

Chapter 3

Topic 7 Secondary sources

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Activity: Research

Does absence cause underachievement?

Learning objectives

At the end of this activity, you should be able to:

- Analyse official statistics to investigate correlation, and cause and effect relationships.

In this activity you are going to use official statistics to test the hypothesis that the higher the rate of absences from a school, the lower the level of achievement in that school.

1. Look up school league tables for secondary schools in your local authority at <http://www.education.gov.uk/performancetables> and select the most recent secondary schools tables for your region.
2. From the list of local authorities, select your own local authority and then select the 'Absence' tab for a table of absence statistics for your local authority. Print this out.
3. Go to the KS4 (Key Stage 4) tab and print the results table. From the two tables, extract the figures for (a) "overall absence" and (b) "Level 2 (5+ A*-C) (or equivalent) including English and maths GCSEs".
4. Now draw a single graph for all the schools in your local authority. Label the vertical axis as 'absences' and the horizontal axis as 'GCSEs'. Plot each school's position on the graph.
 - a. Are the points that you have plotted broadly in a diagonal line, or are they scattered randomly? If they are in a diagonal line, this shows a correlation between the two variables.
 - b. Does your graph support the hypothesis? Explain your answer.
 - c. Assuming that there is a correlation, is it safe to say that absence is the cause of low achievement? What other reasons might there be for the correlation?