

**Research Briefing**

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# Annexe: school attendance statistics, March 2020 to early March 2021 (England)

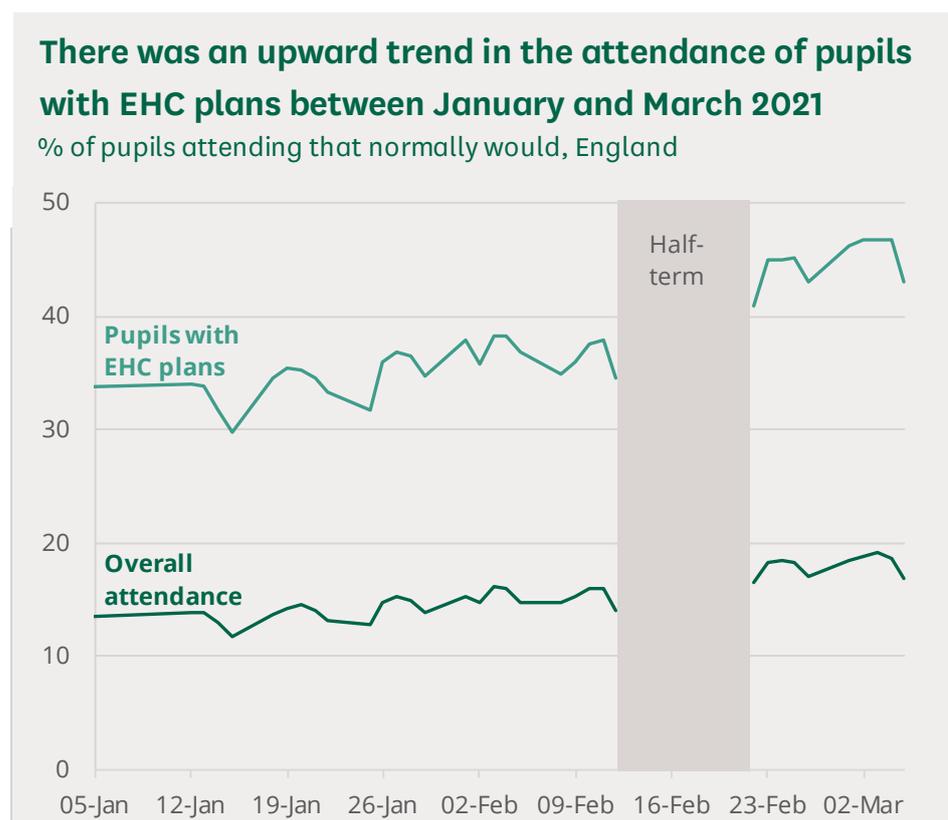
## 1

### Attendance during the January to March 2021 restrictions

During this period, average state-funded pupils' attendance rates followed an upward trend. Fluctuations were relatively small over the period, with attendance rates reaching a high of 19.1%, and a low of 11.7%.

Unsurprisingly, the attendance of pupils with EHC plans was much higher than the average during this period and also followed an upward trend over the closure period. The attendance rate for pupils with EHC plans is shown in the chart below, with overall attendance rates across all pupil groups, for comparison. The attendance rate for pupils with an EHC plan fluctuated within a larger range (between 29.8% and 46.8%, over the period) than was the case for pupils overall.

The DfE also publishes data on the percentage of pupils with a social worker who are attending (not shown in the chart below) – rates for this group closely tracked the rate for pupils with Education Health and Care (EHC) plans.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Education Health and Care plan is known as an EHCP. Attendance rates were affected by poor weather conditions in some areas between 8-11 February.

Source: Department for Education, [Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#), 23 April 2021.

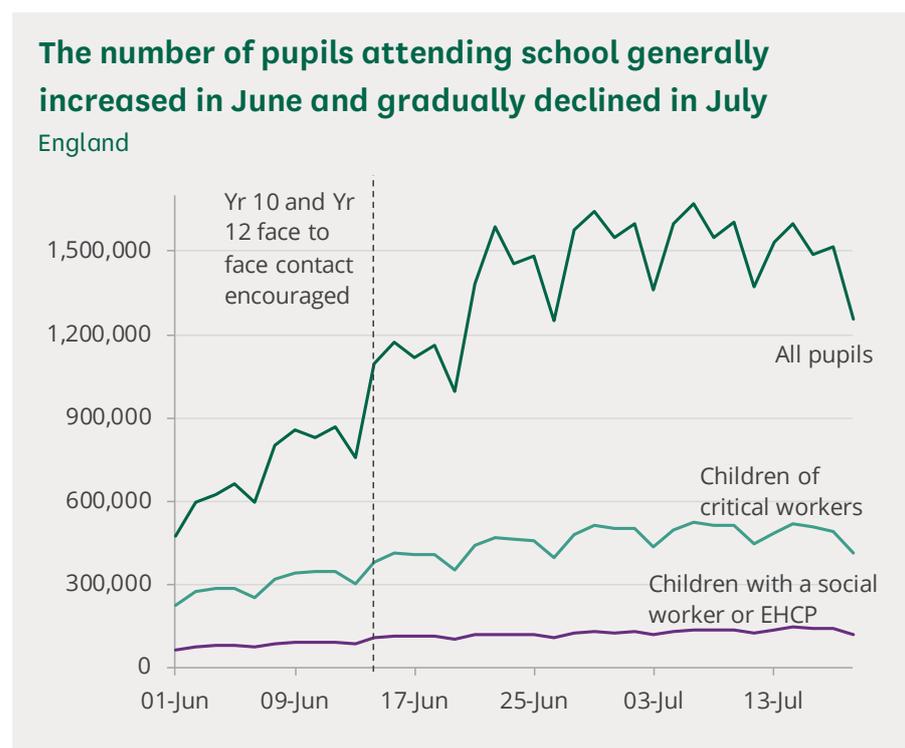
## 2

### School attendance rates during the partial 2020 summer reopening

Government guidance as of 1 June encouraged nursery, reception, year 1, and year 6 pupils to attend school in person, in England. From 15 June schools were encouraged to provide some face to face contact time for year 10 and year 12 pupils.

Between 1 June and 17 July, the response rate of schools to the DfE’s request for daily attendance data has varied between 55% and 77% of establishments.

After 17 July the survey which collects attendance data was closed for the Summer holidays.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. From 1 June the year groups encouraged to attend school were reception, year 1, and year 6. From 15 June schools have been encouraged to provide some face-to-face contact time in school for those in year 10 and year 12. Education Health and Care plan is known as an EHCP.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 17 July 2020. DfE](#)

## 2.1 Summary Statistics

As of Friday 17 July 2020 (the last data available before the Summer holiday period):<sup>1</sup>

- Around 1,253,000 pupils attended schools in England. This was an estimated 13.1% of pupils that would normally attend. This was a decrease from an estimated 14.4% the previous week.
- Around 14,300 schools were open to nursery, reception, year 1 or year 6 (an estimated 71% of the schools that are normally open to these year groups). This was a decrease from 77% for the previous week.
- Around 3,200 schools were open to year 10 or year 12 (an estimated 55% of the schools that are normally open to these year groups). This was a decrease from 65% the previous week.

<sup>1</sup> [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 17 July 2020. DfE](#) (p5-6)

- Around 20,500 schools in total were open (an estimated 83% of schools that are normally open). This was a decrease from 89% the previous week.

## 3 School attendance rates prior to 1 June 2020

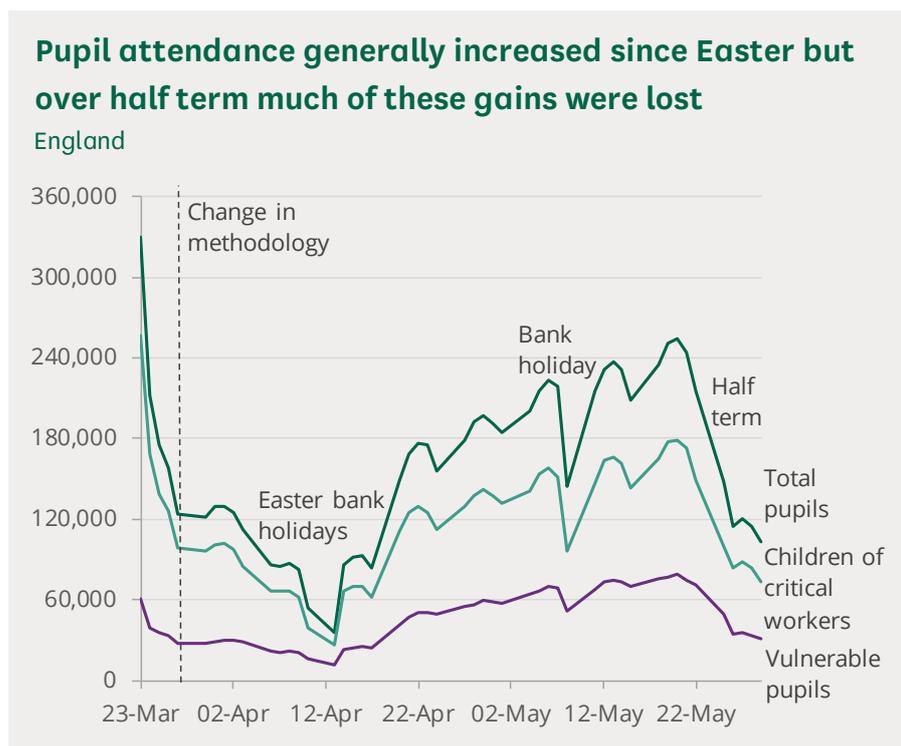
From Monday 23 March, the Department for Education (DfE) [asked schools to report](#) daily attendance figures for vulnerable children, and the children of critical workers. Due to the reasons outlined above it is not appropriate to compare attendance data from before and after 1 June.

Over this comparable period (27 March to 29 May), the response rate of schools varied between 12% and 74% (the low response rate was on 25 May, a bank holiday during what is usually half term).

### 3.1 Summary Statistics

As illustrated in the following chart, in the first two weeks of the comparable period (27 March to 29 May), the number of pupils attending school in person followed a downward trend in general, but this reversed rapidly after the Easter bank holidays among both children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils. Attendance increased (excluding the dip on the Early May Bank holiday) and peaked at around 254,000 pupils on 20 May. The following week was what is usually half term. During this week attendance levels declined and erased much of the increases in attendance since Easter.

In addition to these trends, attendance levels also tend to fluctuate within the week. In general, the highest numbers of pupils attended in the middle of each week.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. The methodology for the adjustment changed from Friday 27 March, this means like for like comparisons before this time cannot be made. Caution should be taken for the results of 1 May, 13 May, 15 May. Due to technical issues with the DfE sign-in, lower rates of establishments were able to record attendance. The response rates were also lower on the bank and school holidays. The DfE cautions that vulnerable children attendance figures are underestimates.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020. DfE](#)

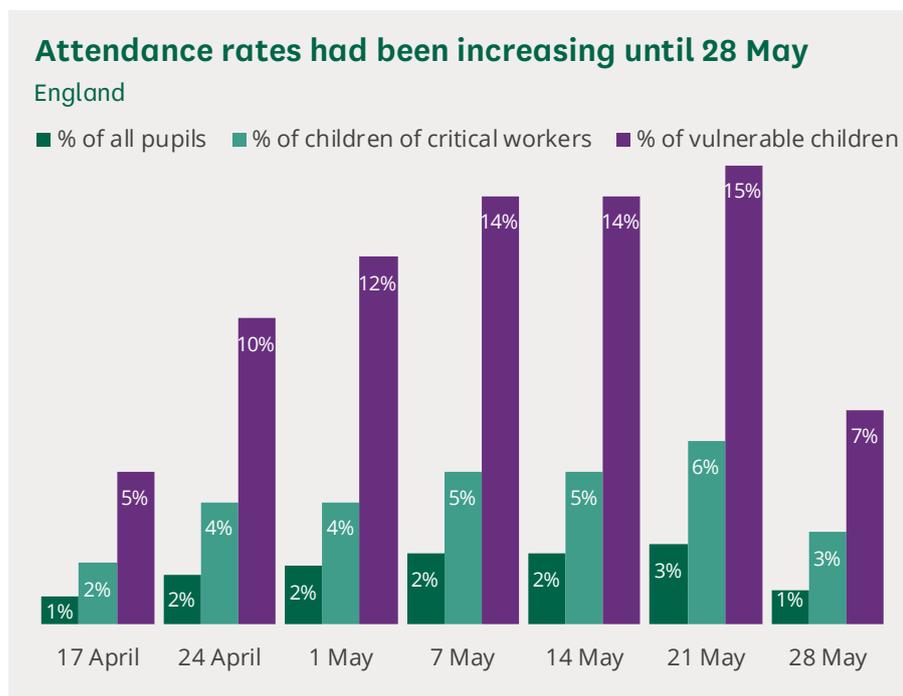
The number of pupils attending school in person expressed as a proportion of the children that would normally attend followed similar trends as above. Overall it remained consistently low. During the comparable period (27 March to 28 May) this proportion ranged between 0.4% and 2.7%.

The DfE also estimated the number of pupils attending school expressed as a proportion of those that are eligible to attend on a weekly snapshot basis since Friday 17 April. The most recent snapshot within the comparable period was as of 28 May, which recorded lower rates of attendance from the previous week.

As shown in the following chart, between Friday 17 April and Thursday 28 May, the proportion of both vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers attending school had been increasing gradually, until 28 May (which would usually have been half term).

Tom Hunt MP stated in an Education Select Committee [oral evidence session](#) that the uptake of school places among children of critical workers and

vulnerable pupils was lower than the Government’s initial expectations of “around 20%”.<sup>2</sup>



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Due to technical issues with the DfE sign-in, on 1 May only 14% of establishments were able to record attendance. The DfE cautions that attendance rates of vulnerable children are underestimates.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE](#)

A breakdown was also published by setting type on a weekly snapshot basis since 30 April, the most recent snapshot within the comparable period was 28 May. Unsurprisingly, pupil attendance rates were highest in non-mainstream settings and lowest in mainstream settings for older pupils. The attendance rate varied between less than 0.5% in further education and secondary school settings, and 20% in special post 16 institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Education Select Committee, [The impact of covid19 on education and children’s services, 22 April 2020, \(Q16\)](#)

<b>Pupil attendance was highest in non-mainstream settings</b>			
28 May 2020, England			
	Establishment Response rate	% of open establishments	% of pupils attending
Special post 16 institution	21%	49%	20%
Alternative provision	17%	40%	2-4%
Special	25%	48%	3%
State-funded nursery	21%	41%	3%
State-funded primary	36%	53%	2%
Independent school	10%	40%	1%
State-funded secondary	40%	60%	<0.5%
Further Education	15%	28%	<0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>1%</b>

Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Figures are ranked in the table by % of pupils attending. The DfE estimated a range of pupil attendance for alternative provision to communicate the uncertainty involved. This is due to pupils at these settings often being enrolled in other settings as well.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE](#)

## 4 Infection and outbreak data - evidence from second half of summer term 2020 (England)

Public Health England (PHE) calculated Coronavirus infection rates for staff and students attending all education settings in England between 1 June and 31 July. PHE highlighted that because their findings were from a period when schools were only partially reopened (with stringent infection control measures and while attendance was not mandatory) they may not be generalisable to the conditions when schools fully reopen. In addition, the small sample of open secondary schools meant their findings were “not likely to be generalisable to secondary schools”.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1 June – 31 July period, there were a total of 198 confirmed cases (70 students and 128 in staff members) across all educational settings in England.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Same as above (page 12)

<sup>4</sup> Public Health England, [SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in educational settings: cross-sectional analysis of clusters and outbreaks in England](#), 23 August 2020 (page 3)

PHE also published both infections and attendance data for certain settings (early years, primary and secondary schools). This means that the estimated proportion of pupils infected can be calculated for these types of settings.

During the period there were a total of 174 confirmed cases (67 students and 107 in staff members) in early years, primary and secondary schools. The vast majority of cases occurred in early years and primary schools (65 students) and a minority in secondary schools (2 students).<sup>5</sup>

The number of confirmed cases expressed as a proportion of the average number of students attending these settings was less than 0.01%, and for teachers it was around 0.02%.<sup>6</sup>

The proportion of these settings with at least one infection was around 0.17%. However, this does not take into account the possibility that during the period subsequent infections occurred at the same setting.<sup>7</sup>

These findings suggested that overall infections and outbreaks were “uncommon” across all educational settings, especially compared to other institutions such as hospitals, care homes, prisons and certain workplace settings. This is in line with findings from other countries.<sup>8</sup>

The study also found there was a “strong correlation” between the number of outbreaks and regional COVID-19 incidence which “emphasises the importance of controlling community transmission to protect educational settings”.<sup>9</sup>

## 5 School absence and attendance rates in the autumn 2020 term

The chart below shows the percentage of pupils reported as attending state-funded schools since the beginning of the autumn 2020 term.

Average state-funded pupils’ attendance was relatively stable between the start of the autumn term and October half term, reaching a high of 90.1% and a low of 86.0%. Attendance rates fluctuated more widely after October half term and generally followed a downward trend, particularly in the last two weeks of term. Between half term and the end of term, attendance reached a high of 89.6% and a low of 76.9%.

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<sup>5</sup> Public Health England, [SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in educational settings: cross-sectional analysis of clusters and outbreaks in England](#), 23 August 2020 (Table 1)

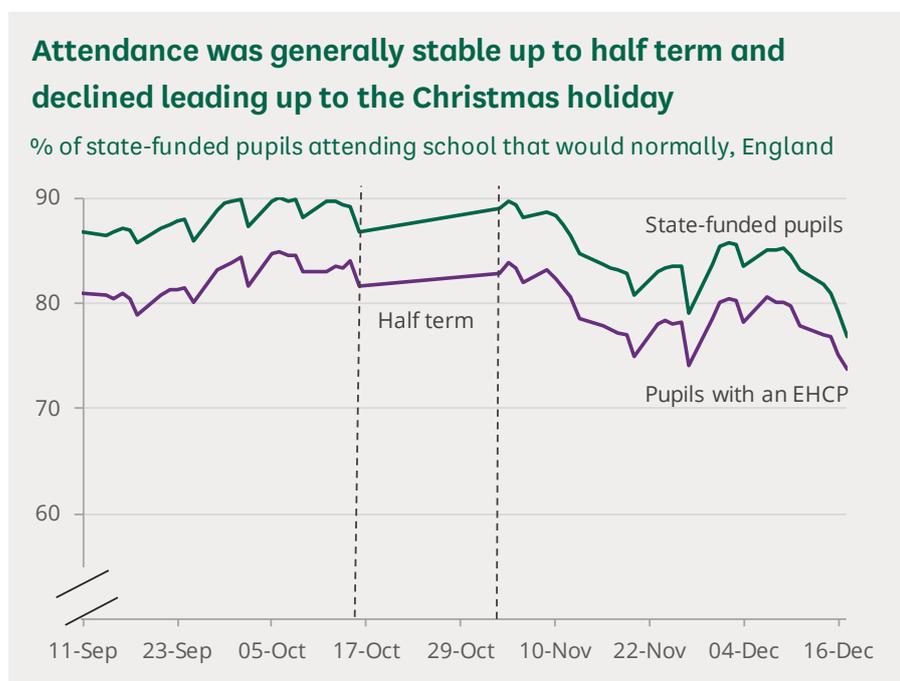
<sup>6</sup> As above (Table 1)

<sup>7</sup> As above (Table 1)

<sup>8</sup> As above (page 10)

<sup>9</sup> As above (page 2)

The attendance of pupils with EHC plans was consistently lower than the average and followed a similar directional trend over the autumn 2020 term. Attendance ranged between 78.9% and 84.9% before half term and 73.7% and 83.9% after half term. Again, the attendance rate for pupils with a social worker very closely tracked the rate for pupils with EHC plans.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Education Health and Care plan is known as an EHCP.

Source: Department for Education, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 13 January 2020](#)

During the autumn term the average attendance rates masked some differences between typical attendance levels in different types of schools. For the majority of the period attendance in state-funded primary schools was higher than in state-funded secondary schools, which in turn was higher than state-funded special schools and state-funded alternative provision.

As at 16 December 2020 attendance at state-funded primaries was around 86%. For secondaries it was 72%, whilst for special schools it was 73% (an example of a minority of dates when attendance was higher than in secondary schools), and for alternative provision it was 50%.

## 5.1 Further breakdown on reasons for absence

The information collected from schools by the DfE has changed over time; from 12 October 2020, it began collecting more detailed information on reasons for absence. Not all absence from school will be due to COVID-19-related reasons.

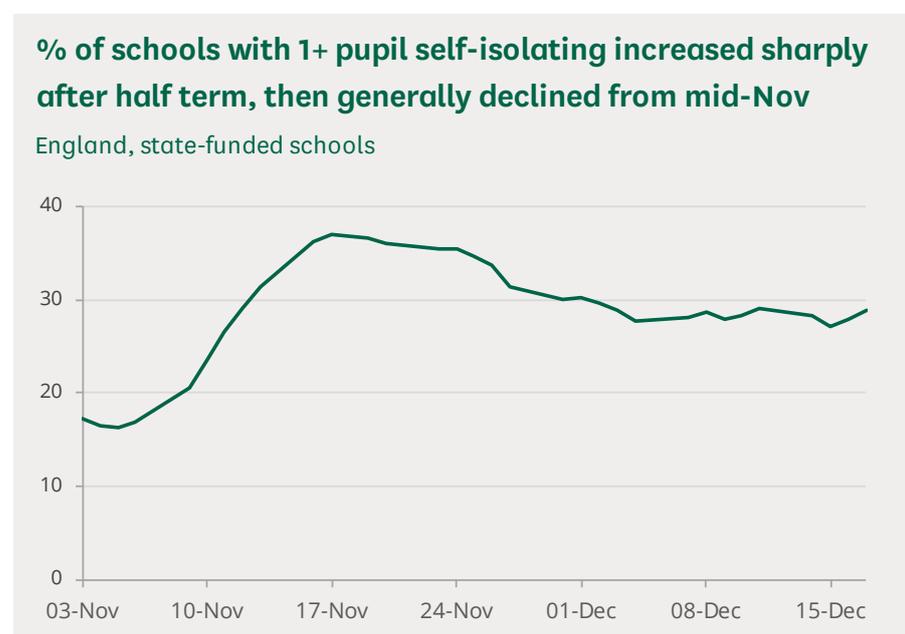
As at 16 December 2020, the DfE estimated that around 9-11% of state-funded school pupils did not attend for COVID-19-related reasons. This included:

- **0.2% of pupils with a confirmed case** of coronavirus – similar to the previous week’s rate, and **0.5% of pupils with a suspected case** of coronavirus – up slightly from the previous week.
- **7.1-8.3% of pupils self-isolating due to potential contact** with a case of coronavirus, up slightly from the previous week.
- **1.7% of pupils in schools closed** for COVID-19 related reasons – up from 0.6% the previous week.<sup>10</sup>

## 5.2 Students self-isolating because of close contact with COVID-19 at school

The chart below shows the proportion of schools reporting one or more pupils self-isolating because of contact with a COVID-19 case within the school.

3 November 2020 was the first recorded data after October half term when 17.3% of schools had 1+ pupil self-isolating due to exposure within the school community. This rate then increased sharply reaching a peak of 37.0% on 17 November. Subsequently the rate generally followed a downward trend but did not return to the levels recorded in early November.



<sup>10</sup> Department for Education, [Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#), 15 December 2020

Note: Figures relate to pupils self-isolating because of contact with a confirmed case within the school community. No comparable data exists for the period prior to half-term.

Source: Department for Education, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 13 January 2020](#)

## Size of groups sent home

There were differences in the typical size of groups sent home to self-isolate, for primary and secondary schools.

As at 16 December 2020, the median group size for primary schools was around 14-15% of pupils on roll, whilst at secondary schools it was around 7-8% of pupils on roll.

The DfE reports that, on average, these proportions equate to the size of a year group in primary schools and just under half a year group in secondary schools.

As at 16 December 2020, the median number of pupils isolating per confirmed case **was 23 for secondary schools, and 29 for primary schools.**

Schools not reporting any pupils with a confirmed case of Covid-19 were excluded from this analysis.<sup>11</sup>

## 5.3

## Regional and local authority-level data

Part-way through the Autumn term the DfE published backdated data on COVID-19-related absence and attendance at the regional and local authority level for the first time.

Data at the LA level is not adjusted for non-responses from schools and so may not be representative. Given considerable differences in response rates between LA areas (from 27% to 100%) and variation in the number of schools in particular areas, this means we should be cautious about 'ranking' local authorities by attendance.

At the regional level:

- All regions showed attendance increasing or remaining relatively stable until the October half term. Afterwards, attendance decreased in all regions, before recovering (albeit not fully) in late November and December, and then falling again in the last week of term.

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<sup>11</sup> Source: Department for Education, [Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak, 15 December 2020](#).

- The South West, South East and East of England had the highest attendance throughout most of the autumn term, but in December attendance fell in the SE, East of England and London (falling particularly sharply in the last week of term).
- From mid-September until October half term, the North West had the lowest attendance, switching to the North East, West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber in the weeks directly after half term.
- By early December, London and the South East had the lowest rates of attendance.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Source: Department for Education, [Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak, 15 December 2020](#).

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