

STATISTICAL FIRST RELEASE

ATTENDANCE AT GRANT-AIDED PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS 2008/09: SUMMARY STATISTICS

INTRODUCTION

Attendance data for the 2008/09 academic year was collected from all grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools via the school census in October 2009.

The purpose of this statistical press release is to present basic attendance figures for schools for the 2008/09 academic year. It includes information on the levels of absence, type of absence and reason for absence. A further release containing a more detailed set of tables, including absence by pupil characteristics, will be published by the end of March 2010.

KEY FINDINGS

Absence rates

In primary schools in 2008/09, 5.1% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 3.9% authorised and 1.2% unauthorised absence. These figures are similar to 2007/08 when overall absence accounted for 5.2% of the total half days (4.1% authorised and 1.1% unauthorised).

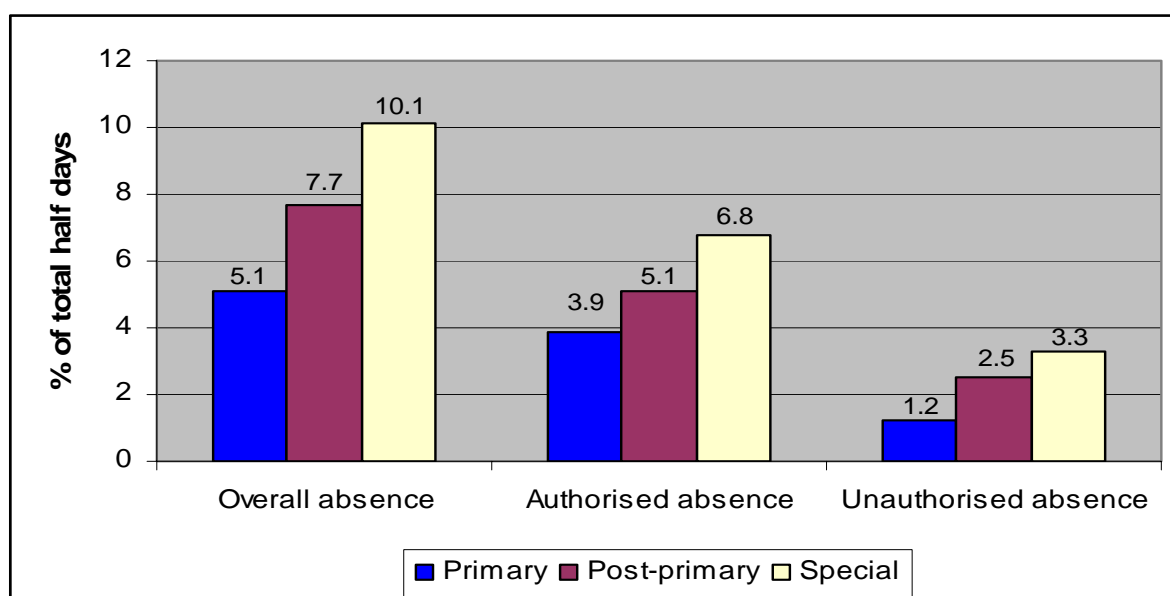
In post-primary schools in 2008/09, 7.7% of all half days were missed due to absence, 5.1% was authorised absence and 2.5% was unauthorised absence. Similarly, in 2007/08, overall absence represented 7.8% of the total half days, 5.2% authorised and 2.6% unauthorised.

In special schools in 2008/09, 10.1% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 6.8% authorised and 3.3% unauthorised absence. Both overall and authorised absence has decreased since 2007/08, from 11.7% and 8.5% respectively. Unauthorised absence showed very slight increase, from 3.2% of the total half days.

Table 1 Attendance at school, 2008/09

	% of total half days		
	Primary Schools	Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
Attended	94.9	92.3	89.9
Not attended	5.1	7.7	10.1
<i>Comprising:</i>			
Authorised absence	3.9	5.1	6.8
Unauthorised absence	1.2	2.5	3.3

Chart 1 Absence at primary, post-primary and special schools, 2008/09



Reasons for absence

The most common reason for absence in all schools was illness, which is an authorised absence. Illness accounted for 65.0% of all absent half days in primary schools, 54.8% in post-primary schools and 46.7% in special schools. This equates to 3.3%, 4.2% and 4.7% of the total half days respectively.

Table 2 Absence in schools by reason, 2008/09

	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools		Special Schools	
	% of absent half days	% of total half days	% of absent half days	% of total half days	% of absent half days	% of total half days
Authorised absence						
Bereavement	1.0	0.1	1.4	0.1	0.6	0.1
Suspended	0.1	0.0	1.5	0.1	1.0	0.1
Family holiday agreed	3.3	0.2	0.8	0.1	3.2	0.3
Illness	65.0	3.3	54.8	4.2	46.7	4.7
Medical / dental appointments	2.3	0.1	4.1	0.3	5.5	0.6
Other exceptional circumstances	4.1	0.2	4.1	0.3	10.0	1.0
Religious observance	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
Traveller absence	1.3	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.0
Total authorised absence	77.2	3.9	67.0	5.1	67.2	6.8
Unauthorised absence						
Family holiday not agreed	4.4	0.2	1.9	0.1	1.4	0.1
Other	10.1	0.5	16.4	1.3	14.7	1.5
No reason yet provided	7.8	0.4	14.3	1.1	16.6	1.7
Late after registration closed	0.5	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.0
Total unauthorised absence	22.8	1.2	33.0	2.5	32.8	3.3
Total overall absence	100.0	5.1	100.0	7.7	100.0	10.1

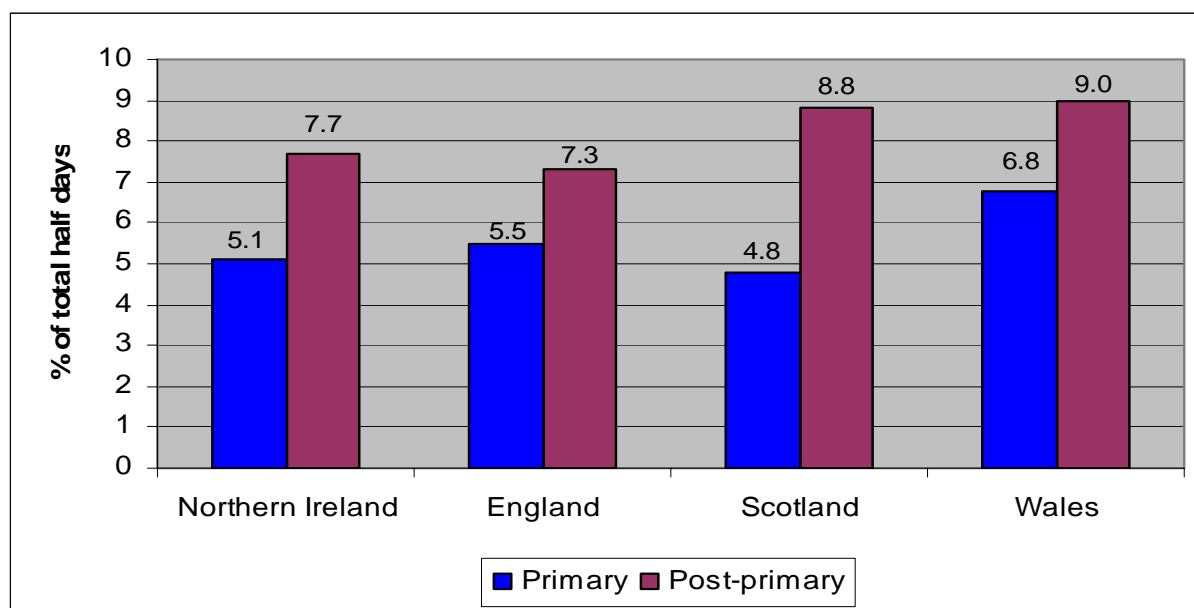
Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales

The highest overall absence rates were recorded in Wales – 6.8% of the total half days in primary schools and 9.0% of the total half days in post-primary schools. This compares with 5.1% and 7.7% respectively in Northern Ireland.

Table 3 Comparison with England, Scotland and Wales, 2008/09

	% of total half days			
	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools	
	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence
NI	1.2	5.1	2.5	7.7
England	0.7	5.5	1.5	7.3
Scotland	N/A	4.8	N/A	8.8
Wales	1.0	6.8	1.7	9.0

Chart 2 Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales – overall absence, 2008/09



Notes to readers:

1. The statistics in this release have been derived from the annual School Census; details about the survey may be found at http://www.deni.gov.uk/census_description_for_web-11.doc.
2. The 2008/09 figures in this statistical release are based on information as at 9th October 2009. They may be subject to minor revision and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy. This can be accessed at http://www.deni.gov.uk/de_statement_on_statistical_revisions-2.doc.
3. Attendance or absence is measured for every pupil in half day sessions (am and pm).

Attendance

In addition to actual attendance within the school premises, attendance also includes:

- Pupils who are educated off site
- Late (before registration closed)
- Approved sporting activities
- Study leave
- Educational visits
- Work experience

Authorised absence

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

- 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, severe weather conditions, court appearance)
- Religious observance
- Traveller absence

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)

This is reflected in the Department of Education's guidance to schools which is detailed in Circular 2006/14, School Attendance: Absence Recording by Schools.

4. As with the data for England, Scotland and Wales, overall absence is considered to be a more reliable measure of absence than authorised and unauthorised absence. 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.

Both figures have been provided, however limitations in comparing rates of unauthorised and authorised absence should be noted.

In addition, 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.

5. 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 2008/09.
6. Attendance information was not available for 21 primary schools, which accounts for 2.4% of the total primary schools and 1.0% of all primary school pupils in Years 1 to 7 in 2008/09. Of the 21 schools, 9 closed just prior to the information being collected and 12 did not have access to the electronic schools management information system or did not yet use it to record attendance.
7. It has not been possible to include attendance data for four post-primary schools which closed prior to the data being collected in 2008/09. This equates to 1.8% of all post-primary schools and 0.3% of all Year 8 to 12 pupils in 2008/09.
8. It has not been possible to include attendance data for two special schools which closed prior to the data being collected in 2008/09. This equates to 4.8% of all special schools and 0.8% of all special school pupils in 2008/09.
9. Comparative data was obtained from the following sources:

Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Autumn Term 2008 and Spring Term 2009
Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2008/09 (Wales)
Absenteeism from Secondary Schools, 2008/09 (Wales)
Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools, 2008/09

There are slight differences in definitions between the regions, for example, England statistics include study leave in authorised absence while the DENI statistics categorise it as present.

There are also methodological differences in collecting the information. For example, it is not compulsory for schools in England to provide a reason for absence, however over 99.4% of schools provided reasons for the majority of their pupil's absence in 2008/09 and the figures have been reported. In Wales, the information is collected via a survey of all primary, special and independent schools with children of primary school age. Responses were received from all primary and secondary schools.

10. In some cases, percentages may not add due to rounding.
11. 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 (www.deni.gov.uk) under the Statistics and Research section.

If you have any comments or suggestions in relation to attendance data or this release, please let us know via the short questionnaire at the following link:
http://www.deni.gov.uk/attendance_statistics_user_questionnaire.doc