



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS, DOCUMENT

Absenteeism from secondary schools: September 2022 to August 2023

Data on authorised and unauthorised absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age for September 2022 to August 2023.

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Introduction

Attendance and absence data in Welsh **maintained middle and secondary schools** for pupils aged 11 to 15, up to the late May bank holiday. It does not cover the entire school year, because of the effect on attendance of public exams which occur in May and June.

This annual data set was last collected in 2018/19 and last published in August 2019. The collection of this data was suspended at the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020 and no data is available for the school years 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Since September 2020 we have been collecting and publishing **daily attendance data from schools**. This data is extracted directly from school **Management Information Systems (MIS)** once a week. This data is collected as management information and is not validated or agreed with schools or local authorities. It does therefore not have the same level of quality assurance as the annual attendance data contained within this release. Both weekly and annual data are available for the 2022/23 school year, but for the above reasons are not strictly comparable.

For further information on the different sources of official attendance data and advice on which to use please see **quality and methodology information** section.

The collection and publication of the Absenteeism from primary schools' data was also suspended during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. It has now been reinstated and will be published Spring 2024.

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Main points

- The percentage of half-day sessions missed by secondary school-aged pupils has doubled to 12.5% between 2022/23 and 2018/19.
- Secondary school-aged pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) missed 20.7% half-day sessions in 2022/23, while secondary school-aged pupils who are not eligible for Free School Meals missed 10% of half-day sessions. Both figures are approximately double the rate of absences in 2018/19.
- 15.6% of half-day sessions were missed by year 11 pupils, compared with 9.4% of half-day sessions missed by year 7 pupils, in 2022/23
- The percentage of secondary school-aged pupils that were persistently absent has tripled to 16.3% between 2022/23 and 2018/19
- 35.7% of secondary school-aged pupils eligible for FSM were persistently absent in 2022/23, compared with 11.2% of secondary ineligible for FSM.
- 22.5% of year 11 pupils were persistently absent, compared with 10.2% of year 7 pupils, in 2022/23.

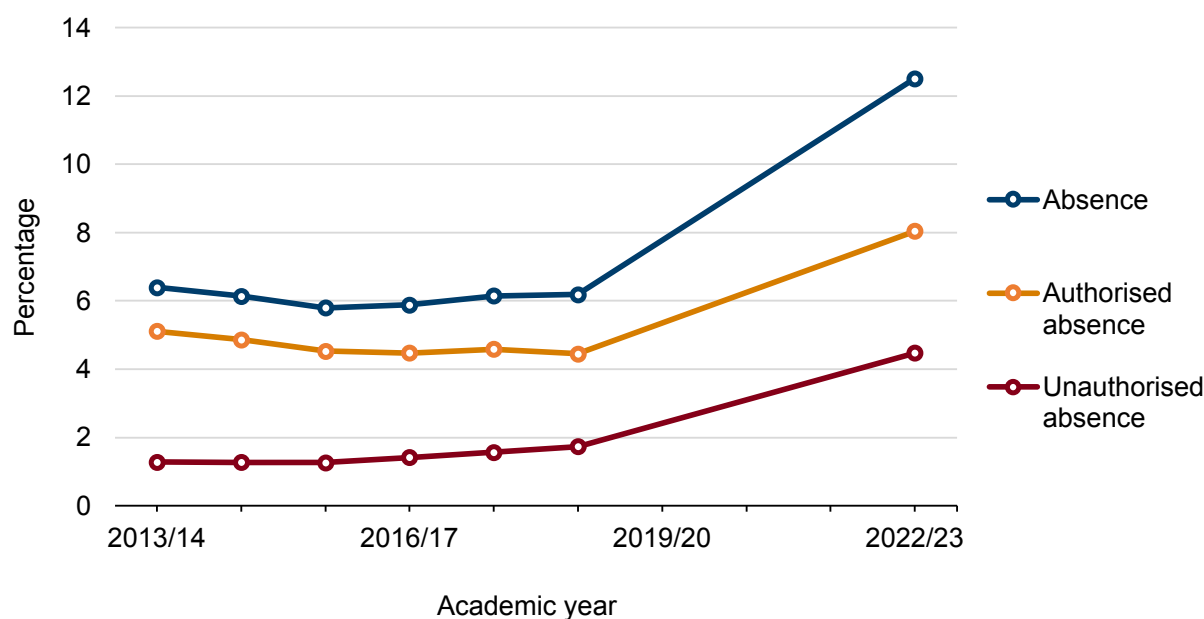
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Overall absence

Figure 1: Percentage of half-day sessions absent from school of secondary school-age pupils, 2013/14 to 2022/23 [Note 1]



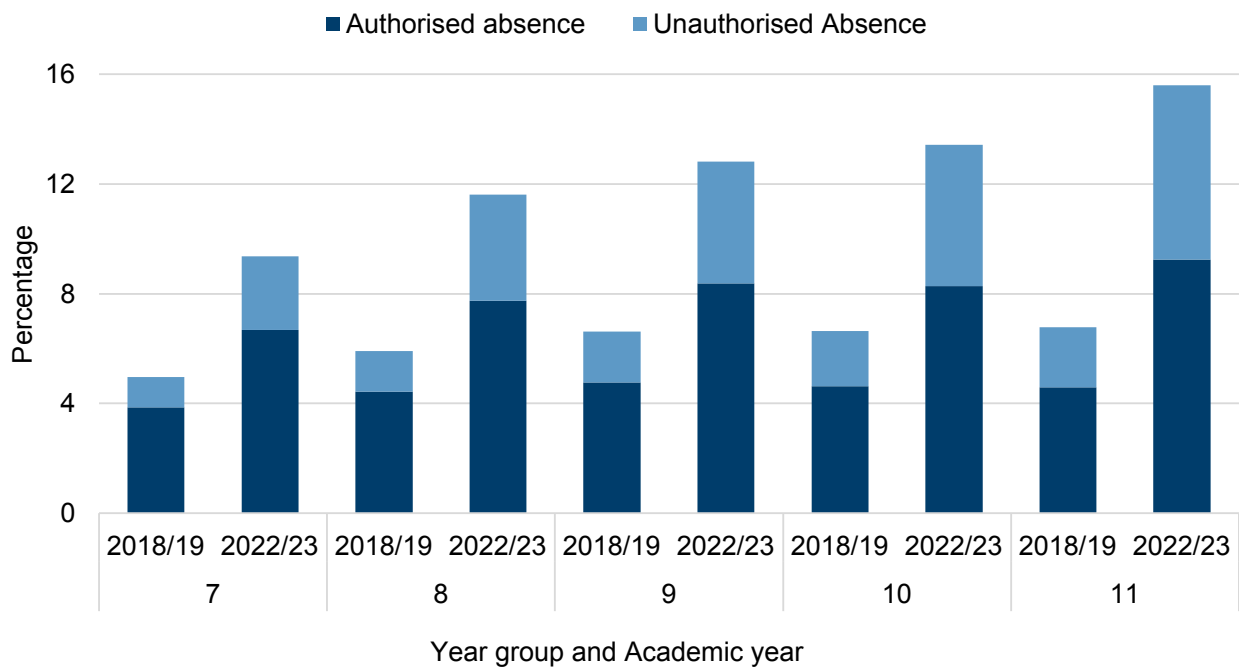
Description of Figure 1: A line graph showing absence between 2013/14 and 2022/23. Absence is broken down into authorised and unauthorised absence. There has been a sharp increase in overall absence, doubling between 2018/19 and 2022/23 following the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

[Note 1] There is no data in this collection for the years 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22. The years where there is data are indicated by the circular markers on the lines.

Absence by year group

Figure 2: Percentage of half-day sessions of absence by year group between 2018/19 and 2022/23



Description of Figure 2: A series of stacked bars showing a sharp increase in absence across all year groups following the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Year 11 pupils have the highest absence both in 2018/19 and 2022/23 and the largest increase between those two years.

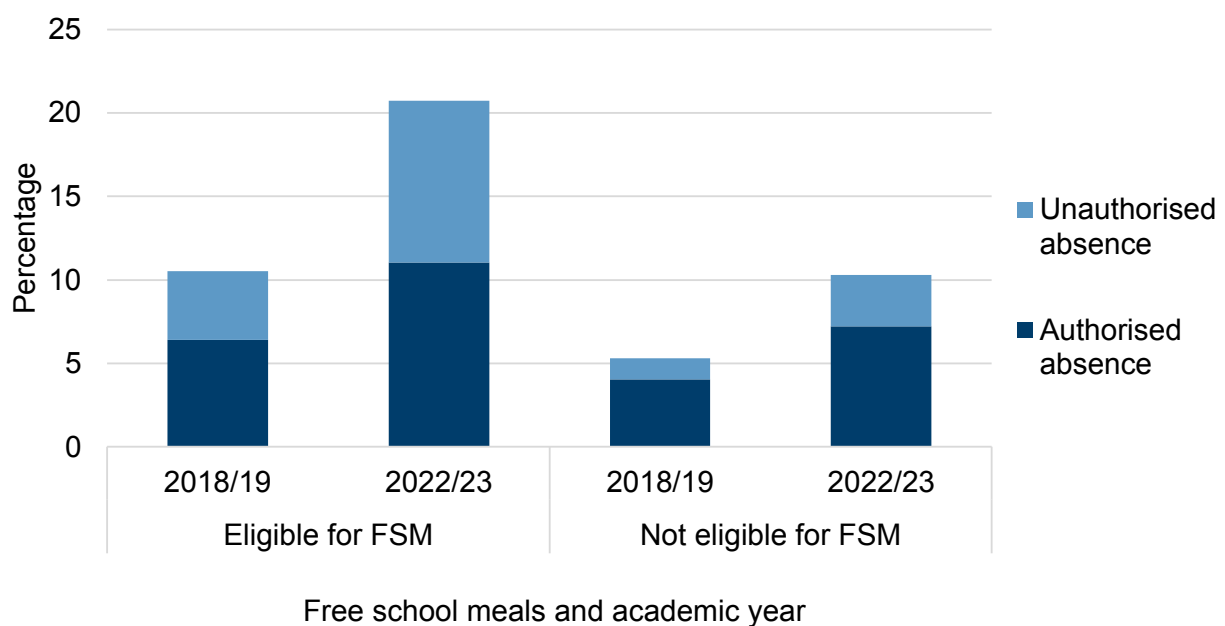
Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

Absence by Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility

Pupils are eligible for **free school meals** if their parents or guardians receive certain means-tested benefits or support payments.

There have been recent significant changes in FSM provision in Wales as part of the rollout of Universal Free School Meals. For further detail, please read the section in the **quality and methodology information**.

Figure 3: Percentage of half-day sessions of absence by FSM eligibility between 2018/19 and 2022/23



Description of Figure 3: Stacked bars showing a sharp increase in absence for pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM following the coronavirus (COVID-19)

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pandemic. The overall absence for both groups has doubled between 2018/19, however FSM eligible pupils have a significantly higher proportion of unauthorised absence.

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

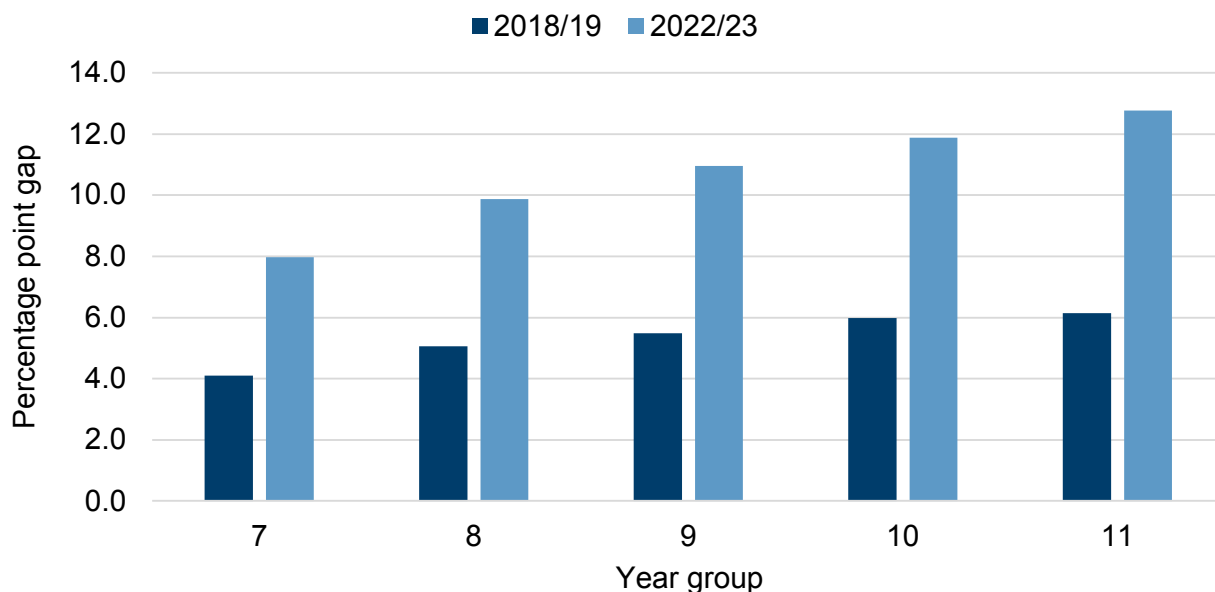
Figure 3 shows both pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM have seen their overall absence double between 2018/19 and 2022/23 and both groups have seen an increase in unauthorised absence as a proportion of their overall absence.

- 23.4% to 29.7% of all absences for pupils ineligible for FSM
- 39.1% to 46.8% of all absences for pupils eligible for FSM
- Between 2013/14 and 2018/19 the attendance figures for all year groups were stable

FSM eligibility and year group

The pattern between pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM is not the same across year groups.

Figure 4: Percentage point gap between the percentage of half day sessions of absence between pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM by year group between 2018/19 and 2022/23



Description of Figure 4: A bar chart showing an increasing gap in absence between pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM as the year group increases. The pattern appears in 2018/19, however it is more pronounced in 2022/23.

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

The gap between pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM has approximately doubled across all year groups between 2018/19 and 2022/23. Between 2013/14 and 2018/19 the gap was consistently between 4.0 and 6.1 percentage points.

The difference between the gap for year 7 pupils and year 11 pupils has

widened between 2018/19 and 2022/23. From 2.0 percentage points in 2018/19 to 4.8 percentage points in 2022/23

Care should be taken when interpreting this information. It's not necessarily the case that for a future group of pupils progressing through year groups that their FSM gap will widen to the degree above. It is possible that coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected year groups differently.

Absence by further characteristics

Absence by sex

In 2022/23 female pupils missed an average of 13% of half-day sessions and male pupils missed an average of 12% of half-day sessions.

Absence by ethnic background

All ethnic groups have seen an increase in absence between 2018/19 and 2022/23.

In 2022/23 pupils who identify as Travellers have the highest rate of absence with 36.2% absence and pupils who identify as Chinese or Chinese British the lowest rate of absence with 3.7% absence.

Absence by Special Educational Needs/Additional Learning Needs (SEN/ALN)

In 2022/23 17.4% of half-day sessions were missed by pupils with an SEN/ALN provision compared to 11.6% without an SEN/ALN provision.

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In 2022/23 the SEN/ALN provision with the highest level of absence is school maintained Individual Development Plan (IDP) with 22.4% absence and the lowest level of absence is statement of SEN with 14.9% absence.

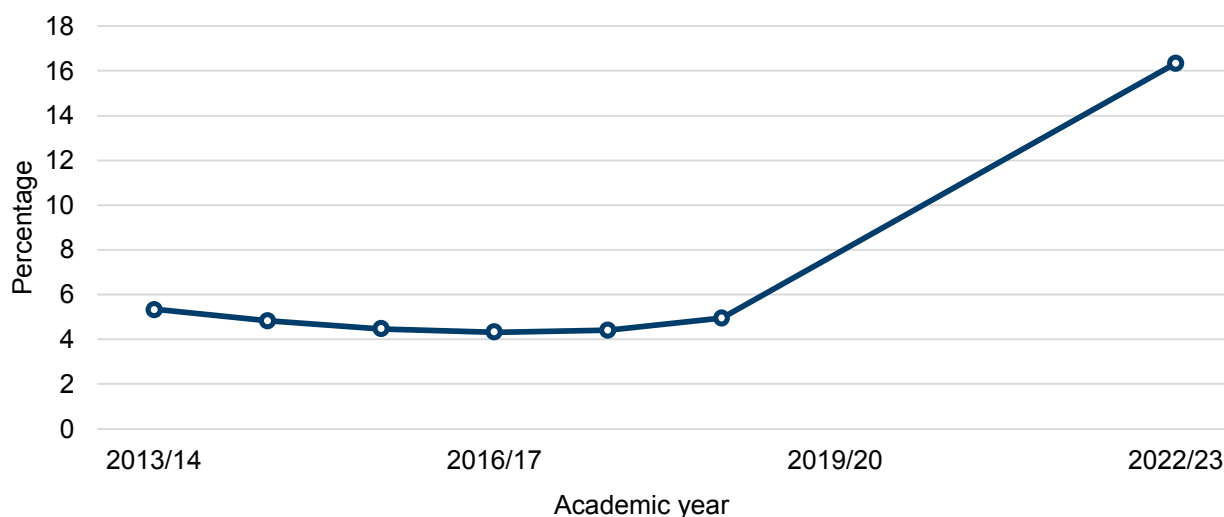
Persistent absence

Not all pupils are required to be in school for the same number of sessions. School closures, moving school, inset days, etc... are all instances where a pupil might not be required to attend school, while other pupils might still be required to attend.

Persistent absence is defined as being absent for 20% of the most common number of required sessions. So, if most pupils are required to be in school for 300 half-day sessions in the year, the threshold for persistent absence is 60 sessions. These sessions need not be continuous for a pupil to be considered persistently absent.

The threshold for persistent absence in 2022/23 is 60 sessions.

Figure 5: Percentage of secondary school-age pupils persistently absent, 2013/14 to 2022/23 [Note 1]



Description of Figure 5: A line graph showing percentage of persistently absent secondary school age pupils stayed between 4.0% and 6.0% between 2013/14 and 2018/19. Following the coronavirus pandemic, persistent absence has tripled between 2018/19 and 2022/23 and the percentage is now 16.3%.

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

[Note 1] There is no data in this collection for the years 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22. The years where there is data are indicated by the circular markers on the lines.

Persistent absence by year group

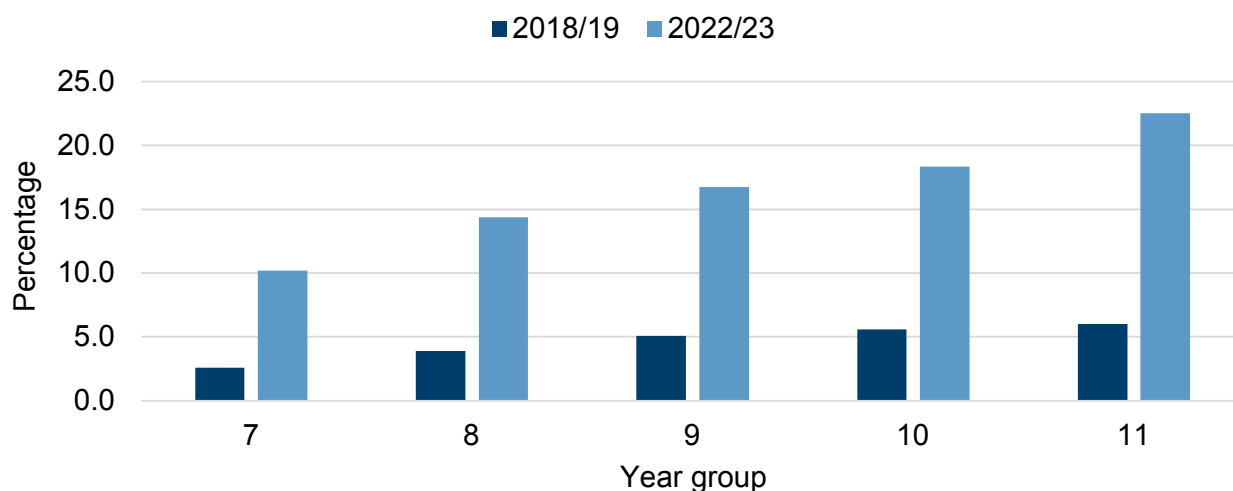
Figure 6: Percentage of pupils persistently absent by year

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group, 2018/19 and 2022/23



Description of Figure 6: A bar chart showing the percentage of persistently absent pupils by year group between 2018/19 and 2022/23 has approximately tripled in most cases. For year 7, the percentage has almost quadrupled.

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

Between 2013/14 and 2018/19 the range of persistent absence between year groups was no greater than 2%, compared to over 10% in 2022/23.

Year 11 pupils have the highest rates of persistent absence, with 22.5 percent of pupils persistently absent during 2022/23. At 3.9 times its 2018/19 percentage, Year 7 has the highest relative increase in persistent absence following the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Year 7 has the lowest rate of persistent absence during 2022/23, with 10.2 percent of pupils persistently absent.

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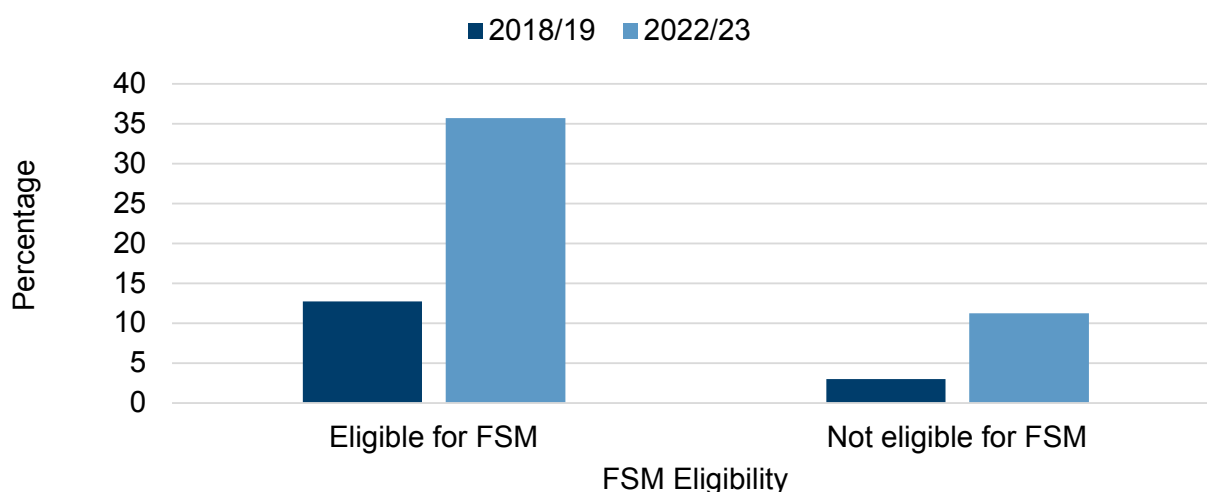
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Persistent absence by FSM eligibility

In 2022/23 the percentage of persistently absent pupils eligible for FSM is the highest since this collection began. In 2022/23 the gap between the persistent absence of pupils eligible for FSM and ineligible for FSM is also the highest since this collection began, at 24.4 percentage points.

Figure 7: Percentage of pupils persistently absent by FSM, 2018/19 and 2022/23



Description of Figure 7: A bar chart showing percentage of persistent absence has almost tripled for pupils eligible for FSM and almost quadrupled for ineligible pupils between 2018/19 and 2022/23.

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

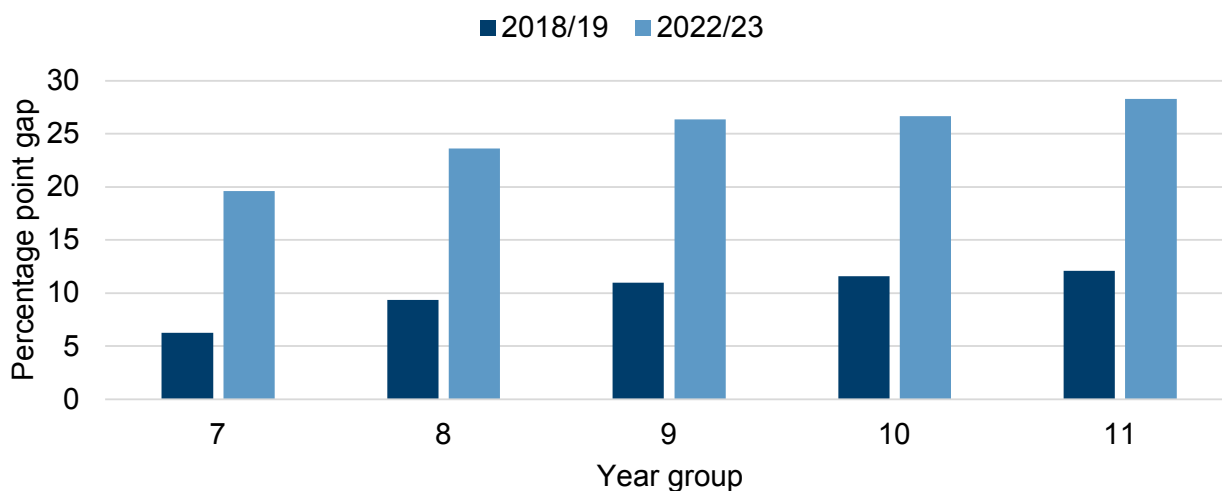
The proportionate increase of persistent absence of pupils ineligible for FSM is higher than the equivalent for eligible pupils. However, the percentage of

persistently absent pupils eligible for FSM is 3 times higher than the equivalent for pupils ineligible for FSM.

Persistent absence by year group and free school meal eligibility

In this section we talk about the persistent absence FSM gap. We calculate the gap by subtracting the percentage of persistently absent pupils ineligible for FSM from the equivalent for pupils eligible for FSM.

Figure 8: FSM gap in percentage of pupils persistently absent, by year group, 2018/19 and 2022/23



Description of Figure 8: A bar chart showing an increasing gap in persistent absence between pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM as the year group increases. The pattern appears in 2018/19, however it is more pronounced in 2022/23.

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Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

The FSM gap for each year group has at least doubled between 2018/19 and 2022/23. In the case of year 7 the gap has tripled; however, it has the lowest gap across the year groups. The gap is largest for year 11 pupils at 28.3 percentage points.

Persistent absence by further characteristics

Persistent absence by sex

An increase in persistent absence has been seen in pupils of both sexes since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, the percentage of pupils that were persistently absent has risen from 4.7% to 17.5% of female secondary school-aged pupils and from 4.5% to 15.2% of male secondary school-aged pupils.

Persistent absence by ethnic background

An increase in persistent absence has been seen in pupils of all ethnic backgrounds since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In 2022/23 the ethnic background with the lowest percentage of persistent absence was Chinese or Chinese British (at 1.9%) and the ethnic backgrounds with highest percentage of persistent absence were Roma (at 63.2%) and Traveller (at 63.1%).

Persistent absence by Special Educational Needs/

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Additional Learning Needs (SEN/ALN)

In 2022/23 the percentage of persistently absent SEN/ALN pupils was highest for those with school maintained IDP provision at 36.2% and lowest for the those with school action provision at 24.3%. The percentage of all SEN/ALN pupil that were persistently absent is 27.1%.

Quality and methodology information

Definitions

Local authority maintained schools

Schools maintained by the local authorities. The authorities meet their expenditure partly from council tax and partly from general grants made by the Welsh Government.

Welsh medium schools

Primary schools include Welsh medium, dual stream and transitional schools. Middle and secondary schools include Welsh medium and bilingual schools. For further information please see these [guidance notes](#).

English medium schools

Includes English medium and English with significant Welsh.

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Independent schools

Schools which charge fees and may also be financed by individuals, companies or charitable institutions.

Nursery schools

Age under 5.

Primary schools

Ages 3/4 to 10.

Middle schools

Ages 3/4 to 16/18.

Secondary schools

Ages 11 to 16/18.

Special schools

Special schools, both day and boarding, provide education for children with ALN or SEN who cannot be educated satisfactorily in mainstream schools.

Additional learning needs (ALN) and special educational needs (SEN)

A child has special needs if they have learning difficulties which requires special educational provision to be made for them. A learning difficulty means that the child has significantly greater difficulty in learning than most children of the same age or that the child has an impairment or health condition or is using British Sign Language and needs different educational facilities from those that the school generally provides for children. Pupils with special educational needs may have Statements issued by the local authority or may have their needs identified by the school. In the latter case they come under one of two further categories: School Action or School Action Plus.

Pupils with statements

Pupils for whom the Authority maintains a statement of special educational needs under Part iv of the Education Act 1996. A statement may be issued by the local authority after assessment of a child's needs.

School Action

When a class or subject teacher identifies that a pupil has special educational needs they provide interventions that are additional to or different from those provided as part of the school's usual curriculum.

School Action Plus

When the class or subject teacher and the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator are provided with advice or support from outside specialists, so that alternative interventions additional or different to those provided for the pupil

through 'School Action' can be put in place. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator usually takes the lead although day-to-day provision continues to be the responsibility of class or subject teacher.

Individual Development Plans

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are statutory plans created under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, which came into force on 1 September 2021. A learner may have either a school maintained IDP or a local authority maintained IDP.

Free school meals

Pupils are eligible for **free school meals** if their parents or guardians are in receipt of certain means-tested benefits or support payments.

Universal primary free school meals

As part of the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, **all primary school children in Wales will get free school meals by 2024**. The rollout began in September 2022 with most local authorities delivering free school meals to Reception aged children from the start of the autumn term (September 2022) and extending the offer to years 1 and 2 no later than the start of the summer term (April 2023).

Whilst this rollout of free school meals to those not previously eligible for them has started, the data presented in this release does not reflect the total number of pupils receiving free school meals in January 2023. Instead, it includes only the number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals if their parents or guardians are in receipt of certain benefits (as reported in previous years) or

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those who are transitionally protected. Please see the [free school meal information guide](#) for full details of eligibility criteria and benefits.

Transitional protection for free school meals

On 1 April 2019 the Welsh Government introduced a new transitional protection for free school meals policy. This was brought in to ensure that pupils have their free school meals protected during the Universal Credit rollout period.

This protection applies to individual pupils and will continue until the end of their current school phase, being the end of primary school or end of secondary school.

Any pupil that was eligible for free school meals on the introduction of the policy on 1 April 2019 should also be transitionally protected. In addition, any pupil that has become eligible at any point during the Universal Credit rollout under the new eligibility criteria should also be transitionally protected.

The FSM analysis in this release only includes pupils who are eligible through the means tested criteria. Those eligible through TP or UPFSM are not included.

Changes to special educational needs data following the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018

The [Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021 \(the ALN Code\) and regulations](#) came into force on 1 September 2021 to ensure children and young people aged 0 to 25 can access additional support to meet their needs that is properly planned for and protected, with learners at the heart of the process.

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Children are moving from the special educational needs (SEN) system to the additional learning needs (ALN) system in groups over 3 years, to ensure enough time for nurseries, schools, pupil referral units and local authorities to discuss the support needed and to prepare plans.

Implementation of the ALN Code has taken place in partnership with education transformation leads, delivery partners and education establishments, with a programme of learning and development, and creation of new statutory roles in local authorities, schools, and the health service.

The 2022 schools census represented the first submissions from dedicated ALN Coordinators across Wales, as part of the Implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

Analysis of the data, along with feedback from local authorities suggests that the fall in ALN/SEN pupils in 2022 is due to a systematic review by schools of their ALN/SEN registers in readiness for the rollout of the ALN system. Those pupils with low level needs, who were not identified as having a recognised ALN/SEN, were removed from the register.

Schools were also asked to stop using the 'General learning difficulties' category and to reassess an appropriate category of need for such pupils. This category had become a catch-all for those requiring catch up support, with minor needs and/or where multiple needs existed, instead of its original intent, which was to capture learners awaiting assessment. This has led to some pupils being removed from the register if they were identified as not having ALN/SEN. The 'General learning difficulties' category will be removed from the 2023 schools' census.

Additionally, many pupils on School Action Plans (those requiring the least amount of special educational provision) have been removed from the ALN/SEN register. This was either because their needs were short term, but they remained on the register, or they do not require provision additional to, or different from,

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that which is provided for other learners, that can be addressed as part of holistic provision.

Welsh Government will continue to monitor the numbers of learners with ALN/SEN throughout ALN system implementation and work with our partners to ensure the data presents an accurate reflection of the numbers and categories of learners with ALN/SEN in Wales, and to ensure that their needs are being met.

Types of absence

All (or 'overall') absences comprise those which are authorised and unauthorised:

- An authorised absence is an absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes instances of absence for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided (e.g. illness, family bereavement or religious observance).
- An unauthorised absence is an absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences.

Note that pupils undertaking approved and supervised educational activities conducted away from the school (e.g. work experience or educational visits) are deemed to be present at the school.

Sources of official data on attendance at maintained schools in Wales

Prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic we collected and published attendance data annually. This annual data set was collected in line with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and is designated as National Statistics.

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Absenteeism from secondary schools was usually published in August, **absenteeism from primary schools** in December and an additional bulletin on **absenteeism from schools by pupil characteristics** followed in February.

The data collections underpinning these outputs were suspended at the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020. There is no data from these collections for the 2019/20, 2020/21 or 2021/22 school years. This release presents the results from the recommencement of these annual collections from the 2022/23 school year onwards.

To inform our policy response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic we started collecting daily management information on attendance in schools from September 2020 onwards. This data is extracted directly from school management information systems and is not validated or verified in any way with the schools and data is not always available for every school on every day. It is not National Statistics and is of lower quality than the annual data presented in this release. However, it is useful in looking at overall levels of absence and trends at the Wales level and looking at patterns between pupils with different characteristics e.g., free school meals. **Attendance at maintained schools** has been published weekly since September 2020.

Key differences in data collected on school attendance before and during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

In October 2022 we published a summary release on **attendance before and during the pandemic**. This looked at the key differences between the annual and weekly data collections and detailed information on those differences can be found in that release.

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Attendance data for the 2022/23 school year

This release contains fully quality assured attendance data to National Statistics standards for secondary schools for the 2022/23 school year.

We have also published a weekly release of the management information during the 2022/23 school year leading to an overlap in the time period covered by the two collections. Our advice is that users should use the data in this release as far as possible and only refer to the data in the weekly release if the information needed cannot be found or produced from this annual data set.

Table 1: Comparison of annual attendance data and weekly management information for secondary schools in the 2022/23 school year [Note 1]

Year Group	Annual data	Weekly management information [Note 1]	Difference
7	90.6	90.4	0.2
8	88.4	88.1	0.3
9	87.2	88.9	0.3
10	86.6	86.2	0.4
11	84.4	84.1	0.3

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23, [Attendance Data - Management Information](#)

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[Note 1] This data is from the 7 June 2023 release

The table shows overall attendance for secondary schools by year group from September 2022 to May 2023. It shows that both the annual and weekly collections produce consistent results with the greatest difference for year 10 pupils at 0.4 percentage points.

The above table confirms that at the Wales level both collections for 2022/23 are producing consistent and comparable results. However, it is likely that due to the way the weekly data are collected and the lack of validation that there would be greater and more significant differences at below the Wales level.

National Statistics status

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 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 Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics 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. The designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in July 2010 following a **full assessment against the Code of Practice**.

It is Welsh Government'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

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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.

Relevance

These statistics are used both within and outside the Welsh Government. Some of the key users are:

- ministers and the Senedd Research in the Senedd
- members of the Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament
- education policy in the Welsh Government
- other areas of the Welsh Government
- Estyn
- the research community
- students, academics, and universities
- individual citizens and private companies

These statistics are used in a variety of ways. Some examples of these are:

- advice to ministers
- to inform the education policy decision-making process in Wales
- to inform Estyn during school inspections
- the education domain of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation
- to assist in research in educational attainment

Accuracy

The Welsh Government works closely with schools and local authorities in order to ensure all data are validated before tables are published. Data are collated into an electronic return and submitted to the Welsh Government through DEWi,

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a secure online data transfer system developed by the Welsh Government. Various stages of automated validation and sense-checking are built into the process to ensure a high quality of data.

In addition, a table is sent to each local authority containing a summary of the data for all their maintained secondary schools which they are asked to check.

Timeliness and punctuality

DEWi was available for uploading files on 24 May 2023, with mainstream secondary and middle schools asked to submit attendance data for every pupil aged between 5 and 15 on roll at the school from the start of September 2022 to the late May bank holiday in 2023. Schools and local authorities were then asked to validate their data within a validation period.

Accessibility and clarity

This Statistical First Release is pre-announced and then published on the Statistics section of the Welsh Government website. The data will also be published on [My Local School](#), a website designed to open up access to school data for parents and all others with an interest in their local school.

Comparability and coherence

Pupil-level absence data were collected from maintained secondary schools for the first time in 2007/08. The definitions and calculations involved in the collection have not changed, so comparability over time has not been affected.

Here is the latest available data for:

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England

[Statistics: pupil absence \(Department for Education\)](#)

Scotland

[Weekly school attendance \(Scottish Government\)](#)

Northern Ireland

[Education statistics \(Department of Education, Northern Ireland\)](#)

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid on 16 March 2016

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Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the wellbeing goals and associated technical information is available in the [Wellbeing of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.

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For more information refer to our [accessibility statement](#).

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