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Chronic absence in Irish schools, 2022/23 and 2023/24: Prevalence, intensity and reasons

ANNA MOYA, EMER SMYTH AND MERIKE DARMODY

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Seirbhís Tacaíochta Oideachais Tusla
Tusla Education Support Service

AN INSTITIÚID UM THAIGHDE EACNAMAÍOCHTA AGUS SÓISIALTA
ESRI ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

CHRONIC ABSENCE IN IRISH SCHOOLS, 2022/23 AND 2023/24: PREVALENCE, INTENSITY AND REASONS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	Annual Attendance Report
CA	Chronic absenteeism (missing 20 or more days in a school year)
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DEY	Department of Education and Youth
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison Scheme
IRR	Incidence Rate Ratio
PP	Percentage points
SAR	School Absence Report
SCP	School Completion Programme
TESS	Tusla Education Support Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, schools are required to complete the **School Absence Report (SAR)** twice a year. The SAR contains information on the annual number of days absent for pupils aged between 6 and 15 registered as chronically absent, defined as missing 20 or more days in a school year, together with the recorded reason for absence. The SAR also provides information on gender and grade. This report examines how the **reasons for absence** are distributed **across different types of schools**, considering DEIS classification,[1] special school status, ethos, gender composition, school size, language of instruction and the Pobal HP Deprivation Index.[2] It also analyses whether the distribution of reasons for absence, as well as the **total number of days lost**, varies by grade and gender.

There is mixed evidence on whether different types of absence are associated with more detrimental impacts on academic performance. Regardless, it is important to analyse the reasons for absence. If unexplained absences are more harmful, as some research indicates (Gershenson et al., 2017; Gottfried, 2009), it is relevant to quantify their extent. If they are not, it becomes equally important to highlight the prevalence of other types of absence that are often seen as innocuous and thus not the focus of school policy (see OECD, 2024). Moreover, designing effective attendance interventions requires a **clear diagnosis** of the circumstances of the school and the student body (Kearney and Graczyk, 2014), and a key component of this is understanding the reasons for absence.

STUDENTS NOT INCLUDED IN THE SAR REPORT

The SAR excludes students aged under 6 and 16 or over. We estimate that, in primary schools, an average of **16 per cent** of students registered as chronically absent are **under 6 years of age**. In post-primary schools, a striking **42 per cent** of chronic absentees are **aged 16 or over**. These figures indicate that a substantial proportion of chronically absent students fall outside the age range currently covered by the SAR – ultimately suggesting a need to reconsider the existing age limits. Such age limits do not allow a comprehensive understanding of chronic absenteeism across the whole span of the schooling career.

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1 The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme provides additional resources and supports to schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

2 The Pobal HP Deprivation Index is used to derive an overall measure of deprivation for the area in which the school is located.

REASONS FOR ABSENCE ACROSS SCHOOL TYPES

At the primary stage, approximately one quarter of absences are recorded as unexplained. Around half are attributed to illness. The remaining absences are due to (in order of prevalence) other reasons, holidays and urgent circumstances.

Alarmingly, the **share of unexplained absences** is **unevenly distributed across socioeconomic lines**. Compared with non-DEIS schools, all categories of DEIS schools record a higher proportion of unexplained absences. DEIS Urban Band 1 schools show a particularly pronounced difference, with shares averaging 18 percentage points higher than non-DEIS schools. A similar pattern emerges by area-level deprivation. Schools located in more affluent areas record a lower share of unexplained absences. Conversely, DEIS and special schools record lower shares of absences attributed to illness and holidays. **Special schools**, moreover, stand out for having particularly high levels of absences classified as **'other'** – which could be linked to therapeutic or medical appointments.

The share of unexplained absences is lower in **multidenominational and minority faith schools** compared to other ethos schools. Perhaps this is related to tighter-knit communities, where parents may feel more compelled to provide, or be more used to providing, reasons for their child's absence.

In **post-primary schools**, half of the absences are unexplained. Of the remainder, 31 per cent are due to illness and the rest are due to (in order of magnitude) other reasons, holidays and urgent family reasons.

Similarly to the primary stage, the **higher share of unexplained absences** also varies along **socioeconomic lines**, with DEIS schools recording a 14 percentage point higher share of unexplained absences than non-DEIS ones. Schools in more deprived areas, compared to schools in advantaged areas, also report higher levels. Another finding is that **minority faith schools** have lower shares of unexplained absences **than Catholic or multidenominational schools.**

COUNTS OF ANNUAL DAYS LOST FOR CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS, 2023/24

No meaningful differences appear by **student gender** in **primary schools** in the number of days missed by chronic absentees or in the reasons for absence. In **post-primary schools,** gender does acquire a little bit more importance, with chronically absent girls having an **expected annual count of days** lost that is **1.2 percentage points higher** than that of boys. Girls also have slightly lower levels of unexplained absences and, conversely, slightly higher levels of illness-related absences, although the differences are very small.

Chronic absenteeism (CA) rates in primary schools reveal that from Senior Infants to 6th Class [3] there is a steady, almost linear increase in the share of students who are chronically absent. We also see that, compared to 1st Class, the **annual number of days lost among chronically absent students** is higher in **Senior Infants** as well as in the **later grades** (5th and 6th Class) and in the **Special grade** category. [4] Moreover, Senior Infants and the higher grades have a somewhat higher share of these days classified as unexplained absence.

In the **post-primary stage**, **CA rates** do not follow a linear pattern. The **annual count of days lost** among chronically absent students **increases over the course of Junior Cycle.** It is also comparatively high in Senior Cycle; however, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as only a small minority of students at this stage are aged under 16. A large portion of students are therefore excluded from the data analysed, which only cover those aged between 6 and 15. Moreover, the **higher grades** also have a **higher share of unexplained absences,** which increases with year level. Transition Year has the lowest counts of days lost, potentially indicating a very positive level of student engagement.

Overall it appears that, generally, the grades with the highest counts of annual days lost also have a higher share of unexplained absences.

COUNTS OF PERIODS REGISTERED AS CHRONIC ABSENTEE STUDENTS

Analyses were conducted on whether the chronic absentee group missed one, two, three or four periods over the school years 2022/23 and 2023/24 (with each school year being divided into two periods for reporting purposes). At the primary stage, the majority of students (68 per cent) are marked as chronically absent for one period. Around one quarter have two periods of chronic absence, while the remainder –representing a small minority (8 per cent) – have three or four periods.

At the primary stage, **gender** is not significantly related to the **number of periods lost**. However, **class level is**, with higher classes having higher expected counts than the lower grades.

The distribution of periods lost also follows **socioeconomic lines**. **DEIS Urban Band 1** schools show a 6 per cent higher count, and **special schools** have a striking 24 per cent higher **count** than mainstream schools. In relation to area-level deprivation, **schools in affluent areas** have lower counts of periods lost compared to other areas. **Irish-medium schools** also have lower expected counts of periods

[3] The Irish primary school stage consists of Junior Infants, Senior Infants, and 1st to 6th Classes. The post-primary school stage is structured into the Junior Cycle (1st to 3rd Year) and Senior Cycle (5th and 6th Year), with an optional Transition Year between the two cycles.

[4] The 'other' category encompasses special classes in mainstream schools and, in special schools, classes that combine students from multiple grades or with different levels of need. Hereafter, the term 'special class' is used instead.

lost than English-medium schools, which could be related to the more advantaged profile of their student body.

At the **post-primary stage**, **64 per cent** of chronically absent students have been marked as such for **one period**. Nearly **one in four** have been marked for **two periods**, **8 per cent** for **three periods**, and a minority of **4 per cent** for **four periods**

Gender is not a particularly meaningful predictor of periods lost at the post-primary stage. **Grade level**, however, is significant. Relative to 1st Year, all other year groups have higher expected counts of periods missed, with the exception of Transition Year.

DEIS post-primary schools also show higher expected counts of periods lost, by **7.5 per cent**, compared with non-DEIS schools. Additionally, **minority faith schools** (relative to other ethos categories) and **boys' schools** (compared with mixed and girls' schools) record lower expected counts of periods missed.

RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The **SAR dataset presents a series of limitations** that do not allow for a more nuanced analysis of attendance. First, it would be important to link the SAR dataset to a wider range of **sociodemographic information**, incorporating variables such as migrant and ethnic background and deprivation level of the area in which students live, as well as identifying specific subgroups, including students experiencing homelessness. Moreover, it would be preferable for the SAR to cover the **entire student population** rather than only chronically absent students, given that attendance problems exist along a continuum – and successful interventions will need to target such varying degrees of absenteeism. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the absence classification system may make it difficult to understand the underlying reasons for non-attendance, such as school refusal. A more **detailed categorisation of absence reasons** would therefore facilitate deeper analysis.

School attendance interventions must be tailored to the circumstances of individual schools and their student populations. With this in mind, the finding that **schools serving disadvantaged communities** record a **higher share of unexplained absences** is concerning, particularly given that these schools also experience higher overall levels of absenteeism. This may place them in a more difficult position when designing and implementing attendance interventions. Greater efforts should therefore be directed towards **ensuring that absences are recorded** with a stated reason. One approach would be to mirror the existing threshold of 20 days' absence, which allows a referral that sets in place a formal response, by introducing a similar mechanism specifically for unexplained absences.

Considering the high proportion of unexplained absences at the post-primary stage, interventions aimed at **strengthening communication and relationships with families** could be beneficial. Such interventions could involve stronger partnerships with parents, the establishment of regular communication channels, and more parental involvement in school decision-making processes. A specific policy that has proven successful is to nudge parents via text or other relevant communication channels about their child's attendance, while also including messages on the importance of attendance for academic achievement (Lasky-Fink et al., 2021; Mussadiq et al., 2024). Moreover, the high share of unexplained absences may also indicate potential **student disengagement** with school. **Psychosocial interventions** addressing such disengagement could therefore be helpful. These might include strengthening in-school relationships between students and staff, as well as recognising and rewarding attendance through classroom or student incentives, such as pizza, small stationery items or advertising a 'student of the month' (Balau and Erlich, 2018). Moreover, promoting participation in extracurricular activities has also been established as a useful tool to motivate children and young people to attend school – especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Centre for Young Lives, 2025).

At a broader level, a combination of measures could prove useful to advance towards the aforementioned goals of strengthening parental communication, raising awareness and improving student engagement. This includes reinforcing the role of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme through targeted training to better support families with attendance problems, alongside continuing national campaigns to underscore the importance of attendance and to make sure it stays in the collective imagination. Schools would arguably also benefit from clearer guidance and practical support in monitoring attendance data, for instance through more user-friendly platforms and basic training in data analysis, ultimately enabling earlier identification of students at risk. In addition, more consistent national or regional guidance on how to respond to unexplained absences would be valuable, combining early identification protocols and clear thresholds with practical direction on follow-up actions and the involvement of relevant actors such as the School Completion Programme (SCP), psychological services and community organisations.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Methodology

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, schools are required to record and submit attendance information for their students. In prior research, we analysed one of

the two statutory data returns – the Annual Attendance Report (AAR) – which provides school-level information on total days lost to absence and the number of students classified as chronically absent.[5] Using the AAR, we documented **large post-pandemic increases** in the **extent of chronic absenteeism**, particularly among schools serving the most deprived communities and those located in disadvantaged areas (Moya et al., 2026). Considering the long-term educational, labour market and wellbeing consequences associated with school attendance (Smyth et al., 2026), attendance can be understood as a catalyst for social stratification and therefore warrants dedicated policy and research attention.

In this study, we draw on the second statutory dataset: the **School Absence Report (SAR)**. The SAR contains student-level data for those aged between 6 and 15[6] and includes information on the **number of days lost** and **disaggregated reasons for each period of absence** – unexplained, illness, urgent, other and holidays – for **students identified as chronically absent**. At the sociodemographic level, the SAR provides information on **student gender** and **year level**. We link this dataset with publicly available Department of Education and Youth data on school characteristics.

As claimed by Heyne et al. (2025), the vast majority of research on attendance does not differentiate between **reasons for absence**. A small body of literature does make this distinction, but – with the exception of Klein et al. (2022) – it typically does so in a **dichotomous way**, with absences being divided as either explained or unexplained. In contrast, we draw on the relatively detailed information in our data on specific reasons for absence and examine whether the distribution of absence reasons differs by school type, student gender and year level.

There is mixed evidence on whether **the reason for an absence matters** for academic achievement outcomes, with some studies positioning unexplained absences as more detrimental (Gershenson et al., 2017; Gottfried, 2009). Regardless of this mixed picture, it is still important to look at the reasons for absence: if they do matter, understanding the extent of unexplained absences is crucial; and if they do not, documenting the prevalence and patterns of explained absences is also valuable. Knowing the reason for absence can also be used to tailor school-based interventions to support attendance (Balu and Erlich, 2018; Kearney and Graczyk, 2020). Moreover, examining which types of schools have **higher shares of unexplained absences** provides insight into family–school communication and commitment regarding attendance.

We also consider the data on annual absence counts for chronically absent students and examine whether these differ by gender and grade level. Finally, we

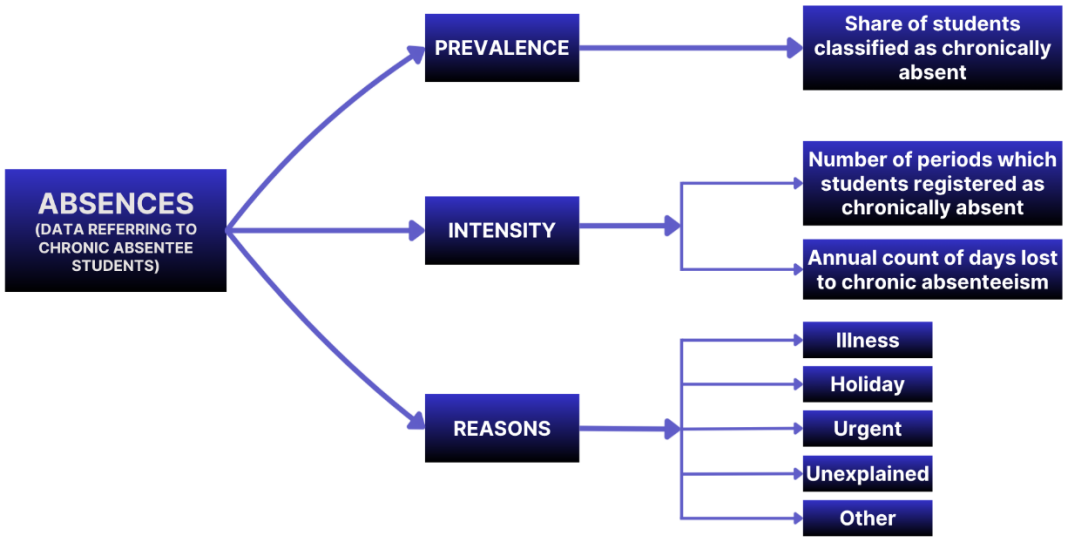
5 Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 20 days or more during a given school year.

6 In Ireland, young people can legally leave school at 16 years of age or after completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is later.

take advantage of the fact that the data are recorded for two periods per year to analyse the number of periods in which a student has been registered as chronically absent over a two-year span, and assess whether this varies by school characteristics, gender and grade level.

With the analysis and outcomes described above, we aim to consider three aspects of chronic absenteeism in Irish primary and post-primary schools. The first is the **prevalence** of chronic absenteeism, measured by the share of students classified as chronically absent – in other words, the chronic absenteeism (CA) rate. The second is the **intensity** of chronic absenteeism, which refers to the following two indicators: the annual count of days lost to chronic absenteeism at the student level, and the number of periods within a two-year timeframe in which students were classified as chronically absent. Finally, the third is the **reasons** for absence. See the conceptual map in Figure 1.1 for an overview.

FIGURE 1.1 CONCEPTUAL MAP OF THE DIMENSIONS OF CHRONIC ABSENCE



The report is structured as follows: We begin by reviewing the prior literature on the relationship between student gender and grade level as predictors of attendance. We then consider the literature on whether the reason for absence matters for educational outcomes and argue that, regardless of whether it does or not, reasons for absence are important to examine, as previously introduced. The methodology section then outlines the limitations of the SAR, describes the data-cleaning process and details the data linkage with publicly available Department of Education and Youth information, including the variables we incorporated through this linkage. We also explain in detail the analysis

undertaken, including the statistical choices we make. The report then turns to the empirical analyses. But first, we begin by examining the number of students excluded from the dataset (that is, those aged under 6 or 16 and over). The first analysis explores the distribution of absence types at the school level, looking at DEIS status, ethos, gender mix, school size, language of instruction and the Pobal HP Deprivation Index.[7] This is followed by an examination of the annual counts of days lost, the distribution of reasons for absence in the 2023/24 academic year and how these relate to student gender and grade. Finally, we analyse the counts of periods recorded as chronic absenteeism and how these relate to student and school characteristics.

1.2 PRIOR RESEARCH

1.2.1 Student gender and attendance

The gender of students is usually **not a primary focus** in the attendance literature. Gubbels et al. (2019) conducted a meta-review of 75 studies on attendance that reported on 731 variables identified as drivers of absenteeism. Their meta-analysis groups these into 44 risk domains, and student gender is not included in any of them.[8] However, some studies have considered the presence of gendered differences, although not as their primary focus, and the findings presented are mixed.

To begin with, some studies report **no gendered differences**. Thornton et al. (2013) used an Irish sample of nine-year-olds and found no meaningful gender differences in their analysis of persistent absenteeism. Moreover, Pflug and Schneider (2016), analysing a German nationwide online survey of high-school students that included both excused and unexcused absences, reported no notable gender differences. In the US, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), studying schooling trajectories during compulsory education across six states, concluded that gender does not play a role in chronic absenteeism. Also in the US, Anderson and Romm (2020), examining overall attendance from pre-kindergarten (usually 4 years old) to second grade (usually 7–8 years old) in a large US urban district, found that gender was not related to attendance.

Showing **worse outcomes for girls in regard to severe absenteeism**, García and Weiss (2018), using US national data on fourth- and eighth-grade students (ages 9 and 14), found that boys actually had higher attendance than girls (46.6 per cent versus 42.1 per cent showing perfect attendance records) and were also slightly

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7 The Pobal HP Index measures the relative affluence or disadvantage of a given geographical area; here, electoral districts. It is constructed using census data and combines indicators relating to demographic profile, social class composition and labour-market situation. For further information, please consult www.pobal.ie/pobal-hp-deprivation-index/.

8 However, they note that several studies do report gender differences in reasons for absence, and the meta-analysis does consider gender as a moderating factor, though not as a primary driver of absenteeism.

less likely to be chronically absent (18.2 per cent of boys versus 20.2 per cent of girls). Similarly, Wood et al. (2024), drawing on a large-scale administrative dataset from Bradford covering students aged 5 to 13, reported that girls were more likely than boys to be persistently absent.

Reasons why girls miss more school could be related to worsening mental health outcomes for adolescent girls after the pandemic (Cosma et al., 2025; WHO, 2022). Moreover, Sawyer et al. (2025) linked menstrual symptoms to 1–2 additional days of absence during the final year of schooling, which is substantial considering that, in their sample, 36 per cent reported heavy bleeding and a little over half reported menstrual pain.

However, several studies have also found that **male adolescents are more prone to truancy**[9] than girls. This was the case in Maynard et al. (2012), who analysed a large-scale US sample of adolescents aged 12 to 17; in Veenstra et al. (2010), who examined preadolescents in the north of the Netherlands with a mean age of 13; in Wagner et al. (2004), who studied students aged 13 to 16 in Cologne; and in Sälzer et al. (2012), who analysed Swiss students aged 12 to 15 in the German-speaking region. In Ireland, Darmody et al. (2008) similarly found, using a sample of school-leavers in their final year of post-primary education, that males were more prone to truancy.

Overall, research has produced differing findings depending on the educational stage examined, the national context of the study and the specific type of absence considered. Therefore, research on the topic remains mixed and scarce.

1.2.2 School grade/age and attendance

The **role of grade** has consistently been a meaningful factor – albeit to varying degrees – when analysing attendance trajectories over time. Several North American studies have documented **higher levels of absenteeism at specific stages**, particularly in kindergarten, the final years of middle school, and high school, compared to the lower absenteeism rates typically observed in elementary school (Ansari and Pianta, 2019; Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; London et al., 2016; Skedgell and Kearney, 2018).

Ansari and Pianta (2019) analysed a longitudinal, nationally representative US sample tracking children from birth to high school. They reported that, starting in kindergarten, ‘the rates of absenteeism from school did not dramatically change over the course of the next eight years of children's educational careers’ (2019:55). However, their findings also highlighted statistically significant spikes in absenteeism at both the beginning and end of this period – specifically in

[9] Truancy refers to the unexplained absence from school by a child who is legally required to attend.

kindergarten (around age 5), sixth grade (age 11–12) and eighth grade (age 13–14, the final years of middle school) compared to first through fifth grade (ages 6–10), a pattern that similarly applied to chronic absenteeism.

Using cross-sectional data from various US states and focusing on chronic absenteeism, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) reported similar patterns. They also found higher absenteeism rates in kindergarten (ages 5–6) and an increase from sixth to eighth grade (ages 13–14) in middle school. Additionally, their study extended into the high school years, where chronic absenteeism continued to rise, reaching its peak in 12th grade (ages 17–18).

Descriptive statistics from London et al. (2019:11), based on longitudinal data on chronic absenteeism, further confirmed that 'the highest rates of chronic absence were seen in the **youngest and oldest grades**'. Similar results emerge in Skedgell and Kearney (2018), who examined a large-scale sample from Nevada, covering elementary, middle and high school absenteeism levels. At the one per cent absenteeism level, risk factors included being in the earliest grades (1, 2) or the later high school years (grades 9–12). At the 10 per cent absenteeism level, a risk factor was being older than 15.5 years, while at the 15 per cent level, risk factors included being 16.5 years or older, as well as being in grades 1, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, or 12.

Benner and Wang (2014) and De Wit et al. (2010) both focused on the transition from middle school to high school, identifying it as a particularly problematic period for absenteeism. Benner and Wang (2014:1295), using longitudinal data from a southern US city, found that 'students experienced significant attendance disruption across the high school transition from 8th to 9th grade'. Similarly, De Wit et al. (2010), analysing longitudinal data from Ontario, Canada, reported a 'sustained decline in attendance' throughout grades 9 and 10. The reasons for this have not been extensively studied in the literature, as Benner and Wang (2014) indicated, but revolve around the fact that it is a period of significant change and potential stressors. Benner and Wang (2014) identified school size and how well it meets students' needs as mediating factors, while De Wit et al. (2010) provided evidence that perceived diminishing levels of classmate and teacher social support also played a meaningful role in explaining these patterns.

Administrative data in I**reland** indicate that chronic absence levels peak in **6th Class** (the final year) of primary school and **3rd Year of post-primary education** (Tusla Education Support Service (TESS), 2024). However, the pattern for post-primary education should be interpreted with caution as student-level returns relate only to the 6–15 age group and thus would cover few young people in the Senior Cycle (upper secondary education).

1.2.3 Should we be concerned about the reason for non-attendance?

Schools' attendance systems typically differentiate between authorised (or excused) and unexplained (also called unexcused) absences. Authorised absences are those for which the school has received (and accepted) the justification, often illness-related absences and medical appointments, but they can also include other reasons such as religious events. Unexplained absences are those for which no justification has been provided and/or the school has not approved the request. These often include cases of truancy or, in some cases, family holidays taken during term time without permission.

As pointed out by Heyne et al. (2025), most of the literature considering the relationship between attendance and academic achievement focuses on **overall absences without any differentiation** (e.g., Bell et al., 2024; Glew et al., 2005; Ladd and Sorensen, 2017; Mackner et al., 2012). It is often unclear whether this lack of disaggregation is due to limited information on the reasons for absence, or to a methodological choice in which the reasons for absence have been considered outside of the research scope. A smaller body of research has considered how different reasons for absences may have varying effects on academic outcomes, with the vast majority adopting a dichotomy between authorised and unexplained absences.

Several studies provide evidence that **unexcused absences are more detrimental** to academic achievement than excused absences. Gottfried (2009) analysed a large-scale longitudinal dataset of students in 2nd to 4th grade (approximately ages 7–10) in the Philadelphia School District. Academic performance was measured using standardised reading and mathematics test scores. His study portrayed unexcused absences in a particularly negative light. Specifically, he found that a higher proportion of unexcused absences was strongly associated with lower academic achievement, concluding that 'as a student tends to have a greater proportion of unexcused absences, his or her test performance suffers' (2009:410).

Gershenson et al. (2017) drew on two complementary datasets: a nationally representative longitudinal study of US kindergarteners followed into first grade (the ECLS K), and longitudinal administrative data on all third- through fifth-grade students in North Carolina public schools. They measured achievement by reading and mathematics test scores. Overall, the authors found no meaningful differences between excused and unexcused absences in the ECLS K sample; however, in the North Carolina administrative data, they found that unexcused absences were two to three times more harmful to academic achievement than excused absences.

Providing similar evidence, Pyne et al. (2023) used data from a school district in Wisconsin to examine the relationship between attendance – distinguishing between excused and unexcused absences – and academic achievement.

Achievement was measured using standardised reading and mathematics test scores in third grade. Overall, the authors found little evidence that absences, in general, had a substantial impact on achievement. However, they noted that unexcused absences were more detrimental than excused absences. They also found that unexcused absences functioned as an indicator of educational disadvantage, with unconditional estimates showing that 'one unexcused absence has far greater power to signal poor reading and math test scores over the school year than do 18 excused absences' (2023:693).

Conflicting with the studies reviewed above, other research **finds no compelling or mixed evidence of meaningful differences** between excused and unexcused absences. This was the case for the research by Dräger et al. (2024), which examined longitudinal trajectories of school absences in England, distinguishing between authorised and unexplained absences across pupils' entire school careers. They identified several types of trajectories based on whether absences remained consistently low or increased over time, and whether they were authorised or unexplained. The study linked these trajectories to academic achievement measured by performance in high-stakes national examinations.[10] Compared with pupils who maintained consistently low absence levels, those in the increasing absence categories, both authorised and unexplained, performed significantly worse. Among the increasing absence groups, students following a Moderately Increasing Unexplained Absence trajectory were the least disadvantaged, while those in the Strongly Increasing Unexplained Absence trajectory experienced the most severe academic penalties. Importantly, all increasing absence groups performed statistically worse than the consistently low absence group, indicating that authorised absences do not shield students from the negative academic consequences of non-attendance.

Klein et al. (2022) used Scottish longitudinal data to analyse whether different types of absences had differential effects on academic achievement, measured by national standardised examinations taken at the end of compulsory schooling and again in post-compulsory education. Their dataset included an exceptionally high level of detail, with absences being disaggregated into exceptional domestic circumstances, truancy, family holidays and sickness-related absences. With the exception of family holidays, all other types of absences showed negative associations with achievement. However, the authors did not find statistically significant differences (at the 5 per cent level) between the effects of the different absence types on achievement.

[10] The study controlled for a wide range of covariates that may influence both absenteeism and academic performance, including sociodemographic characteristics and attitudes towards school, as well as cognitive ability and prior performance.

Taking a longer-term perspective, Klein et al. (2024) analysed longitudinal data from England and Wales to examine students' academic trajectories. They looked at absences disaggregated into authorised and unexplained categories and assessed their relationship with performance in high-stakes national examinations at the end of post-compulsory schooling. Their findings showed that both authorised and unexplained absences were negatively associated with examination outcomes, though the magnitude of the association varied by context and subject.

The authors reported that unexplained absences were generally more detrimental than authorised ones, but the extent of this difference depended on the specific achievement measure. For example, in Wales unexplained absences were estimated to be 3.31 times more harmful to GCSE English scores than authorised absences. However, the pattern was not uniform across the educational trajectory: while unexplained absences appeared more harmful in the early years of schooling, this difference diminished over time and may even have reversed in later stages.

Regardless of whether the type of absence matters for academic achievement, it is **still important to examine the reasons for non-attendance**, as this research does. If absence type does influence achievement, then quantifying the share of absences registered as unexplained becomes crucial, since these tend to be a source of greater educational disadvantage. However, even if the reasons for absence do not differentially affect achievement, an analysis disaggregating absence is still valuable. This is because policy often gives much more weight to unexcused absences, which are often seen as inherently more harmful, and excused absences are seen as relatively more innocuous (see OECD, 2024). Bringing attention to the actual proportions of each type, particularly of the often-overlooked volume of excused absences, is therefore important for capturing the true scale of national attendance issues.

There are two further reasons why examining the reasons for absences is important. First, **quantifying the share of unexplained absence**, especially across schools serving disadvantaged socioeconomic communities, is crucial. Unexplained absences are arguably particularly problematic because they provide little information about what the student or their family may be struggling with. Without this context, schools may lack the necessary insight to respond appropriately. It is therefore important to identify which schools have higher levels of absences that are unexplained, as this may indicate underlying issues related to school engagement, communication with families, or the ability to monitor attendance in ways that are informative for the school.

A closely related second reason is that **successful attendance support interventions** must be **tailored to the specific circumstances** of a school or a school system, and this is arguably only possible when the reasons for absences are

known. The well-established multi-tiered model for supporting attendance developed by Kearney and Graczyk (2014) emphasises the importance of a dedicated team responsible for regularly reviewing attendance data and identifying the nature of students' non-attendance. Indeed, they indicate that these teams should be examining attendance data at least twice per month. Without disaggregated information on absence types, the task of designing tailored, responsive interventions becomes difficult, which also extrapolates to the national-level unit of analysis.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Data preparation

We took some steps to address **issues in the SAR dataset**. First, we dropped student observations with **more than 182 days of total annual absences** (equivalent to a full school year), as these are not logically possible and indeed represented a very small minority.[11] We also dropped student observations with **fewer than 20 days of annual absences**, as these are assumed to be errors given that the dataset is intended to capture chronically absent students. These, too, represent a very small minority.[12]

In the 2023/24 datasets for both primary and post-primary, there **were duplicate entries** for the same student ID within the same period. For primary schools the number of duplicate entries was 1,027, and for post-primary schools it was 727. Given that the sample sizes are 95,178 observations for primary and 62,585 for post-primary, these duplicates represent a very small proportion of the data, approximately 1.08 per cent of the primary sample and 1.16 per cent of the post-primary sample. When the difference between the duplicated entries was less than or equal to five days, we kept the entry with the larger value (assuming the smaller value reflected an earlier, non-updated record). When the differences were larger the duplicates were dropped, as there was no accurate way to decide which entry was the true one.

1.3.2 Variables

As outlined, the SAR datasets include two student-level variables: a dichotomous indicator of student gender (male versus female) and the student's grade. With respect to grade, both the primary and post-primary datasets contain a category labelled 'other'. This category encompasses special classes in mainstream schools

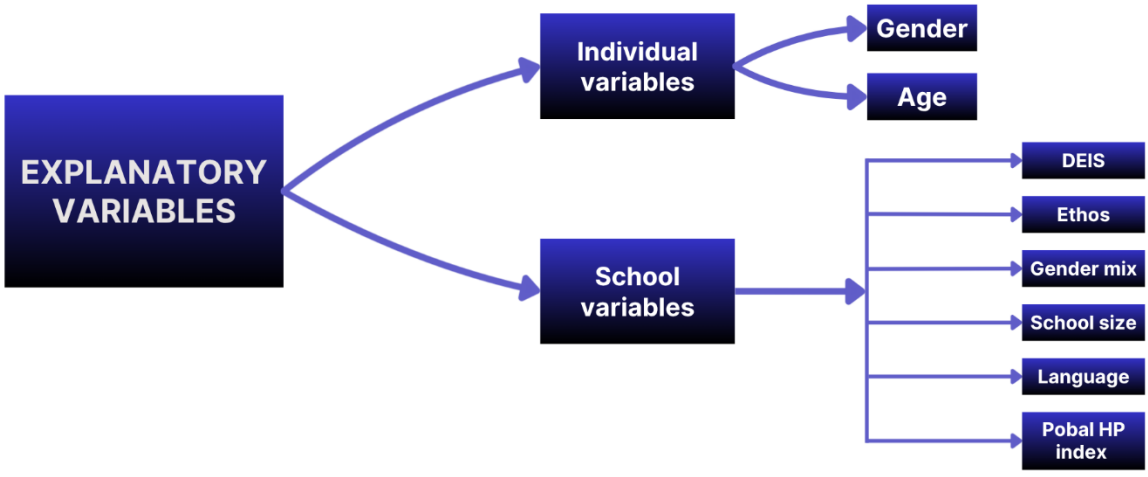
[11] In primary schools, this affected 18 out of 95,178 observations in 2023/24 and 36 out of 108,131 observations in 2022/23. In post-primary schools, it affected 20 out of 62,585 observations in 2023/24 and 26 out of 59,151 observations in 2022/23.

[12] In primary schools, this amounted to 116 out of 95,178 observations in 2023/24 and 103 out of 108,131 in 2022/23. In post-primary schools, the numbers were 526 out of 62,585 observations in 2023/24 and 497 out of 59,151 in 2022/23.

and, in special schools, classes that combine students from multiple grades or levels of need. From this point onwards, we refer to this grade as 'Special Class'.

The SAR datasets were linked to **publicly available data from the Department of Education and Youth**, which provides access to a range of school-level variables, including school size, ethos, DEIS status, special school status, gender mix, language of instruction and geographical coordinates. Several of these variables were transformed for analytical purposes. In particular, school size was grouped into four categories (smallest, small, large, largest), and a language of instruction dummy was created to distinguish schools that incorporate Irish to some degree or use it for all instruction from those that do not (with the categories being Irish-medium or English-medium for simplicity). The categories of student gender are female and male. The categories of gender mix are girls only, boys only and mixed. The ethos categories are Catholic, multidenominational and minority faith. For grade, in the primary stage the grades are Senior Infants, 2nd Class, 3rd Class, 4th Class, 5th Class, 6th Class and Special Class. In the post-primary stage the grades are 1st Year, 2nd Year, 3rd Year, Transition Year, 5th Year, 6th Year and Special Class. See the conceptual map in Figure 1.2 for an overview of the explanatory variables.

FIGURE 1.2 CONCEPTUAL MAP OF THE EXPLANATORY VARIABLES



We also processed the geographical coordinates of schools using the geospatial software QGIS to obtain the Pobal HP Deprivation Index for the electoral districts in which schools are located, using the categories 'Deprived', 'Marginally below average', 'Marginally above average' and 'Affluent'.

1.3.3 Data analysis

This report consists of three different sets of analyses.

The first considers the **distribution of reasons for absences at the school level**. To do this, we pool data from 2022/23 and 2023/24 and aggregate the student-level counts of each type of absence to the school level. At the primary stage the number of observations is 5,738; 2,849 of the observations, representing 49.65 per cent, are from the year 2022/23 and 2,889, representing 50.35 per cent, are from the year 2023/24. At the post-primary stage the total number of observations is 1,270, of which 624 (49.13 per cent) are from the year 2022/23 and 646 (50.87 per cent) are from the year 2023/24.

The first stage consists of descriptive graphs showing the distribution of types of absences by school characteristics (DEIS status, ethos, gender mix, language of instruction, school size and the Pobal HP Index). The second stage involves a series of regression models in which the outcome variable is the share of a specific type of absence. These models look at whether certain school types are more strongly associated with particular absence categories. In order to account for the nesting of data within schools, we use standard errors that are adjusted for clustering at the school level. When relevant, we test interaction effects, which use transformed variables: school size and the Pobal HP Index are grouped into two categories, and for interactions of DEIS status with gender mix and Irish-medium instruction, DEIS status is converted into a binary variable (for primary). These transformations are applied to avoid overly small interaction groups.

The second analysis considers the **annual count of absences for the population of students registered as chronic absentees,** along with the **registered reason for absence**. For this section we use the most recent available data, the year **2023/24**, and aggregate the absences of each period at the annual level (which range from 20 to 182 days). The first stage consists of descriptive statistics on annual absences, as well as the distribution of absence types by grade and gender. We also draw on enrolment information from publicly available Department of Education and Youth data to calculate **rates of chronic absenteeism** – meaning the number of students registered as chronic absentees as a percentage of the total number of students in that grade.

This second analysis also consists of a set of regression models. First, we estimate models in which the outcome is the **annual count of absences**. We include **school-level fixed effects** to account for the clustering of students within schools. Depending on model fit, we estimate either Poisson or negative binomial count models. The explanatory variables include the two available student-level characteristics: gender and grade. We then estimate a second set of models where the **outcome is the share of a specific type of absence**. Here, we examine whether gender or grade is more strongly associated with each type of absence. School fixed

effects are again used. It should be noted that this analysis does not specifically pay attention to the school-level variables, as there is a separate report that primarily examines how chronic absenteeism – including days lost per student – is distributed across different types of schools (Moya et al., 2026). Moreover, insights on the distribution of absence types by school characteristics are presented in the first set of findings in this report.

The third and final analysis is a **count model that examines the number of periods during which a given student is registered as chronically absent** – which can range from 1 to 4. We remove schools that did not submit a student-level record for either of the two years, and also failed to submit their school-level records for that same year. In these observations, we assume that the absence of student-level data was due to non-submission rather than the school having no students registered as chronically absent. The descriptive part of this analysis presents graphs showing the share of students with different numbers of periods recorded as chronically absent, broken down by school characteristics as well as by student gender and grade. We then estimate regression models – Poisson models or negative binomials, depending on the goodness of fit – regressing the number of periods in which a student is registered as chronically absent on gender, class and the aforementioned set of school characteristics.

In this last analysis, we *do* pay attention to the regression coefficients of the school-level characteristics, unlike in the previous section. The reason is that the outcome used here – the number of periods a student is registered as chronically absent – gives us insights into a **particular dimension of the severity of chronic absenteeism**, which is not fully captured by the counts of chronically absent students or the days lost per student that are the core focus of our prior work on attendance data.

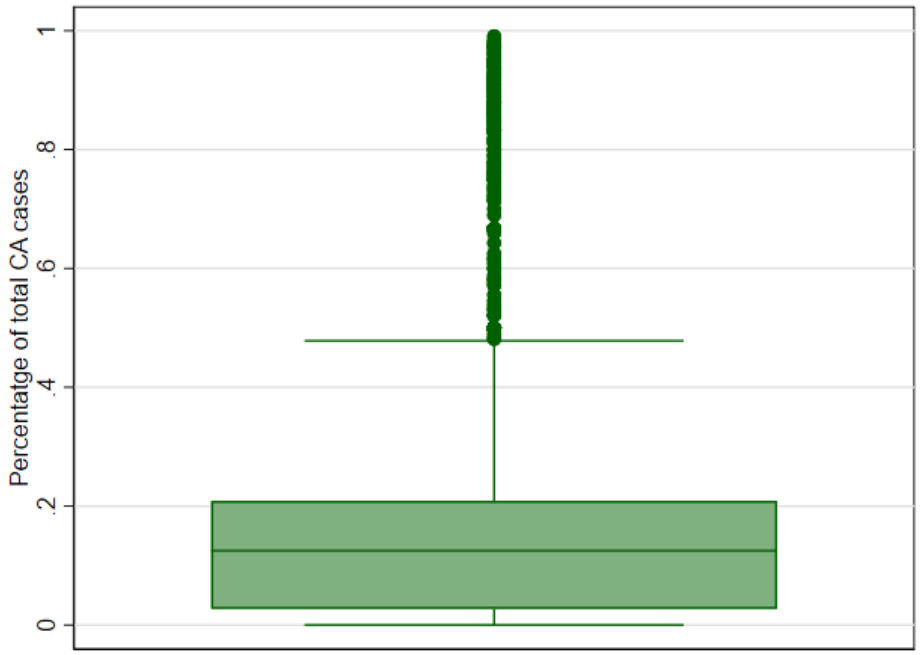
1.3.4 Data limitations

A first limitation of the data is that, similar to the AAR, the SAR does not provide information on a range of **student sociodemographic characteristics**. Variables such as socioeconomic background, family structure or migration status – all of which have been shown to be important drivers of attendance (Gubbels et al., 2019) – are absent. Without these characteristics, we cannot be certain whether the findings on which schools appear to be performing better or worse reflect **contextual factors or compositional differences**. While we do have information on gender and year level, these variables are rather limited in scope. Ideally, both the AAR and SAR would be linkable to richer student-level sociodemographic data.

A second limitation concerns the magnitude of chronic absenteeism for the lower and upper ages that are not covered by the SAR – **specifically those aged under 6 and 16 or over**, which we estimate in the following paragraphs. We do this by using the AAR dataset (which includes students aged under 6 and 16 or over) and subtracting from the total number of chronic absentees the count recorded in the SAR (which does not cover these ages). This allows us to estimate the number of chronic absentees below age 6 and aged 16 and over. Before detailing what we found, it is important to note that these results should be interpreted with caution, as there are concerns about the quality and accuracy of the data. A portion of observations show a higher count of students registered as chronic absentees in the SAR than in the AAR, which should not be logically possible given that the AAR covers a wider age range. In primary schools, 150 out of 2,209 observations fall into this category, and in post-primary schools the figure is 121 out of 404. Moreover, in primary 530 observations show a null difference, and in post-primary there are 46 such observations.

Figure 1.3 shows the box plot [13] of the **percentage of students registered as chronic absentees who are under 6 years old**, expressed as a share of the total number of chronic absentees in primary schools. As we can see, most observations fall between 5 and 20 per cent, indicating that a sizeable portion of primary-level chronic absenteeism is accounted for by children under age 6. The average share is **16.01 per cent,** with a relatively modest standard deviation of 3 per cent.

FIGURE 1.3 BOX PLOT: CHRONIC ABSENTEE STUDENTS UNDER 6 YEARS OF AGE

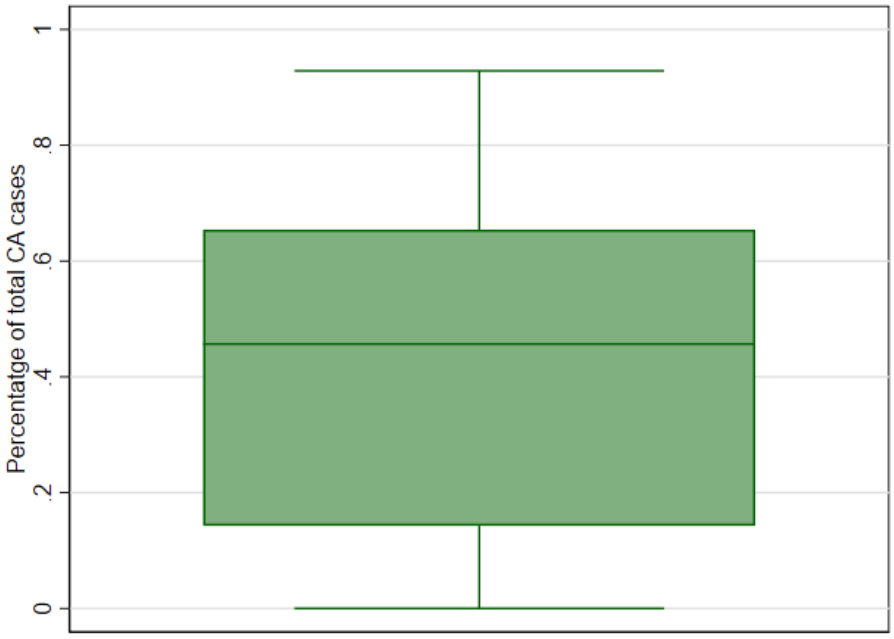


Source: Administrative data from TESS.

[13] A box plot is a graphical representation of the distribution of a variable. The box shows the middle 50% of values (from the 25th to the 75th percentile), the horizontal line inside is the median, and the whiskers (horizontal line) extend to the typical minimum and maximum values, with any points beyond them considered unusual observations.

Figure 1.4 shows the box plot for the **percentage of students registered as chronic absentees who are aged 16 and over**, expressed as a share of the total number of chronic absentees in post-primary schools. In comparison with primary, the proportion is substantially higher and shows greater heterogeneity. The average share is **41.9 per cent,** with a large standard deviation of 28 per cent. The 25th percentile corresponds to 14.3 per cent and the 75th percentile to 65.4 per cent. This suggests that students aged 16 and over are **experiencing particularly high levels of chronic absenteeism.** This aligns with the findings of Skedgell and Kearney (2018) who, using a large-scale US sample, showed that being older than 15.5 years is a risk factor for absenteeism over and above grade level. It is important to note that this high level of non-attendance among 16-year-olds is not currently being captured in the SAR data.

FIGURE 1.4 BOX PLOT: CHRONIC ABSENTEE STUDENTS AGED 16 AND OVER



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

CHAPTER 2

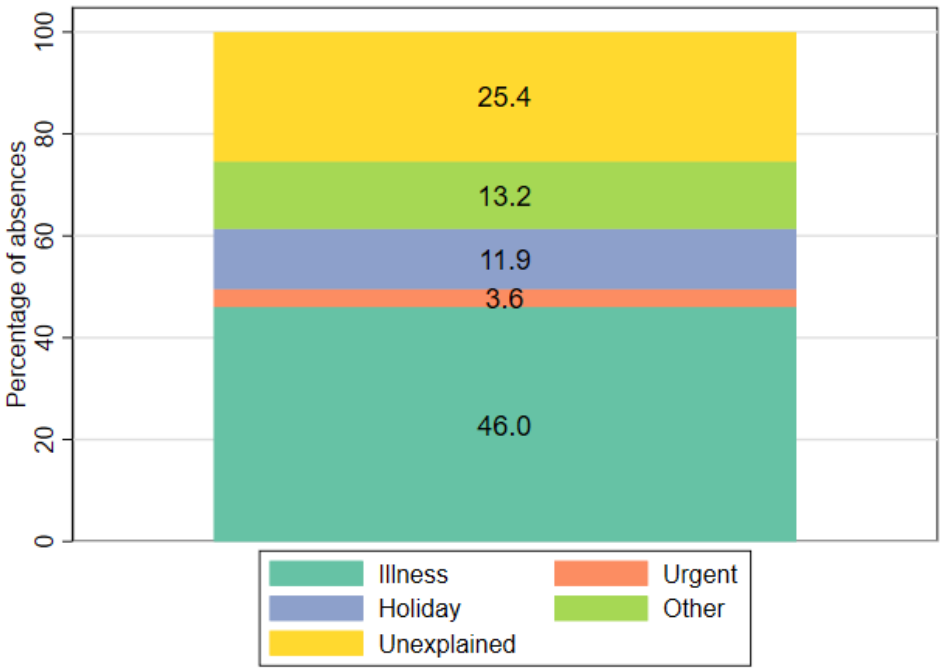
The Distribution of Reasons for Absence at the School Level

2.1 PRIMARY STAGE

2.1.1 Descriptive graphs

Figure 2.1 presents the overall distribution of absence reasons at the primary stage. **Illness-related absences** are by far the **most common form** of chronic absence, accounting for nearly one in two. **Unexplained absences** make up the second-largest category at almost a quarter of the total (25.4 per cent), indicating that a significant portion of absences are not formally accounted for. **Holiday absences** and **'other' absences** account for 11.9 per cent and 13.2 per cent respectively. **Urgent** absences [14] are relatively low.

FIGURE 2.1 OVERALL ABSENCE REASONS (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

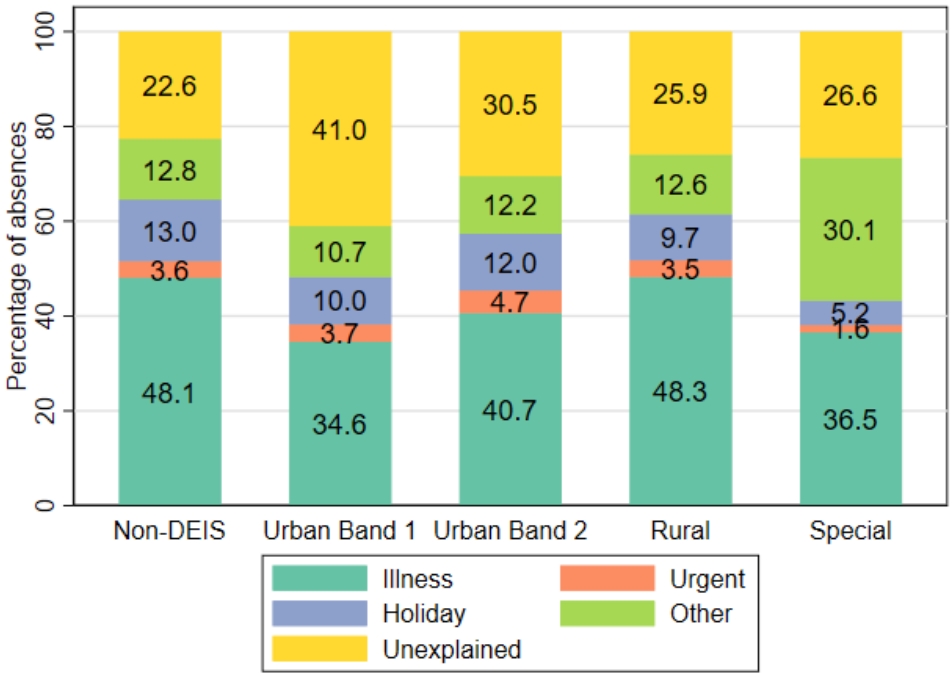
[14] No definition of this category is given but it is likely to relate to family bereavement, serious illness or other exceptional circumstances.

Looking at the **differences by DEIS status (Figure 2.2)**, **there does not seem to be a divide** between non-DEIS and DEIS schools in terms of absence type distribution. Instead, differences appear across all categories, including between the various DEIS types themselves.

While illness is the most common reason for absence across most categories, its prevalence varies. Rural schools report the highest share of illness-related absences at 48.3 per cent. In contrast, Urban Band 1 schools show a significantly lower rate of illness-related absences. Conversely, unexplained absences are particularly high in Urban Band 1 schools, accounting for 41 per cent of all absences – by far the highest among the categories. This figure decreases across Urban Band 2 (30.5 per cent), special (26.6 per cent), rural (25.9 per cent) and non-DEIS (22.6 per cent) schools.

Special schools stand out for having a significantly higher share of absences classified as **'other',** while this category remains relatively low and consistent across other school types. These absences in special schools may be related to medical or therapeutic appointments. Regarding holiday-related absences, non-DEIS schools have a slightly higher share (13 per cent) compared to DEIS schools, where figures range from 9.7 per cent to 12 per cent. Special schools show a comparatively lower share of holiday-related absences at 5.2 per cent.

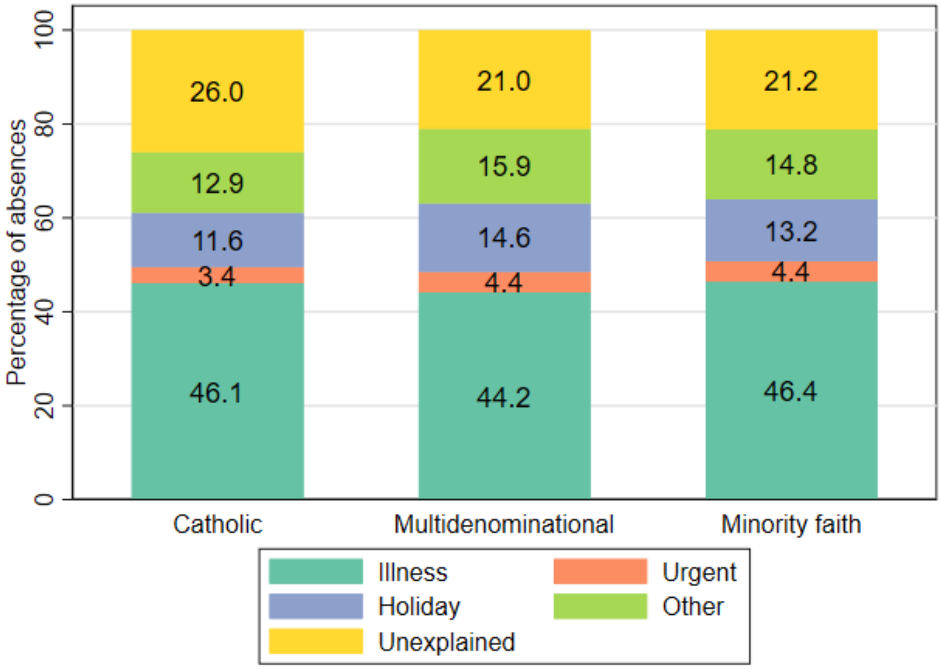
FIGURE 2.2 ABSENCE REASONS BY DEIS AND SPECIAL SCHOOL STATUS (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Looking at the **ethos of schools (Figure 2.3)**, the overall percentages of absence types **are broadly similar**, though there are some slight differences worth noting. Catholic schools have the highest proportion of unexplained absences at 26 per cent, compared to 21 per cent in multidenominational schools and 21.2 per cent in minority faith schools. Multidenominational schools also have slightly higher shares of holiday-related and 'other' absences.

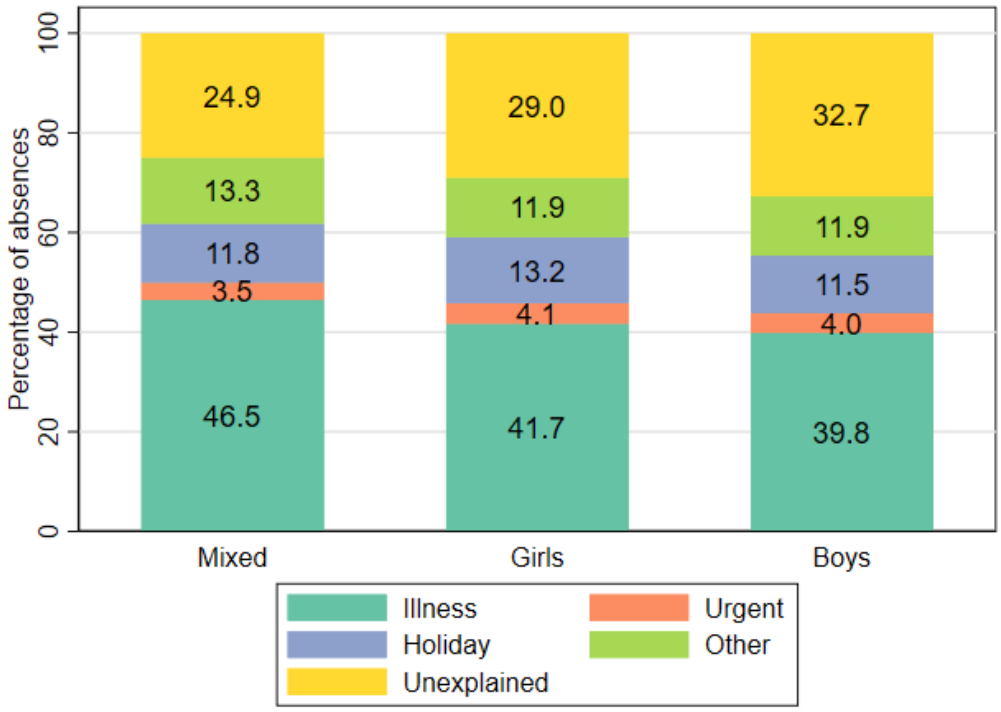
FIGURE 2.3 ABSENCE REASONS BY ETHOS (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

When comparing single-sex and mixed schools (Figure 2.4), the percentage of absences due to illness is similar for girls' and boys' schools – 41.7 per cent and 39.8 per cent respectively. This figure is higher in mixed schools, where illness accounts for around 46.5 per cent of absences. This difference in illness-related absences is mirrored in **the share of unexplained absences**: girls' schools and boys' schools report 29 per cent and 32.7 per cent respectively, while **mixed schools have a lower rate** of 24.9 per cent.

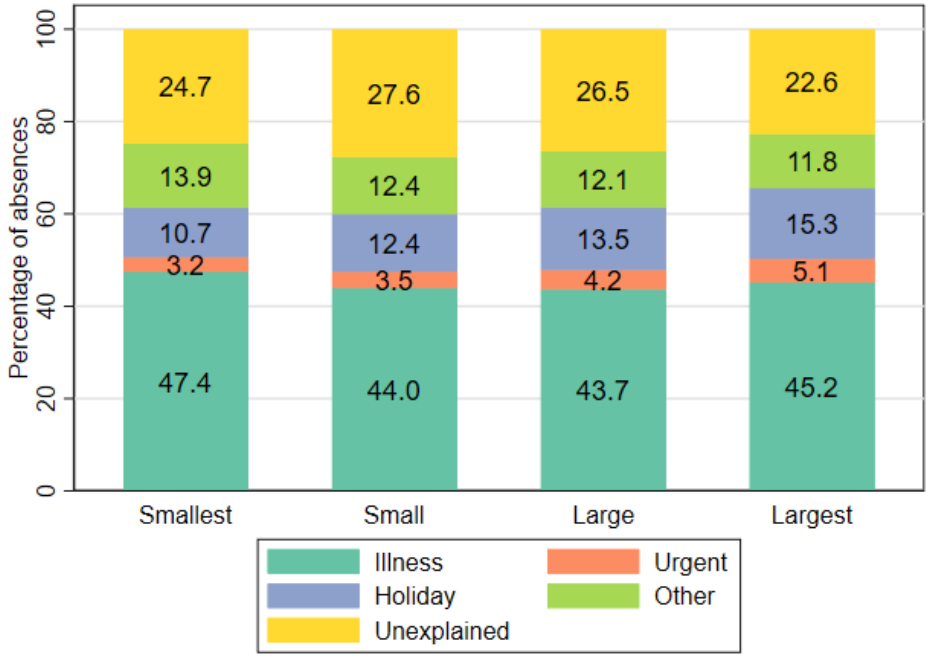
FIGURE 2.4 ABSENCE REASONS BY GENDER MIX (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Moving on to **school size (Figure 2.5),** we do not observe **any clear linear patterns** in the distribution of absences by size – at least descriptively. Illness-related absences are the most common across all school sizes, but they are highest in the smallest schools at 47.4 per cent. Conversely, small and large schools have a higher share of unexplained absences, though this is not a linear relationship with size, as the largest schools actually have the lowest share at 22.6 per cent. Holiday absences appear slightly more common in the largest schools.

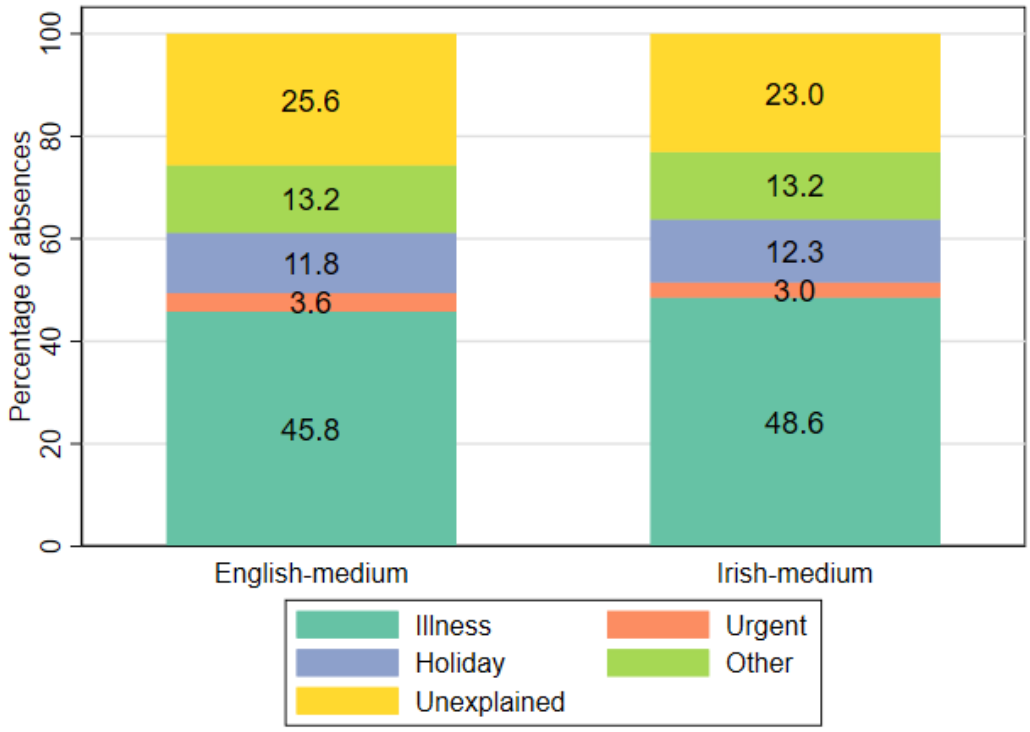
FIGURE 2.5 ABSENCE REASONS BY SCHOOL SIZE (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Moving on to the **language of instruction (Figure 2.6)**, the differences between English-medium and Irish-medium schools are **limited.** Roughly half of all absences in both types of schools are related to illness. The other categories show only minor variation – although it is worth noting that English-medium schools have a slightly higher share of unexplained absences (25.6 per cent versus 23 per cent).

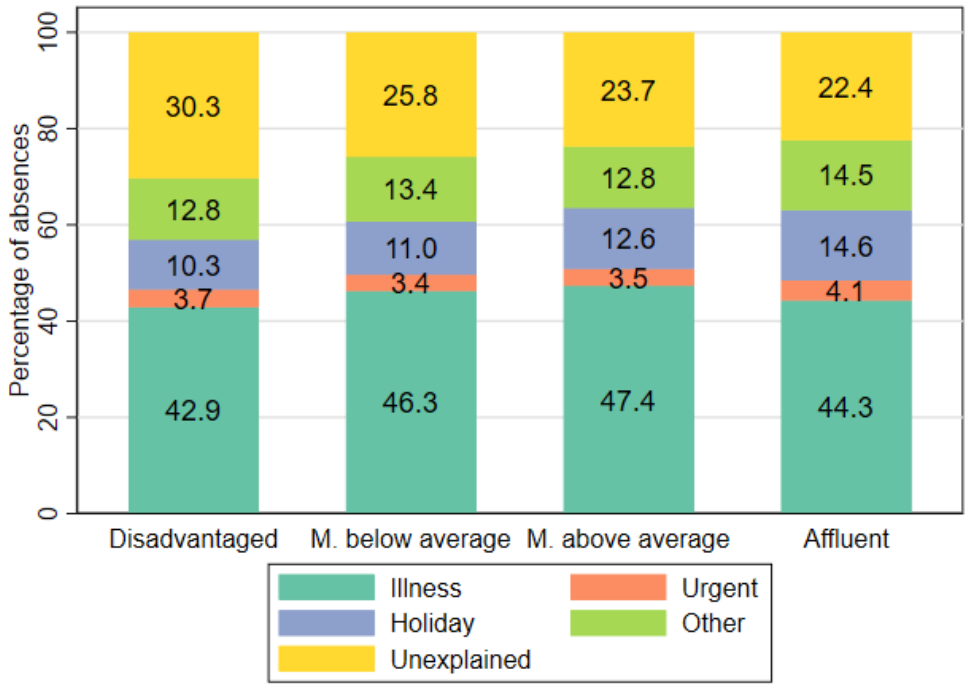
FIGURE 2.6 ABSENCE REASONS BY LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

While the overall patterns are broadly similar across all socioeconomic levels of the areas that schools are in, a few differences are noticeable. Following the general trend, illness-related absences are the most common across all groups, with percentages ranging from 42.9 per cent to 47.4 per cent (Figure 2.7). **Unexplained absences appear to be more prominent in disadvantaged areas**, with a share of 30.3 per cent. This proportion decreases as the socioeconomic level improves, falling to 22.4 percentage points in affluent areas. Another pattern is that **holiday absences are most common in affluent areas**, with the share gradually decreasing as the level of deprivation increases, which is not necessarily surprising.

FIGURE 2.7 ABSENCE REASONS BY POBAL HP INDEX (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Note: 'M. below' = 'marginally below' and 'M. above' = 'marginally above'.

2.1.2 Regression models

The following regression models are estimated using linear OLS models with standard errors adjusted for clustering at the school level, where the outcome variable is the share of each type of absence, treated as a continuous variable.

2.1.2.1 Unexplained absences

Table 2.1 presents the results of the regression models. Using regression models allows us to identify which school characteristics have the strongest association with the proportion of unexplained absences. The first column reports estimates from a model including DEIS status, school ethos, gender mix, school size and language of instruction, while the second column adds the Pobal HP Index of the school's local area to these variables.

TABLE 2.1 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF UNEXPLAINED ABSENCES (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS TYPE		
Urban Band 1	17.67***	16.91***
Urban Band 2	7.98***	7.61***
Rural	3.01**	2.36*
Special school	4.19*	4.10*
Base: Non-DEIS		
ETHOS		
Multidenominational	-3.72**	-3.70**
Minority faith	-3.50*	-3.38*
Base: Catholic		
GENDER MIX		
Mixed	-2.70±	1.57
Girls	-4.29*	4.49*
Base: Boys		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Smallest	2.26*	1.79±
Small	3.15**	2.86**
Large	2.06±	1.88±
Base: Largest		
Irish-medium	-1.91	-2.01
POBAL HP INDEX		
Marginally below		-1.05
Marginally above		-2.24*
Affluent		-4.10**
Base: Disadvantaged		
R2	0.0743	0.0769
N	5,738	5,738

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

Compared with mainstream non-DEIS schools**, all types of DEIS schools** have a higher share of **unexplained absences. Band 1 schools** show a strikingly higher share of almost **18 percentage points** (1 per cent significance level), while Band 2 and rural schools have differences of 7.98 and 3.01 percentage points (1 per cent

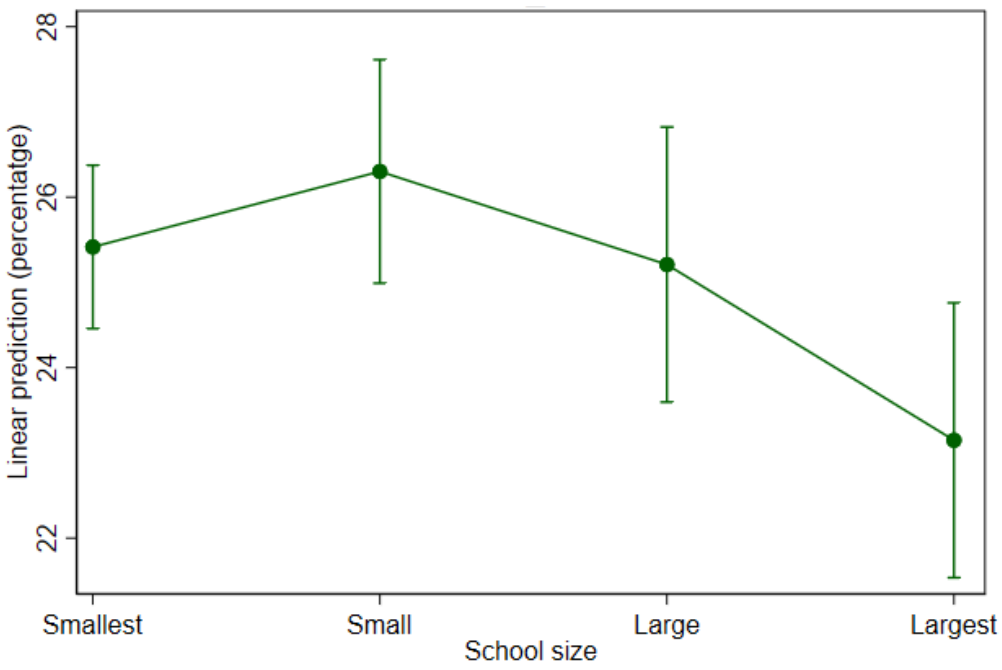
levels) respectively. Special schools have a higher share of 4.19 percentage points (5 per cent level) than mainstream non-DEIS schools.

Catholic schools have a **higher share of unexplained absences** than schools of other ethos, with relatively small-sized effects. They record a 3.72 percentage point higher share compared with multidenominational schools (significant at the 1 per cent level) and 3.5 percentage points higher compared with minority faith schools (significant at the 5 per cent level).

Boys' schools register a 4.29 percentage points **higher share** than girls only schools (5 per cent significance level).

Compared with the largest schools, other schools record slightly higher shares of unexplained absences: the smallest have 2.26 percentage points more (5 per cent significance level) and the small schools 3.15 percentage points (1 per cent significance level). As shown in Figure 2.8, which presents predictive margins for school size with other variables set at their means, the main takeaway is that the **largest schools** record the **lowest share of unexplained absences.**

FIGURE 2.8 EFFECT OF SCHOOL SIZE ON THE SHARE OF UNEXPLAINED ABSENCES (PRIMARY)



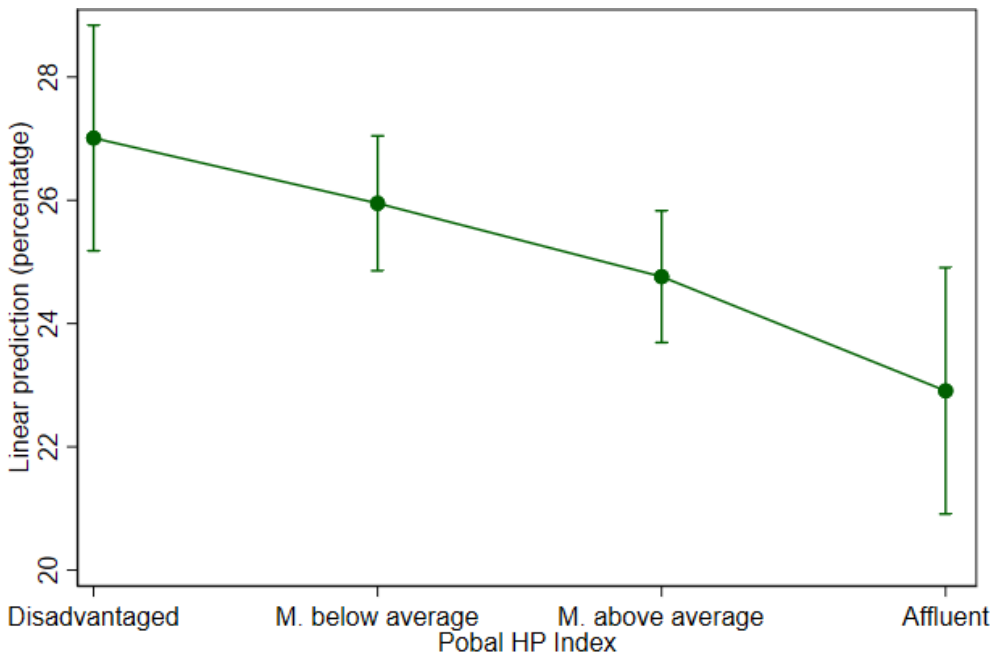
Source: Administrative data from TESS.

No significant differences are found by the language of instruction at the 5 per cent level or below. Finally, in the model that includes the Pobal HP Index, schools in marginally above average areas and affluent areas record a 2.24 and 4.1 percentage point lower share of unexplained absences respectively, compared

with schools in disadvantaged areas (significant at the 5 and 1 per cent levels respectively). Compared with schools in marginally below average areas, those in affluent areas have 3.04 percentage points fewer unexplained absences (1 per cent level). Overall, the results indicate somewhat of a **gradient where schools in more prosperous areas** tend to have **a lower proportion of unexplained absences**, particularly in comparison with schools in the most disadvantaged areas. This gradient can be visualised in Figure 2.9.

We also consider whether having both indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage – DEIS status and the Pobal HP Index – might further worsen levels of unexplained absences. To test this, we include interaction terms between the two measures but overall find no evidence of an aggravating effect. The only exception is an interaction between Rural × Deprived, which has a coefficient of –5.44 (significant at the 5 per cent level; see Table A2.1 in Appendix Chapter 2). This effect is opposite to the expected direction: it suggests that the higher share of unexplained absences in rural schools and the higher share in deprived areas are partially offset when both characteristics occur together. However, it is important to note that this pattern applies only to rural schools, and there is not a broader relationship between DEIS status and the Pobal HP Index when it comes to the share of unexplained absences.

FIGURE 2.9 EFFECT OF POBAL HP INDEX ON THE SHARE OF UNEXPLAINED ABSENCES (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Note: 'M. below' = 'marginally below' and 'M. above' = 'marginally above'.

2.1.2.2 Illness absences

The regression output presented in Table 2.2 indicates that, compared to mainstream non-DEIS schools, **Urban Band 1, Urban Band 2 and special schools** show statistically significant differences at the 1 per cent level in the share of illness-related absences. Specifically, these schools have **a lower share of illness-related absences than non-DEIS schools**. On average, special schools have 12.28 percentage points fewer illness-related absences, Urban Band 1 schools have 12.66 points fewer and Urban Band 2 schools have 6.29 points fewer.

TABLE 2.2 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF ILLNESS ABSENCES (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS TYPE		
Urban Band 1	-12.66***	-12.36***
Urban Band 2	-6.29***	-6.06***
Rural	-0.85	-0.60
Special school	-12.28***	-12.058***
Base: Non-DEIS		
ETHOS		
Multidenominational	-1.52	-1.43
Minority faith	-1.20	-1.10
Base: Catholic		
GENDER MIX		
Mixed	2.82**	2.75**
Girls	2.58	2.61
Base: Boys		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Small	-2.18**	-2.18**
Large	-2.31**	-2.32**
Largest	-2.24*	-2.22**
Base: Smallest		
Irish-medium	2.30*	2.40*
POBAL HP INDEX		
Marginally below		0.30
Marginally above		1.15
Affluent		-0.08
Base: Disadvantaged		
R2	0.0602	0.0609
N	5,738	5,738

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

Considering the gender mix of schools, boys seem to have a somewhat lower **share of illness-related absences** than mixed schools – by 2.8 percentage points approximately (1 per cent significance level).

Compared to the **smallest schools**, all other school sizes have **a significantly lower share** of illness-related absences at the 5 per cent level or lower, although these differences are small compared to the DEIS and special school differences. Specifically, compared to the smallest schools the other sizes have approximately 2.1 to 2.4 percentage points fewer illness-related absences each. There are no statistically significant differences among the remaining school sizes.

Language of instruction emerges as statistically significant at the 5 per cent level, with Irish-medium schools having a slightly higher share of illness-related absences, by 2.3 percentage points.

Ethos and the Pobal HP Index are not associated with variations in the share of illness-related absences at the 5 per cent significance level or below.

2.1.2.3 Holiday absences

The regression output in Table 2.3 indicates that, **compared to mainstream non-DEIS schools**, all **DEIS and special schools** have a **lower share of holiday-related absences**, with these differences being statistically significant at the 1 per cent level. Special schools show the largest difference, at 7.06 percentage points (pp) lower, followed by Urban Band 1 schools (3.22 pp), rural schools (2.26 pp) and Urban Band 2 schools (1.99 pp).

TABLE 2.3 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF HOLIDAY ABSENCES (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS TYPE		
Urban Band 1	-3.22***	-2.84***
Urban Band 2	-1.99***	-1.73***
Rural	-2.26***	-1.88***
Special school	-7.06***	-7.10***
Base: Non-DEIS		
ETHOS		
Multidenominational	2.51***	2.44***
Minority faith	1.85**	1.71*
Base: Catholic		
GENDER MIX		
Mixed	-1.25 ±	-1.22 ±
Boys	-1.26	-1.37
Base: Girls		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Small	1.45***	1.29***
Large	2.32***	2.09***
Largest	3.76***	3.36***
Base: Smallest		
Irish-medium	0.23	0.27
POBAL HP INDEX		
Marginally below		0.19
Marginally above		1.12**
Affluent		2.65***
Base: Disadvantaged		
R2	0.0618	0.0677
N	5,738	5,738

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

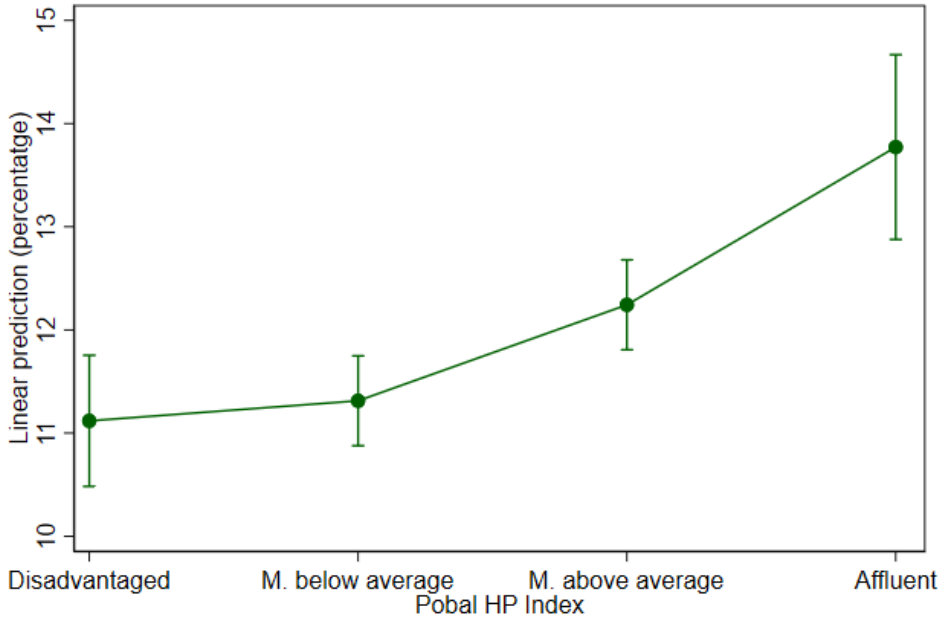
Compared to Catholic schools, **multidenominational and minority faith schools** have a marginally **higher share of holiday-related absences**, with these differences statistically significant at the 1 per cent level – specifically, 2.51 and 1.85 percentage points higher on average.

Regarding **school size**, there is a small gradient where larger schools have a greater share of holiday absences. Compared to the smallest schools, all other sizes show higher shares: 1.45 percentage points for small schools, 2.32 for large and 3.76 for the largest, all significant at the 1 per cent level. Compared to small schools, large schools have 0.87 percentage points more (5 per cent significance level), and the largest have 2.31 more (1 per cent significance level). The difference between large and largest schools is also significant at 1.43 percentage points (1 per cent level).

The coefficients for gender mix and **language of instruction** are not statistically significant at the 5 per cent level or below. In the model including the Pobal HP Index we see that, compared to schools in disadvantaged areas, those in more affluent areas have somewhat higher shares of holiday-related absences. Schools in marginally above average areas have, on average, a 1.12 percentage point higher share of holiday-related absences, while schools in affluent areas show an even greater difference of 2.65 percentage points – statistically significant at the 1 per cent level. When comparing schools in marginally below average areas, schools in marginally above average areas show a 0.93 percentage point higher share, and those in affluent areas a 2.45 percentage point higher share; both differences are also significant at the 1 per cent level. Additionally, compared to marginally above average areas, schools in affluent areas report a further 1.58 percentage point increase, significant at the 1 per cent level.

Overall, these results reveal **a socioeconomic gradient (plotted in Figure 2.9)**, with **holiday-related absenteeism increasing** as the **affluence of the school's surrounding area rises.** The only exception is the comparison between disadvantaged and marginally below average areas. This pattern is not surprising, given that the Pobal HP Index somewhat acts as a proxy for the socioeconomic composition of the student body, and a large portion of Irish families cannot afford to go on holidays (Holland, 2025). It is important to consider this type of absence, even if it primarily relates to children from more privileged backgrounds, because the negative effects of poor attendance on academic performance are not necessarily mitigated by socioeconomic status (Drager et al., 2024; Klein et al., 2022).

FIGURE 2.10 EFFECT OF POBAL HP INDEX ON THE SHARE OF HOLIDAY ABSENCES (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Note: 'M. below' = 'marginally below' and 'M. above' = 'marginally above'.

2.1.2.4 Urgent absences

Table 2.4 shows the results of the regression models where the outcome variable is the share of urgent absences. Compared with mainstream non-DEIS schools, Urban Band 2 schools show a slightly higher share of urgent absences (+0.81 percentage points, 5 per cent significance level). This does **not suggest a clear relationship between DEIS status and the share of urgent absences**, given that the effect size is very small and only applies to Urban Band 2 schools. Special schools show a marginally lower share (-1.7 pp) than mainstream schools, significant at the 1 per cent level.

TABLE 2.4 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF URGENT ABSENCES (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS TYPE		
Urban Band 1	0.11	0.09
Urban Band 2	0.81**	0.78**
Rural	0.45±	0.45±
Special school	-1.70***	-1.75***
Base: Non-DEIS		
ETHOS		
Multidenominational	0.99***	0.96***
Minority faith	1.18*	1.15*
Base: Catholic		
GENDER MIX		
Mixed	-0.24	-0.23
Boys	-0.02	-0.06
Base: Girls		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Small	0.22	0.19
Large	0.89***	0.86***
Largest	1.87***	1.82***
Base: Smallest		
Irish-medium	-0.79*	-0.80**
POBAL INDEX		
Marginally below		-0.16
Marginally above		-0.13
Affluent		0.17
Base: Disadvantaged		
R2	0.0256	0.0259
N	5,738	5,738

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

Relative to Catholic schools, multidenominational schools and minority faith schools have a slightly higher share of urgent absences, significant at the 1 and 5 per cent levels, by 0.99 and 1.18 percentage points, respectively.

Relative to the smallest schools, **large and the largest schools** show marginally **higher shares of urgent absences** – 0.89 and 1.87 percentage points more respectively, significant at the 1 per cent level. Compared with small schools, large schools have 0.67 percentage points more urgent absences (1 per cent level), and the largest have 1.65 percentage points more (1 per cent level). In turn, relative to large schools, the largest record 0.97 percentage points more (1 per cent level). Taken together**, the larger the school, the higher the share of urgent absences** (with the only exception being the variation between the smallest and small schools, which is not significant).

The **gender mix** of schools as well as the socioeconomic level where schools are located, as measured by the Pobal HP Index, is not significantly related to variations in the share of urgent absences at the 5 per cent significance level or below.

2.1.2.5 'Other' absences

Table 2.5 shows that, compared with non-DEIS schools, Urban Band 1 schools record a slightly lower share of 'other' types of absences, 1.89 percentage points lower (significant at the 1 per cent level). **Special schools**, however, show a **very large difference**, with a **16.85 percentage point higher share** (1 per cent level).

TABLE 2.5 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF 'OTHER' ABSENCES (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS TYPE		
Urban Band 1	-1.89***	-1.79***
Urban Band 2	-0.49	-0.59
Rural	-0.34	-0.32
Special school	16.85***	16.81***
Base: Non-DEIS		
ETHOS		
Multidenominational	1.74*	1.72*
Minority faith	1.66	1.61
Base: Catholic		
GENDER MIX		
Mixed	-0.32	-0.26
Boys	-0.41	-0.44
Base: Girls		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Small	-0.38	-0.37
Large	-0.70	-0.72
Largest	-1.13*	-1.16*
Base: Smallest		
Irish-medium	0.18	0.14
POBAL HP INDEX		
Disadvantaged		-1.35±
Marginally below average		-0.63
Marginally above average		-1.25±
Base: Affluent		
R2	0.0688	0.0699
N	5,738	5,738

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

Differences by ethos are limited. The only significant comparison is that, compared with Catholic schools, multidenominational schools have a 1.74 percentage point higher expected share of 'other' absences, significant at the 5 per cent level.

Compared to the smallest schools**, the largest schools** have **marginally lower shares of 'other' absences**, at 1.13 percentage points (significant at the 5 per cent level). This is, however, the only significant pairwise comparison regarding school size – pointing overall at little meaningful variation in this regard.

Gender mix and **language of instruction** are not significantly related to differences in the share of 'other' types of absences.

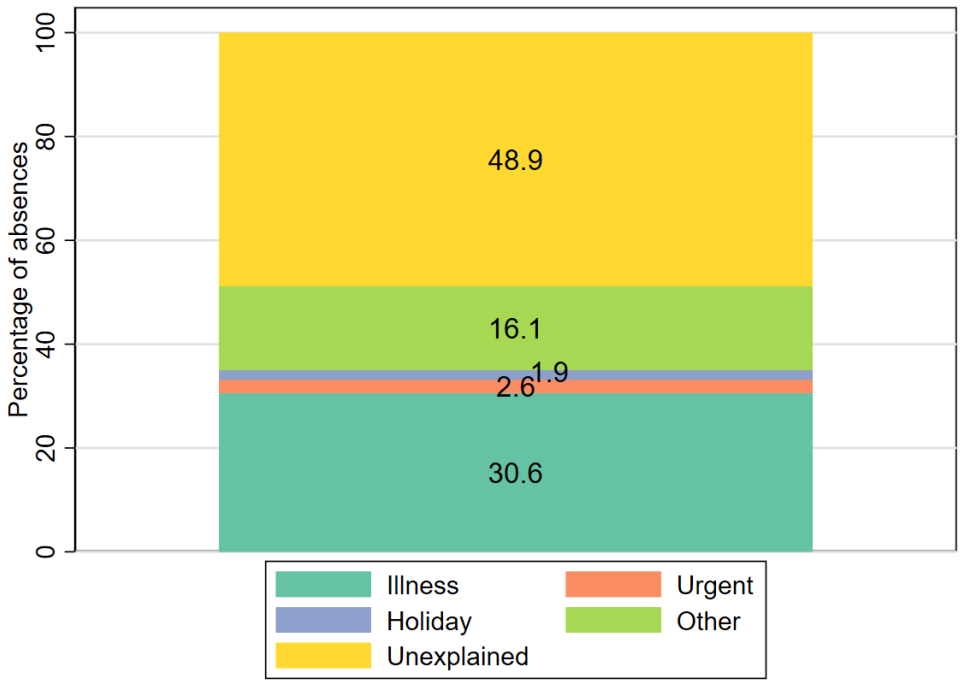
In a model including the Pobal HP Index, we see **no clear, systemic differences** by area-level deprivation.

2.2 POST-PRIMARY STAGE

2.2.1 Descriptive graphs

Figure 2.11 shows the **overall distribution of reasons for absence** at the post-primary stage. Compared to the primary stage the overall pattern has changed, as the **most prominent reason** for absences is now **'unexplained',** accounting for almost half of all absences. Conversely, **illness** represents a smaller share, roughly one-third. **'Other'** accounts for 16.1 per cent of absences, while **holiday** and **urgent reasons** play very minor roles at 1.9 per cent and 2.6 per cent respectively.

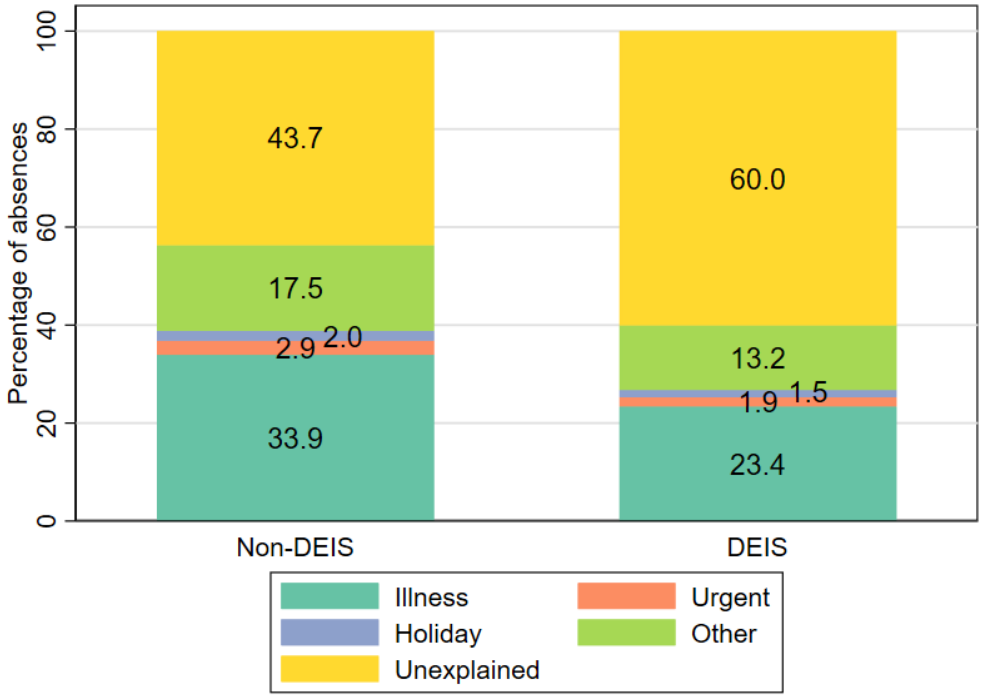
FIGURE 2.11 OVERALL ABSENCE REASONS (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Moving on to **DEIS classification** (Figure 2.12), DEIS post-primary schools have a **substantially larger share of unexplained absences,** with six in ten absences falling into this category compared to four in ten for non-DEIS schools. Conversely, non-DEIS schools show a higher proportion of absences due to 'other' reasons (17.5 per cent versus 13.2 per cent) as well as illness (33.9 per cent versus 23.4 per cent). Non-DEIS schools also have marginally higher shares of holiday and urgent absences.

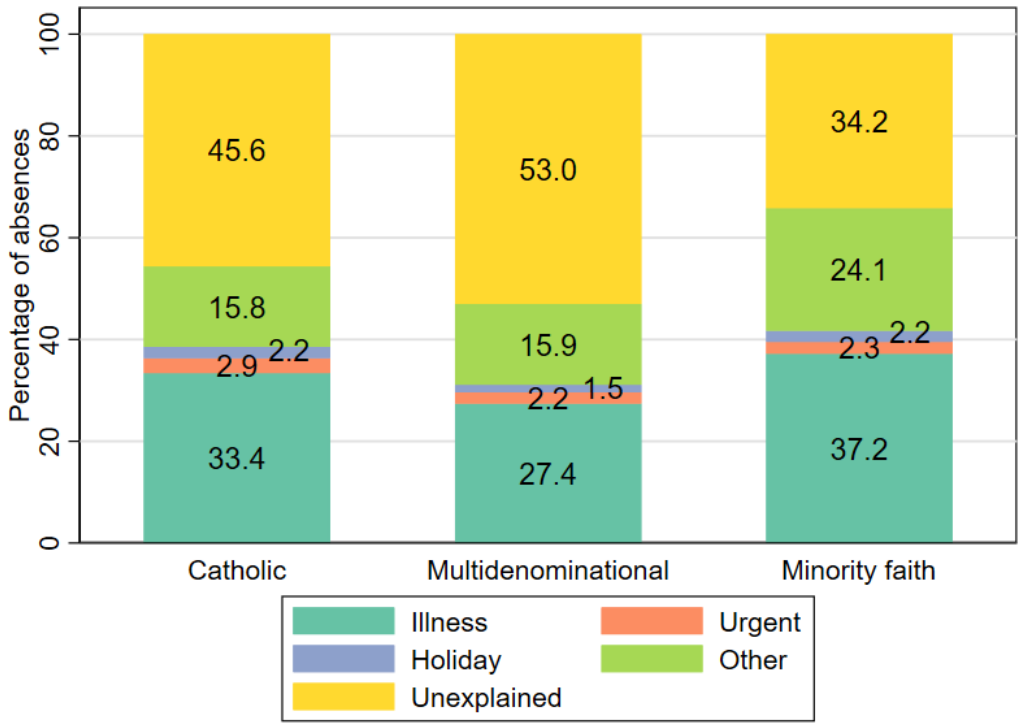
FIGURE 2.12 ABSENCE REASONS BY DEIS STATUS (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Moving on to **ethos** (Figure 2.13), the distribution does differ. Looking at the share of unexplained absences, minority faith schools stand out for having a comparatively lower share at 34.2 per cent, compared to 45.6 per cent for Catholic schools and an even higher 53 per cent for multidenominational schools. The **lower share of unexplained absences in minority faith schools** is accompanied by a larger share of absences due to 'other' reasons, as well as illness.

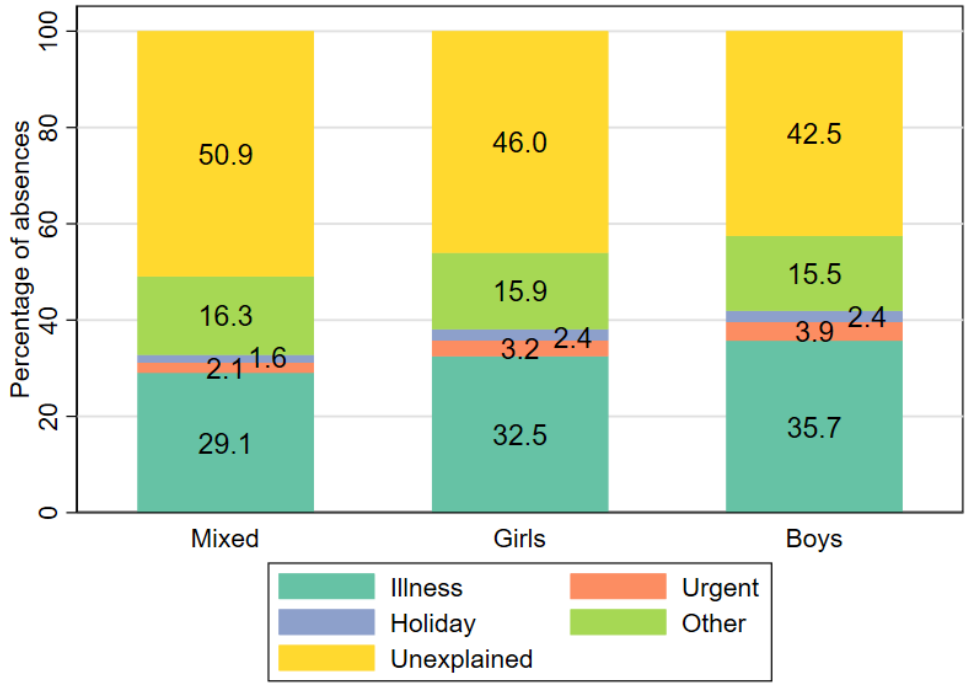
FIGURE 2.13 ABSENCE REASONS BY ETHOS (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Proceeding with the **gender mix of schools** (Figure 2.14), **single-gender schools** have a **lower share of unexplained absences**, especially boys' schools. The shares are 50.9 per cent for mixed schools, 42.5 per cent for boys' schools and 46 per cent for girls' schools. Mixed schools also show a lower share of absences due to illness and slightly higher shares for 'other' types of absences. Boys' and girls' schools additionally have marginally higher absences of an urgent nature.

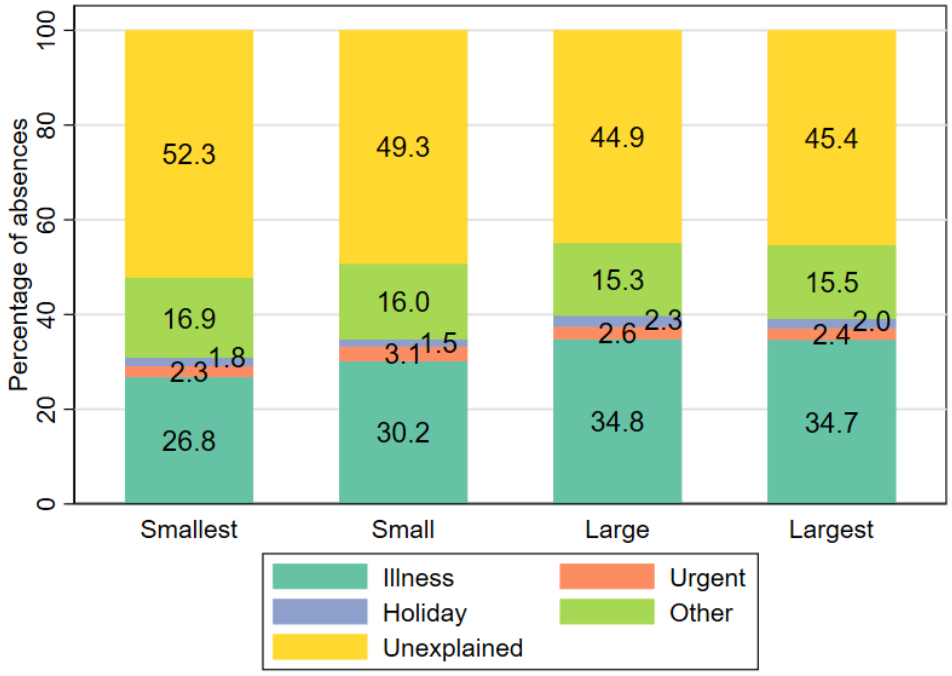
FIGURE 2.14 ABSENCE REASONS BY GENDER MIX (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Looking at **school size** (Figure 2.15), we see that the **share of unexplained absences decreases with size**, which is somewhat surprising given the assumption that smaller schools, where people know each other better, might exert more pressure to clarify the reasons for absences. Smaller schools also have a slightly higher share of 'other' absences, though the differences are small. Conversely, they show a substantially lower share of absences due to illness and a slightly smaller share of holiday-related absences.

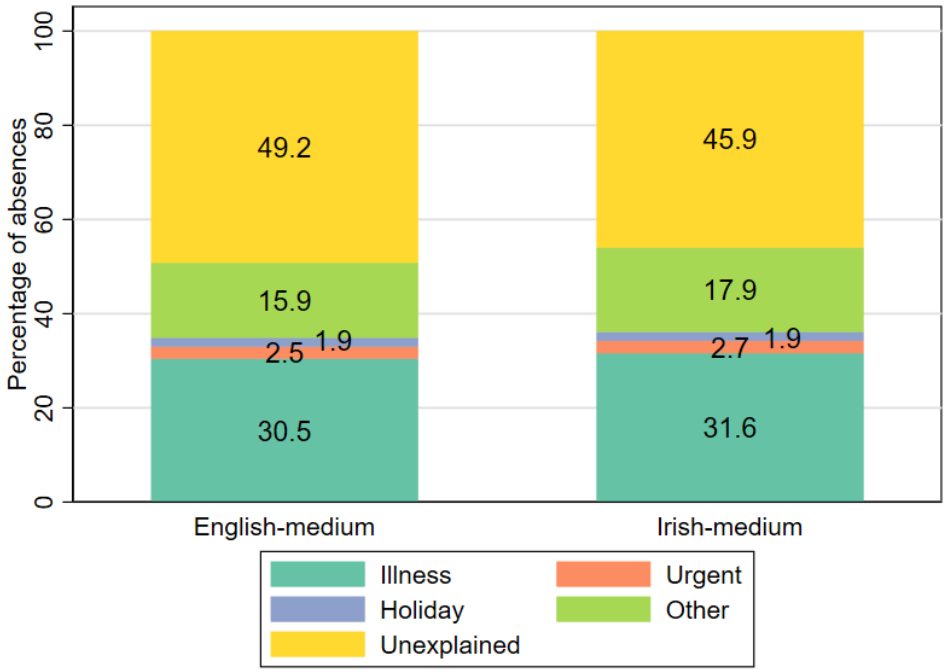
FIGURE 2.15 ABSENCE REASONS BY SCHOOL SIZE (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Considering the **language of instruction** of schools (Figure 2.16), the differences are modest. Irish-medium schools have a slightly lower share of unexplained absences and a slightly higher share of 'other' absences. Overall, though, these differences are small.

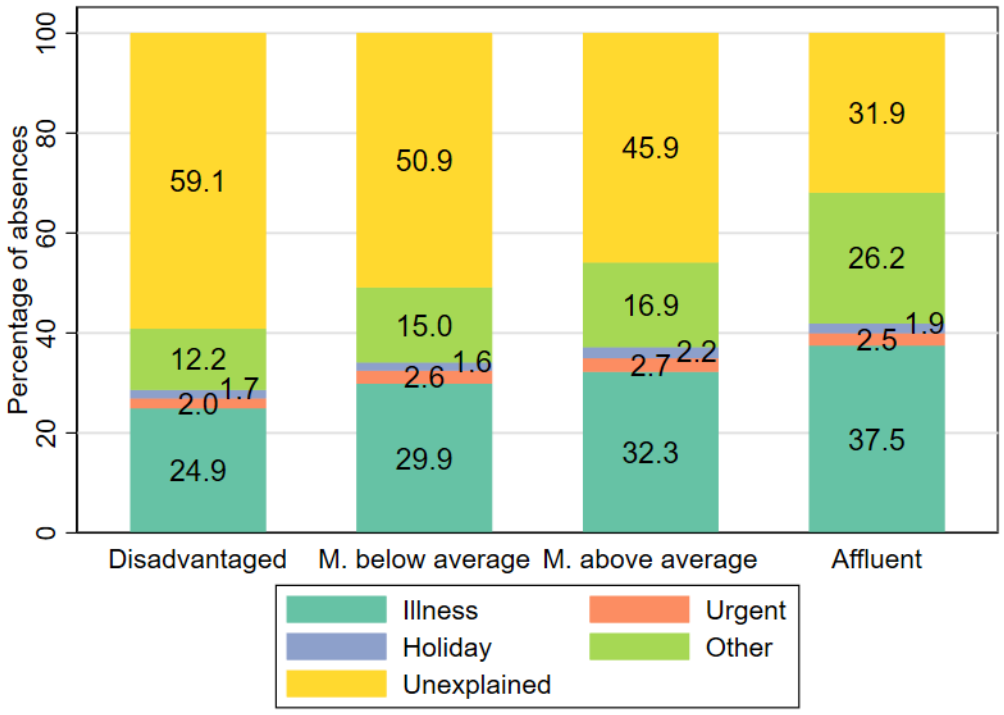
FIGURE 2.16 ABSENCE REASONS BY LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Finally, the Pobal HP Index (Figure 2.17) **seems to reveal somewhat of a gradient**: schools in more **disadvantaged areas** report a **much higher share of unexplained absences**. The differences are substantial, with a striking 59.1 per cent for schools in disadvantaged areas, compared to just 31.9 per cent for schools in affluent areas. In contrast, schools in more well-off areas have a somewhat higher share of absences due to 'other' reasons and illness. The shares of urgent and holiday absences are quite similar across groups.

FIGURE 2.17 ABSENCE REASONS BY POBAL HP INDEX (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Note: 'M. below' = 'marginally below' and 'M. above' = 'marginally above'.

2.2.2 Regression models

The following regression models are estimated using linear OLS models with standard errors adjusted for clustering at the school level, where the outcome variable is the share of each type of absence, treated as a continuous variable.

2.2.2.1 Unexplained absences

Table 2.6 shows the regression output for two models where the outcome variable is the share of unexplained absences. The first model includes DEIS status, ethos, school size, gender mix and language of instruction as explanatory variables. The second model includes all the aforementioned variables plus the Pobal HP Index.

TABLE 2.6 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF UNEXPLAINED ABSENCES (POST-PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS	13.78***	11.73***
ETHOS		
Catholic	12.04**	9.63*
Multidenominational	14.58**	12.62***
Base: Minority faith		
GENDER MIX		
Girls	-1.65	-0.43
Boys	-4.96	-3.99
Base: Mixed		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Small	-0.52	-0.47
Large	-3.76	-3.61
Largest	-2.99	-2.20
Base: Smallest		
Irish-medium	-7.21*	-7.52*
POBAL HP INDEX		
Marginally below		-6.15*
Marginally above		-8.43**
Affluent		-20.00***
Base: Disadvantaged		
R2	0.1157	0.1448
N	1,270	1,270

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

We can see that **DEIS post-primary schools**, compared to non-DEIS schools, have a **substantially higher share of unexplained absences** – 13.78 percentage points more, significant at the 1 per cent level.

Compared to **minority faith schools**, **Catholic** and **multidenominational schools** have 12.04 and 14.58 percentage points higher shares of unexplained absences respectively, significant at the 1 per cent level.

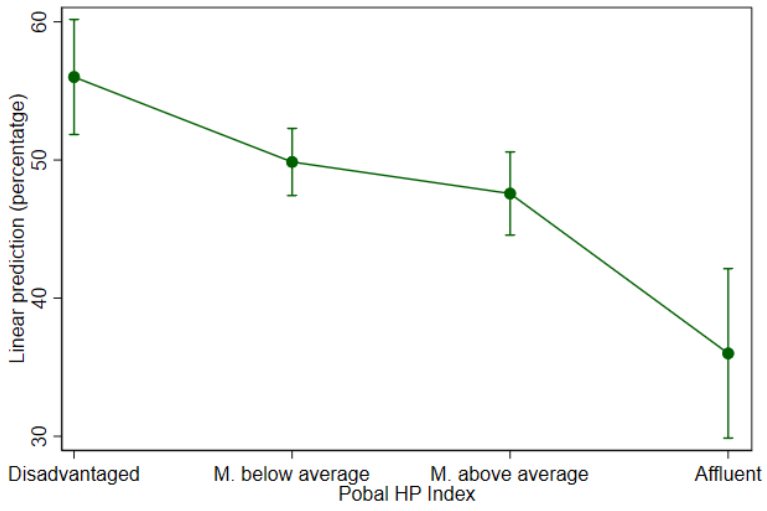
We also see that **Irish-medium schools**, as opposed to English-medium ones, have a **7.21 percentage point lower share** of unexplained absences.

There are **no statistically significant differences** by **gender mix** or **school size** at the 5 per cent level or below, once other school characteristics are taken into account.

Regarding the model including the Pobal HP Index, compared to schools in disadvantaged areas, all other schools have a lower share of unexplained absences. Schools in marginally below average areas have a 6.15 percentage point lower share (significant at the 5 per cent level); marginally above average areas show an 8.43 percentage point lower share (significant at the 1 per cent level); and schools in affluent areas report a sizeable difference of 20 percentage points (significant at the 1 per cent level). Compared to schools in marginally below average areas, affluent schools have a 13.85 percentage point lower share (1 per cent level). The difference between marginally above average and affluent schools is also significant, with the latter having 11.57 percentage points less (1 per cent level). Overall, this indicates a **gradient whereby schools in more well-off areas have a lower share of unexplained absences** (plotted in Figure 2.18).

Just as in the primary-level analysis, we also look at whether having both indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage – DEIS status and the Pobal HP Index – might combine to increase unexplained absences. Instead, the interaction term comes out negative (-9.74) and is significant at the 5 per cent level, which is the opposite of what we would have expected (Table A2.2 in Appendix Chapter 2). In other words, while DEIS schools and more deprived areas each tend to have higher levels of unexplained absences on their own, this effect is partly reduced when the two occur together. One possible explanation is that schools facing both forms of disadvantage may receive more targeted supports, which could help with some of the challenges associated with unexplained absence.

FIGURE 2.18 EFFECT OF POBAL HP INDEX ON THE SHARE OF UNEXPLAINED ABSENCES (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Note: 'M. below' = 'marginally below' and 'M. above' = 'marginally above'.

2.2.2.2 Illness absences

Table 2.7 shows the regression output for the models where the outcome variable is the share of illness-related absences. **DEIS schools**, compared to non-DEIS schools, have a 7.67 percentage point **lower share of illness-related absences** (significant at the 1 per cent level).

TABLE 2.7 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF ILLNESS ABSENCES (POST-PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS	-7.67***	-6.86***
ETHOS		
Multidenominational	-3.29	-3.47
Minority faith	4.12	3.48
Base: Catholic		
GENDER MIX		
Girls	0.19	-0.15
Boys	3.16	2.93
Base: Mixed		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Small	1.78	1.74
Large	5.79**	5.74**
Largest	5.76*	5.45*
Base: Smallest		
Irish-medium	4.78	4.97
POBAL HP INDEX		
Marginally below		3.30
Marginally above		3.67
Affluent		7.43*
Base: Disadvantaged		
R2	0.0762	0.0817
N	1,270	1,270

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10. Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

Considering **school size**, compared to the smallest schools, large and the largest schools have 5.79 and 5.76 percentage points higher shares of illness-related absences (significant at the 1 per cent and 5 per cent levels respectively). There are no other significant differences, suggesting that rather than a clear progressive linear pattern, the smallest **schools** simply tend to have somewhat **fewer illness-related absences** compared to larger ones.

Gender mix, ethos and **language of instruction** are not significant at the 5 per cent level or below.

Considering the model with the Pobal HP Index, there do not appear to be any meaningful patterns – except for a statistically significant difference at the 5 per cent level where schools in affluent areas have a higher share of illness-related absences compared to disadvantaged schools by 7.43 percentage points.

2.2.2.3 Holiday absences

Compared with small schools, large schools have a 0.82 percentage point higher share (significant at the 1 per cent level), while the largest schools have a 0.57 percentage point higher share of holiday absences (significant at the 5 per cent level). There are no significant differences among the remaining size pairwise comparisons. Overall, this suggests that **large schools**, compared to small and the smallest schools, tend to have **higher holiday absences,** but the differences are very small, and the relationship is not fully linear, so this finding should be interpreted with caution.

TABLE 2.8 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF HOLIDAY ABSENCES (POST-PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS	-0.26	-0.20
ETHOS		
Multidenominational	-0.44	-0.40
Minority faith	0.26	0.32
Base: Catholic		
GENDER MIX		
Girls	0.43	0.45
Boys	0.43	0.44
Base: Mixed		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Smallest	0.41	-0.40
Large	0.82**	0.41
Largest	0.57*	0.13
Base: Small		
Irish-medium	0.40	0.39
POBAL HP INDEX		
Disadvantaged		0.05
Marginally above		0.45±
Affluent		-0.02
Base: Marginally below		
R2	0.0327	0.0381
N	1,270	1,270

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

DEIS status, ethos, gender mix and language of instruction are not significant at the 5 per cent level or below, indicating no meaningful variation in the distribution of holiday absences across these categories.

The Pobal HP Index does not yield **any meaningful variation**, indicating that there is no systematic variation between area-level deprivation and the share of holiday absences.

2.2.2.4 Urgent absences

Table 2.9 shows the regression output with the proportion of urgent absences as the outcome variable. **DEIS schools**, compared to non-DEIS schools, have a slightly **lower share of urgent absences**, by an average of 0.84 percentage points, which is significant at the 5 per cent level.

TABLE 2.9 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF URGENT ABSENCES (POST-PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS	-0.84*	-0.81*
ETHOS		
Multidenominational	0.51	0.52
Minority faith	0.24	0.43
Base: Catholic		
GENDER MIX		
Girls	1.36*	1.44*
Boys	1.98*	2.07*
Base: Mixed		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Small	0.56	0.55
Large	-0.00	-0.00
Largest	-0.01	-0.02
Base: Smallest		
Irish-medium	0.47	0.51
POBAL HP INDEX		
Marginally below		0.57
Marginally above		0.39
Affluent		0.14
Base: Disadvantaged		
R2	0.0360	0.0388
N	1,270	1,270

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

Compared with mixed schools, **girls' and boys' schools** have a slightly **higher share of urgent absences** – by 1.36 percentage points (5 per cent significance level) and 1.98 percentage points (5 per cent level) respectively.

No significant differences are observed **by ethos, school size, language of instruction** or the Pobal HP Index at the 5 per cent level or less. Overall, the findings point to limited differences in urgent absences across the school groups considered.

2.2.2.5 'Other' absences

The regression output in Table 2.10 indicates that **DEIS post-primary schools** have a **lower share of 'other' absences**, with a difference of 4.99 percentage points (significant at the 1 per cent level).

TABLE 2.10 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF 'OTHER' ABSENCES (POST-PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
DEIS	-4.99***	-3.85**
ETHOS		
Catholic	-7.41	-5.38
Multidenominational	-6.73±	-5.00
Base: Minority faith		
GENDER MIX		
Girls	-0.32	-1.31
Boys	-0.60	-1.46
Base: Mixed		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Small	-1.41	-1.41
Large	-2.45±	-2.54
Largest	-2.93	-3.36
Base: Smallest		
Irish-medium	1.55	1.64
POBAL HP INDEX		
Marginally below		2.32
Marginally above		3.95*
Affluent		12.80***
Base: Disadvantaged		
R2	0.0252	0.0515
N	1,270	1,270

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.

There are **no statistically significant differences** by **gender mix, ethos, school size** or **language of instruction** at the 5 per cent level or below.

Moving on to the model with the Pobal HP Index: compared to schools in disadvantaged areas, schools in marginally above average and affluent areas have somewhat higher shares of 'other' absences by 3.95 and 12.8 percentage points respectively (significant at the 5 per cent and 1 per cent levels respectively). Compared to schools in marginally below average areas, schools in affluent areas also have a higher share by 10.47 percentage points (1 per cent significance level). The difference between marginally above average and affluent schools is also significant at the 1 per cent level, with affluent schools having 8.84 percentage points more. Overall, this points to a **gradient** whereby schools in more **affluent areas** tend to have a **higher share of 'other' absences.**

CHAPTER 3

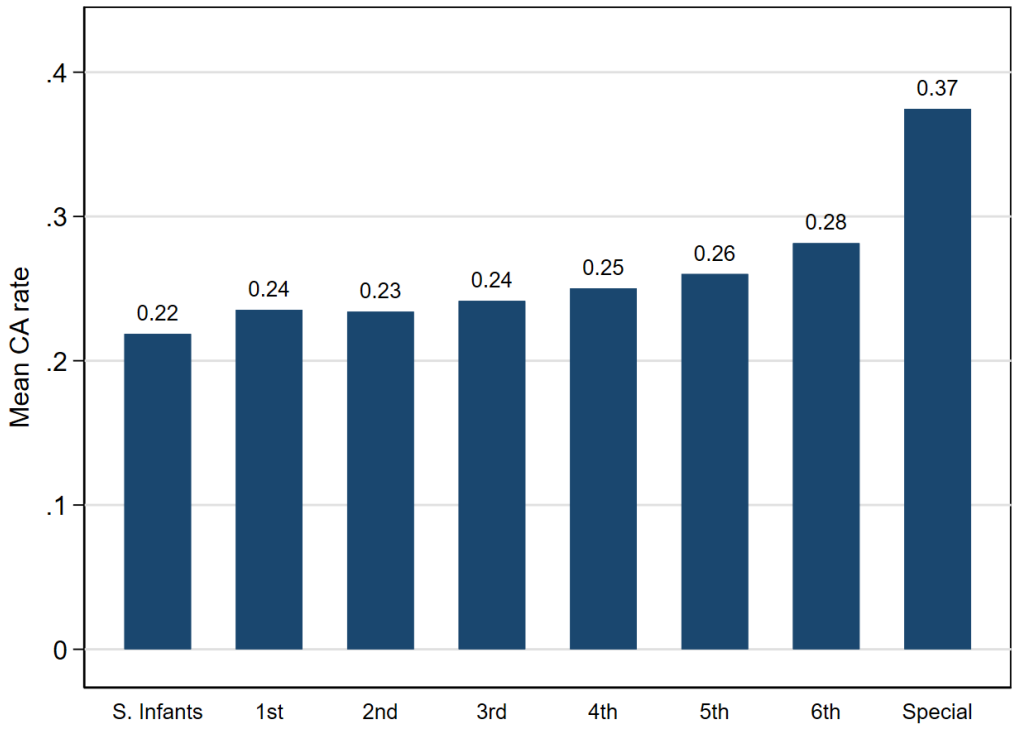
The Distribution of Reasons for Absence at the Student Level

3.1 PRIMARY STAGE

3.1.1 Descriptive graphs

Figure 3.1 shows the **CA (chronic absenteeism) rate** by class group, defined as the share of students recorded as chronically absent (missing 20 days or more). From Senior Infants to 6th Class there is a progressive, **linear increase in the CA** share. Senior Infants have a CA rate of 0.22, which rises to about one-quarter in 4th Class and reaches nearly one-third (28 per cent) in 6th Class. Students in the Special Class category report a strikingly high CA rate of 37 per cent.

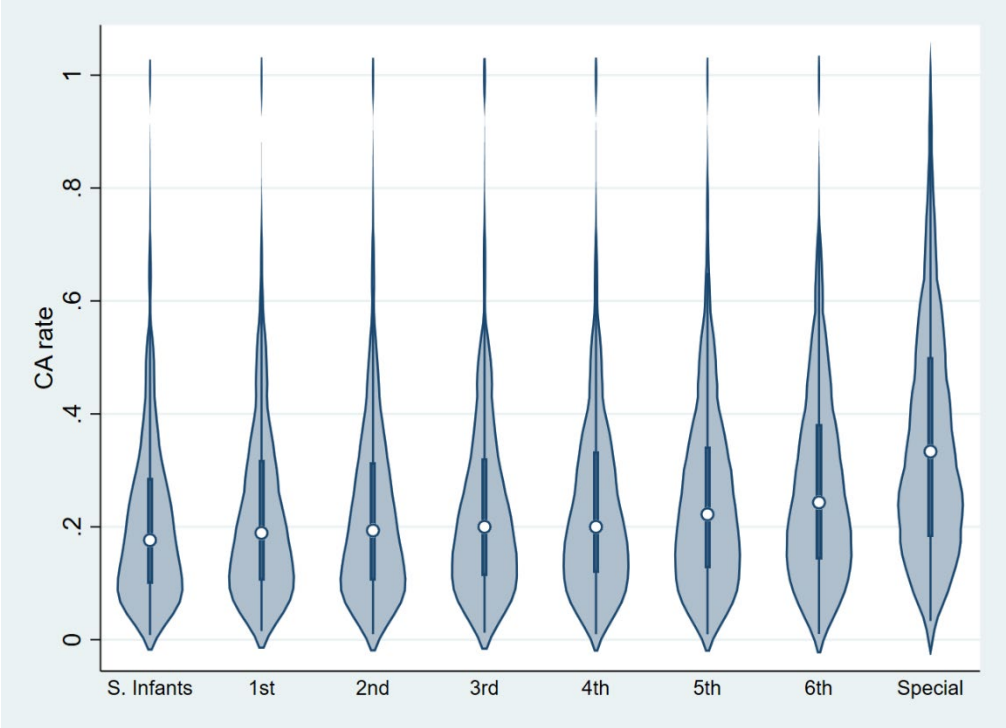
FIGURE 3.1 CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE BY GRADE (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS; population figures from DEY.

An alternative way to examine CA rates by class is to use a **violin plot (Figure 3.2)**, which shows the distribution of CA rates for each class. The width of the violin represents how common the values are within that range. We can see that the distributions of CA rates across classes do not differ dramatically, except for the higher end in the upper grades, indicating greater variability at the top, which helps explain their higher averages. We also see that the Special Class category follows a unique distribution: it is narrower and much taller than the others, suggesting that its CA rates have a larger range and that there is less variability.

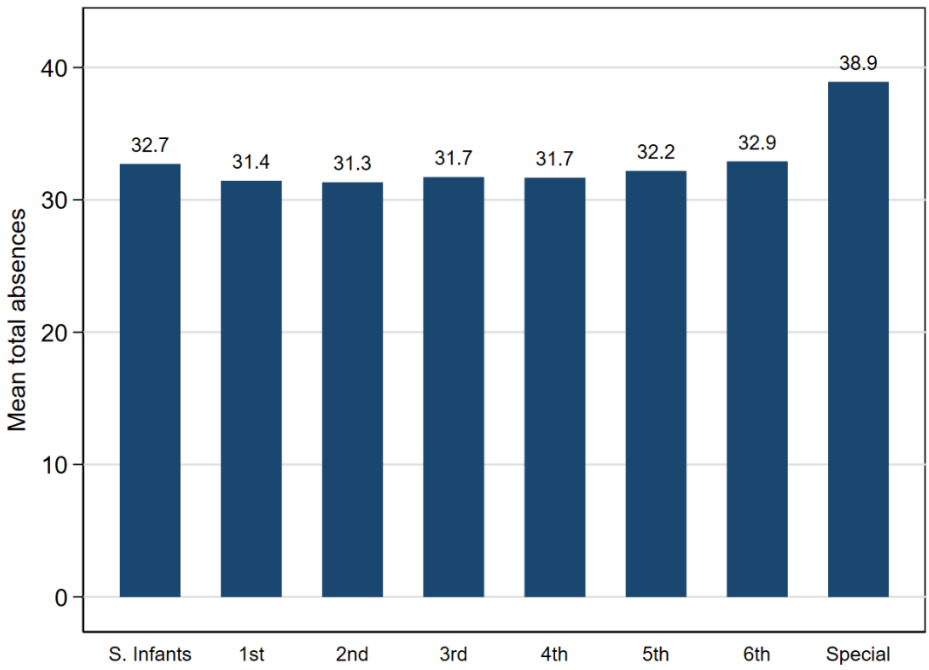
FIGURE 3.2 VIOLIN PLOTS: CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE BY GRADE (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

The **average annual days lost** by the chronic absentee primary students is **32.51 days.** Figure 3.3 shows the figures disaggregated by grade. Absences appear mostly consistent from 1st to 4th Class – albeit with marginal increases – and then are **comparatively higher in 5th and 6th Class**, where students miss an average of 32.2 and 32.9 days respectively. Chronic absenteeism is also marginally **worse in Senior Infants**. However, the worst-performing grade is, by a large margin, the **Special Class category**, where chronically absent students miss an average of **38.9 days per year**.

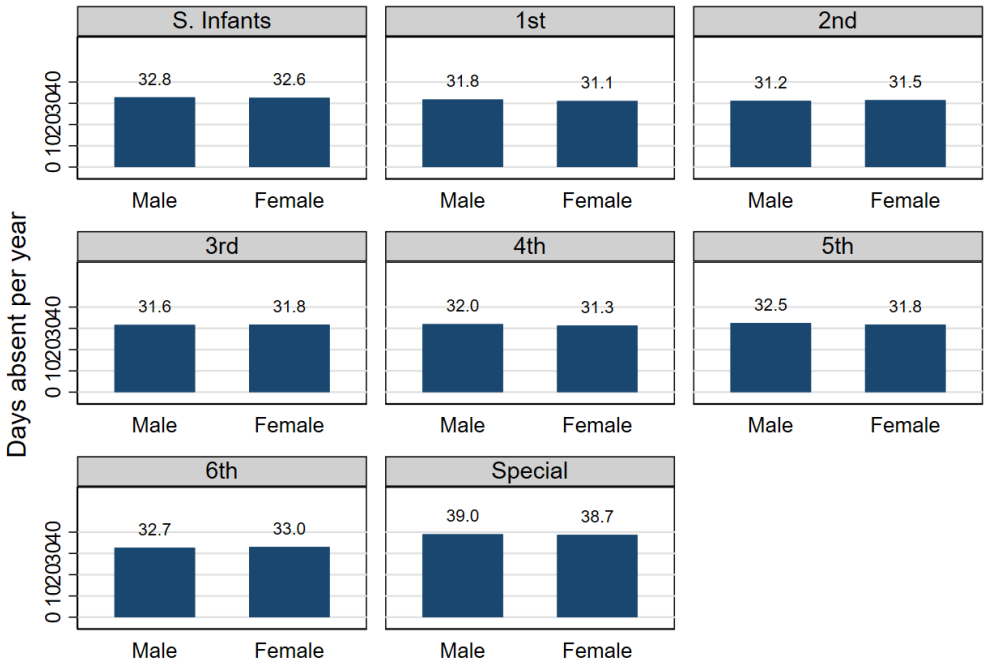
FIGURE 3.3 DAYS LOST TO CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY GRADE (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

In relation to student **gender**, the average number of days lost is similar, though slightly higher for boys, who have an average of 32.7 days compared with 32.3 days for girls. As shown in Figure 3.4, there are no pronounced gender differences when looking at the data disaggregated by class level.

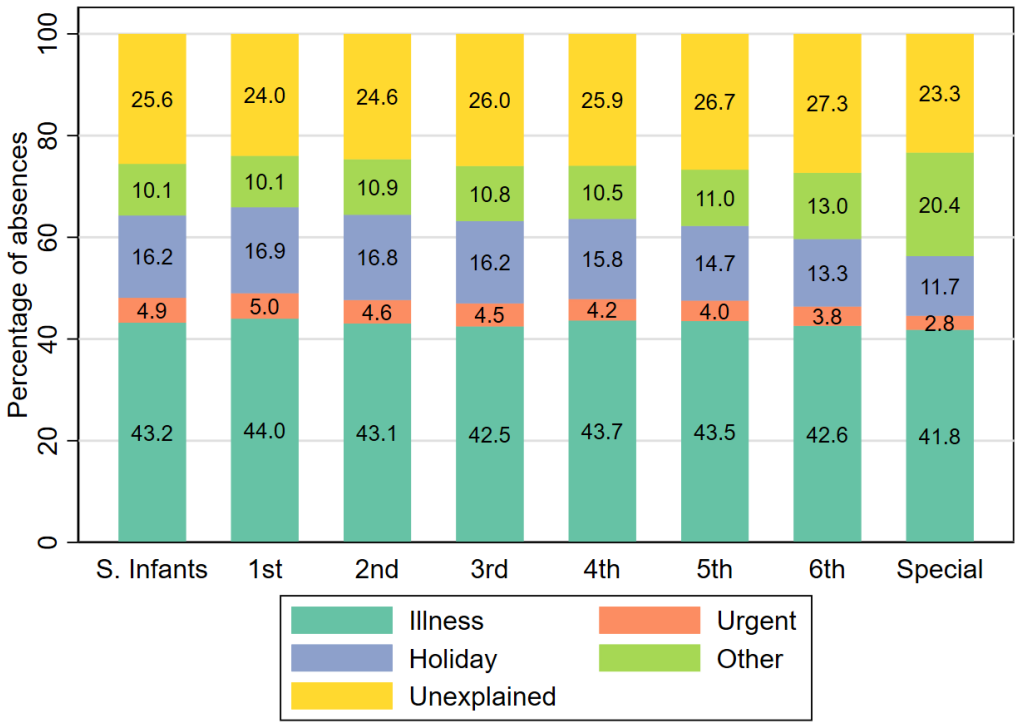
FIGURE 3.4 DAYS LOST TO CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY GRADE AND GENDER (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

When examining the **distribution of reasons for absences by grade (Figure 3.5)**, we see that the share of unexplained absences is highest in the later grades. From 1st Class onwards, the share is comparatively low but then begins to increase, reaching 27.3 per cent in 6th Class. This higher share appears to correspond with a slightly lower share of holiday- and urgent-related absences. The Special Class grade has the lowest share of unexplained absences, at 23.3 per cent.

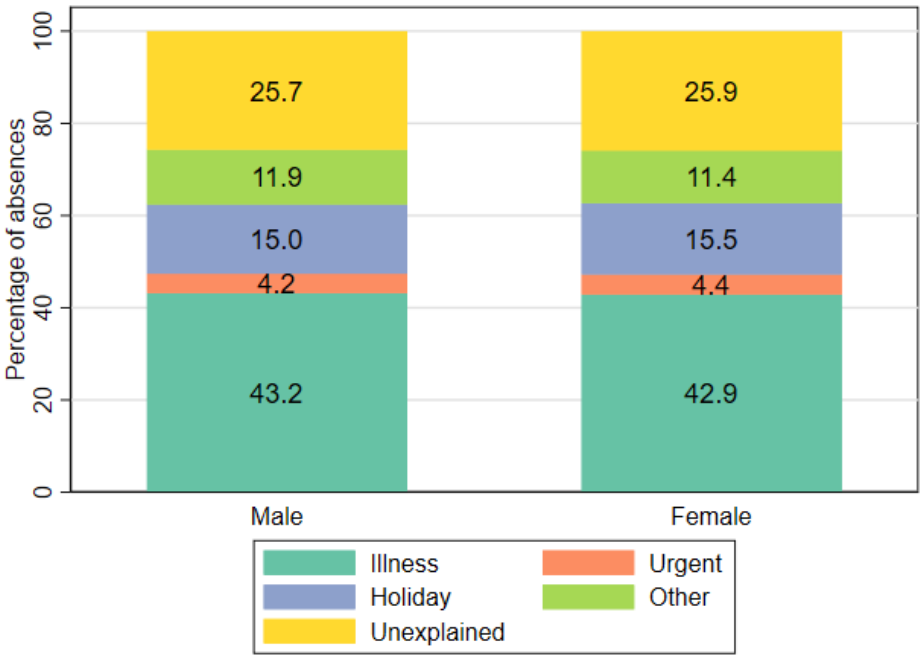
FIGURE 3.5 ABSENCE REASONS BY GRADE (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

When looking at **student gender** (Figure 3.6), we see a very similar distribution of reasons for absences. The shares differ by only slight percentage points, such as girls having 0.5 percentage points fewer 'other' absences and 0.4 percentage points more holiday-related absences. The remaining differences are only a few decimal points and – at least descriptively – do not seem to reflect meaningful patterns.

FIGURE 3.6 ABSENCE REASONS BY GENDER (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

3.1.2 Regression models

3.1.2.1 Counts of annual absences as the outcome

Since a Poisson model does not provide a good fit given overdispersion,[15] we use a **negative binomial** regression model to model **the count of annual absences**. The coefficients of the regression output (Table 3.1) are shown as incidence rate ratios (IRRs).[16]

TABLE 3.1 REGRESSION: DAYS LOST TO CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL
Female	0.998
S. Infants	1.015**
2nd Class	0.993
3rd Class	1.000
4th Class	0.999
5th Class	1.018**
6th Class	1.031***
Special Class	1.031***
Base: 1st Class	
Wald chi2	92.13
N	85,452

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
The model includes school-level fixed effects.
The coefficients are reported as incidence rate ratios (IRRs).

We can see that the **gender coefficient** has a very small IRR. It is below 1, indicating fewer annual absences for chronically absent girls. It is **not significant at the 5 per cent level or less**, suggesting that overall, **gender is not related to variation in annual absence counts for chronic absentee students**.

This **aligns with the reviewed literature** showing no gendered differences in attendance at the primary stage in Ireland (Thornton et al., 2013) and in the US (Anderson and Romm, 2020; Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012), as well as the broader fact that gender is generally not positioned as an important factor in the attendance literature. However, the finding stands in contrast to those of García and Weiss (2018) and Wood et al. (2024), both of which covered primary-age samples and

15 Overdispersion here refers to the fact that the variability of the count outcome (in this case, annual absence counts) is greater than would be appropriate for using a Poisson model. The Poisson model assumes that the mean and variance of the outcome are equal; however, both the deviance goodness-of-fit test and the Pearson goodness-of-fit test indicate that the Poisson model does not fit the data well.

16 Incidence Rate Ratios (IRRs) indicate how much higher or lower the expected count of the outcome (in this case, annual absences) is. An IRR above 1 means the outcome is more frequent, while values below 1 indicate it is less frequent, compared with the reference group, all else being equal. An IRR of, for example, 1.04 can be interpreted as meaning that a one-unit increase in X is associated with the count being multiplied by a factor of 1.04 – or, equivalently, that the expected count will be 4% higher.

reported that girls were somewhat more likely than boys to be persistently absent (the difference in findings can perhaps be related to the fact that here we are not looking at gender differences in the counts of chronically absent students, but rather at the days lost of the chronic absentees).

Regarding grade, and using **1st Class** as the reference category (Table 3.1), **most other grades display higher expected counts of annual absences**, with the exception of 2nd, 3rd and 4th Class (though neither of these coefficients are statistically significant at the 5 per cent level or lower). Senior Infants are predicted to have a 1.5 per cent higher expected number of absences. Fifth and 6th Class are associated with 1.8 and 3.1 per cent higher expected counts respectively, relative to 1st Class (both significant at the 1 per cent level). The Special Class grade also presents a higher expected count by 3.1 percentage points (also significant at the 1 per cent level).

This pattern aligns with Figure 3.3, indicating that **the intensity of chronic absenteeism peaks in the earlier grades** (Senior Infants) and again in **the later grades** (5th and 6th Class), with **intermediate grades remaining relatively stable.** However, it is important to note that the size effects are small.

3.1.2.2 Shares of types of non-attendance as the outcome

Table 3.2 presents the regression results for five different models, each using a specific type of absence as the outcome variable.

When examining regression models in which each absence-type share is used as the outcome, **gender does not show meaningful patterns**, with the only exception being that girls are associated with a 0.44 percentage point lower share of illness-related absences, which is statistically significant at the 5 per cent level. This effect is very small, so its relevance should not be overstated.

When looking at the class level, we see that the **share of unexplained absences peaks in the later classes**. The lowest share of unexplained absences is for 1st Class and the Special Class grade, and then the share peaks at the later grades. Compared to 1st Class, 5th and 6th Classes have 2.89 and 3.62 percentage points higher shares of unexplained absences respectively. In addition, relative to 1st Class, the other grades are associated with a marginally higher share of 'other' absences, with the largest differences observed for 5th Class and 6th Class. The size effects are small, but the coefficients for both groups are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level.

Looking across the other models, where each outcome captures the share of a different type of absence, the higher proportions of unexplained and 'other' absences among 5th and 6th Class appear to be driven by **slightly lower shares of other absence categories**. In particular for illness-related absences, relative to 1st

Class, 5th and 6th Class show reductions of 1.01 and 2.11 percentage points respectively. These grades also show marginally lower shares of holiday-related absences and urgent-related absences.

We also test interaction terms between gender and grade in relation to the share of illness-related absence, to explore the finding in the literature that girls may miss a sizeable amount of school due to menstrual symptoms (Sawyer et al., 2025). In particular, we wanted to see whether girls in 6th Class (typically aged 11–12, when some may begin menstruating) have higher illness-related absence than girls in earlier grades. We find that none of the interaction effects are statistically significant at the 5 per cent level (Table A3.1 in Appendix Chapter 3). However, this does not necessarily constitute evidence against absences related to menstrual symptoms, as we later find that girls have a statistically significantly higher share of illness-related absence at the post-primary stage, when most girls have begun menstruating.

TABLE 3.2 REGRESSION: ABSENCE REASONS OF THE CHRONIC ABSENTEES (PRIMARY)

Variables	Illness	Unexplained	Urgent	Holiday	Other
Female	-0.44*	0.37	0.09	0.15	-0.18
S. Infants	-0.57	1.15**	-0.09	-0.64*	0.15
2nd Class	-1.54***	1.36**	-0.34*	-0.40	0.92***
3rd Class	-1.63***	2.00***	-0.44**	-0.73*	0.80***
4th Class	-0.75	1.91***	-0.65***	-1.13***	0.62**
5th Class	-1.01**	2.89***	-0.80***	-2.20***	1.13***
6th Class	-2.11***	3.62***	-1.03***	-3.54***	3.06***
Special Class	0.10	-1.82**	-1.98***	-3.99***	7.69***
Base: 1st Class					
R2	0.0002	0.0018	0.0026	0.0056	0.0205
N	85,597	85,597	85,597	85,597	85,597

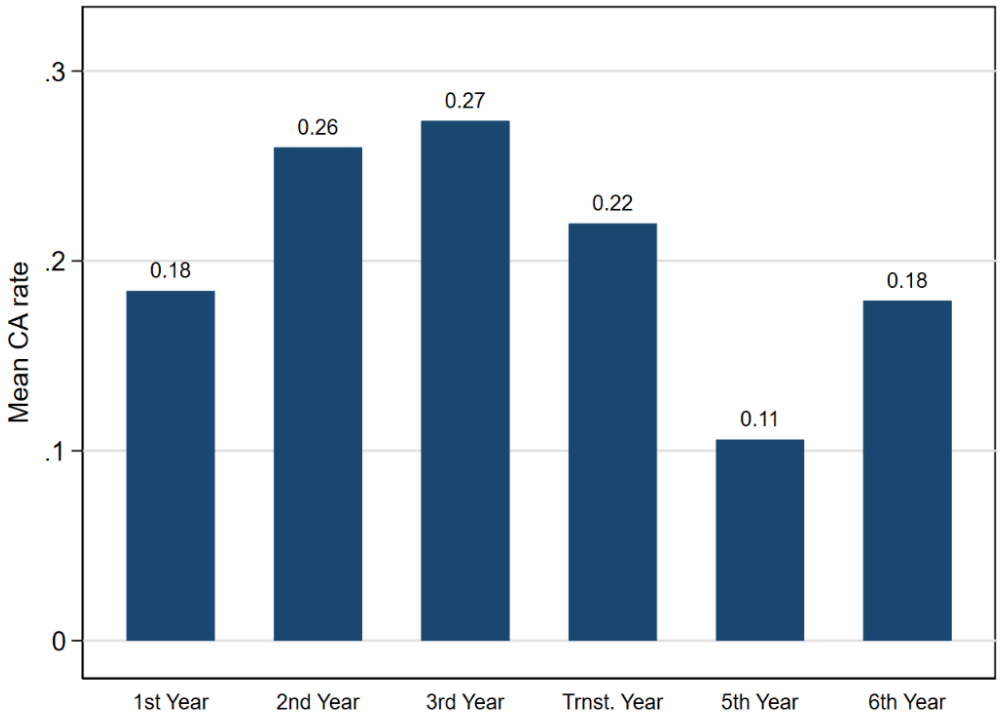
Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
The model includes school-level fixed effects.

3.2 POST-PRIMARY STAGE

3.2.1 Descriptive graphs

Figure 3.7 shows the **chronic absenteeism rate by year group**. There does not seem to be a linear trend. The rate is comparatively lower in 1st Year and again in the final two years (5th and 6th Years). It peaks in 2nd and 3rd Years. The figures for Transition, 5th and 6th Years should be interpreted with caution as most students in these years will be aged 16 and over, and therefore outside the scope of SAR reporting.

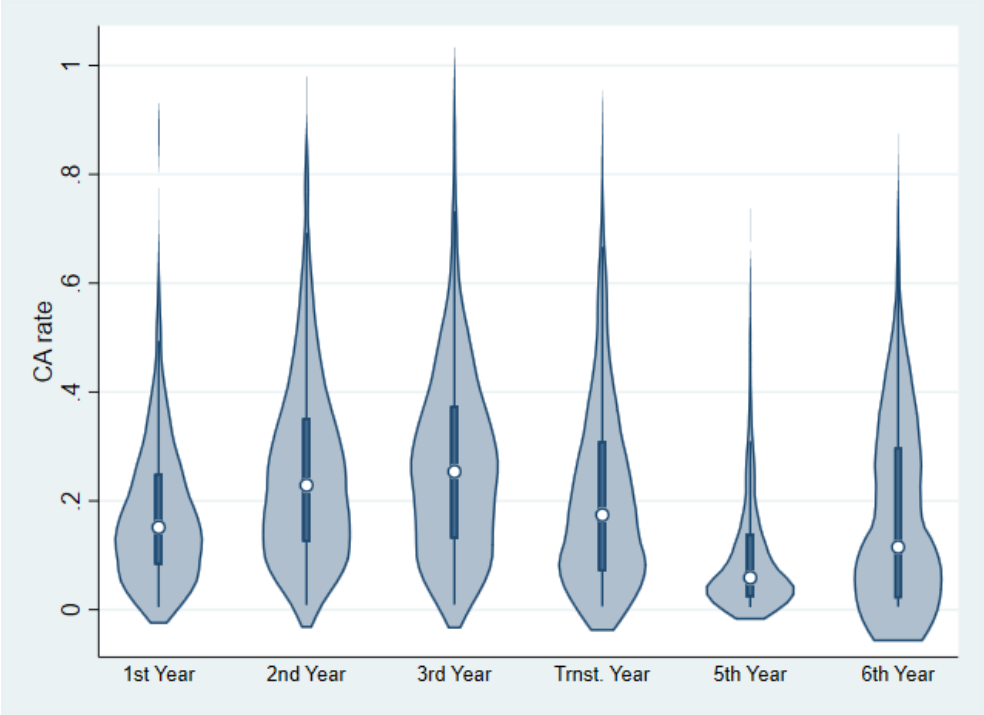
FIGURE 3.7 CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE BY GRADE (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Another way to visualise the chronic absenteeism rates is through **violin plots** (Figure 3.8). The most dispersed distributions appear in the years with the highest CA rates, that is, 2nd and 3rd Years. These years also have the longest upper tails, indicating the presence of students with particularly high absenteeism rates.

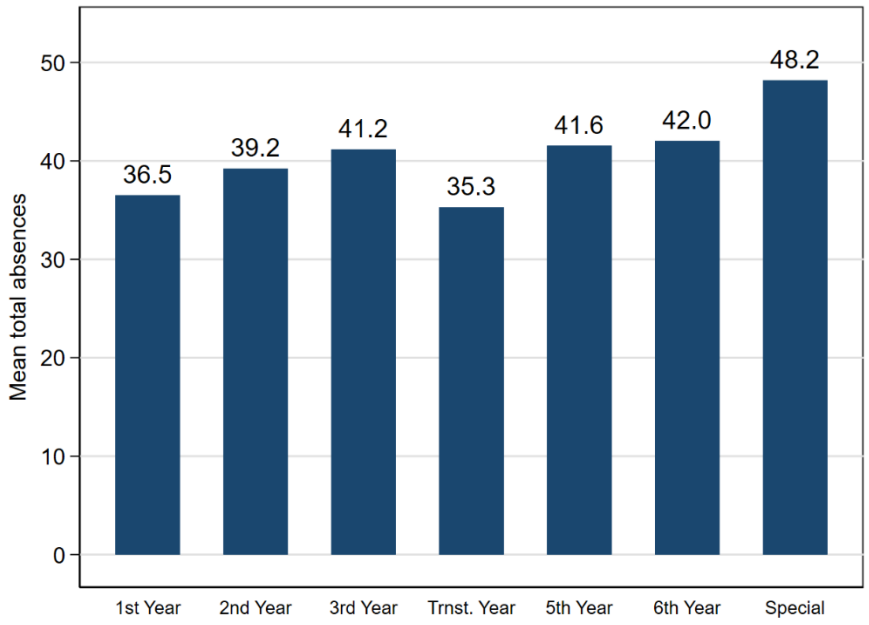
FIGURE 3.8 VIOLIN PLOTS: CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE BY GRADE (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

The average annual number of days that post-primary students registered as chronic absentees were absent is **38.99 days**. Figure 3.9 shows the average figures by year. There is somewhat of a **gradient** with, for the most part, **increases from 1st Year to 6th Year**. The average in 1st Year is 36.5 days, rising to 41.6 days in 5th Year and 42 days in 6th Year. The exception is **Transition Year**, where the average is 35.3 days – which is the lowest. The figure for the Special Class group is particularly high at 48.2 days. These figures may appear surprising when compared with the overall CA rates (Figure 3.7). The distribution of CA rates and the distribution of days lost among chronic absentees do not follow the same pattern: although 2nd and 3rd Years have the highest CA rates, they do not record the highest counts of days lost among chronic absentees; instead, these counts are greatest in the upper grades.

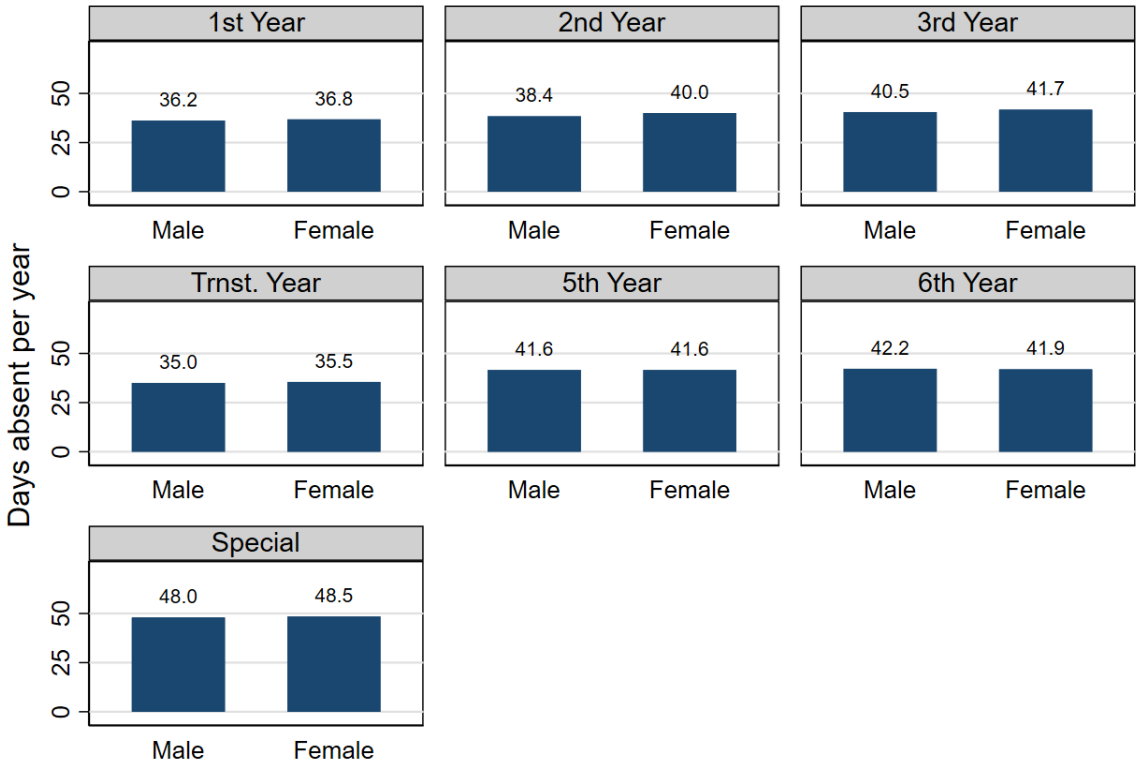
FIGURE 3.9 DAYS LOST TO CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY GRADE (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Regarding student **gender**, the averages are similar: chronic absentee **girls** miss an average of **39.5 days**, slightly higher than the **38.5 days for boys**. Figure 3.10 shows the differences by gender disaggregated by class level, and we see that there **are no substantial differences**. Girls appear to have marginally higher averages in every year except 5th and 6th Years.

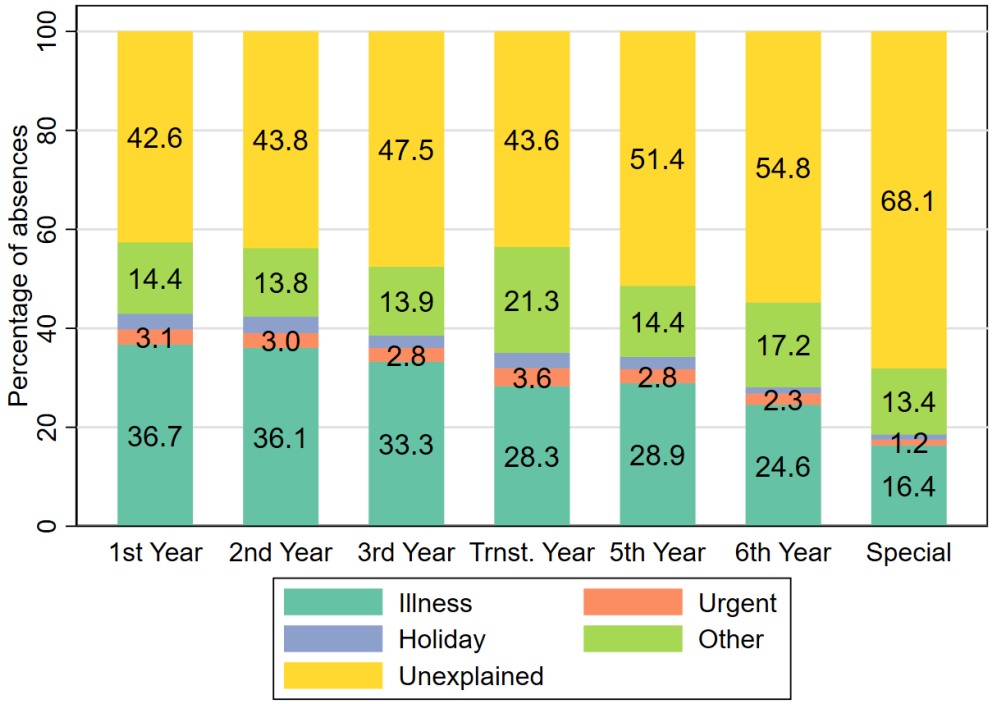
FIGURE 3.10 DAYS LOST TO CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY GRADE AND GENDER (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Considering the distribution of reasons for absences by grade (Figure 3.11), we observe a **descriptive gradient**: the **share of unexplained absences increases with year level**, rising from 42.6 per cent in 1st Year to 54.8 per cent in 6th Year. The only exception is **Transition Year**, which has a lower share than most earlier grades. The Special Class category has a strikingly high share of unexplained absences, with almost seven out of ten absences falling into this category. Another observable point is that Transition Year shows a higher share of 'other' absences than the rest, at 21.3 per cent, while other years range between 13 per cent and 17 per cent. Regarding holiday absences, the differences are small: the lowest is 1 per cent for the Special Class, and the figures marginally increase with lower years – 1.2 per cent in 6th Year, 2.5 per cent in 5th Year, 3.1 per cent in Transition Year, 2.6 per cent in 3rd Year, 3.4 per cent in 2nd Year and 3.2 per cent in 1st Year.

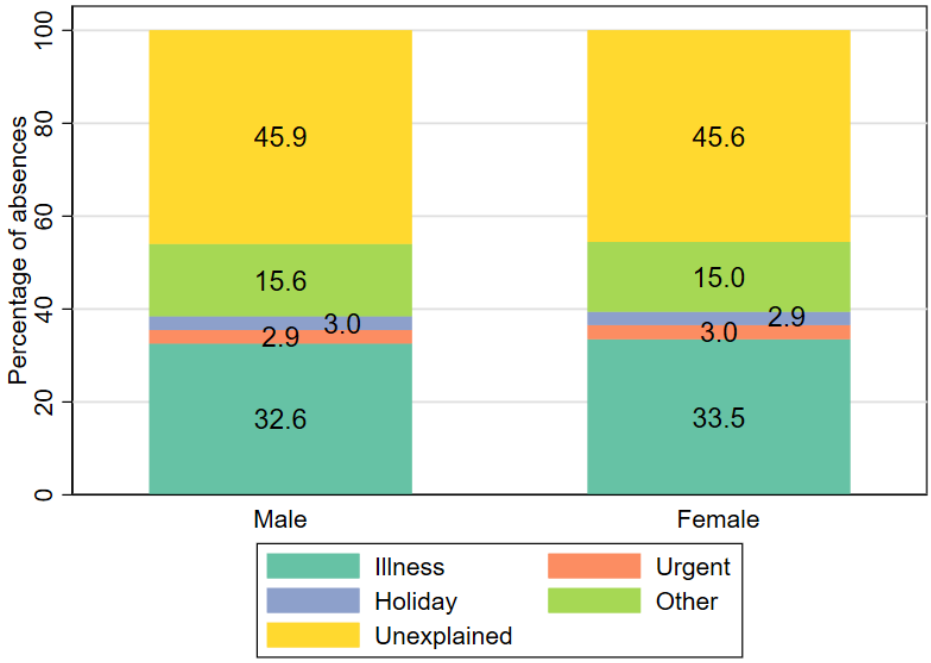
FIGURE 3.11 ABSENCE REASONS BY GRADE (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Regarding the distribution of absences by **gender** (Figure 3.12), there are very **few differences**; the percentages are almost identical, changing only by a few percentage points.

FIGURE 3.12 ABSENCE REASONS BY GENDER (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

3.2.2 Regression models

3.2.2.1 Counts of annual absences as the outcome

Since a Poisson model does not provide a good fit given overdispersion, we use a negative binomial regression model to model the count of annual absences. The coefficients of the regression output (Table 3.3) are shown as incidence rate ratios (IRRs).

TABLE 3.3 REGRESSION: DAYS LOST TO CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM (POST-PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL
Female	1.012**
2nd Year	1.054***
3rd Year	1.092***
Transition Year	1.018*
5th Year	1.111***
6th Year	1.142***
Special class	1.256***
Base: 1st Year	
Constant	4.313
Wald chi2	415.79
N	50,591

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
The model includes school-level fixed effects.
The coefficients are reported as incidence rate ratios (IRRs).

The **gender dummy is significant at the 1 per cent level**, with chronically absent girls having an **expected annual count of days lost** that is **1.2 percentage points higher**. This differs from the primary stage, where no statistically significant differences are observed at the 5 per cent significance level or less. Even if the effect size is small, this finding is somewhat surprising given that, as discussed, gender is often not given much weight as a risk factor in the attendance literature.

Because the limited research that does examine gender is mixed, this result both contradicts some studies and supports others. Specifically, it contradicts the results of Pflug and Schneider (2016) for German high school students, who found no gender differences. In contrast, the findings align with García and Weiss (2018) who, examining US national data for students aged nine and fourteen, found that girls were somewhat more likely than boys to be chronically absent. However, it is important to note that the outcome measured here differs somewhat: we are not looking at whether more boys or girls are registered as chronically absent, but rather at the number of days lost among chronic absentees disaggregated by gender.

Compared to 1st Year, all other coefficients **show higher expected annual counts** of days lost, and most are significant at the 1 per cent level. The **effect size generally increases with year level:** for example, 2nd Year has an expected count that is 5.4 percentage points higher, 5th Year is 11.1 percentage points higher and 6th Year is 14.2 percentage points higher. The exception to this is Transition Year, which has a smaller coefficient – 1.8 per cent – than 2nd and 3rd Years. The Special Class group shows a strikingly large difference, with an expected annual count that is 25.6 percentage points higher, also significant at the 1 per cent level.

This progressive worsening of the number of days lost to chronic absenteeism, which peaks at the oldest grade, is not surprising. Evidence from the US on chronic absentee students – including Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) and London et al. (2016) – shows that CA rates tend to peak in the final years of high school. Again, it is important to note that, in our case, we are not examining CA rates but rather the expected count of days lost among chronic absentee students. Nonetheless, there is still evidence of a shared trend beyond Ireland.

3.2.2.2 Shares of types of non-attendance as the outcome

Table 3.4 shows the regression output for five models, each using a different type of absence as the outcome variable.

TABLE 3.4 REGRESSION: ABSENCE REASONS OF THE CHRONIC ABSENTEES (POST-PRIMARY)

Variables	Illness	Unexplained	Urgent	Holiday	Other
Female	0.87**	-0.97**	0.10	-0.13	0.13
2nd Class	-1.63***	2.09***	-0.02	0.17	-0.61*
3rd Class	-4.01***	5.05***	-0.27*	-0.58***	-0.17
Trnst. Year	-9.61***	4.75***	0.16	-0.00	4.70***
5th Class	-7.82***	9.62***	-0.03	-0.31±	-1.45***
6th Class	-14.83***	18.98***	-0.84**	-1.58***	-1.65**
Special Class	-15.14***	20.23***	-1.07**	-1.66***	-2.35**
Base: 1st Class					
R2	0.0144	0.0093	0.0015	0.0028	0.0107
N	50,593	50,593	50,593	50,593	50,593

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
The model includes school-level fixed effects.

Girls show a statistically significant difference, although the **magnitudes are very small.** Specifically, they have a 0.97 percentage-point **lower share of unexplained absences** (significant at the 1 per cent level), which is accompanied by 0.87 per cent **higher illness-related absences** (significant at the 1 per cent level). This marginally higher level of illness absences is contrary to what we see at the primary stage where they have a lower share of illness than boys, and it could be related to girls missing school due to menstrual symptoms (Sawyer et al., 2025). The lower share of unexplained absences aligns with several studies reporting that **male**

adolescents are more prone to **truancy** than girls (Darmody et al., 2008; Maynard et al., 2012; Sälzer et al., 2012; Veenstra et al., 2010; Wagner, 2004). None of the other coefficients are statistically significant. Overall, considering that the only significant difference relates to illness-related absence, and that even this effect is very small, the findings point to limited gender variation in the distribution of absences at the post-primary stage.

Looking at year, we observe some differences. **Compared to 1st Year**, all other years have a **higher share of unexplained absences**, with effects significant at the 1 per cent level. The size of the effects generally increases progressively: 2nd Year has 2.09 percentage points more, Transition Year 4.75 and 6th Year 18.98. The Special Class category shows a strikingly larger share of unexplained absences at 20.23 percentage points. This increase is offset by **a lower share of illness-related absences** across all other years. For example, compared to 1st Year, 5th Year has 7.28 percentage points less and 6th Year has 14.83 percentage points less. The larger share of unexplained absences in higher years and in the Special Class is also accompanied by a marginally **lower share of 'other' absences**, though the effects are small – for instance, relative to 1st Year, 5th Year has 1.45 percentage points less and 6th Year 1.65 less. The higher and the Special Classes also have a marginally lower share of **urgent- and holiday-related absences** that helps account for the comparatively higher share of unexplained absences.

CHAPTER 4

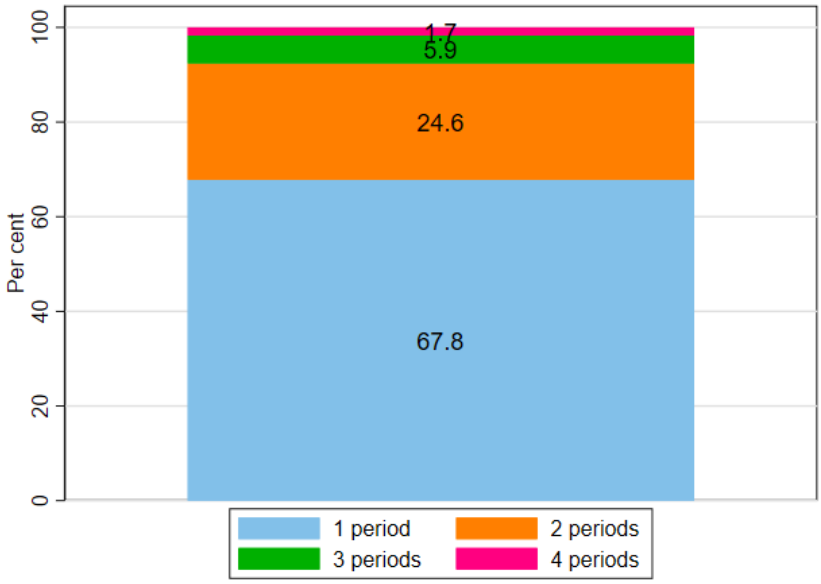
Counts of Chronic Absenteeism Periods

4.1 PRIMARY STAGE

4.1.1 Descriptive graphs

Figure 4.1 shows the **overall distribution of the number of periods** in which a student is recorded as chronically absent over the two years, among those who were chronic absentees for at least one period.[17] The vast majority of these students, 67.8 per cent, are marked as chronically absent for only one period, while around one quarter have two periods of chronic absence. A smaller group, accounting for 6 per cent, have three periods recorded, and fewer than 2 per cent are marked as chronically absent across all four periods.

FIGURE 4.1 OVERALL COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS (PRIMARY)

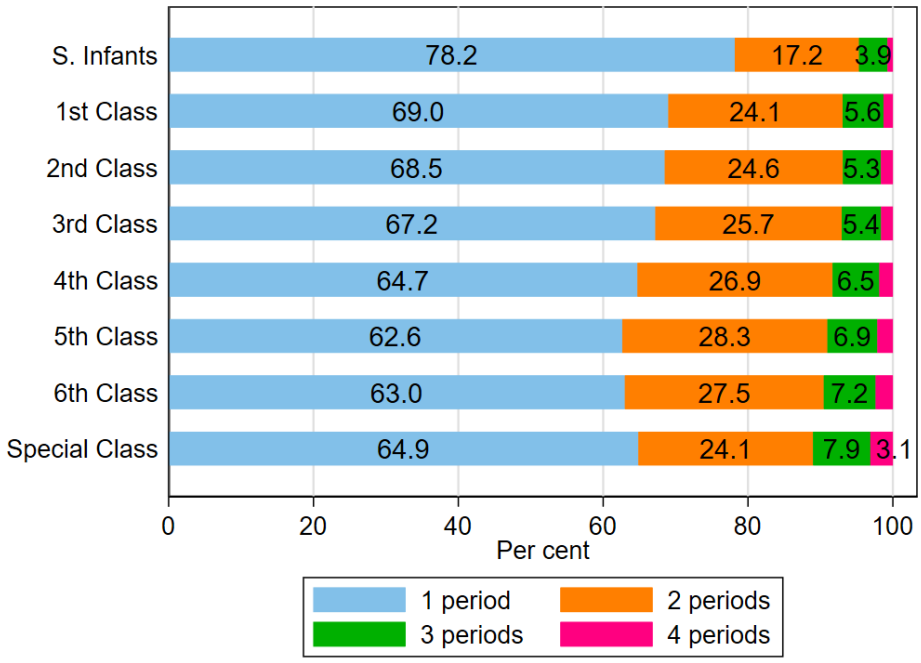


Source: Administrative data from TESS.

[17] It is important to emphasise that this refers to the population of students who are counted as chronic absentees in *at least* one period. For context, in 2023/24 the average chronic absence rate is 19.79 per cent, meaning that roughly one in five students is recorded as a chronic absentee. It is true that some of these students will not be counted in this analysis because the analysis focuses on students who – at least – have more than 20 days of absence within a single period, whereas the chronic absence rate refers to 20 days across the full academic year. Therefore, it is likely that the analysis reflects slightly less than 20 per cent of the total primary school population.

Looking at students' class levels in Figure 4.2, we see variation in the number of periods during which they are recorded as chronically absent.[18] **Senior Infants have the fewest periods of chronic absence**. The **peak occurs in 4th, 5th and 6th Classes**, where more than a quarter of students are recorded as chronically absent during two periods. In these grades, 1.9 per cent, 2.1 per cent and 2.4 per cent of students respectively are recorded as absent during four periods. This is slightly higher than the share for the other class groups, which ranges from 0.7 per cent to 1.9 per cent – with the exception of the Special Class grade which has the highest share of students missing four periods at 3.1 per cent.

FIGURE 4.2 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY GRADE (PRIMARY)

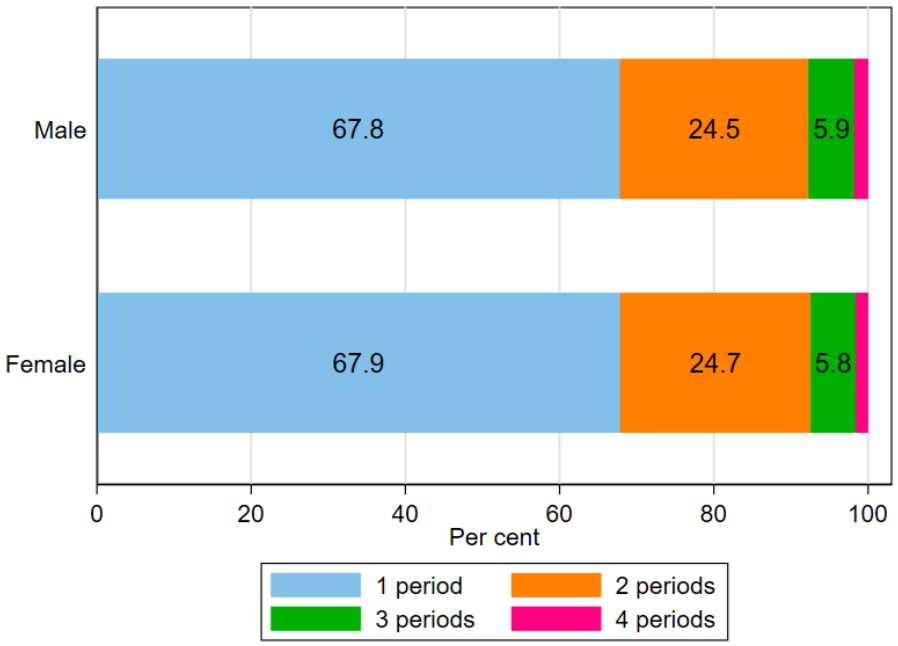


Source: Administrative data from TESS.

[18] For each student, the class recorded is their first year. We examine the number of periods missed over two years, so if a student's first year is 1st Class, we consider both 1st and 2nd Class. When we state that a student in 2nd Class has missed three periods, this refers to absences between 2nd and 3rd Class.

Looking at **student gender does not yield particularly meaningful insights** (Figure 4.3). The shares are very similar, only differing by a few percentage points. The share of students with four periods of chronic absence is almost identical: 1.8 per cent for boys and 1.6 per cent for girls.

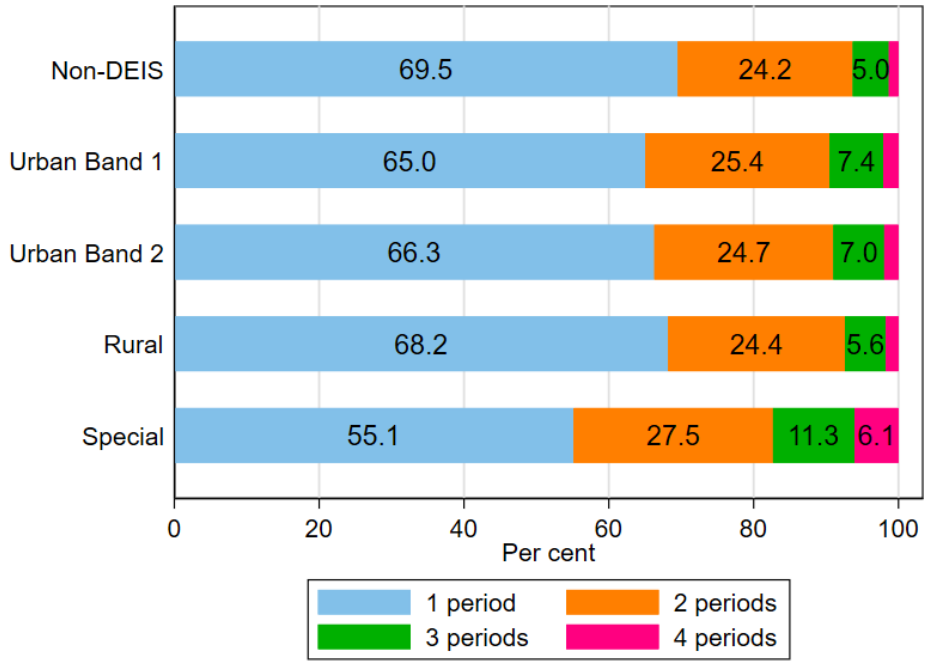
FIGURE 4.3 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY GENDER (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

The proportion of chronic absentees is significantly higher in DEIS primary schools, especially Urban Band 1 schools (Moya et al., 2026). However, among those who were chronic absentees **(Figure 4.4), we do not see a clear difference by DEIS status – at least descriptively**. Non-DEIS schools have a marginally higher share of students with only one period recorded as chronically absent, which translates into a lower share of those with two, three or four periods, suggesting they perform somewhat better, although the differences are modest. For students with four periods of chronic absence, the shares are: non-DEIS 1.3 per cent, Urban Band 1 2.1 per cent, Urban Band 2 2.0 per cent and rural 1.8 per cent. What stands out in the graph is **that special schools perform remarkably worse**, with two or three times the share of students with four periods of chronic absence and nearly a third (27.5 per cent) recorded as chronically absent for two periods.

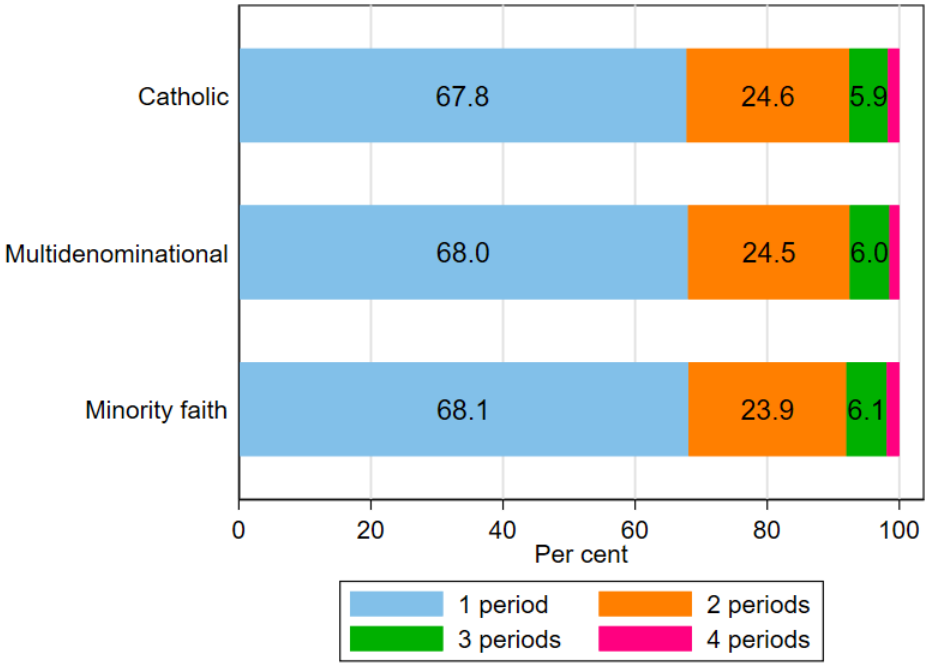
FIGURE 4.4 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY DEIS STATUS (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Looking at school **ethos in Figure 4.5 reveals very few descriptive differences**. The share of students with four periods of chronic absence is 1.7 per cent in Catholic schools, 1.5 per cent in multidenominational schools and 1.9 per cent in minority faith schools.

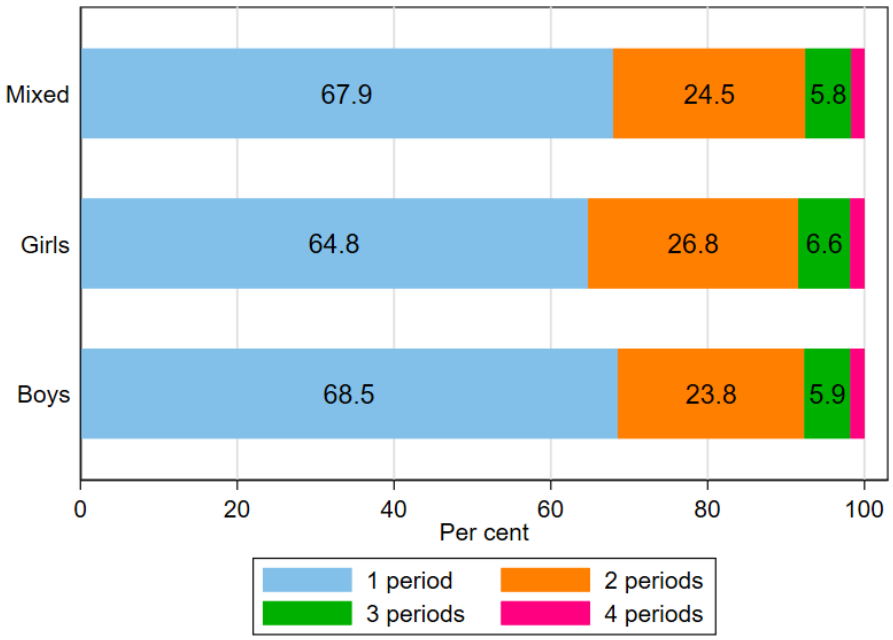
FIGURE 4.5 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY ETHOS (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Looking at **gender mix** (Figure 4.6) shows marginally worse descriptive results for girls' schools, with 26.8 per cent and 6.6 per cent of students being chronically absent for two or three periods respectively, compared to slightly lower figures for both mixed and boys' schools. Regarding the share of students with four periods of chronic absence, the figure is 1.7 per cent for mixed schools and 1.8 per cent for single-gender schools.

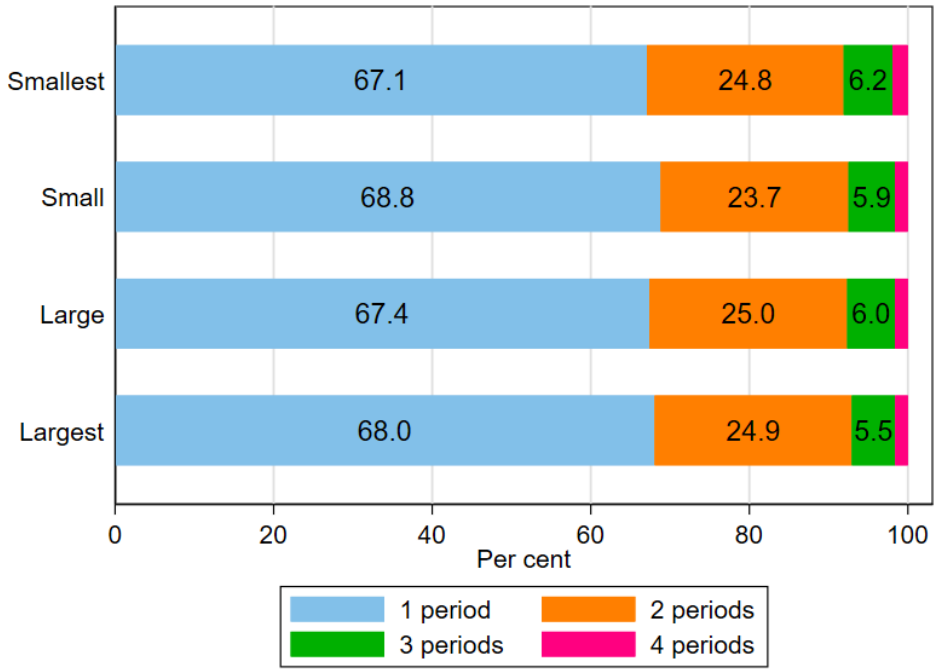
FIGURE 4.6 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY GENDER MIX (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

When it comes to **school size** (Figure 4.7) there does not appear to be any clear pattern, with only a few percentage point differences and no consistent direction. The share of students with four periods of chronic absence is 1.9 per cent for the smallest schools, 1.6 per cent for small, 1.7 per cent for large and 1.6 per cent for the largest.

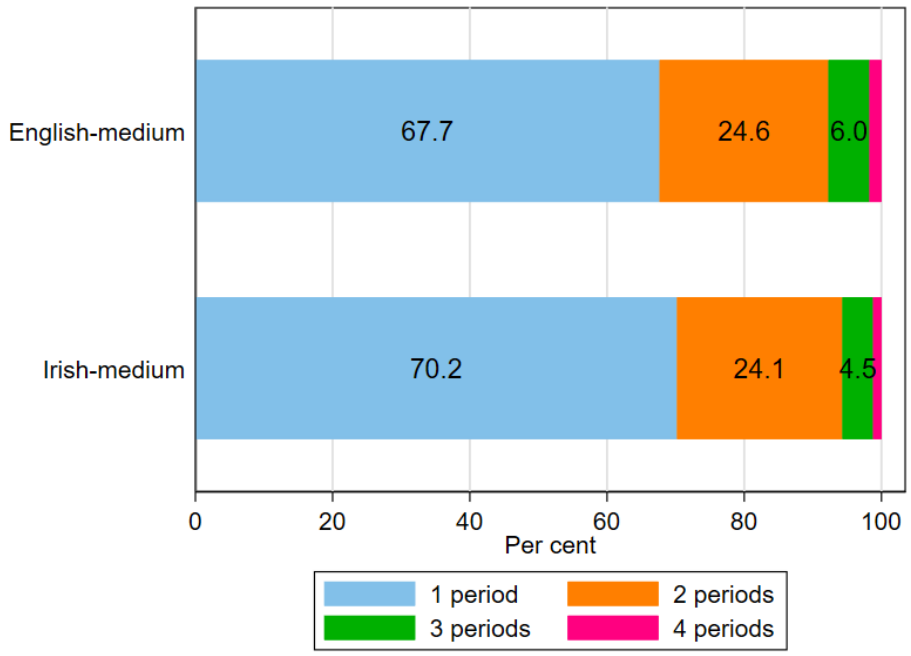
FIGURE 4.7 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY SCHOOL SIZE (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Regarding the **language of instruction** (Figure 4.8) there are barely any descriptive differences, although Irish-medium schools have marginally better outcomes, with a slightly smaller share of students missing two, three and four periods. The figure for students missing four periods is 1.7 per cent for English-medium schools and 1.2 per cent for Irish-medium.

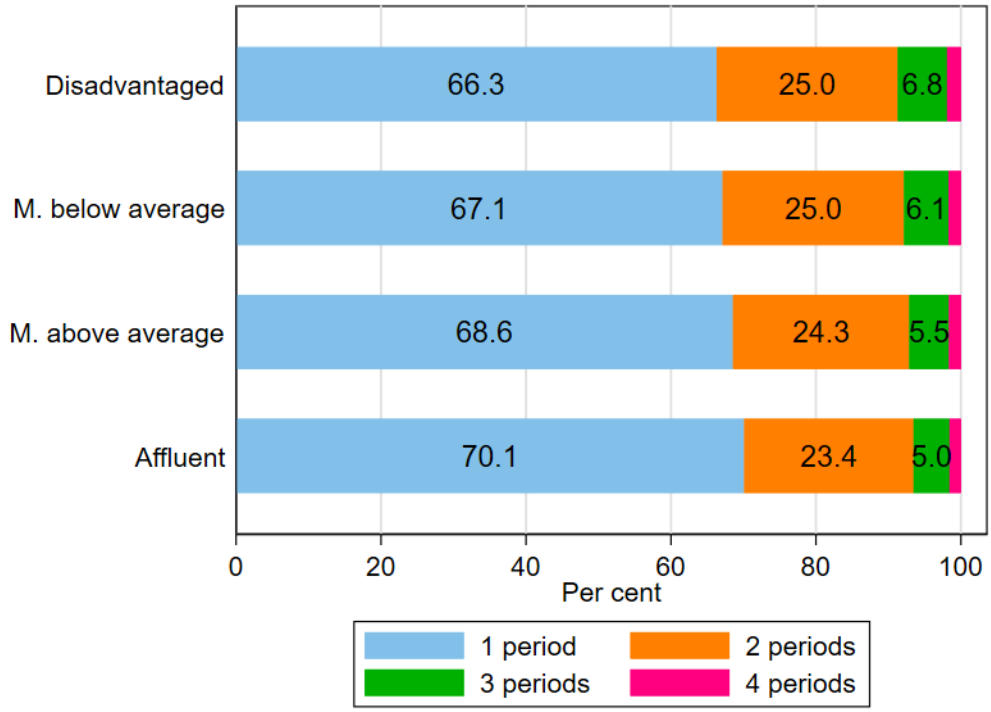
FIGURE 4.8 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Finally, looking at the Pobal HP Index (Figure 4.9), schools in more **deprived areas** seem to experience **worse patterns of chronic absence**. There is a subtle gradient: the higher the level of deprivation, the greater the share of students with two, three and four periods recorded as chronically absent, although the differences are modest. For students with four periods of chronic absence, the percentages are 1.9 per cent for schools in disadvantaged areas, 1.7 per cent for those marginally below average, and 1.6 per cent for marginally above average and affluent areas.

FIGURE 4.9 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY POBAL HP INDEX (PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Note: 'M. below' = 'marginally below' and 'M. above' = 'marginally above'.

4.1.2 Regression models

Table 4.1 shows the regression output of a Poisson model.[19] The coefficients are shown as incidence rate ratios (IRRs).

[19] Both the deviance goodness-of-fit test and the Pearson goodness-of-fit test indicate that the Poisson model fits the data well.

TABLE 4.1 REGRESSION: COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
Female	0.994	0.994
GRADE		
S. Infants	0.913***	0.913***
2nd Class	1.010±	1.010±
3rd	1.020**	1.020**
4th Class	1.048***	1.048***
5th	1.073***	1.073***
6th Class	1.073***	1.073***
Special Class	1.022	1.016
Base: 1st Class		
DEIS TYPE		
Urban Band 1	1.064***	1.062***
Urban Band 2	1.048***	1.046***
Rural	1.023*	1.019±
Special	1.237***	1.239***
Base: non-DEIS		
ETHOS		
Catholic	0.993	0.990
Minority faith	1.010	1.009
Base: Multidenominational		
GENDER MIX		
Mixed	0.980	0.981
Boys	0.961*	0.963*
Base: Girls		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Smallest	1.009	1.008
Large	1.015	1.015
Largest	1.014	1.017±
Base: Small		
Irish-medium	0.972**	0.973**
POBAL HP INDEX		
Disadvantaged		1.029*
M. below average		1.035**
M. above average		1.024*
Base: Affluent		
Pseudo R2	0.0024	0.0024
N	128,147	128,147

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
The coefficients are reported as incidence rate ratios (IRRs).
'M. below' = 'marginally below' and 'M. above' = 'marginally above'.

The **dummy variable for girls** is not significant at the 5 per cent level, and its coefficient is very close to 1, indicating **no meaningful size effect**.

There are **sizeable differences by student class.** Compared to 1st Class, students in Senior Infants have 8.7 per cent lower expected numbers of periods recorded as chronically absent (significant at the 1 per cent level). The remaining classes show a higher expected number of periods, mostly significant at the 1 per cent level. For example, 5th and 6th Classes have 7.3 per cent higher expected counts. There is a subtle gradient, with **higher classes tending to have a greater expected number of periods**, as reflected in the model output. Special classes also have worse outcomes in comparison with 1st Class, but the coefficient is not statistically significant.

Moving on to school-level characteristics, there are some **differences by DEIS status**. Compared to non-DEIS schools, Urban Band 1 schools have an expected number of periods recorded as chronically absent that is 6.4 per cent higher (significant at the 1 per cent level), Urban Band 2 schools 4.8 per cent higher (1 per cent level), and rural DEIS schools have a small difference of 2.3 per cent higher (5 per cent level). **Comparatively, special schools show a larger effect**, with an expected count that is 23.7 per cent higher – significant at the 1 per cent level.

Regarding gender mix, **girls' schools** have an expected number of periods recorded as chronically absent that is **3.9 per cent higher than boys' schools**, significant at the 5 per cent level. There is no significant difference between mixed and girls' schools, or between boys' and mixed schools.

Irish-medium schools show a small difference, with an expected count that is **2.8 per cent lower than English-medium schools**, significant at the 1 per cent level.

None of the coefficients for **school ethos** or school size are statistically significant, indicating **no meaningful variation** in this sense.

Regarding the model with the Pobal HP Index, we find relatively small though significant differences. Compared to schools in affluent areas, those in disadvantaged areas have an expected count that is 2.9 per cent higher (significant at the 5 per cent level), those in marginally below average areas 3.5 per cent higher (1 per cent level), and those in marginally above average areas 2.4 per cent higher (5 per cent level). The other coefficient comparisons are not significant, suggesting that rather than a strong linear gradient, the **main difference is between affluent areas and the rest.**

There is a statistically **significant interaction** between being in a **deprived area** and an **Urban Band 1 school** (see Model A4.1 in Appendix Chapter 4). Specifically, when these two characteristics co-occur, their effects are partially offset. As a result, Urban Band 1 schools located in more deprived areas show somewhat lower counts of periods of chronic absenteeism (by 4.04 per cent less percentage points) than would otherwise be expected based on the main effects alone. A similar

pattern appears for special schools, where those in more deprived areas show around a 2.4 per cent lower count than would otherwise be expected.

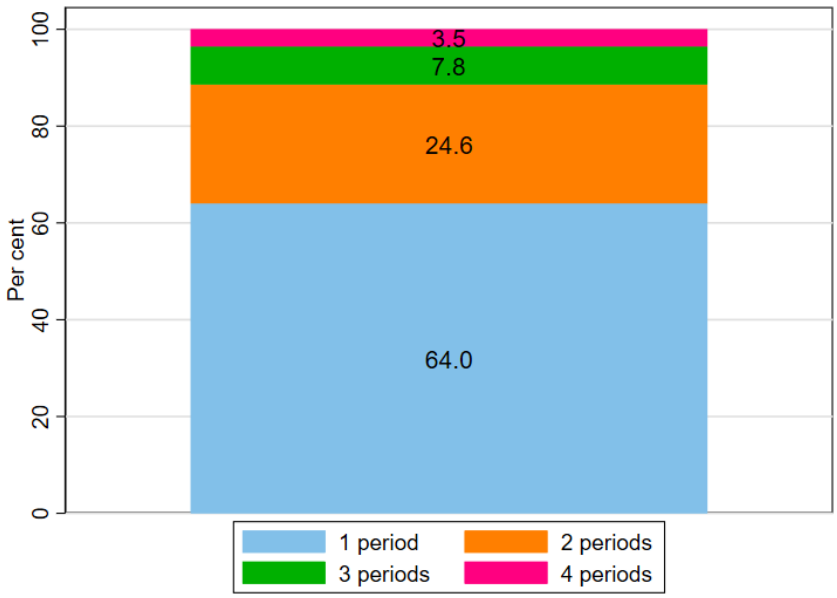
Compared to the differences in the **extent of chronic absenteeism** by **DEIS status** and Pobal HP Index (see Moya et al., 2026), **these differences are more limited**. This suggests that although DEIS schools and schools in deprived areas have a higher overall extent of chronic absenteeism, among students who are chronically absent, the severity of their absenteeism (measured here as the number of periods with chronic absenteeism) does not differ dramatically across school types. This points at the fact that **policy interventions should distinguish between chronic absenteeism prevalence** (the CA rate) **and intensity** (how much the chronically absent students are missing). Despite the CA rate being lower in non-DEIS and non-deprived area schools, these schools still face challenges related to the intensity of absenteeism among the students who are chronically absent. The exception is **special schools**, which do show markedly **higher levels of both prevalence and intensity** of chronic absenteeism.

4.2 POST-PRIMARY STAGE

4.2.1 Descriptive graphs

Figure 4.10 shows the overall distribution of the number of periods students are registered as chronically absent[20] during a total span of two years: **64 per cent** of chronically absent students have been marked as such for **one period**. Nearly **one in four** have been marked for **two periods**, **7.8 per cent** for **three periods**, and a minority of **3.5 per cent** for **four periods** – which, while a small percentage, still encompasses over **2,700 students.**

FIGURE 4.10 OVERALL COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS (POST-PRIMARY)

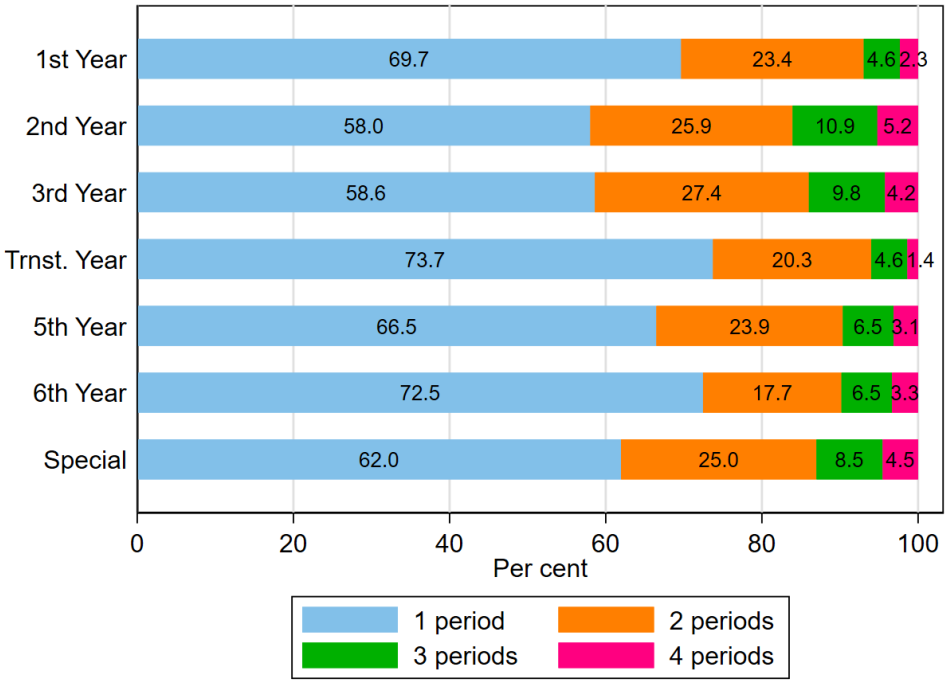


Source: Administrative data from TESS.

20 For contextualisation, the average CA rate in 2023/24 for post-primary schools is 22.30 per cent. As mentioned earlier, it is important to keep in mind that the following analysis only considers students who, at a minimum, have been marked as chronically absent in at least one period. This proportion will likely be lower than one in five, because some chronically absent students will not necessarily be classified as CA for a given period (since the CA rate refers to 20 days lost per year, not per period).

Looking descriptively at year group (Figure 4.11), there is **no clear linear trend**.[21] The years that seem to **perform best** – in the sense of having a larger proportion of chronically absent students missing only one period – are **Transition Year**, **1st Year** and **6th Year**. Outcomes appear particularly poor in **2nd Year, 3rd Year and 5th Year**. Perhaps surprisingly, 2nd and 3rd Years did not have the worst averages for annual counts of absences among chronically absent students; yet they show the highest proportion of students registered as chronically absent for more than one period. Students in Special Classes also have comparatively worse outcomes, with a combined total of 38 per cent chronically absent for more than one period.

FIGURE 4.11 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY GRADE (POST-PRIMARY)

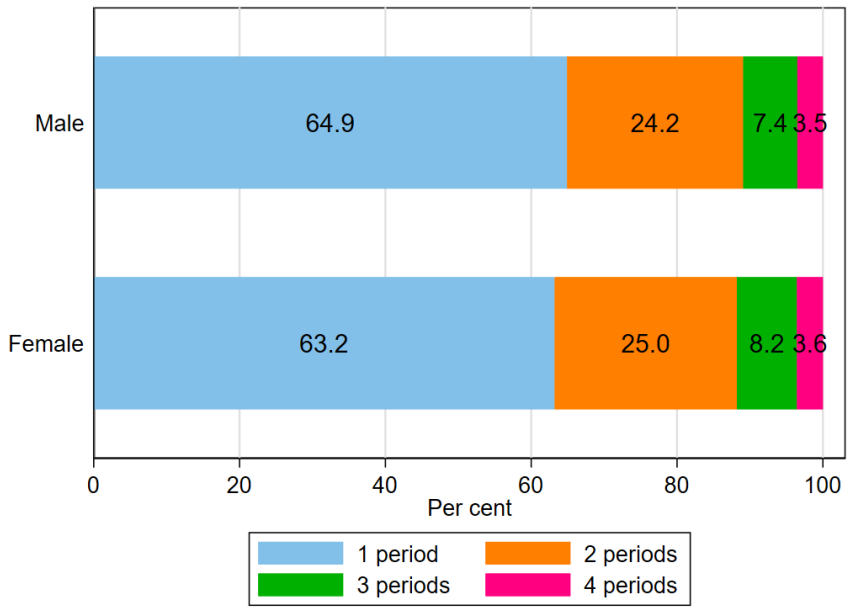


Source: Administrative data from TESS.

21 For each student, the year group recorded is their first year. We examine the number of periods missed over two years, so if a student's first year is 3rd Year, we are considering both 3rd and 4th Year. When we state that a student in 3rd Year has missed three periods, this refers to absences between 3rd and 4th Year.

Considering student **gender** (Figure 4.12), the percentages are quite similar. For boys, the share missing more than one period is **35.1 per cent,** which compares with girls at **36.8 per cent.**

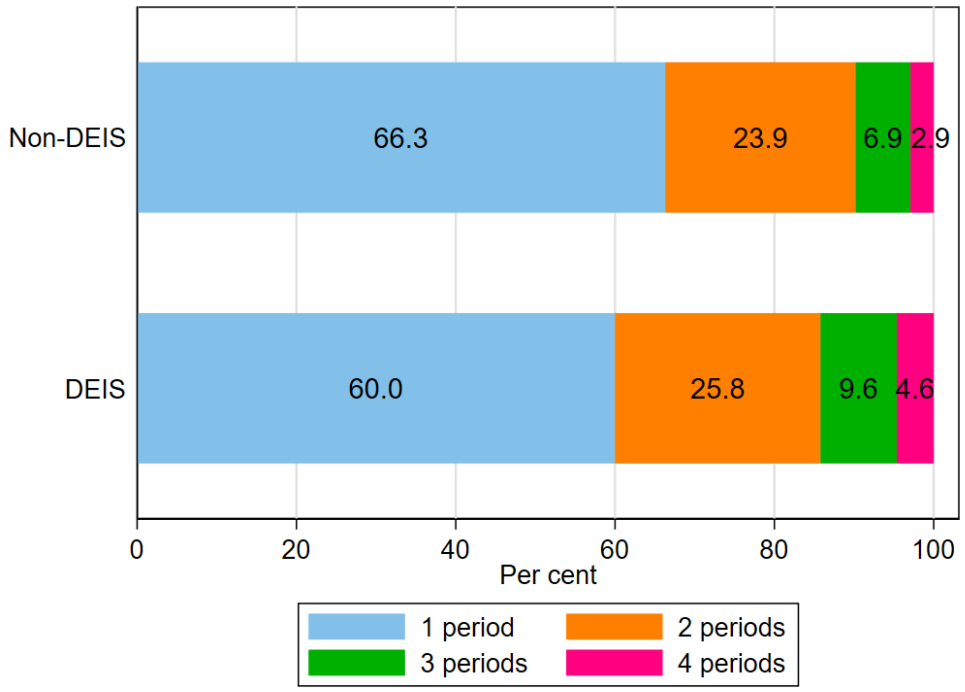
FIGURE 4.12 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY GENDER (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Moving on to **DEIS classification** (Figure 4.13), non-DEIS schools show marginally better outcomes, though the **differences are small**. In non-DEIS schools, 23.9 per cent of students are registered as chronically absent for two periods, and a combined 9.8 per cent for three or four periods. This compares to 25.8 per cent of students in DEIS schools missing two periods, and 14.2 per cent missing three or four periods.

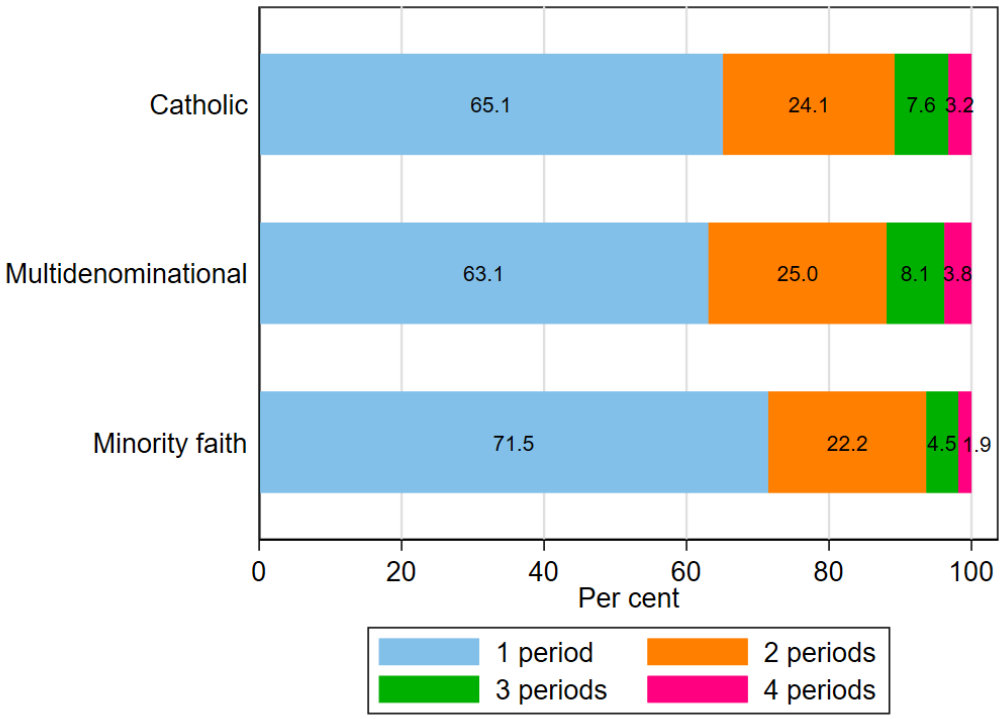
FIGURE 4.13 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY DEIS STATUS (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

When looking at **ethos** (Figure 4.14), **minority faith** schools appear to **perform somewhat better** (at least descriptively), as they have lower shares of students missing more than one period as chronic absentees. A combined 6.4 per cent miss three or four periods, which is slightly lower than the combined 11.9 per cent for multidenominational schools and 10.8 per cent for Catholic schools. Between Catholic and multidenominational schools, the figures are quite similar – perhaps with Catholic schools performing slightly better, but the differences amount to only a few decimal percentage points.

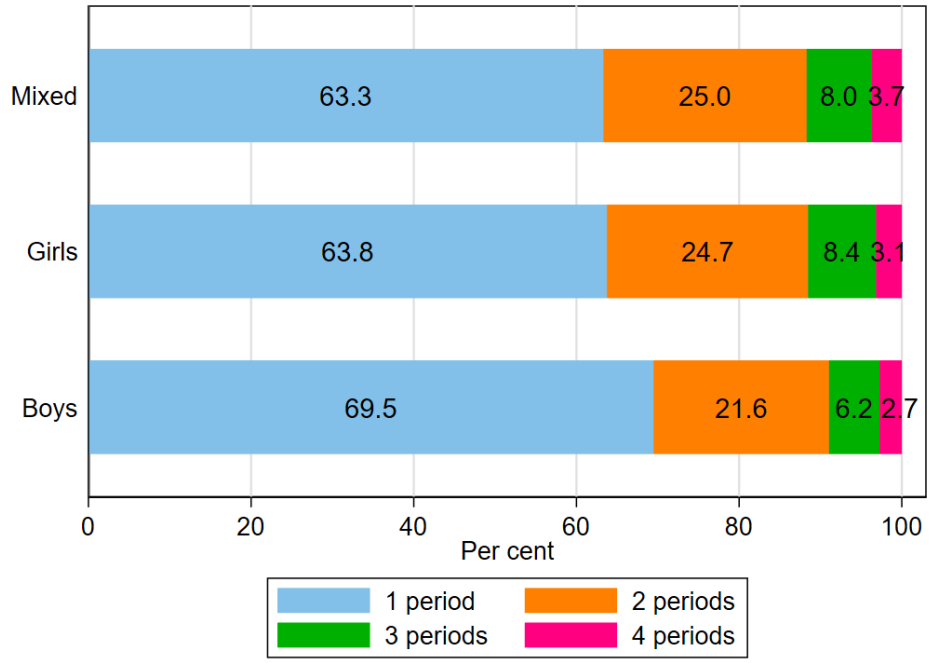
FIGURE 4.14 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY ETHOS (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Considering the **gender mix of schools** (Figure 4.15), mixed schools appear to perform slightly worse, though the differences are small. The combined share of students missing more than one period as chronically absent is 36.7 per cent for mixed schools. This compares to 36.2 per cent for girls' schools and 30.5 per cent for boys' schools.

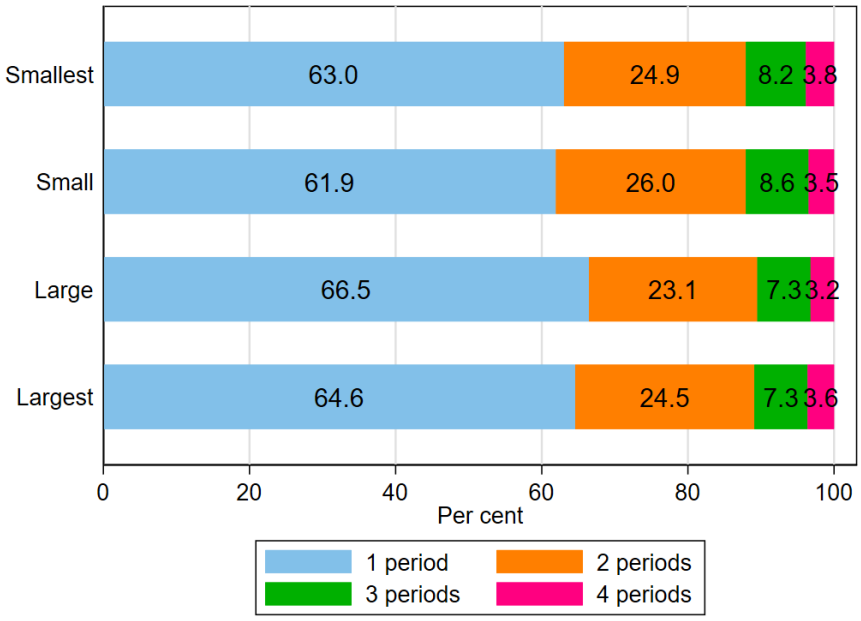
FIGURE 4.15 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY GENDER MIX (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Looking at Figure 4.16 there are **no distinguishable patterns** between periods recorded as chronic absenteeism and **school size at the descriptive level**. Large schools appear to perform slightly better, but the differences are minimal, and there is no linear or progressive relationship between size and the outcome.

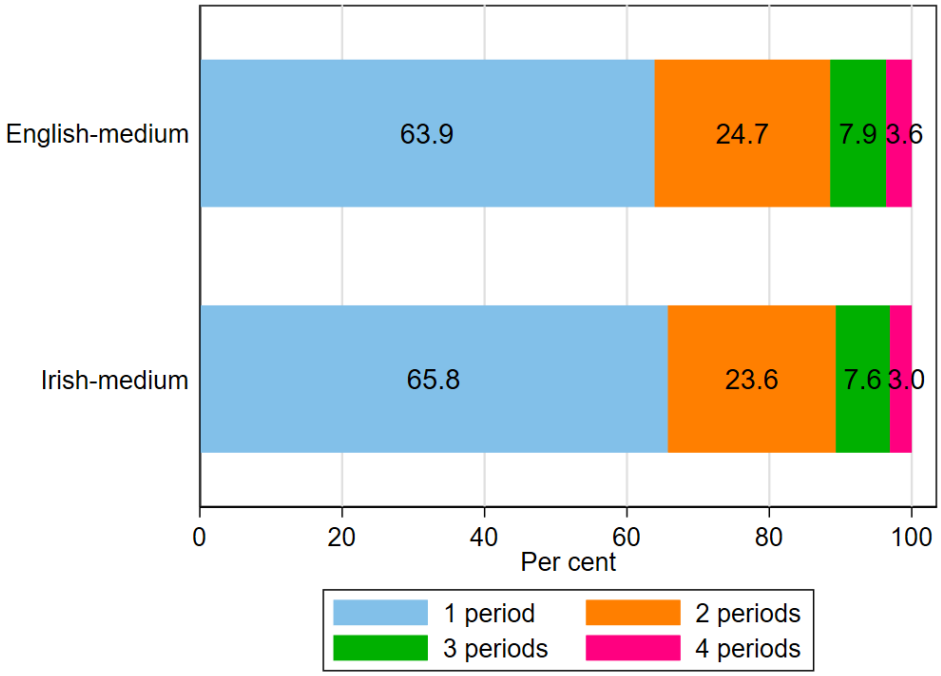
FIGURE 4.16 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY SCHOOL SIZE (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Figure 4.17 shows the distribution by **language of instruction**. The percentages are similar, with no major differences. Irish-medium schools show slightly better outcomes, but the differences are small.

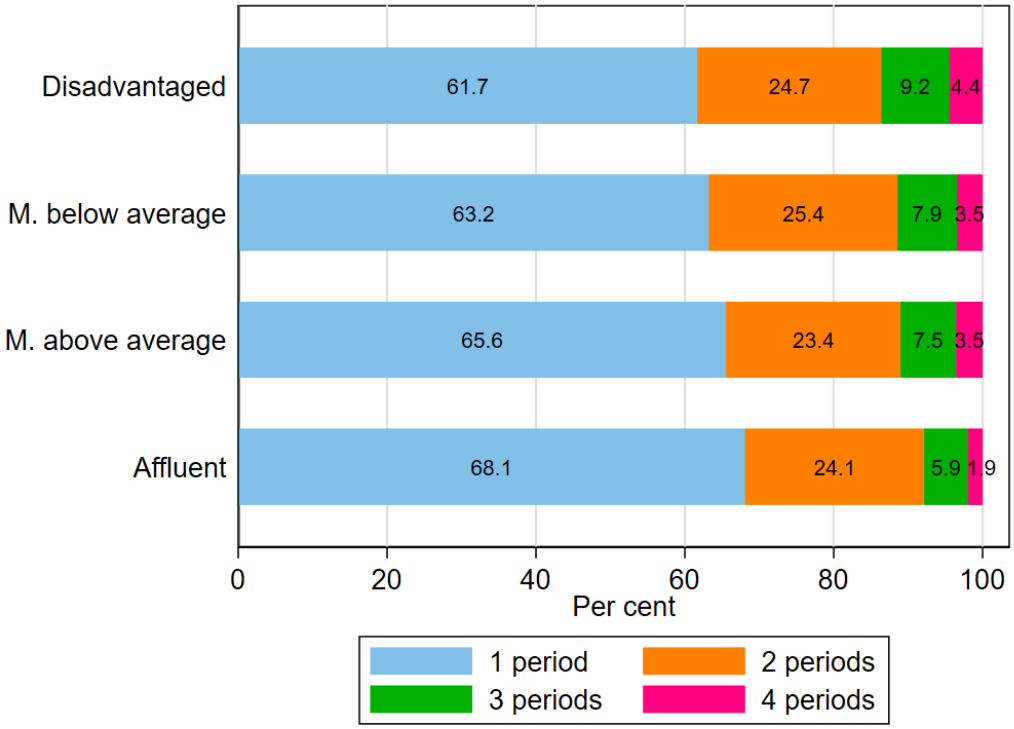
FIGURE 4.17 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.

Finally, looking at the Pobal HP Index (Figure 4.18) we observe a gradient: **schools in more affluent areas** tend to have **better outcomes**, reflected in fewer students being chronically absent for shorter periods. While the differences are not dramatic, there is a noticeable linear pattern. For example, in disadvantaged area schools, a total of 38.3 per cent of students have missed two or more periods. In contrast, for schools in marginally above average areas the corresponding total is 34.4 per cent, and for schools in affluent areas it is 31.9 per cent. Moreover, while 1.9 per cent of students in affluent areas have missed four periods, the figure is more than double for schools in disadvantaged areas (4.4 per cent).

FIGURE 4.18 COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS BY POBAL HP INDEX (POST-PRIMARY)



Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Note: 'M. below' = 'marginally below' and 'M. above' = 'marginally above'.

4.2.2 Regression models

Table 4.2 shows the regression output of two Poisson models. [22] The coefficients of the regression output are shown as incidence rate ratios (IRRs).

TABLE 4.2 REGRESSION: COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS (POST-PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL	MODEL WITH POBAL HP INDEX
Female	1.008	1.008
GRADE		
2nd Year	1.163***	1.163***
3rd Year	1.147***	1.147***
Transition Year	0.968***	0.969***
5th Year	1.039*	1.039*
6th Year	1.019	1.019
Special Class	1.086**	1.085**
Base: 1st Year		
DEIS	1.075***	1.072***
ETHOS		
Catholic	1.077*	1.064*
Multidenominational	1.065*	1.054
Base: Minority faith		
GENDER MIX		
Mixed	1.052*	1.052*
Girls	1.044±	1.045±
Base: Boys		
SCHOOL SIZE		
Smallest	0.987	0.987
Large	0.970±	0.971±
Largest	0.993	0.995
Base: Small		
Irish-medium	1.029	1.030
POBAL HP INDEX		
M. below average		0.982
M. above average		0.983
Affluent		0.949±
Base: Disadvantaged		
Pseudo R2	0.0045	0.0045
N	76,594	76,594

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
The regression coefficients are reported as incidence rate ratios (IRRs).
'M. below' = 'marginally below' and 'M. above' = 'marginally above'.

The gender dummy is not significant **at the 5 per cent level**, and its **coefficient is very close to 1**, indicating limited importance. For primary schools, the coefficient

[22] Both the deviance goodness-of-fit test and the Pearson goodness-of-fit test indicate that the Poisson model fits the data well.

was also close to zero and not significant, but in the opposite direction (girls having slightly lower expected counts, whereas now the coefficient is positive).

Compared to 1st Year, most other years have positive coefficients, indicating **higher expected counts**, with the only exception being **Transition Year**. The largest effects are recorded in the earlier grades: 2nd Year shows an increase of 1.163 in expected counts, and 3rd Year an increase of 1.147. Transition Year, by contrast, has an expected count that is approximately 3.2 per cent lower. Sixth Year is not statistically significant. Additionally, the Special Class category has an expected count that is 8.6 per cent higher.

Moving on to school characteristics, **DEIS schools** have an expected count that is **7.5 per cent higher than non-DEIS schools**, and this difference is significant at the 1 per cent level.

Minority faith schools have **lower expected counts** compared to Catholic and multidenominational schools. Catholic schools show an expected count that is 7.7 per cent higher and multidenominational schools 6.5 per cent, both significant at the 5 per cent level.

Boys' schools have **fewer expected counts** of periods recorded as chronic absenteeism compared to mixed schools by 5.2 per cent fewer expected counts (significant at the 5 per cent level).

The coefficients for **language of instruction**, school size and Pobal HP Index are **not significant** at the 5 per cent level or below.

Overall, the conclusions are similar to those at the primary stage: **unlike CA rates,** there appears to be **less variation in CA intensity** across schools (with some exceptions noted). While DEIS status is significant, the effect size is not huge, and the Pobal HP Index is not meaningful – contrary to what we see for CA rates (see Moya et al., 2026). This reinforces the point, as in the primary stage, that we should distinguish between CA prevalence and CA intensity and avoid assuming they are always related.

CHAPTER 5
Conclusions and implications

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Schools are required to record and submit attendance information for their students under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. They are obliged to complete an Annual Attendance Report (AAR), which provides school-level information on total days lost to absence and the number of students classified as chronically absent (missing 20 days or more), and a School Absence Report (SAR), which contains student-level information on the number of days lost, reason for absence, gender and grade for those aged between 6 and 15 with chronic levels of absence. This report presents findings on these student-level data, documenting how many students are excluded from the scope of the SAR, the main reasons for school absence and whether these reasons differ by school type, gender and grade. The findings therefore provide an important evidence base for developing tailored interventions at school level that take into account the reason(s) for non-attendance.

5.2 STUDENTS NOT INCLUDED IN THE SAR REPORTS

A first finding is that a sizeable portion of students are not currently being considered in the SAR data, given that they do not include children under 6 or adolescents aged 16 years or older. Across primary schools, an average of **16 per cent** of students registered as chronically absent are **under 6 years old.** Across post-primary schools, a striking **42 per cent** of chronic absentees are **aged 16 or over,** which highlights older age as an important risk factor for absenteeism – aligning with prior research (Skedgell and Kearney, 2018). Discussions are currently underway about reforming the Education (Welfare) Act to broaden the age. The study findings indicate that a significant group are currently not counted, and provide evidence for reconsidering the lower and upper age bounds of the SAR dataset coverage.

5.3 REASONS FOR ABSENCE ACROSS SCHOOL TYPES

At the primary stage, almost one in two absences (46 per cent) are recorded as illness. A quarter (25.4 per cent) are registered as unexplained. The remaining absences are attributed to other reasons (13.2 per cent), holidays (11.9 per cent) [23] and urgent circumstances (3.6 per cent).

[23] It should be noted that these figures will not fully reflect the total amount of time lost due to illness or holidays as they count only those students who miss 20 days or more. A student may go on a two-week holiday during term time but not count as a chronic absentee unless they miss ten or more days for other reasons.

We find clear differences in the distribution of absences across school types along socioeconomic lines. The most sizeable relates to the varying shares of unexplained absences. These are particularly concerning because a high proportion of unexplained absences indicates that schools have limited information about why students are missing school, arguably making it more difficult for staff to identify problems and intervene accordingly.

Compared with non-DEIS schools, all types of **DEIS schools** have a **higher share of unexplained absences. DEIS Urban Band 1 schools** show a strikingly higher share, averaging 17.67 percentage points more. There is also a gradient by the socioeconomic context of the area in which schools are located, with schools in **affluent areas** recording a **lower share of unexplained absences**. Compared with schools in disadvantaged areas, those in marginally above average and affluent areas show shares that are 2.24 and 4.1 percentage points lower respectively. This higher level of unexplained absenteeism is accompanied in disadvantaged schools by a lower share of absences attributed to illness.

Perhaps surprisingly, at the primary stage **very large schools** have **a lower share of unexplained absences** than small and very small schools. In contrast, larger schools tend to have a higher share of absences recorded as urgent or due to holidays. This may seem counterintuitive, as one might expect that in smaller schools – where staff and families may know each other well – there would be more of a social pressure to account for absences. However, the opposite mechanism may be at play: in small schools, staff may already be informally aware of the reasons for students' absences, and so families may not feel a need to formally record them. Personal relationships between staff and families may also encourage the sharing of absence reasons through informal channels. A further possibility is that larger schools may be equipped with more robust bureaucratic systems, including greater administrative capacity, more advanced attendance recording and higher-quality datasets, all of which potentially enable more effective management of student absence.

Another finding is that **Catholic schools**, compared to the other ethoses, have a higher share of unexplained absences. Moreover, at the post-primary level English-medium schools, as opposed to Irish-medium ones, also show higher levels of unexplained absences. This may reflect the fact that Irish-medium schools, as well as multidenominational and minority faith schools, may foster a **tighter-knit community**, where parents may feel more compelled, or are more used to providing, reasons for their child's absence. Moreover, this may reflect the more advantaged socioeconomic composition of these schools, which fosters different types of parent–school relationships. Finally, it is not surprising to see that non-DEIS schools and schools in affluent areas have a higher share of holiday-related absences.

Regarding post-primary schools, the overall pattern changes compared to primary: there are now far more unexplained absences, with around half of all absences falling into this category. Of the rest, 30.6 per cent are due to illness, 16.1 per cent to other reasons, 1.9 per cent to holidays and 2.6 per cent to urgent family reasons.

There is also meaningful variation in the distribution of absences across post-primary schools, although the differences are less pronounced than at the primary stage. **Important and sizeable disparities remain in the share of unexplained absences along socioeconomic lines. DEIS schools** record a **13.78 percentage point higher share of unexplained absences**. A gradient is also evident in relation to area-level deprivation, with schools in more affluent areas having a lower share of unexplained absences, akin to the pattern observed in primary schools.

Another finding for post-primary schools is that **minority faith schools** have **lower shares of unexplained absences** too, similar to what happens in primary schools, which could again be related to perhaps a tighter community and identity.

Overall, this research builds upon prior research with administrative data showing that DEIS schools and schools in less socioeconomically affluent areas have higher absences (Moya et al., 2026), **revealing another problem: not only are absences higher, but a higher share is also unexplained**.

5.4 COUNTS OF ANNUAL DAYS LOST FOR CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS, 2023/24

In **primary schools gender** does not emerge as a significant factor shaping the annual counts of days lost for the population of chronically absent students, which is not surprising given the findings of previous research (Anderson and Romm, 2020; Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Thornton et al., 2013). Boys and girls also appear to have a **similar distribution of absence** types at the primary stage.

In **post-primary schools** the result is different, although the gap is still small: **chronic absentee girls** have an **expected annual count of days lost that is 1.2 percentage points higher than boys.** There is little variation in the types of absences between boys and girls, although girls have slightly lower levels of unexplained absences and slightly higher levels of illness-related absences, which aligns with a body of literature showing that boys are more prone to truancy than girls (Darmody et al., 2009; Maynard et al., 2012; Salzer et al., 2012; Veenstra et al., 2010).

For primary schools we derive **rates of chronic absenteeism by class level**, and from Senior Infants to 6th Class there is a steady, almost linear increase in the share of students who are chronically absent. While the chronic absenteeism rate is 22

per cent in Senior Infants, it rises to 24 per cent by 3rd Class and reaches 28 per cent in 6th Class.

We see that the **intensity of chronic absenteeism – as measured by annual days lost – peaks in the earliest grades** and again in the **later grades**. In comparison with 1st Class, the upper grades (5th and 6th Classes) have expected counts of days lost to chronic absenteeism that are 1.8 per cent and 3.1 per cent higher respectively. The Special Class category also has 3.1 per cent more days lost than 1st Class.

Moreover, the earlier and higher grades not only have a greater number of days lost among chronically absent students, but a **higher share of these days are unexplained absences**. Compared with 1st Class, Senior Infants have a 1.15 percentage points higher share of unexplained absences, while the figures for 5th and 6th Classes are 2.89 and 3.62 higher percentage points higher respectively.

In the **post-primary stage**, the **rates of chronic absenteeism** do not follow a linear pattern. They are comparatively lower in 1st Year as well as in the two upper years, 5th and 6th (though the latter pattern may be driven by the fact that most of these students are not included in the SAR if 16 years of age or older, and AAR data indicate a substantial amount of chronic absence occurs among those aged 16 or over).

Compared with 1st Year, all **higher years have higher counts** of days lost for the chronic absentee students, and the increases generally rise with year level. Fifth Year is 11.1 percentage points higher than 1st Year, and 6th Year is 14.2 percentage points higher. The only exception is **Transition Year**, which is slightly lower – potentially indicating higher student engagement in that year. The pattern of counts of days lost may seem at odds with the distribution of CA rates, as the later years do have lower rates. This suggests that the issue in these final years is not so much the *prevalence* of chronic absenteeism, but rather the *intensity* among the students who are chronically absent.

Moreover, similar to the primary stage, the **share of unexplained absences** increases with year level. Compared to 1st Year, 5th and 6th Years have a predicted higher share of unexplained absences by 9.62 and 18.98 percentage points respectively. The **Special Class** category also shows a strikingly high share of unexplained absences compared with 1st Year, with almost 20.23 percentage points more.

5.5 COUNTS OF PERIODS REGISTERED AS CHRONIC ABSENTEE STUDENTS

SAR data are recorded for two periods per school year. Analyses were conducted on whether the chronic absentee group missed one, two, three or four periods

over the school years 2022/23 and 2023/24. At the primary stage, **gender** does not play **a meaningful role** in explaining the counts of periods in which a student is recorded as being chronically absent. In contrast, **class level** shows **sizeable differences**, with higher classes having higher expected counts than the lower grades. Fifth and 6th Classes have 7.3 percentage points higher counts of periods recorded as chronic absentee students.

DEIS schools have an expected number of periods recorded as chronic absenteeism that is higher than in non-DEIS schools, with DEIS Urban Band 1 schools in particular showing a **6.4 per cent higher count.** Moreover, **special schools** have a striking **23.7 per cent higher count** than mainstream schools.

Regarding the Pobal HP Index, rather than showing a linear gradient as in the case of annual counts of days lost for chronically absent students, the main difference here is between schools in the most affluent areas and all others. Schools in affluent areas have lower expected counts of periods when a student is recorded as chronically absent than schools in disadvantaged areas (2.9 per cent lower), marginally below average areas (3.5 per cent lower) and marginally above average areas (2.4 per cent lower).

A small difference emerges with **language of instruction**, with Irish-medium schools having slightly lower counts of periods recorded as chronic absenteeism. The remaining school characteristics – gender mix and school size – show limited differences, and the effect of ethos is not significant.

At the post-primary stage, the **gender effect** is also **very small** and not significant at the 5 per cent level or below, although this time in the opposite direction: girls have a marginally higher expected count of periods recorded as chronically absent. Compared with **1st Year**, all other years have higher expected counts of periods missed except for Transition Year. Unlike the expected counts of days lost to chronic absenteeism, here the **earlier grades** have higher coefficients.

Regarding school types, **DEIS schools** have a **higher expected count by 7.5 per cent.** Moreover, **minority faith schools** – compared with the other ethos categories – fare better. The Pobal HP Index, gender mix and school size do not yield any meaningful variation.

5.6 RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.6.1 Implications for future research

The SAR data provide interesting insights into the reasons given for absence and the intensity of absence levels. However, there is considerable potential to enhance the value of these data through matching them with student-level

information contained in the Primary Online Database (POD), the Post Primary Online Database (PPOD) and other administrative data such as the Tusla Children in Care dataset. This would allow for insights into the extent to which chronic absence varies by migrant and ethnic background as well as for specific subgroups such as those experiencing homelessness or those living in International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS). A limitation of POD and PPOD is the lack of a direct measure of family socioeconomic background. However, the student's address could be used to derive the Pobal HP Index for each student. While a multidimensional approach (having data on, for example, social class, parental education and income) would be preferable, this would provide a reasonable proxy for family background, thus providing more detailed information on the groups of students with chronic absence.

In prior work (Moya et al., 2026), we observed large differences in the **extent** of chronic absenteeism – measured as the percentage of students classified as chronically absent – with striking disparities along socioeconomic lines, as captured by DEIS status and the Pobal HP Index, as well as by special school status. In contrast, in this analysis of the **intensity** of chronic absenteeism – assessed through the number of periods in which a student is recorded as chronically absent, and the annual count of days lost to chronic absenteeism – these differences exist, but are not as pronounced. This distinction points to the idea that it is important to **differentiate between the *prevalence* and the *intensity* of chronic absenteeism**. Even if non-DEIS schools have a lower prevalence of chronic absenteeism, the intensity among those who are chronically absent may still be concerning. The **exception is special schools**, which show both a high extent and a high intensity of chronic absenteeism.

Future research could explore ***why* schools serving disadvantaged communities and areas have a higher share of unexplained absences**. For instance, do parents feel less pressure or urgency to provide a reason? Are parents unaware that their child is absent from school? Or, perhaps, are schools themselves placing less emphasis on recording this information? It may also be the case that some parents who have had negative experiences with school or the education system feel a degree of distrust towards the school, which could make them less likely to engage with the school when absences occur.

Beyond DEIS status and the Pobal HP Index, it would also be valuable to examine why certain other types of schools report lower shares of unexplained absences – including minority faith schools, Irish-medium schools and larger primary schools. **Exploring what these schools are doing differently**, or what the social mechanisms are at play, could be helpful to inform practice.

5.6.2 Implications for policy

5.6.2.1 Methodological limitations

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 places requirements on schools to report chronic absence for students between 6 and 15 years of age. The study findings show that a significant proportion of chronic absence falls outside this age range (16 per cent at the primary stage and a striking 42 per cent at the post-primary stage). As a result, no information is collected on why these students are absent, and they are not subject to follow-up by the Educational Welfare Service. There is currently a discussion about reforming the legislation, and it is clear that this would enhance the system's capacity to identify and respond to chronic absence among these age groups.

Moreover, it would be helpful to collect reasons for absence for the **entire student population**, rather than limiting this information to chronically absent students. Effective attendance interventions must be sensitive to different degrees of absenteeism. Kearney and Graczyk (2014; 2020) propose **a tiered framework of attendance** that extends beyond chronic absenteeism (Tier 3) to include Tiers 1 and 2. Tier 1 encompasses the general student population, with interventions focused on promoting overall good attendance, while Tier 2 refers to students who are beginning to experience attendance difficulties and would benefit from early, more personalised support. At present, the SAR **dataset lacks information on students who would fall within Tiers 1 and 2** – which represent important layers of school attendance patterns and are crucial to consider for the design of targeted and preventative interventions. Related to this, there are likely types of absences that become **underreported when looking only at chronic absentees**. For example, holiday absences might be relatively common in the general student population but not necessarily among the chronic absentees; as a result, we may be missing important information on certain patterns of absenteeism.

Another data collection issue that hinders the design of effective interventions is the relative **ambiguity of the absence classification system**, which may make it difficult in some cases to identify the underlying reasons for absenteeism. For example, the existing categories do not allow for a clear **identification of school avoidance/refusal.** School refusal is linked to socio-emotional and mental health difficulties (Elliott and Place, 2019), yet it is unclear how parents report these absences. They may be recorded as unexplained, classified as illness in a mental health sense, or placed in a general 'other' category. Expanding or refining attendance categories could therefore help capture these underlying issues better and, as a result, support more targeted interventions.

5.6.2.1 School and public policy

School attendance interventions[24] must be targeted not only according to the degree of absenteeism, but also according to the **reasons for absence** and the specific circumstances of a given school and its student body (Kearney and Graczyk, 2014; 2020). Therefore, identifying the reasons for non-attendance is crucial. In this context, the fact that **schools serving more disadvantaged communities have a higher share of unexplained absences** is particularly problematic. Efforts should be made to ensure that families provide reasons for absences wherever possible. One potential approach would be to mirror the **existing threshold of 20 days' absence**, which allows a referral that sets in place a formal response, by introducing a **similar mechanism for unexplained absences**. For example, if more than half of a student's absences are unexplained, this could prompt a formal response to understand what is happening.

Considering the high extent of unexplained absences, especially at the post-primary stage where one in two absences among chronically absent students is unexplained, potentially effective attendance interventions may focus on **improving communication with parents and ensuring appropriate messaging to different groups of parents**. In particular, it is possible that some parents are unaware of their children's absenteeism, or that they do not place enough importance on attendance and therefore are not very motivated to clarify reasons for absence. In this regard, several studies suggest that communicating with parents via text message or email by providing information on their children's attendance, as well as emphasising the importance of regular attendance, can be effective (Díaz et al., 2020; Lasky-Fink et al., 2021; Mussadiq et al., 2024; Robison et al., 2018; Rogers and Feller, 2018). The study by Lasky-Fink et al. (2021), which involved sending different types of messages to parents across a large sample in a US public school district, showed that the most effective messages are those that highlight the role of parents in addressing attendance and those that emphasise the detrimental effects of absenteeism on academic achievement. Therefore, sending regular messages to parents, such as every fortnight, about their children's attendance, as well as the importance of attendance for achievement, could be a relevant policy at the school level.

Moreover, **psychosocial interventions for parents** have also been shown to be successful for improving attendance – and could arguably also help to engage parents with attendance communication systems. Sheldon's (2007) study examined a **partnership programme** in the US involving 69 elementary schools, where schools aimed to strengthen their relationships with parents in several ways, including improving two-way communication, providing ideas for learning

[24] It is, of course, acknowledged that schools currently put in place measures to support attendance. However, to date there has been a lack of research on the prevalence of specific strategies and the extent to which they are (seen as) working. Ongoing research on the Anseo pilot programme should add to the evidence base.

activities at home, and involving parents as representatives and leaders in school decision-making. After one year, there were significant improvements in attendance. Similar findings were reported by Sheldon and Epstein (2004), who also examined US schools implementing a number of **initiatives with families**. They found that schools communicating with parents and celebrating attendance via newsletters significantly reduced chronic absenteeism. These studies do not report on outcomes related to how attendance is registered, but the fact that absenteeism decreased is promising, as it suggests that parents did became more concerned about attendance – and this could arguably also lead them to be more mindful of communicating reasons for absence.

Regarding **interventions aimed at students** themselves, **psychosocial interventions** have also been proven successful for students dealing with chronic absenteeism, which is the focus of this report. For the group of students with a high share of unexplained absences, this may be indicative of school disengagement, and there are interventions that have been shown to make school more appealing, fulfilling and relevant, improving attendance. For example, research by Marvul (2012) examined the effect of an intervention targeted at chronic absentee students, which included participation in a moral issues class as well as involvement in club football and basketball teams. They found that, after five months of intervention, students in the control group were about three times more likely to be absent. Similarly, the intervention studied by Young et al. (2020) – a one- to three-month programme based on **rewards**, including prizes for good attendance and activities aimed at strengthening students' relationships with peers and teachers – also found improvements. Moreover, a report by the Centre for Young Lives (2025) in the UK provides evidence of links between **after-school activities** and school attendance, with many students reporting that such activities motivated them to attend the regular school day.

The introduction of the **DEIS Plus Scheme** promises to enable and strengthen such school-based psychosocial interventions, particularly given that the most disadvantaged schools tend to have higher levels of unexplained absences and therefore need the greatest support. Its focus on improving wellbeing, inclusion and community-based partnerships – including providing additional wellbeing practitioners and counselling supports – is a hopeful development in this regard. At a broader policy level, several measures could help address the needs identified above, such as strengthening communication with parents, raising awareness and promoting school engagement among students. Additional support for the **Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme** could be beneficial, for example through the provision of targeted training to address attendance issues. This would enable HSCL coordinators to better assist families in monitoring attendance and in navigating attendance-related challenges with their children, for instance by providing guidance on how to set boundaries when children say they do not want to attend school. With the introduction of the **DEIS Plus scheme**, HSCL will be expanded to 130 schools – a welcome step in tackling attendance issues, but one

that also reinforces the need to ensure the programme has the right supports in place to address absenteeism.

Moreover, continued **national campaigns on the importance of attendance** would be beneficial to raise awareness as a topic of national concern – especially given that research shows a student's poor attendance can also be detrimental to the achievement outcomes of other students in their school (Smyth et al., 2026).

It would also be useful to provide schools with **clearer support and practical guidance** on how to monitor and make sense of their **attendance data**. This could involve improving the online platforms already in use, such as Aladdin, so that they are more intuitive and easier to navigate in day-to-day practice.[25] Alongside this, offering basic training in data analysis would help ensure that someone within each school feels confident interpreting attendance patterns, especially across different groups of students. This aspect would be important in preventing attendance issues from becoming more serious, by enabling the early identification of students at risk. Additional funding for data infrastructure may be needed to enable these changes.

There is also scope for more consistent **national or regional guidance** on when and how to **follow up on unexplained absence**. Setting a clear threshold would be beneficial, as previously mentioned, but it should be accompanied by practical guidance on the steps to take once that threshold is reached. This might include setting out which cross-sector actors should be brought in, for example the School Completion Programme (SCP), psychological services and community organisations. The evidence presented in this research indicates that the need to account for absences is especially important in the earliest and highest grades of primary school, as well as in the final years of post-primary. These are the stages where chronic absenteeism is associated with particularly high numbers of days lost and a higher share of unexplained absences. These findings highlight the need to target particular groups of students within the school based on their patterns of attendance, with interventions tailored to the drivers of absence at different points in the educational career.

[25] As well as differing in the software they use for attendance, schools also vary in the information made available to parents through the app. Enabling parents to see how many days their children have missed to date may be of benefit.

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APPENDIX: CHAPTER 2

TABLE A2.1 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF UNEXPLAINED ABSENCES – INTERACTION DEIS X POBAL HP INDEX (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL
DEIS TYPE	
Urban Band 1	17.84***
Urban Band 2	6.85***
Rural	6.46***
Special school	4.35
Base: Non-DEIS	
ETHOS	
Multidenominational	-3.78***
Minority faith	-3.48*
Base: Catholic	
GENDER MIX	
Mixed	1.74
Boys	4.61*
Base: Girls	
SCHOOL SIZE	
Small	1.04
Large	0.07
Largest	-1.78±
Base: Smallest	
Irish-medium	-1.85
Deprived (Pobal HP)	2.52***
Interaction DEIS x Pobal HP	
Band 1#Deprived	-1.26
Band 2#Deprived	0.86
Rural#Deprived	-5.44*
Special#Deprived	-0.63
R2	0.0777

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
Standard errors are adjusted for school-level clustering.
# denotes the interaction term.

TABLE A2.2 REGRESSION: PROPORTION OF UNEXPLAINED ABSENCES – INTERACTION DEIS X POBAL HP INDEX (POST-PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL
DEIS	19.44***
Deprived	7.83***
Interaction DEIS x Deprived	-9.74*
Large	-2.77
ETHOS	
Catholic	-2.80
Minority faith	-13.69***
Base: Multidenominational	
GENDER MIX	
Girls	-1.22
Boys	-4.86
Base: Mixed	
Irish-medium	-6.96*
R2	0.1325

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10

APPENDIX: CHAPTER 3

TABLE A3.1 REGRESSION: SHARE OF ILLNESS ABSENCE – INTERACTION GRADE X GENDER (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL
Female	-0.67
GRADE	
S. Infants	-0.85
2nd Class	-1.43**
3rd	-2.13***
4th Class	-1.02±
5th	-0.72
6th Class	-1.95***
Other	-0.29
Base: 1st Class	
Gender x class	
Female#S. Infants	0.59
Female#2nd	-0.19
Female#3rd Class	1.03
Female#4th	0.57
Female#5th Class	-0.59
Female#6th	-.33
Female#Other	1.18
Constant	44.46
R2	0.0004
N	85,597

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10
# denotes the interaction term.

APPENDIX: CHAPTER 4

TABLE A4.1 REGRESSION: COUNTS OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PERIODS – INTERACTION DEIS X POBAL HP INDEX (PRIMARY)

Variables	MAIN MODEL
Female	0.994
GRADE	
S. Infants	0.913***
2nd Class	1.009±
3rd	1.020***
4th Class	1.048***
5th	1.073***
6th Class	1.073***
Special Class	1.016
Base: 1st Class	
DEIS TYPE	
Urban Band 1	1.088***
Urban Band 2	1.045
Rural	1.008
Special	1.250***
Base: Non-DEIS	
ETHOS	
Catholic	0.991
Minority faith	1.008
Base: Multidenominational	
GENDER MIX	
Mixed	0.980
Boys	0.963
Base: Girls	
SCHOOL SIZE	
Smallest	1.008
Large	1.015
Largest	1.017±
Base: Small	
Irish-medium	0.971***
Deprived	1.022***
Interaction DEIS x Pobal HP	
Urban Band 1#Deprived	0.959*
Urban Band 2#Deprived	0.994
Rural#Deprived	1.010
Special#Deprived	0.977

Source: Administrative data from TESS.
Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; ± p<.10.
The coefficients are reported as incidence rate ratios (IRRs).
# denotes the interaction term.



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