School Attendance Data
from Primary and Post-Primary Schools

2015/16

[under Section 21(6) of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000]

Analysis and Report to the Child and Family Agency

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Executive Summary

Response rates of schools to annual attendance reporting requirements were high in the primary and post-primary sectors in 2015/16

- While remaining high, response rates fell from 99.7% in 2014/15 to 99.0% in 2015/16 in primary and from 99.4% to 98.3% in post-primary.

General Non-Attendance for 2015/16 was up on the previous two years for both primary and post-primary schools

- The percentage of overall student/days lost through absence in a school year was 5.9% in primary schools and 7.9% in post-primary schools. These figures represent an increase of 0.3 percentage points in primary schools and of 0.2 percentage points in post-primary schools. This follows a similar increase between 2013/14 and 2014/15.

- It is estimated that, on average, about 59,900 students miss school each day, consisting of approximately 32,600 primary and 27,300 post-primary students. This equates to a loss of 11 school days for a primary school student from the required 183-day school year and 13 days for a post-primary student from the 167-day school year.

Figures for Twenty-Day Absences increased in primary schools but decreased in post-primary schools

- In primary schools, 12.3% of pupils were absent for twenty days or more over the school year. This represents an increase of 1.2 percentage points compared to the previous year, following on from an increase of 0.7 percentage points between 2013/14 and 2014/15. The 2013/14 figure for primary was the lowest for the five year period covered in this report (2011/12 - 2015/16). The figure for twenty-day absences in post-primary schools was 14.9% in 2015/16 (1.3 percentage points lower compared to 2014/15). The 2015/16 post-primary twenty-day absences figure was the lowest for the five year period.

- Based on population numbers this represents approximately 68,000 primary school students, and 51,400 post-primary students missing 20 days or more during the school year.

Non-Attendance remains higher in special schools

- In the primary school sector non-attendance remains substantially higher in special schools and higher in mainstream schools with special classes.

Non-Attendance in primary schools higher in urban areas

- Rates of non-attendance in primary schools are higher in towns and cities than they are in rural areas. This is particularly apparent in terms of the percentage of pupils absent for twenty days or more where rates of 20-day absences are about double the rural rate. This pattern remains stable year-on-year. The increase in general non-attendance and in 20-day absences in 2015/16 was apparent in both rural and urban schools.

Non-Attendance higher in schools serving disadvantaged families

- In primary schools non-attendance is generally higher in schools involved in the School Support Programme (SSP) under DEIS. The increase in general non-attendance in primary schools in 2015/16 appeared in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

- In primary schools non-attendance is not simply related to whether or not schools serve disadvantaged families. There continues to be an important urban/rural dimension in non-attendance. General non-attendance and twenty-day absences are higher in urban schools outside the SSP (5.9% and 12.5%) than they are in rural schools within the SSP (5.5% and 9.7%).

- In post-primary schools all forms of non-attendance were higher in schools within the SSP under DEIS.

Expulsions are rare

- Only 19 expulsions were reported in primary schools in 2015/16 (21 in 2014/15). The corresponding figures in post-primary schools showed an increase of 62 in 2015/16 (195 students, accounting for 0.057% of students).

Suspensions occur mostly in post-primary schools

- 3.9% (13,383) of post-primary students were suspended in 2015/16. This represents a small increase from 3.8% in 2014/15 but still below the figures of 4.1% in 2013/14 and 4.5% in 2012/13. Just 0.3 % (1,438) of primary pupils were suspended in 2015/16, a slight increase on the previous year (1,264, 0.2%).

Irish non-attendance figures similar to those in Northern Ireland and the UK for primary schools but higher in post-primary

- Non-attendance in Irish primary schools was 5.4% of student/days in 2015/16 (removing data for special schools and schools with special classes) compared to between 3.9% and 5.1% for Northern Ireland, England and Wales. Non-attendance for Irish post-primary schools was 7.9% of student days, compared to between 5.0% and 6.5% in neighbouring jurisdictions.

Annual Attendance Reports 2014/15 and 2015/16: Main Statistics

Response rate of schools to the Annual Attendance Report

	2014/15	*2015/16*
Primary	**99.7%**	**99.4%**
Post-primary	**99.0%**	**98.3%**

Percentage of student/days lost

	2014/15	*2015/16*	
Primary	**5.6%**	**5.9%**	*Student-level*[1]
Post-primary	**7.7%**	**7.9%**	

Percentage of twenty-day absences

	2014/15	*2015/16*	
Primary	**11.1%**	**12.3%**	*Student-level*
Post-primary	**16.2%**	**14.9%**	

Number and percentage of expulsions

	2014/15	*2015/16*
Primary	21	19
	0.004%	**0.003%**
Post-primary	133	195
	0.040%	**0.057%**

Number and percentage of suspensions

	2014/15	*2015/16*
Primary	1,264	1,438
	0.2%	**0.3%**
Post-primary	12,727	13,383
	3.8%	**3.9%**

[1] Student-level figures, directly interpretable as percentages of students, are used in Section 1 of this report.

Introduction

Data on non-attendance in primary and post-primary schools are collected by the Child and Family Agency through the *Annual Attendance Report* (AAR). Data for the years 2003/04 through to 2014/15 are the focus of the earlier reports (Weir (2004), Ó Briain (2006), Mac Aogáin (2008), Millar (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016)). This report presents data for the academic year 2015/16 and links to the data reported previously.

The report is in three sections:

1 *Non-Attendance from 2011/12 to 2015/16*, integrating the 2015/16 Child and Family Agency data with summary statistics for the five-year period, and a discussion of issues relating to the data set as a whole.

2 *Non-Attendance in Primary Schools in 2015/16*, which provides data for non-attendance by school location (urban / rural), SSP status of the school under DEIS, county by county figures, and non-attendance in special schools.

3 *Non-Attendance in Post-Primary Schools in 2015/16*, which provides data for non-attendance by school type (community / comprehensive, secondary, vocational), SSP status of the school under DEIS, and county by county figures.

Section 1

Non-Attendance Data, 2011/12 to 2015/16

1.1 Response Rate

Table 1.1 shows the number of primary and post-primary schools in the state, together with the number of pupils in those schools for the years 2011/12 to 2015/16. Data for 2011/12 through 2015/16 were provided directly to the Educational Research Centre (ERC) by DES Statistics Section. Post-primary figures exclude schools that cater for post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) students only and PLC students in other post-primary schools. There has been a year-on-year increase in the numbers of pupils/students in the primary and post-primary school sectors since 2011/12. In primary schools there has been an increase of over 35,000 pupils over the period. In post-primary schools the number of students has increased by over 20,000.

Table 1.1
Number of primary and post-primary schools and students, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Primary		*2011/12*	*2012/13*	*2013/14*	*2014/15*	*2015/16*
	Schools	3,300	3,281	3,274	3,265	3,252[2]
	Students	516,458	526,064	536,051	540,559	553,102
Post-Primary						
	Schools	701	695	696	704	710[3]
	Students	322,519	326,628	332,569	338,615	344,998

Table 1.2 shows the numbers and percentages of schools responding to the *AAR* for 2011/12 through 2015/16. Response rates for 2015/16 were high for primary and post-primary schools but not quite as high as 2013/2014 or 2014/15. Twenty-one primary schools and twelve post-primary schools failed to provide data for 2015/16.

[2] Ten primary schools were excluded from the population: nine hospital schools and one school catering for pupils aged between three and six years. These 10 schools accounted for 278 pupils.
[3] Twenty-five post-primary schools were excluded from the population as they cater for adult students or students taking PLC or VTOS courses. These 25 schools accounted for 19,555 students. A further 14,202 PLC or VTOS students in 129 other schools were excluded from the analysis.

Table 1.2
Number of schools, number of schools responding, and response rate to the Annual Attendance Report, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Primary	*2011/12*	*2012/13*	*2013/14*	*2014/15*	*2015/16*
N schools	3,300	3,281	3,274	3,265	3,252
N schools responding	3,269	3,257	3,266	3,255	3,231
Response rate	**99.1%**	**99.3%**	**99.8%**	**99.7%**	**99.4%**
Post-Primary					
N schools	701	695	696	704	710
N schools responding	695	684	695	697	698
Response rate	**99.1%**	**98.4%**	**99.9%**	**99.0%**	**98.3%**

1.2 Results of the *Annual Attendance Report*

The core of the Child and Family Agency data-set consists of four variables. It records

(1) 'Total number of days lost through student absence in the entire school year',

(2) 'number of students who were absent for 20 days or more in the school year',

(3) 'total number of students expelled in respect of whom all appeal processes have been exhausted', and

(4) 'total number of students who were suspended'.

The numbers of schools listed in the tables below sometimes differ slightly from one table to the next. This is because schools providing data for one form of non-attendance may have had missing or unusable data for another.

1.2.1 Non-Attendance

The data provided by the first *AAR* question are generally referred to as 'non-attendance' in this report, in order to distinguish this from the more specific forms of non-attendance associated with 20-day absences, expulsions and suspensions. In this section it is always expressed as the percentage of available student/days that are lost through absence. Non-attendance figures for 2011/12 to 2015/16 are presented in bold type in Table 1.3. Above them, are the numbers of students, student/days, days in the school year, and student/days lost, from which they are calculated, together with the number of schools providing data.

Table 1.3
Number of schools, number of students, number of school days per year, number of student/days, number of student/days lost, and percentage of student/days lost for primary and post-primary schools 2011/12 to 2015/16

Primary	*2011/12*	*2012/13*	*2013/14*	*2014/15*	*2015/16*
N schools	3,261	3,244	3,264	3,254	3,229
N students	512,032	521,265	534,940	539,707	550,351
N school days per year	183	183	183	183	183
N student/days	93,701,856	95,391,495	97,894,020	98,766,381	100,714,233
N student/days lost	5,449,588	5,672,077	5,317,857	5,540,969	5,921,963
% student/days lost	**5.8%**	**5.9%**	**5.4%**	**5.6%**	**5.9%**
Post-Primary					
N schools	687	677	690	695	684
N students	317,556	319,021	329,516	334,665	337,511
N school days per year	167	167	167	167	167
N student/days	53,031,852	53,276,507	55,029,172	55,889,055	56,364,337
N student/days lost	4,065,761	4,096,418	4,102,713	4,328,061	4,456,355
% student/days lost	**7.7%**	**7.7%**	**7.5%**	**7.7%**	**7.9%**

The information contained in the rows of the table is as follows:

N schools refers to the number of schools providing usable data. The figure is therefore slightly smaller than the figure for *Schools Responding* (to the questionnaire) in Table 1.2. Note that the latter, in turn, is smaller than the *Schools* figure reported in Table 1.1, which refers to every school in the country.

N students gives the official DES enrolment figures for the schools in question, in the year in question.

N school days per year is 183 in primary schools and 167 in post-primary schools.

N student/days is the product of *N students* and *N school days per year*. In a primary school with 100 students it would be 18,300. It gives the maximum number of daily attendances that could be recorded in the school for the year. This figure would be achieved only if every student was present on every school day.

N student/days lost is the figure requested by the first item on the *Annual Attendance Report*, 'individual student absences'.

% student/days lost is the same as *student/days lost*, except that it is now expressed as a percentage of *N student/days*, the maximum attendance that is possible. Thus *% student/days lost* is *N student/days lost* divided by *N student/days*, multiplied by 100 to convert the resulting proportion to a percentage.

The data show that 5.9% of pupil days were lost due to absence in primary schools in 2015/16 (an increase of 0.3% on 2014/15) and that 7.9% of student days were lost in

post-primary schools (up 0.2% from 2014/15). Both the primary and post-primary school non-attendance in 2015/16 are the highest for the five year period, up from a low in 2013/14.

1.2.2 Twenty-Day Absences

The number and percentage of students who were absent for 20 days or more during the 2015/16 school year are summarised in Table 1.4, along with corresponding figures from 2011/12 to 2014/15.

Table 1.4
Number of schools, number of students, number of students absent for 20 days or more, and percentage of students who were absent for 20 days or more for primary and post-primary schools 2011/12 to 2015/16

Primary	*2011/12*	*2012/13*	*2013/14*	*2014/15*	*2015/16*
N schools	3,269	3,257	3,266	3,255	3,229
N students	513,520	523,036	535,095	539,760	549,978
N 20-day absences	56,782	60,663	55,445	60,002	67,902
% students with 20-day absences	**11.1%**	**11.6%**	**10.4%**	**11.1%**	**12.3%**
Post-Primary					
N schools	695	684	695	695	695
N students	321,543	321,940	332,102	334,394	341,033
N 20-day absences	51,685	49,871	50,999	54,220	50,790
% students with 20-day absences	**16.1%**	**15.5%**	**15.4%**	**16.2%**	**14.9%**

The percentage of pupils who were absent for twenty-days or more lay in the range of approximately 10-12% in primary schools between 2011/12 and 2014/15. The 2015/16 figure represents an increase of 1.2% on the previous year and is the highest for the period shown. The previous highest was 11.6% in 2013/14. In contrast, for post-primary, the 2015/16 figure is 1.3% lower than the previous year. This is the lowest figure in the five year period.

1.2.3 Expulsions

The numbers of expulsions reported by primary and post-primary schools are shown in Table 1.5. Expulsions are rare, particularly in primary schools. To give some sense of scale, about one in every 29,000 primary school pupils was expelled in 2015/16. In post-primary schools there were 62 more expulsions in 2015/16 compared to the year before. This figure is about one in every 1,750 students.

Table 1.5
Number of schools, number of students, number of students expelled, and percentage of students expelled for primary and post-primary schools 2011/12 to 2015/16

Primary	*2011/12*	*2012/13*	*2013/14*	*2014/15*	*2015/16*
N schools	3,269	3,257	3,266	3,255	3,231
N students	513,520	523,036	535,095	539,760	550,675
N expulsions	26	23	23	21	19
% expulsions	**0.005%**	**0.004%**	**0.004%**	**0.004%**	**0.003%**
Post-Primary					
N schools	695	684	695	697	694
N students	321,543	321,940	332,102	335,315	340,589
N expulsions	186	211	146	133	195
% expulsions	**0.058%**	**0.066%**	**0.044%**	**0.040%**	**0.057%**

1.2.4 Suspensions

The numbers of suspensions reported for 2015/16 are shown in Table 1.6, with equivalent figures for 2011/12 to 2014/15. Suspensions are rare in primary schools when compared to post-primary schools (0.3% in primary and 3.9% in post-primary). In percentage terms the figures in primary schools have remained fairly constant, although the 2015/16 figure represents an increase against a low base. The number of suspensions in post-primary schools increased in 2015/16 by 0.1% compared to 2014/15 but the figure is still below those for the previous three years.

Table 1.6
Number of schools, number of students, number of students suspended, and percentage of students suspended for primary and post-primary schools 2011/12 to 2015/16

Primary	*2011/12*	*2012/13*	*2013/14*	*2014/15*	*2015/16*
N schools	3,269	3,257	3,266	3,255	3,231
N students	513,520	523,036	535,095	539,760	550,675
N suspensions	1,280	1,302	1,287	1,264	1,438
% suspensions	**0.2%**	**0.2%**	**0.2%**	**0.2%**	**0.3%**
Post-Primary					
N schools	695	684	695	697	696
N students	321,543	321,940	332,102	335,315	342,018
N suspensions	15,056	14,331	13,473	12,727	13,383
% suspensions	**4.7%**	**4.5%**	**4.1%**	**3.8%**	**3.9%**

1.3 Aspects of Non-Attendance

Non-attendance, defined as the percentage of all student/days lost through absence, needs to be discussed briefly. Twenty-day absences, expulsions and suspensions do not require any further discussion here.

1.3.1 Non-Attendance in the Population and in Schools

Firstly, non-attendance for the entire population of students, which has just been reported on, needs to be distinguished from non-attendance in a particular school. In Section 1 of the report, non-attendance has in all cases been treated as feature of the population of students nationally, and the statistic is computed and presented accordingly, as shown above in Table 1.3. Individual schools do not enter the picture, except for their role in providing the data. Numbers of student/days lost through non-attendance are added up school by school, and only when the total number of student/days lost nationwide has been calculated is non-attendance expressed as a percentage, by dividing by the maximum student/days achievable nationwide in the year in question.

In Sections 2 and 3 of the report, on the other hand, non-attendance is calculated as a separate figure for each school. These figures are close to 0% in some schools and can be 20% or more in others. This rescaling, relative to the size of the school, provides an index that shows to what extent each school is affected by the phenomenon of non-attendance. Such school-based indices of non-attendance are essential in establishing relationships between non-attendance and other school-based measures of educational disadvantage, such as retention rates and academic achievement. They are also needed to link non-attendance to aspects of disadvantage described only at school level, as will be done in the following two sections of this report. In this section, however, non-attendance refers to the percentage of students absent from school each day.

1.3.2 Precision of Non-Attendance Figures

Non-attendance is rounded to one decimal place in this report. This is the usual practice in the international literature, consistent with the view that two decimal places would overstate the level of precision that is to be expected in national non-attendance data. Nonetheless, Table 1.7 shows that a difference of even one tenth of one percent in non-attendance nationally amounts to a very substantial numbers of student/days saved or lost. Thus the reported figure of 5.9% for non-attendance in primary schools in 2015/16 suggests an increase of 0.3% in the figure of 5.6% reported for 2014/15 (Table 1.3), implying a loss of about 300,000 student days in attendance between 2014/15 and 2015/16

The question arises whether the data are accurate enough to be interpreted in this way, or whether changes of the magnitude of 0.3% should be treated as random fluctuations due to error in the data. Analyses by Mac Aogáin (2008) and Millar (2010) suggest that error in the data due to inconsistency is considerable and therefore small changes (± 0.1%) are likely to be attributable only to error. Annual data are now checked for year-on-year consistency within schools and where abnormally large changes occur the Child and Family Agency contact the school to confirm or correct the return. This process should, in time, reduce inconsistency and improve the accuracy of attendance data.

Table 1.7
Differences in percentage student/days lost nationally, expressed as changes in numbers of student/days, 2015/16

	Primary	*Post-Primary*
% student/days lost	5.9%	7.9%
N students	553,102	344,998
N school days	183	167
N student/days	101,217,666	57,614,666
0.1% gain/loss in NA as student/days	101,218	57,615

1.3.3 Other Formulations of Non-Attendance Rates

Since non-attendance is reported as a percentage of student/days, where the latter is the product of Total Students and Total School Days, it can be applied directly to either of these figures, as is done in Table 1.8 for the 2015/16 data. When applied in this way, the non-attendance percentage returns figures for

(1) students absent per day (where the *N students absent per day* is calculated as % student/days lost times N students (rounded to the nearest 100), and

(2) days lost per student per year (where *N days lost per student* is calculated as % student/days lost times N school days (rounded to the nearest whole day).

Table 1.8
Re-expressions of non-attendance, 2015/16

	Primary	Post-Primary
% student/days lost	5.9%	7.9%
N students	553,102	344,998
N students absent per day	32,600	27,300
N school days	183	167
N days lost per student	11	13

Section 2

Non-Attendance in Primary Schools, 2014/15

2.1. Non-Attendance by School Type

Pupils with special educational needs may attend special schools or special classes and 'mainstream' classes within 'mainstream' schools. Table 2.1 shows the percentage of available student/days lost through absence for mainstream schools, mainstream schools with special classes, and special schools. The total figures are directly comparable to those shown in Table 1.3, above.

Table 2.1
Percentage of available student/days lost through absence and number of schools by school type, 2014/15 and 2015/16

	2014/15		*2015/16*	
	%	*N schools*	*%*	*N schools*
Mainstream	5.3	2,793	5.4	2,722
Mainstream & special classes	6.5	335	6.5	383
Special	11.1	126	12.1	124
Total	5.6	3,254	5.9	3,229

Pupils in mainstream primary schools were absent for 5.4% of the available days in 2015/2016. The percentage days lost was higher for mainstream schools with special classes (6.5%) and highest in special schools (12.1%). While the figures for 2015/16 are a little higher in mainstream schools the increase was larger in special schools. Mainstream schools with special classes showed no change from 2014/15. Section 2.5 provides additional analysis of non-attendance in special schools.

2.2. Non-Attendance in Urban and Rural Schools

The Child and Family Agency non-attendance data gathered from primary schools were merged with data maintained by the ERC on the same schools. The ERC data are based on a nationwide survey of disadvantage in all mainstream[4] primary schools conducted in 2005. The ERC data include details on school location and level of disadvantage. Special schools were not included in the survey and these schools are not included in the following analyses. A total of 2,851 schools (91.8% of the 3,105 mainstream schools that returned AAR data) were matched for 2015/16. Table 2.2 gives averages for non-attendance, 20-day absences, and suspensions in urban and rural primary schools. Expulsions have not been included because of the low numbers.

[4] Including mainstream schools with special classes.

Table 2.2
Mean percentage and SD of student/days lost, mean percentage of students missing 20 days, and mean percentage of students suspended in urban and rural primary schools, 2014/15 and 2015/16*

	2014/15			*2015/16*		
Non Attendance	*Mean %*	*N schools*	*SD*	*Mean %*	*N schools*	*SD*
Rural Schools	4.7	1,880	1.43	5.0	1,856	2.72
Urban Schools	6.2	1,018	2.10	6.4	995	2.97
Total	5.2	2,898	1.84	5.5	2,851	2.88
20-Day Absences						
Rural Schools	7.0	1,880	7.19	7.7	1,856	6.50
Urban Schools	14.0	1,018	9.44	15.4	993	9.87
Total	9.4	2,898	8.72	10.4	2,849	8.65
Suspensions						
Rural Schools	0.06	1,880	0.35	0.07	1,856	0.50
Urban Schools	0.33	1,018	0.99	0.39	995	1.28
Total	0.15	2,898	0.66	0.18	2,851	0.87

***** Rural location is defined as "A village or rural community – population less than 1499".

Non-attendance in all forms is higher in urban schools. This is in line with the findings for 2014/15 and previously. Twenty-day absences distinguish urban from rural schools much more sharply than general non-attendance does. Suspensions, while uncommon in either school type, are more common in urban schools.

In looking at Table 2.2 it should be remembered that data on absenteeism are here reported at the school level (see section 1.3.1 above). For example, for the 2,851 matched schools in 2015/16 the percentage of days lost was calculated for each school. Then the mean and standard deviation for all schools was calculated. Thus for the 1,856 rural schools the mean percentage of student days lost (*Non Attendance*) per school was 5.0%. The mean percentage of pupil days lost for the 995 urban schools was higher, 6.4%. However, there was some variation within each school type (as measured by the standard deviation), with this spread being greater for urban schools. Much the same is true for the twenty-day absences and suspensions. For the 2,849 schools for which we have data for 2015/16, the mean school figure for the percentage of pupils missing twenty days' schooling was 10.4%. However, there were considerable differences between schools as shown by the large standard deviation (8.65). This means that some schools will have had no pupils absent for twenty or more days while others will have more than one fifth (20%) of pupils missing this number of days.

2.3 DEIS Categories and Non-Attendance

In addition to information on school location, the *AAR* data were linked to levels of socio-economic and educational disadvantage in schools as categorised under the DEIS strategy of the Department of Education and Skills. The DEIS categories can be equated with the amount of assistance received by schools in the School Support Programme (SSP). This yields five categories: (1) Rural not in SSP, (2) Rural in SSP, (3) Urban not in SSP, (4) Urban in SSP Band 2, and (5) Urban in SSP Band 1. SSP schools experience higher levels of disadvantage than non-SSP schools. For urban schools there are two SSP bands, with schools in Band 1 experiencing greater levels of disadvantage.

Figures for non-attendance in the DEIS classification of schools are presented in Tables 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5.

Table 2.3
Mean percentage and SD of student/days lost by DEIS category

		2014/15			*2015/16*		
		Mean %	*N schools*	*SD*	*Mean %*	*N schools*	*SD*
Rural	Not in SSP	4.6	1,571	1.38	5.0	1,559	2.87
Rural	In SSP	5.1	309	1.62	5.5	297	1.62
Urban	Not in SSP	5.7	705	1.77	5.9	697	3.01
Urban	In SSP Band 2	7.0	131	1.66	7.1	124	1.73
Urban	In SSP Band 1	7.8	182	3.81	8.1	174	2.76
	Total	5.2	2,898	1.84	5.5	2,851	2.88

Table 2.4
The mean percentage and SD of students who were absent for 20 days or more by DEIS Category

		2014/15			*2015/16*		
		Mean %	*N schools*	*SD*	*Mean %*	*N schools*	*SD*
Rural	Not in SSP	6.7	1,571	7.07	7.3	1,559	5.80
Rural	In SSP	8.5	309	7.57	9.7	297	9.11
Urban	Not in SSP	11.3	705	7.44	12.5	695	7.67
Urban	In SSP Band 2	18.4	131	8.07	19.5	124	8.70
Urban	In SSP Band 1	21.1	182	12.08	23.7	174	12.44
	Total	9.4	2,898	8.72	10.4	2,849	8.65

A comparison of Tables 2.3 and 2.4, for non-attendance and 20-day absences, shows that both are linked to the DEIS categories. However, 20-day absences display the link more graphically. The two tables also show an important urban/rural dimension to non-attendance. The tables show that non-DEIS urban schools (*Urban Not in SSP*)

had higher levels of non-attendance and twenty-day absences than DEIS rural schools (*Rural in SSP*). Table 2.4 shows a substantial difference in twenty-day absences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. These differences are more pronounced in urban schools.

The overall figures for non-attendance and for twenty-day absences were both higher in 2015/16 than in the previous year. Increases are apparent in all five categories. This follows on from a similar increase between 2013/14 and 2014/15 (Millar, 2016).

The figures for suspensions by DEIS category are given in Table 2.5. As noted above, suspensions are too infrequent in primary schools to give this variable a substantial association with other disadvantage variables. Just over one percent of pupils were suspended in Urban SSP Band 1 schools in 2015/16 (an increase on 2014/15). In Urban Band 2 schools the figure was 0.55% (a small decrease on 2014/15).

Table 2.5
The mean percentage and SD of students suspended by DEIS Category

		2014/15			*2015/16*		
		Mean %	*N schools*	*SD*	*Mean %*	*N schools*	*SD*
Rural	Not in SSP	0.05	1,571	0.32	0.05	1,559	0.35
Rural	In SSP	0.07	309	0.48	0.15	297	0.94
Urban	Not in SSP	0.16	705	0.53	0.16	697	0.47
Urban	In SSP Band 2	0.60	131	1.55	0.55	124	1.33
Urban	In SSP Band 1	0.83	182	1.50	1.17	174	2.52
	Total	0.15	2,898	0.66	0.18	2,851	0.87

2.4. Non-Attendance by Province and County

Table 2.6 shows the data for mean non-attendance, 20-day absences, expulsions and suspensions by area. As elsewhere in this section, the data in table 2.6 are calculated at the school level and then the average non-attendance is reported for all schools in a particular province or county. Absenteeism data are directly comparable although the absolute numbers of students differ between regions. Thus the mean percentage of school days lost was 6.1% in Leinster schools and 5.0% in schools in Ulster (Part of). This difference represents about two school days per year per child. Again from Table 2.6 we see that the mean percentage of pupils per school who were absent twenty-days or more (Abs20) was 13.0% for Leinster and 8.0% for Ulster.

From Tables 2.6 it is apparent that expulsions (Exp) and suspensions (Sus) are very unlikely for any particular school. This reflects the data reported earlier which showed that the number of expulsions and suspensions in primary schools was very low.

Table 2.6 *The mean percentage of student/days lost, 20-day absences, expulsions, and suspensions by county for primary schools 2015/16*

	Mean % Abs.	Mean % Abs20	Mean % Exp.	Mean % Sus.
LEINSTER	6.1	13.0	0.02	0.72
Carlow	6.0	13.3	0.00	0.15
Dublin	6.9	16.5	0.05	1.61
Kildare	5.7	11.7	0.04	0.22
Kilkenny	5.1	8.3	0.00	0.54
Laois	5.7	11.2	0.00	0.21
Longford	5.9	12.0	0.00	0.03
Louth	6.0	13.0	0.00	0.32
Meath	5.3	9.7	0.01	0.10
Offaly	6.4	11.0	0.00	0.13
Westmeath	5.6	11.8	0.01	0.30
Wexford	5.7	11.0	0.00	0.12
Wicklow	5.8	10.7	0.01	0.17
MUNSTER	5.7	11.1	0.00	0.48
Clare	5.6	10.6	0.00	0.19
Cork	5.5	10.5	0.00	0.49
Kerry	5.9	11.6	0.00	0.10
Limerick	6.3	13.8	0.00	1.44
Tipperary N.R.	5.7	10.0	0.00	0.14
Tipperary S.R.	5.2	9.4	0.00	0.30
Waterford	5.6	11.1	0.00	0.27
CONNACHT	5.7	10.3	0.00	0.17
Galway	6.1	11.4	0.01	0.16
Leitrim	5.5	10.2	0.00	0.10
Mayo	5.4	9.5	0.00	0.22
Roscommon	5.4	9.1	0.00	0.14
Sligo	5.3	9.7	0.00	0.14
ULSTER (part of)	5.0	8.0	0.00	0.14
Cavan	5.4	9.1	0.00	0.13
Donegal	5.1	7.9	0.00	0.16
Monaghan	4.6	7.0	0.00	0.08
STATE	5.8	11.4	0.01	0.48

Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 show the county data for student/days lost (Mean % Abs.), 20-day absences (Mean % Abs20), and suspensions (Mean % Sus.) from Table 2.6, along with the comparable data for the previous three years.

In Figure 2.1 two things are apparent. First, the percentage of student days lost within schools is generally higher in counties Dublin and Limerick. Second, the increase in general non-attendance in 2015/16 over 2014/15 is apparent almost nationwide.

Figure 2.2 shows the percentage of students who were absent for 20 days or more by county. It is clear that there is substantial geographical variation. Again, County Dublin stands out as having relatively high non-attendance. Counties Carlow, Limerick, Longford and Louth also have comparatively higher percentages of students being absent for 20 days or more. In contrast, counties Donegal, Kilkenny and Monaghan recorded lower rates of 20-days absences across the four years. The higher rates of absenteeism recorded for 2015-16 are again reflected in the figures here.

The geographical differences for non-attendance are shown most starkly in Figure 2.3, which shows the mean percentage of students suspended within schools by county. Counties Dublin and Limerick stand out as having higher rates of suspensions. There is a noticeable peak for county Monaghan for 2012/13. This may reflect some inaccuracies in the recorded data or specific issues in that particular year. More generally there seems to be some element of an urban/rural divide. Although having markedly lower rates of suspensions than either Dublin or Limerick, counties Cork and Waterford have somewhat higher rates than other counties, although these rates are generally comparatively low.

Figure 2.1: *The mean percentage of student/days lost by county for primary schools 2012-13 to 2015-16*

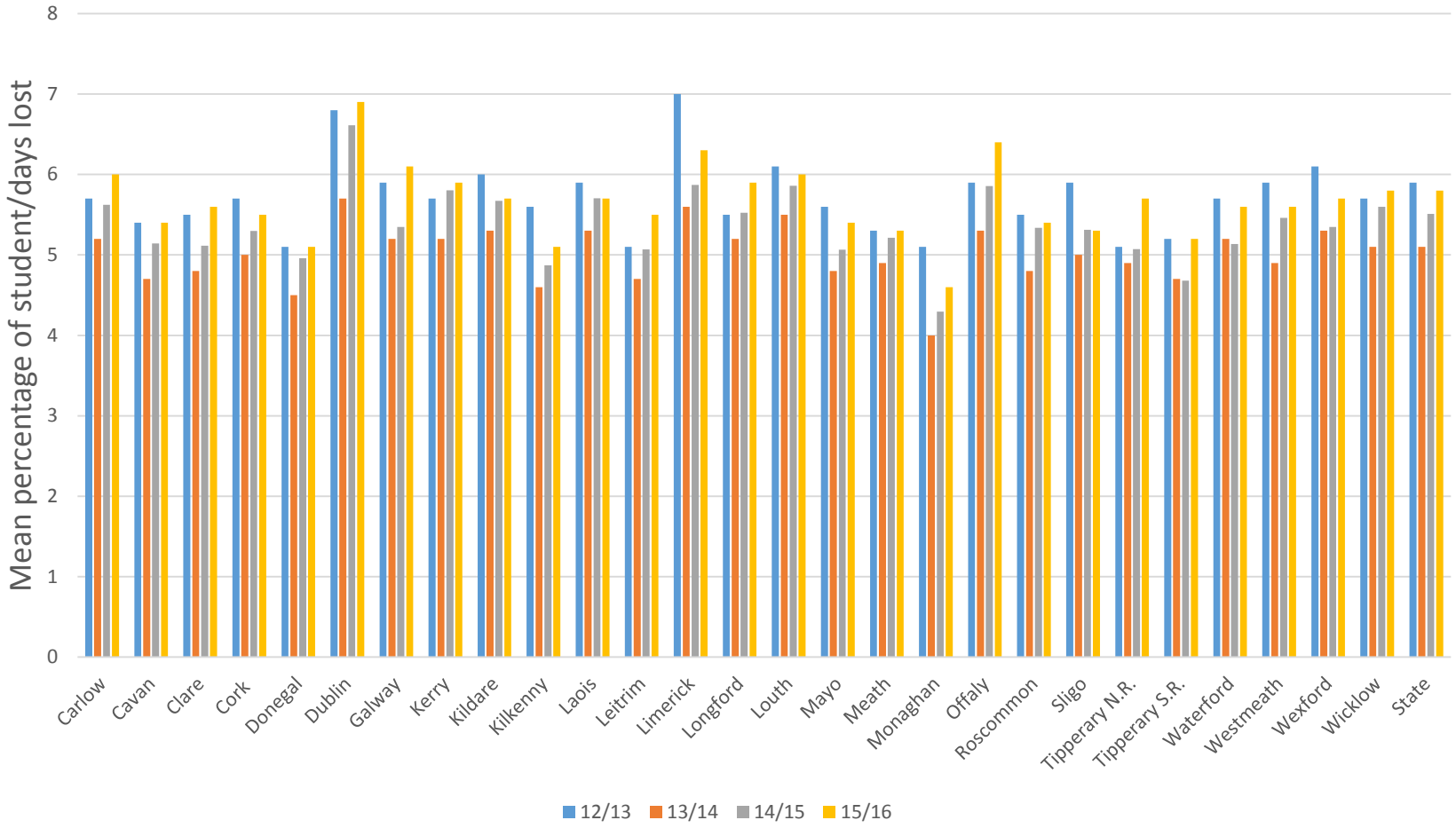


Figure 2.2: *The mean percentage of 20-day absences by county for primary schools 2012/13 to 2015/16*

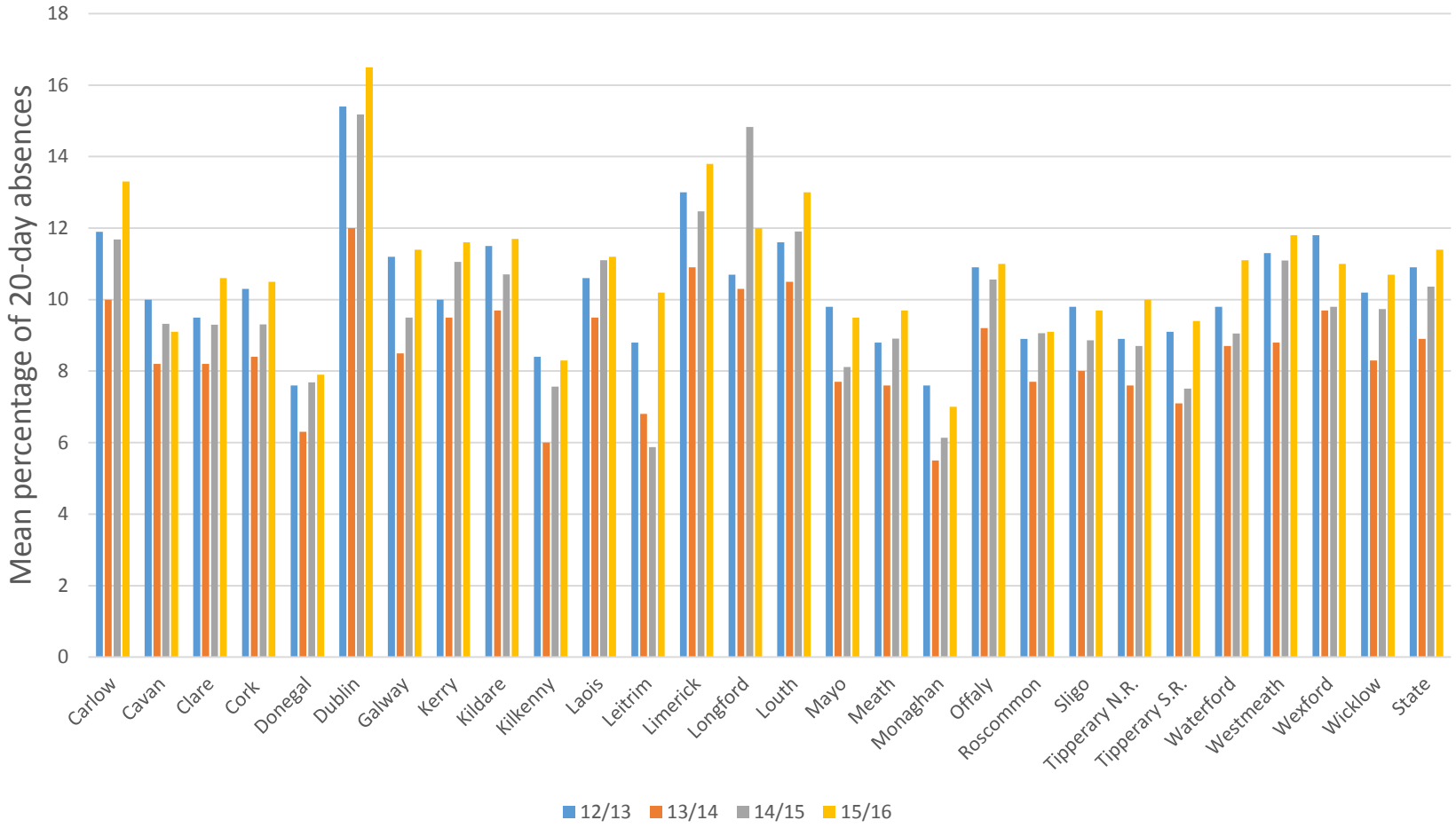
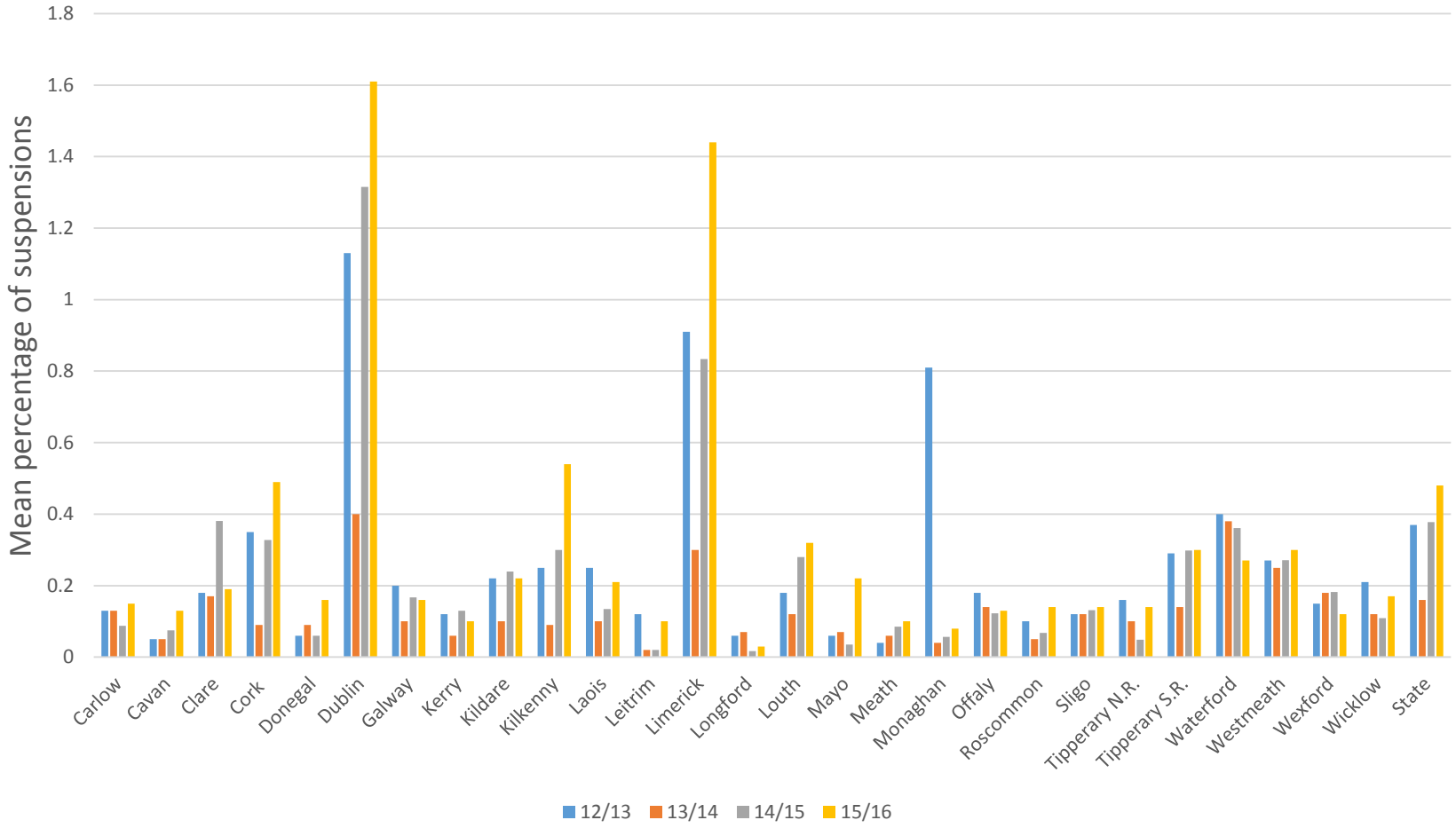


Figure 2.3: *The mean percentage of suspensions by county for primary schools 2012-13 to 2015-16*



2.5. Non-Attendance in Special Schools

Non-attendance in special schools was reported along with other schools in the primary school sector in Section 1 of this report. However the pattern of non-attendance in special schools is sufficiently different to warrant a more detailed analysis. A total of 126 of the 128 special schools (98.4%) returned AAR data[5].

Table 2.7 shows the mean percentage of student days lost and the mean percentage of 20-day absences in primary schools, primary schools with special classes, and special schools. It is apparent that general non-attendance is about twice as high in special schools when compared to mainstream primary schools, and the rate of 20-day absences is more than three times higher in special schools. Unfortunately the data do not give us any information as to why this might be the case. However, we can assume that multiple factors, including the nature of the special needs, are involved. A report by Banks, Maître and McCoy (2015) found that 9% of young people with intellectual or learning disabilities were absent from school for at least three months over a school year compared to 25% of young people with Emotional, Psychological and Mental Health (EPMH) disabilities.

General non-attendance was higher in primary schools and special schools in 2015/16 when compared to the previous year. 20-day absences were higher in all school types.

Table 2.7:
The mean percentage of student/days lost and mean percentage of 20-Day Absences in primary schools, primary schools with special classes, and special schools 2014/15 and 2015/16

	2014/15		*2015/16*	
	Non Attendance	20-Day Absences	Non Attendance	20-Day Absences
Primary	5.1%	8.9%	5.4%	9.8%
Primary with special class(es)	6.6%	15.1%	6.5%	16.3%
Special	11.5%	29.5%	12.1%	32.5%

While the total number of expulsions in the primary sector is very small Table 2.8 shows that expulsions are disproportionately higher in special schools. Pupils in special schools make up 1.4% of the primary school population but 52.6% (10 of 19) of the total number of pupils expelled from primary school in 2015/16. This pattern is very similar to 2014/15 (Millar, 2016).

[5] As noted previously, 10 primary schools (all special schools) were excluded from the population: nine hospital schools and one school catering for pupils aged between three and six years. These 10 schools accounted for 278 pupils. All other DES-listed special schools were retained in the analysis. This category includes schools for pupils with educational and physical special needs, High Support Units and segregated schools for children from the Traveller community.

Table 2.8
Number and percentage of expulsions, pupils, and schools for primary schools, primary schools with special classes, and special schools 2015/16

	Expulsions		Pupils		Schools	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Primary	3	15.8	427,155	77.6	2,722	84.2
Primary with special class(es)	6	31.6	115,820	21.0	383	11.9
Special	10	52.6	7,700	1.4	126	3.9
Total	19		550,675		3,231	

The total number of suspensions in the primary school sector is small, but more numerous than expulsions (Table 2.9). Again, suspensions in special schools are disproportionately high. Pupils in special schools account of 22.7% of the 1,438 suspensions in 2015/16. This pattern is very similar to 2014/15 (Millar, 2016).

Table 2.9
Number and percentage of suspensions, pupils, and schools for primary schools, primary schools with special classes, and special schools 2015/1

	Suspensions		Pupils		Schools	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Primary	695	48.3	427,155	77.6	2,722	84.2
Primary with special class(es)	417	29.0	115,820	21.0	383	11.9
Special	326	22.7	7,700	1.4	126	3.9
Total	1,438		550,675		3,231	

Figure 2.4 shows the distribution of general non-attendance in primary schools, primary schools with special classes, and special schools. The y axis shows the percentage of schools within each of the three categories. The x axis shows the percentage of pupil days lost within schools. It is clear that general non-attendance (the percentage of available student days lost through absence) is a much more common issue in special schools than in primary schools or primary schools with special classes. Comparatively few primary schools have more than 9 percent non-attendance. In contrast, the majority of special schools lose more than 9 percent of student days on an annual basis. However, the overlap in the distributions show that a small number of special schools have levels on absenteeism that are on a par with primary schools.

Figure 2.5 shows the distribution of 20-day absences in primary schools, primary schools with special classes, and special schools. The y axis shows the percentage of schools within each of the three categories. The x axis shows the percentage of pupils within a school that were absent for 20 days or more during the school year. About 7.3% of primary schools and 2.4% of special schools had no pupils absent for 20 days or more in 2015/16. However, if we look to the right of the distribution we can see that few primary schools or primary schools with special classes had 30% of pupils

absent for 20 days or more. In contrast, a substantial proportion of special schools had non-attendance of this order.

Figure 2.4: Percentage of pupil days lost by school for primary (P), primary with special classes (P+S), and special schools (S)

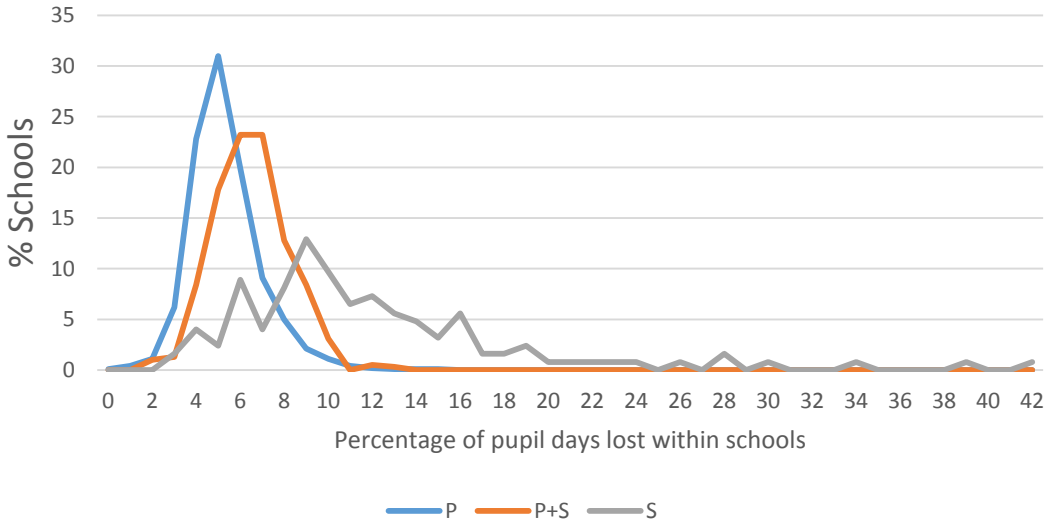
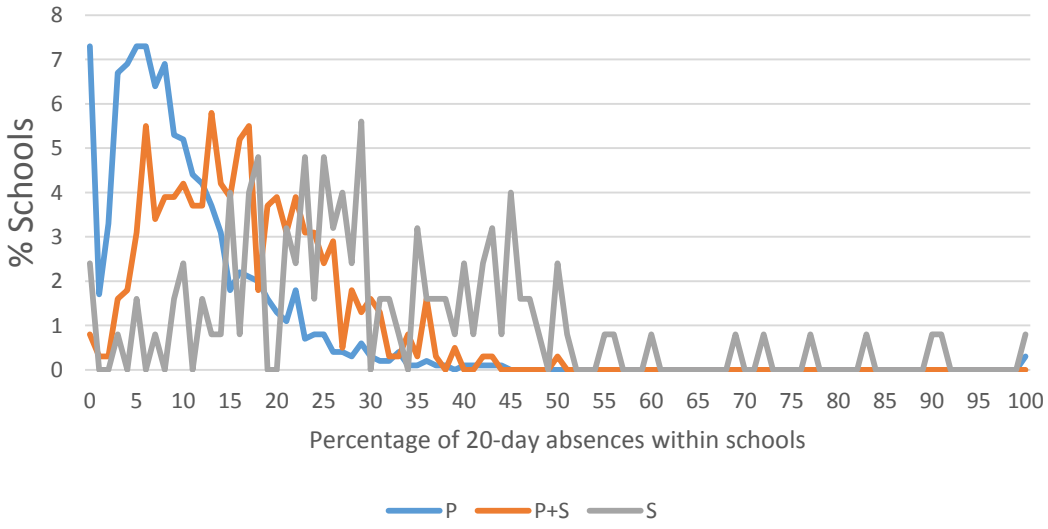


Figure 2.5: Percentage of 20-day absences by school for primary (P), primary with special classes (P+S), and special schools (S)



Section 3

Non-Attendance in Post-Primary Schools, 2015/16

3.1. Secondary, Vocational, and Community/Comprehensive Schools

Non-Attendance data for secondary, vocational, and community/comprehensive schools are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1
Mean percentage and SD of student/days lost, mean percentage of students missing 20 days, and mean percentage of students suspended by school type, 2014/15 and 2015/16

	2014/15			*2015/16*		
Type of school	*Mean %*	*N schools*	*SD*	*Mean %*	*N schools*	*SD*
Student/days lost						
Secondary	7.1	368	2.58	7.2	365	2.58
Comm. / Comp.	8.4	94	2.94	8.7	93	3.00
Vocational	9.4	233	3.99	9.6	226	3.81
Total	8.0	695	3.33	8.2	684	3.28
20-day absences						
Secondary	14.1	367	9.05	13.1	371	9.52
Comm. / Comp.	19.3	94	11.36	17.7	94	10.81
Vocational	21.5	234	12.87	20.2	230	12.10
Total	17.3	695	11.31	16.1	695	11.10
Expulsions						
Secondary	0.03	369	0.17	0.04	370	0.16
Comm. / Comp.	0.05	94	0.12	0.09	94	0.22
Vocational	0.06	234	0.20	0.07	230	0.29
Total	0.05	697	0.15	0.06	694	0.22
Suspensions						
Secondary	3.18	369	3.81	3.17	371	3.57
Comm. / Comp.	4.55	94	4.49	4.95	94	4.68
Vocational	6.34	234	6.84	5.97	231	6.23
Total	4.44	697	5.30	4.34	696	4.92

All forms of non-attendance are generally lowest in secondary schools and higher in community/comprehensive schools and vocational schools. The pattern of results is mixed between 2014/15 and 2015/16. Non-attendance was higher for all school types in 2015/16, however 20-day absences were all lower.

3.2 DEIS and Non-Attendance

Non-attendance data in DEIS schools and all other schools are summarised in Table 3.2. The numbers of schools providing data are given in brackets.

Table 3.2
Mean percentage of student/days lost, mean percentage of students missing 20 days, mean percentage of students expelled, mean percentage of students suspended, and number of schools by DEIS /Other

	2014/15		*2015/16*	
	DEIS	*Other*	*DEIS*	*Other*
Student/days lost	10.3 (190)	7.2 (505)	10.4 (181)	7.4 (503)
20-Day absences	25.3 (191)	14.2 (504)	23.4 (187)	13.4 (508)
Expulsions	0.10 (191)	0.03 (506)	0.09 (186)	0.05 (508)
Suspensions	8.94 (191)	2.73 (506)	8.36 (187)	2.86 (509)

DEIS schools show higher figures for all forms of non-attendance. However, there was only a small in the percentage of student/days lost and a somewhat larger drop in the mean percentage of students per school missing twenty days or more in DEIS and other schools. DEIS schools showed lower rates of expulsions and suspensions in 2015/16 continuing a decline from 2013/14 (Millar, 2016). Non DEIS schools showed slightly higher rates of suspensions and expulsions (against a very small base figure).

3.3. Non-Attendance by Province and County

Table 3.3 shows the data for mean non-attendance, 20-day absences, expulsions and suspensions across schools by area. Absenteeism rates are directly comparable although the absolute numbers of students differ between regions.

As with the other tables in this section, the data in Tables 3.3 are calculated at the school level and then the average non-attendance is reported for all schools in a particular category. Thus in Table 3.3 the mean percentage of school days lost is 8.3% in Leinster schools and 8.7% in schools in Ulster (Part of). Again from Table 3.3 we see that the mean percentage of pupils per school who were absent twenty-days or more (Abs20) was 16.0% for Leinster and 17.8% for Ulster (Part of).

Table 3.3 *The mean percentage of student/days lost, 20-day absences, expulsions, and suspensions by county for post-primary schools 2015/16*

	Mean % Abs.	Mean % Abs20	Mean % Exp.	Mean % Sus.
LEINSTER	8.3	16.0	0.07	5.13
Carlow	7.8	14.6	0.04	4.30
Dublin	8.4	15.6	0.06	5.68
Kildare	8.0	15.6	0.26	4.85
Kilkenny	8.1	15.2	0.00	4.03
Laois	9.9	19.0	0.15	4.89
Longford	9.8	19.8	0.00	4.95
Louth	7.5	12.5	0.16	5.70
Meath	6.5	13.8	0.00	3.86
Offaly	7.7	18.1	0.06	3.19
Westmeath	8.9	18.3	0.09	3.70
Wexford	9.8	19.6	0.08	6.70
Wicklow	7.7	16.3	0.02	3.73
MUNSTER	7.9	14.8	0.03	3.67
Clare	7.8	14.2	0.01	2.69
Cork	8.0	14.3	0.02	3.53
Kerry	8.3	16.4	0.05	3.27
Limerick	7.6	14.6	0.09	4.47
Tipperary N.R.	7.9	15.7	0.02	4.24
Tipperary S.R.	7.6	15.1	0.01	3.93
Waterford	7.5	14.3	0.02	3.93
CONNACHT	8.4	18.1	0.04	3.18
Galway	8.2	18.6	0.05	3.17
Leitrim	9.4	14.6	0.00	2.25
Mayo	8.8	17.9	0.05	2.76
Roscommon	7.8	17.5	0.07	3.52
Sligo	8.4	18.9	0.00	4.35
ULSTER (part of)	8.7	17.8	0.10	3.82
Cavan	8.7	19.5	0.14	3.55
Donegal	8.9	17.1	0.04	3.48
Monaghan	8.2	18.1	0.20	4.80
STATE	8.2	16.1	0.06	4.34

Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 show the county data for student/days lost (Mean % Abs.), 20-day absences (Mean % Abs20), and suspensions (Mean % Sus.) from Table 3.3, along with the comparable data for the previous three years.

Figure 3.1 shows some regional variation in the mean percentage of student/days lost. However, unlike at primary level, where counties Dublin and Limerick showed comparatively high levels of non-attendance it is counties such as Longford and Wexford that show higher figures. County Meath in comparison shows consistently the lowest level of general non-attendance. For the state as a whole the figures have remained fairly stable.

Figure 3.2 shows the mean percentage 20-day absences by county for 2012-13 through 2015-16. There are obvious inter-county differences in this measure of non-attendance. However, there are no clear urban / rural differences. For example, counties Monaghan and Dublin show quite similar data across the four years. While the 20-day absences figures are quite stable in some counties (Clare, Dublin, Wicklow) there are some that show considerable variation across years (Laois, Leitrim).

Suspensions are much more common in post-primary schools than in primary schools. Figure 3.3 shows the mean percentage of suspensions by county for 2012-13 through 2015-16. Counties Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Mayo, Monaghan and Roscommon show consistently low rates of suspension. Dublin and Wexford show higher rates.

Figure 3.1: *The mean percentage of student/days lost by county for post-primary schools 2012-13 to 2015-16*

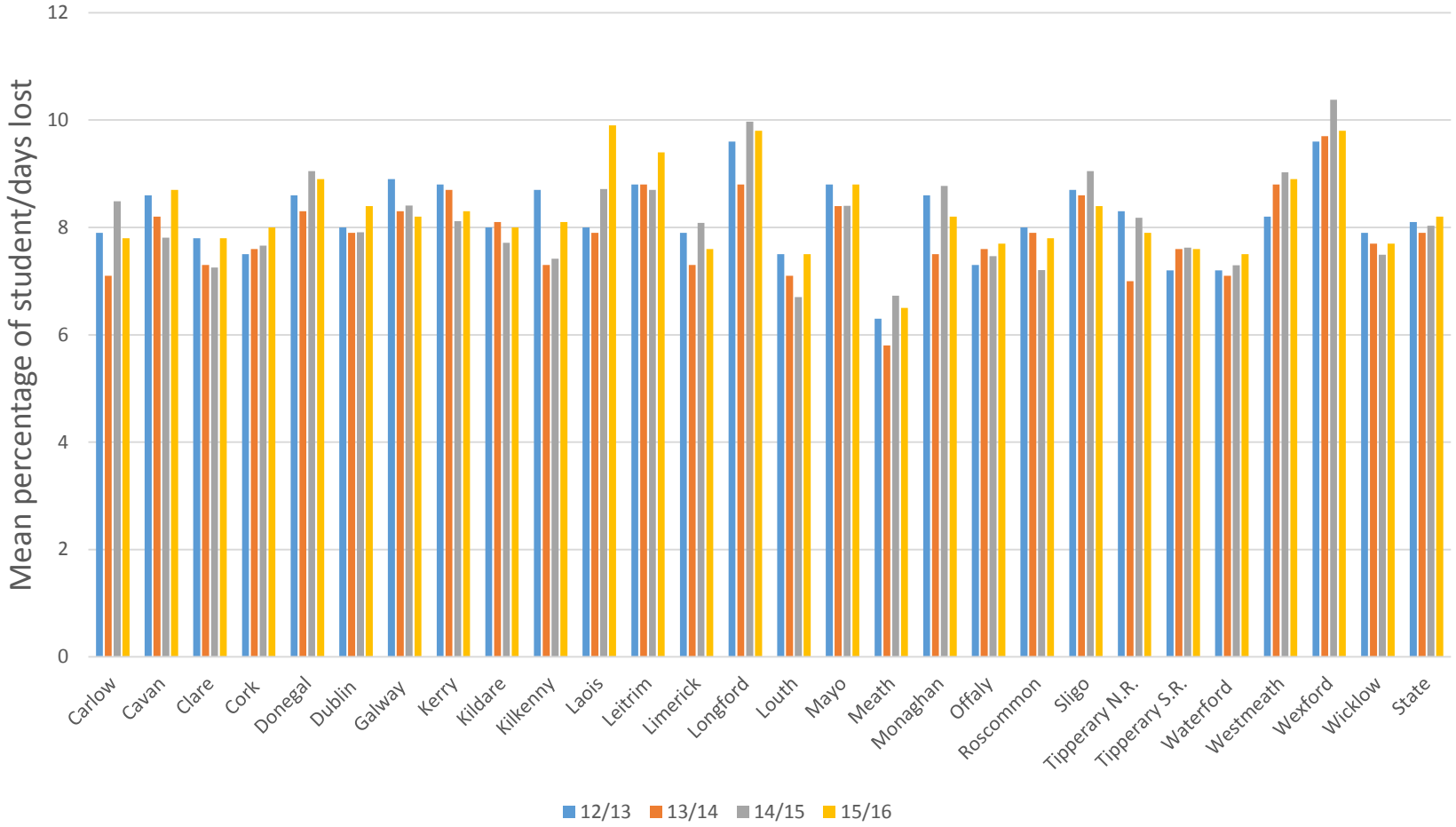


Figure 3.2: *The mean percentage of 20-day absences by county for post-primary schools 2012-13 to 2015-16*

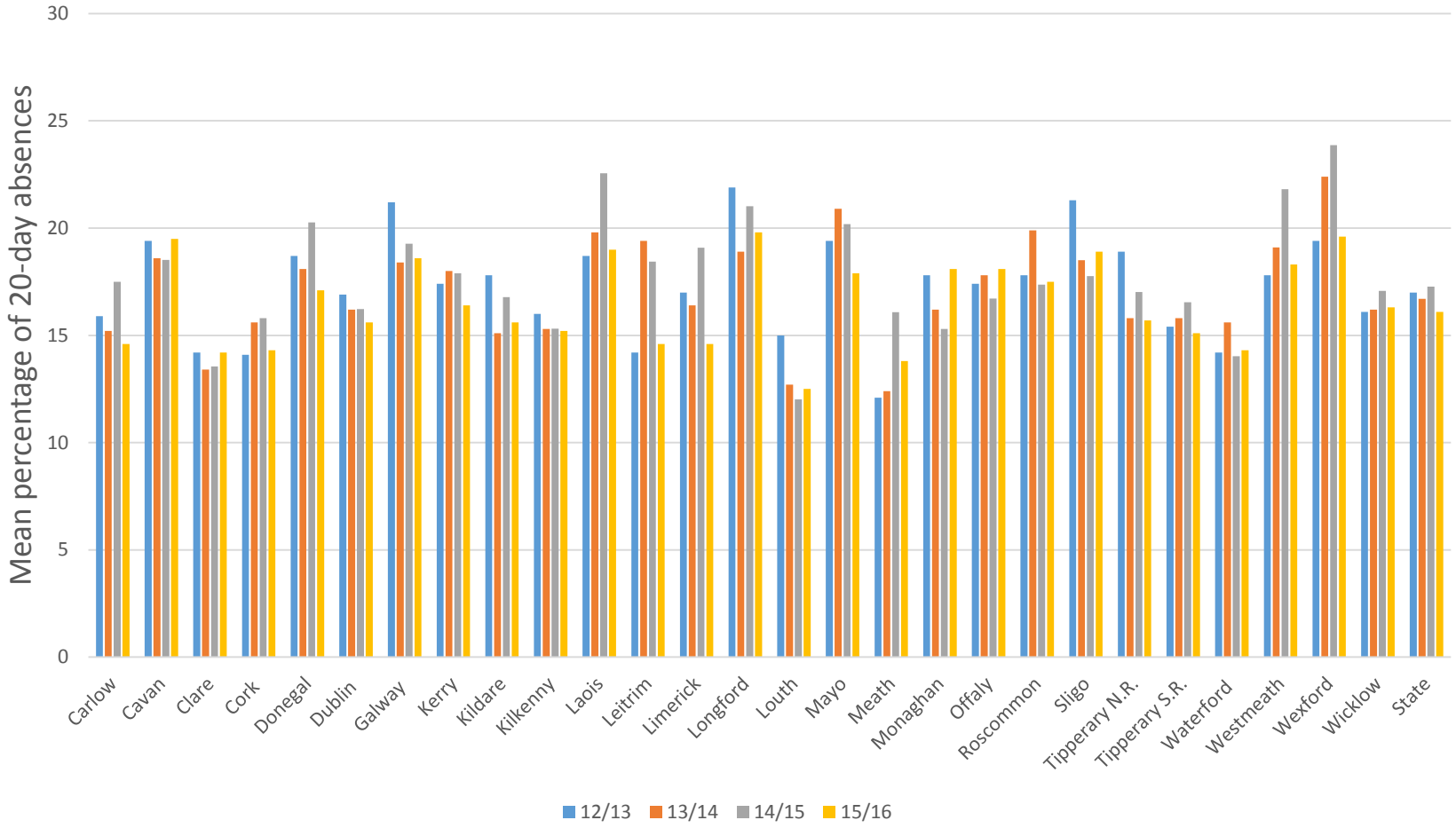
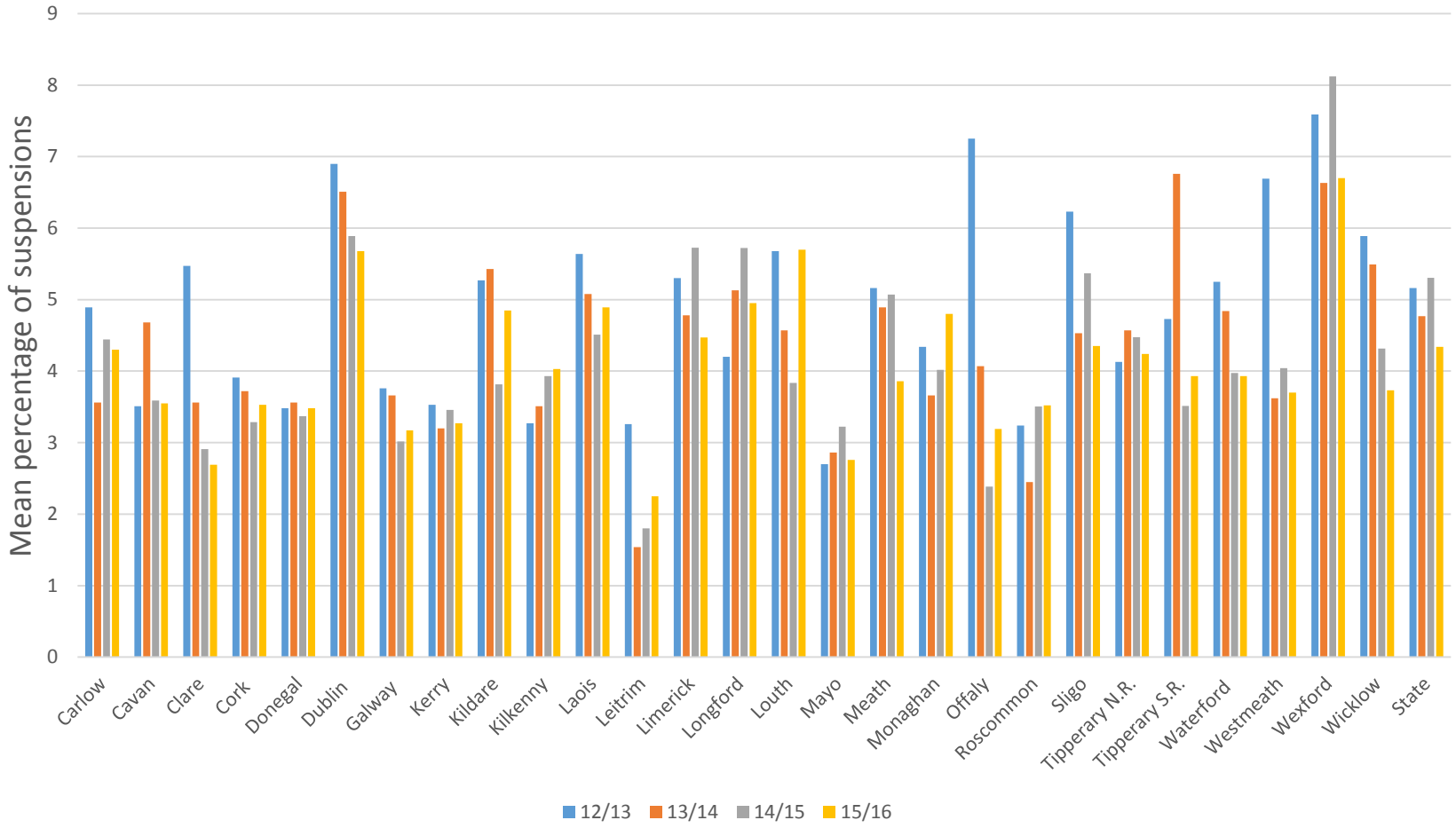


Figure 3.3: *The mean percentage of suspensions by county for post-primary schools 2012-13 to 2015-16*



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Appendix

Comparison with Northern Irish and British Rates of Non-attendance

Table 1 shows data non-attendance in Ireland and the nations of the UK for 2014/15.

Table 1
Percentage of student/days lost in primary and secondary schools in Ireland and the UK 2015/16

	Primary		Post-primary	
	Unauthorised	Overall	Unauthorised	Overall
Ireland	-	5.9%	-	7.9%
Northern Ireland	1.2%	4.5%	2.2%	6.5%
England	0.8%	3.9%	1.2%	5.0%
Scotland	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wales	1.1%	5.1%	1.3%	5.8%

Non-attendance rates for 2015/16 were between 0.8% and 2.0% higher in Irish primary schools than schools in Northern Ireland, England, and Wales. At post-primary England, Northern Ireland, and Wales also had a lower rate of non-attendance than Ireland. Statistics for Scotland are compiled on a two-year basis which means that no data are available for 2015/16.

Two things are worth noting when comparing the data. First, Northern Ireland, England and Wales provide data on unauthorised (and authorised) absences. The UK data on authorised and unauthorised absences are quite detailed (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2017) and list eight reasons for authorised and four for unauthorised absence. Such information is not currently collected on the AAR.

As noted by Mac Aogáin (2008), there are obvious difficulties with the notion of unauthorised absence as a variable in a national data-base. Subjective judgments about the reasons for absence are inevitably involved in deciding whether or not it is authorised. In addition, authorisation may be easier to obtain in some schools than in others. And even if reasonably objective criteria for unauthorised absence could be established and implemented nation-wide, it does not follow, in any case, that fully authorised absence, complete with letters, certificates, etc., can be treated as if it were not a problem.

The second point to be taken into consideration is that the UK data differentiate between special schools and mainstream schools in the primary sector. The Irish data in Table 1 and in previous tables in the main body of this report (except for section 2.5) treat special and mainstream primary schools together. This approach is in line with that taken by Mac Aogáin (2008) but differs from the two previous NEWB attendance reports (Weir, 2004; Ó Briain, 2006) where data for special schools was not reported on at all. Table 2 shows Irish primary data by school type together with Northern Irish data.

Table 2
Percentage of student/days lost in primary and special schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland 2015/16

	Ireland	Northern Ireland
Primary	5.4%	4.5%
Primary with special class(es)	6.5%	-
Special	12.1%	9.8%

Two things can be taken from Table 2. First, while non-attendance in primary schools is still higher in Ireland than in Northern Ireland, the difference is in the order of 0.9% rather than 1.4%. Second, the rate of non-attendance is higher in primary schools with special classes and special schools. Indeed, the rate of absenteeism in special schools is twice the figure for mainstream schools (see Section 2.5).