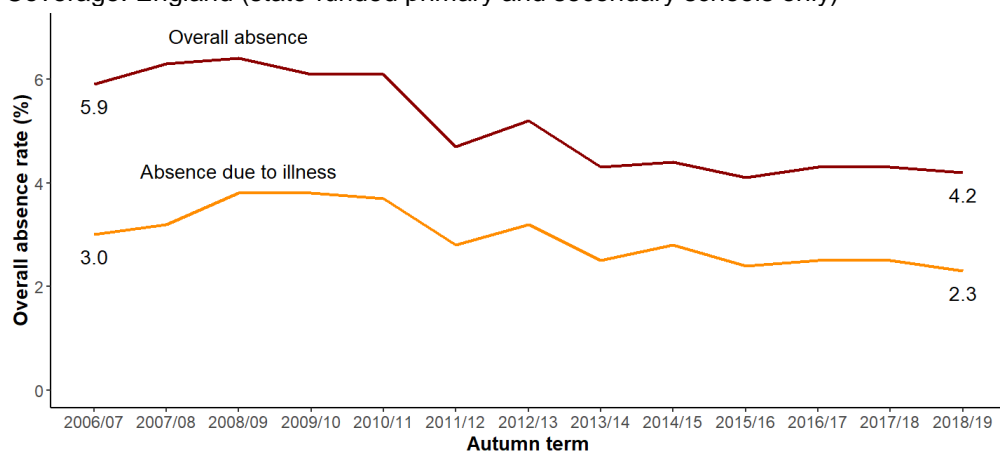
#### Absence due to illness

Illness is the most common reason for absence (accounting for 55.5 per cent of all absences) and heavily influences overall absence rates (see figure A below). It is the main driver for the overall decrease over the long term and since autumn 2017.

**Figure A: Comparison of the trend in overall and illness absence rates**

Years: Autumn term 2006 to Autumn term 2018

Coverage: England (state-funded primary and secondary schools only)



#### Reasons for persistent absence

Illness has also been the driver for the reduction in the persistent absentee rate compared to autumn 2017. Amongst persistent absentees, the proportion of sessions missed due to illness decreased from 8.4 per cent to 8.1 per cent and there were 49,000 fewer persistent absentees with this reason.

**Figure B: Absence by reason for persistent absentees**

Years: Autumn term 2017 to Autumn term 2018

Coverage: England (state-funded primary, secondary and special schools)

	<b>Absence rates</b>			<b>Enrolments</b>		
	<b>Autumn 2017</b>	<b>Autumn 2018</b>	<i>difference</i>	<b>Autumn 2017</b>	<b>Autumn 2018</b>	<i>difference</i>
Illness	8.4	8.1	-0.3ppts	672,800	623,800	-49,000
Medical/dental appointments	0.8	0.9	-	279,400	269,700	-9,700
Religious observance	0.0	0.0	-	6,000	5,400	-600
Study leave	0.0	0.0	-	2,300	1,700	-600
Traveller absence	0.1	0.1	-	2,700	2,900	+200
Agreed family holiday	0.3	0.3	-	27,400	25,700	-1,700
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.5	0.6	-	53,600	55,100	+1,500
Other authorised circumstances	1.4	1.6	+0.2ppts	186,700	178,400	-8,300
<b>Total authorised absence</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>738,600</b>	<b>693,700</b>	<b>-44,900</b>
Family holiday not agreed	1.8	2.0	+0.2ppts	140,300	143,700	+3,400
Arrived late	0.3	0.4	-	103,800	104,800	+1,000
Other unauthorised circumstances	4.4	4.9	+0.5ppts	360,200	361,500	+1,300
No reason yet	0.3	0.2	-	49,600	46,100	-3,500
<b>Total unauthorised absence</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>+0.7ppts</b>	<b>509,400</b>	<b>507,300</b>	<b>-2,100</b>

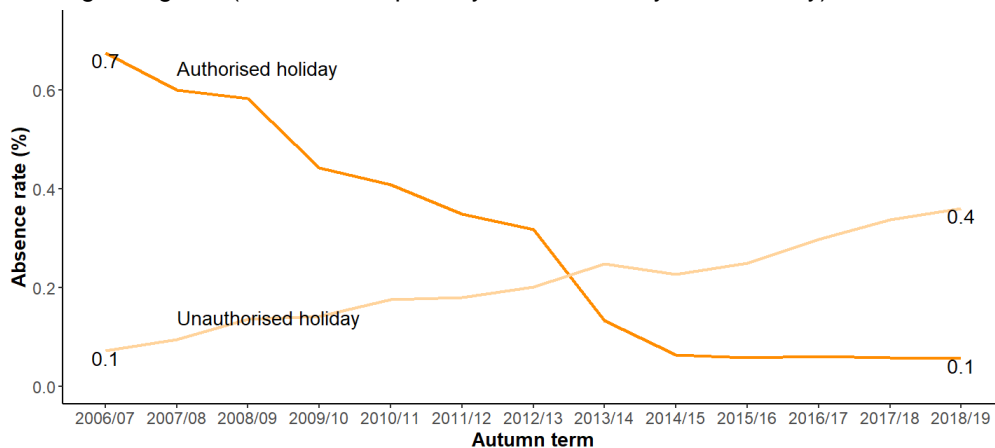
## Absence due to holidays

The unauthorised holiday rate has increase slightly, continuing a trend, but remains at 0.4 rounded to 1 decimal place. Unauthorised holiday absence has been increasing gradually since 2006/07 whilst authorised holiday absence is now much lower but has remained steady over recent years. From September 2013, amended regulations 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 C: Comparison of the trend in overall and illness absence rates:

Years: Autumn term 2006 to Autumn term 2018

Coverage: England (state-funded primary and secondary schools only)



Note: the charts in this section relate to state-funded primary and secondary schools only in order to give the full time series back to 2006/07, termly data on special school absence was first collected in 2016/17.

## 4. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in Excel format on the Department's statistics website.

### National tables

1. Pupil absence and pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees by type of school
2. Pupil absence by reason
3. Pupil absence by reason for persistent absentees
4. Enrolments with one or more session of absence by reason
5. Percentage of enrolments by their overall absence rates
6. Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for pupil referral units

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.

Symbols are used in the tables as follows:

0 zero  
. not applicable

### Additional information

This statistical publication 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](#).

## 5. 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](mailto:school.stats@wales.gov.uk) or Welsh Government Statistics and Research

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

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

## 6. Revisions

There are no further planned revisions to this Statistical First Release. However, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the Departmental revisions policy.

## 7. National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority designated these statistics as National Statistics in October 2017, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Details of their report can be found [here](#).

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.

## 8. 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 information used in this release is sourced from the school census, further information is available in chapter 4 of the guide to absence statistics.

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.
- 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, 29 schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

## 9. Get in touch

### Media enquiries

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### Other enquiries/feedback

Education Standards Evidence and Dissemination Division, Level 2, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT. Email: [schools.statistics@education.gov.uk](mailto:schools.statistics@education.gov.uk)