

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

2011/12

[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 of schools to annual attendance reporting requirements rose to their highest levels for both primary and post-primary in 2011/12

- The *Annual Attendance Report* represents a de facto census. Response rates were 99.1% for both the primary and post-primary sectors.

Figures for General Non-Attendance lower for 2011/12

- The percentage of overall student/days lost through absence in a school year was 5.8% in primary schools and 7.7% in post-primary schools. The figures at both levels for 2011/12 are lower than for 2010/11 and are at the lowest for the five year period 2007/08 – 2011/12.
- Approximately 55,000 students on average miss school each day, consisting of approximately 30,000 primary and 24,800 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 stable for primary school pupils but lower for post-primary students

- In primary schools 11.1% of pupils were absent for twenty days or more, the same figure as the previous year. The figure for twenty-day absences in post-primary schools was 16.1% in 2011/12 (0.4% lower compared to 2010/11).
- Based on population numbers this represents approximately 57,500 primary school students, and 52,000 post-primary students.

Non-Attendance remains higher in Special Schools

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

Non-Attendance in Primary School 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.

Non-Attendance higher in schools serving disadvantaged areas, but falling

- In primary schools non-attendance is generally higher in schools involved in the DEIS School Support Programme (SSP) for designated schools serving socio-economically disadvantaged communities. However, there continues to be an important urban/rural dimension in non-attendance when DEIS and non-DEIS primary schools are compared. General non-attendance and twenty-day absences are higher in urban schools outside DEIS than they are in rural schools within the DEIS programme. This pattern is stable year-on-year.
- In post-primary schools all forms of non-attendance were higher in schools within the DEIS programme. Around 27% of students in these schools were absent for twenty days or more in 2011/12. This figure is down 1.5% from 2010/11 and down approximately 3% from 2009/10. In schools outside DEIS the figure for 20-day absences was 14.2% for 2011/12, down 0.4% on the previous year.

Expulsions Still Rare

- Only 26 expulsions were reported in primary schools in 2011/12 (25 in 2010/11). The corresponding figures in post-primary schools showed an increase of 50 in 2011/12 (186 students, accounting for less than 0.06% of students).

Suspensions Occur Mostly in Post-Primary Schools

- Less than 5% of post-primary students were suspended in 2011/12. However, there was a small increase from 4.4% to 4.7% when compared to 2010/11. Just 0.2 % of primary pupils were suspended in 2011/12.

Irish non-attendance figures similar to those in Northern Ireland and the UK

- Non-attendance in Irish primary schools was 5.8% of student/days in 2011/12 (removing data for special schools) compared to between 4.4% and 6.2% for Northern Ireland, England and Wales. Non-attendance for Irish post-primary schools was 7.7% of student days, compared to between 5.7% and 7.8% in neighbouring jurisdictions.

Annual Attendance Reports 2010/11 and 2011/12: Main Statistics

Response Rate of Schools to the Annual Attendance Report

| | <i>2010/11</i> | <i>2011/12</i> |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <i>Primary</i> | 98.5% | 99.1% |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | 97.7% | 99.1% |

Non-Attendance

| | <i>2010/11</i> | <i>2011/12</i> | |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Primary</i> | 6.1% | 5.8% | <i>Student-level¹</i> |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | 7.8% | 7.7% | |

Twenty-Day Absences

| | <i>2010/11</i> | <i>2011/12</i> | |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|
| <i>Primary</i> | 11.1% | 11.1% | <i>Student-level</i> |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | 16.5% | 16.1% | |

Expulsions

| | <i>2010/11</i> | <i>2011/12</i> |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Primary</i> | 25 0.004% | 26 0.005% |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | 136 0.043% | 186 0.058% |

Suspensions

| | <i>2010/11</i> | <i>2011/12</i> |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Primary</i> | 1,266 0.3% | 1,280 0.2% |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | 13,869 4.4% | 15,056 4.7% |

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

Introduction

This is the first report to the Child and Family Agency in this series. With the establishment of the Agency on 1 January 2014, the former National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was dissolved and its functions under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 transferred to the Agency. The obligation on schools under Sections 21(6) of the Act of 2000 (the Annual Attendance Report) is not affected.

Data on non-attendance in primary and post-primary schools are collected by the through the *Annual Attendance Report* (AAR) requirement on schools. Data for the years 2003/04 through to 2010/11 are the focus of the earlier reports (Weir (2004), Ó Briain (2006), Mac Aogáin (2008), Millar (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013)). This report deals with data for the academic year 2011/12 and links to the data reported previously.

The report is in three sections:

- 1 *Non-Attendance from 2007/08 to 2011/12*, integrating the 2011/12 NEWB 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 2011/12*, which provides data for non-attendance by school location (urban / rural), disadvantaged area status of the school, and county by county figures.
- 3 *Non-Attendance in Post-Primary Schools in 2011/12*, which provides data for non-attendance by school type (community / comprehensive, secondary, vocational), disadvantaged area status of the school and county by county figures.

Section 1

Non-Attendance Data, 2007/08 to 2011/12

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 2007/08 to 2011/12. Data for 2007/08 through 2011/12 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 schools². There has been a year-on-year increase in the numbers of pupils/students in the primary and post-primary school sectors since 2007/08. In primary schools there has been an increase of 30,000 pupils over the period. In post-primary schools the number of students has increased by over 17,000.

Table 1.1

Number of Primary and Post-Primary Schools and Students, 2007/08 to 2011/12

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <i>Primary</i> | | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
| Schools | | 3,282 | 3,303 | 3,295 | 3,304 | 3,300 |
| Students | | 486,444 | 498,914 | 505,998 | 509,652 | 516,458 |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | | | | | | |
| Schools | | 709 | 710 | 708 | 707 | 701 |
| Students | | 305,114 | 307,503 | 312,159 | 317,432 | 322,519 |

Table 1.2 shows the numbers and percentages of schools responding to the AAR for 2007/08 through 2011/12. Response rates for 2011/12 are the highest recorded for both primary and post-primary. Thirty-one primary and six post-primary schools failed to return data.

Table 1.2

Response to the Annual Attendance Report, 2007/08 to 2011/12

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <i>Primary</i> | | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
| Schools | | 3,282 | 3,303 | 3,295 | 3,304 | 3,300 |
| Schools Responding | | 3,117 | 3,083 | 3,199 | 3,256 | 3,269 |
| <i>Response Rate</i> | | 95.0% | 93.3% | 97.1% | 98.5% | 99.1% |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | | | | | | |
| Schools | | 708 | 709 | 707 | 707 | 701 |
| Schools Responding | | 664 | 657 | 678 | 691 | 695 |
| <i>Response Rate</i> | | 93.8% | 92.7% | 95.9% | 97.7% | 99.1% |

² In 2011/12 there were 21 post-primary schools that catered for PLC students only (n=17,084). A further 20,736 PLC students were in 161 other post-primary schools. The 21 schools and 37,820 PLC students were excluded from the analyses.

1.2 Results of the *Annual Attendance Report*

The core of the NEWB data-set consists of four variables. They record

- (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 item AAR are referred to as 'non-attendance' in this report, in order to distinguish it 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 2007/08 to 2011/12 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

Non-Attendance, 2007/08 to 2011/12

| <i>Primary</i> | <i>2007/08</i> | <i>2008/09</i> | <i>2009/10</i> | <i>2010/11</i> | <i>2011/12</i> |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Schools | 3,116 | 3,075 | 3,160 | 3,235 | 3,261 |
| Students | 464,951 | 468,612 | 487,504 | 500,678 | 512,032 |
| School Days per Year | 183 | 183 | 183 | 183 | 183 |
| Student/Days | 85,086,033 | 85,755,996 | 89,213,232 | 91,624,074 | 93,701,856 |
| Student/Days Lost | 5,497,895 | 5,421,565 | 5,547,529 | 5,614,353 | 5,449,588 |
| | 6.5% | 6.3% | 6.2% | 6.1% | 5.8% |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | | | | | |
| Schools | 664 | 655 | 670 | 684 | 687 |
| Students | 288,520 | 287,627 | 297,777 | 310,0714 | 317,556 |
| School Days per Year | 167 | 167 | 167 | 167 | 167 |
| Student/Days | 48,182,840 | 48,033,709 | 49,728,759 | 51,781,857 | 53,031,852 |
| Student/Days Lost | 3,895,214 | 3,984,782 | 3,938,033 | 4,028,629 | 4,065,761 |
| | 8.1% | 8.3% | 7.9% | 7.8% | 7.7% |

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

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.

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

School Days per Year is 183 in primary schools and 167 in post-primary schools.

Student/Days is the product of *Number of Students* and *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.

Student/Days Lost is the figure requested by the first item on the *Annual Attendance Report*, 'individual student absences'. Ideally, it would correspond to the number of zeros recorded in an error-free roll-book for that year.

Non-Attendance is the same as *Student/Days Lost*, except that it is now expressed as a percentage of *Total Student/Days*, the maximum attendance that is possible. Thus *Non-Attendance* is *Student/Days Lost* divided by *Total Student/Days*, multiplied by 100 to convert the resulting proportion to a percentage.

The data show that 5.8% of pupil days were lost due to absence in primary schools in 2011/12 and that 7.7% of student days were lost in post-primary schools. Both the primary and post-primary figures are lower than for 2010/11 and are the lowest recorded over the five years.

1.2.2 Twenty-Day Absences

The number and percentage of 'students who were absent for 20 days or more' during the 2011/12 school year are summarised in Table 1.4, along with corresponding figures from 2007/08 to 2010/11.

Table 1.4

Twenty-Day Absences, 2007/08 to 2011/12

| | | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <i>Primary</i> | | | | | | |
| | Schools | 3,117 | 3,079 | 3,198 | 3,256 | 3,269 |
| | Students | 465,047 | 469,085 | 493,259 | 504,606 | 513,520 |
| | 20-Day Absences | 55,795 | 55,259 | 57,739 | 56,183 | 56,782 |
| | | 12.0% | 11.8% | 11.7% | 11.1% | 11.1% |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | | | | | | |
| | Schools | 662 | 657 | 678 | 690 | 695 |
| | Students | 287,835 | 288,986 | 301,548 | 311,931 | 321,543 |
| | 20-Day Absences | 50,893 | 52,096 | 52,992 | 51,590 | 51,685 |
| | | 17.7% | 18.0% | 17.6% | 16.5% | 16.1% |

The percentage of pupils who were absent for twenty-days or more lies in the range of approximately 11-12% in primary schools over the five year period. The 2011/12 figure lies at the lower end of this range but shows no improvement from 2010/11. For post-primary the figure is 0.4% lower than the previous year and is the lowest figure for the 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 19,750 primary school pupils was expelled in 2011/12. In post-primary schools, where there were 50 more expulsions in 2011/12 compared to the year before, the figure is about one in every 1,730.

Table 1.5
Expulsions, 2007/08 to 2011/12

| <i>Primary</i> | <i>2007/08</i> | <i>2008/09</i> | <i>2009/10</i> | <i>2010/11</i> | <i>2011/12</i> |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Schools | 3,117 | 3,081 | 3,199 | 3,256 | 3,269 |
| Students | 465,124 | 469,794 | 493,435 | 504,606 | 513,520 |
| Expulsions | 15 | 14 | 10 | 25 | 26 |
| | 0.003% | 0.003% | 0.002% | 0.004% | 0.005% |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | | | | | |
| Schools | 664 | 657 | 678 | 691 | 695 |
| Students | 288,520 | 288,986 | 301,548 | 312,294 | 321,543 |
| Expulsions | 136 | 128 | 148 | 136 | 186 |
| | 0.047% | 0.044% | 0.049% | 0.043% | 0.058% |

1.2.4 Suspensions

The numbers of suspensions reported for 2011/12 are shown in Table 1.6, with equivalent figures for 2007/08 to 2010/11. Suspensions are rare in primary schools when compared to post-primary schools (0.2% in primary and 4.7% in post-primary). In percentage terms the figures in primary schools have remained fairly constant. The number of suspensions in post-primary schools increased in 2011/12 by 0.3%.

Table 1.6
Suspensions, 2007/08 to 2011/12

| <i>Primary</i> | <i>2007/08</i> | <i>2008/09</i> | <i>2009/10</i> | <i>2010/11</i> | <i>2011/12</i> |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Schools | 3,117 | 3,081 | 3,199 | 3,256 | 3,269 |
| Students | 465,124 | 469,794 | 493,435 | 504,606 | 513,520 |
| Suspensions | 1,143 | 1,086 | 1,051 | 1,266 | 1,280 |
| | 0.2% | 0.2% | 0.2% | 0.3% | 0.2% |
| <i>Post-Primary</i> | | | | | |
| Schools | 664 | 657 | 678 | 691 | 695 |
| Students | 288,520 | 288,986 | 301,548 | 312,294 | 321,543 |
| Suspensions | 15,915 | 14,235 | 14,162 | 13,869 | 15,056 |
| | 5.5% | 4.9% | 4.7% | 4.4% | 4.7% |

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 don't 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 nation-wide has been calculated is non-attendance expressed as a percentage, by dividing through 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 5.8% for non-attendance in primary schools in 2011/12 suggests a decrease of 0.3% in the figure of 6.1% reported for 2010/11 (Table 1.3), implying a gain of 283,000 additional student days in attendance. The decrease in non-attendance of 0.1% in post-primary from 2010/11 implies an additional 53,000 student days in attendance.

The question arises whether the data are accurate enough to be interpreted in this way, or whether changes of the magnitude of 0.1% 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 changes of this size 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 NEWB 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 Non-Attendance Nationally, Expressed as Changes in Numbers of Student/Days, 2011/12

| | <i>Primary</i> | <i>Post-Primary</i> |
|---|----------------|---------------------|
| <i>Non-Attendance (NA)</i> | 5.8 | 7.7 |
| Population of Students | 516,458 | 322,519 |
| School Days | 183 | 167 |
| Student/Days | 94,511,814 | 53,860,673 |
| <i>0.1% gain/loss in NA as Student/Days</i> | 94,512 | 53,861 |

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 2011/12 data. When applied in this way, the non-attendance percentage returns figures for

- (1) students absent per day, and
- (2) days lost per student per year .

Table 1.8

Re-Expressions of Non-Attendance, 2011/12

| | <i>Primary</i> | <i>Post-Primary</i> |
|--------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| <i>Non-Attendance</i> | 5.8 | 7.7 |
| Total Students | 516,458 | 322,519 |
| <i>Students Absent per Day</i> | 30,000 | 24,800 |
| Total School Days | 183 | 167 |
| <i>Days Lost per Student</i> | 11 | 13 |

Section 2

Non-Attendance in Primary Schools, 2011/12

2.1. Non-Attendance by School Type

Irish pupils with special educational needs may attend special schools or special classes and ordinary 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.

Important note: The 2010/11 and 2011/12 figures in Table 2.1 are not directly comparable for the “Ordinary” school and “Ordinary with special classes” categories. Up until 2010/11 children from the Traveller community, taught by a special class teacher, were counted in the special class category. From 2011/12 on schools were instructed by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to no longer count them in that category and that the category was only to include children with special educational needs.

Table 2.1

Percentage of Available Student/Days Lost Through Absence by School Type, 2010/11 and 2011/12

| | 2010/11 | | 2011/12 | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| | <i>Non-Attendance</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>Non-Attendance</i> | <i>Schools</i> |
| Ordinary | 5.5 | 2,513 | 5.6 | 2,882 |
| Ordinary with special classes | 7.3 | 601 | 6.5 | 251 |
| Special | 11.5 | 121 | 11.0 | 128 |
| <i>Total</i> | 6.1 | 3,235 | 5.8 | 3,261 |

Pupils in mainstream primary schools were absent for 5.6% of the available days in 2011/12. The percentage days lost was higher for mainstream schools with special classes (6.5%) and highest in special schools (11.0%).

2.2. Non-Attendance in Urban and Rural Schools

NEWB 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 mainstream³ 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 2,957 schools (94.1% of the 3,141 mainstream schools that returned AAR data) were matched for 2011/12. Table 2.2 gives averages

³ Including mainstream schools with special classes

for non-attendance, 20-day absences, and suspensions in urban and rural primary schools. Expulsions have not been included because of the low numbers.

Table 2.2

Non-Attendance in Urban and Rural Primary Schools, 2010/11 and 2011/12*

| | 2010/11 | | | 2011/12 | | |
|------------------------|---------|----------|------|---------|----------|------|
| | Mean | Schools | SD | Mean | Schools | SD |
| <i>Non Attendance</i> | | | | | | |
| Rural Schools | 5.00 | 1,911 | 1.46 | 4.81 | 1,915 | 1.47 |
| Urban Schools | 6.83 | 1,030 | 2.95 | 6.44 | 1,034 | 2.63 |
| <i>Total</i> | 5.64 | 2,941 | 2.28 | 5.38 | 2,949 | 2.11 |
| | | <i>N</i> | | | <i>N</i> | |
| <i>20-Day Absences</i> | | | | | | |
| Rural Schools | 7.34 | 1,919 | 6.38 | 7.14 | 1,918 | 6.15 |
| Urban Schools | 14.12 | 1,041 | 9.13 | 13.77 | 1,039 | 8.55 |
| <i>Total</i> | 9.73 | 2,960 | 8.13 | 9.47 | 2,957 | 7.76 |
| | | <i>N</i> | | | <i>N</i> | |
| <i>Suspensions</i> | | | | | | |
| Rural Schools | .05 | 1,919 | .37 | .05 | 1,918 | .34 |
| Urban Schools | .36 | 1,041 | 1.30 | .38 | 1,039 | 1.29 |
| <i>Total</i> | .16 | 2,960 | .84 | .17 | 2,957 | .83 |

*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 2010/11 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 2,957 matched schools in 2011/12 the percentage of days lost was calculated for each school. Then the mean and standard deviation for all schools was calculated. Thus for the 1,911 rural schools the mean percentage of student days lost (*Non Attendance*) per school was 4.81%. The mean percentage of pupil days lost for the 1,030 urban schools was higher, 6.44%. 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 2,957 schools for which we have data for 2011/12, the mean school figure for the percentage of pupils missing twenty days’ schooling was just under 9.5%. However, there were considerable differences between schools as shown by the large standard deviation (7.76). 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

Non-Attendance and DEIS Categories

| | | 2010/11 | | | 2011/12 | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|-----------|
| | | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Rural | Not in SSP | 4.92 | 1,600 | 1.36 | 4.73 | 1,604 | 1.28 |
| Rural | In SSP | 5.41 | 311 | 1.84 | 5.25 | 311 | 2.16 |
| Urban | Not in SSP | 6.11 | 714 | 1.98 | 5.81 | 722 | 1.74 |
| Urban | In SSP Band 2 | 7.91 | 134 | 2.34 | 7.45 | 130 | 2.05 |
| Urban | In SSP Band 1 | 8.84 | 182 | 4.78 | 8.25 | 182 | 4.32 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 5.64 | 2,941 | 2.28 | 5.38 | 2,949 | 2.11 |

Table 2.4

Twenty-Day Absences and DEIS Categories

| | | 2010/11 | | | 2011/12 | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|-----------|
| | | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Rural | Not in SSP | 6.97 | 1,606 | 5.87 | 6.82 | 1,607 | 5.65 |
| Rural | In SSP | 9.25 | 313 | 8.26 | 8.83 | 311 | 8.07 |
| Urban | Not in SSP | 11.12 | 722 | 7.07 | 11.26 | 726 | 7.14 |
| Urban | In SSP Band 2 | 19.58 | 135 | 9.39 | 18.01 | 131 | 8.39 |
| Urban | In SSP Band 1 | 21.90 | 184 | 9.68 | 20.72 | 182 | 8.82 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 9.73 | 2,960 | 8.13 | 9.47 | 2,957 | 7.76 |

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. Both tables show that non-DEIS urban schools (*Urban Not in SSP*) had higher levels of non-attendance and twenty-day absences than DEIS rural school (*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.

While the overall figures for non-attendance and for twenty-day absences were both lower in 2011/12 than in the previous year it is apparent that the decreases are apparent in all five categories (with the exception of a small increase in twenty-day absences in urban non-DEIS schools (Table 2.4)). In the DEIS schools categories (in SSP) the figures are all lower than for 2010/11.

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 2011/12. In Urban Band 2 schools the figure is lower (0.44%, about 1 in 200 pupils). In urban non-DEIS schools the figure was about 1 in 500 pupils, while in rural schools it was of the order of 1 in 1000 or fewer. This pattern is the same for 2009/10 and earlier (Millar, 2012).

Table 2.5
Suspensions and DEIS Categories

| | | 2010/11 | | | 2011/12 | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|-----------|
| | | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Rural | Not in SSP | 0.04 | 1,606 | 0.31 | 0.05 | 1,607 | 0.30 |
| Rural | In SSP | 0.08 | 313 | 0.59 | 0.08 | 311 | 0.48 |
| Urban | Not in SSP | 0.17 | 722 | 0.82 | 0.19 | 726 | 0.72 |
| Urban | In SSP Band 2 | 0.54 | 135 | 1.26 | 0.44 | 131 | 0.95 |
| Urban | In SSP Band 1 | 0.96 | 184 | 2.29 | 1.10 | 182 | 2.48 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 0.16 | 2,960 | 0.84 | 0.17 | 2,957 | 0.83 |

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 is 6.0 in Leinster schools and 4.9 in schools in Ulster (Part of). This difference represents just over 2 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 11.9% for Leinster and 7.5% 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 *Non-Attendance by County for Primary Schools 2011/12*

| | Abs. | Abs20 | Exp. | Sus. |
|-------------------------|------|-------|------|------|
| LEINSTER | 6.0 | 11.9 | 0.01 | 0.52 |
| Carlow | 5.3 | 10.0 | 0.00 | 0.11 |
| Dublin | 6.8 | 15.2 | 0.02 | 1.09 |
| Kildare | 5.7 | 10.8 | 0.00 | 0.19 |
| Kilkenny | 5.2 | 8.3 | 0.02 | 0.30 |
| Laois | 5.7 | 11.2 | 0.00 | 0.24 |
| Longford | 5.5 | 9.5 | 0.01 | 0.15 |
| Louth | 6.1 | 11.7 | 0.00 | 0.16 |
| Meath | 5.1 | 8.7 | 0.00 | 0.06 |
| Offaly | 5.6 | 10.4 | 0.01 | 0.11 |
| Westmeath | 5.8 | 11.3 | 0.02 | 0.29 |
| Wexford | 5.4 | 10.1 | 0.00 | 0.18 |
| Wicklow | 5.4 | 9.5 | 0.00 | 0.39 |
| MUNSTER | 5.6 | 9.8 | 0.01 | 0.35 |
| Clare | 5.3 | 9.1 | 0.00 | 0.15 |
| Cork | 5.6 | 10.0 | 0.02 | 0.45 |
| Kerry | 5.6 | 9.5 | 0.00 | 0.14 |
| Limerick | 6.5 | 12.4 | 0.02 | 0.74 |
| Tipperary N.R. | 4.9 | 8.2 | 0.00 | 0.21 |
| Tipperary S.R. | 4.9 | 7.8 | 0.00 | 0.09 |
| Waterford | 5.5 | 9.8 | 0.00 | 0.28 |
| CONNACHT | 5.4 | 9.5 | 0.00 | 0.11 |
| Galway | 5.6 | 10.3 | 0.00 | 0.16 |
| Leitrim | 5.2 | 10.9 | 0.00 | 0.07 |
| Mayo | 5.4 | 9.0 | 0.00 | 0.08 |
| Roscommon | 5.1 | 8.2 | 0.00 | 0.06 |
| Sligo | 5.2 | 8.7 | 0.00 | 0.12 |
| ULSTER (part of) | 4.9 | 7.5 | 0.00 | 0.21 |
| Cavan | 5.2 | 9.2 | 0.00 | 0.06 |
| Donegal | 4.9 | 7.1 | 0.01 | 0.12 |
| Monaghan | 4.5 | 6.4 | 0.00 | 0.64 |
| STATE | 5.6 | 10.4 | 0.01 | 0.36 |

Section 3

Non-Attendance in Post-Primary Schools, 2011/12

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
Non-Attendance and Type of School

| <i>Type of School</i> | <i>2010/11</i> | | | <i>2011/12</i> | | |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| <i>Non-Attendance</i> | | | | | | |
| Secondary | 7.30 | 374 | 3.04 | 7.18 | 372 | 2.99 |
| Comm. / Comp. | 8.21 | 89 | 2.50 | 8.17 | 92 | 2.79 |
| Vocational | 10.09 | 221 | 4.36 | 9.70 | 223 | 4.92 |
| <i>Total</i> | 8.32 | 684 | 3.68 | 8.13 | 687 | 3.62 |
| <i>20-Day Absences</i> | | | | | | |
| Secondary | 14.53 | 379 | 10.71 | 14.41 | 376 | 9.96 |
| Comm. / Comp. | 18.95 | 90 | 9.99 | 18.84 | 93 | 10.27 |
| Vocational | 24.75 | 221 | 14.31 | 22.54 | 226 | 13.03 |
| <i>Total</i> | 18.38 | 690 | 12.75 | 17.65 | 695 | 11.67 |
| <i>Expulsions</i> | | | | | | |
| Secondary | 0.04 | 379 | 0.14 | 0.06 | 376 | 0.17 |
| Comm. / Comp. | 0.04 | 90 | 0.12 | 0.07 | 93 | 0.20 |
| Vocational | 0.09 | 222 | 0.33 | 0.09 | 226 | 0.22 |
| <i>Total</i> | 0.05 | 691 | 0.22 | 0.07 | 695 | 0.19 |
| <i>Suspensions</i> | | | | | | |
| Secondary | 3.73 | 379 | 4.15 | 3.81 | 376 | 4.52 |
| Comm. / Comp. | 6.08 | 90 | 5.81 | 5.90 | 93 | 6.57 |
| Vocational | 7.25 | 222 | 7.14 | 8.21 | 226 | 9.40 |
| <i>Total</i> | 5.16 | 691 | 5.72 | 5.52 | 695 | 7.02 |

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 broadly similar to 2010/11.

3.2 DEIS and Non-Attendance

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

Table 3.2

Non-Attendance in DEIS Schools

| | 2010/11 | | 2011/12 | |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | <i>DEIS</i> | <i>Other</i> | <i>DEIS</i> | <i>Other</i> |
| Non-Attendance | 11.17 (189) | 7.23 (495) | 10.81 (191) | 7.10 (496) |
| 20-Day Absences | 28.39 (189) | 14.60 (501) | 26.65 (194) | 14.17 (501) |
| Expulsions | 0.11 (190) | 0.03 (501) | 0.15 (194) | 0.04 (501) |
| Suspensions | 10.16 (190) | 3.27 (501) | 11.13 (194) | 3.35 (501) |

DEIS schools show higher figures for all forms of non-attendance. The mean number of student per school missing twenty days or more is roughly 12.5% higher in DEIS schools as compared to non-DEIS schools. Overall, 26.65% of students in DEIS post-primary schools were absent for more than 20 days. However, this figure is down by over 1.5% on 2010/11 and is almost 3% lower than in 2009/10 (Millar 2013).

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 8.0% in Leinster schools and 8.3% 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 17.7% for Leinster and 17.2% for Ulster (Part of).

Table 3.3 *Non-Attendance by County for Post-Primary Schools 2011/12*

| | Abs. | Abs20 | Exp. | Sus. |
|-------------------------|------|-------|------|------|
| LEINSTER | 8.0 | 17.7 | 0.09 | 6.74 |
| Carlow | 7.2 | 14.8 | 0.11 | 5.60 |
| Dublin | 7.9 | 17.2 | 0.12 | 7.26 |
| Kildare | 8.1 | 18.3 | 0.06 | 5.89 |
| Kilkenny | 9.5 | 17.6 | 0.03 | 4.52 |
| Laois | 8.7 | 24.9 | 0.04 | 5.43 |
| Longford | 10.0 | 23.4 | 0.00 | 6.20 |
| Louth | 7.3 | 15.3 | 0.05 | 6.46 |
| Meath | 6.5 | 15.7 | 0.12 | 6.10 |
| Offaly | 7.8 | 18.9 | 0.06 | 4.93 |
| Westmeath | 8.5 | 18.0 | 0.13 | 4.56 |
| Wexford | 9.7 | 20.8 | 0.05 | 9.74 |
| Wicklow | 7.4 | 16.6 | 0.06 | 6.79 |
| MUNSTER | 7.9 | 16.4 | 0.05 | 4.52 |
| Clare | 7.5 | 13.4 | 0.01 | 4.26 |
| Cork | 7.8 | 16.1 | 0.04 | 4.43 |
| Kerry | 9.0 | 19.3 | 0.00 | 3.69 |
| Limerick | 8.2 | 17.0 | 0.05 | 5.08 |
| Tipperary N.R. | 7.8 | 16.9 | 0.09 | 3.59 |
| Tipperary S.R. | 6.8 | 14.6 | 0.15 | 5.72 |
| Waterford | 7.9 | 16.3 | 0.06 | 5.17 |
| CONNACHT | 8.8 | 20.4 | 0.05 | 4.16 |
| Galway | 8.9 | 20.7 | 0.06 | 3.42 |
| Leitrim | 8.5 | 14.9 | 0.03 | 4.23 |
| Mayo | 9.1 | 22.1 | 0.06 | 4.72 |
| Roscommon | 7.5 | 18.3 | 0.03 | 3.47 |
| Sligo | 8.6 | 20.1 | 0.00 | 5.87 |
| ULSTER (part of) | 8.3 | 17.2 | 0.05 | 4.04 |
| Cavan | 8.4 | 19.2 | 0.06 | 4.82 |
| Donegal | 8.4 | 16.7 | 0.05 | 3.53 |
| Monaghan | 8.1 | 16.5 | 0.03 | 4.48 |
| STATE | 8.1 | 17.7 | 0.07 | 5.52 |

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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 2011/12.

Table 1 *Total Absence in Primary and Secondary Schools in Ireland and the UK 2011/12*

| | Primary | | Post-primary | |
|------------------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|
| | Unauthorised | Overall | Unauthorised | Overall |
| Ireland | - | 5.8% | - | 7.7% |
| Northern Ireland | 1.3% | 4.8% | 2.6% | 7.0% |
| England | 0.6% | 4.4% | 1.3% | 5.7% |
| Scotland | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Wales | 0.7% | 6.2% | 1.4% | 7.8% |

Non-attendance rates for 2010/11 were between 1% and 1.4% higher in Irish primary schools than schools in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland, and 0.4% lower than for Wales. At post-primary England and Northern Ireland had a lower rate of non-attendance than Ireland. The rate for Wales was just above the Irish figure.

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, 2013) and lists 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 get 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 treat special and ordinary 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
*Total Absence in Primary and Special Schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland
 2011/12*

| | Ireland | Northern Ireland |
|--------------------------------|---------|------------------|
| Primary | 5.6% | 4.8% |
| Primary with special class(es) | 6.5% | - |
| Special | 11.0% | 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 0.8% rather than 1.0%. This difference (of 0.2%) is less than it was in previous years (e.g. Millar (2003)). As noted above, up until 2010/11 children from the Traveller community, taught by a special class teacher, were counted in the special class category. From 2011/12 on schools were instructed by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to no longer count them in that category and that the category was only to include children with special educational needs. This change has had the result of marginally increasing the level of non-attendance in the mainstream primary category and reducing the level of non-attendance in primary schools with special classes. 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. Given this, and given the desire to understand and deal with certain aspects of non-attendance, it is worthwhile taking into account these differences in parts of the primary sector.