

Statistical Bulletin 1/2017

Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland – 2015/16: Summary statistics- Revised August

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This statistical bulletin presents basic, final attendance figures for schools for the 2015/16 academic year. It includes information on the levels of absence, types of absence and reasons for absence.

Attendance data for the 2015/16 academic year was collected from all grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland via the school census which was conducted in October 2016.

In December 2016, the Department launched a new attendance strategy *Miss School = Miss Out*, which aims to reduce school absence levels by 2021.

KEY FINDINGS - ALL SCHOOLS

Absence is reported by schools in half day units and recorded as authorised or unauthorised.

- The overall attendance rate for primary, post-primary and special schools in 2015/16 was 94.6% of the total half days.
- 5.4% of total half days in primary, post-primary and special schools were missed due to absence. These comprised:
 - 3.8% authorised absence
 - 1.6% unauthorised absence
- The overall absence rate remained unchanged from 2014/15.



Northern Ireland
Statistics and Research Agency

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Introduction

Attendance data are collected annually via the school census and are required by a range of organisations and individuals for a variety of purposes. The data are used by members of the NI Assembly, the Department of Education (DE), the Education Authority and the Education and Training Inspectorate for benchmarking, policy making and performance monitoring.

Responsibility for attendance policy lies with the Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team in DE which monitors non-attendance and provides guidance to schools in relation to attendance. In December 2016, the Department launched a new attendance strategy *Miss School = Miss Out*, which aims to reduce school absence levels by 2021.

The statistics are also used by other departments when developing and monitoring cross-departmental policies. For example, attendance is an indicator in the Education Domain of the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure. The data are also used by researchers, academics and students for research purposes and by the general public for informing choices about service providers.

A technical error with the source data from schools resulted in a small number of primary schools (three in total) whose School Census returns did not include attendance data. The total number of pupils within these three schools, 696 represents less than one half of one per cent of the student population in 2015/16. The attendance data for these schools is included in this revised publication. Where a figure within the report has been revised this will be indicated by (r). However it should be noted that due to the small number of schools / pupils the overall absence levels; including both authorised and unauthorised, are unchanged at the reporting level of percentages, rounded to one decimal place.

Section 1: Key Findings

Absence rates

There does not tend to be large variation in annual absence levels over time and overall absence levels in 2015/16 were mainly unchanged compared with the previous year.

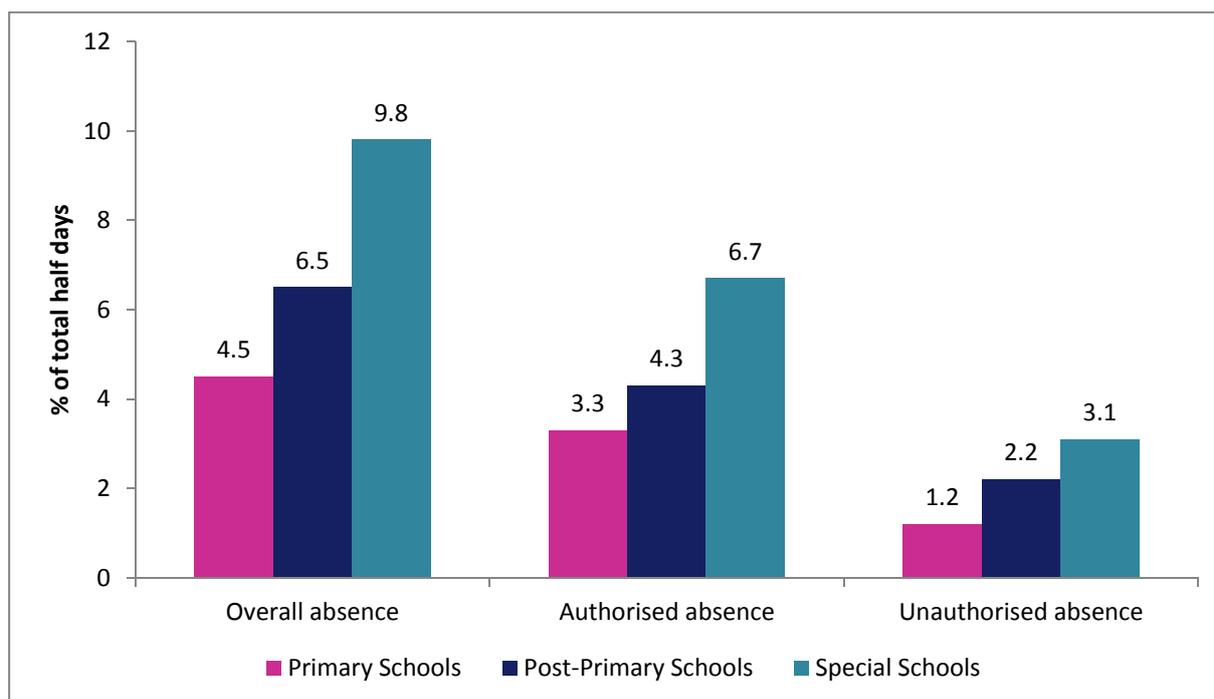
- In primary schools, 4.5% of all half days were missed, comprising 3.3% authorised and 1.2% unauthorised absence (see Table 1 overleaf). In 2014/15, overall absence was 4.6% of all half days (3.5% authorised and 1.1% unauthorised)¹.
- In post-primary schools, 6.5% of all half days were missed, comprising 4.3% authorised absence and 2.2% unauthorised absence (see Table 1 overleaf). In 2014/15, overall absence was 6.6% of the total half days (4.5% authorised and 2.1% unauthorised).
- In special schools, 9.8% of all half days were missed, comprising 6.7% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised absence (see Table 1 below). These figures were unchanged from 2014/5.

Table 1: Attendance and absence at school by school type, 2015/16

	% of total half days		
	Primary Schools	Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
Attended	95.5	93.5	90.2
Overall absence	4.5	6.5	9.8
Authorised absence	3.3	4.3	6.7
Unauthorised absence	1.2	2.2	3.1

¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/attendance-at-grant-aided-primary-post-primary-and-special-schools-in-northern-ireland-2014-15-summary-statistics.pdf>

Chart 1: Absence from primary, post-primary and special schools, 2015/16



Section 2: Reasons for absence

The level of absence attributable to any particular reason tends to remain fairly consistent on an annual basis and this pattern continued in 2015/6. A full set of figures is provided overleaf in Table 2.

- Illness remains the common reason for absence in all schools. It is an authorised absence and accounted for 63.1% of absent half days in primary schools, 53.0% in post-primary schools and 48.4% in special schools in 2015/16. This equated to 2.9%⁽¹⁾, 3.5% and 4.7% of total half days respectively. The percentage of total half days lost through illness in 2014/15 was 2.9% in primary schools, 3.5% in post-primary schools and 4.5% in special schools.
- The proportion of absences stemming from other exception circumstances decreased in 2015/16. Such absences, which are authorised, accounted for 3.0% of missed half days in primary schools, 3.6% in post-primary schools and 7.8% in special schools. The equivalent figures for 2014/15 were 4.9%, 5.8% and 10.5%.
- With regards to unauthorised absence, the proportion of absent half days for which no reason was provided increased across primary and post-primary schools during 2015/16. Such absences represented 12.1% of absent half days in primary schools and 22.3% in

post-primary schools. The equivalent figures from 2014/5 were 10.2% and 19.7%. The proportion fell in special schools from 24.6% to 23.4%.

- In primary schools, non-agreed family holidays represented 9.2% of absent half days in 2015/16, 2.9% in post-primary schools and 5.0% in special schools. The equivalent figures in 2014/15 were 8.1%, 2.6% and 2.5% respectively.

Table 2: Absence from schools by reason, 2015/16

	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools		Special Schools	
	% absent half days	% total half days	% absent half days	% total half days	% absent half days	% total half days
Authorised absence						
Total	73.2^(r)	3.3	66.7	4.3	68.3	6.6
Illness	63.1	2.9 ^(r)	53.0	3.5	48.4	4.7
Medical / dental appointments	3.4	0.2	5.8	0.4	8.4	0.8
Other exceptional circumstances	3.0	0.1	3.6	0.2	7.8	0.8
Family holiday agreed	2.0	0.1	0.6	*	2.1	0.2
Bereavement	1.2	0.1	1.8	0.1	0.5	*
Artistic endeavour	0.3	*	0.3	*	*	*
Suspended	0.1	*	1.5	0.1	0.7	*
Religious observance	0.1	*	0.1	*	0.3	*
Unauthorised absence						
Total	26.8^(r)	1.2	33.3	2.2	31.7	3.1
No reason provided	12.1	0.5	22.3	1.5	23.4	2.3
Family holiday not agreed	9.2	0.4	2.9	0.5	5.0	0.5
Other	4.9 ^(r)	0.2	7.7	0.2	3.2	0.3
Late after registration closed	0.8	*	0.3	*	0.2	*
Total overall absence	100	4.5	100	6.5	100	9.7

Note: * denotes a figure greater than zero but less than 0.1. In some cases, percentages may not sum due to rounding.

(r) denotes a revised figure

Section 3: Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales

There are differences in how attendance is recorded across the UK, which means that comparisons in attendance between Northern Ireland and England, Scotland and Wales must be accompanied by some caveats. The most notable are:

- Figures for Scotland are prepared on a biennial (every two years) basis. This means that no figures are available for 2015/16.
- Figures for Wales are not directly comparable as the region includes special schools within its figures for primary and post-primary schools.
- There are differences in the definitions of absence reasons between the regions.

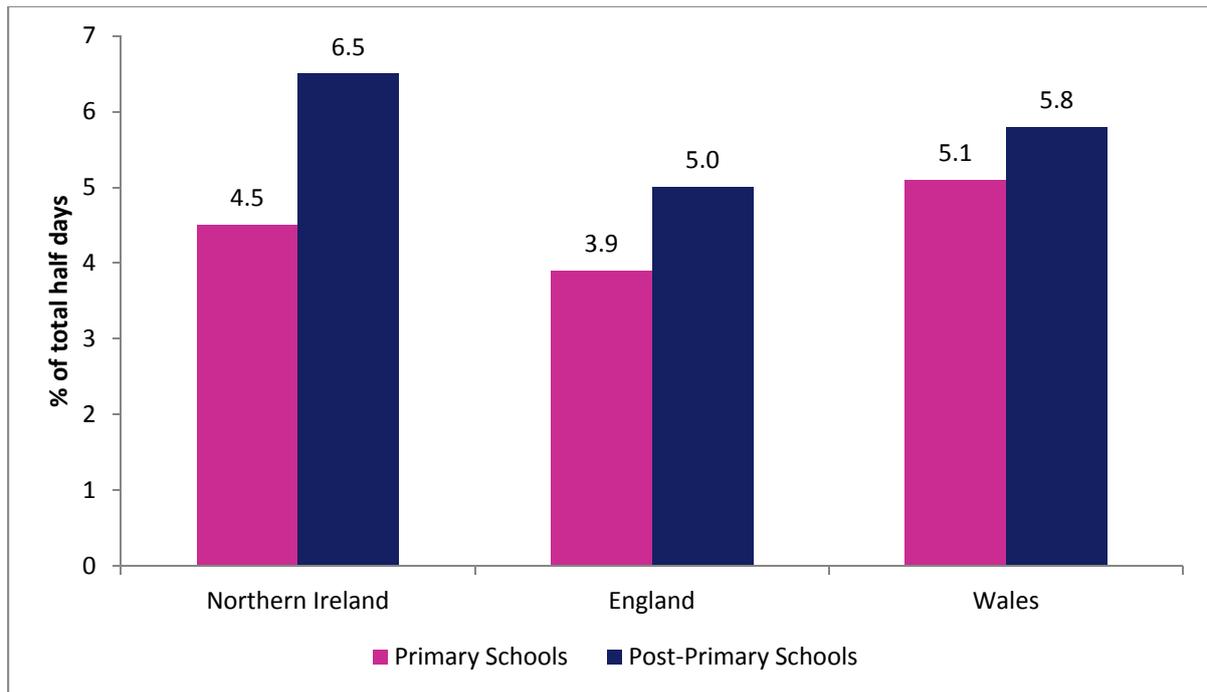
The highest overall absence rates in primary schools in 2015/6 were recorded in Wales with 5.1% of total half days missed through absence. This compares with 4.5% in Northern Ireland and 3.9% in England. Northern Ireland had the highest level of unauthorised absences at 1.2% of all half days. The equivalent figures for England and Wales were 0.8% and 1.1% respectively (See Table 3 overleaf).

In post-primary schools, the highest overall absence rate in 2015/16 was recorded in Northern Ireland (6.5%). The overall absence rates recorded in Wales and England were lower at 5.8% and 5.0% of total half days respectively. The highest level of unauthorised absence was also recorded in Northern Ireland, representing 2.2% of all half days. The equivalent figures for both Wales and England are lower at 1.3% and 1.2% respectively (See Table 3 below and Chart 2 overleaf).

Table 3: Absence rates for Northern Ireland, England and Wales, 2015/16

	% of total half days			
	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools	
	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence
Northern Ireland	4.5	1.2	6.5	2.2
England	3.9	0.8	5.0	1.2
Scotland	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wales	5.1	1.1	5.8	1.3

Chart 2: Comparisons with England and Wales – overall absence, 2015/16



Data sources: England - *Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Autumn Term 2015 and Spring Term 2016*; Wales - *Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2015/16 and Absenteeism from Secondary Schools, 2015/16*.

Notes for readers

Background information

National Statistics

1. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is the Department of Education's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored

2. For general enquiries about National Statistics, contact the National Statistics Public Enquiry Service:

Customer Contact Centre,
Office for National Statistics,
Rm 1.101,
Government Buildings,
Cardiff Road,
Newport, NP10 8XG

E-mail: info@statistics.gov.uk

Tel: 0845 601 3034

Minicom: 01633 812399 *Fax:* 01633 652747

3. You can also find National Statistics on the Internet: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>
4. The statistics in this release have been derived from the annual School Census. More information about the collection of school attendance data can be found at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/updated-data-collection-procedures-1415.pdf>
5. The 2015/16 figures in this statistical release are based on school census information as at 7 October 2016. They may be subject to minor revision and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy. This can be accessed at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Revisions%20policy.pdf>
6. The data is produced at aggregate level only; therefore individual pupils cannot be identified. More information on confidentiality can be found in the DE Confidentiality and Access Statement at the following link: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Confidentiality%20and%20Access.pdf>

Definitions

7. Attendance and absence is measured for every pupil in half day sessions (am and pm). Absence can be either authorised or unauthorised.

Attendance

In addition to actual attendance within the school premises, the following are also considered as attendance at school:

- Late (before registration closed)
- Approved sporting activities
- Study leave
- Educational visits
- Work experience
- Alternative education provision (organised by the ELB)*
- Home/hospital tuition (organised by the ELB)*
- Pupil referral unit*
- Another mainstream school (under Entitlement Framework)*
- Training Organisation (under Entitlement Framework)*
- FE College (under Entitlement Framework)*
- Intensive Support Learning Unit*
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)*

Authorised absence

An authorised absence is absence with permission from an authorised school representative on provision of a satisfactory explanation. This includes:

- Artistic endeavour**
- Bereavement
- Suspension
- Agreed family holiday (in very exceptional circumstances)
- Illness
- Medical / dental appointments
- Other exceptional circumstances (includes an exceptional event outside control of the school, for example, travelling children, court appearance)
- Religious observance

Unauthorised absence

An unauthorised absence is absence without permission from an authorised school representative due to unexplained or unjustified absence. This includes:

- Family holiday not agreed
- Other absence (includes absence not covered by any other code or a reason which is not acceptable to the school, for example, pupil's / parent's or sibling's birthday).
- No reason provided for absence
- Late (after registration closed)

Notes

* - In 2010/11, the former 'Educated offsite' code was broken into these eight codes to provide more detail on the type of alternative educational provision.

** New code added in 2010/11.

The code 'Traveller absence' was removed prior to the 2010/11 academic year.

See <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Attendance%20Guidance%20and%20Absence%20Recording%20by%20Schools.pdf> for further information.

Data quality and coverage

8. Overall absence is considered to be a more reliable measure of absence than authorised and unauthorised absence. Both figures have been provided, however limitations in comparing rates of unauthorised and authorised absence should be noted - for those absences which are not covered by a specific code, the decision to allocate the absence as authorised or unauthorised is taken by the school.
9. Prior to September 2009, schools were advised to record unexplained absence initially as 'no reason yet provided', however, if a reason was not provided within a specified period of time, these should be changed to 'other'. From September 2009 onwards, schools were instructed that, if a reason was never provided, the code should remain as 'no reason yet provided'. This has resulted in higher levels of unauthorised absence being recorded as 'no reason yet provided' and lower figures for 'other' than in previous years.
10. Primary and post-primary data refer to pupils in Years 1 to 12 only, which aligns with the compulsory school age in Northern Ireland. Figures for special schools include all pupils attending special schools in 2015/16.
11. Attendance information was not available for ten primary schools and two post-primary schools which closed or amalgamated prior to the data being collected. This accounts for 1.2% and 1.0% of the total primary schools and post-primary schools.
12. Comparative data was obtained from the following sources:
Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Autumn Term 2015 and Spring Term 2016:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-2015-and-spring-2016>
Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2015/16 (Wales):
<http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-primary-schools/?lang=en>
Absenteeism from Secondary Schools, 2015/16 (Wales):
<http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-secondary-schools/?lang=en>

There are slight differences in definitions between the regions, for example, statistics for England include study leave in authorised absence while the DE statistics categorise it as present. Figures for England do not include Summer Term 2016 (when the majority of study leave is recorded), meaning their data can only be compared with DE's data with appropriate caveats. There are also methodological differences in collecting the information. For example, the statistics for England are reported on a term by term basis. Overall absence is considered to be a better measure of comparison, rather than authorised or unauthorised absence.

13. In some cases, percentages may not sum due to rounding.

Users and uses of the data

14. The statistics are widely used by a range of groups including members of the NI Assembly, the Department of Education, other government departments, Education and Library Boards, schools, the Education and Training Inspectorate, researchers, students and the public. The data are used for benchmarking, performance indicators, policy development and monitoring, cross-departmental indicators e.g. NI Multiple Deprivation Measure, and research studies.

15. Requests for further information should be addressed to:

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Special analyses of the attendance information can be undertaken on request.

DE Statistical Releases can be accessed on the DE website: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research-1>

Feedback on this publication can be provided directly to Michael Woods (contact details above) or via the feedback section on our website: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/forms/feedback>.