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## PUPIL ABSENCE – AUTUMN 2008 TERM REPORT

### INTRODUCTION

This document reports on absence during the autumn 2008 term in maintained primary, secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies in England. It is based on pupil level absence data collected via the spring 2009 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 more than 27 or 63 sessions; and the proportion of absence by reason.

This is **not** a National Statistics publication. 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.

### ABSENCE RATES FOR AUTUMN 2008

The percentages of half days missed due to overall absence in the autumn 2008 term were:

- Maintained primary schools – 5.61 per cent (an increase from 5.36 per cent in autumn 2007 term) (Table 1)
- State funded secondary schools<sup>1</sup> – 7.34 per cent (an increase from 7.27 per cent in autumn 2007 term) (Table 1)
- Primary and secondary schools<sup>1</sup> – 6.42 per cent (an increase from 6.26 per cent in autumn 2007 term) (Table 1)

<sup>1</sup> Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies.

### PERSISTENT ABSENTEES

Persistent Absentees are defined as missing more than 63 sessions across the full year (typically more than 20 per cent of time in school).

- In the autumn 2008 term some 0.6 per cent of enrolments across all maintained primary, secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies missed more than 63 sessions, classifying them as persistent absentees. (Table 2)
- Some 5.5 per cent of enrolments are persistent absentees or may

become persistent absentees if their absence continues at the same rate. (Table 2)

- In state funded secondary schools, the percentage of enrolments who are, or who may become, persistent absentees has decreased from 7.6 per cent to 7.3 per cent when compared with data for the same term in 2007/08. (Table 2)

Data linking pupil absence across the autumn 2008 and spring 2009 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

- The most commonly reported reason for absence was “**illness (not medical or dental appointments)**” which accounted for some 3.76 per cent of half days (where reason for absence was provided). (Table 3)
- 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 unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed. Absence for family holidays accounted for 0.73 per cent of half days – this equates to around 3.2 million school days in the autumn term. Some 81 per cent of these days were authorised by the school. (Table 3)

## LOCAL AUTHORITY ANALYSIS

Local authority level data are provided in tables 4 to 6 and cover the maintained sector only as they are designed to help authorities monitor, compare and improve absence levels. Table 7 provides overall figures that include absence data for city technology colleges and academies.

## **TABLES**

Table 1	Primary and Secondary Schools: Rates of absence, England, Autumn Term: 2006, 2007 and 2008
Table 2	Primary and Secondary Schools: Number and rates of enrolment who are <i>OR</i> may become persistent absentees, England, Autumn Term: 2006, 2007 and 2008
Table 3	Primary and Secondary Schools: Reason for absence, England, Autumn Term 2008
Table 4	LA Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence, By Local Authority area, Autumn Term 2008
Table 5	LA Maintained Primary Schools: Pupil Absence, By Local Authority area, Autumn Term 2008
Table 6	LA Maintained Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence, By Local Authority area, Autumn Term 2008
Table 7	Primary and Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence, By Local Authority area, Autumn Term 2008

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### Definitions

1. Absence is measured in sessions; there are two sessions in one school day.
2. 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 3.4 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 and the rate of persistent absentees 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.
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 2006 Pupil Registration regulations came into force on 1 September 2006 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](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolattendance/legislation).
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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).
7. 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, Coverage and Quality

8. Following a review of the presentation of statistics on academies, changes have been made to the coverage of some of the tables in this report. To account for the growth in the academies sector, the majority of tables now 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 03/2009.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. 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**

15. The termly reports are not classified as National Statistics because full data analysis and cleaning has not been completed. The aim of this document is to provide emerging findings of absence data relating to the autumn 2008 term for operational and management purposes. Data presented in the SFRs will go through a more comprehensive validation process and will be published as National Statistics.

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

17. Information based on absence data linked across the autumn 2008 and spring 2009 terms will be published in October 2009 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 2008/09 school year. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2008/09 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in February 2010. 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.

18. 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@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:schools.statistics@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk)

19. 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):**  
**RATES OF ABSENCE**  
 Autumn Term: 2006 - 2008  
 England

	Autumn 2006 Term	Autumn 2007 Term	Autumn 2008 Term
<b>Primary and Secondary Schools (2)</b>			
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	6,351,820	6,268,130	6,197,070
Percentage of half days missed due to: (4)			
Authorised absence	5.04	5.32	5.44
Unauthorised absence	0.90	0.94	0.98
Overall absence	5.94	6.26	6.42
<b>LA Maintained Primary Schools (1)</b>			
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	3,364,390	3,320,510	3,285,080
Percentage of half days missed due to: (4)			
Authorised absence	4.27	4.80	4.98
Unauthorised absence	0.48	0.56	0.63
Overall absence	4.75	5.36	5.61
<b>State Funded Secondary Schools (2)</b>			
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	2,987,430	2,947,630	2,911,990
Percentage of half days missed due to: (4)			
Authorised absence	5.91	5.89	5.97
Unauthorised absence	1.37	1.38	1.37
Overall absence	7.28	7.27	7.34

*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 during the autumn 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.

(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):  
NUMBER AND RATES OF ENROLMENTS WHO ARE OR MAY BECOME PERSISTENT ABSENTEES (3)**

Autumn Term: 2006 - 2008

England

	Autumn 2006 Term	Autumn 2007 Term	Autumn 2008 Term
<b>Primary and Secondary Schools (2)</b>			
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	6,351,820	6,268,130	6,197,070
Number of enrolments who have missed more than 63 sessions (Persistent Absentee)	48,080	43,920	37,930
Percentage of enrolments who have missed more than 63 sessions (Persistent Absentees)	0.8	0.7	0.6
Number of enrolments who have missed more than 27 sessions (may become Persistent Absentee) (4)	336,940	348,950	339,690
Percentage of enrolments who have missed more than 27 sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (4)	5.3	5.6	5.5
<b>LA Maintained Primary Schools (1)</b>			
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	3,364,390	3,320,510	3,285,080
Number of enrolments who have missed more than 63 sessions (Persistent Absentee)	7,180	7,100	6,460
Percentage of enrolments who have missed more than 63 sessions (Persistent Absentees)	0.2	0.2	0.2
Number of enrolments who have missed more than 27 sessions (may become Persistent Absentee) (4)	103,830	125,100	128,070
Percentage of enrolments who have missed more than 27 sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (4)	3.1	3.8	3.9
<b>State Funded Secondary Schools (1)(2)</b>			
Number of pupil enrolments (3)	2,987,430	2,947,630	2,911,990
Number of enrolments who have missed more than 63 sessions (Persistent Absentee)	40,900	36,820	31,480
Percentage of enrolments who have missed more than 63 sessions (Persistent Absentees)	1.4	1.2	1.1
Number of enrolments who have missed more than 27 sessions (may become Persistent Absentee) (4)	233,100	223,850	211,620
Percentage of enrolments who have missed more than 27 sessions (may become Persistent Absentees) (4)	7.8	7.6	7.3

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 during the autumn 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.

(4) Includes those enrolments already defined as being a Persistent Absentee (missing more than 63 sessions).

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10

Table 3  
**PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1)(2):**  
**REASON FOR ABSENCE**  
Autumn Term 2008  
England

	LA Maintained Primary (1)	State Funded Secondary (1)(2)	Primary and Secondary Schools (2)
Number of sessions possible (3)	463,433,620	409,740,190	873,173,810
Number of sessions missed due to authorised absence (3)	23,061,530	24,469,190	47,530,720
Percentage of sessions missed due to authorised absence	4.98	5.97	5.44
Number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absence (3)	2,921,620	5,621,800	8,543,430
Percentage of sessions missed due to unauthorised absence	0.63	1.37	0.98
Number of sessions missed due to overall absence (3)	25,983,150	30,090,990	56,074,140
Percentage of sessions missed due to overall absence	5.61	7.34	6.42
<b><u>DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE</u></b>			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental)	60.7	57.4	58.9
Medical/dental appointments	4.6	5.7	5.2
Religious observance	4.5	2.4	3.4
Study leave	0.0	0.7	0.4
Traveller absence	0.4	0.1	0.2
Agreed family holiday	13.1	5.7	9.1
Agreed extended family holiday	0.4	0.1	0.2
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.3	2.2	1.3
Other authorised circumstances	4.8	7.0	6.0
<b>Total Authorised Absence</b>	<b>88.7</b>	<b>81.3</b>	<b>84.8</b>
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	2.2	2.0	2.1
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	1.1	0.9	1.0
Unauthorised absence, not covered	5.5	11.5	8.8
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	2.4	4.2	3.4
<b>Total Unauthorised Absence</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>15.2</b>
<b>Total Overall Absence</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b><u>ABSENCE RATES BY REASON</u></b>			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental)	3.39	4.18	3.76
Medical/dental appointments	0.26	0.41	0.33
Religious observance	0.25	0.18	0.22
Study leave	0.00	0.05	0.03
Traveller absence	0.02	0.01	0.02
Agreed family holiday	0.73	0.42	0.58
Agreed extended family holiday	0.02	0.01	0.01
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.02	0.16	0.08
Other authorised circumstances	0.27	0.51	0.38
Unclassified	0.02	0.04	0.03
<b>Total Authorised Absence</b>	<b>4.98</b>	<b>5.97</b>	<b>5.44</b>
Percentage of absent sessions due to (4):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	0.12	0.15	0.14
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	0.06	0.07	0.06
Unauthorised absence, not covered	0.31	0.84	0.56
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	0.14	0.30	0.21
Unclassified	0.00	0.01	0.01
<b>Total Unauthorised Absence</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>1.37</b>	<b>0.98</b>
<b>Total Overall Absence</b>	<b>5.61</b>	<b>7.34</b>	<b>6.42</b>

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 during the autumn 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.

(4) Percentages are based on absence totals as reported by reason (not overall totals). See Notes to Editors 10.

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10