



An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

**School Attendance Data  
from Primary and Post-Primary Schools**

**2016/17**

**[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 2016/17**

- Response rates were high, rising from 99.4% in 2015/16 to 99.9% in 2016/17 in primary and from 98.3% to 99.7% in the post-primary sector.

### **General Non-Attendance for 2016/17 was down in primary schools and remained static for post-primary schools**

- The percentage of overall student/days lost through absence in a school year was 5.6% in primary schools and 7.9% in post-primary schools. In the five-year period (2012/13 - 2016/17) primary school non-attendance has ranged between a low of 5.4% and a high of 5.9%. In post-primary schools the figure has ranged between 7.5% and 7.9%.
- It is estimated that, on average, about 59,000 students miss school each day, consisting of approximately 31,200 primary and 27,800 post-primary students. This equates to a loss of 10 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 decreased in both primary and post-primary schools**

- In primary schools, 11.8% of pupils were absent for twenty days or more over the school year. This represents a decrease of 0.5 percentage points compared to the previous year, following on from an increase of 1.2 percentage points between 2014/15 and 2015/16. The 2013/14 figure for primary was the lowest for the five-year period covered in this report (2012/13 - 2016/17). The figure for twenty-day absences in post-primary schools was 14.7 % in 2016/17 (0.2 percentage points lower compared to 2015/16). The 2016/17 post-primary twenty-day absences figure was the lowest for the five-year period.
- Based on population numbers this represents approximately 65,800 primary school students, and 51,700 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 almost double the rural rate. This pattern remains stable year-on-year. The decrease in general non-attendance and in 20-day absences in 2016/17 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 decrease in general non-attendance in primary schools in 2016/17 was apparent 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 were higher in urban schools outside the SSP (5.6% and 12.0%) than they are in rural schools within the SSP (5.4% and 9.4%).
- In post-primary schools all forms of non-attendance were higher in schools within the SSP under DEIS. This was especially apparent in terms of 20-day absences and suspensions.

### **Expulsions are rare**

- Thirty-five expulsions were reported in primary schools in 2016/17 (19 in 2014/15). While this is an increase in absolute numbers the total is still a very small fraction of the population. No primary school reported more than two expulsions in the year. The corresponding figures in post-primary schools showed a decrease of 28 in 2016/17 (167 students, accounting for 0.048% of students).

### **Suspensions occur mostly in post-primary schools**

- 3.8% (13,169) of post-primary students were suspended in 2016/17. This represents a small decrease from 3.9 % in 2015/16. The 2016/17 figures are the joint lowest in the five-year period from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Just 0.3 % (1,550) of primary pupils were suspended in 2016/17, no change in terms of percentage points on the previous year (1,438, 0.3%).

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

- Non-attendance in Irish primary schools was 5.1% of student/days in 2016/17 (having removed data for special schools and schools with special classes) compared to between 4.0% and 5.1% for Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland. Non-attendance for Irish post-primary schools was 7.9% of student days, compared to between 5.2% and 8.8% in neighbouring jurisdictions. The rate of non-attendance in Scotland (8.8%) was markedly higher than for any of the other jurisdictions in the UK.

## ***Annual Attendance Reports 2015/16 and 2016/17: Main Statistics***

### *Response rate of schools to the Annual Attendance Report*

	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>
<i>Primary</i>	<b>99.4%</b>	<b>99.9%</b>
<i>Post-primary</i>	<b>98.3%</b>	<b>99.7%</b>

### *Percentage of student/days lost*

	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	
<i>Primary</i>	<b>5.9%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<i>Student-level<sup>1</sup></i>
<i>Post-primary</i>	<b>7.9%</b>	<b>7.9%</b>	

### *Percentage of twenty-day absences*

	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	
<i>Primary</i>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<i>Student-level</i>
<i>Post-primary</i>	<b>14.9%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>	

### *Number and percentage of expulsions*

	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>
<i>Primary</i>	19	35
	<b>0.003%</b>	<b>0.006%</b>
<i>Post-primary</i>	195	167
	<b>0.057%</b>	<b>0.048%</b>

### *Number and percentage of suspensions*

	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>
<i>Primary</i>	1,438	1,550
	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>
<i>Post-primary</i>	13,383	13,169
	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>

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<sup>1</sup> 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 2015/16 are the focus of the earlier reports (Weir (2004), Ó Briain (2006), Mac Aogáin (2008), Millar (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017)). This report presents data for the academic year 2016/17 and links to the data reported previously.

The report is in three sections:

- 1 *Non-Attendance from 2012/13 to 2016/17*, integrating the 2016/17 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 2016/17*, 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 2016/17*, 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, 2012/13 to 2016/17<sup>6</sup>

### 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 2012/13 to 2016/17. Data for 2012/13 through 2016/17 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 2012/13. In primary schools there has been an increase of almost 32,000 pupils over the period. In post-primary schools the number of students has increased by over 25,000.

Table 1.1

*Number of primary and post-primary schools and students, 2012/13 to 2016/17*

<i>Primary</i>		2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
	Schools	3,281	3,274	3,265	3,252	3,240 <sup>2</sup>
	Students	526,064	536,051	540,559	553,102	557,998
<i>Post-Primary</i>						
	Schools	695	696	704	710	707 <sup>3</sup>
	Students	326,628	332,569	338,615	344,998	351,816

Table 1.2 shows the numbers and percentages of schools responding to the AAR for 2012/13 through 2016/17. Response rates continue to be high. Only three primary schools and two post-primary schools failed to provide data for 2016/17.

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<sup>2</sup> 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 316 pupils.

<sup>3</sup> Four post-primary schools were excluded from the population as they cater for adult students or students taking PLC or VTOS courses. These four schools accounted for 441 students.

Table 1.2

*Number of schools, number of schools responding, and response rate to the Annual Attendance Report, 2012/13 to 2016/17*

<i>Primary</i>		<i>2012/13</i>	<i>2013/14</i>	<i>2014/15</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>
	N schools	3,281	3,274	3,265	3,252	3,240
	N schools responding	3,257	3,266	3,255	3,231	3,237
	<i>Response rate</i>	<b>99.3%</b>	<b>99.8%</b>	<b>99.7%</b>	<b>99.4%</b>	<b>99.9%</b>
<i>Post-Primary</i>						
	N schools	695	696	704	710	707
	N schools responding	684	695	697	698	705
	<i>Response rate</i>	<b>98.4%</b>	<b>99.9%</b>	<b>99.0%</b>	<b>98.3%</b>	<b>99.7%</b>

## **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 2012/13 to 2016/17 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 2012/13 to 2016/17*

<i>Primary</i>	<i>2012/13</i>	<i>2013/14</i>	<i>2014/15</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>
N schools	3,244	3,264	3,254	3,229	3,237
N students	521,265	534,940	539,707	550,351	557,815
N school days per year	183	183	183	183	183
N student/days	95,391,495	97,894,020	98,766,381	100,714,233	102,080,145
N student/days lost	5,672,077	5,317,857	5,540,969	5,921,963	5,748,571
% student/days lost	<b>5.9%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>
<i>Post-Primary</i>					
N schools	677	690	695	684	701
N students	319,021	329,516	334,665	337,511	348,257
N school days per year	167	167	167	167	167
N student/days	53,276,507	55,029,172	55,889,055	56,364,337	58,158,919
N student/days lost	4,096,418	4,102,713	4,328,061	4,456,355	4,603,066
% student/days lost	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>7.9%</b>	<b>7.9%</b>

The information contained in the rows of Table 1.3 is as follows:

*N schools* refers to the number of schools providing usable data. The figure can therefore be 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 5.6 % of pupil days were lost due to absence in primary schools in 2016/17 (a decrease of 0.3% from 2015/16) and that 7.9% of student days were lost in

post-primary schools (no change from 2015/16). For primary schools non-attendance is about mid-range for the period with a low of 5.4% in 2013/14 and a high of 5.9% in the years 2012/13 and 2015/16. Post-primary school non-attendance in 2016/17 was the joint highest for the five-year period, up from a low of 7.7% 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 2016/17 school year are summarised in Table 1.4, along with corresponding figures from 2012/13 to 2015/16.

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 2012/13 to 2016/17*

<i>Primary</i>		<i>2012/13</i>	<i>2013/14</i>	<i>2014/15</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>
	N schools	3,257	3,266	3,255	3,229	3,237
	N students	523,036	535,095	539,760	549,978	557,815
	N 20-day absences	60,663	55,445	60,002	67,902	65,790
	% students with 20-day absences	<b>11.6%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>
<i>Post-Primary</i>						
	N schools	684	695	695	695	702
	N students	321,940	332,102	334,394	341,033	349,060
	N 20-day absences	49,871	50,999	54,220	50,790	51,402
	% students with 20-day absences	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>14.9%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>

The percentage of pupils who were absent for twenty-days or more lay in the range of approximately 10-12% in primary schools between 2012/13 and 2015/16. The 2016/17 figure represents a decrease of 0.5% on the previous year (which was the highest for the period shown). In contrast, for post-primary, the 2016/17 figure is 0.2% 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. However, 16 more primary school pupils were expelled in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. To give some sense of scale, about one in every 29,000 primary school pupils was expelled in 2015/16 and one in 16,000 in 2016/17. In post-primary schools there were 28 fewer expulsions in 2016/17 compared to the year before. This figure is about one in every 2,100 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 2012/13 to 2016/17*

<i>Primary</i>	<i>2012/13</i>	<i>2013/14</i>	<i>2014/15</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>
N schools	3,257	3,266	3,255	3,231	3,237
N students	523,036	535,095	539,760	550,675	557,815
N expulsions	23	23	21	19	35
% expulsions	<b>0.004%</b>	<b>0.004%</b>	<b>0.004%</b>	<b>0.003%</b>	<b>0.006%</b>
<i>Post-Primary</i>					
N schools	684	695	697	694	705
N students	321,940	332,102	335,315	340,589	350,593
N expulsions	211	146	133	195	167
% expulsions	<b>0.066%</b>	<b>0.044%</b>	<b>0.040%</b>	<b>0.057%</b>	<b>0.048%</b>

#### 1.2.4 Suspensions

The numbers of suspensions reported for 2016/17 are shown in Table 1.6, with equivalent figures for 2012/13 to 2015/16. Suspensions are rare in primary schools when compared to post-primary schools (0.3% in primary and 3.8% in post-primary). In percentage terms the figures in primary schools have remained fairly constant, although the 2015/16 and 2016/17 figures represent an increase against a low base. The number of suspensions in post-primary schools decreased in 2016/17 by 0.1% compared to 2015/16. The percentage of post-primary students suspended have been below 4% since 2013/14 and were 0.7% lower in 2016/17 compared to the high of 4.5% in 2012/13.

Table 1.6

*Number of schools, number of students, number of students suspended, and percentage of students suspended for primary and post-primary schools 2012/13 to 2016/17*

<i>Primary</i>	<i>2012/13</i>	<i>2013/14</i>	<i>2014/15</i>	<i>2015/16</i>	<i>2016/17</i>
N schools	3,257	3,266	3,255	3,231	3,237
N students	523,036	535,095	539,760	550,675	557,815
N suspensions	1,302	1,287	1,264	1,438	1,550
% suspensions	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>
<i>Post-Primary</i>					
N schools	684	695	697	696	705
N students	321,940	332,102	335,315	342,018	350,593
N suspensions	14,331	13,473	12,727	13,383	13,169
% suspensions	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>4.1%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>

## **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 number of student/days saved or lost. Thus the reported figure of 5.6 % for non-attendance in primary schools in 2016/17 suggests a decrease of 0.3% in the figure of 5.9 % reported for 2015/16 (Table 1.3), implying a gain of about 306,000 student days in attendance between 2015/16 and 2016/17.

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 ( $\pm 0.1\%$ ) 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, 2016/17*

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Post-Primary</i>
% student/days lost	5.6%	7.9%
N students	557,998	351,816
N school days	183	167
N student/days	102,113,634	58,753,272
<i>0.1% gain/loss in NA as student/days</i>	102,114	58,753

### 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 2016/17 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, 2016/17*

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Post-Primary</i>
% student/days lost	5.6%	7.9%
N students	557,998	351,816
<i>N students absent per day</i>	31,200	27,800
N school days	183	167
<i>N days lost per student</i>	10	13

## Section 2

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

#### 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, 2015/16 and 2016/17*

	2015/16		2016/17	
	%	<i>N schools</i>	%	<i>N schools</i>
Mainstream	5.4	2,722	5.1	2,685
Mainstream & special classes	6.5	383	6.3	427
Special	12.1	124	12.2	125
<i>Total</i>	5.9	3,229	5.6	3,237

Pupils in mainstream primary schools were absent for 5.1% of the available days in 2016/2017. The percentage days lost was higher for mainstream schools with special classes (6.3 %) and highest in special schools (12.2%). While the figures for 2016/17 were a little lower in mainstream schools and mainstream schools with special classes, there was a small increase in special schools. 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 from the DES on school location. In previous reports (e.g. Millar (2017), which dealt with non-attendance data for 2015/16) school location was based on a nationwide survey of disadvantage in all mainstream<sup>4</sup> primary schools conducted by the ERC in 2005. As the ERC survey data were becoming dated and location data were not available for new or amalgamated schools<sup>5</sup> it was decided to find a more recent source for location data. DES school location data for the school year 2017/18 matched to 3,102 of the 3,115 (99.6%) mainstream and mainstream with special classes schools. Special schools (n=125) are not included in the following analyses. Table 2.2 gives averages for non-attendance, 20-day absences, and

<sup>4</sup> Including mainstream schools with special classes.

<sup>5</sup> A total of 2,851 schools (91.8% of the 3,105 mainstream schools that returned AAR data) were matched for 2015/16.



suspensions in urban and rural primary schools. Expulsions have not been included because of the low numbers.

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, 2015/16 and 2016/17*

	2015/16			2016/17		
	Mean %	N schools	SD	Mean %	N schools	SD
<i>Non Attendance</i>						
Rural Schools	5.0	1,856	2.72	4.8	1,984	1.58
Urban Schools	6.4	995	2.97	6.1	1,115	1.74
<i>Total</i>	5.5	2,851	2.88	5.3	3,099**	1.75
<i>20-Day Absences</i>						
Rural Schools	7.7	1,856	6.50	7.5	1,984	6.90
Urban Schools	15.4	993	9.87	14.5	1,115	8.58
<i>Total</i>	10.4	2,849	8.65	10.0	3,099	8.26
<i>Suspensions</i>						
Rural Schools	0.07	1,856	0.50	0.08	1,984	0.45
Urban Schools	0.39	995	1.28	0.41	1,115	1.27
<i>Total</i>	0.18	2,851	0.87	0.20	3,099	0.86

\* 17/18 data using new DES location data. Rural location is defined as “A village or rural community – population less than 1499”.

\*\* Although 3,112 schools returned data, 13 schools are missing from the analysis as they did not have DES location data.

Non-attendance in all forms is higher in urban schools. This is in line with the findings for 2015/16 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 3,009 matched schools in 2016/17 the percentage of days lost was calculated for each school. Then the mean and standard deviation for all schools was calculated. Thus for the 1,984 rural schools the mean percentage of student days lost (*Non Attendance*) per school was 4.8%. The mean percentage of pupil days lost for the 1,115 urban schools was higher, 6.1 %. 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 3,099 schools for which we have both absence and location data for 2016/17, the mean school figure for the percentage of pupils missing twenty days’ schooling was 10.0 %. However, there were considerable differences between schools as shown by the large standard deviation (8.26). Some schools will have had no pupils absent for twenty or more days while others will have had 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*

		2015/16			2016/17		
		Mean %	N schools	SD	Mean %	N schools	SD
Rural	Not in SSP	5.0	1,559	2.87	4.7	1,672	1.21
Rural	In SSP	5.5	297	1.62	5.4	311	2.22
Urban	Not in SSP	5.9	697	3.01	5.6	792	1.45
Urban	In SSP Band 2	7.1	124	1.73	6.8	138	1.53
Urban	In SSP Band 1	8.1	174	2.76	7.9	189	2.63
<i>Total</i>		5.5	2,851	2.88	5.3	3,102*	1.75

\*10 Not in SSP schools are missing from the total as there was no location data available.

Table 2.4

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

		2015/16			2016/17		
		Mean %	N schools	SD	Mean %	N schools	SD
Rural	Not in SSP	7.3	1,559	5.80	7.1	1,672	5.63
Rural	In SSP	9.7	297	9.11	9.4	311	7.79
Urban	Not in SSP	12.5	695	7.67	12.0	792	7.09
Urban	In SSP Band 2	19.5	124	8.70	18.4	138	7.88
Urban	In SSP Band 1	23.7	174	12.44	23.4	189	12.89
<i>Total</i>		10.4	2,849	8.65	10.0	3,102*	8.26

\*10 Not in SSP schools are missing from the total as there was no location data available.

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 lower in 2016/17 than in the previous year. Between 2013/14 and 2014/15, and 2014/15 and 2016 there had been increases across all five categories of schools (Millar 2016, 2017).

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. However, suspensions were more likely in DEIS schools and more likely in urban schools regardless of DEIS status. Just over one percent of pupils were suspended in Urban SSP Band 1 schools in 2016/17.

Table 2.5

*The mean percentage and SD of students suspended by DEIS Category*

		2015/16			2016/17		
		Mean %	N schools	SD	Mean %	N schools	SD
Rural	Not in SSP	0.05	1,559	0.35	0.07	1,672	0.44
Rural	In SSP	0.15	297	0.94	0.10	311	0.52
Urban	Not in SSP	0.16	697	0.47	0.21	792	0.61
Urban	In SSP Band 2	0.55	124	1.33	0.55	138	1.20
Urban	In SSP Band 1	1.17	174	2.52	1.15	189	2.48
<i>Total</i>		0.18	2,851	0.87	0.20	3,102*	0.86

\*10 Not in SSP schools are missing from the total as there was no location data available.

## 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 for 2016/17. 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 5.9% in Leinster schools and 4.8% 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 12.5% for Leinster and 7.8% 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 2016/17*

		Mean % Abs.	Mean % Abs20	Mean % Exp.	Mean % Sus.
<b>LEINSTER</b>		5.9	12.5	0.03	0.68
Carlow		5.7	11.3	0.02	0.15
Dublin		6.6	15.6	0.07	1.43
Kildare		5.7	11.2	0.00	0.31
Kilkenny		5.1	8.4	0.10	0.86
Laois		5.9	11.9	0.01	0.27
Longford		5.7	12.6	0.00	0.14
Louth		5.9	12.9	0.02	0.28
Meath		5.2	9.3	0.00	0.10
Offaly		5.7	10.8	0.00	0.14
Westmeath		5.6	11.7	0.00	0.34
Wexford		5.5	10.6	0.00	0.15
Wicklow		5.5	10.1	0.00	0.19
<b>MUNSTER</b>		5.5	10.8	0.01	0.51
Clare		5.3	10.0	0.01	0.25
Cork		5.5	10.9	0.01	0.56
Kerry		5.6	10.8	0.00	0.15
Limerick		6.1	13.1	0.00	1.32
Tipperary N.R.		5.0	9.1	0.00	0.14
Tipperary S.R.		5.2	9.1	0.01	0.43
Waterford		5.3	11.0	0.00	0.24
<b>CONNACHT</b>		5.3	9.2	0.01	0.19
Galway		5.4	10.0	0.01	0.24
Leitrim		4.7	6.4	0.00	0.01
Mayo		5.4	9.0	0.00	0.24
Roscommon		5.4	8.9	0.06	0.12
Sligo		5.0	9.1	0.00	0.11
<b>ULSTER (part of)</b>		4.8	7.8	0.01	0.10
Cavan		5.0	9.3	0.00	0.06
Donegal		4.9	7.6	0.00	0.13
Monaghan		4.3	6.7	0.02	0.07
<b>STATE</b>		5.6	10.9	0.02	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 there is some variation between counties in terms of the percentage of student days lost within schools. Dublin shows generally higher rates than other counties and Monaghan generally lower rates. Second, the decrease in general non-attendance in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16 is apparent almost nationwide.

Figure 2.2 shows the percentage of students who were absent for 20 days or more by county. As with Figure 2.1, 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, Leitrim and Monaghan recorded lower rates of 20-days absences across the four years. The lower rates of absenteeism recorded for 2016-17 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. County Kilkenny shows an unusual increase in suspensions over the four years. This may simply reflect some inaccuracies in the recorded data or specific issues in that particular county.

Figure 2.1: *The mean percentage of student/days lost by county for primary schools 2013-14 to 2016-17*

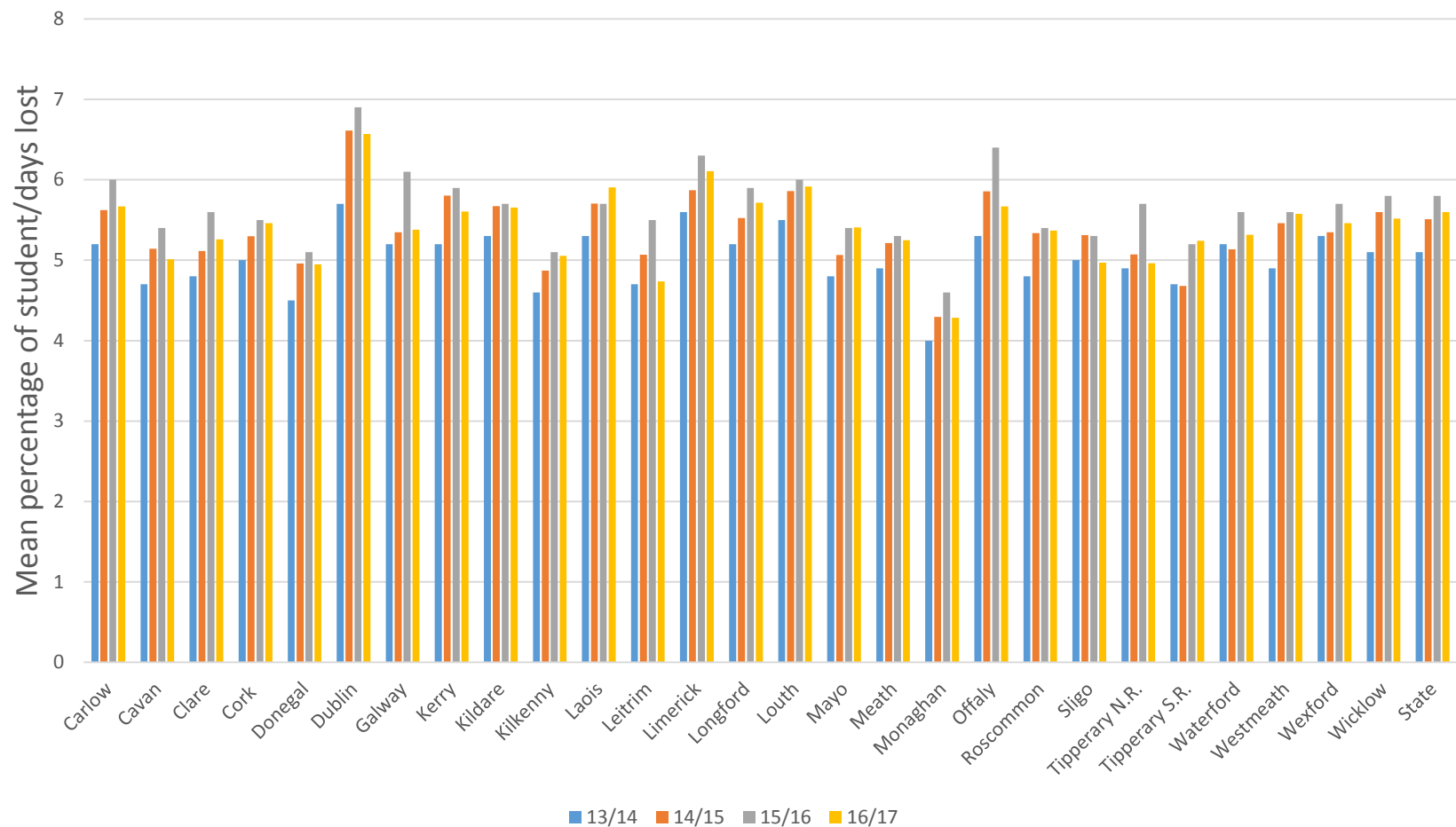


Figure 2.2: *The mean percentage of 20-day absences by county for primary schools 2013/14 to 2016/17*

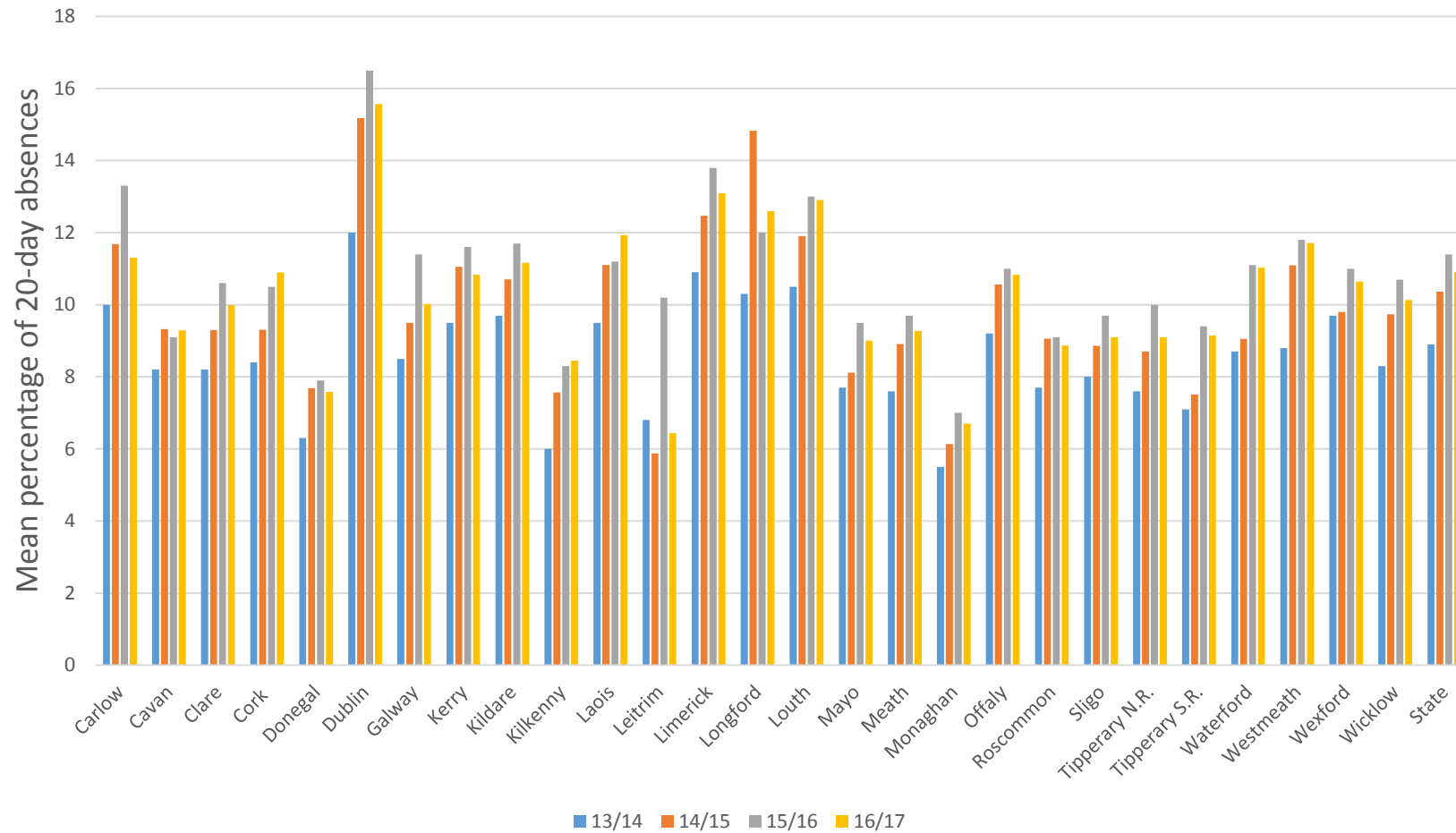
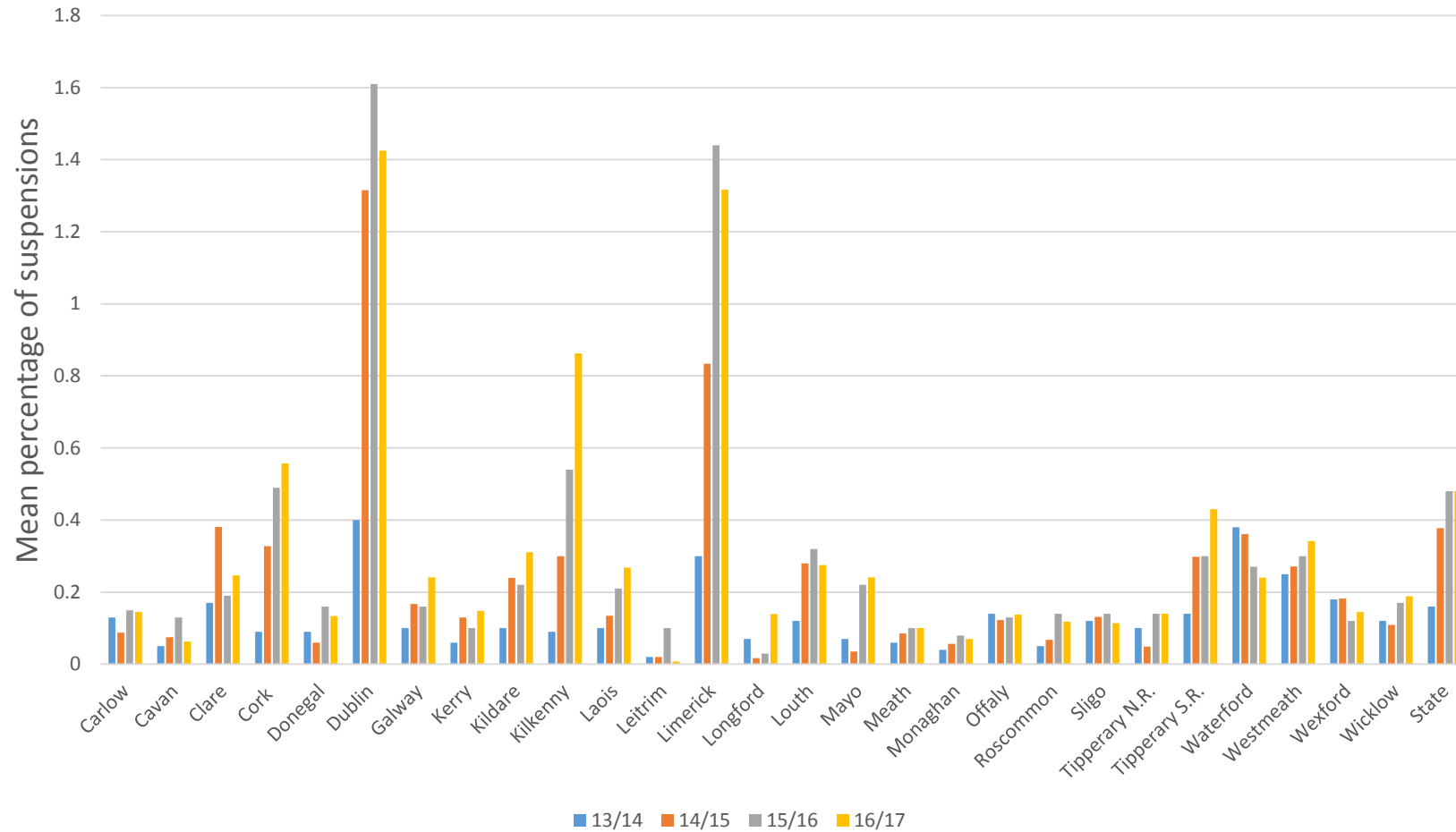


Figure 2.3: *The mean percentage of suspensions by county for primary schools 2013-14 to 2016-17*





## 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. All 125 of the special schools returned AAR data<sup>6</sup>.

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 more than 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 and 20-day absences were lower in primary schools and primary schools with special classes in 2016/17 when compared to the previous year. In special schools there was a small increase in both of these measures of non-attendance.

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 2015/16 and 2016/17*

	2015/16		2016/17	
	Non Attendance	20-Day Absences	Non Attendance	20-Day Absences
Primary	5.4%	9.8%	5.1%	9.2%
Primary with special class(es)	6.5%	16.3%	6.3%	15.7%
Special	12.1%	32.5%	12.2%	32.8%

While the total number of expulsions in the primary sector is very small Table 2.8 shows that expulsions are disproportionately high in special schools. Pupils in special schools make up 1.4% of the primary school population but account for 28.6% of the total number of pupils expelled from primary school in 2016/17. This pattern is very similar to 2015/16 (Millar, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> 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 316 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 2016/17*

	Expulsions		Pupils		Schools	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Primary	17	48.6	421,703	75.6	2,685	82.9
Primary with special class(es)	8	22.9	128,314	23.0	427	13.2
Special	10	28.6	7,798	1.4	125	3.9
Total	35		557,815		3,237	

The total number of suspensions in the primary school sector is small, but more numerous than expulsions. Again, suspensions in special schools are disproportionately high. Pupils in special schools account of 22.2 % of the 1,550 suspensions in 2016/17. This pattern is very similar to 2014/15 (Millar, 2017).

Table 2.9

*Number and percentage of suspensions, pupils, and schools for primary schools, primary schools with special classes, and special schools 2016/17*

	Suspensions		Pupils		Schools	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Primary	777	50.1	421,703	75.6	2,685	82.9
Primary with special class(es)	429	27.7	128,314	23.0	427	13.2
Special	344	22.2	7,798	1.4	125	3.9
Total	1,550		557,815		3,237	

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 6.8% of primary schools had no pupils absent for 20 days or more in 2016/17. 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)

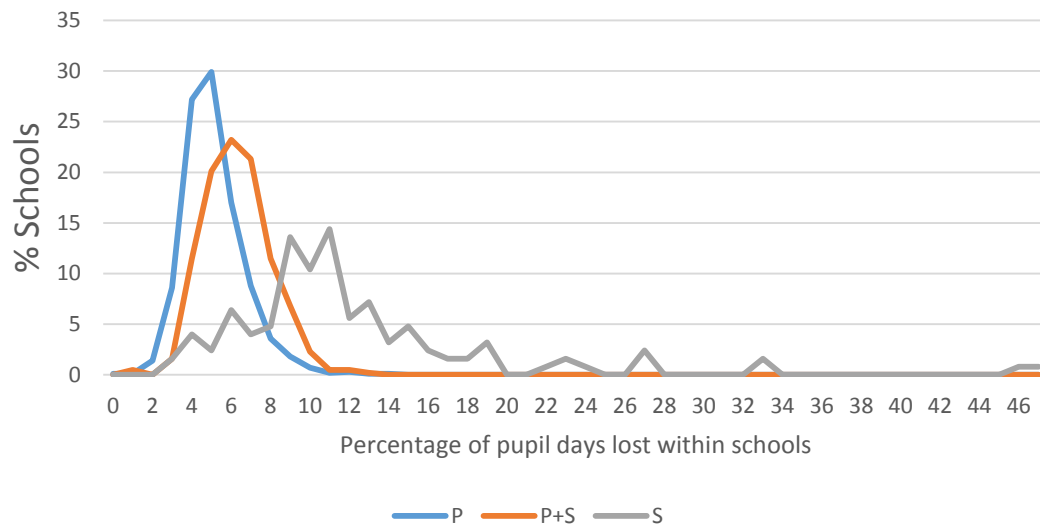
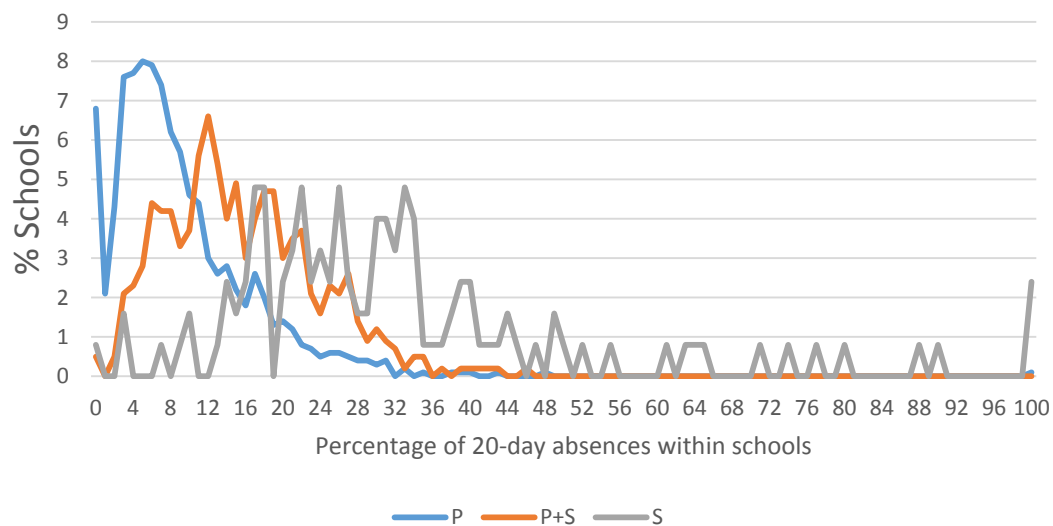


Figure 2.5: Percentage of 20-day absences by school for primary (P), primary with special classes (P+S), and special schools (S)



## 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, 2015/16 and 2016/17*

Type of school	2015/16			2016/17		
	Mean %	N schools	SD	Mean %	N schools	SD
<i>Student/days lost</i>						
Secondary	7.2	365	2.58	7.2	372	3.13
Comm. / Comp.	8.7	93	3.00	8.6	95	3.39
Vocational	9.6	226	3.81	9.6	234	3.54
Total	8.2	684	3.28	8.2	701	3.47
<i>20-day absences</i>						
Secondary	13.1	371	9.52	12.6	371	9.64
Comm. / Comp.	17.7	94	10.81	17.8	95	9.64
Vocational	20.2	230	12.10	20.0	236	12.67
Total	16.1	695	11.10	15.8	702	11.29
<i>Expulsions</i>						
Secondary	0.04	370	0.16	0.03	373	0.12
Comm. / Comp.	0.09	94	0.22	0.08	95	0.22
Vocational	0.07	230	0.29	0.09	237	0.33
Total	0.06	694	0.22	0.05	705	0.22
<i>Suspensions</i>						
Secondary	3.17	371	3.57	3.04	373	3.78
Comm. / Comp.	4.95	94	4.68	4.59	95	5.47
Vocational	5.97	231	6.23	6.17	237	6.49
Total	4.34	696	4.92	4.30	705	5.26

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 2015/16 and 2016/17. Only 20-day absences show an appreciable reduction in 2016/17. Even here there was no reduction for community / comprehensive schools.

## 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*

	2015/16		2016/17	
	DEIS	Other	DEIS	Other
Student/days lost	10.4 (181)	7.4 (503)	10.2 (183)	7.5 (518)
20-Day absences	23.4 (187)	13.4 (508)	22.8 (183)	13.3 (519)
Expulsions	0.09 (186)	0.05 (508)	0.11 (184)	0.04 (521)
Suspensions	8.36 (187)	2.86 (509)	9.01 (184)	2.64 (521)

DEIS schools show higher figures for all forms of non-attendance. There was a small decrease in student/days lost and a somewhat larger drop in 20-day absences in DEIS schools between 2015/16 and 2016/17, while the rate of expulsions and suspensions increased marginally. Little change was apparent in non-DEIS schools.

## 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 was 8.1% in Leinster schools and 9.0% 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 15.7% for Leinster and 18.9% for Ulster (Part of).

Table 3.3 *The mean percentage of student/days lost, 20-day absences, expulsions, and suspensions by county for primary schools by county for post-primary schools 2016/17*

	Mean % Abs.	Mean % Abs20	Mean % Exp.	Mean % Sus.
<b>LEINSTER</b>	8.1	15.7	0.06	5.12
Carlow	9.0	16.4	0.09	6.86
Dublin	8.0	15.1	0.08	6.00
Kildare	7.6	14.7	0.03	4.81
Kilkenny	7.5	17.5	0.05	2.68
Laois	9.3	15.9	0.01	4.74
Longford	11.4	19.2	0.06	4.10
Louth	7.4	10.3	0.07	3.95
Meath	6.8	13.5	0.01	3.72
Offaly	8.0	15.8	0.03	2.41
Westmeath	8.6	16.9	0.02	3.20
Wexford	9.9	20.4	0.08	6.00
Wicklow	7.7	19.6	0.04	4.26
<b>MUNSTER</b>	7.8	13.8	0.04	3.54
Clare	7.6	13.4	0.04	3.18
Cork	7.8	13.5	0.04	3.29
Kerry	9.0	14.9	0.01	3.00
Limerick	7.1	12.0	0.07	4.17
Tipperary N.R.	7.7	14.8	0.05	3.61
Tipperary S.R.	7.5	16.9	0.01	4.92
Waterford	7.4	12.7	0.11	3.74
<b>CONNACHT</b>	9.0	18.6	0.04	3.23
Galway	9.0	19.5	0.07	3.06
Leitrim	10.3	20.2	0.00	1.65
Mayo	9.3	18.4	0.00	2.48
Roscommon	7.4	13.6	0.04	4.58
Sligo	8.6	18.1	0.05	5.32
<b>ULSTER (part of)</b>	9.0	18.9	0.10	3.69
Cavan	9.2	14.5	0.37	3.49
Donegal	9.4	22.0	0.02	3.86
Monaghan	7.9	15.7	0.03	3.51
<b>STATE</b>	8.2	15.8	0.06	4.30

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, with a small increase from 2013/14 to 2015/16, with a levelling off in 2016/17.

Figure 3.2 shows the mean percentage 20-day absences by county for 2013-14 through 2016-17. 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) 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 2013-14 through 2016-17. Counties Clare, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Leitrim and Mayo 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 2013-14 to 2016-17*

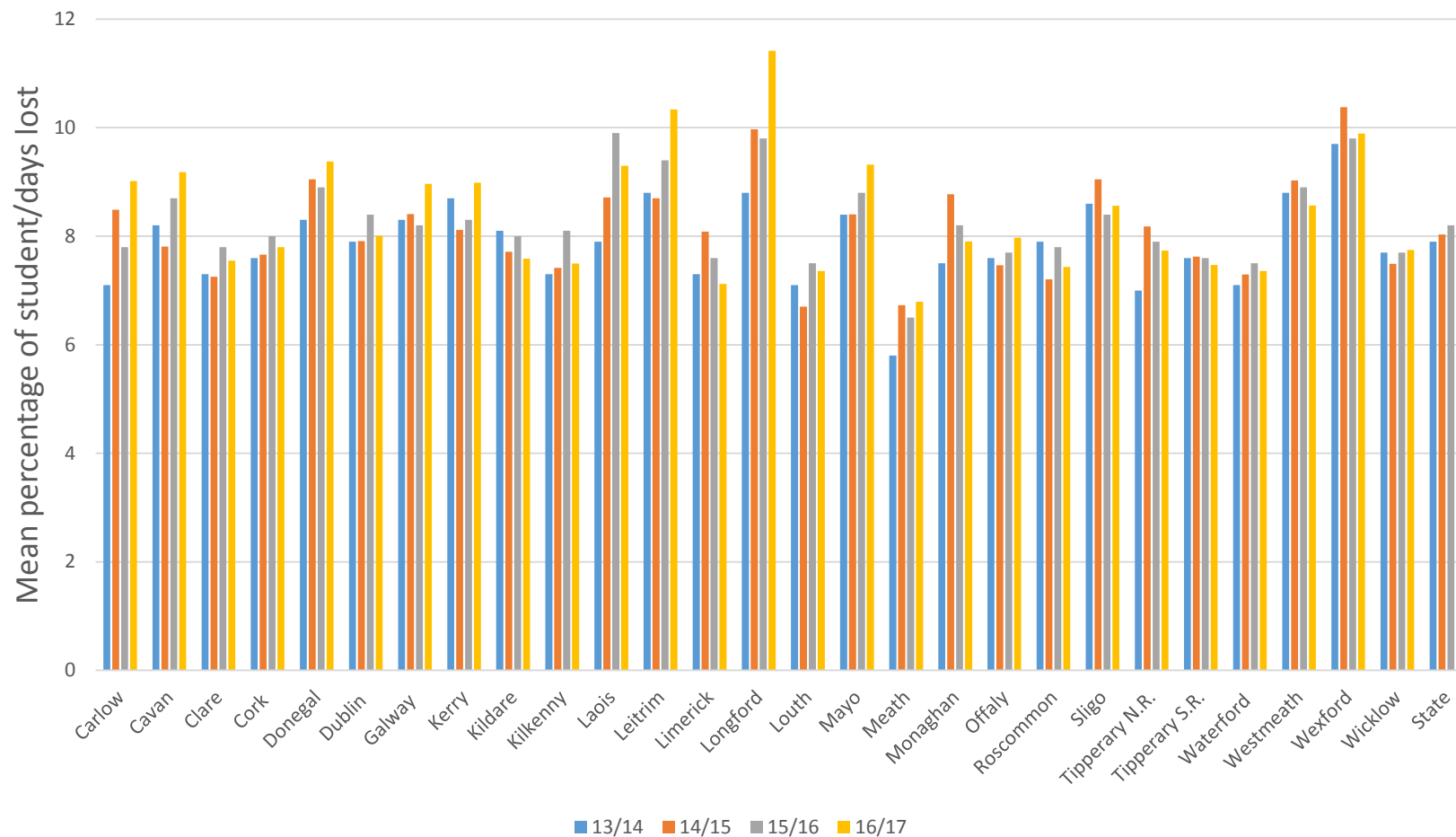




Figure 3.2: *The mean percentage of 20-day absences by county for post-primary schools 2013-14 to 2016-17*

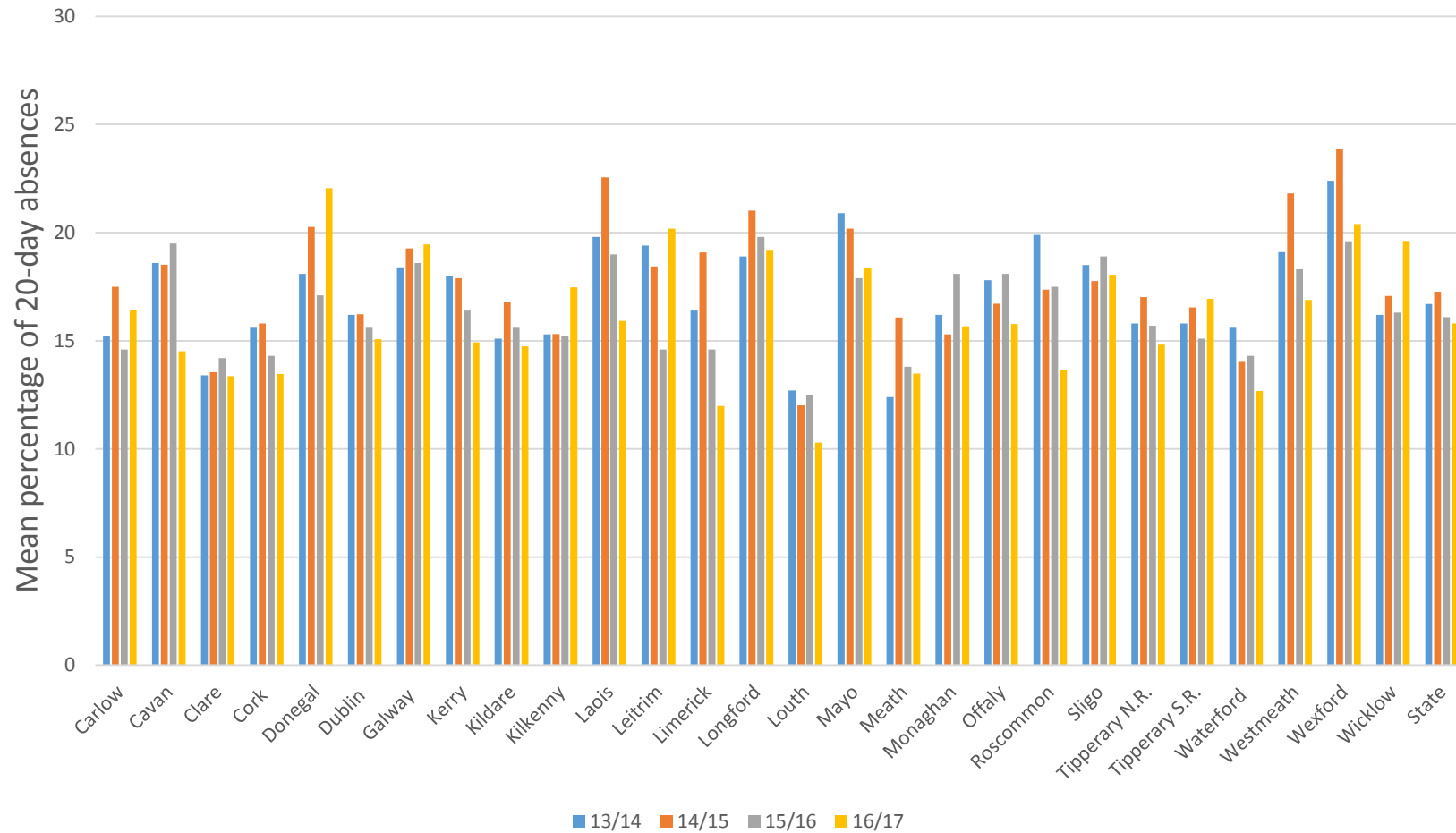
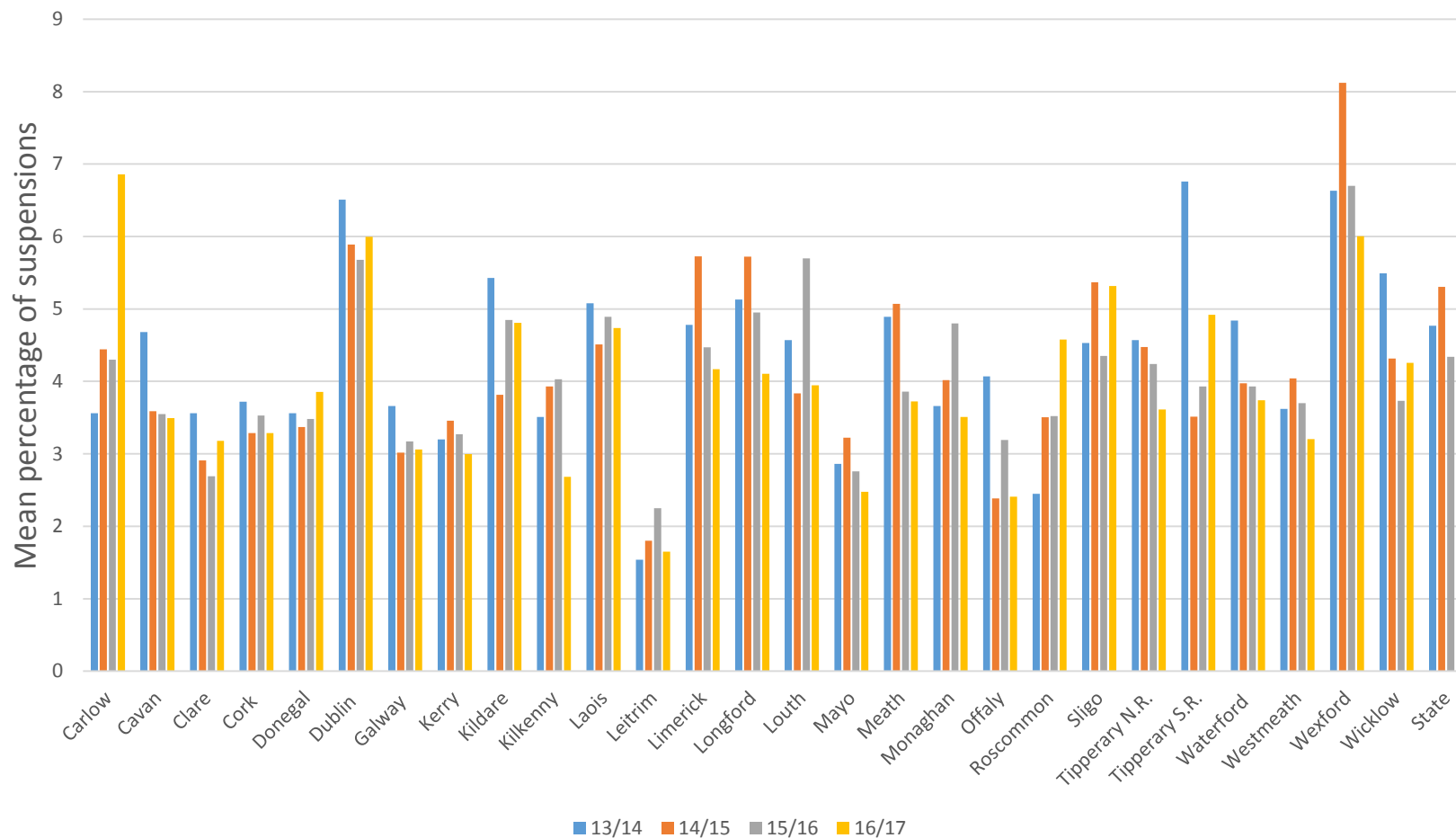


Figure 3.3: *The mean percentage of suspensions by county for post-primary schools 2013-14 to 2016-17*



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## Appendix

Table 1 shows data non-attendance in Ireland and the nations of the UK for 2016/17.

Table 1

*Percentage of student/days lost in primary and secondary schools in Ireland and the UK 2016/176*

	Primary		Post-primary	
	Unauthorised	Overall	Unauthorised	Overall
Ireland	-	5.6%	-	7.9%
Northern Ireland	1.4%	4.5%	2.3%	6.7%
England	0.9%	4.0%	1.3%	5.2%
Scotland	N/A	5.1%	N/A	8.8%
Wales	1.1%	5.1%	1.4%	5.9%

Non-attendance rates for 2016/17 were between 0.5% and 1.6% higher in Irish primary schools than schools in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. This is lower than for 2015/16 where non-attendance rates in Ireland were between 0.8% and 2.0% higher (Millar, 2017). At post-primary England, Northern Ireland, and Wales also had a lower rate of non-attendance than Ireland. However, non-attendance was higher in Scotland than in Ireland, with the Scottish rate being markedly higher than the rest of the UK.

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, 2018) 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 2016/17*

	Ireland	Northern Ireland
Primary	5.1%	4.5%
Primary with special class(es)	6.3%	-
Special	12.2%	9.9%