

Absenteeism from secondary schools, 2017/18: Notes

Context

Policy/Operational

All children who are receiving an education at school during the normal school day must be placed on the attendance register. An attendance register records every pupil's attendance at every session the school is open to pupils and must be called twice a day: at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. The register must show whether each pupil is present, engaged in an approved educational activity off-site (treated as present if they attend that provision), or absent. In addition, where a pupil of compulsory school age is absent, the register must also show whether the absence was authorised or unauthorised.

Improving attendance continues to be a key Ministerial priority. Evidence suggests that absence impacts on an individual learner's attainment. The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring young people are given every opportunity to fulfil their potential including by ensuring regular attendance at school. The [Attendance Analysis Framework](#) continues to play an important role in the context of school improvement, providing a standardised and robust approach to data analysis.

Data source and coverage

The Pupils' Attendance Record is made up of pupil-level attendance data collected electronically from maintained schools, care of their local authority (LA). School-level attendance data from independent schools are collected via a voluntary, paper-based survey. The same form is sent to maintained special schools via their local authorities and it is mandatory for special schools to respond. All collections are carried out by Knowledge and Analytical Services within the Welsh Government.

The absenteeism information in this Statistical First Release relates to the percentage of half-day sessions missed by pupils due to unauthorised and overall absence from the start of the academic year to the late May bank holiday. Pupils of compulsory school age (5-15) registered at maintained secondary schools and pupils aged 11-15 registered at special and independent schools are included in the data (ages as on 31st August before the start of the academic year). Attendance data were received from 277 schools with pupils within these age groups in the 2017/18 academic year.

The free school meal data are collected through the January Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) and is based on a 3-year average. Where schools have merged, the 3-year average for the new school includes free school meal data for the previous schools for the year or years that they were open prior to merging.

"Male" and "female" are now used instead of "boy" and "girl" to be consistent with the data collection system and other outputs.

Key quality information

Relevance

The statistics are used both within and outside the Welsh Government to monitor educational trends and as a baseline for further analysis of the underlying data. Some of the key users are:

- Ministers and the Members Research Service in the National Assembly for Wales
- Education Directorate
- Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales
- other areas of the Welsh Government
- My Local School
- The Department for Education in England
- Other government departments
- Local authorities and schools
- Wales Audit Office
- The research community
- Students, academics and universities
- Individual citizens and private companies and the media

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

- advice to Ministers
- the all-Wales education core data packs (the replacement for the National Pupil Database)
- LA and school comparisons and benchmarks
- to inform the education policy decision-making process in Wales
- to inform Estyn during school inspections
- international benchmarking
- the education domain of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation
- to assist in research into 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.

In addition, a table is sent to each local authority containing a summary of the data for all of their maintained secondary schools which they are asked to check. A similar table is sent to local authorities to check their special schools' data. In the past a letter was sent to special schools directly to ask them to check a summary of their data.

Timeliness and punctuality

DEWi was available for uploading files on 25 May 2018, with mainstream secondary schools asked to submit attendance data for every pupil aged between 5 and 15 on roll at the school from the start of September 2017 to the late May bank holiday in 2018. Mainstream middle schools, maintained special schools and independent schools were asked to submit attendance data for pupils aged between 11 and 15 on roll from the start of September 2017 to the late May bank holiday in 2018. 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](#). It is accompanied by more detailed tables on [StatsWales](#), a free-to-use service that allows visitors to view, manipulate and download data.

Comparability and coherence

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

In 2007/08 it became compulsory for maintained secondary schools to provide gender information whilst remaining voluntary for special and independent schools. 271 schools (97.8 per cent) supplied gender data in 2017/18, compared to 276 schools (97.9 per cent) in 2016/17. It is not advisable to compare year on year changes prior to 2007/08 in absenteeism by gender as different schools responded each year.

Since 2013/14, absence percentages are calculated by dividing the number of half-day sessions absent by the total number of sessions that pupils were on roll in the school and multiplying by 100. Because of the change in methodology, care should be taken when comparing special and independent schools' data before and after 2013/14.

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.

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.

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven well-being 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 Well-being goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before the National Assembly. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being 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 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 well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

Further details

The document is available at: <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/absenteeism-secondary-schools/?lang=en>

A similar release relating to absenteeism from maintained primary, special and independent schools in Wales during the 2016/17 academic year entitled '[Absenteeism from Primary Schools, 2016/17](#)' was released on 14 December 2017. Absenteeism in primary schools for 2017/18 will be published in December 2018.

England publishes absenteeism data for primary and secondary schools in the statistical release entitled '[Pupil absence in schools in England: 2016 to 2017](#)'.

Scotland publishes [absenteeism data for primary and secondary schools](#) in supplementary dataset tables.

Northern Ireland publish [primary and post-primary \(secondary\) school absenteeism data](#).

Accessing the data electronically

The data behind some of the charts and tables in this release can be found on [StatsWales](#) (a free-to-use internet service that allows visitors to view, manipulate, create and download tables and charts).

Further data relating to these tables or attendance data for individual schools is available on request; please e-mail school.stats@gov.wales.

School level data is also available on [My Local School](#) (Updated in early 2018).

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