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PUPIL ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND – SPRING TERM 2010

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) reports on absence during spring term 2010 in maintained primary and maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies in England. It is based on pupil level absence data collected via the summer 2010 School Census. This release provides local level information on the rates of absence (authorised, unauthorised and overall) by type of school and the proportion of absence by reason. Information on persistent absentees is not included in this report (see Technical Note 10).

The statistics are presented as emerging findings and have been released to help planning and study trends on pupil attendance.

ABSENCE RATES FOR SPRING 2010

The percentages of half days missed due to overall absence in the spring term 2010 were:

- Maintained primary schools and state-funded secondary schools – 5.92 per cent (a decrease from 6.18 per cent in spring term 2009 term) (Table 1)
- Maintained primary schools – 5.22 per cent (a decrease from 5.28 per cent in spring term 2009) (Table 1)
- State-funded secondary schools – 6.73 per cent (a decrease from 7.20 per cent in spring term 2009) (Table 1)

REASON FOR ABSENCE

- The most commonly reported reason for absence was “**illness (not medical or dental appointments)**” which accounted for 3.42 per cent of sessions (where reason for absence was provided). (Table 2)
- Absence for **family holidays** accounted for 0.41 per cent of sessions – this equates to around 1.4 million school days in the spring term. Some 76 per cent of these sessions were authorised by the school. (Table 2)

LOCAL AUTHORITY ANALYSIS

Local authority level data are provided in tables 3 and 4. Table 4 covers maintained secondary schools only as it is designed to help authorities monitor, compare and improve absence levels for these schools.

TABLES

- Table 1** Maintained primary and state-funded secondary schools: Rates of absence, England, Spring Term: 2007 - 2010
- Table 2** Maintained primary and state-funded secondary schools: Reason for absence, England, Spring Term 2010
- Table 3** Maintained primary and state-funded secondary schools: Pupil Absence, by Local Authority area, Spring Term 2010
- Table 4** Maintained secondary schools: Pupil Absence, by Local Authority area, Spring Term 2010

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

DFE: Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics: 2008/09
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000918/index.shtml>

DFE: Pupil Absence in Spring Term 2009
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000871/index.shtml>

DFE: Pupil Absence in Autumn Term 2009
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000928/index.shtml>

TECHNICAL NOTES

Definitions

1. The more reliable measures of absence are deemed to be rates of overall absence and reason for absence rather than rates of authorised and unauthorised absence. The decision to authorise an absence is a local decision leading to unmeasured variation both between and within schools. In addition, some 3 per cent of all possible sessions missed were due to “unauthorised absence – no reason yet”. Until the reason for absence is known, schools should record a pupil as “unauthorised absence – no reason yet”. So some cases of unauthorised absence may change to authorised absence at a later stage (once an explanation has been reported to the school). However, if the reason for absence is supplied to the school after the School Census database has closed, the absence will still be recorded as “unauthorised absence – no reason yet”. Using overall absence rates removes variation and gives more suitable data for performance reporting. Both sets of measures are given in this release, although limitations in comparing rates of authorised and unauthorised absence should be noted.
2. The Department has published specific guidance ‘Keeping Pupil Registers’, which provides guidance on applying the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006; and ‘Absence and Attendance Codes’ which provides guidance on the use of codes to record pupil attendance and absence in schools.” Both are available at
<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/attendance/pupilregis/>
3. In law, parents of children of compulsory school age (aged 5 to 15 at the start of the school year) are required to ensure that they receive a suitable education by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Failure to comply with this statutory duty can lead to prosecution. LAs are responsible in law for making sure that pupils attend school.
4. Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day: once at the beginning of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. In their register, schools are required to distinguish whether pupils are present, engaged in an approved educational activity or are absent. Where a day pupil of compulsory school age is absent, schools have to indicate in their register whether the absence is authorised by the school or unauthorised.
5. Authorised absence is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes instances of absences for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided (for example, illness).
6. Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences. Arriving late for school, after the register has closed, is recorded as unauthorised absence.

Data Collection

7. To account for the growth in the academies sector, the majority of tables include city technology colleges and academies along with Local Authority (LA) maintained schools in a category labelled “state-funded”. However, in cases where there is expected to be continued interest, the figures for LA maintained schools only have also been provided. Figures for academies and city technology colleges are not shown separately. Specific analyses of absence in academies were published in SFR 07/2010 (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000918/index.shtml>).

8. In 2006 the School Census (SC) started to collect pupil level absence data on a termly basis (spring, summer and autumn collections) from maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies relating to absence during the 2005/06 school year. For the 2006/07 school year the scope of collection was extended to also include maintained primary schools and special schools. The SC collects information for a pupil's attendance in the term prior to the census. For example, the spring SC collects information on absence during the autumn term. Special schools provide annual absence data in the autumn SC and are therefore not included in this release.

9. Reason for absence was collected for the first time for the autumn term 2006. Schools were able to provide absence data using a reason code or by using total figures for the number of sessions missed due to authorised or unauthorised absence. It was not expected that schools would use both. However, one software supplier enabled both absences by reason and total authorised and unauthorised absence to be returned. A small proportion of schools have provided both a breakdown of absence by reason and totals. In addition, some schools do not have the required software to provide absence data by reason, and therefore are only able to provide overall totals. To derive absence rates, the sum of absence by reason has been used unless this is missing or is less than the total provided, in which case overall totals have been used.

Data Coverage and Quality

10. Information relating to persistent absence (PA) is not included in this report as looking at PA for spring term in isolation has little value. To provide a more meaningful measure, the PA indicator will be cumulative, tracking pupils throughout the year. The Department's key measure of PA relates to the school year and is defined in terms of those missing 64 or more sessions, around 20 per cent overall absence. There are three Statistical First Releases (SFR) each year that include the PA indicator:

- The SFR on pupil absence in the autumn term presents PA rates for that term based on 64 or more sessions (around 20 per cent overall absence for the academic year) and those on track to becoming PA based on those missing 28 or more sessions, around 20 per cent overall absence for one term (released in May/June each year);
- The SFR on pupil absence for the cumulative autumn and spring terms presents PA rates for the first two terms of the academic year (released in October, and this indicator will also be included in the Achievement and Attainment Tables) usually based on those missing 52 or more sessions, around 20 per cent overall absence across the two terms;
- The SFR on pupil absence, including pupil characteristics provides PA rates for the academic year based on those missing 64 or more sessions, around 20 per cent overall absence (released in February/March each year).

11. Schools have provided, via the SC, individual level attendance data relating to spring term 2010 for pupils aged 5 to 15 (at the start of the school year) who are non-boarders. The SC has collected the number of possible sessions of attendance; the number of sessions missed, broken down by reason for absence, and overall totals of sessions missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence.

12. Information relating to pupil absence counts the number of pupil enrolments rather than the number of pupils. Where a pupil has moved school throughout the year, they will be counted more than once as they have recorded attendance at more than one school. Pupil absence is recorded for the period a pupil is enrolled at a school.

13. For a pupil enrolment, if the number of possible sessions in a term is zero/missing or is less than the total number of sessions missed due to overall absence, then the enrolment has not been included.

14. Some school closures were reported in spring 2010, as a result of bad weather. Where a school closes, neither the sessions missed or the possible sessions during the affected period are reported on the SC, therefore absence rates are largely unaffected. Where a school remains open and pupils cannot make it to school they are reported as absent in these statistics. In future, partial closures are likely to be treated the same as full closures.

15. The information in this SFR is based on data returned by schools as part of the School Census. It does not include data which has been submitted by local authorities or schools outside of the School Census collection.

16. The data presented here are based on attendance registers which are taken twice a day: once at the beginning of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. It therefore does not include "internal unauthorised absence". This is defined as unauthorised absence by pupils between the school's twice-daily registrations, i.e. a pupil is recorded as attending during morning or afternoon registration but is physically not present at another part of the relevant session. The Department's current data systems are limited insofar as they only record and measure the registrations, not any subsequent absence.

17. The data contained in this release relates only to those pupils on the roll of a LA maintained primary school or secondary school, city technology college or academy. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school.

General

18. For all tables enrolment numbers and the number of sessions have been rounded to the nearest 10. Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure was also zero.

19. All percentages have been rounded to two decimal places.

20. The following symbols have been used within this publication:

- 0 – zero
- . – not applicable

21. Absence data for 2005/06 were not released on a termly basis as this was the first year of collection.

22. Information based on absence data linked across the autumn 2009 and spring 2010 terms will be published in October 2010 in a Statistical First Release (SFR). This will include rates of absence (authorised, unauthorised and overall) and persistent absence in the first two terms of the 2009/10 school year. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2009/10 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in March 2011. This product will add value to the emerging findings published in termly reports and the October SFR by presenting whole year findings (cumulative results from the three termly collections) and providing more detailed analyses of absence by pupil characteristics and persistent absentees.

23. Under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, the UK Statistics Authority has a statutory function to assess sets of statistics against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, with a view to determining whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated, or to retain their designation, as National Statistics. Following a recent assessment of absence statistics, the Statistics Authority confirmed that the following reports should be redesignated as National Statistics:

- Pupil Absence in schools in England: Autumn term; and
- Pupil Absence in schools in England: Spring term

This is now a National Statistics publication. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

24. Further information, including local authority level analyses are available through the following link:- <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000946/index.shtml>

25. There are no 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 which is published at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/nat-stats.shtml>

26. Enquiries (non-media) about information contained in this document should be addressed to Schools Data Unit, Room 1F Area H, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, Co Durham, DL3 9BG or e-mail schools.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk

27. Media enquiries about information contained in this Statistical First Release should be made to the Department's Press Office at DfE, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT or telephone 020 7925 6789.

Table 1

MAINTAINED PRIMARY AND STATE-FUNDED SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2):**RATES OF ABSENCE**

Spring Term: 2007 - 2010

England

	Spring Term 2007	Spring Term 2008	Spring Term 2009	Spring Term 2010
Maintained Primary and State-funded Secondary Schools (1) (2)				
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	6,320,720	6,171,330	6,173,690	6,154,550
Percentage of half days missed due to: (4)				
Authorised absence	6.00	5.25	5.08	4.81
Unauthorised absence	1.06	1.00	1.10	1.12
Overall absence	7.07	6.26	6.18	5.92
Maintained Primary Schools (1)				
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	3,348,140	3,291,550	3,271,870	3,271,400
Percentage of half days missed due to: (4)				
Authorised absence	5.32	4.77	4.61	4.48
Unauthorised absence	0.57	0.56	0.67	0.74
Overall absence	5.89	5.33	5.28	5.22
State-funded Secondary Schools (1) (2)				
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	2,972,580	2,879,780	2,901,820	2,883,160
Percentage of half days missed due to: (4)				
Authorised absence	6.78	5.82	5.60	5.17
Unauthorised absence	1.62	1.51	1.59	1.56
Overall absence	8.40	7.32	7.20	6.73

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies (including all through academies).

(3) Includes pupils aged 5 to 15 who were on roll for at least one session during the spring term, even if they are no longer on the school roll, excluding boarders. Pupils may be counted more than once, if they were registered at more than one school, or moved schools during the term. See Technical Notes 11 and 12.

(4) The number of sessions of authorised/unauthorised/overall absence expressed as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions.

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts because numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Table 2

MAINTAINED PRIMARY AND STATE-FUNDED SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2):**REASON FOR ABSENCE**

Spring Term 2010

England

	Maintained Primary (1)	State-Funded Secondary (1)(2)	Total (1)(2)
DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (3):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	60.72	55.66	58.04
Medical/dental appointments	4.99	6.42	5.75
Religious observance	0.05	0.05	0.05
Study leave	0.01	0.35	0.19
Traveller absence	0.29	0.09	0.18
Agreed family holiday	7.71	2.67	5.04
Agreed extended family holiday	0.34	0.07	0.20
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.33	2.52	1.49
Other authorised circumstances	11.41	9.09	10.18
Total Authorised Absence	85.85	76.91	81.11
Percentage of absent sessions due to (3):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	2.10	1.33	1.69
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	1.24	1.33	1.29
Unauthorised absence, not covered	8.65	16.79	12.96
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	2.16	3.65	2.95
Total Unauthorised Absence	14.15	23.09	18.89
Total Overall Absence	100.00	100.00	100.00
ABSENCE RATES BY REASON			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments)	3.16	3.73	3.42
Medical/dental appointments	0.26	0.43	0.34
Religious observance	0.00	0.00	0.00
Study leave	0.00	0.02	0.01
Traveller absence	0.02	0.01	0.01
Agreed family holiday	0.40	0.18	0.30
Agreed extended family holiday	0.02	0.00	0.01
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.02	0.17	0.09
Other authorised circumstances	0.59	0.61	0.60
Unclassified (5)	0.02	0.02	0.02
Total Authorised Absence	4.48	5.17	4.81
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	0.11	0.09	0.10
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	0.06	0.09	0.08
Unauthorised absence, not covered	0.45	1.12	0.76
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	0.11	0.24	0.17
Unclassified (5)	0.00	0.01	0.00
Total Unauthorised Absence	0.74	1.56	1.12
Total Overall Absence	5.22	6.73	5.92

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies (including all through academies).

(3) The number of sessions absent by reason expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions absent as reported by reason (not overall totals). See Technical Notes 9 and 11.

(4) The number of sessions absent by reason expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions possible. See Technical Notes 9 and 11.

(5) Includes absence returned as either authorised or unauthorised totals but not broken down by reason.