

STATISTICAL FIRST RELEASE

ATTENDANCE AT GRANT-AIDED PRIMARY, POST-PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS 2007/08: SUMMARY STATISTICS

INTRODUCTION

Attendance data for all grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools was collected for the first time at pupil level in the school census in October 2008.

The purpose of this statistical press release is to present basic attendance figures for schools for the 2007/08 academic year. It includes information on the levels of absence, type of absence and reason for absence. A further press release containing a more detailed set of tables, including absence by pupil characteristics, will be published by the end of April 2009.

KEY FINDINGS

Absence rates

- In primary schools in 2007/08, 5.2% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 4.1% authorised and 1.1% unauthorised absence.
- In post-primary schools in 2007/08, 7.8% of all half days were missed due to absence - 5.2% was authorised absence and 2.6% was unauthorised absence.
- In special schools in 2007/08, 11.7% of all half days were missed due to absence, comprising 8.5% authorised and 3.2% unauthorised absence.

Reasons for absence

- The most common reason for absence in all schools was illness, which is an authorised absence. Illness accounted for 66.6% of all absent half days in primary schools, 54.7% in post-primary schools and 40.8% in special schools. This equates to 3.5%, 4.3% and 4.8% of the total half days respectively.

Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales

- The highest overall absence rates were recorded in Wales – 6.7% of the total half days in primary schools and 9.1% of the total half days in post-primary schools. This compares with 5.2% and 7.8% respectively in Northern Ireland.

Table 1 Attendance at school, 2007/08

	% of total half days		
	Primary Schools	Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
Attended	94.8	92.2	88.3
Not attended	5.2	7.8	11.7
<i>Comprising:</i>			
Authorised absence	4.1	5.2	8.5
Unauthorised absence	1.1	2.6	3.2

Chart 1 Absence at primary, post-primary and special schools, 2007/08

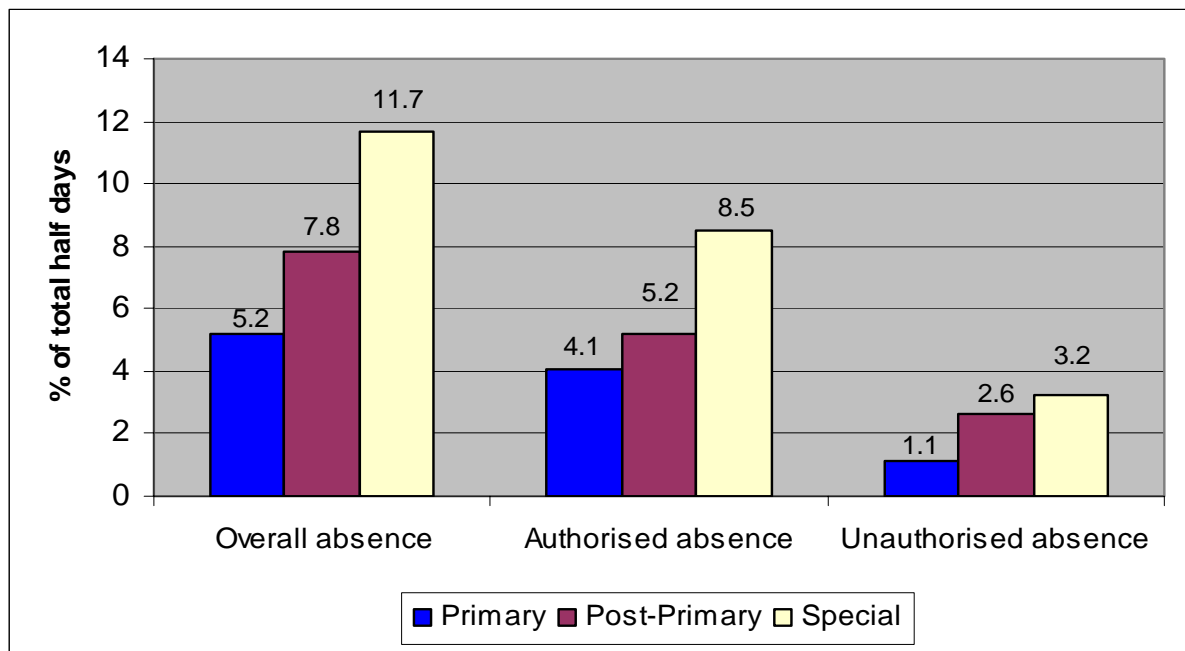


Table 2 Absence in schools by reason, 2007/08

	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	0.9	0.0	1.4	0.1	0.5	0.1
Suspended	0.1	0.0	1.5	0.1	1.0	0.1
Family holiday agreed	3.8	0.2	0.9	0.1	2.7	0.3
Illness	66.6	3.5	54.7	4.3	40.8	4.8
Medical / dental appointments	2.0	0.1	3.7	0.3	4.0	0.5
Other exceptional circumstances	4.7	0.2	4.6	0.4	22.7	2.7
Religious observance	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Traveller absence	1.2	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.6	0.1
Total authorised absence	79.3	4.1	67.2	5.2	72.5	8.5
Unauthorised absence						
Family holiday not agreed	3.6	0.2	2.0	0.2	1.4	0.2
Other	14.8	0.8	26.5	2.1	23.1	2.7
No reason yet provided	1.8	0.1	4.0	0.3	3.0	0.3
Late after registration closed	0.5	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.0
Total unauthorised absence	20.7	1.1	32.8	2.6	27.5	3.2
Total overall absence	100.0	5.2	100.0	7.8	100.0	11.7

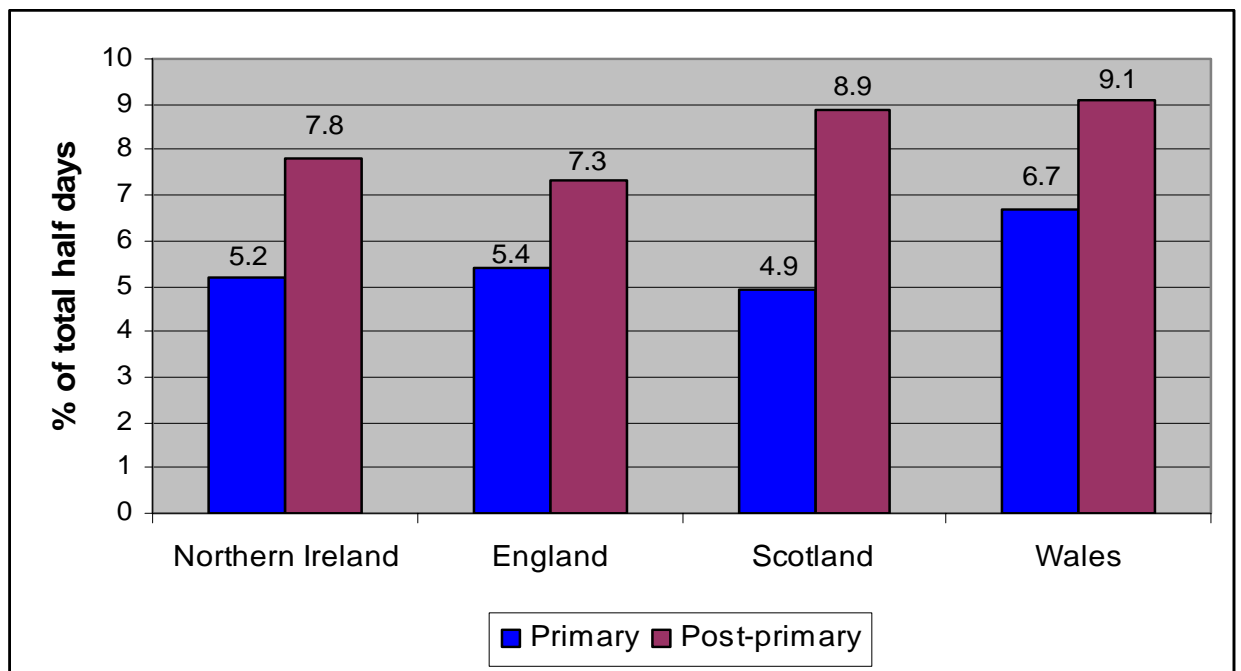
Table 3

Comparison with England, Scotland and Wales, 2007/08

	% of total half days			
	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools	
	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence	Unauthorised absence	Overall absence
Northern Ireland	1.1	5.2	2.6	7.8
England	0.6	5.4	1.4	7.3
Scotland	N/A	4.9	N/A	8.9
Wales	0.9	6.7	1.8	9.1

Chart 2

Comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales – overall absence, 2007/08



Notes to Editors:

1. 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.

2. 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. In Northern Ireland, schools are advised to record unexplained absence initially as 'no reason yet provided', however, if a reason is not provided within a specified period of time, these are changed to 'other'. It is possible that these are automatically changed to 'other' at the end of the academic year or are overlooked / not followed up, thereby inflating the rate of unauthorised absence. 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.

3. Attendance information was not available for approximately 37 primary schools, which accounts for 4.2% of the total primary schools and 1.4% of all primary school pupils in Years 1 to 7 in 2007/08. Of the 37 schools, 17 closed just prior to the information being collected and 11 did not have access to the electronic schools management information system. At the date of publication, the remaining 9 schools had not yet submitted their attendance data due to procedural issues, however all available information will be included in the detailed report at the end of April 2009.
4. 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 schools and 0.4% of all Year 8 to 12 pupils in 2007/08.
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 2007/08.
6. Comparative data was obtained from the following sources:

Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Autumn Term 2007 and Spring Term 2008

Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2007/08 (Wales)

Absenteeism from Secondary Schools, 2007/08 (Wales)

Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools, 2007/08

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 91% of schools provided a reason in 2007/08 and the figures have been reported. In Wales, the primary 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 schools.

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

8. Requests for further information should be addressed to:

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