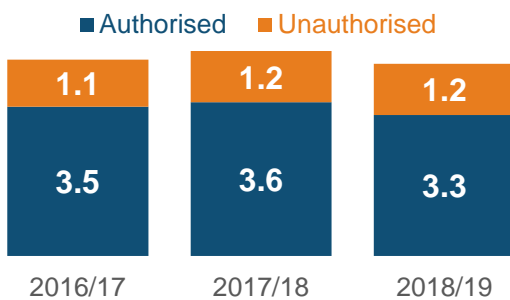




Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2018 and spring 2019

10 October 2019

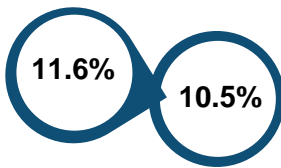
The overall absence rate has decreased



The overall absence rate in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools has decreased from 4.7 per cent in the 2017/18 autumn and spring terms to 4.5 per cent in 2018/19. This decrease is consistent across school types.

Authorised absence has decreased (from 3.6 to 3.3 per cent) and unauthorised absence has remained stable (1.2 per cent).

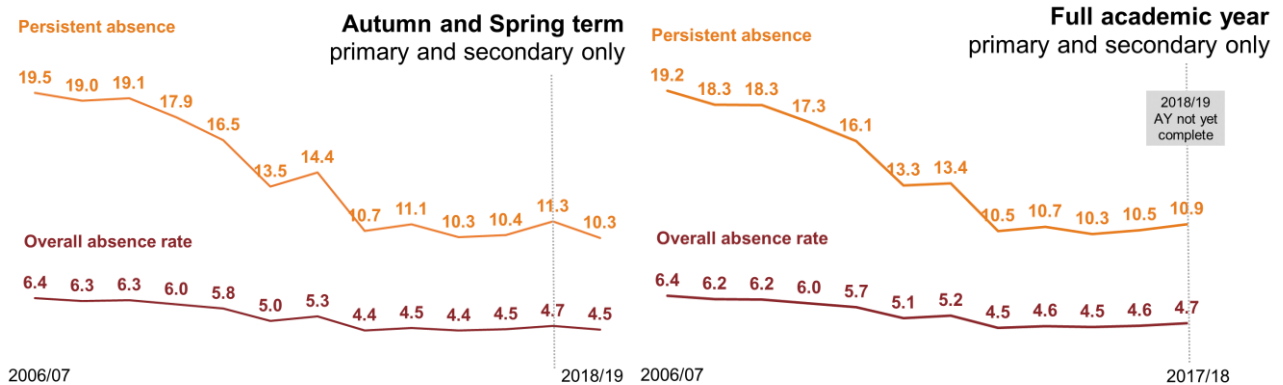
Persistent absence has decreased



The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools that were classified as persistent absentees during the autumn and spring terms declined from 11.6 per cent in 2017/18 to 10.5 per cent in 2018/19.

These are the second set of absence rates published for 2018/19

This is the second of three planned absence publications relating to the 2018/19 academic year and relates to the autumn and spring terms combined. Figures relating to the full 2018/19 academic year will be published in March 2020 with more detailed data and commentary. The autumn and spring term combined rates have historically given a good indication of the full academic year rates.



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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 2018 and spring term 2019. This data is collected via the termly school census. 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 2019, Easter Sunday was on 21 April, compared with 1 April in 2018, meaning that the autumn/spring term covered a three-week longer period in 2018/19. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2018/19 school year are intended for publication in March 2020.

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 third 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 therefore now included in all relevant tables and totals including special schools are also presented. Unless specified otherwise, overall rates refer to the total of state-funded primary, secondary and special schools.

In this publication

The following tables are included in the release:

- Absence_2term_201819_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

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 4.7 per cent in the 2017/18 autumn and spring terms to 4.5 per cent in 2018/19. This is the same level as in 2016/17. The decrease occurred across all school types.
- Absence rates vary by school type: overall absence in **primary schools** was 3.9 per cent, in **secondary schools** was 5.2 per cent and in **special schools** was 10.1 per cent.
- **Authorised** absence has decreased (from 3.6 to 3.3 per cent) and **unauthorised** absence has remained stable (1.2 per cent).
- The total **number of days missed** due to absence was 41 million and the **average number of days** missed per enrolment was 5.8 days.
- The overall absence rate for **four year olds** (who are not of compulsory school age) has decreased from 5.4 per cent in 2017/18 to 5.1 per cent in 2018/19.
- The overall absence rate for pupils in **pupil referral units** (including alternative provision academies and free schools), decreased from 34.6 per cent in 2017/18 to 34.4 per cent in 2018/19. Authorised absence decreased (from 19.6 to 18.8 per cent) and unauthorised absence increased (from 15.1 to 15.6 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 11.6 per cent in 2017/18 to 10.5 per cent in 2018/19. This has been driven by reductions in the absence taken due to illness (see "Reasons for absence" section).
- Persistent absence rates vary by school type: persistent absence in **primary schools** was 8.4 per cent, in **secondary schools** was 12.7 per cent and in **special schools** was 28.5 per cent.
- The persistent absence rate in **pupil referral units** decreased from 74.3 per cent in 2017/18 to 72.2 per cent in 2018/19.

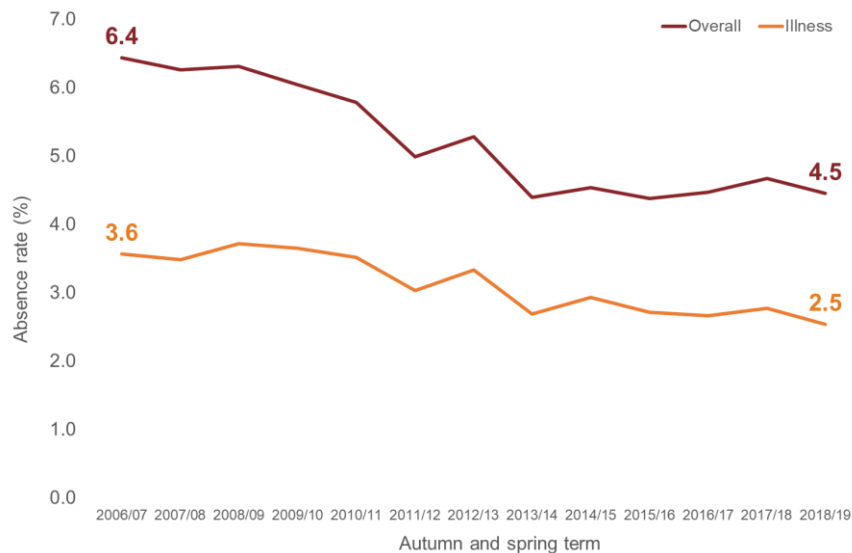
3. Reasons for absence

Absence due to illness

Illness is the **most common reason for absence** (accounting for 57.6 per cent of all absences in primary and secondary schools) and heavily influences overall absence rates (see figure A below). It is the main driver for the overall decrease over the long term and the decrease since 2017/18.

Figure A: Illness remains the most common reason for absence

England, 2006/07 to 2018/19 autumn and spring terms, state-funded primary and secondary schools

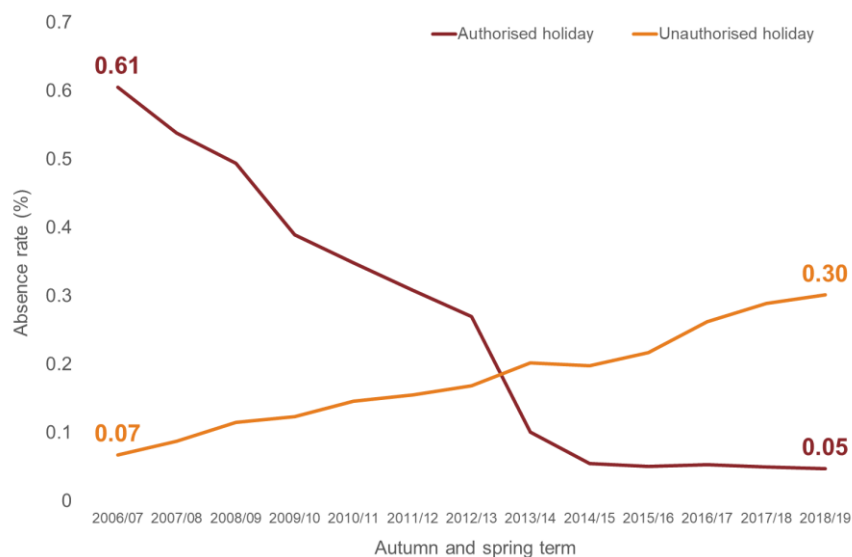


Absence due to family holiday

The **unauthorised holiday** rate has continued to increase slightly, continuing a trend, but remains at 0.3 per cent when rounded to 1 decimal place. 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 B: Unauthorised holiday absence rates continue to increase:

England, 2006/07 to 2018/19 autumn and spring terms, state-funded primary and secondary schools



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.

Variation across school types

The larger absence rates in **special schools** are driven by higher rates due to illness (4.5 per cent compared with 2.4 and 2.8 per cent in primary and secondary schools), medical/dental appointments (1.1 per cent compared with 0.2 and 0.3), other authorised circumstances (1.8 per cent compared with 0.2 and 0.3) and other unauthorised circumstances (1.8 per cent compared with 0.5 and 1.2).

Reasons for persistent absence

Illness has also been the **driver for the reduction in persistent absence** compared to 2017/18. Amongst persistent absentees, the proportion of sessions missed due to illness decreased from 8.4 per cent to 8.1 per cent, whilst there were 120,000 fewer enrolments where the pupil was persistently absent for this reason.

Figure C: There were fewer persistent absentees due to illness absence

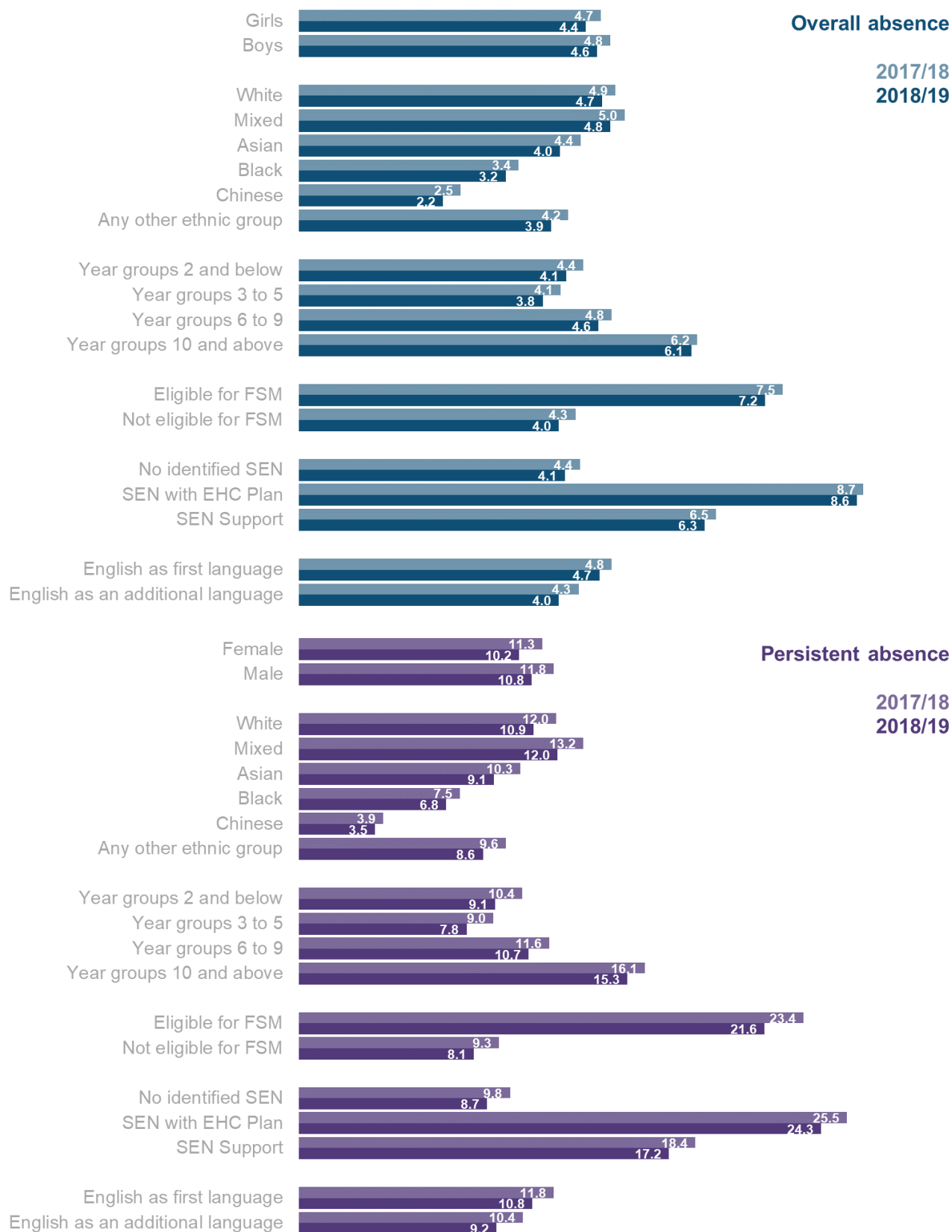
England, 2017/18 to 2018/19 autumn and spring terms, state-funded primary, secondary and special schools

	Absence rates			Enrolments		
	2017/18	2018/19	difference	2017/18	2018/19	difference
Illness	8.4	8.1	-0.3ppts	1,241,600	1,124,500	-117,100
Medical/dental appointments	0.8	0.9	-	497,400	484,200	-13,200
Religious observance	0.0	0.0	-	6,600	5,800	-800
Study leave	0.0	0.0	-	2,700	2,300	-400
Traveller absence	0.1	0.1	-	4,900	5,000	+100
Agreed family holiday	0.2	0.2	-	25,700	23,100	-2,600
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.5	0.6	+0.1ppts	99,800	109,600	+9,800
Other authorised circumstances	1.5	1.7	+0.2ppts	341,900	319,600	-22,300
Total authorised absence	11.6	11.7	+0.1ppts	2,220,600	2,074,100	-146,500
Family holiday not agreed	1.1	1.1	-	138,300	135,400	-2,900
Arrived late	0.4	0.4	-	206,800	207,300	+500
Other unauthorised circumstances	5.0	5.7	+0.7ppts	713,800	708,100	-5,700
No reason yet	0.3	0.3	-	88,600	84,600	-4,000
Total unauthorised absence	6.7	7.6	+0.8ppts	1,147,400	1,135,500	-11,900

4. Absence by pupil characteristics

- By **gender**, boys have slightly higher overall absence rates than girls (4.6 per cent compared with 4.4) and higher persistent absence rates (10.8 per cent compared with 10.2).
- Overall absence rates are higher for pupils who are eligible for and claiming **free school meals** – 7.2 per cent compared to 4.0. They are over twice as likely to be persistently absent (21.6 per cent compared with 8.1).
- Overall absence rates are higher for pupils whose **first language** is English – 4.7 per cent compared with 4.0 for pupils where it is other than English. They are also more likely to be persistently absent (10.8 compared with 9.2).
- Pupils in national curriculum **year groups** 3 to 5 had the lowest overall absence rates whilst pupils in year groups 10 and 11 had the highest rates. This trend is repeated for persistent absence.
- Pupils with an Education, Health and Care plan (EHC) had an overall absence rate of 8.6 per cent compared to 4.1 for those with no identified **Special Educational Need**. They are more than twice as likely to be persistently absent (24.3 per cent compared with 8.7).
- The highest overall absence rates were for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils at 17.1 and 11.9 per cent respectively. The lowest rates were for pupils of a Chinese and of a Black African **ethnicity** at 2.2 and 2.7 per cent respectively. A similar pattern is seen in persistent absence rates; Traveller of Irish heritage pupils had the highest rate at 58.2 per cent and Chinese pupils had the lowest rate at 3.5 per cent.

Figure D: Overall and persistent absence decreased across all the main characteristics groups
 England, 2017/18 to 2018/19 autumn and spring terms, state-funded primary, secondary and special schools



5. 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 and gender
3. Pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees by reason
4. Pupil enrolments with one or more sessions of absence by reason
- 5.1 Pupil absence by characteristics
- 5.2 Pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees by characteristics
- 6.1 Pupil absence by ethnic group
- 6.2 Pupil enrolments who are persistent absentees by ethnic group
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 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](#).

6. 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](#).

7. Further information

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](#)

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. Get in touch

Media enquiries

Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. Tel: 020 7783 8300

Other enquiries/feedback

Data Insight and Statistics Division, Level 1, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT. Email: schools.statistics@education.gov.uk