



# **Pupil suspensions and expulsions in Northern Ireland 2022/23**

**Official Statistics in Development**

**April 2024**



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## **Key findings.**

The figures presented cover the 2022/23 academic year and relate to pupils of compulsory school age in primary, post-primary and special schools across Northern Ireland.

- In 2022/23, 5,129 pupils were suspended, representing 1.7% of all pupils, an increase of 415 pupils (8.8%) from the 2021/22 academic year when 4,714 pupils, representing 1.6% of all pupils, were suspended.
- In 2022/23, the 5,129 pupils were suspended a total of 8,262 times. The majority of suspended pupils (69.6%) were suspended once during the 2021/22 academic year.
- In 2022/23, persistent infringements of school rules was the most common reason for a pupil to be suspended. This reason was given by schools for 2,508 suspensions representing 30.4% of all suspensions.
- In 2022/23, 23 pupils were expelled in Northern Ireland an increase of three pupils compared to the 2021/22 academic year. These numbers, after rounding of the figures, represent 0.008% of pupils both in 2021/22 and 2022/23.

## **1.0 Introduction.**

This report presents statistics on suspensions and expulsions during the 2022/23 academic year and relate to pupils of compulsory school age, for brevity referred to pupils in the body of this report, in primary, post-primary and special schools across Northern Ireland.

The report includes:

- the number and percentage of pupils suspended
- characteristics of suspended pupils and the schools they attended
- reasons why pupils were suspended
- the number and percentage of expelled pupils.

The Education Authority (EA) collate the returns made by schools and the resultant annual suspensions and expulsions data are shared with the Department of Education (DE) for processing and publication of this report.

During 2019/20 and 2020/21, while suspensions and expulsions were possible throughout the academic year, Covid-19 restrictions will have had an impact on the numbers presented and caution should be taken when comparing across years.

## 2.0 Pupil suspensions.

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

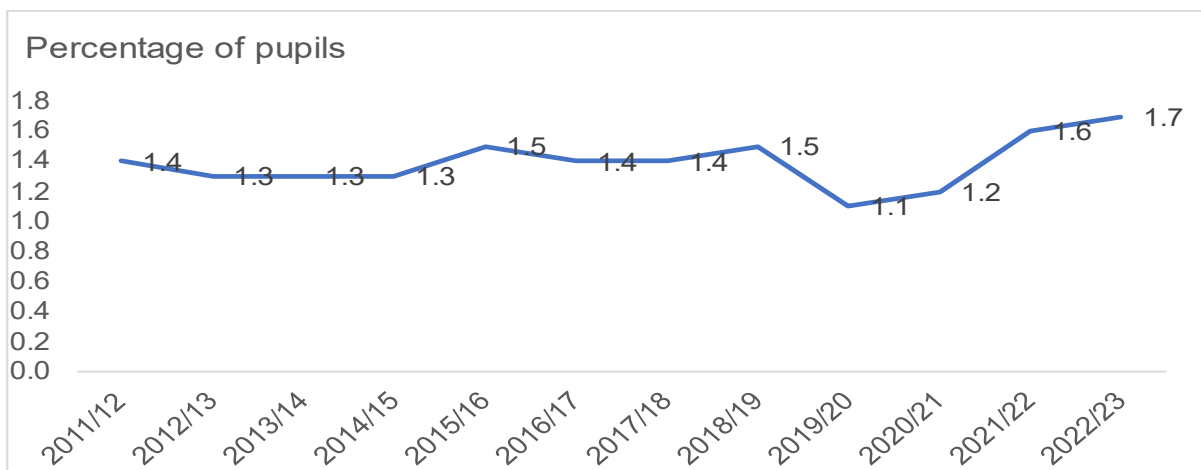
### 2.1 Total number of pupils suspended in the academic year 2022/23.

In the academic year 2022/23, 5,219 pupils were suspended, an increase of 415 (8.8%) pupils compared to the 2021/22 academic year.

### 2.2 The percentage of pupils suspended over time in Northern Ireland.

In 2022/23, 5,129 pupils were suspended, an increase of 1,250 pupils (23%) from 2011/12 when 3,879 pupils were suspended. These numbers of suspended pupils represent 1.7% of all pupils in 2022/23 and 1.4% of all pupils in 2011/12. ([Annex 1 Table 1](#)).

**Figure 1 Percentage of pupils suspended in Northern Ireland 2011/12 – 2022/23.**



Source Education Authority & the School Census

Note:

1. During 2019/20 and 2020/21, while suspensions and expulsions were possible throughout the academic year, Covid-19 restrictions will have had an

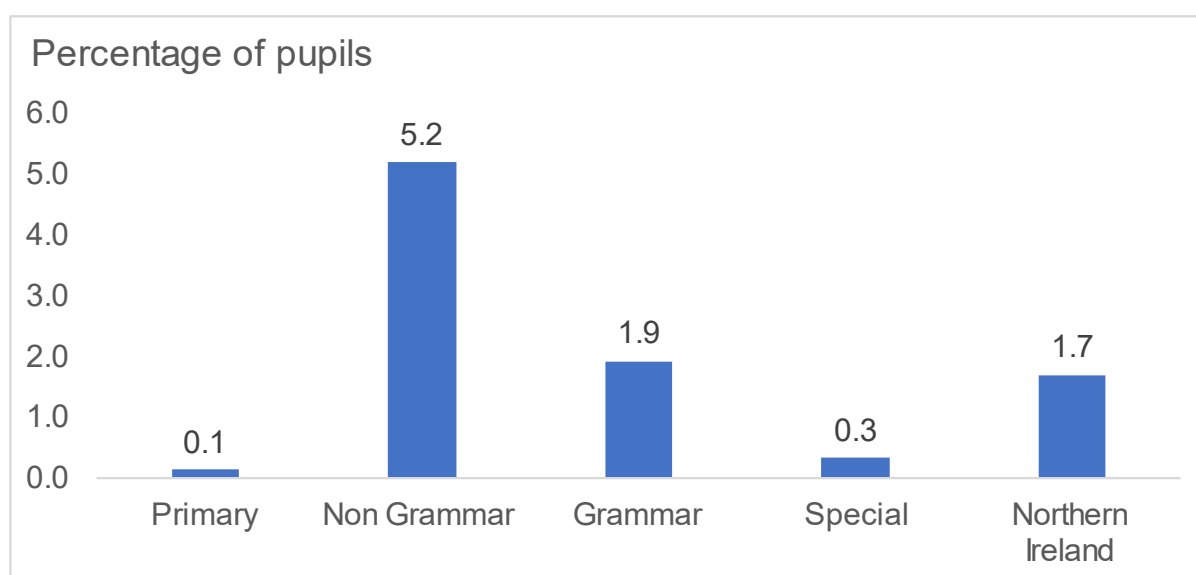
impact on the numbers presented and caution should be taken when comparing across years.

In the years prior to Covid-19 (2011/12 to 2018/19), the percentage of pupils suspended was relatively stable ranging from 1.3% to 1.5%. The academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 were both impacted by Covid-19 with periods of school closures resulting in lower percentages of pupils suspended than in the any of the preceding eight years, 1.1% and 1.2% respectively. The 2021/22 academic year saw the percentage of pupils suspended increase slightly to 1.6% and increase slightly further to 1.7% in 2022/23.

### **2.3 Suspended pupils and type of school.**

In 2022/23, 3,970 suspended pupils representing 77.4% of all suspended pupils were in non-grammar schools. A further 934 (18.2%) were in grammar schools, 206 (4.0%) were in primary schools and 19 (0.4%) were in special schools. ([Annex 1 Table 2](#)).

**Figure 2: Percentage of pupils suspended by school type in Northern Ireland 2022/23.**



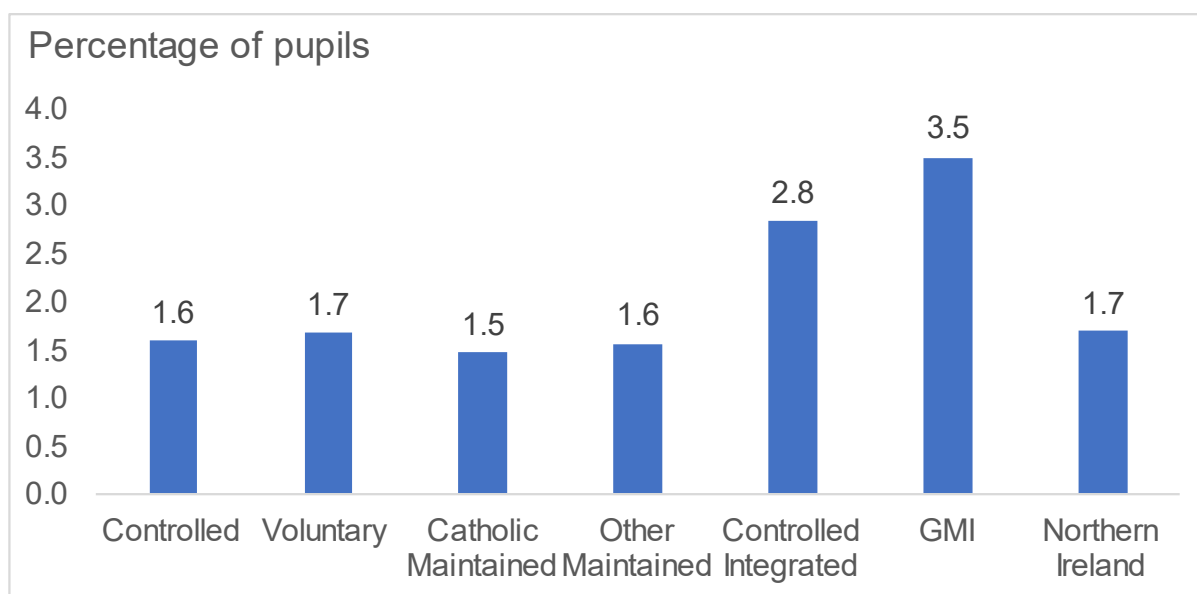
Source Education Authority & the School Census

In 2022/23, 5.2% of non-grammar school pupils were suspended as were 1.9% of grammar school pupils, 0.3% of special school pupils and 0.1% of primary school pupils.

#### **2.4 Suspended pupils and school management type.**

In 2022/23, 1,948 suspended pupils representing 38.0% of all suspended pupils were in controlled schools, 1,659 suspended pupils (32.3%) were in Catholic maintained schools. A further 656 suspended pupils (12.8%) were in voluntary schools, 547 suspended pupils (10.7%) were in Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools, 244 suspended pupils (4.8%) were in Controlled Integrated schools and 75 suspended pupils (1.5%) were in Other maintained schools ([Annex 1 Table 3](#)).

**Figure 3: Percentage of pupils suspended by school management type in Northern Ireland 2022/23.**



Source Education Authority & the School Census

In GMI schools and Controlled Integrated schools 3.8% and 2.8% of pupils respectively were suspended, the highest across management types and above the Northern Ireland average (1.7%). In Voluntary schools 1.7% of pupils were suspended as were 1.6% of pupils both in Controlled schools and Other maintained

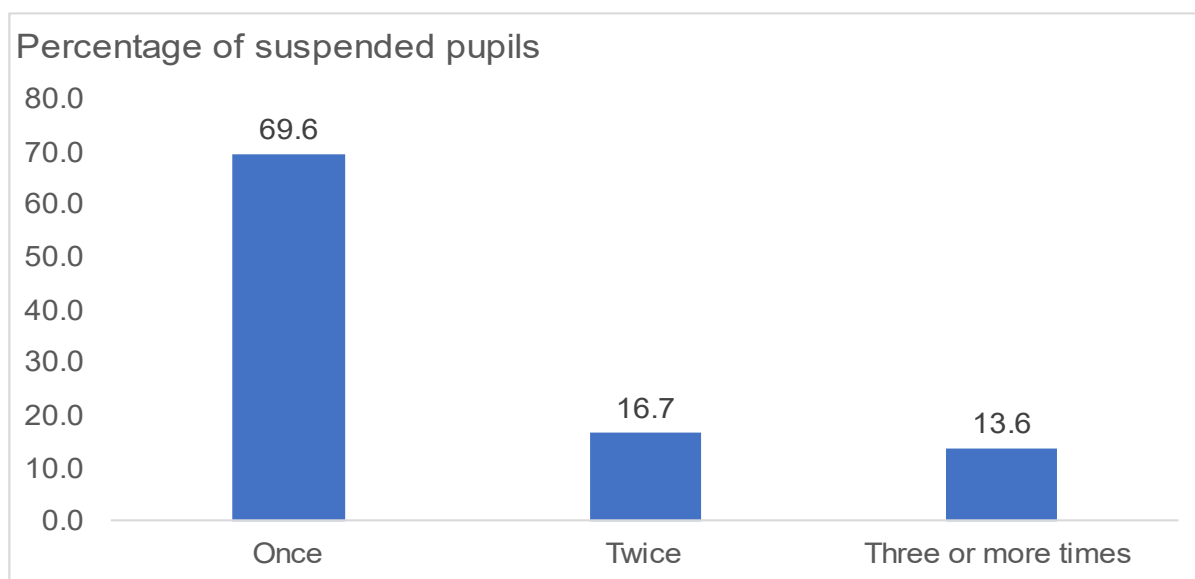


schools. The lowest percentage of pupils suspended (1.5%) was in Catholic maintained schools.

### **2.5 Pupils with one or more suspension occasion.**

In 2022/23, 3,572 pupils were suspended once, 859 were suspended twice and 698 were suspended on three or more occasions ([Annex 1 Table 4](#)).

**Figure 4: Number of times pupils were suspended in Northern Ireland 2022/23.**



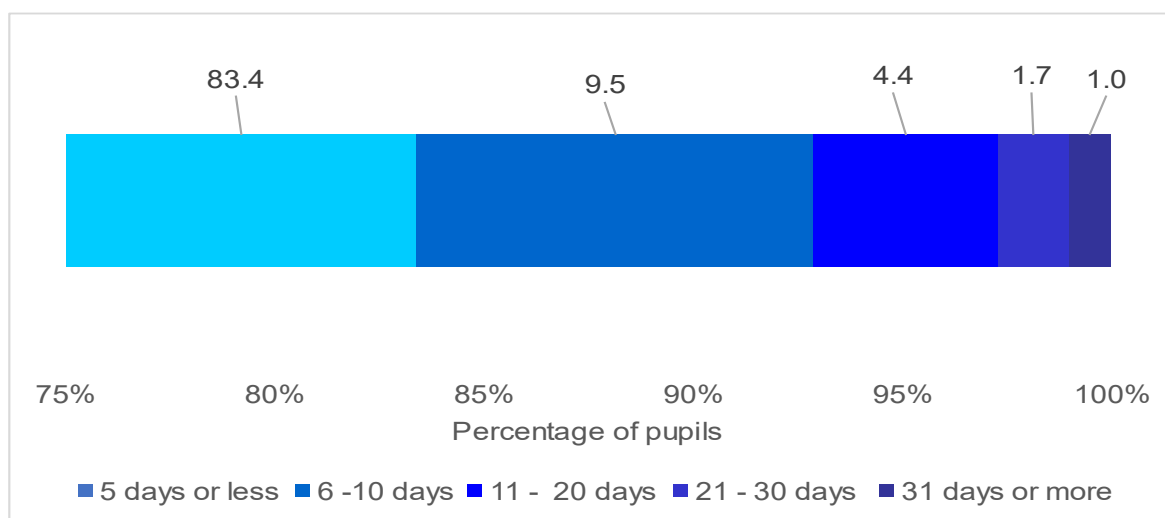
Source Education Authority

Pupils that were suspended once accounted for 69.6% of all suspended pupils, pupils suspended twice accounted for 16.7% and pupils that were suspended on three or more occasions accounted for 13.6% of all suspended pupils.

### **2.6 Duration of pupils' suspensions.**

A pupil may be suspended for a maximum of 45 days in an academic year. A school may initially suspend a pupil for up to five days, informing the EA that they have done so as soon as possible. If a school extends the suspension beyond five days the EA must be informed of this continuation with the process repeated for each continuation of five days or less until the suspension is completed ([Annex 1 Table 5](#)).

**Figure 5: Duration of pupils' suspension(s) in Northern Ireland 2022/23**



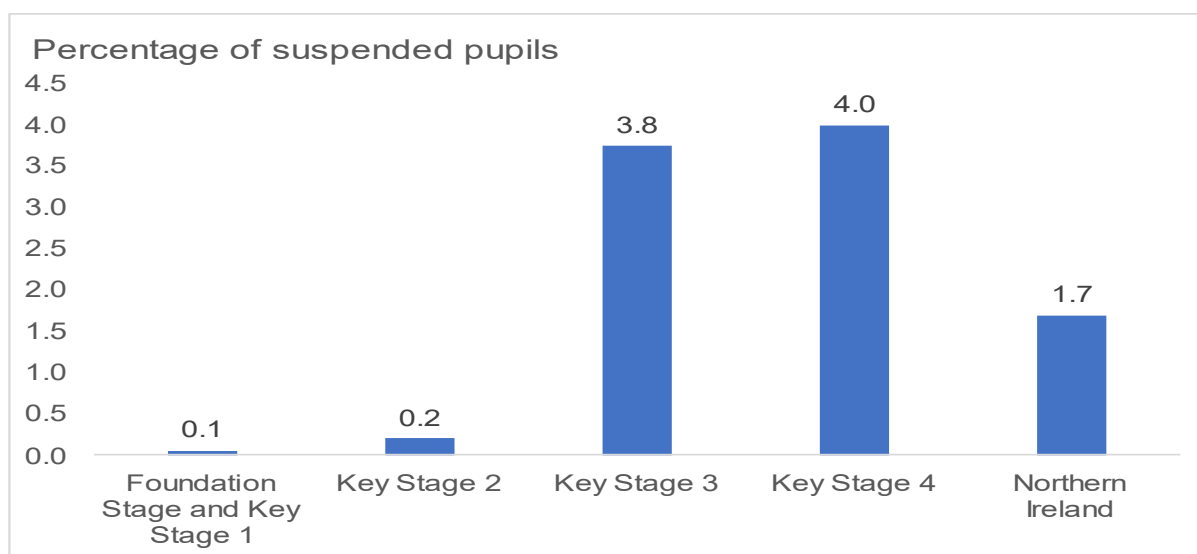
Source Education Authority

In 2022/23, 4,278 suspended pupils were suspended for five days or less representing 83.4% of all suspended pupils. A further 489 suspended pupils (9.5%) were suspended for 6-10 days, 225 suspended pupils (4.4%) were suspended for 11-20 days, 85 suspended pupils (1.7%) were suspended for 21-30 days, and 52 suspended pupils (1.0%) were suspended for 31 days or more.

### ***2.7 Suspended pupils and Key Stage of study.***

In 2022/23, 56 suspended pupils were in the Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1 representing 1.1% of all suspended pupils. A further 152 suspended pupils (3.0%) were in Key Stage 2, 2,908 suspended pupils (56.7%) were in Key Stage 3 and 2,013 suspended pupils (39.2%) were in Key Stage 4 ([Annex 1 Table 6](#)).

**Figure 5: Percentage of pupils suspended by Key Stage in Northern Ireland 2022/23.**



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.

In the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, 0.1% of pupils were suspended as were 0.2% of pupils in Key Stage 2. In Key Stage 3, 3.8% of pupils were suspended and 4.0% of pupils in Key Stage 4 were suspended.

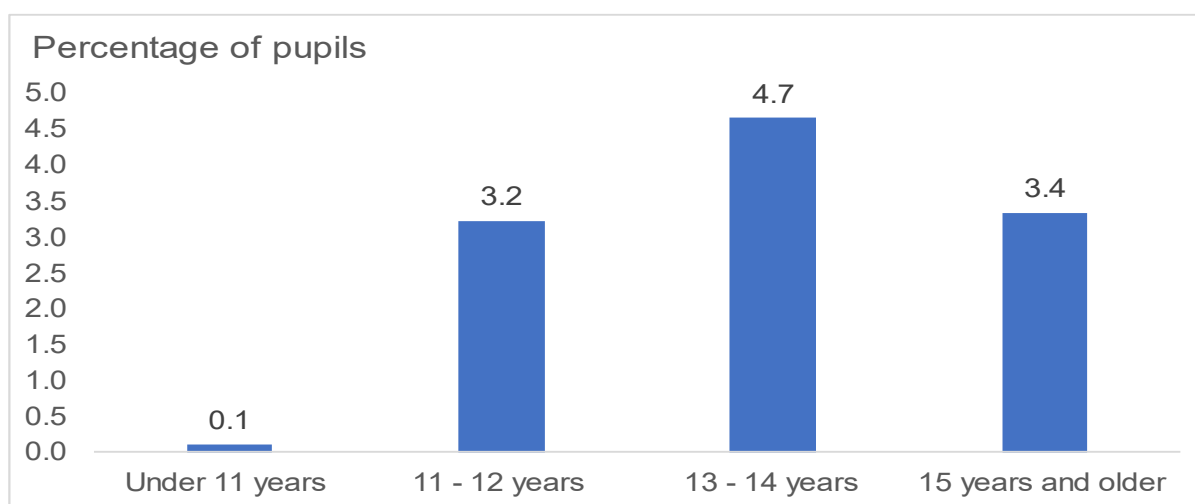
## **2.8 The sex of suspended pupils.**

In 2022/23, 3,779 suspended pupils were male, representing 73.7% of all suspended pupils, and 1,350 suspended pupils (26.3%) were female. These numbers of males and females suspended represent 2.4% of males and 0.9% of females ([Annex 1 Table 7](#)).

## 2.9 The age of suspended pupils.

In 2022/23, 208 suspended pupils, representing 4.1% of all suspended pupils, were aged under 11 years, 1,668 suspended pupils (32.5%) were aged 11-12 years, 2,417 suspended pupils (47.1%) were aged 13-14 years and 836 suspended pupils (16.3%) were aged 15 years or older ([Annex 1 Table 7](#)).

**Figure 6: Percentage of pupils suspended by age in Northern Ireland 2022/23.**



Source Education Authority & School Census

Note:

1. Age is as of 1 July 2022.

Across pupils' age groups those aged 13-14 years had the largest percentage suspended (4.7%) and those aged under 11 years (0.1%) had the smallest percentage. Less than one in 20 pupils (3.4%) aged 15 years or older were suspended as were 3.2% of pupils aged 11 – 12 years.

## 2.10 The ethnicity of suspended pupils.

In 2022/23, 4,799 suspended pupils were White, representing 93.6% of all suspended pupils and 330 suspended pupils (6.4%) were from a minority ethnic

background[1]. These numbers of pupils suspended represent 1.7% of White pupils and 1.8% of pupils from a minority ethnic background ([Annex 1 Table 7](#)).

### ***2.11 The Children Looked After status of suspended pupils.***

In 2022/23, 174 suspended pupils, representing 3.4% of all suspended pupils, were Children Looked After (CLA)[2] and 4,955 suspended pupils (96.6%) were not CLA . These numbers of pupils suspended represent 6.4% of all pupils who were CLA and 1.7% of children who were not CLA ([Annex 1 Table 7](#)).

### ***2.12 The Special Educational Needs status of suspended pupils.***

In 2022/23, 1,872 suspended pupils, representing 36.5% of all suspended pupils, had Special Educational Needs (SEN) and 3,257 suspended pupils (63.5%) did not have SEN. These numbers of pupils suspended represent 3.1% of pupils with SEN, and 1.1% for pupils with no SEN ([Annex 1 Table 7](#)).

### ***2.13 The religion[3] of suspended pupils.***

In 2022/23, 2,455 suspended pupils, representing 48.5% of all suspended pupils, were Catholic, 1,652 suspended pupils (32.7%) were Protestant and 950 suspended pupils (18.8%) were from another or religion or had no religion. These numbers of pupils suspended represent 1.6% of Catholic pupils, 1.8% of Protestant pupils and 1.6% of pupils with another or no religion ([Annex 1 Table 7](#)).

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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.

3 This characteristic is not collected by the EA and is sourced by matching the pupil's suspension record to their School Census record. In 2022/23 this match was not possible for 72 pupils who were suspended.

### **2.14 The Newcomer status[3] of suspended pupils.**

In 2022/23, 255 suspended pupils, representing 5.0%% of all suspended pupils, were Newcomer pupils and 4,802 suspended pupils (95.0%) were not Newcomers. These numbers of suspended pupils represent 1.4% of Newcomer pupils and 1.7% of pupils that were not Newcomers ([Annex 1 Table 7](#)).

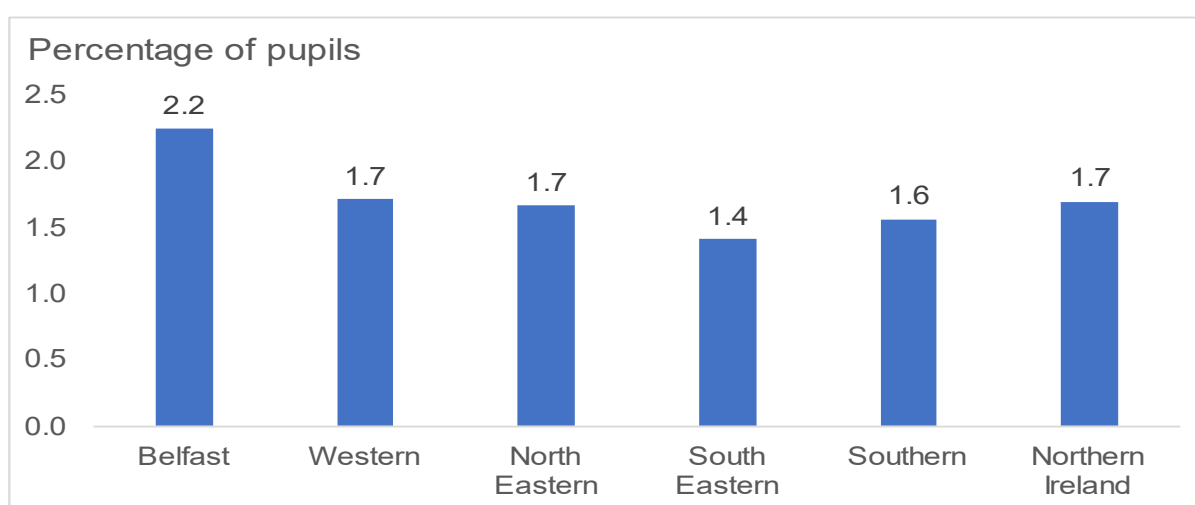
### **2.15 The Free School Meals Entitlement[3] status of suspended pupils.**

In 2022/23, 2,514 suspended pupils, representing 49.7%% of all suspended pupils, were entitled to Free School Meals (FSME) and 2,543 suspended pupils (50.3%) were not FSME. These numbers of suspended pupils represent 2.9% of FSME pupils and 1.2% of pupils who were not FSME ([Annex 1 Table 7](#)).

### **2.16 Pupils suspended in Education Authority regions.**

In 2022/23, 1,163 suspended pupils, representing 22.7% of all suspended pupils, were in the EA's Belfast region. A further 1,161 suspended pupils (22.6%) were in the Southern region, 1,085 suspended pupils (21.2%) were in the North Eastern region, 861 suspended pupils (16.8%) were in the Western region and 859 suspended pupils (16.7%) were in the South Eastern region ([Annex 1 Table 8](#)).

**Figure 7: Percentage of pupils suspended by Education Authority region in Northern Ireland 2022/23.**



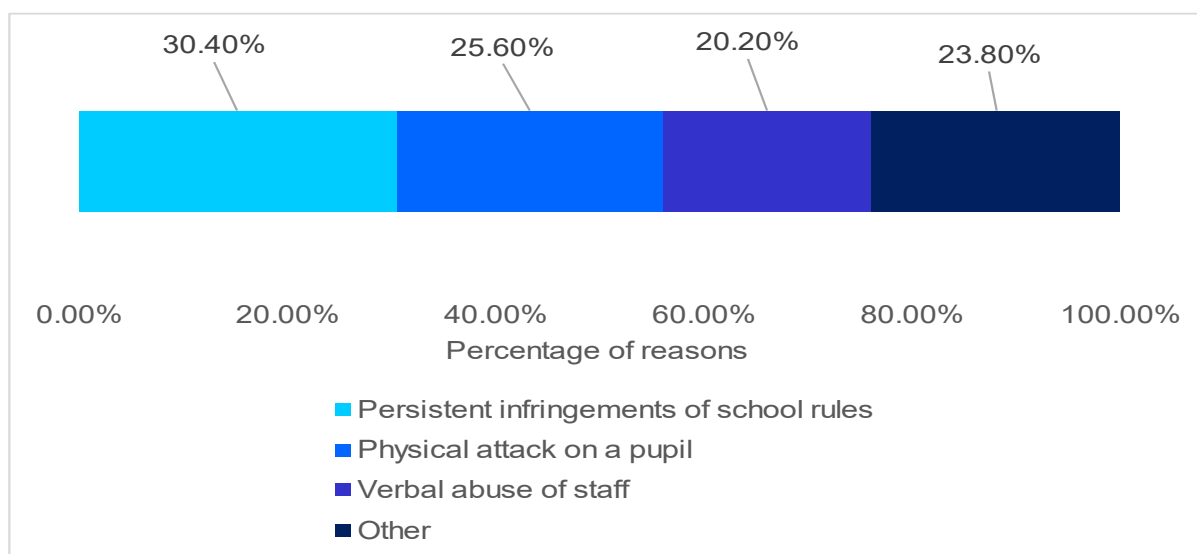
Source Education Authority & the School Census

In the Belfast region 2.2% of pupils were suspended and 1.7% of pupils were suspended both in the Western and North Eastern regions. In the Southern region 1.6% of pupils were suspended and in the South Eastern region 1.4% of pupils were suspended.

**2.17 The reasons reported by schools for suspending pupils.**

In 2022/23, 5,129 pupils were suspended on a total of 8,262 occasions. Schools record one of 11 reasons for each suspension occasion. Where a pupil has been suspended for more than one of these reasons only the most serious reason is recorded, and the school may include additional explanatory information ([Annex 1 Table 9](#)).

**Figure 8: Reasons for pupils being suspended in Northern Ireland 2022/23.**



Source Education Authority

Persistent infringements of school rules was the reason for a suspension most frequently reported by schools. This reason was given for 2,508 suspensions representing 30.4% of all suspensions. Physical attack on a pupil was the reason for 2,118 suspensions (25.6%) and verbal abuse of staff was the reason for a further 1,669 suspensions (20.2%). The remaining eight reasons in total account for 1,967 suspensions (23.8%).

### **3.0 Pupil expulsions.**

In 2022/23, 23 pupils were expelled across Northern Ireland, an increase of three pupils compared to the 2021/22 academic year. These numbers, allowing for rounding, represent 0.008% of pupils both in 2021/22 and 2022/23.

All pupils expelled were in Year 8 or above and the majority were males. Eleven of the expelled pupils (47.8%) had SEN and 12 (52.2%) did not have SEN.

Physical attack on pupil was the most common reason for a pupil to be expelled. Seven pupils, representing 30.4% of all expelled pupils, were expelled for this reason. A further five pupils (21.7%) were expelled due to persistent infringements of school rules.



## 4.0 Country comparisons.

This section of the report compares suspensions and expulsions across the countries of the UK. In England and Wales, the most recent annual data relates to the 2021/22 academic year and in Scotland the 2022/23 academic year. For comparative purposes In Northern Ireland, in the 2021/22 academic year 1.6% of school age pupils were suspended and 0.008% were expelled.

The Department for Education, England, publishes statistics on permanent exclusions (expulsions in Northern Ireland) and suspensions. The most recent statistics for a complete academic year relate to 2021/22[4], when 578,280 pupils were suspended representing 6.91% of all pupils, and 6,495 pupils were permanently excluded representing 0.08% of all pupils. These figures for England relate to all pupils in Years 1 – 14 and in Northern Ireland relate to pupils in Years 1-12, which aligns with compulsory school age.

The most recent figures for Scotland[5] show that in 2022/23 11,675 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 1.7% of all pupils and the percentage of pupils removed from the register was reported as “low”. These figures for Scotland relate to pupils in P1 to S6 which corresponds to Years 1 – 14 in Northern Ireland.

In Wales[6], the most recent figures relating to 2021/22 show that there were 23,890 pupils of all ages in maintained primary, middle, secondary and special schools excluded for a fixed period (suspended in Northern Ireland), representing 5.0 % of all pupils and 275 pupils were permanently excluded (expelled in Northern Ireland), representing 0.05% of all pupils.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: [Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England, Summer term 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

<sup>5</sup> Source: [School exclusion statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

<sup>6</sup> Source: [Permanent and fixed-term exclusions from schools: September 2021 to August 2022 | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales) and Schools' census results: January 2023 | GOV.WALES.

## Annex 1: Data tables

Table 1: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended 2011/12 – 2022/23.

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
2021/22	4714	1.6
2022/23	5129	1.7

Source Education Authority & the School Census

Note:

1. During 2019/20 and 2020/21, while suspensions and expulsions were possible throughout the academic year, Covid-19 restrictions will have had an impact on the numbers presented and caution should be taken when comparing across years.

Table 2: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended by school type 2022/23.

School Type	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of suspended pupils	Percentage of pupils
Primary	206	4.0	0.1
Non Grammar	3970	77.4	5.2
Grammar	934	18.2	1.9
Special	19	0.4	0.3
Northern Ireland	5129	100.0	1.7

Source Education Authority & the School Census

Table 3: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended by school management type 2022/23.

Management type	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of suspended pupils	Percentage of pupils
Controlled	1948	38.0	1.6
Voluntary	656	12.8	1.7
Catholic Maintained	1659	32.3	1.5
Other Maintained	75	1.5	1.6
Controlled Integrated	244	4.8	2.8
GMI	547	10.7	3.5
Northern Ireland	5129	100.0	1.7

Source Education Authority & the School Census

Table 4: Pupils of compulsory school age with one or more suspensions 2022/23.

Number of times suspended	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of all suspended pupils
Once	3572	69.6
Twice	859	16.7
Three or more times	698	13.6
Northern Ireland	5129	100.0

Source Education Authority

Table 5: Length of time pupils of compulsory school age were suspended 2022/23.

Duration	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of all suspended pupils
5 days or less	4278	83.4
6 -10 days	489	9.5
11 - 20 days	225	4.4
21 - 30 days	85	1.7
31 days or more	52	1.0
All suspended pupils	100	100.0

Source Education Authority

Table 6: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended by Key Stage 2022/23.

Key Stage	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of suspended pupils	Percentage of pupils
Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1	56	1.1	0.1
Key Stage 2	152	3.0	0.2
Key Stage 3	2908	56.7	3.8
Key Stage 4	2013	39.2	4.0
Northern Ireland	5129	100.0	1.7

Source Education Authority & School Census

Table 7: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended by pupil characteristic 2022/23.

Pupil characteristic	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of suspended pupils	Percentage of pupils
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	3779	73.7	2.4
Female	1350	26.3	0.9
<b>Age</b>			
Under 11 years	208	4.1	0.1
11 - 12 years	1668	32.5	3.2
13 - 14 years	2417	47.1	4.7
15 years and older	836	16.3	3.4
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White	4799	93.6	1.7
Minority Ethnic <sup>1</sup>	330	6.4	1.8
<b>Children looked after</b>			
Yes	174	3.4	6.4
No	4955	96.6	1.7
<b>Special Education Needs</b>			
Yes	1872	36.5	3.1
No	3257	63.5	1.1
<b>Religion<sup>2</sup></b>			
Protestant	1652	32.7	1.8
Roman Catholic	2455	48.5	1.6
Other including no religion	950	18.8	1.6
<b>Newcomer<sup>2</sup></b>			
Yes	255	5.0	1.4
No	4802	95.0	1.7
<b>Free School Meals Entitlement<sup>2</sup></b>			
Yes	2514	49.7	2.9
No	2543	50.3	1.2
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>5129</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1.7</b>

Source Education Authority & School Census

Note:

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 2022/23 this match was not possible for 72 pupils who were suspended.

Table 8: The number and percentage of pupils of compulsory school age suspended by Education Authority region 2022/23.

Education Authority Region	Number of pupils suspended	Percentage of suspended pupils	Percentage of pupils
Belfast	1163	22.7	2.2
Western	861	16.8	1.7
North Eastern	1085	21.2	1.7
South Eastern	859	16.7	1.4
Southern	1161	22.6	1.6
Northern Ireland	5129	100.0	1.7

Source Education Authority & School Census

Table 9: Reasons for suspension occasions for pupils of compulsory school age 2022/23.

Reason for suspension occasion	Number	Percentage
Persistent infringements of school rules	2508	30.4
Physical attack on a pupil	2118	25.6
Verbal abuse of staff	1669	20.2
Disruptive behaviour in class	447	5.4
Significant damage to property	297	3.6
Verbal abuse of a pupil	279	3.4
Substance abuse	266	3.2
Physical attack on staff	244	3.0
Bullying of a pupil	219	2.7
Stealing	159	1.9
Alcohol abuse	56	0.7
Total	8262	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) when a pupil has been suspended or expelled. The school principal, or a suitable deputy, do so using [Suspension Form \(002\).pdf \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#). Guidance on completion is provided [notes.pdf \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#). Subsequently the returns are provided to the Department's Statistics and Research Team for processing and publication of this report. The statistics presented in this publication are derived from these schools returns.

The data are produced at aggregate level only therefore individual pupils cannot be identified. More information on confidentiality can be found [Statistical Revisions \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Coverage of the data. The suspensions and expulsions data presented in this publication cover pupils of compulsory school age, pupils in Year 1 to Year 12, in Northern Ireland attending primary, post-primary or special schools. Pupil's age in this publication is as 1 July 2022 and calculated from the pupil's date of birth collected in their school's return.

The school's management type is derived from the school's Departmental reference number. Definitions of school management types are as follows:

- Controlled: Schools are managed and funded by the, Education Authority (EA)
- through Boards of Governors (BoG). Primary and post-primary school BoGs
- consist of representatives of transferors - mainly the Protestant churches - along with representatives of parents, teachers and the EA.

- Voluntary: Self-governing schools, generally of long standing, originally established to provide an academic education at post primary level on a fee paying basis. Now funded by the Department and managed by Boards of Governors. The BoGs are constituted in accordance with each school's scheme of management - usually representatives of foundation governors, parents, teachers and in most cases, the Department or EA representatives. The BoGs is the employing authority and is responsible for the employment of all staff in its school.
- Maintained schools are managed by Boards of Governors which consist of
- members nominated by trustees, along with representatives of parents, teachers
- and the Education Authority. These schools are funded through the Education
- Authority for their running costs and directly by the Department in relation to
- capital building works. For Catholic Maintained schools, the Employing Authority is
- the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). Other maintained schools
- are any schools that are not Catholic maintained. They are typically, but not
- exclusively, Irish medium schools.
- Controlled integrated: Controlled schools which have acquired integrated status.
- Grant Maintained integrated: Self-governing schools with integrated education status, funded directly by the Department and managed by Boards of Governors. The BoG is the employing authority and responsible for employing staff.

The pupil characteristics of religion, Newcomer status and Free School Meals Entitlement are not recorded in a school's suspension return and are sourced by matching the return to the School Census. In 2022/23 this match was not possible for 72 suspended pupils.



Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact [Feedback | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#) with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk) or via [the OSR website](#).

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