

SFR 07/2011

25 May 2011

Coverage: England

**Theme: Children,
Education and Skills**

Issued by
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PUPIL ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND, AUTUMN TERM 2010

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) reports on absence during autumn term 2010 in maintained primary, maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies in England. It is based on pupil level absence data collected via the spring 2011 School Census. This release provides local level information on the rates of absence (authorised, unauthorised and overall) by type of school; number of enrolments missing 28 or more, or 64 or more sessions; and the proportion of absence by reason.

The 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.

KEY POINTS

ABSENCE RATES

- The percentages of half days missed due to absence in autumn term 2010 are as follows (figures in brackets refers to autumn term 2009):

Authorised Absence 5.07 per cent (5.20 per cent)

Unauthorised Absence 1.04 per cent (0.93 per cent)

Overall Absence 6.11 per cent (6.13 per cent)

- Overall absence rates increased in state-funded primary schools, but decreased in state-funded secondary schools.
- Authorised absence rates also increased in state-funded primary schools, but decreased in state-funded secondary.
- Unauthorised absence rates increased in both state-funded primary and secondary schools.

PERSISTENT ABSENTEES

A Persistent Absentee (PA) is defined as having 64 or more sessions of absence (authorised and unauthorised) during the year, around 20 per cent overall absence rate. For the autumn term, a pupil who may become a persistent absentee is defined as having 28 or more sessions of absence. See Technical Note 14 for an explanation of how varying term lengths can impact on these figures.

- In the autumn term some 0.4 per cent of enrolments across state-funded primary and secondary schools missed 64 or more sessions, classifying them as persistent absentees (Table 2).
- Some 4.2 per cent of enrolments across all state-funded primary and secondary schools are persistent absentees, or may become persistent absentees if their absence continues at the same rate (Table 2).
- Some 5.4 per cent of enrolments across state-funded secondary schools are persistent absentees, or may become persistent absentees if their absence continues at the same rate (Table 2).

Data linking pupil absence across the autumn 2010 and spring 2011 terms is expected to be available in October and will provide a rate of persistent absence across both terms, rather than looking at each term in isolation.

REASON FOR ABSENCE

- Within the 6.11 per cent overall absence, 3.67 per cent of days (where reason for absence was provided) were recorded as illness (not medical or dental appointments). This was the most commonly reported reason for absence (Table 3).
- Absence due to family holidays includes the following reason codes: agreed family holiday; agreed extended family holiday and family holiday not agreed. This accounted for 0.59 per cent of days. Around 70 per cent of these days were authorised by the school (Table 3).

LOCAL AUTHORITY ANALYSIS

Local authority level data are provided in table 4. Local authority level data for maintained secondary schools is not available. See Technical Note 8.

TABLES

- Table 1** State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools: Rates of absence, England, Autumn Term: 2006 to 2010
- Table 2** State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools: Number and rates of enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees, England, Autumn Term: 2006 to 2010
- Table 3** State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools: Absence by reason, England, Autumn Term 2010
- Table 4** State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence by school type, by Local Authority area and region, England, Autumn Term 2010

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In line with the Government's agenda to make data more accessible, underlying data will be published at <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001003/index.shtml> on 25 May 2011 in the 'Publication's Underlying Data' section.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

DfE: Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics: 2009/10
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000994/index.shtml>

DfE: Pupil Absence in Autumn Term 2009
<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000928/index.shtml>

Guidance on school and pupil characteristics collected via the School Census is available on the DfE Statistics website: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/schoolcensus.shtml>

TECHNICAL NOTES

Definitions

1. The measures of absence used here are rates of authorised, unauthorised and overall absence and persistent absentees. 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 this is supplied to the school after the School Census (SC) database has closed, the absence will still be recorded as “no reason yet”. In this respect, using overall absence rates and the rate of persistent absentees gives more suitable data for performance reporting.
2. The Department for Education (DfE) 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.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/attendance/schoolattendancedata/a0010008/pupil-registration-regulations-and-guidance>.
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. Local authorities (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.
7. The Department’s key measure of persistent absence (PA) relates to the school year and is defined in terms of those missing 64 or more sessions, around 20 per cent overall absence. For autumn term, figures show how many enrolments have already become PA, based on missing 64 or more sessions and how many are classed as being on track to becoming PAs, based on the standard threshold of 28 or more sessions used for the autumn term. To aid transparency and simplicity our termly PA thresholds don’t tend to change from year to year (unless there are exceptional circumstances).

Data Collection

8. To account for the growth in the academies sector, the tables include city technology colleges, sponsor-led and secondary converter academies along with LA maintained secondary schools in a category labelled "state-funded secondary", and LA maintained primary schools and primary converter academies in a category labelled "state-funded primary". Due to the large numbers of schools converting to academies during the autumn term 2010, tables showing maintained schools only are not included in this release. Figures for academies and city technology colleges are not shown separately. Specific analyses of absence in academies were published in SFR 07/2011 (<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000994/index.shtml>).
9. In 2006 the School Census 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.
10. Reason for absence was collected for the first time for the autumn term 2006. Schools are 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. 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

11. Schools have provided, via the SC, individual level attendance data relating to autumn 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. Where a pupil has a dual registration, their absence may be returned from both schools, if both schools return absence data via the School Census.
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 in this SFR.

14. Termly data can be affected by changes in term length. Our data shows that autumn term 2010 shows a similar number of possible sessions to autumn term 2009, but these vary compared to autumn term 2008. In both 2009 and 2010 there were a large number of school closures caused by extreme weather. Fewer (or more) possible sessions provide less (or more) opportunity for pupils to become PAs based on the fixed threshold of 28 sessions. Consequently, comparisons between terms should be treated with caution. A longer term next autumn could appear to reverse the improvement shown in these latest figures. End year results provide the definitive view of PA.
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 SFR relates only to those pupils on the roll of a maintained primary school or maintained secondary school, city technology college, or academy. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school.

General

18. For national tables (tables 1 to 3), enrolment numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5.
19. For the local authority table (table 4), national and regional enrolment numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5. Enrolment numbers of 1 or 2 have been suppressed, being replaced in the table by an 'x'. Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure was also zero. Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is 1 or 2, this has been replaced by an 'x'. 'x' has also been used for secondary suppression to prevent disclosure.
20. All percentages have been rounded to two decimal places, except where they refer to persistent absentees, where one decimal place has been used.
21. The following symbols have been used within this publication:

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 | – zero |
| x | – small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality (see Technical Notes 18 and 19) |
| . | – not applicable |
22. Absence data for 2005/06 were not released on a termly basis as this was the first year of collection.

23. Information based on absence data linked across the autumn 2010 and spring 2011 terms will be published in October 2011 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 2010/11 school year, as well as pupil characteristics. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2010/11 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in March 2012. 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.
24. 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.

25. Further information, including local authority level analyses are available through the following link:- <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001003/index.shtml>
26. 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.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/nat-stats.shtml>.
27. Enquiries (non-media) or feedback 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
28. 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
STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):
RATES OF ABSENCE
Autumn Term: 2006 - 2010
England

| | Autumn Term 2006 | Autumn Term 2007 | Autumn Term 2008 | Autumn Term 2009 | Autumn Term 2010 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools (1)(2)(3) | | | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (4) | 6,351,820 | 6,268,135 | 6,197,070 | 6,174,080 | 6,168,270 |
| Percentage of half days missed due to: (5) | | | | | |
| Authorised absence | 5.04 | 5.32 | 5.44 | 5.20 | 5.07 |
| Unauthorised absence | 0.90 | 0.94 | 0.98 | 0.93 | 1.04 |
| Overall absence | 5.94 | 6.26 | 6.42 | 6.13 | 6.11 |
| State-funded Primary Schools (1)(2) | | | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (4) | 3,364,390 | 3,320,505 | 3,285,085 | 3,285,635 | 3,304,095 |
| Percentage of half days missed due to: (5) | | | | | |
| Authorised absence | 4.27 | 4.80 | 4.98 | 4.81 | 4.84 |
| Unauthorised absence | 0.48 | 0.56 | 0.63 | 0.62 | 0.75 |
| Overall absence | 4.75 | 5.36 | 5.61 | 5.43 | 5.60 |
| State-funded Secondary Schools (1)(3) | | | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (4) | 2,987,430 | 2,947,625 | 2,911,990 | 2,888,445 | 2,864,175 |
| Percentage of half days missed due to: (5) | | | | | |
| Authorised absence | 5.91 | 5.89 | 5.97 | 5.65 | 5.34 |
| Unauthorised absence | 1.37 | 1.38 | 1.37 | 1.28 | 1.37 |
| Overall absence | 7.28 | 7.27 | 7.34 | 6.92 | 6.71 |

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes primary academies.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and secondary academies.

(4) Number of pupil enrolments in schools in autumn term 2010. Includes pupils on the school roll for at least one session who are aged between 5 and 15. Excludes boarders. Some pupils may be counted more than once (if they moved schools during the autumn term or are registered in more than one school). See Technical Notes 12 and 13.

(5) The number of sessions missed due to 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 5.

Table 2
STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):
NUMBER AND RATES OF ENROLMENTS WHO ARE, OR MAY BECOME, PERSISTENT ABSENTEES (4)(5)
Autumn Term: 2006 - 2010
England

| | Autumn Term 2006 | Autumn Term 2007 | Autumn Term 2008 | Autumn Term 2009 | Autumn Term 2010 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| State-funded Primary and Secondary Schools (1)(2)(3) | | | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (4) | 6,351,820 | 6,268,135 | 6,197,070 | 6,174,080 | 6,168,270 |
| Number of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (5) | 48,080 | 43,920 | 37,930 | 29,205 | 26,750 |
| Percentage of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) | 0.8 | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.4 |
| Number of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (5)(6) | 336,935 | 348,945 | 339,685 | 275,225 | 260,740 |
| Percentage of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) | 5.3 | 5.6 | 5.5 | 4.5 | 4.2 |
| State-funded Primary Schools (1)(2) | | | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (4) | 3,364,390 | 3,320,505 | 3,285,085 | 3,285,635 | 3,304,095 |
| Number of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (5) | 7,180 | 7,105 | 6,455 | 5,175 | 4,990 |
| Percentage of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Number of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (5)(6) | 103,835 | 125,100 | 128,070 | 106,315 | 106,745 |
| Percentage of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) | 3.1 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| State-funded Secondary Schools (1)(3) | | | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (4) | 2,987,430 | 2,947,625 | 2,911,990 | 2,888,445 | 2,864,175 |
| Number of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) (5) | 40,900 | 36,820 | 31,475 | 24,030 | 21,760 |
| Percentage of enrolments who have missed 64 or more sessions (Persistent Absentees) | 1.4 | 1.2 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| Number of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (5)(6) | 233,100 | 223,845 | 211,615 | 168,910 | 153,995 |
| Percentage of enrolments who have missed 28 or more sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) | 7.8 | 7.6 | 7.3 | 5.8 | 5.4 |

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes primary academies.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and secondary academies.

(4) Number of pupil enrolments in schools in autumn term 2010. Includes pupils on the school roll for at least one session who are aged between 5 and 15. Excludes boarders. Some pupils may be counted more than once (if they moved schools during the autumn term or are registered in more than one school). See Technical Notes 12 and 13.

(5) Persistent Absentees are defined as having 64 or more sessions of absence (authorised and unauthorised) during the year, around 20 per cent overall absence rate.

(6) Including those enrolments already defined as being a Persistent Absentee.

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts because numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5.

Table 3
STATE-FUNDED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)(3):
ABSENCE BY REASON
 Autumn Term 2010
 England

| | State-funded Primary (1)(2) | State-funded Secondary (1)(3) | Total (1)(2)(3) |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <u>DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE</u> | | | |
| Percentage of absent sessions due to (4): | | | |
| Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments) | 62.05 | 58.17 | 60.08 |
| Medical/dental appointments | 4.39 | 5.91 | 5.16 |
| Religious observance | 4.03 | 2.49 | 3.25 |
| Study leave | 0.01 | 0.40 | 0.21 |
| Traveller absence | 0.37 | 0.11 | 0.24 |
| Agreed family holiday | 9.64 | 3.82 | 6.68 |
| Agreed extended family holiday | 0.25 | 0.06 | 0.15 |
| Excluded, no alternative provision | 0.27 | 1.95 | 1.13 |
| Other authorised circumstances | 5.56 | 6.68 | 6.13 |
| Total Authorised Absence | 86.56 | 79.58 | 83.01 |
| Percentage of absent sessions due to (4): | | | |
| Family holiday not agreed | 3.19 | 2.60 | 2.89 |
| Arrived late | 1.13 | 0.97 | 1.05 |
| Other unauthorised circumstances | 7.10 | 13.64 | 10.42 |
| No reason yet | 2.02 | 3.21 | 2.63 |
| Total Unauthorised Absence | 13.44 | 20.42 | 16.99 |
| Total Overall Absence | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |
| <u>ABSENCE RATES BY REASON</u> | | | |
| Percentage of possible sessions missed due to (5): | | | |
| Illness (NOT medical or dental appointments) | 3.46 | 3.90 | 3.67 |
| Medical/dental appointments | 0.24 | 0.40 | 0.31 |
| Religious observance | 0.23 | 0.17 | 0.20 |
| Study leave | 0.00 | 0.03 | 0.01 |
| Traveller absence | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Agreed family holiday | 0.54 | 0.26 | 0.41 |
| Agreed extended family holiday | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.01 |
| Excluded, no alternative provision | 0.02 | 0.13 | 0.07 |
| Other authorised circumstances | 0.31 | 0.45 | 0.37 |
| Unclassified (6) | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Total Authorised Absence | 4.84 | 5.34 | 5.07 |
| Percentage of possible sessions missed due to (5): | | | |
| Family holiday not agreed | 0.18 | 0.17 | 0.18 |
| Arrived late | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.06 |
| Other unauthorised circumstances | 0.40 | 0.91 | 0.64 |
| No reason yet | 0.11 | 0.22 | 0.16 |
| Unclassified (6) | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Total Unauthorised Absence | 0.75 | 1.37 | 1.04 |
| Total Overall Absence | 5.60 | 6.71 | 6.11 |

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes primary academies.

(3) Includes city technology colleges and secondary academies.

(4) 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 10 and 11.

(5) The number of sessions absent by reason expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions possible. See Technical Notes 10 and 11.

(6) Includes absence returned as either authorised or unauthorised totals but not broken down by reason. See Technical Note 10.