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PUPIL ABSENCE – SPRING 2008 TERM REPORT (PROVISIONAL)

INTRODUCTION

This document reports on absence during the spring 2008 term in maintained primary, secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies in England. It is based on pupil level absence data collected via the summer 2008 School Census. This release provides local level information on the rates of absence (authorised, unauthorised and overall) by type of school and the proportion of absence by reason. Information on persistent absentees is not included in this report (see Notes to Editors 7 and 8).

This is **not** a National Statistics publication. The statistics are presented as emerging findings (based on provisional data) and have been released to help planning, to study trends and to monitor outcomes of initiatives and interventions on pupil attendance. This is the fourth in a series of termly reports on pupil absence.

ABSENCE RATES FOR SPRING 2008 TERM

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

- Maintained primary schools: 5.33 per cent (a decrease from 5.89 per cent in spring 2007 term) (Table 1)
- State funded secondary schools¹: 7.32 per cent (a decrease from 8.40 per cent in spring 2007 term) (Table 1)
- Primary and secondary schools¹: 6.26 per cent (a decrease from 7.07 per cent in spring 2007 term) (Table 1)

¹ Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies.

REASON FOR ABSENCE

- The most commonly reported reason for absence was “**illness (not medical or dental appointments)**” which accounted for some 3.85 per cent of days (where reason for absence was provided). (Table 2)
- Absence for **family holidays**² accounted for 0.50 per cent of days – this equates to around 1.5 million school days in the spring term. Some 85 per cent of these days were authorised by the school. (Table 2)

² Includes agreed family holidays; agreed extended family holidays and unauthorised absence for family holidays that were not agreed.

LOCAL AUTHORITY ANALYSIS

Local authority level data are provided in tables 3 to 5 and cover the maintained sector only as they are designed to help authorities monitor, compare and improve absence levels. Table 6 provides overall figures that include absence data for city technology colleges and academies.

TABLES

Table 1	Primary and Secondary Schools: Rates of absence, England, Spring Term: 2007 and 2008
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Table 3	LA Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence, By Local Authority area, Spring Term 2008
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Table 5	LA Maintained Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence, By Local Authority area, Spring Term 2008
Table 6	Primary and Secondary Schools: Pupil Absence, By Local Authority area, Spring Term 2008

NOTES TO EDITORS

Definitions

1. In law, parents of children of compulsory school age (aged 5 to 15 at the start of the school year) are required to ensure that they receive a suitable education by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Failure to comply with this statutory duty can lead to prosecution. LAs are responsible in law for making sure that pupils attend school.
2. Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day: once at the beginning of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. In their register, schools are required to distinguish whether pupils are present, engaged in an approved educational activity or are absent. Where a day pupil of compulsory school age is absent, schools have to indicate in their register whether the absence is authorised by the school or unauthorised.
3. Authorised absence is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes instances of absences for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided (for example, illness).
4. Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences. Arriving late for school, after the register has closed, is recorded as unauthorised absence.
5. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published specific guidance on the categorisation of attendance and absence in February 2005 when it launched the new codes as part of the collection of absence data via the School Census. This guidance was revised when the 2006 Pupil Registration regulations came into force on 1 September 2006 and was published alongside "Keeping Pupil Registers" which is guidance on applying the regulations. The guidance is available at www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolattendance/legislation.
6. The more reliable measures of absence are deemed to be rates of overall absence, persistent absentees and reason for absence rather than rates of authorised and unauthorised absence. The decision to authorise an absence is a local decision leading to unmeasured variation both between and within schools. In addition, some 3 per cent of all possible sessions missed were due to "unauthorised absence – no reason yet". Until the reason for absence is known, schools should record a pupil as "unauthorised absence – no reason yet". So some cases of unauthorised absence may change to authorised absence at a later stage (once an explanation has been reported to the school). However, if the reason for absence is supplied to the school after the School Census database has closed, the absence will still be recorded as "unauthorised absence – no reason yet". Using overall absence rates and the rate of persistent absentees removes variation and gives more suitable data for performance reporting. Measures relating to authorised; unauthorised and overall absence are given in this release, although limitations in comparing rates of authorised and unauthorised absence should be noted.

Data Collection, Coverage and Quality

7. Information relating to persistent absence has been removed from this report. A persistent absentee (PA) is defined as missing more than 63 sessions across the school year (typically more than 20 per cent of the available sessions). To provide a more meaningful measure, the PA indicator will be cumulative, tracking pupils throughout the year. There will be three releases of the PA indicator for each academic year. The autumn term absence report will present PA rates for the autumn term (released in May each year); the Statistical First Release on Pupil Absence in the autumn and spring terms will present PA rates for the first two terms of the academic year (released in October, and this indicator will also be included in the Achievement and Attainment Tables); and the Statistical First Release: 'Pupil Absence, including Pupil Characteristics' will provide PA rates for the academic year (released in February each year).

8. Due to an unusual Easter date this year, schools have provided absence data relating to a much shorter spring term than in previous years. The average number of possible sessions per enrolment was around 96 in the spring 2008 term, compared with 111 sessions in the spring 2007 term – a decrease of around a week and a half. As the spring term was unusually short, the number of pupils missing more than 27 sessions in the term has fallen. For example, in spring 2008 term, some 2.7 per cent of enrolments in primary and secondary schools missed more than 27 sessions in the term. This compares with 4.4 per cent of pupils in the spring 2007 term. But it is likely that a substantial part of this decrease is due to the short term time. Using the current methodology, it is likely that the rate of persistent absence (PA) for the autumn and spring terms will be understated. Officials are now developing a revised numerical threshold to give a better representation of the 20 per cent of available sessions. The revised threshold will be used to derive PA rates for publication in the Statistical First Release on Pupil Absence across the autumn and spring terms in October; and in the Achievement and Attainment Tables.

9. Following a review of the presentation of statistics on academies, changes have been made to the coverage of some of the tables in this report. To account for the growth in the academies sector, the majority of tables now include city technology colleges and academies along with Local Authority (LA) maintained schools in a category labelled “state-funded”. However, in cases where there is expected to be continued interest, the figures for LA maintained schools only have also been provided. Figures for academies and city technology colleges are not shown separately. Specific analyses of absence in academies were published in SFR 05/2008.

10. In 2006 the School Census (SC) started to collect pupil level absence data on a termly basis (spring, summer and autumn collections) from maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies relating to absence during the 2005/06 school year. For the 2006/07 school year the scope of collection was extended to also include maintained primary schools and special schools. The SC collects information for a pupil’s attendance in the term prior to the census. For example, the spring SC collects information on absence during the autumn term. Special schools provide annual absence data in the autumn SC and are therefore not included in this release.

11. Reason for absence was collected for the first time for the autumn term 2006. Schools were able to provide absence data using a reason code or by using total figures for the number of sessions missed due to authorised or unauthorised absence. It was not expected that schools would use both. However, one software supplier enabled both absences by reason and total authorised and unauthorised absence to be returned. A small proportion of schools have provided both a breakdown of absence by reason and totals. In addition, some schools do not have the required software to provide absence data by reason, and therefore are only able to provide overall totals. To derive absence rates, the sum of absence by reason has been used unless this is missing or is less than the total provided, in which case overall totals have been used.

12. Information relating to pupil absence counts the number of pupil enrolments rather than the number of pupils. Where a pupil has moved school throughout the year, they will be counted more than once as they have recorded attendance at more than one school. Pupil absence is recorded for the period a pupil is enrolled at a school.

13. For a pupil enrolment, if the number of possible sessions in a term is zero/missing or is less than the total number of sessions missed due to overall absence, then the enrolment has not been included.

14. The data presented here are based on attendance registers which are taken twice a day: once at the beginning of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. It therefore does not include “internal unauthorised absence”. This is defined as unauthorised absence by pupils between the school’s twice-daily registrations, i.e. a pupil is recorded as attending during morning or afternoon registration but is physically not present at another part of the relevant session. The Department’s current data systems are limited insofar as they only record and measure the registrations, not any subsequent absence.

15. The data contained in this release relates only to those pupils on the roll of a LA maintained primary

school or secondary school, city technology college or academy. It does not include those children who are not registered at a school.

General

16. This is not a National Statistics publication. The aim of this document is to provide emerging findings of absence data relating to the autumn 2007 term for operational and management purposes. Quality assurance checks of the absence data are still underway.

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

18. Information based on absence data linked across the autumn 2007 and spring 2008 terms will be published in October 2008 in a Statistical First Release (SFR). This will include rates of absence (authorised, unauthorised and overall) and persistent absence in the first two terms of the 2007/08 school year. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2007/08 school year are intended for publication as National Statistics in February 2009. This product will add value to the emerging findings published in termly reports and the October SFR by presenting whole year findings (cumulative results from the three termly collections) and providing more detailed analyses of absence by pupil characteristics and persistent absentees.

19. Enquiries (non-media) about information contained in this document should be addressed to Schools Data Unit, Room 1F Area E, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, Co Durham, DL3 9BG or e-mail schools.statistics@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

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

Table 1
**PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1):
 RATES OF ABSENCE (2)**
 Spring Term: 2007 and 2008 (Provisional)
 England

	Spring 2007 Term	Spring 2008 Term (P)
Primary and Secondary Schools (3)		
Number of pupil enrolments	6,320,720	6,171,330
Percentage of half days missed due to:		
Authorised absence	6.00	5.25
Unauthorised absence	1.06	1.00
Overall absence	7.07	6.26
LA Maintained Primary Schools		
Number of pupil enrolments	3,348,140	3,291,550
Percentage of half days missed due to:		
Authorised absence	5.32	4.77
Unauthorised absence	0.57	0.56
Overall absence	5.89	5.33
State Funded Secondary Schools (3)		
Number of pupil enrolments	2,972,580	2,879,780
Percentage of half days missed due to:		
Authorised absence	6.78	5.82
Unauthorised absence	1.62	1.51
Overall absence	8.40	7.32

Source: School Census

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) Includes pupils who were on roll for at least one session during the spring term, even if they are no longer on the school roll.

(3) Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies.

(P) Provisional

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Table 2
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1):
REASON FOR ABSENCE (2)
 Spring Term 2008 (Provisional)
 England

	LA Maintained Primary	State Funded Secondary (3)	Primary and Secondary Schools (3)
Number of sessions possible	315,549,380	275,151,790	590,701,170
Number of sessions missed due to authorised absence (4)	15,036,170	16,001,040	31,037,210
Percentage of sessions missed due to authorised absence	4.77	5.82	5.25
Number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absence (4)	1,773,900	4,143,050	5,916,950
Percentage of sessions missed due to unauthorised absence	0.56	1.51	1.00
Number of sessions missed due to overall absence (4)	16,810,060	20,144,100	36,954,160
Percentage of sessions missed due to overall absence	5.33	7.32	6.26
<u>DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR ABSENCE</u>			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (5):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental)	67.5	57.5	62.0
Medical/dental appointments	5.3	6.2	5.8
Religious observance	0.1	0.1	0.1
Study leave	0.0	0.5	0.3
Traveller absence	0.3	0.1	0.2
Agreed family holiday	9.8	3.8	6.6
Agreed extended family holiday	0.5	0.1	0.3
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.4	2.7	1.7
Other authorised circumstances	5.5	8.3	7.0
Total Authorised Absence	89.4	79.4	84.0
Percentage of absent sessions due to (5):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	1.4	1.1	1.2
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	1.1	1.2	1.2
Unauthorised absence, not covered	5.8	14.1	10.3
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	2.3	4.3	3.3
Total Unauthorised Absence	10.6	20.6	16.0
Total Overall Absence	100.0	100.0	100.0
<u>ABSENCE RATES BY REASON</u>			
Percentage of absent sessions due to (5):			
Illness (NOT medical or dental)	3.57	4.16	3.85
Medical/dental appointments	0.28	0.45	0.36
Religious observance	0.00	0.00	0.00
Study leave	0.00	0.04	0.02
Traveller absence	0.02	0.01	0.01
Agreed family holiday	0.52	0.28	0.41
Agreed extended family holiday	0.03	0.01	0.02
Excluded, no alternative provision	0.02	0.20	0.10
Other authorised circumstances	0.29	0.60	0.44
Unclassified	0.03	0.07	0.05
Total Authorised Absence	4.77	5.82	5.25
Percentage of absent sessions due to (5):			
Unauthorised absence, family holiday not agreed	0.08	0.08	0.08
Unauthorised absence, arrived late	0.06	0.09	0.07
Unauthorised absence, not covered	0.30	1.02	0.64
Unauthorised absence, no reason yet	0.12	0.31	0.21
Unclassified	0.00	0.02	0.01
Total Unauthorised Absence	0.56	1.51	1.00
Total Overall Absence	5.33	7.32	6.26

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

Source: School Census

(2) Includes pupils who were on roll for at least one session during the spring term, even if they are no longer on the school roll.

(3) Includes maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies.

(4) See Background Note 8.

(5) Percentages are based on absence totals as reported by reason (not overall totals). See Background Note 8.

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.