



Department  
for Education

# **A guide to absence statistics**

**March 2018**

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# 1. Introduction

This document provides a comprehensive guide to the [pupil absence in schools in England statistics](#) published by the Department for Education.

The key areas covered in this guide are:

- Background to published statistics and methodology
- Data collection and coverage
- Data processing

## 1.1 Requirements of schools in ensuring pupil attendance

All maintained schools are required to provide two possible sessions per day, morning and afternoon, to all pupils. The length of each session, break and the school day is determined by the school's governing body. Schools must meet for at least 380 sessions or 190 days during any school year to educate their pupils. If a school is prevented from meeting for one or more sessions because of an unavoidable event, it should find a practical way of holding extra sessions. However, if it cannot find a practical way of doing this then it is not required to make up the lost sessions. Academy and free school funding agreements state that the duration of the school day/sessions is the responsibility of the academy trust.

Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day: once at the start of the first/morning session of each school day and once during the second/afternoon session. In their register, schools are required to record whether pupils are:

- Present
- Attending an approved educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Where a pupil of compulsory school age is absent, schools have a responsibility to:

- Ascertain the reason
- Ensure the proper safeguarding action is taken
- Indicate in their register whether the absence is authorised by the school or unauthorised
- Identify the correct code to use before entering it on to the school's electronic register, or management information system which is then used to download data to the school census. A code set of these is available in [Annex C](#).

The Parent of every child of compulsory school age is required to ensure that the child receive a suitable full time education to the child's ability, age, aptitude and any special education needs the child may have either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Failure of a parent to secure regular attendance of their school registered child of compulsory school age can lead to a penalty notice or prosecution. Local authorities (LAs) and schools have legal responsibilities regarding accurate recording of a pupil's attendance.

Further information is available in the Departmental advice on [school attendance](#).

## 1.2 Uses and Users

Data used to derive published absence statistics is collected via the school census.

There is widespread use of data from the schools census. In addition to mainstream and specialist media coverage of our statistical publications that data are used by a range of companies. These include housing websites such as Rightmove and Zoopla, specialist publications such as the good schools guide, organisations providing data analysis services to schools such as Fischer Family Trust. The data is well used by the academic research community (e.g. Durham University), education think tanks (Education Policy Institute). It is also used by central government (DfE, Ofsted, other government departments).

The published data are used frequently in answers to parliamentary questions and public enquiries, including those made under the Freedom of Information Act.

## 2. Background to published statistics

### 2.1 Current termly publications

The Department publishes termly pupil absence data via three National Statistics releases each year. These are:

- Autumn term, published in May
- Autumn and spring terms, published in October
- Full year, published in March

Only the full year absence release gives a definitive view of pupil absence. Termly publications can be affected significantly by term length and therefore findings from these releases are for indicative purposes only and the results should be treated with caution.

The Department's annual absence statistical releases have been badged as National Statistics since the 1999/00 academic year publication. The termly and two term combined releases were badged as National Statistics slightly later. The combined autumn and spring term release was badged as national statistics from the autumn 2006 and spring 2007 publication and the single term releases were badged as National Statistics as of the autumn term 2009 publication.

#### Historical publications:

Prior to the 2012/13 academic year the Department also published spring term only absence data. However, this was discontinued as it was deemed no longer necessary and of the least importance to users. The last published spring term release was [Pupil absence in schools in England: spring term 2012](#) published on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

For the 2005/06 academic year, due to the transition of absence collection between the Absence in Schools Survey and the school census, absence information was published for secondary schools only as a National Statistics release. Absence data for 2005/06 were not released on a termly basis as this was the first year of collection.

For academic years 1999/00 to 2004/05, annual pupil absence information was collected via the Absence in Schools Survey and published as an annual National Statistics release.

For academic years 1993/94 to 1998/99, annual pupil absence information was collected via the Absence in Schools Survey and published via Statistical bulletins.

Links to all absence publications can be found in [Annex D](#).

## 2.2 Key absence measures

The Department monitors pupil absence levels using two key measures - overall absence rate and persistent absence (PA) rate. The key measures are calculated for pupils who are of compulsory school age i.e. aged between 5 and 15 as at the start of the academic year (31<sup>st</sup> August).

Absence information is reported as a totals or rates across a period, usually by school term or academic year.

**Overall absence** is the aggregated total of all authorised and unauthorised absences.

Authorised absence is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the schools. This includes instances of absence for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided e.g. illness.

Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences and arrivals after registration has closed.

See [overall absence methodology](#) section for further information.

**Persistent absence** is when a pupil enrolment's overall absence equates to 10 per cent or more of their possible sessions.

See [persistent absence methodology](#) section for further information.

## 2.3 Cohort used in absence measures

Absence information is collected and disseminated at enrolment level rather than pupil level. This means that where a pupil has moved school throughout the year, they will be counted more than once as they have recorded attendance and absence at more than one school. This allows for schools to be held accountable for pupil absences, as the absence is attached to enrolments at a particular school, not the individual pupil. All the enrolments at a school over the period in question are included in the absence measures, not just the pupils on roll at a particular date.

Schools only record absence for the period a pupil is on roll at their school.

The number of pupil enrolments is approximately 4 per cent higher than the number of pupils.

**Table 1: State-funded primary, secondary and special schools - pupils of compulsory school age pupil and enrolment numbers comparison**

<b>Academic year</b>	<b>Pupil numbers as at January each year<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Enrolment numbers across full academic year</b>	<b>Percentage difference</b>
2012/13	6,230,420	6,477,725	4.0
2013/14	6,300,105	6,554,005	4.0
2014/15	6,381,940	6,642,755	4.0
2015/16	6,484,725	6,737,190	3.9

## **2.4 The school year (five half terms vs six half terms)**

Generally, the academic year is made up of three terms, autumn, spring and summer. Each term has two parts (half terms) which are usually separated by a half term break.

Since the 2012/13 academic year, pupil absence information has been collected for the full academic year i.e. all six half terms. However, prior to this absence information was collected for the first five half terms only, meaning absences in the second half of the summer term were not collected.

Since the 2012/13 academic year, the Department's key absence indicators have been based on the full academic year's (six half term) data. However, as we are unable to rework time series tables or provide any historical six half term absence levels the Department continued to publish a full set of absence information for the first five half terms up to and including the 2013/14 academic year. Following this, a single csv file based on data for five half terms has been published alongside the annual absence publications to enable users to still make longer term time comparisons on this basis if they wish to.

To account for high levels of study leave and other authorised absences for pupils aged 15 in the second half of the summer term, all possible sessions and absences relating to this period for 15 year olds (as at the start of the academic year) are removed prior to any analysis being undertaken and are not included in any published statistics.

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<sup>1</sup> Pupils with a sole or dual main registration, aged between 5 and 15 who are not boarders as of the January school census each year.



In published absence statistics, pupil enrolments who first enrolled at a school within the second half of the summer term are not included. This is to ensure the same cohorts of enrolments are included in both the five and six half term absence measures.

## **2.5 Published geographical and characteristics breakdowns**

The Department routinely publishes pupil absence information at national, local authority and school level including breakdowns by pupil characteristics.

The autumn term absence publication provides high level information designed to give an early indication on absence levels and the effect of winter illness. Information provided includes authorised, unauthorised and overall absence rates, absence broken down by reason, the number of pupils with one or more sessions of absence for different reasons and information on persistent absence.

The combined autumn and spring term publication includes similar information to that of the autumn term. However, it also includes absence levels broken down by pupils' gender, free school meal eligibility, national curriculum year group, first language, special educational need and ethnic group.

The full academic year's absence publication includes combined absence information for the autumn, spring and summer terms. It is the largest publication and includes similar breakdowns to that of the combined autumn and spring term publication (as outlined above) as well as persistent absence broken down by reason for absence and pupil characteristic. Additional breakdowns included in this full year release relate to the distribution of enrolments by length of overall absence, percentage of enrolments by their overall absence and number of schools by the percentage of persistent absentees. In this publication, information is also provided at district level, based on Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and by degree of rurality. In addition, from 2015/16 onwards, characteristics include free school meal eligibility in the last 6 years.

The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) is provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). The index measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families and is based on Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England. Each LSOA is given a rank between 1 and 32,844 where the LSOA with the rank of 1 is the most deprived LSOA and the LSOA with the rank of 32,844 is the most deprived. IDACI is a subset of the Income Deprivation Domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015, which which measures the proportion of the population in an area experiencing deprivation relating to low income. The definition of low income used includes both those people

that are out-of-work, and those that are in work but who have low earnings (and who satisfy the respective means tests). Further information about IDACI can be found on the [CLG site](#).

IDACI bands from 2014/15 are based on 2015 IDACI scores. IDACI bands for 2010/11 to 2013/14 are based on 2010 IDACI scores and those for 2007/08 to 2009/10 are based on 2007 IDACI scores. Care should be taken when comparing IDACI tables based on different IDACI scores.

The Rural and Urban Area Classification is a product of a joint project to produce a single and consistent classification of urban and rural areas. The project was sponsored by a number of government departments. The rural and urban definitions classify output areas, wards and super output areas by aggregating the underlying hectare grid squares classifications for the measures of settlement size and sparsity. Up to eight classes of output areas could be distinguished; four settlement types (urban, town and fringe, village, hamlet and isolated dwelling) in either a sparse or less sparse regional setting.

Absence data by degree of rurality from 2014/15 has been analysed based on the 2011 Rural and Urban Area Classification, whereas equivalent data for previous years was analysed based on the 2004 Rural and Urban Area Classification. Further information about the Rural and Urban Area Classification 2011 can be found on the [Office for National Statistics website](#).

A full list of published absence breakdowns (as of the latest academic year's releases) is available in [Annex E](#).

From 2015/16 onwards, published tables on characteristics breakdowns include figures for pupils with unclassified or missing characteristics information. This represents a small proportion of all pupils and the figures should be interpreted with caution. For some characteristics, like free school meals eligibility, pupils with unclassified or missing characteristics information have been found to have a low average number of sessions possible, which might explain more variability in absence rates which use the number of possible sessions as a denominator.

## **2.6 Underlying data provided alongside publications**

From the 2009/10 academic year, each National Statistics release has been accompanied by underlying data, including national, local authority and school level information. Alongside the underlying data there is an accompanying document (metadata) 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](#).

Following the '[Consultation on improvements to pupil absence statistics](#)', results published in October 2015, releases are now accompanied by time series underlying data, containing additional breakdowns and data from 2006/07 to the latest year. This additional data is intended to provide users with all information in one place and give them the option of producing their own analysis.

## 2.7 Suppression of absence data

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 protects confidentiality.

To do this totals are rounded and small numbers are suppressed according to the following rules:

- Enrolment numbers at national and regional levels are rounded to the nearest 5. Local authority totals across school types are also rounded to the nearest 5 to prevent disclosure of any suppressed values.
- Enrolment numbers of 1 or 2 are suppressed to protect pupil confidentiality.
- Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers of 1 or 2, the percentage is suppressed. This suppression is consistent with the [Departmental statistical policy](#).
- Where any number is shown as 0, the original figure was also 0.

Symbols used to identify this in published tables are as follows:

0	Zero
x	Small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality
.	Not applicable
..	Not available

## 2.8 Other related publications

Pupil absence information is also available in the following publications:

- Other National Statistics releases published by the Department:
  - [Children in Need](#)
  - [Children looked after](#)
  - [School and college performance tables](#)
- Other reports published by the Department:

- [The link between absence and attainment at KS2 and KS4](#)

In addition historical pupil absence data is available in the following publications which have been discontinued:

- [Special Educational Needs: an analysis](#) (Department for Education) - data up to and including 2013/14
- [Neighbourhood statistics](#) (ONS small area tables) - 2006/07 to 2012/13 inclusive

## 2.9 Devolved administration statistics on absence

The Department collects and reports on 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.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.stats@wales.gsi.gov.uk) or

[Welsh Government – Statistics and Research](#)

Scotland: [school.stats@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.stats@wales.gsi.gov.uk) or

[Scottish Government – School Education Statistics](#)

Northern Ireland: [statistics@deni.gov.uk](mailto:statistics@deni.gov.uk) or

[Department of Education – Education Statistics](#)

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Overall absence methodology

An enrolment's overall absence rate is the total number of overall absence sessions as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions available to that enrolment, where overall absence is the sum of authorised and unauthorised absence and one session is equal to half a day.

To calculate school, local authority and national level overall absence rates, the total absences and possible sessions for all enrolments within the relevant areas are included.

$$\text{Overall absence rate} = \frac{\text{Total overall absence sessions}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$$

### 3.2 Persistent absence methodology

The persistent absence measure was introduced in 2005/06. The sections below outline how the measure has changed since it was implemented.

In published releases, to allow users to compare over time, time series information is recalculated following any methodology change.

#### 3.2.1 Overview of persistent absence measures used since 2005/06

**Table 2: Persistent absence measures since 2005/06**

<b>Description of persistent absence measure</b>	<b>Academic years</b>
10% or more of sessions missed (based on each pupil's possible sessions)	2015/16 onwards
Around 15% or more of sessions missed (based on a standard threshold)	2010/11 to 2014/15
Around 20% or more of sessions missed (based on a standard threshold)	2005/06 to 2009/10

### 3.2.2 2015/16 onwards (10 per cent, based on an exact methodology):

Since the start of the 2015/16 academic year schools, a pupil has been classified as a persistent absentee if they miss 10 per cent or more of their own possible sessions, rather than if they reach a standard threshold of absence sessions. Meaning, that if an enrolment's overall absence rate 10 per cent or higher<sup>2</sup> they will be classified as persistently absent. See [overall absence methodology](#) section for further information.

To calculate school, local authority and national level persistent absence rates, all persistently absent enrolments within the relevant areas are included.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Persistent absence rate} \\ = \frac{\text{Number of enrolments classed as persistent absentees}}{\text{Number of enrolments}} \times 100 \end{aligned}$$

Note that, although the measure was only in place from September 2015, figures based on the 10 per cent exact methodology were published alongside the 2014/15 [Pupil absence in schools in England](#) releases for information purposes only.

Table 3 provides a comparison of figures at the 10% and 15% level using the previous threshold methodology and the current exact methodology, based on figures for the full 2014/15 academic year, when the change became effective.

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<sup>2</sup> An unrounded overall absence rate, calculated using overall absence as a percentage of possible sessions

**Table 3: Comparison of the number and percentage of persistent absentees for the 2014/15 academic year based on the threshold (previous) and exact (current) methodology**

	Threshold methodology		Exact methodology	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>Total</b>				
10 per cent	627,070	9.4	728,080	11.0
15 per cent	245,840	3.7	308,100	4.6
<b>Primary</b>				
10 per cent	257,945	6.9	314,440	8.4
15 per cent	79,955	2.1	113,160	3.0
<b>Secondary</b>				
10 per cent	347,425	12.3	390,185	13.8
15 per cent	152,775	5.4	180,610	6.4
<b>Special</b>				
10 per cent	21,700	25.4	23,460	27.5
15 per cent	13,110	15.4	14,330	16.8

Further details on the rationale for the methodology change can be found in the original consultation document on proposed changes to absence statistics which was published in October 2014 in Section 9 of the [Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2013 and spring 2014](#) Statistical First Release. A consultation response summarising feedback received from users on the proposed change to the methodology and next steps, published in October 2015, can also be found on the same webpage.

### **3.2.3 2010/11 to 2014/15 methodology (15 per cent PA threshold)**

Pupils were identified as persistent absentees by comparing the number of overall absence sessions they had against a standard threshold of around 15 per cent of possible sessions, equating to 56 or more sessions across the full academic year for pupils aged 5 to 14 and 46 or more sessions across the full academic year for pupils aged 15 (whose absence information is based on the first five half terms only, as any sixth half term absence is removed prior to analysis as set out in the section on [the school year \(five half terms vs six half terms\)](#)).

Prior to 2012/13 (when absence data was first collected for the second half of the summer term), the threshold was 46 sessions across the first five half terms of the year for all pupils.

For the autumn term, figures showed how many enrolments had already become persistent absentees, as well as those who may become persistent absentees based on the standard threshold of 22 or more sessions of absence.

For the autumn and spring terms, figures showed how many enrolments had already become persistent absentees, as well as those who may become persistent absentees based on the standard threshold of 38 or more sessions of absence.

Standard termly persistent absentee thresholds were calculated by taking 15 per cent of the mode (most common number of) possible sessions for all enrolments. This meant that, in some cases, the standard threshold may be more or less than 15 per cent of an individual pupil's sessions. The termly persistent absence thresholds were reviewed each term to account for any changes to the mode possible sessions, but the thresholds did not tend to change from year to year. See table 4 for standard thresholds.

**Table 4: Standard cumulative persistent absence thresholds for missing 15 per cent of possible sessions**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Threshold</b>
Autumn term	22 sessions
Spring term (as of 2012/13, no longer published individually)	16 sessions
Autumn and spring terms	38 sessions
First five half terms	46 sessions
Full academic year – six half terms	56 sessions

### **3.2.4 2005/06 to 2009/10 methodology (20 per cent PA threshold)**

The persistent absence measure was first introduced in 2005/06, where a pupil was identified as a persistent absentee if they missed around 20 per cent or more of possible sessions.

Persistent absence figures were published in a similar way to that of the 15 per cent threshold figures that were in place between 2010/11 and 2013/14. With both the autumn term and autumn and spring term releases showing how many enrolments



have already become persistent absentees, as well as those who may become, persistent absentees based on the standard threshold. See table 5 for standard thresholds to which missing 20 per cent of sessions equated to.

This threshold was reduced to 15 per cent as of September 2010.

**Table 5: Standard absence thresholds for missing 20 per cent of possible sessions, between 2005/06 and 2009/10**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Threshold</b>
Autumn term	28 sessions
Spring term	52 sessions
Autumn and Spring terms	52 sessions
First five half terms	64 sessions

## 4. Data collection

### 4.1 The collection process 2005/06 to present

The school census collects information for a pupil's absence in the term prior to the census i.e. one term in arrears. For example, the spring school census collects information on absence during the autumn term. Data is collected one term in arrears to ensure all absences are accounted for and recorded in each term.

Within the autumn census all schools are required to provide the first and second halves of the summer term's absence figures separately. This allows total absence levels to be calculated for both the full year and the first five half terms. See [the school year \(five half terms vs six half terms\)](#) section for more information.

**Table 6: School census pupil absence collection schedule**

Phase	Census	Schedule
State-funded primary, secondary and special schools <sup>3</sup>	Spring Census	Collects autumn term absence - From 1st August to 31st December
	Summer Census	Collects spring term absence - From 1st January to Easter Sunday
	Autumn Census	Collects first half of summer term absence - From Easter Monday to Sunday before spring bank holiday  Collects second half of summer term absence - From spring bank holiday to 31st July

Schools submit their school census returns via the Department's data collection software, COLLECT. Guidance on the school census, including absence, is available on the [DfE statistics website](#).

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<sup>3</sup> Prior to the 2016/17 academic year absence information from special schools was collected on an annual basis only, this was collected each year via the autumn school census.

## 4.2 Background of absence data collection

The following sections outline how absence data collection has changed since it was first collected in 1993/94. A timeline is also available in [Annex F](#).

High level absence information showing rates from before and after the absence collection moved to the school census is available in [Annex G](#).

### 4.2.1 2005/06 to present: Pupil absence information is collected via the school census

In **spring 2006** the school census started to collect enrolment level absence data on a termly basis (spring, summer and autumn collections) from maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies relating to absence in the 2005/06 academic year.

In the **spring 2007** school census the scope of the collection was extended to maintained primary schools, collecting absence data for the 2006/07 academic year.

Reason for absence was also collected for the first time in the **spring 2007** school census, collecting absence by reason data for the autumn term 2006.

Prior to the 2016/17 academic year special schools did not provide termly absence data; instead they provided annual enrolment level absence returns. Special school absence information was collected for the first time in the **autumn 2007** school census, collecting absence data for the 2006/07 academic year.

From **September 2011** data collection systems were amended so that the national attendance code “D” (dual registered) was no longer counted in the school census as an attendance or a possible session. Following this, schools should only record the pupil’s attendance and absence for those sessions that a pupil was scheduled to attend at that school and the code “D” attendance code should be used to signify a session attended via the dual school. This means that any dual registered pupils attending full time at their dual school (school B) for the period would have zero possible sessions recorded for school A.

Absence data for four year olds was collected for the first time in the **spring 2013** school census, collecting absence information for the autumn term 2012.

Absence data for the second half of the summer term (the sixth half term) was collected by the Department for the first time in the **autumn 2013** school census; previously absence data had only been collected for autumn term, spring term and the first half of the summer term. An amended persistent absentee threshold for the full year was also introduced to account for the additional half term of absence.

Whilst six half term data is more indicative of the academic year and therefore became the main measure for overall absence from this point, five half term data is still published alongside six half term data up to and including the 2013/14 academic year (until a meaningful time series for six half term data is established). Table 7 provides a comparison of absence figures based on five half terms and six half terms, for the full 2012/13 academic year, when data for the sixth half term was first included.

**Table 7: Comparison of absence indicators for the 2012/13 academic year based on five half terms and six half terms**

	<b>Five half terms</b>	<b>Six half terms</b>
<b>State-funded primary, secondary and special schools</b>		
Percentage of sessions missed due to:		
Overall absence	5.2	5.3
Authorised absence	4.2	4.2
Unauthorised absence	1.0	1.1
Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees (1)	4.6	4.6
<b>State-funded primary schools</b>		
Percentage of sessions missed due to:		
Overall absence	4.7	4.7
Authorised absence	3.9	3.9
Unauthorised absence	0.7	0.8
Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees (1)	3.0	2.7
<b>State-funded secondary schools</b>		
Percentage of sessions missed due to:		
Overall absence	5.8	5.9
Authorised absence	4.5	4.5
Unauthorised absence	1.3	1.4
Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees (1)	6.4	6.5
<b>Special schools</b>		
Percentage of sessions missed due to:		
Overall absence	9.7	9.6
Authorised absence	7.8	7.7
Unauthorised absence	1.9	1.9
Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees (1)	16.1	16.2

(1) Persistent absence defined with the 15% threshold methodology in place at the time of the change.

In **spring 2014**, the scope of the collection was extended again to collect termly pupil referral unit (PRU) absence information, relating to absence in the 2013/14 academic year. Previously absence data for PRUs had been collected annually via the PRU Census, where the absence information related to the previous academic year. This Census has now been amalgamated into the school census. Pupil level PRU absence information was collected from all PRUs via the PRU Census for 2009/10 to 2011/12; however no absence information for the 2012/13 academic year was collected for PRUs due to the move from PRU Census to school census.

As of the **spring 2014** school census, code “F” (authorised absence due to agreed extended family holiday) was discontinued following an amendment to the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. In the [Pupil absence in schools in England: 2013 to 2014](#) release any extended family holiday absences (code “F”) recorded by schools have been combined with authorised family holiday absences (code “H”).

Termly absence data for special schools was collected by the Department for the first time in the **autumn 2016** school census; previously absence data had been collected from special schools on an annual basis only and therefore in year figures (the autumn and autumn/spring terms combined) could not be calculated.

#### **4.2.2 1993/94 to 2004/05: Pupil absence information was collected via the Absence in Schools Survey**

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, at school level, the number of day pupils of compulsory school age together with information on the number of sessions missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence. Absence information was collected from maintained primary, secondary, all special and independent schools, city technology colleges and academies in England.

Data covering the 2005/06 academic year from both sources shows that the school census provided information on more pupil enrolments and tended to have higher rates of absence reported than the Absence in Schools Survey. Table 8 provides a comparison of absence figures based on the school census and the Absence in Schools Survey.

For more information on the change from the Absence in Schools Survey to the school census, please see [Pupil Absence in Secondary Schools in England, 2005/06](#).

**Table 8: Comparison of absence indicators for the 2005/06 academic year based on the Absence in Schools Survey and the school census**

	<b>Absence in Schools survey</b>	<b>School Census</b>
<b>Maintained Secondary Schools</b>		
Number of enrolments	3,017,628	3,024,728
Percentage of sessions missed due to:		
Overall absence	7.94	8.24
Authorised absence	6.74	6.82
Unauthorised absence	1.20	1.42
<b>City Technology Colleges</b>		
Number of enrolments	9,552	9,559
Percentage of sessions missed due to:		
Overall absence	5.60	5.81
Authorised absence	5.33	5.45
Unauthorised absence	0.27	0.35
<b>Academies</b>		
Number of enrolments	22,243	22,040
Percentage of sessions missed due to:		
Overall absence	8.69	9.05
Authorised absence	6.78	6.63
Unauthorised absence	1.91	2.42

## 4.3 Data coverage

### 4.3.1 Coverage for 2006/07 to present

Schools provide, via the school census, individual level attendance data for pupils of compulsory school age (ages 5 to 15 at the start of the school year) and, as of September 2012, pupils aged 4 (at the start of the school year) who are non-boarders.

Departmental guidance states it is important that schools are able to work with parents of four year olds to develop good patterns of school attendance before they reach compulsory school age, and avoid it becoming a problem later on in their academic career.

Within published absence statistics, schools are categorised into the following phases.

**Table 9: School types included in published absence statistics**

Phase	Types of school
State-funded primary	Local authority maintained schools Middle schools as deemed Sponsored academies Converter academies Free schools
State-funded secondary	Local authority maintained schools Middle schools as deemed City technology colleges Sponsored academies Converter academies Free schools University technical colleges Studio schools
Special	Local authority maintained special schools Non-maintained special schools Sponsored academies Converter academies Free schools
Pupil referral units	Pupil referral units Alternative provision sponsored academies Alternative provision converter academies Alternative provision free schools

Prior to the 2016/17 academic year special school information was published in full year absence releases only as termly data was not collected.

In the **spring 2014** school census, the Department introduced a new “all-through” school phase. Schools with a statutory low age of below seven and a statutory high age of above fourteen have been flagged as all-through schools in pupil absence National Statistics releases. For recent releases an approximation of all-through absence can be estimated using the school level underlying data.

### **4.3.2 Coverage for 2005/06**

Absence information for 2005/06 was the first years' worth of absence data collected termly, at enrolment level, via the school census. In this first year of collection, information was collected for secondary schools only.

### **4.3.3 Coverage for 1993/94 to 2004/05**

The absence in Schools Survey collected annual absence data, at school level, for compulsory school aged pupils in primary, secondary, special and independent schools. Information on academy absence was first collected for the 2002/03 academic year.

## **4.4 What absence information is collected**

Schools are expected to supply the following via their school census returns:

### **4.4.1 The number of sessions possible**

Schools must record the number of sessions possible for each enrolment for the attendance period (term or half term). There are two sessions for each school day (morning and afternoon).

Every pupil aged 4 to 15 (excluding boarders) as at the start of the academic year (31 August) who was on the school roll for at least one session during the specified attendance period should have an entry for the number of possible sessions.

Enrolments with zero possible sessions are not included in the Department's absence releases.

Special cases when recording possible sessions:

- Dual registered pupils

To avoid the double counting absence for pupils who are registered at more than one school (referred to as 'dual registered'). Each school should:

- Only record the attendance and absence for the sessions the pupil is required to attend at their school
- Use code 'D' (dual registered at another educational establishment) to record all of the sessions that the pupil is due to attend at the other school



- Zero sessions possible

Zero sessions possible can be recorded where a dual registered pupil has spent all of the attendance period (term or half term) at their other school. For example, if a dually registered pupil spent all of the term/ half term at his/her subsidiary registration then the main registration would have zero sessions possible recorded for that term in the Census.

- Summer half term

The official school leaving date for a pupil who ceases to be of compulsory school age is the last Friday in June of the academic year following the pupil's fifteenth birthday. This means that year 11 pupils must remain on the school roll until this date and their attendance must be recorded.

Schools remain responsible for year 11 pupils up to the leaving date, even when they have finished exams. It is up to schools to consider how they might seek to widen the range of learning opportunities during this time to meet the needs of their pupils.

Note: Absence data for the second half of the summer term is collected for such pupils however any possible sessions and/or absence information for pupils aged 15 years old in this term will not be published in any National Statistics.

- Pupils aged four

Pupils aged four are not of compulsory school age, their absence information is collected for indicative purposes only. The Department collects this data because good patterns of regular and punctual attendance can be set from the early years and schools will want to be aware of their performance in this respect.

For pupils aged four, the number of sessions that they are expected to attend will vary from pupil to pupil and from school to school. Attendance code 'X' (non-compulsory school age absence - not counted in possible attendances) should be used for those sessions when a four year old is not expected to attend.

Within National Statistics, four year old absences are presented separately to those for pupils of compulsory school age and only overall absence rates are published.

#### **4.4.2 Sessions missed due to authorised absence**

Schools are required to report the number of authorised absence sessions accrued by each enrolment. This can either be reported by a reason for absence breakdown, or by an aggregated total. See [the number of sessions missed for each specified reason for absence](#) section for more information.

Authorised absence is absence which has been authorised by a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. See [key absence measures](#) section for more information.

#### **4.4.3 Sessions missed due to unauthorised absence**

Schools are required to report the number of unauthorised absence sessions accrued by each enrolment. This can either be reported by a reason for absence breakdown, or by an aggregated total. See [the number of sessions missed for each specified reason for absence](#) section for more information.

Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. See [key absence measures](#) section for more information.

Unauthorised absence does not apply to pupils of non-compulsory school age i.e. those aged four. Any absence for four year olds should be recorded as authorised.

#### **4.4.4 The number of sessions missed for each specified reason for absence.**

Schools are able to provide their absence data using a reason code breakdown or by using total figures for the number of sessions missed due to authorised or unauthorised absence.

Some schools do not have the required software to provide absence data broken down by reason, and therefore are only able to provide overall totals. In instances where no reason breakdown is provided absence is categorised under “unclassified”. The majority of schools are able to and do provide absence information broken down by reason for absence, but an estimated 1 per cent of schools do not.

When deriving absence levels for each enrolment, in the first instance, the sum of their absence by reason has been used, if this is missing or is less than the total provided, their overall totals have been used.

**Table 10: In the first instance, absences provided by reason are used to create absence totals**

	<b>Authorised absence total (as provided)</b>	<b>Unauthorised absence total (as provided)</b>	<b>Sum of provided reason breakdown (calculated)</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Pupil A	15 sessions	35 sessions	42 sessions	The sum of enrolment's reason for absence breakdown is lower than the sum of authorised and unauthorised totals. Therefore, the reason for absence breakdown is not used.
Pupil B	30 sessions	10 sessions	50 sessions	The sum of enrolment's reason for absence breakdown is higher than provided totals. Therefore, the reason for absence breakdown is used.
Pupil C	20 sessions	5 sessions	25 sessions	Reason breakdown total equals the sum of provided authorised and unauthorised totals. Reason breakdown figures are used.

### **Authorised absence reasons**

Only special circumstances should warrant an authorised leave of absence. Schools should consider each application individually and take into account the specific circumstances and relevant background context behind the request before authorising.

The authorised reasons schools can use to record absences via the school census are as follows:

- Illness (not medical or dental appointments)

Schools should advise parents to notify them on the first day the child is unable to attend due to illness. Schools should authorise absences due to illness unless they have genuine cause for concern about the veracity of an illness. If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, schools can request parents to provide medical evidence to support illness. Schools can record the absence as unauthorised if not satisfied of the authenticity of the illness but should advise parents of their intention. Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily. Medical evidence can take the form of prescriptions, appointment cards, etc. rather than doctors' notes.

- Medical or dental appointments

Missing registration for a medical or dental appointment is counted as an authorised absence. Schools should, however, encourage parents to make appointments out of school hours. Where this is not possible, the pupil should only be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary for the appointment.

- Holiday authorised by the school

Headteachers should not grant leave of absence unless there are exceptional circumstances. The application must be made in advance and the headteacher must be satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances based on the individual facts and circumstances of the case which warrant the leave. Where a leave of absence is granted, the headteacher will determine the number of days a pupil can be away from school. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the headteacher's discretion.

- Religious observance

Schools must treat absence as authorised when it is due to religious observance. The day must be exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong. Where necessary, schools should seek advice from the parents' religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance.

- Study leave

Schools must record study leave as authorised absence. Study leave should be used sparingly and only granted to year 11 pupils during public examinations. Provision should still be made available for those pupils who want to continue to come into school to revise.

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence

A number of different groups are covered by the generic term Traveller – Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Showmen (fairground people) and Circus people, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers.

This code should be used when Traveller families are known to be travelling for occupational purposes and have agreed this with the school but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision. It should not be used for any other types of absence by these groups.

To help ensure continuity of education for Traveller children it is expected that the child should attend school elsewhere when their family is travelling and be dual registered at that school and the main school. Children from these groups whose families do not travel are expected to register at a school and attend as normal. They are subject to the same rules as other children in terms of the requirement to attend school regularly once registered at a school.

- Excluded but no alternative provision made

If no alternative provision is made for a pupil to continue their education whilst they are excluded but still on the admission register, they should be marked absent in the attendance register using code “E”. Alternative provision must be arranged for each excluded pupil from the sixth consecutive day of any fixed period or permanent exclusion. Where alternative provision is made they should be marked using the appropriate attendance code.

- Other authorised absences

Any authorised absences not covered by the groups above, this code should only be used in exceptional circumstances.

### **Unauthorised absence reasons**

If the school is not satisfied with the reason given for absence they should record it as unauthorised.

The unauthorised reasons schools can use to record absences via the school census are as follows:

- Holiday not authorised by the school or in excess of the period determined by the headteacher.

If a school does not authorise a leave of absence for the purpose of a holiday but the parents still take the child out of school, or the child is kept away for

longer than was agreed, the absence is unauthorised. The regulations do not allow schools to give retrospective approval. If the parents did not apply for leave of absence in advance, the absence must be recorded as unauthorised.

- Arrived in school after registration closed

Schools should actively discourage late arrival, be alert to patterns of late arrival and seek an explanation from the parent.

- Reason for absence not yet provided

Schools should follow up all unexplained and unexpected absences in a timely manner. Every effort should be made to establish the reason for a pupil's absence. When the reason for the pupil's absence has been established the register should be amended. This code should not be left on a pupil's attendance record indefinitely; if no reason for absence is provided after a reasonable amount of time it should be replaced with code O (absent from school without authorisation).

- Other unauthorised absences

Any unauthorised absences not covered by the groups above.

### **Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances**

In 2012, for the 2011/12 academic year, the school census started to collect absence information for pupils who are unable to attend school due to exceptional circumstances, or attendance code "Y".

Absences due to exceptional circumstances do not count as a possible session and are not included in National Statistics.

This code can be used where a pupil is unable to attend because:

- The school site, or part of it, is closed due to an unavoidable cause
- The transport provided by the school or a local authority is not available and where the pupil's home is not within walking distance
- A local or national emergency has resulted in widespread disruption to travel which has prevented the pupil from attending school

This code can also be used where a pupil is unable to attend because:

- The pupil is in custody; detained for a period of less than four months. If the school has evidence from the place of custody that the pupil is attending

educational activities then they can record those sessions as code “B” (present at approved educational activity).

#### **4.4.5 Absence by reason for four year olds**

Schools are not obliged to use individual absence and attendance codes for pupils aged four. However they are encouraged to use these codes and, if they do so, the appropriate absences will be returned in the school census. If schools do not wish to use these codes then the total number of absences for the attendance period will be recorded as sessions missed due to authorised absence.

Absences recorded for four year olds will not be treated as ‘authorised’ or ‘unauthorised’ and will instead be reported, and published, as overall absence only.

### **4.5 No longer collected but available historically**

The authorised absence code “extended family holiday” was discontinued as of September 2014 and should not be used by schools. As of the [Pupil absence in schools in England: 2013 to 2014](#) Statistical First Release any extended family holiday absence returned will be combined with “authorised family holiday” absence. Separate absence figures for “extended family holiday” are published historically.

For 2009/10 to 2011/12, absence information for pupils attending pupil referral units (PRUs) was collected annually via the PRU Census and published as an additional table to the full year absence release in May each year. As of January 2014 PRU census information, including absence data, is now collected termly via the school census and published as an additional table to each termly SFR. For the 2012/13 academic year, due to the move from PRU Census to school census, absence data was not collected from PRUs.

### **4.6 What absence information is not collected**

The following section outlines information the Department does not collect, including areas regularly queried by users.

#### **4.6.1 Boarding school absence**

Boarding schools without day-pupils are not required to keep an attendance register. Schools with a mixture of day-pupils and boarders must keep an attendance register for the day-pupils but absence information will not be collected for boarders.

#### **4.6.2 Closed school absence**

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.

#### **4.6.3 Internal absence**

The Department is unable to identify “internal absence”. This is defined as any 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 to only record and measure the registrations required by law, not any subsequent absence.

#### **4.6.4 Those not registered at a school**

The Department only collects absence data for pupils on roll of a state-funded primary, state-funded secondary, special schools or pupil referral units (including alternative provision academies) during the absence period. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school.

#### **4.6.5 Daily absence and periods of absence**

Absence information is collected termly for primary and secondary schools and pupil referral units and is collected annually for special schools. The Department does not collect dates of absence and is therefore unable to provide absence figures for specific days, weeks or months.

In addition, the Department is also unable to identify the lengths of individual absences as only aggregated absence totals, either overall or broken down by reason, are collected for each enrolment.

#### **4.6.6 Individual reason absence, for example chronic illness or snow days**

The Department collects pupil absence information broken down by reason, however these groupings are broad and often cover a range of potential reasons grouped under one relevant category.

Breakdowns often requested by users are absences due to specific types of illness or days lost due to snow or flooding, both of which we are unable to provide individually. Specific illnesses would be covered under the “illness” reason for



absence and sessions missed due to snow or flooding would be covered under the “exceptional circumstances” reason for absence, or attendance code “Y”.

#### **4.6.7 Post 16 and nursery pupil’s absence**

Absence information is collected and published for pupils of compulsory school age, aged between five and fifteen as of the start of the academic year (31st August). Absence information for four year olds is also collected for indicative purposes only. The Department does not report on absence for pupils aged three and below or aged sixteen and above and schools should not provide this data, therefore such breakdowns are unavailable.

#### **4.6.8 Pupil attendance**

The Department collects pupil absence information only - attendance codes are not collected.

Attendance codes used by schools are as follows:

- Present at School

Pupils must not be marked present if they were not in school during registration. If a pupil were to leave the school premises after registration they would still be counted as present for statistical purposes.

- Late arrival before the register has closed

Schools should have a policy on how long registers should be kept open; this should be for a reasonable length of time but not that registers are to be kept open for the whole session. A pupil arriving after the register has closed should be marked absent with code “U”, or with another absence code if that is more appropriate.

Attendance codes for when pupils are present at an approved off-site educational activity are as follows:

- Off-site educational activity

This code should be used when pupils are present at an off-site educational activity that has been approved by the school. Ultimately schools are responsible for the safeguarding and welfare of pupils educated off-site. Therefore by using code B, schools are certifying that the education is supervised and measures have been taken to safeguard pupils. This code should not be used for any unsupervised educational activity or where a pupil

is at home doing school work. Schools should ensure that they have in place arrangements whereby the provider of the alternative activity notifies the school of any absences by individual pupils. The school should record the pupil's absence using the relevant absence code.

- Consortia Schools

Pupils attending consortia schools as part of their course only need to be placed on the registers of their 'main' school rather than on all of the schools they attend. They should be treated as guest pupils at the other consortia schools. The consortia schools however, must ensure they have suitable systems in place for monitoring and reporting the attendance and absence of the pupils involved, which must be shared with the 'main' school.

- Dual Registered - at another educational establishment

This code is not counted as a possible attendance in the school census. The law allows for dual registration of pupils at more than one school. This code is used to indicate that the pupil was not expected to attend the session in question because they were scheduled to attend the other school at which they are registered.

The main examples of dual registration are pupils who are attending a pupil referral unit, a hospital school or a special school on a temporary basis. It can also be used when the pupil is known to be registered at another school during the session in question.

Each school should only record the pupil's attendance and absence for those sessions that the pupil is scheduled to attend their school. Schools should ensure that they have in place arrangements whereby all unexplained and unexpected absence is followed up in a timely manner.

- At an interview with prospective employers, or another educational establishment

This code should be used to record time spent in interviews with prospective employers or another educational establishment. Schools should be satisfied that the interview is linked to employment prospects, further education or transfer to another educational establishment.

- Participating in a supervised sporting activity

This code should be used to record the sessions when a pupil is taking part in a sporting activity that has been approved by the school and supervised by someone authorised by the school.

- Educational visit or trip

This code should be used for attendance at an organised trip or visit, including residential trips organised by the school, or attendance at a supervised trip of a strictly educational nature arranged by an organisation approved by the school.

- Work experience

Work experience is for pupils in the final two years of compulsory education. Schools should ensure that they have in place arrangements whereby the work experience placement provider notifies the school of any absences by individual pupils. Any absence should be recorded using the relevant code.

The following codes are used as administrative codes and are not counted as a possible attendance in the school census:

- Not required to be in school

This code is used to record sessions that non-compulsory school age children are not expected to attend.

- Pupil not on admission register

This code is available to enable schools to set up registers in advance of pupils joining the school to ease administration burdens. Schools must put pupils on the admission register from the first day that the school has agreed, or been notified, that the pupil will attend the school.

- Planned whole or partial school closure

This code should be used for whole or partial school closures that are known or planned in advance such as: between terms; half terms; occasional days (for example, bank holidays); weekends (where it is required by the management information system); up to five non-educational days to be used for curriculum planning/training; and use of schools as polling stations.

- Different term dates for different pupils:

Schools and local authorities can agree to set different term dates for different year groups – e.g. for ‘staggered starts’ or ‘induction days’. A code “#” can be

used to record the year group(s) that is not due to attend. This is only acceptable where the school ensures that those pupils not attending on that day are still offered a full education over the school year.

## 5. Data processing

The sections below outline how pupil absence data goes from raw school census returns to a finalised dataset used to prepare National Statistics releases.

### 5.1 Data linking

Annual and combined termly absence data are derived by linking pupil records collected in each relevant school census to calculate overall totals for the number of possible sessions; the number of sessions missed by reason for absence and the number of sessions missed due to authorised and unauthorised absence for each enrolment. Derived absence totals are then linked to a pupil's characteristics data, also collected via the school census, at the time of the absence. Where characteristics data are missing, information collected in the following census are used, except for ethnicity as this information is only collected in the spring school census, see table 11.

For pupil enrolments joining mid academic year, characteristic information is taken from the census relating to the term of absence, if no data is available the following census is used.

Characteristics data is only linked once, on the earliest term of data, so 'in-year' changes in characteristic information will not be picked up until the following academic year.

**Table 11: Characteristics linking for absence data**

<b>Absence period</b>	<b>Source of absence data</b>	<b>First choice for characteristic (same as absence period)</b>	<b>Second choice for characteristic (following Census)</b>
Autumn term	Spring school census	Autumn school census	Spring school census
Spring term	Summer school census	Spring school census	Summer school census
Summer term	Autumn school census	Summer school census	Autumn school census

### 5.2 Data removed

To prepare the absence data for publication routine checks are applied to the linked data and where necessary data is removed as follows.

Schools with fewer than 6 pupil enrolments aged between five and fifteen are removed from the analysis. This usually amounts to a negligible number of schools; most commonly post 16 establishments with a small number of 15 year old pupils.

For all pupil enrolments, 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 is removed from the absence data and is not included in National Statistics.

Any sponsored academies which opened part way through a term, and provided predecessor school absence data via the school census will have the term of data which includes predecessor information removed before any analysis. This absence data is removed because when a sponsored academy opens it is a new school, and therefore should not be held accountable for absence levels accrued within the predecessor school.

To identify these academies we look at their average number of possible sessions (mean and mode) supplied via the school census. If a sponsored academy has a higher average possible sessions than we would expect, estimated using their open date, we assume they have supplied information for their predecessor school.

Table 12 provides examples of sponsored academies which would be reviewed when compiling autumn and spring terms absence data. We would expect schools to provide around 250 possible sessions across the autumn and spring term.

**Table 12: Removing predecessor school absence from sponsored academies**

<b>Open date</b>	<b>Average possible sessions</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
January	125 sessions (as expected)	No data removed
January	200 sessions (too high, includes predecessor information)	Autumn term absence removed
March	60 sessions (as expected)	No data removed
March	130 sessions (too high, includes predecessor information)	Academy removed completely

Year on year comparisons of local authority data may be affected by schools converting to academies.

## 5.3 Variables added

Most of the variables needed to produce national level absence statistics can be calculated directly from the fields collected via the school census. However, to prepare the absence data for publication the following variables are also added to the dataset.

### 5.3.1 Authorised, unauthorised and overall absence totals

Termly authorised and unauthorised absence totals are derived by taking whichever is highest – either the total authorised or unauthorised absence sessions provided by the school or the sum of the authorised or unauthorised absence reasons provided by the school. These fields are set to zero if the absence totals greater than the number of sessions possible or if the number of sessions possible is equal to zero.

The termly overall absence total is calculated by taking the sum of the authorised and unauthorised absence totals. Again this is set to zero if the absence total is greater than the number of sessions possible or if the number of sessions possible is equal to zero.

Full year totals are derived by summing the termly totals together.

### 5.3.2 Persistent absentee indicators

An indicator variable for the published persistent absence measure is added to each enrolment before producing any analysis. This is derived by comparing each enrolment's overall absence total to their own possible sessions to establish if they have missed 10 per cent or more of the sessions available to them (see [persistent absence methodology](#)).

### 5.3.3 School type, academy type

School type information, including school type, academy type and academy open date, are added to our underlying data prior to producing any analysis to allow us to produce the school/academy type breakdowns in our statistical releases.

These variables are derived using a combination of Edubase and the [Open academies and academy projects in development](#) data. Within absence National Statistics, academies are only indicated as academies if they were open as of the 12<sup>th</sup> September.

## 5.4 Consistency checks

After the data is processed as set out above, consistency checks are performed against the [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#) National Statistics release to check that the numbers of schools and enrolments are as expected.

Further checks are carried out on the consistency of figures compared with previous years, both nationally and at local authority level.

## 5.5 Data quality

The following should be taken into account when reviewing published pupil absence statistics.

The absence information reported in published releases is based on data returned by schools as part of the school census. This might include duplicates if schools have recorded duplicated pupils.

It does not include data which has been submitted by local authorities or schools outside of the school census.

It is a school's responsibility to record absence data correctly in their school census return and the parent's responsibility to truthfully report the reason for a child's absence from school.

Only full year absence statistics give a definitive view of pupil absence, so figures presented in the interim termly publications should be treated with caution.

Caution is recommended when interpreting the data for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma children due to potential under-reporting for these ethnic classifications.



## **6. Research relating to pupil absence**

Research relating to pupil absence falls into three broad categories: the impact of absenteeism on pupils, factors associated with absenteeism, and approaches to reduce absenteeism. The following is from a non-systematic search of the EBSCO research database, which allows for search and retrieval of published research from a range of different research journals. However, this will not represent all of the available research evidence relating to pupil absence.

### **6.1 The impact of absenteeism on pupils**

Research has found a strong statistical link between absenteeism and underachievement (e.g. Gottfried 2011, 2013a; Hancock et al., 2013). For example, a robust study of over 20,000 pupils in Philadelphia found a potentially causal, detrimental negative effect of absences on both reading and maths achievement (Gottfried, 2013a). The effects remained significant even after accounting for other factors such as neighbourhood, teacher, classroom, and school factors. In line with these results, a large scale study of Australian school children (n=415,000) found that average academic achievement was negatively affected by any absence, and it continued to decline as absences increased (Hancock et al., 2013). Furthermore, unauthorised absences had a significantly stronger association with achievement than authorised absences, and even small amounts of unauthorised absence from school were associated with a fall in test scores (Hancock et al., 2013). Conversely, a study by Schmitt and colleagues (2013) found no statistically significant relationship between number of absence days and reading scores on a standardised test. However, the sample size in this study was very small (n=106).

### **6.2 Factors associated with absenteeism**

Studies have found that many contextual factors are associated with absenteeism. Factors discussed below include neighbourhood attributes, school building conditions, pupil health conditions, and grade retaining policies.

A large scale US study by Gottfried (2014) indicates that the neighbourhood context can influence school absenteeism in urban youth. The results from the study show significant relationships between school absences and neighbourhood attributes such as poverty, family structure, homeownership status, and race.

Simons et al. (2010) found that building conditions in Upstate New York schools was also a contributing factor. An association was found between student absenteeism and adverse school building conditions such as visible mould, humidity, poor ventilation, vermin, building system or structural problems related to these

conditions. These effects were stronger in schools in lower socioeconomic areas and in schools attended by younger students.

Researchers have also investigated the impact of certain health factors, along with socioeconomic status. In a US-based study of 920 fourth grade pupils, Baxter (2011) found no statistically significant relationship between absenteeism and Body Mass Index or Socio-economic Status (operationalised as eligibility for free/reduced price school meals). This result does contradict other research (see for example Gottfried, 2014, cited above), and more robust investigation may be needed to understand the interplay of socio-economic status and absenteeism.

Finally, a quasi-experimental study by Gottfried (2013b) examined the effect of retained pupils (pupils who repeat a year) on the outcomes of other students in the same classroom. Results showed that a greater percentage of retained classmates increased other students' absence rates. Because the effect was only present on unexcused absences, and not excused absences, this suggests that grade retention increases disengagement levels in other students in the classroom.

### **6.3 Approaches to reduce absenteeism**

Given the impacts outlined in section 6.1 of absenteeism on achievement in school, there is some research into approaches to reduce absenteeism. A literature review by Kearney and Graczyk (2014) identifies the need for identifying and intervening early, monitoring progress overtime, assessing functional behaviour, and the implementation of evidence-based procedures and protocols, and of team-based approaches.

Researchers have also focussed on absence due to ill health (Wilkie 2011; 2012), and approaches to keeping those pupils in education. Wilkie (2012) conducted a qualitative case study of 22 senior secondary students and their mathematics teachers. The study found widespread ambiguities about educational responsibility for students during absence due to ill health. Teachers also demonstrated surprise in finding out that their students wished to continue their studies, and also a degree of hesitance to initiate contact with students. Students nevertheless expressed their desire for teachers to remain involved with them.

Wilkie (2011) discusses the potential of using online collaboration to allow for academic continuity for pupils with absence due to chronic ill health. The study finds that early data from the 'Information and Communications Technology addressing educational disadvantage due to remoteness or prolonged absence from school' project (Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute, 2007), have demonstrated the potential of videoconferencing, online 'whiteboarding', and interactive whiteboard

application sharing for pupils in this situation. The authors also acknowledge that this approach requires particular resources and infrastructures, and support for teachers.

## 6.4 References

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## 7. Contacts

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## Annex A - Glossary

The following are key terms used in published absence statistics and their definitions:

Academic year	31 <sup>st</sup> August to the 31 <sup>st</sup> July. The academic year is generally broken into three terms, autumn spring and summer.
Authorised absence	Absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the schools. Counted in sessions, where each session is equivalent to half a day.
Overall absence	The aggregated total of all authorised and unauthorised absences, counted in sessions where each session is equivalent to half a day.
Persistent absence	A pupil enrolment is identified as a persistent absentee if they miss 10 per cent or more of their own possible sessions.
Possible session	Schools are required to provide two possible sessions per day, where one session is the equivalent to half a day i.e. one session in the morning and one in the afternoon.
Pupil enrolment	The number of pupil enrolments presented includes pupils on the school roll for at least one session who are aged between 5 and 15, excluding boarders. Some pupils may be counted more than once (if they moved schools during the academic year or are registered in more than one school).
School census	Statutory termly data collection for all maintained nursery, primary, secondary, middle-deemed primary, middle-deemed secondary, local authority maintained special and non-maintained special schools, academies including free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges and city technology colleges in England.
Unauthorised absence	Absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences and late arrivals. Counted in sessions, where each session is equivalent to half a day.

## Annex B - Calculations

The following calculations are used to produce absence National Statistics:

Percentage of sessions missed due to overall absence	$\frac{\text{Total overall absence sessions}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$
Percentage of sessions missed due to authorised absence	$\frac{\text{Total authorised absence sessions}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$
Percentage of sessions missed due to unauthorised absence	$\frac{\text{Total unauthorised absence sessions}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$
Percentage of pupils with one or more session of absence by reason	$\frac{\text{Number of enrolments with one or more session of absence for a reason}}{\text{Number of enrolments}} \times 100$
Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees	$\frac{\text{Number of enrolments classed as persistent absentees}}{\text{Number of enrolments}} \times 100$
Percentage of overall absence for which persistent absentees are responsible	$\frac{\text{Overall absence sessions for persistent absentees}}{\text{Total overall absence sessions}} \times 100$
Percentage of authorised absence for which persistent absentees are responsible	$\frac{\text{Authorised absence sessions for persistent absentees}}{\text{Total overall absence sessions}} \times 100$
Percentage of unauthorised absence for which persistent absentees are responsible	$\frac{\text{Unauthorised absence sessions for persistent absentees}}{\text{Total overall absence sessions}} \times 100$
Distribution of reasons for absence	$\frac{\text{Absence for this reason}}{\text{Total overall absence with reasons}} \times 100$
Absence rates by reason	$\frac{\text{Absence for this reason}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$

## Annex C – School attendance codes

The following codes are used by schools when taking registers, further details are available in the Department’s School Attendance advice:

Code	Reason	Collected in school census?
/	Present (AM)	No
\	Present (PM)	No
L	Late (before registers closed) marked as present	No
I	Authorised absence due to illness (NOT medical or dental etc. appointments)	Yes
M	Authorised absence due to medical / dental appointments	Yes
R	Authorised absence due to religious observance	Yes
S	Authorised absence due to study leave	Yes
T	Authorised absence due to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence	Yes
H	Authorised absence due to authorised family holiday	Yes
E	Authorised absence as pupil is excluded, but still on the admission register, with no alternative provision made	Yes
C	Authorised absence for reasons not covered by any other authorised absence code, this code should only be used in exceptional circumstances	Yes
B	Approved educational activity as pupil being educated off site (not dual registration)	No
D	Dual registered (at another establishment) - not counted in possible attendance	No
J	Approved educational activity as pupil is attending interview with prospective employer or another educational establishment	No
P	Approved education activity as pupil is participating in an approved supervised sporting activity	No
V	Approved educational activity as pupil is at an organised educational visit or trip	No
W	Approved educational activity as pupil is attending work experience	No
G	Unauthorised absence as pupil is on a family holiday, not agreed, or is taking days in excess of an agreed family holiday	Yes
U	Unauthorised absence as pupil arrived after registration closed	Yes
O	Unauthorised absence as the school is not satisfied with the reason given for the absence, has not authorised the absence and it is not covered by any other code / description	Yes
N	Unauthorised absence as pupil missed session/s for a reason that has not yet been provided	Yes
X	Non-compulsory school age absence - not counted in possible attendances	No
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances - not counted in possible attendances	Yes
Z	Pupil not yet on roll - not counted in possible attendances	No
#	Planned whole or partial school closure - not counted in possible attendances	No

## Annex D – Links to Pupil Absence National Statistics publications

Published pupil absence National Statistics are available at the following links.

\* Identifies those published as National Statistics.

~ For the 2006/07 academic year the separate autumn and spring term reports were published as parts of one release.

^ Provisional publication

### Full academic year:

[Pupil Absence and Truancy from Schools in England: 1993/94-1997/98](#)

[Pupil Absence and Truancy from Schools in England: 1998/99](#)

[Pupil Absence and Truancy from Schools in England: 1999/2000](#) \*

[Pupil Absences from Schools in England, 2001/2002 \(Provisional figures\)](#) \*^

[Pupil Absence in Schools in England: 2002/2003 \(Revised\)](#) \*

[Pupil Absence in Schools in England: 2003/2004 \(Provisional\)](#) \*^

[Pupil Absence in Schools in England: 2004/2005 \(Revised\)](#) \*

[Pupil Absence in Secondary Schools in England, 2005/06](#) \*

[Pupil Absence in Schools in England, including Pupil Characteristics: 2006/07](#) \*

[Pupil Absence in Schools in England, including Pupil Characteristics: 2007/08](#) \*

[Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics: 2008/09](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England, including pupil characteristics: academic year 2009 to 2010](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England, including pupil characteristics: academic year 2010 to 2011](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England, including pupil characteristics: 2011 to 2012](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: 2012 to 2013](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: 2013 to 2014](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: 2014 to 2015](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: 2015 to 2016](#) \*



## Autumn term

[Pupil absence - Autumn 2006 term report and spring 2007 term report](#) ~

[Statistical Release - Autumn 2007 Term Report](#)

[Pupil Absence in Autumn Term 2008](#)

[Pupil absence: autumn term 2009](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2010](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2011](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2012](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2013](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2014](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2015](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2016](#) \*

## Spring term

[Pupil absence - Autumn 2006 term report and spring 2007 term report](#) ~

[Pupil Absence - Spring 2008 Term Report \(Provisional\)](#) ^

[Pupil Absence in spring 2009 Term](#)

[Pupil absence in schools in England: spring term 2010](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: spring term, 2011](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: spring term 2012](#) \*

## Autumn and spring terms

[Pupil Absence in Schools in England: Autumn Term 2006 and spring Term 2007](#) \*

[Pupil Absence in Schools in England: Autumn Term 2007 and spring Term 2008](#) \*

[Pupil Absence in Schools in England: Autumn Term 2008 and spring Term 2009](#) \*

[Pupil absence: schools in England - autumn term 2009 and spring term 2010](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2010 and spring term 2011](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2011 and spring term 2012](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2012 and spring 2013](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2013 and spring 2014](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2014 and spring 2015](#) \*

[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2015 and spring 2016](#) \*

## Annex E – Standard breakdowns that are currently published

The following breakdowns are currently available in published absence statistics.

\* Available in full year release only

~ Available in combined autumn and spring and full year releases only

National level:		
Absence rates		Overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rate breakdowns. Time series.
Those who are persistent absentees		Those missing 10 per cent or more of their own possible sessions in the period. Time series.
Absence by reason		Breakdown of absence by reason. [Available by gender in combined autumn and spring and full year releases.]
Pupils who miss one or more session due to absence by reason		The number and percentage of pupils missing one or more session for overall, authorised and unauthorised absence and for individual reasons for absence
Absence by reason for persistent absentees	*	Breakdown of absence by reason for pupils who are classified as persistent absentees.
Absence by pupil characteristic	* ~	Overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates by gender, free school meal eligibility, free school meal eligibility in the last 6 years, national curriculum year group, first language, SEN provision and ethnic group.
Characteristics of persistent absentees	* ~	Persistent absence rates as well as the overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates for persistent absentees by gender, free school meal eligibility, free school meal eligibility in the last 6 years, national curriculum year group, first language, Special Educational Need (SEN) provision and ethnic group.
Absence levels by SEN primary need	*	Including overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates and persistent absence rates by SEN pupil's primary need.

Distribution of enrolments by overall absence (days)	*	Distribution of pupil enrolments by length of overall absence in days and by overall absence rates.
Distribution of schools by the percentage of persistent absentees	*	Including the number of schools by persistent absence rate brackets.
Pupil absence in schools by IDACI decile	*	Including overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates and persistent absence rates by income deprivation affecting children indices (IDACI) decile of pupil residence.
Local authority level, available local authority tables (full year release only) or accompanying csv files (all releases)		
Absence rates		Overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rate breakdowns
Those who are persistent absentees		Those missing 10 per cent or more of their own possible sessions in the period
Absence by reason		A breakdown of absence sessions by reason
PRU absence		Overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates, persistent absentee rates and absence by reason in pupil referral units (PRUs)
Pupils who miss one or more session due to absence by reason		The number of pupils missing one or more session for overall, authorised and unauthorised absence and for individual reasons for absence
Absence and persistent absence by pupil characteristic	* ~	Overall, authorised, unauthorised and persistent absence rates and absence by reason by gender, free school meal eligibility, free school meal eligibility in the last 6 years, national curriculum year group, first language, SEN provision and ethnic group.
Pupil absence in schools by IDACI decile	*	Including overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates and persistent absence rates by income deprivation affecting children indices (IDACI) decile of pupil residence and school location. [Available at LA District level]
Four year old absence		Overall absence rates for four year olds

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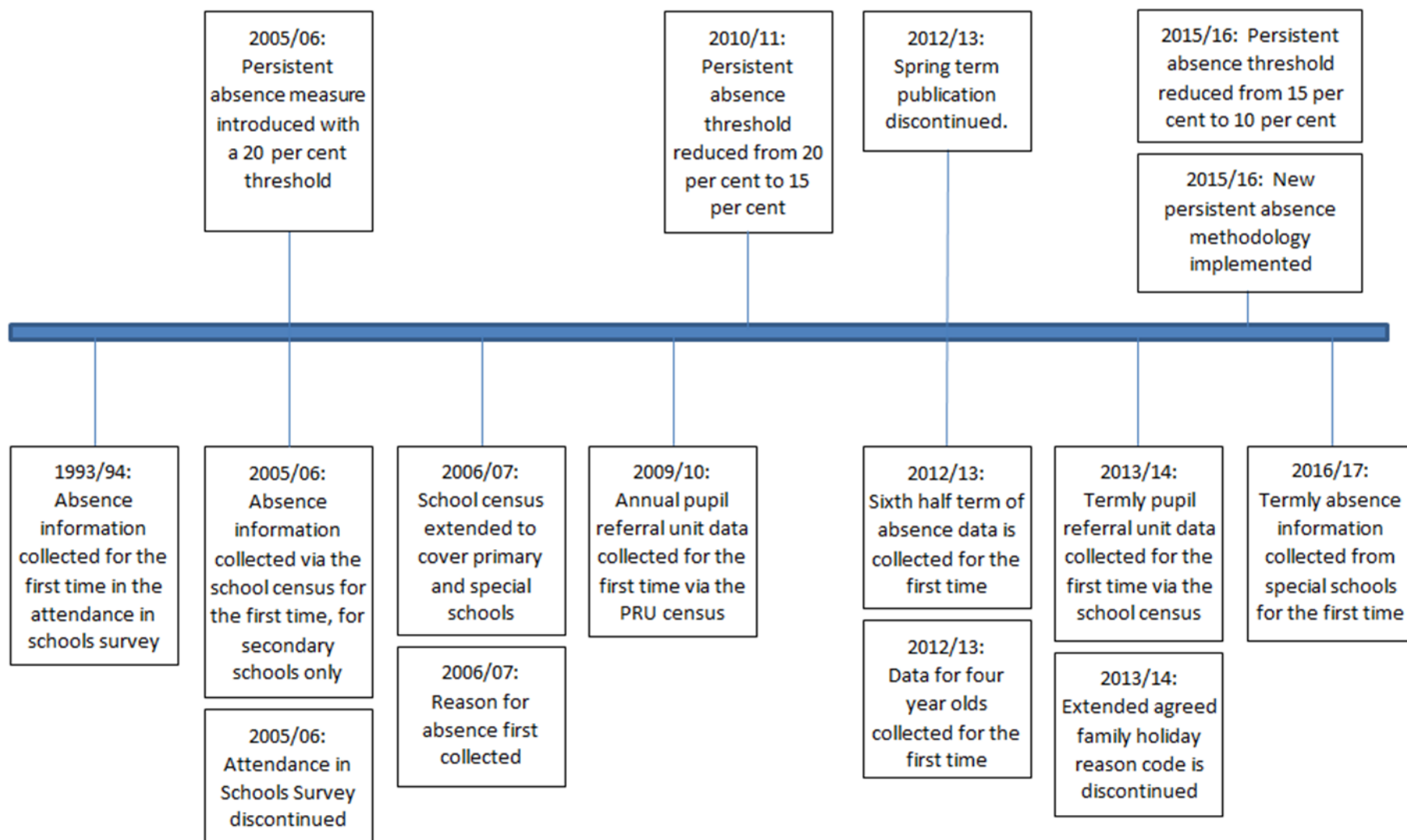
School level, available via underlying data only:

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Absence rates		Overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rate breakdowns
Those who are persistent absentees		Those missing 10 per cent or more of their own possible sessions in the period
Absence by reason		A breakdown of absence sessions by reason.
Four year old absence		Overall absence rates for four year olds.

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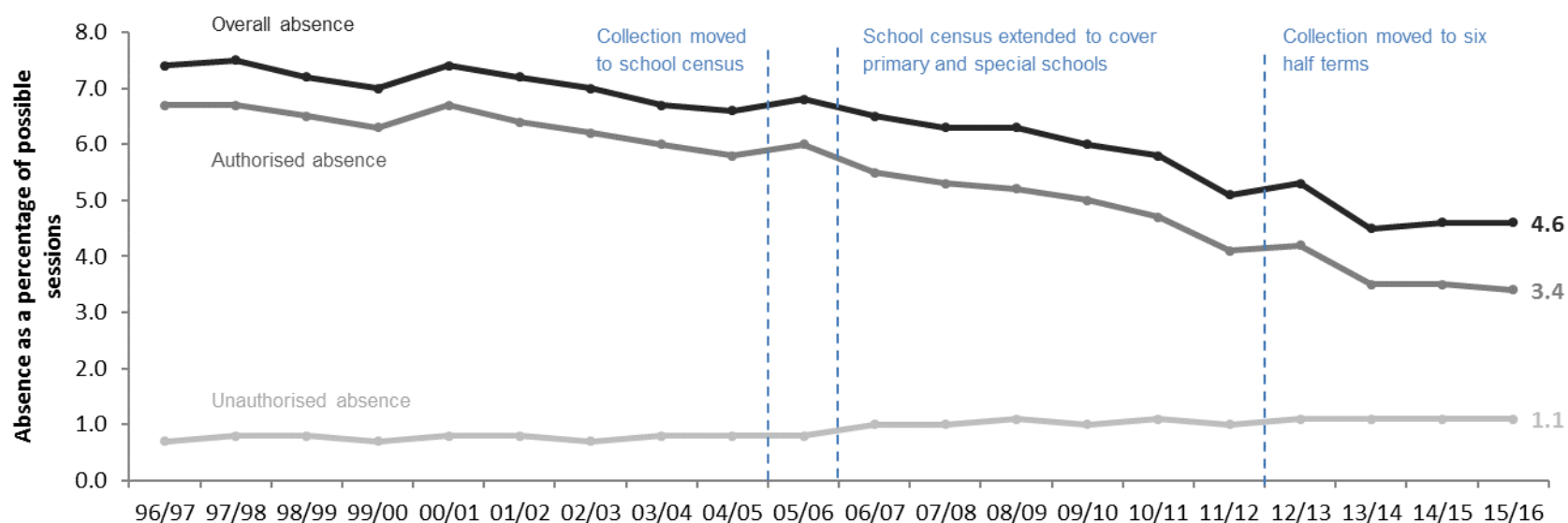
## Annex F – Timeline



## Annex G – Absence rates over time

The chart and table below shows overall, authorised and unauthorised absence rates, comparing absence levels from when collected via the attendance in schools survey to those collected via the school census. Comparisons here are for contextual information only and should be treated with caution as the survey and census did not collect information on the same basis – see [background of absence data collection](#) for further information. Current national statistics compare absence rates to the earliest comparable academic year, 2006/07.

**Table 13: State-funded primary, secondary and special schools – Absence rates 1996/97 to 2015/16**



	Attendance in schools survey										School census									
	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Overall absence	7.4	7.5	6.5	7.0	7.4	7.2	7.0	6.7	6.6	6.8	6.5	6.3	6.3	6.0	5.8	5.1	5.3	4.5	4.6	4.6
Authorised absence	6.7	6.7	7.2	6.3	6.7	6.4	6.2	6.0	5.8	6.0	5.5	5.3	5.2	5.0	4.7	4.1	4.2	3.5	3.5	3.4
Unauthorised absence	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1



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