

31 March 2010

## **Attendance at grant aided primary, post-primary and special schools 2008/09: Detailed statistics**

### **Key points**

#### **Overall absence – all schools**

- The overall attendance rate for primary, post-primary and special schools in 2008/09 was 93.7%.
- In 2008/09, 6.3% of the total half days in primary, post-primary and special schools were missed due to absence.
- Of the total half days, 4.5% were recorded as authorised absence.
- Unauthorised absence accounted for 1.8% of the total half days in primary, post-primary and special schools throughout 2008/09.

#### **Primary schools**

- 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.
- The most common reason for absence in primary schools was illness, which is an authorised absence and accounted for 3.3% of the total half days or 65.0% of all absent half days in 2008/09.
- Controlled integrated primary schools had the highest levels of average overall absence (5.9% of the total half days) while voluntary schools had the lowest at 3.2% of the total half days.
- At 6.3% of the total half days, the highest average overall absence for primary schools was recorded by the Belfast Education and Library Board. The North Eastern Education and Library Board reported the lowest average overall absence, with 4.5% of the total half days missed.
- Overall absence was higher for urban primary schools (5.6% of the total half days) than for rural primary schools (4.2% of the total half days).
- The figures show that average overall absence levels generally increase in line with the percentage of pupils enrolled who are eligible for free school meals. In schools where less than 10% of pupils enrolled were eligible for free school meals, the average overall absence level was 3.9% of the total half days. This compares with 8.5% of the total half days for schools with more than 50% of pupils enrolled eligible for free school meals. Since the level of free school meal eligibility is indicative of levels of deprivation, the data suggest that absence tends to be higher in more disadvantaged areas.
- Average overall absence rates were similar for boys and girls of primary school age (5.2% and 5.1% of the total half days respectively).
- The highest average overall absence occurred in Year 1 of primary school when 5.7% of the total half days are missed.
- Traveller children attending primary school had a higher average overall absence rate than any other ethnic group. They missed 32.0% of the total half days, compared with 4.9% for white children and 7.5% for children from a minority ethnic background.
- Of all pupils enrolled in primary schools in 2008/09, 7.4% had no absence throughout the year. Most of those who were absent from school (36.8%) were absent for between 0.5 and 5 days in 2008/09. Just under 6% of pupils enrolled were absent for more than 25 days.

## Post-primary schools

- In post-primary schools in 2008/09, 7.7% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 5.1% authorised and 2.5% unauthorised absence.
- The most common reason for absence in post-primary schools was illness, which is an authorised absence and accounted for 4.2% of the total half days (54.8% of all absent half days).
- At 9.4% of the total half days, average levels of overall absence in secondary schools were higher than in grammar schools (4.8%). There was a marked difference in the levels of unauthorised absence in secondary and grammar schools (3.6% and 0.7% of the total half days respectively).
- Controlled integrated schools had the highest levels of overall absence (10.6% of the total half days) while voluntary schools had the lowest at 4.9% of the total half days.
- At 8.1% of the total half days, average overall absence was highest in the South Eastern Education and Library Board post-primary schools. The North Eastern Education and Library Board reported the lowest level of overall absence (7.2% of the total half days).
- The figures indicate that generally, absence levels increase in line with the percentage of pupils enrolled who are eligible for free school meals. In schools where less than 10% of pupils enrolled were eligible for free school meals, the average overall absence level was 4.9% of the total half days. This compares with 12.2% of the total half days for schools with more than 50% of pupils enrolled eligible for free school meals. Since the level of free school meal eligibility is indicative of levels of deprivation, the data suggest that absence tends to be higher in more disadvantaged areas.
- At 7.8% and 7.5% of total half days respectively, average overall absence was similar for males and females. While the predominant cause of absence for both genders was illness, females missed a greater proportion of the total half days for this reason than males. The proportion of total half days missed due to suspension from school was more than three times higher for males than for females.
- Average absence levels increased steadily between Year 8 and Year 11 (from 5.6% to 9.1% of the total half days), before decreasing to 8.3% of the total half days in Year 12. Levels of unauthorised absence generally increased in line with year group, from 1.3% of all half days in Year 8 to 3.6% in Year 12.
- At 47.1% of their total half days, average level of overall absence was higher for Traveller children than for any other ethnic group. This compares with 7.6% for white children and 7.2% for children from a minority ethnic background.
- Over 5% of pupils enrolled in Year 8 to Year 12 at post-primary schools had no absence during 2008/09. Most pupils enrolled (27.0%) were absent from school for between 0.5 and 5.0 days in 2008/09; 14.3% of pupils enrolled were absent for more than 25 days.

## Special schools

- 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.
- The most common reason for absence in special schools was illness, which is an authorised absence and accounted for 4.7% of the total half days (46.7% of all absent half days).
- Average overall absence was highest (11.3% of total half days) in Belfast Education and Library Board in 2008/09 and lowest in the Southern Education and Library Board (8.5% of total half days).
- Overall absence rates were slightly higher for females attending special schools than for males (10.5% and 9.8% of total half days respectively).
- Four per cent of pupils enrolled at special schools had no absence throughout 2008/09. In terms of days missed, just under one quarter of pupils enrolled (24.0%) were absent for between 0.5 and 5.0 days. One fifth of pupils missed more than 25 days in the same year.

## Notes to readers:

1. More detail about the collection of school attendance statistics may be found at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/school\\_attendance\\_statistics\\_-\\_data\\_collection.doc](http://www.deni.gov.uk/school_attendance_statistics_-_data_collection.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](http://www.deni.gov.uk/de_statement_on_statistical_revisions-2.doc).
3. Attendance or absence of pupils should be recorded at the beginning of the morning and afternoon registration sessions therefore, is measured for every pupil in half day sessions (am and pm). It does not include absence by pupils outside the two daily registrations for example, if a pupil is recorded as present at registration but subsequently misses some of the session, this will be recorded as 'present'.

The terms used in this report are defined in the Department of Education's guidance to schools (Circular 2006/14, School Attendance: Absence Recording by Schools) and summarised below for information:

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

For those absences which are not directly covered by a specific code, the decision to allocate the absence as authorised or unauthorised is ultimately taken by the school.

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

5. Primary and post-primary data refer to pupil enrolments 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 20 primary schools, which accounts for 2.3% of the total primary schools and 1.0% of all primary school pupils in Years 1 to 7 in 2008/09. Of the 20 schools, 9 closed just prior to the information being collected and 11 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 October 2009. This equates to 1.8% of all post-primary schools and 0.4% 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. This equates to 4.8% of all special schools and 0.8% of all special school pupils in 2008/09.
9. Comparative data were 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. For the purpose of this analysis, urban and rural are defined according to the findings of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group which can be accessed using the following link:  
[http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/mapxtreme\\_towns/Reports/ur\\_report.pdf](http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/mapxtreme_towns/Reports/ur_report.pdf)
11. Pupil level information refers to the number of pupil enrolments rather than the number of pupils. A pupil can move schools during the year and will therefore have an attendance record at more than one school.
12. Comparison of the number of looked after children recorded in the school census and the number recorded by the DHSSPS Children Order Statistical Tables suggests some under-reporting of looked after children in the school census. It is possible that schools are unaware of the child's looked after status. Despite this, attendance rates for looked after children have been included in this publication since there are sufficient numbers recorded to produce indicative figures.
13. As stated earlier, attendance is measured for each pupil in half day sessions. In order to provide information on the actual number of school days missed, these totals have

been divided by two. While this is useful to provide an indication of school days missed, it is generally more accurate to report in terms of half days.

Schools are required to be in operation for 190 days in the school year, less any School Development Days (SDDs). Schools can apply for up to five SDDs, which can produce slight variations between the numbers of days individual schools are open to pupils.

14. In some cases, percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

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 ([www.deni.gov.uk](http://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](http://www.deni.gov.uk/attendance_statistics_user_questionnaire.doc)

**Press enquiries should be made to the Department's Press Office at the same address, telephone (028) 9127 9268 / fax (028) 9127 9271.**

16. The full report and school level attendance rates can be accessed using the following link to the DENI website:

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research\\_-\\_statistics\\_on\\_education-pupil\\_attendance/statistics\\_and\\_research\\_-\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_attendance\\_200809.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research_-_statistics_on_education-pupil_attendance/statistics_and_research_-_statistics_on_education_attendance_200809.htm)