



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION, DOCUMENT

# Persistent absenteeism from secondary schools: September 2022 to August 2023

Data on persistent absence in Welsh maintained secondary and middle schools for pupils aged 11 to 15 over the entire 2022/23 academic year, using the definition of being absent for more than 10% of school sessions.

**First published:** 5 March 2024

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# Introduction

On **19 October 2023** we published data on absenteeism from secondary schools which included data on persistent absence using the historical definition of being absent for more than 20% of school sessions.

Following that release, the Welsh Government released new **guidance on improving school attendance** and **announced a change to the statistical definition of persistent absence** from missing 20% of sessions to missing 10% of sessions. This release presents data on persistent absence from secondary schools using this new definition. **Similar data for primary schools was published on 7 February.**

The collection of this annual attendance data set 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. Therefore, it doesn't 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.**

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## Main points

- Using the 10% threshold, the percentage of Secondary school-aged pupils that were persistently absent has more than doubled to 40.1% between 2018/19 and 2022/23
- Using the 10% threshold, 64.3% of Secondary school-aged pupils eligible for FSM were persistently absent in 2022/23, compared with 33.9% of Secondary pupils ineligible for FSM.
- Using the 10% threshold, 49.0% of year 11 pupils were persistently absent, compared with 31.2% of year 7 pupils, in 2022/23.

## Persistent absence

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

Following the change in definition announced in October 2023 persistent absence is defined as being absent for 10% of the most common number of required sessions. So, if most pupils are required to be in school for 300 half-day session in the year, the threshold for persistent absence was 30 sessions. These sessions need not be continuous for a pupil to be considered persistently absent.

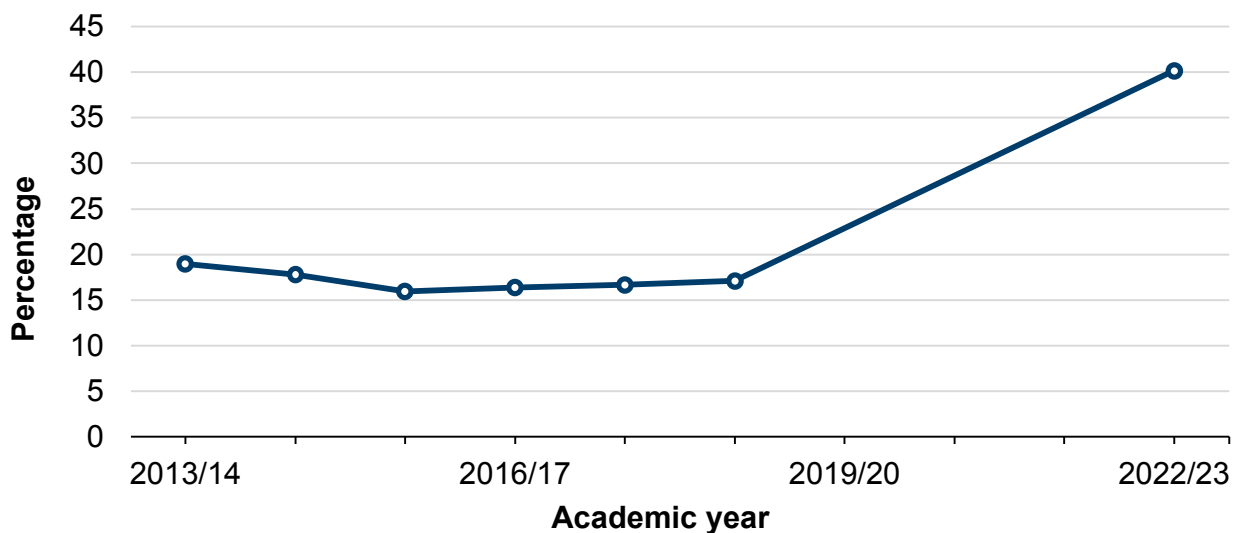
For Secondary schools, the threshold for 10% persistent absence in 2022/23 is 30 sessions. All figures in this release use this 10% threshold, additionally, the spreadsheet accompanying this release includes data on the 20% threshold. The 20% threshold data is identical to data published on 19 October 2023.

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**Figure 1: Percentage of Secondary school-age pupils persistently absent (10% threshold), 2013/14 to 2022/23 [Note 1]**



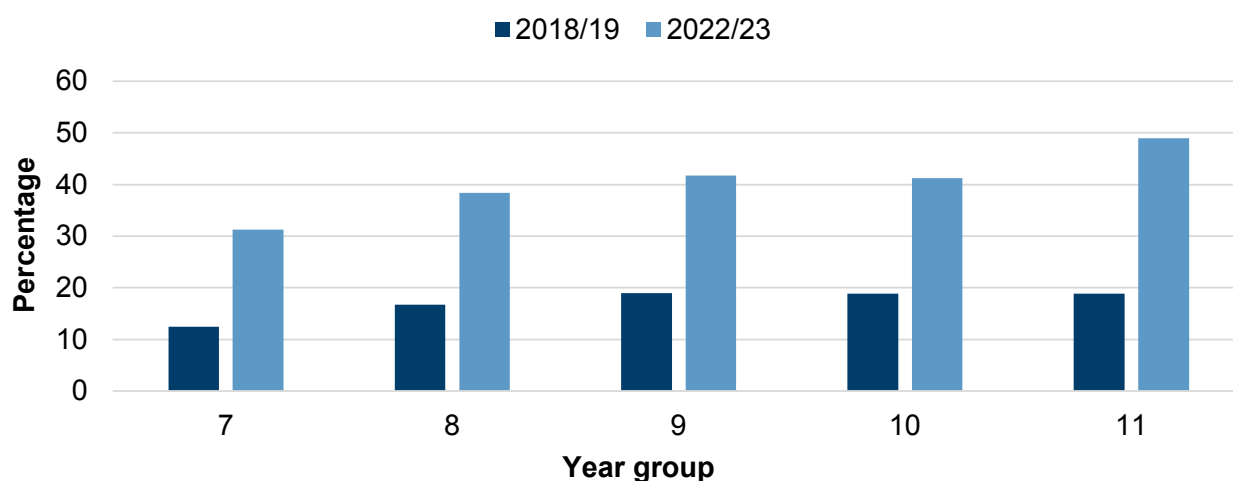
Description of Figure 1: A line graph showing that the percentage of persistently absent (10% threshold) secondary school age pupils stayed between 15.9% and 19.0% between 2013/14 and 2018/19. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, persistent absence (10% threshold) has more than doubled between 2018/19 and 2022/23 to 40.1%.

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

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

## Persistent absence by year group

**Figure 2: Percentage of pupils persistently absent (10% threshold) by year group, 2018/19 and 2022/23**



Description of Figure 2: A bar chart showing the percentage of persistently absent pupils by year group between 2018/19 and 2022/23 has at least doubled in most cases.

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

In 2018/19 the maximum of persistent absence for all secondary school year groups was no greater than 6.5 percentage points, compared to 17.7 maximum percentage points in 2022/23.

Year 11 pupils have the highest rates of persistent absence, with 49.0% of pupils persistently absent during 2022/23.

At 2.6 times its 2018/19 percentage, Year 11 has the highest relative increase in persistent absence following the COVID-19 pandemic. At 2.2 times its 2018/19 percentage, Year 10 has the lowest relative increase.

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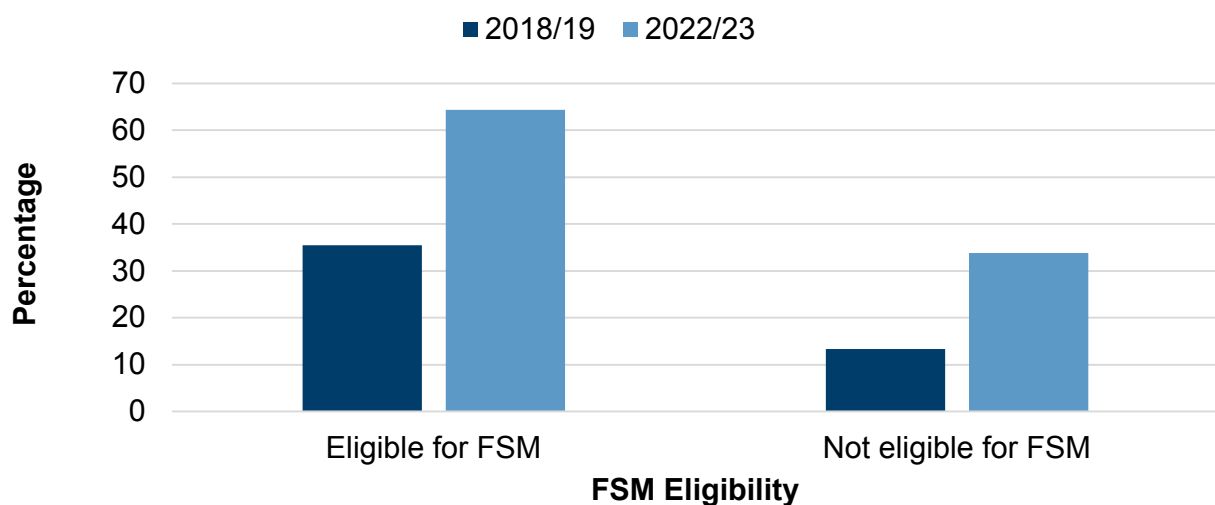
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Year 7 has the lowest rate of persistent absence over 2022/23, with 31.2% of pupils persistently absent.

## 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 30.5 percentage points.

**Figure 3: Percentage of pupils persistently absent (10% threshold) by FSM, 2018/19 and 2022/23**



Description of Figure 3: A bar chart showing percentage of persistent absence has almost doubled for pupils eligible for FSM and more than doubled for ineligible pupils between 2018/19 and 2022/23.

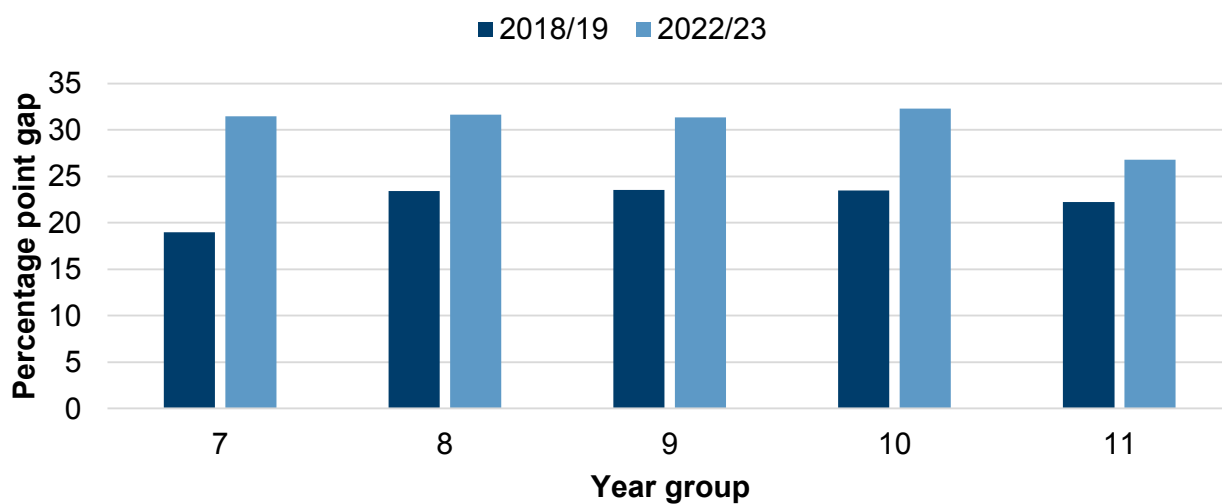
Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

Persistent absence has increased amongst for both pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM. The gap between pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM has increased. The percentage of persistently absent pupils eligible for FSM is almost twice as high than the equivalent for pupil's 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 4: FSM gap in percentage of pupils persistently absent (10% threshold), by year group, 2018/19 and 2022/23**



Description of Figure 4: A bar chart showing the gap in persistent absence between pupils eligible and ineligible for FSM for each year group. The gap is



higher in 2022/3 than in 2018/19 for all year groups and is over 30 percentage points for years 7 to 10 in 2022/23.

Source: Attendance Data Collection: Secondary 2022/23

The FSM gap for each year group has increased between 2018/19 and 2022/23. It is over 30 percentage points for years 7 to 10 in 2022/23. The gap is largest for year 10 pupils at 32.3 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 COVID-19 pandemic.

Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, the percentage of pupils that were persistently absent has risen from:

- 17.0% to 41.6% for female Secondary school-aged pupils
- 17.2% to 38.8% for 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 COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2022/23 the ethnic background with the lowest percentage of persistent absence was Chinese or Chinese British (at 7.7%). The ethnic background with highest percentage of persistent absence was Traveller (at 87.8%).

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# Persistent absence by Special Educational Needs/ Additional Learning Needs (SEN/ALN)

There was an increase in persistent absence between 2018/19 and 2022/23 for pupils with all different levels of SEN/ALN provision. In 2022/23 51.6% of Secondary school-aged pupils with an SEN/ALN provision were persistently absent compared to 38.2% without an SEN/ALN provision.

## 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.

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

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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Statements and plans such as individual education plans (IEPs) and learning and skills plans (LSPs) are being replaced with a new plan called an individual development plan (IDP). The terms and data on 'Pupils with statements', 'School Action Plus', and 'School Action' will no longer be used or collected when transition and implementation of the ALN system is complete.

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

During transition children and young people are reported in one of four categories while the two systems run in parallel.

## **Individual Development Plans**

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are statutory plans created under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, for learners determined to have additional learning needs. A learner may have either a school maintained IDP or a local authority maintained IDP.

## **Pupils with statements**

Pupils where the authority maintains a statement of special educational needs under Part iv of the Education Act 1996. A statement may previously have been issued by the local authority after assessment of a child's needs.

## **School Action Plus**

When the class or subject teacher and the Special Educational Needs Co-

ordinator were previously provided with advice or support from outside specialists, so that alternative interventions additional or different to those provided for the pupil through 'School Action' could be put in place. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator usually took the lead although day-to-day provision was the responsibility of class or subject teacher.

## School Action

When a class or subject teacher previously identified that a pupil had special educational needs they provided interventions that were additional to or different from those provided as part of the school's usual curriculum.

## 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.

## 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 Secondary 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

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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 not included.

## 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 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. [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.

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The data collections underpinning these outputs were suspended at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. There is no data from these collections for the 2019/20, 2020/21 or 2021/22 school years.

To inform our policy response to the 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 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.

## 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

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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

Year Group	Annual data	Weekly management information	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](#)

[Note 1] This data is from the 02 August 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

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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 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.

This section provides a summary of information on this output against five dimensions of quality: Relevance, Accuracy, Timeliness and Punctuality, Accessibility and Clarity, and Comparability.

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## 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, 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.

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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. Barring the 10% persistent absence threshold, 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:

## **England**

[Statistics: pupil absence \(GOV.UK\)](#)

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## Scotland

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

## Northern Ireland

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

# Statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

All of our statistics are produced and published in accordance with a number of statements and protocols to enhance trustworthiness, quality and value. [These are set out in the Welsh Government's Statement of Compliance.](#)

These official statistics demonstrate the standards expected around trustworthiness, quality and public value in the following ways.

## Trustworthiness

The published figures provided are compiled by professional analysts and statisticians who work under the supervision of the Welsh Government Chief Statistician to ensure that the statistics, data and explanatory material are presented impartially and objectively.

The administrative data underlying these statistics consist of personal data. These data are processed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018. We have put in place a thorough governance process to ensure that the data are securely managed and reviewed before release.

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## Quality

The attendance and pupil characteristics data in this release originate from administrative systems in maintained schools in Wales. We work closely with the commercial suppliers of such systems to ensure that the correct data is provided to us and that on entry validation is both comprehensive and intuitive. Following the on-entry validation, the data is validated on upload to us, which includes additional cross school validation. A final stage of validation involves sign off by local authority officers during a dedicated validation window.

The statistics in this output are quality-assured prior to publication, including a fully independent analysis by a second qualified analyst. All stages in the collection, validation and production of these statistics are supported by professional statisticians from the Government Statistical Group.

These data sources are considered to be of sufficient quality to support this analysis.

## Value

High attendance rates are vital in ensuring our pupils learn effectively. Our evidence tells us that attendance rates fell significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic and have not since recovered to pre-pandemic levels. To tackle these lower levels of attendance the Minister for Education and Welsh Language has established a **National Attendance Task Force** to provide strategic direction to improve school attendance and learner engagement.

The statistics in this release will support the work of the task force and keep users informed about current rates of attendance and how they differ by pupil characteristics. These statistics complement other official statistics on **absenteeism in secondary schools** and the management information

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on [attendance in maintained schools](#) that is published weekly.

The figures have been published in an accessible ODS format which can be shared and reused widely and which complies with the [Government Analysis Function guidance on Releasing statistics in spreadsheets](#). Data are clearly presented in each table, with the spreadsheet also including a cover sheet listing each table. The commentary and notes in the release have been developed to try to make the information as accessible as possible to the widest range of users.

## 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

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

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

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**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.

## Contact details

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