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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

PUPIL ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND, Autumn Term 2008 and Spring Term 2009

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) reports on absence in primary and state funded secondary schools between autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009. It is based on pupil level absence data collected via the School Census; data is combined from autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009 returns.

This release provides information on the levels of absence (authorised, unauthorised and overall) by type of school, summary statistics on persistent absentees and the proportion of absence by reason.

Local Authority tables for maintained primary, maintained secondary and state funded secondary schools are also provided as extra tables on the Department's website.

Final data for the academic year 2008/09 will be published in March 2010 and will include analysis on absence and pupil characteristics.

Please see Technical Note 13 for details of our **user consultation** on pupil absence statistics.

KEY POINTS

ABSENCE RATES

For primary and state funded secondary schools the percentage of half days missed due to absence for the combined autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009 are:

| | |
|---|---|
| Authorised Absence 2007 and spring 2008) | 5.28 per cent (5.29 per cent in autumn 2007 and spring 2008) |
| Unauthorised Absence 2007 and spring 2008) | 1.03 per cent (0.97 per cent in autumn 2007 and spring 2008) |
| Overall Absence 2007 and spring 2008) | 6.31 per cent (6.26 per cent in autumn 2007 and spring 2008) |

The rate of overall absence in primary schools was 5.46 per cent (compared with 5.35 per cent in autumn 2007 and spring 2008). The rate for all secondary schools was 7.28 per cent (7.30 in autumn 2007 and spring 2008).

PERSISTENT ABSENTEES

A persistent absentee is defined as a pupil who is absent for more than 20% of all possible half days, for this publication this is taken as being absent for 52 or more half days. For more information please see Technical Note 6.

- Across the two terms there were 72,600 persistent absentees in primary schools (2.2 per cent of pupil enrolments) and 168,600 in state funded secondary schools (5.7 per cent of pupil enrolments); of these 159,820 persistent absentees were in Local Authority maintained secondary schools (5.6 per cent of pupil enrolments).
- The rate of overall absence (authorised and unauthorised) for persistent absentees is 32.64 per cent, which is over 5 times higher than the rate for all pupils.
- Across primary and state funded secondary schools, persistent absentees account for 19.78 per cent of overall absence – 14.62 per cent of authorised absence and 46.15 per cent of unauthorised absence.

REASON FOR ABSENCE

This is the third year for which information on the reasons for absence is available. It is not compulsory for schools to provide reason for absence data – it is dependent on the software used by schools to collate their attendance data.

- The most commonly reported reason for pupil absence was “illness (not medical or dental appointments)” which accounted for 59.2 per cent of absent half days (where reason was provided).
- The second most commonly reported reason for absence was family holiday which includes the following reason codes: agreed family holiday; agreed extended family holiday and family holiday not agreed. Absence for family holidays accounted for 9.7 per cent of absent half days. 81.4 per cent of these half days were authorised by the school.

FULL YEAR ESTIMATES FOR 2008/09

All the above figures relate to the first two terms of the 2008/09 school year. Broad estimates for the full 2008/09 academic year have been calculated based on 2007/08 data (see Technical Note 8 for information as to how these were obtained). Full year estimates for the overall absence rate in 2008/09 are:

- 5.46 per cent for maintained primary schools
- 7.28 per cent for state funded secondary schools
- 6.31 per cent for all maintained primary and secondary schools, CTCs and Academies
- 6.36 per cent for all maintained primary and secondary schools, CTCs, Academies and special schools.

The Children's Plan delivery goal is to reduce the level of persistent absence so that by 2011 no local authority will have more than five per cent of its secondary pupils as persistent absentees.

TABLES

- Table 1** Primary and Secondary Schools: Pupil absence by type of school, England, autumn term 2006 and spring term 2007 to autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009
- Table 2** Primary and Secondary Schools: Persistent absentees, England, autumn term 2006 and spring term 2007 to autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009
- Table 3** Primary and Secondary Schools: Absence by reason, England, autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009

FURTHER INFORMATION

Supplementary tables containing figures at Local Authority (LA) and Government Office Region (GOR) level are available on the DCSF statistics website:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000882/index.shtml>

- Table 4** Primary Schools: Pupil Absence by Local Authority Area, autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009
- Table 5** Maintained Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence by Local Authority Area, autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009
- Table 6** State-funded Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence by Local Authority Area, autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009

TECHNICAL NOTES

Definitions

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published specific guidance on the categorisation of attendance and absence in February 2005 when it launched the new codes as part of the collection of absence data via the School Census. This guidance was revised when the 2007 Pupil Registration regulations came into force on 1 September 2007 and was published alongside "Keeping Pupil Registers" which is guidance on applying the regulations. The guidance is available at www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolattendance/legislation.

4. 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).

5. 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 can sometimes be recorded as unauthorised absence.

6. A persistent absentee is defined as a pupil absent for more than 20% of all possible half days. For the autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009 this is taken as being absent for 52 or more possible half days. For autumn term 2007 and spring term 2008 a persistent absentee was taken as being absent for 48 or more possible half days. This reduction was needed because of the shorter spring term in 2008. Due to the early date of Easter in 2008 the spring term was shorter by approximately 20 possible half days in the majority (approximately 82 per cent) of schools.

7. The more reliable measures of absence are deemed to be rates of overall absence, persistent absentees 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 3.3 per cent of all possible half days missed were due to "unauthorised absence - no reason yet". Until the reason for absence is known schools are meant to 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). Using overall absence rates and the rate of persistent absentees (Technical Note 6) removes this variation giving 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.

8. Estimates for overall absence rates for the period including the first half of the summer term (full-year) for all school types except special schools use the proportion of sessions in the autumn and spring terms of the 2008/09 school year to calculate an estimated number of possible sessions and absences for the full year. For special schools (for which there is no termly data), this is based on

the ratio of full-year absence in 2007/08 to 2006/07. This is applied to the absence for 2007/08 to calculate an estimate for 2008/09 following the same trend.

Data Collection and Publication

9. Prior to 2005/06 the Department's main source of absence data was the Absence in Schools Survey which was conducted in May each year and collected the number of day pupils of compulsory school age together with information on the number of half days missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence from maintained primary, secondary, all special and independent schools, city technology colleges and academies in England. Findings from the 2005/06 survey have been published in SFR 35/2006 available at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000679/index.shtml>

10. 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. The School Census was expanded in January 2007 to include primary and special schools. Absence data from the School Census was published for the first time in March 2007 and is available at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000718/index.shtml>

11. 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 half days missed due to authorised or unauthorised absence. In autumn term 2008 and spring term 2009, over 99.4% of schools provided reason codes for the majority of their pupils.

12. This release, and the termly reports published in June and August 2009, provide an overview of the latest absence statistics. More detailed analyses e.g. for academies and pupil characteristics, are due for release in March 2010.

13. We are seeking user input into our pupil absence reporting. If you would like to contribute, please email with your contact details to andrew.clarke@dcfs.gsi.gov.uk.

Data Coverage and Quality

14. Schools have provided, via the School Census, individual level attendance data relating to the autumn 2008 and spring 2009 terms for pupils aged 5 to 15 (at the start of the school year), who are non-boarders at the time of the census. In each term the School Census has collected the number of possible half days of attendance and the number of half days missed.

15. The School Census collects information for a pupil's attendance in the term prior to the census. Data on attendance is only collected for the part of the summer term prior to the Spring Bank Holiday. This data for summer 2009 will be collected in October 2009. Analysis of data for the academic year 2008/09 (for the period up to 22 May 2009) will be available in a Statistical First Release due to be published in March 2010.

16. 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 data in 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.

17. For a pupil enrolment, if the number of possible half days in a term is zero/missing or is less than the total number of half days missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence, or if the

total number of possible half days exceeds the limit for the term, then the absence variables have been set to zero for that term only, and that term's information has been discounted from this SFR. If the total number of possible half days for each and every term equals zero, then the enrolment has not been included.

18. The information shown for attendance and absence is for two terms of the 2008/09 academic year. Data for schools which have since closed is included for the reporting period prior to their closure.

19. The information in the 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 data collection.

20. The data are based on the 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 effectively 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.

21. The data contained in this SFR relates only to those pupils on the roll of a maintained primary or secondary school, CTC or Academy. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school or who attend special schools.

General

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

23. Further information, including LA level analyses, are available through the following link:-
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000882/index.shtml>

24. Enquiries (non-media) about information contained in this Statistical First Release should be addressed to School Statistics Unit, Room 1F Area H, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, Co Durham, DL3 9BG or e-mail schools.statistics@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

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

Table 1

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)
PUPIL ABSENCE BY TYPE OF SCHOOLAutumn 2006 and Spring 2007 Terms to Autumn 2008 and Spring 2009 Terms
England

| | Autumn 2006 and Spring 2007 Terms | Autumn 2007 and Spring 2008 Terms | Autumn 2008 and Spring 2009 Terms |
|--|---|---|---|
| Primary and Secondary Schools (1)(2) | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (3) | 6,444,630 | 6,352,360 | 6,287,410 |
| Percentage of half days missed due to: (4) | | | |
| Authorised absence | 5.47 | 5.29 | 5.28 |
| Unauthorised absence | 0.97 | 0.97 | 1.03 |
| Overall absence | 6.44 | 6.26 | 6.31 |
| Primary Schools (1) | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (3) | 3,428,390 | 3,377,690 | 3,346,350 |
| Percentage of half days missed due to: (4) | | | |
| Authorised absence | 4.73 | 4.79 | 4.81 |
| Unauthorised absence | 0.52 | 0.56 | 0.65 |
| Overall absence | 5.26 | 5.35 | 5.46 |
| State-funded Secondary Schools (1)(2) | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (3) | 3,016,240 | 2,974,670 | 2,941,060 |
| Percentage of half days missed due to: (4) | | | |
| Authorised absence | 6.30 | 5.86 | 5.81 |
| Unauthorised absence | 1.48 | 1.43 | 1.47 |
| Overall absence | 7.78 | 7.30 | 7.28 |
| <i>Of which:</i> | | | |
| <i>Maintained Secondary Schools (1)</i> | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments (3) | 2,968,570 | 2,902,260 | 2,828,610 |
| Percentage of half days missed due to: (4) | | | |
| Authorised absence | 6.30 | 5.86 | 5.79 |
| Unauthorised absence | 1.46 | 1.41 | 1.44 |
| Overall absence | 7.76 | 7.27 | 7.24 |

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 age 5 to 15 who were on roll for at least one session between 1 September 2008 and the end of the Spring term 2009, 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.

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

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10

Table 2
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)
PERSISTENT ABSENTEES (3)
Autumn 2006 and Spring 2007 Terms to Autumn 2008 and Spring 2009 Terms
England

| | Autumn 2006 and Spring 2007 Terms | Autumn 2007 and Spring 2008 Terms | Autumn 2008 and Spring 2009 Terms |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Primary and Secondary Schools (1)(2) | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees (3)(4) | 283,170 | 272,760 | 241,200 |
| Total number of pupil enrolments (4) | 6,444,630 | 6,352,360 | 6,287,410 |
| Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees | 4.4 | 4.3 | 3.8 |
| Percentage of half days missed by persistent absentees due to (5): | | | |
| Authorised Absence | 22.62 | 21.22 | 20.17 |
| Unauthorised Absence | 11.73 | 11.72 | 12.47 |
| Overall absence | 34.34 | 32.94 | 32.64 |
| Percentage of absence for which persistent absentees are responsible (6): | | | |
| Authorised Absence | 18.1 | 17.17 | 14.62 |
| Unauthorised Absence | 52.9 | 51.66 | 46.15 |
| Overall absence | 23.4 | 22.51 | 19.78 |
| Primary Schools (1) | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees (3)(4) | 73,940 | 81,530 | 72,600 |
| Total number of pupil enrolments (4) | 3,428,390 | 3,377,690 | 3,346,350 |
| Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees | 2.2 | 2.4 | 2.2 |
| Percentage of half days missed by persistent absentees due to (5): | | | |
| Authorised Absence | 22.43 | 21.30 | 20.42 |
| Unauthorised Absence | 7.21 | 7.16 | 7.75 |
| Overall absence | 29.64 | 28.45 | 28.17 |
| Percentage of absence for which persistent absentees are responsible (6): | | | |
| Authorised Absence | 10.2 | 10.75 | 9.22 |
| Unauthorised Absence | 29.9 | 30.89 | 26.00 |
| Overall absence | 12.2 | 12.86 | 11.21 |
| State-funded Secondary Schools (1)(2) | | | |
| Number of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees (3)(4) | 209,230 | 191,240 | 168,600 |
| Total number of pupil enrolments (4) | 3,016,240 | 2,974,670 | 2,941,060 |
| Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees | 6.9 | 6.4 | 5.7 |
| Percentage of half days missed by persistent absentees due to (5): | | | |
| Authorised Absence | 22.68 | 21.19 | 20.06 |
| Unauthorised Absence | 13.33 | 13.67 | 14.51 |
| Overall absence | 36.01 | 34.86 | 34.57 |
| Percentage of absence for which persistent absentees are responsible (6): | | | |
| Authorised Absence | 24.8 | 23.08 | 19.68 |
| Unauthorised Absence | 62.1 | 60.81 | 56.16 |
| Overall absence | 31.9 | 30.50 | 27.05 |
| <i>Of which:</i> | | | |
| <i>Maintained Secondary Schools (1):</i> | | | |
| <i>Number of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees (3)(4)</i> | <i>204,810</i> | <i>185,060</i> | <i>159,820</i> |
| <i>Total number of pupil enrolments (4)</i> | <i>2,968,570</i> | <i>2,902,260</i> | <i>2,828,610</i> |
| <i>Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees</i> | <i>6.9</i> | <i>6.4</i> | <i>5.6</i> |
| <i>Percentage of half days missed by persistent absentees due to (5):</i> | | | |
| <i>Authorised Absence</i> | <i>22.72</i> | <i>21.24</i> | <i>20.11</i> |
| <i>Unauthorised Absence</i> | <i>13.25</i> | <i>13.56</i> | <i>14.40</i> |
| <i>Overall absence</i> | <i>35.96</i> | <i>34.80</i> | <i>34.51</i> |
| <i>Percentage of absence for which persistent absentees are responsible (6):</i> | | | |
| <i>Authorised Absence</i> | <i>24.7</i> | <i>22.96</i> | <i>19.46</i> |
| <i>Unauthorised Absence</i> | <i>62.0</i> | <i>60.80</i> | <i>56.01</i> |
| <i>Overall absence</i> | <i>31.8</i> | <i>30.31</i> | <i>26.74</i> |

Source: School Census

- (1) Includes middle schools as deemed.
(2) Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies (including all-through academies).
(3) Persistent Absentees are defined as having 52 or more sessions of absence (authorised and unauthorised) during the year, typically over 20 per cent overall absence rate. (This figure was 48 or more sessions for Autumn 2007 and Spring 2008.)
(4) Includes pupils age 5 to 15 who were on roll for at least one session between 1 September and the end of the Spring term each year, 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.
(5) The number of sessions missed due to authorised/unauthorised/overall absence expressed as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions.
(6) The total number of sessions missed due to authorised/unauthorised/overall absence by persistent absentees expressed as a percentage of the total number of sessions missed due to authorised/unauthorised/overall absence by all pupil enrolments.

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10

Table 3

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2)**ABSENCE BY REASON (3)**

Autumn 2008 and Spring 2009 Terms

England

| | Primary (1) | State-funded Secondary (1)(2) | Primary and Secondary (1)(2) |
|---|--------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <u>DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE</u> | | | |
| Percentage of absent sessions due to (4): | | | |
| Illness (NOT medical or dental) | 62.0 | 56.9 | 59.2 |
| Medical/dental appointments | 4.8 | 5.9 | 5.4 |
| Religious observance | 2.6 | 1.4 | 1.9 |
| Study leave | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.3 |
| Traveller absence | 0.4 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Agreed family holiday | 11.2 | 4.6 | 7.7 |
| Agreed extended family holiday | 0.4 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Excluded, no alternative provision | 0.3 | 2.4 | 1.4 |
| Other authorised circumstances | 6.4 | 7.8 | 7.2 |
| Total Authorised Absence | 88.1 | 79.8 | 83.6 |
| Percentage of absent sessions due to (4): | | | |
| Family holiday not agreed | 2.0 | 1.7 | 1.8 |
| Arrived late | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| Other unauthorised | 6.3 | 13.3 | 10.1 |
| No reason yet | 2.4 | 4.1 | 3.3 |
| Total Unauthorised Absence | 11.9 | 20.2 | 16.4 |
| Total Overall Absence | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| <u>ABSENCE RATES BY REASON</u> | | | |
| Percentage of absent sessions due to (4): | | | |
| Illness (NOT medical or dental) | 3.37 | 4.11 | 3.72 |
| Medical/dental appointments | 0.26 | 0.43 | 0.34 |
| Religious observance | 0.14 | 0.10 | 0.12 |
| Study leave | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.02 |
| Traveller absence | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Agreed family holiday | 0.61 | 0.33 | 0.48 |
| Agreed extended family holiday | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Excluded, no alternative provision | 0.02 | 0.17 | 0.09 |
| Other authorised circumstances | 0.35 | 0.56 | 0.45 |
| Unclassified (5) | 0.02 | 0.04 | 0.03 |
| Total Authorised Absence | 4.81 | 5.81 | 5.28 |
| Percentage of absent sessions due to (4): | | | |
| Family holiday not agreed | 0.11 | 0.12 | 0.11 |
| Arrived late | 0.06 | 0.08 | 0.07 |
| Other unauthorised | 0.34 | 0.96 | 0.63 |
| No reason yet | 0.13 | 0.30 | 0.21 |
| Unclassified (5) | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Total Unauthorised Absence | 0.65 | 1.47 | 1.03 |
| Total Overall Absence | 5.46 | 7.28 | 6.31 |

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 age 5 to 15 who were on roll for at least one session between 1 September 2008 and the end of the Spring term 2009, 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.

(4) Percentages are based on absence totals as reported by reason (not overall totals). See Technical Note 11.

(5) Includes absence return as either authorised or unauthorised but not broken down by reason, see Technical Note 11.