



Pupil suspensions and expulsions in Northern Ireland 2020/21

**Experimental Statistics
June 2022**



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Key findings

The figures presented cover the 2020/21 academic year and relate to pupils of compulsory school age in primary, post-primary and special schools across Northern Ireland.

In the 2019/20 academic year schools, except special schools, were closed for all but those children of key workers and vulnerable children between 23 March and 29 June. In 2020/21, between 19 October and 2 November schools were closed for an extended mid-term break, and did not re-open after the Christmas break until 8 March when a phased return of year groups was in place. Suspensions and expulsions were possible throughout each year, including periods of school closures. However due to school closures both in 2019/20 and 2020/21 comparisons to previous years should be treated with caution.

- In 2020/21, 3,506 compulsory school age pupils were suspended an increase of 164 pupils compared to the 2019/20 academic year.
- In 2020/21, 1.2% of compulsory school age pupils were suspended compared to 1.1% in 2019/20.
- In 2020/21, the 3,506 pupils suspended were suspended on a total of 4,963 occasions.
- Persistent infringements of school rules was the most common reason for a suspension occasion. This reason was given by schools for 1,563 suspension occasions representing 31.5% of all occasions
- In 2020/21, 25 compulsory school age pupils were expelled in Northern Ireland an increase of 14 pupils compared to the 2019/20 academic year. These numbers represent 0.008% of compulsory school age pupils in 2020/21 compared to 0.003% in 2019/20.

1.0 Introduction

This publication presents statistics on suspensions and expulsions within the 2020/21 academic for compulsory school age pupils across primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland.

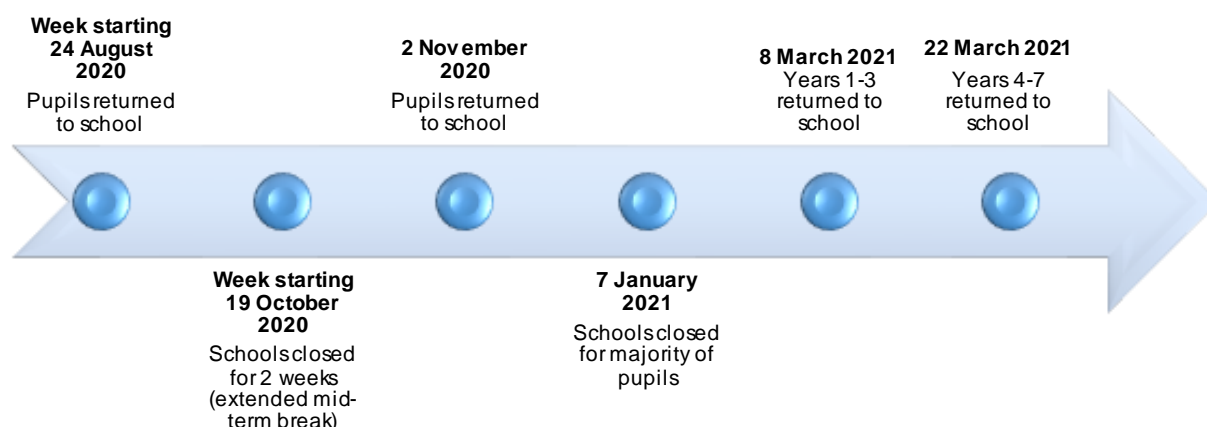
The publication includes data on:

- the number and percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended
- suspensions by pupil characteristics
- reasons schools report for suspending and expelling and pupils
- the number and percentage of compulsory school age pupils expelled

The data are collated from schools' returns to the Education Authority (EA) and processed by the Department of Education.

In the 2019/20 academic year schools, except special schools, were closed for all but those children of key workers and vulnerable children between 23 March and 29 June. In 2020/21, between 19 October and 2 November schools were closed for an extended mid-term break, and did not re-open after the Christmas break until 8 March when a phased return of year groups was in place. Suspensions and expulsions were possible throughout each year, including periods of school closures. However due to school closures both in 2019/20 and 2020/21 comparisons to previous years should be treated with caution.

Figure 1: Periods of school closure timeline 2020/21 academic year



1.1. The number and percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended

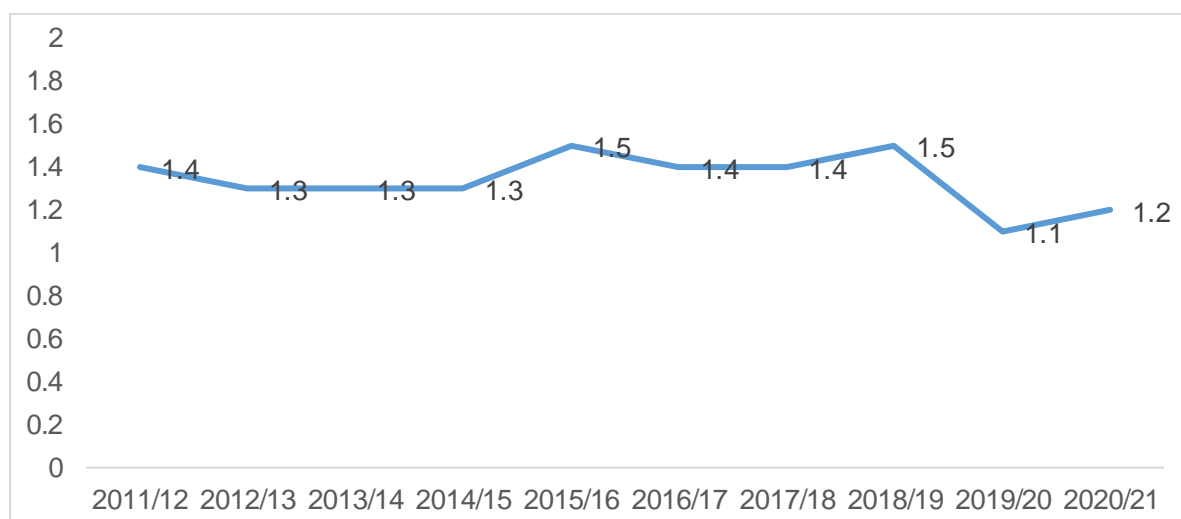
A suspension refers to when a pupil is excluded from a school for a set period of time. A pupil may be suspended for one or more occasions up to a maximum of 45 school days in a single academic year. This total includes suspensions from previous schools.

In the academic year 2020/21, 3,506 compulsory school age pupils were suspended, an increase of 164 pupils compared to the 2019/20 academic year.

The number of pupils suspended in 2020/21 represents 1.2% of compulsory school age pupils compared to 1.1% in 2019/20.

During the periods of school closures in 2020/21, 44 pupils were suspended and in the period of school closure in 2019/20 the number of pupils suspended was below release thresholds. It should be noted that during the school closures in 2020/21 on average more pupils (children of key workers, vulnerable children and children attending special schools) attended school than in the period of school closure in 2019/20.

Figure 2: Percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended in Northern Ireland 2011/12 – 2020/21



Source Education Authority & the School Census

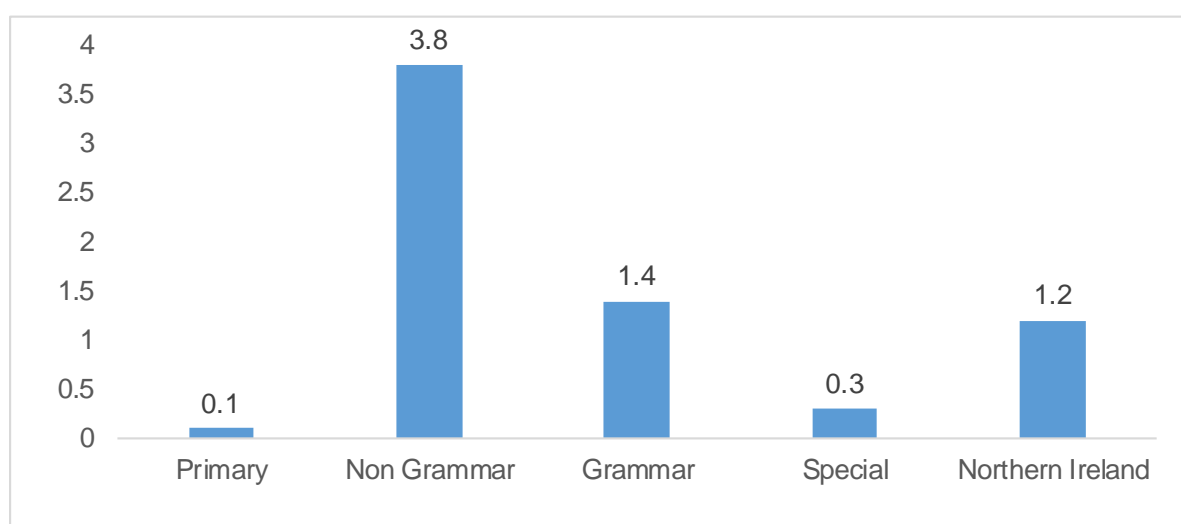
Over the period since 2011/12, with the exception of the current year and 2019/20 both of which were impacted by school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended ranged from 1.3% to 1.5%.

1.2 School level analysis

1.2.1 Percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended by school types

The highest percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended in 2020/21 was in non-grammar schools (3.8%) and lowest in primary schools (0.1%). The comparable percentages for grammar schools and special schools were 1.4% and 0.3% respectively.

Figure 3: Percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended by school types in Northern Ireland 2020/21



Source Education Authority & the School Census

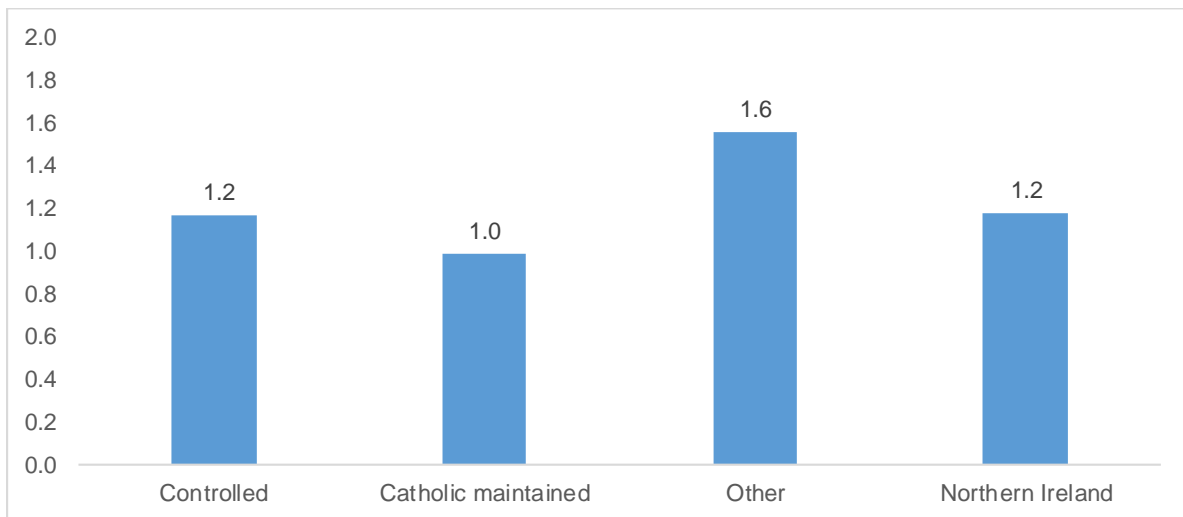
The pattern of pupil suspensions across school types has been consistent over the period 2011/12 – 2020/21 with the highest percentages of compulsory school age pupils suspended in post-primary settings, especially non-grammar schools, and lowest in primary schools.

1.2.2 Percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended by school management types

In 2020/21, 1,504 compulsory school age pupils were suspended while attending controlled schools, 1,101 while attending Catholic maintained schools and 901 pupils were attending schools of another management type.

These numbers of pupils suspended represent 1.2% of compulsory school age pupils in Controlled schools, 1.0% in Catholic maintained schools and 1.6% in other management type schools.

Figure 4: Percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended by school management types in Northern Ireland 2020/21



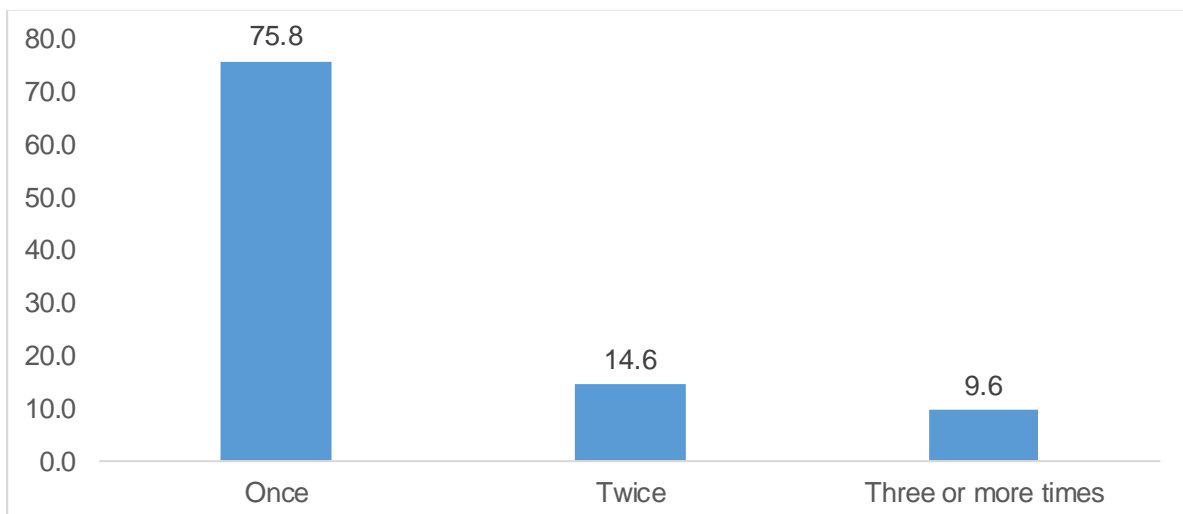
Source Education Authority & the School Census

Notes 1. The Controlled group includes controlled integrated and controlled Irish Medium schools.
 2. The Other group includes grant maintained integrated schools, voluntary grammar schools (both denominational and non-denominational) and other voluntary maintained schools.

1.3 Pupils of compulsory school age with one or more suspensions

In 2020/21, 2,659 compulsory school age pupils were suspended once, 512 were suspended twice and 335 were suspended three or more occasions.

Figure 5: Number of times compulsory school age pupils were suspended in Northern Ireland 2020/21



Source Education Authority

Pupils that were suspended once accounted for 76% of all suspended pupils, pupils suspended twice account for 15% and pupils that were suspended three or more

occasions account for 10% of all pupils of compulsory school age that were suspended in 2020/21.

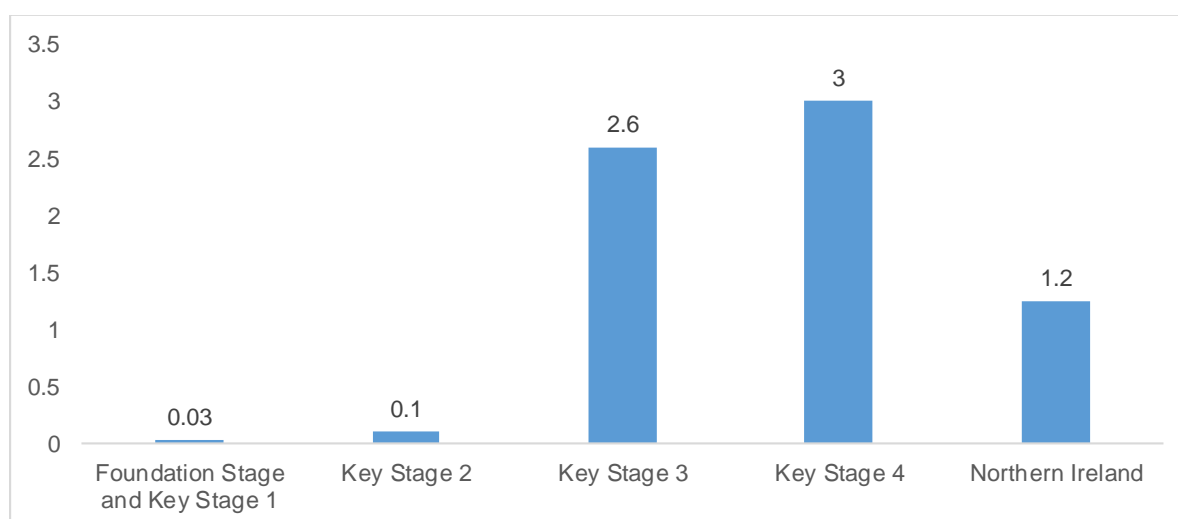
1.4 Duration of pupils' suspensions

In 2020/21, 3,000 compulsory school age pupils were suspended for five days or less representing 85.6% of all suspended pupils. A further 317 pupils (9.0%) were suspended for 6-10 days, 138 pupils (3.9%) were suspended for 11-20 days, 33 pupils (0.9%) were suspended for 21-30 days and 18 pupils (0.5%) were suspended for 31 days or more.

1.5 Numbers and percentages of pupils suspended by Key Stage

In 2020/21, 1,964 pupils in Key Stage 3 were suspended, 1,421 pupils in Key Stage 4 were suspended, 87 pupils in Key Stage 2 were suspended as were 34 pupils in the Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1.

Figure 6: Percentage of pupils suspended by Key Stage in Northern Ireland 2020/21



Source Education Authority & the School Census

Note: 1. The Foundation Stage is Years 1 and 2; Key Stage 1 is Years 3 and 4; Key Stage 2 is Years 5 to 7; Key Stage 3 is Years 8 to 10; and Key Stage 4 is Years 11 and 12.

These numbers of suspended pupils represent 2.6% of Key Stage 3 pupils, 3.0% of Key Stage 4 pupils, 0.1% of Key Stage 2 pupils and 0.03% of pupils in the Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1.

1.6 Pupil level characteristics

This section of the report presents a socio-demographic profile of compulsory school age pupils suspended in 2020/21. The characteristics of gender, age, ethnicity, children looked after and Special Educational Needs (SEN) are reported by schools in their returns to the EA. The remaining characteristics in this section, religion, Newcomer status and Free School Meals (FSM) are sourced from the School Census by linking the pupils' suspension returns to their School Census returns. Population totals for all characteristics i.e. the number of pupils of compulsory school age by characteristic are sourced from the School Census and used in calculating the percentages of pupils suspended.

1.6.1 Gender

In 2020/21, 2,702 boys and 804 girls of compulsory school age were suspended. These numbers of boys and girls that were suspended represent 1.8% of boys and 0.6% of girls.

1.6.2 Age

In 2020/21, 1,644 suspended pupils were aged 13-14 years, 1,135 were aged 11-12 years, 607 were aged 15 years or older and 120 aged under 11 years. These numbers of suspended pupils represent 3.4% of pupils aged 13-14 years, 2.2% of pupils aged 11-12 years, 2.6% of pupils aged 15 years and over and 0.1% of pupils aged under 11 years.

1.6.3 Ethnicity

In 2020/21, 3,326 white pupils and 180 pupils from a minority ethnic background¹, of compulsory school age, were suspended. These numbers of pupils suspended represent 1.2% of white pupils of compulsory school age and 1.2% from a minority ethnic background.

1.6.4 Children looked after²

In 2020/21, 148 compulsory school age pupils suspended were children looked after and 3,358 pupils were not. These numbers of suspended pupils represent 5.9% of children looked after and 1.1% of children that were not.

¹ Minority ethnic includes Traveller pupils

² Children looked after' includes children defined in 'The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995', i.e., 'a child who is looked after by an authority is a reference to a child who is: (a) in the care of the authority; or (b) provided with accommodation by the authority.' This includes children who are fostered.

1.6.5 Special Educational Needs (SEN)

In 2020/21, 1,254 compulsory school age pupils who were suspended had SEN and 2,252 pupils did not. These numbers of pupils suspended represent 2.0% of pupils with SEN, and 0.9% for pupils with no SEN.

1.6.6 Religion³

In 2020/21, 1,595 Catholic pupils, 1,265 Protestant pupils and 557 pupils from another or no religion were suspended. These numbers of pupils of compulsory school age suspended represent 1.1% of Catholic pupils, 1.3% of Protestant pupils and 1.0% of pupils from another or no religion.

1.6.7 Newcomer status³

In 2020/21, 121 compulsory school age pupils who were suspended were Newcomer pupils and 3,296 pupils were not. These numbers of suspended pupils represent 0.8% of Newcomer pupils and 1.2% of pupils that were not.

1.6.8 Free School Meals (FSM)³

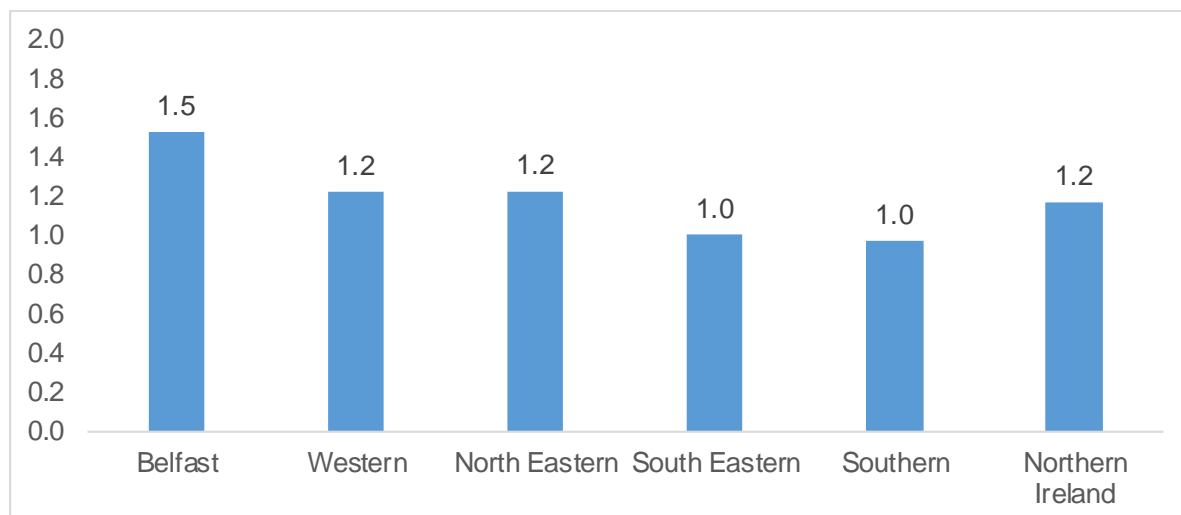
In 2020/21, 1,778 compulsory school age pupils who were suspended were eligible for FSM and 1,639 pupils who were suspended were not. These numbers of suspended pupils represent 2.0% of pupils eligible for FSM and 0.8% of pupils who were not.

1.7 Sub-regional analysis

In 2020/21, 796 compulsory school age pupils in the EA's North Eastern region, 783 in the Belfast region, 714 in the Southern region, 607 in the Western region and 606 in the South Eastern region were suspended. These numbers of suspended pupils represent 1.2% of pupils in the North Eastern region, 1.5% in the Belfast region, 1.0% in the Southern region, 1.2% in the Western region and 1.0% in the South Eastern region.

³ This characteristic is not collected by the EA and is sourced by matching the pupil's suspension record to the School Census. In 2020/21 this match was not possible for 89 pupils who were suspended.

Figure 7: Percentage of compulsory school age pupils suspended by Education Authority region in Northern Ireland 2020/21



Source Education Authority & the School Census

1.8 The reasons reported by schools for suspension occasions

In 2020/21, 3,506 compulsory school age pupils were suspended on a total of 4,963 occasions.

Persistent infringements of school rules was the reason for a suspension occasion most frequently reported by schools. This reason was given for 1,563 suspension occasions representing 31.5% of all suspension occasions.

Physical attack on a pupil was the reason for 1,136 suspension occasions (22.9%) and verbal abuse of staff was the reason for 920 suspension occasions (18.5%)

2.0 Expulsions

In 2020/21, 25 compulsory school age pupils were expelled across Northern Ireland, an increase of 14 pupils compared to the 2019/20 academic year. The numbers of pupils expelled represent 0.008% of pupils in 2020/21 and 0.003% in 2019/20.

The relatively small number of compulsory school age pupils expelled constrains the level of disaggregation that is possible.

All compulsory school age pupils expelled were in Year 8 or above and the majority were males. Twelve of the expelled pupils (48%) in 2020/21 had SEN.

Ten compulsory school age pupils (40%) were expelled for persistent infringements of school rules, seven (28%) for substance abuse and five (20%) for physical attacks on pupils.

3.0 Country comparisons

The Department for Education, England, has published their statistics on permanent exclusions (expulsions in Northern Ireland) and suspensions. The most recent statistics relate to 2019/20⁴, when 310,733 pupils were suspended representing 3.76% of all pupils, and 5,057 were permanently excluded representing 0.06% of all pupils. These figures for England relate to all pupils, in Northern Ireland the statistics are for Years 1-12, which aligns with compulsory school age.

The most recent figures for Scotland⁵ show that in 2020/21 8,322 pupils were temporarily excluded (suspended in Northern Ireland) and one was removed from the register (expelled in Northern Ireland). The number of pupils temporarily excluded represents 1.19% of all pupils, the percentage of pupils removed from the register was reported as “low”. These figures for Scotland relate to pupils in P1 to S6.

In Wales⁶, the most recent figures relating to 2019/20 show that there were 13,409 pupils of all ages in maintained primary, middle, secondary and special schools excluded for a fixed period (suspended in Northern Ireland), representing 2.8% of all pupils and 218 pupils were permanently excluded (expelled in Northern Ireland), representing 0.05% of all pupils.

In 2017/18 in the Republic of Ireland 3,178 primary and post-primary pupils were suspended, representing 1.5% of all pupils, and 132 primary and post-primary pupils were expelled, representing 0.02% of all pupils.

⁴ Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-exclusions-and-suspensions-in-england-2019-to-2020>

⁵ Source: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-exclusion-statistics/>

⁶ Source: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2021/11/4/1637832618/permanent-and-fixed-term-exclusions-schools-september-2019-august-2020.pdf>

Annex 1: Data tables

Table 1: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended 2011/12 – 2020/21

Year	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of pupils
2011/12	3879	1.4
2012/13	3556	1.3
2013/14	3677	1.3
2014/15	3647	1.3
2015/16	4156	1.5
2016/17	4048	1.4
2017/18	4069	1.4
2018/19	4549	1.5
2019/20	3342	1.1
2020/21	3506	1.2

Source Education Authority & the School Census

Table 2: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended by school type 2020/21

School Type	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of pupils
Primary	118	0.1
Non Grammar	2729	3.8
Grammar	642	1.4
Special	17	0.3
Northern Ireland	3506	1.2

Source Education Authority & the School Census

Table 3: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended by school management type 2020/21

Management type	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of pupils
Controlled	1504	1.2
Catholic maintained	1101	1.0
Other	901	1.6
Northern Ireland	3506	1.2

Source Education Authority & the School Census

Note: 1. The Controlled group includes controlled integrated and controlled Irish Medium schools. 3. The Other group includes grant maintained integrated schools, voluntary grammar schools (both denominational and non-denominational) and other voluntary maintained schools.

Table 4: Pupils of compulsory school age with one or more suspensions 2020/21

Number of times suspended	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of all suspended pupils
Once	2659	75.8
Twice	512	14.6
Three or more times	335	9.6
Northern Ireland	3506	100.0

Source Education Authority

Table 5: Length of time pupils of compulsory school age were suspended 2020/21

Duration	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of all suspended pupils
5 days or less	3000	85.6
6 -10 days	317	9.0
11 - 20 days	138	3.9
21 - 30 days	33	0.9
31 days or more	18	0.5
All suspended pupils	3506	100

Source Education Authority

Table 6: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended by pupil characteristics 2020/21

Pupil characteristic	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of pupils
Gender		
Male	2702	1.8
Female	804	0.6
Age		
Under 11 years	120	0.1
11 - 12 years	1135	2.2
13 - 14 years	1644	3.4
15 years and older	607	2.6
Ethnicity		
White	3326	1.2
Minority Ethnic ¹	180	1.2
Children looked after		
Yes	148	5.9
No	3358	1.1
Special Education Needs		
Yes	1254	2.0
No	2252	0.9
Religion²		
Protestant	1265	1.3
Roman Catholic	1595	1.1
Other including no religion	557	1.0
Newcomer²		
Yes	121	0.8
No	3296	1.2
Free School Meals Eligibility²		
Yes	1778	2.0
No	1639	0.8
Northern Ireland	3506	1.2

Source Education Authority & School Census

Notes 1. Minority ethnic includes Traveller pupils

2. This characteristic is not collected by the EA and is sourced by matching the pupil's suspension record to the School Census. In 2020/21 this match was not possible for 89 pupils who were suspended.

Table 7: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended by Education Authority region 2020/21

Education Authority region	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of pupils
Belfast	783	1.5
Western	607	1.2
North Eastern	796	1.2
South Eastern	606	1.0
Southern	714	1.0
Northern Ireland	3506	1.2

Source Education Authority

Table 8: Reasons for suspension occasions for pupils of compulsory school age 2020/21

Reason for suspension occasion	Number	Percentage
Persistent infringements of school rules	1563	31.5
Physical attack on a pupil	1136	22.9
Verbal abuse of staff	920	18.5
Disruptive behaviour in class	399	8.0
Significant damage to property	259	5.2
Substance abuse	227	4.6
Physical attack on staff	139	2.8
Verbal abuse of a pupil	138	2.8
Bullying of a pupil	112	2.3
Stealing	45	0.9
Alcohol abuse	25	0.5
Total	4963	100.0

Source Education Authority

Note 1. A pupil may be suspended for more than one occasion and therefore the number of pupils suspended in any year will be less than the number of suspension occasions.

Notes for readers

The statistics presented in this publication are classified as Experimental statistics and are a subset of Official Statistics which may not fully meet the standards of the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) (the Code). Methods to comply fully with the Code are being developed.

[The Schools \(suspension and Exclusion of Pupils\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1995](#) requires schools to immediately inform the Education Authority (EA) and in the case of Catholic maintained schools the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), when a pupil has been suspended or expelled.

The statistics presented in this publication are derived from schools' returns to the Education Authority. Schools make their returns to their Education Authority (EA) region and the returns are collated centrally by the EA. Subsequently the returns are provided to the Department's Analytical Services Unit for processing and publication of this report.

The pupil characteristics of religion, Newcomer status and Free School Meals Eligibility are not recorded in a school's suspension return and are sourced by matching the return to the School Census. In 2020/21 this match was not possible for 89 suspended pupils.

The suspensions and expulsions data presented in this publication cover pupils of compulsory school age in Northern Ireland attending primary, post-primary or special schools.

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