



PRESS RELEASE

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PUBLIC THEMATIC REPORT

MANAGING TEACHER ABSENCES

With more than one million employees - i.e., almost half of all civil servants - including 900,000 teachers, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport devotes a large part of its work to managing its human resources, and in this context, must manage teacher absences. The report published today emphasises that these absences, far from being a global phenomenon, actually cover two very distinct categories: absences for personal reasons (linked in particular to health), and those related to the running of the school itself (on-going training, examinations, school trips, etc.). While the health crisis has highlighted the importance of the continuity of face-to-face learning, the Court of Accounts makes six recommendations aimed at better understanding the phenomenon, improving preventive healthcare initiatives, and limiting and covering short-term absences.

Absence from work and absence from school: two distinct realities

The specific features of the teaching profession, in particular, the weekly service obligations and the school calendar, make it difficult to measure their absences, and distort comparisons with other categories of employees. For example, a teacher who is unable to teach a lesson because they are called on by their superiors to carry out another task - such as sitting on an examination board - is considered absent by their pupils' families. However, through this activity, they are contributing to the running of the school. The Court notes that in primary education, teaching cover is arranged for school teachers in almost 80% of cases, from the first day of absence. This is not the case in secondary education: in 2018-2019, almost 10% of teaching hours were "lost" in secondary school, i.e., a loss that was up 24% compared to the previous year. What are known as "short-term" absences, i.e., of less than two weeks, account for almost 2.5 million hours, of which only just over 500,000 were covered. While parents and pupils themselves have less and less tolerance for this, this lost teaching time is not well identified by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MENJS).

Measuring and comparing the phenomenon: an essential preliminary step

To date, the Ministry still lacks robust and remotely accessible tools to measure these absences and relate them to service obligations. Although the majority of secondary schools are now equipped with school life software that can be used to provide families with information, the lack of an interface between this software and the Ministry's national applications means the institution does not have the necessary information. Due to a lack of



tools, the Ministry is conducting a survey of lost teaching hours in secondary schools, which provides only approximate data.

Consolidating the Ministry's preventive healthcare policy

Furthermore, the Court points out that the Ministry does not have a structured preventive healthcare policy, even though health reasons are the main cause of absence. As guarantor of the national vision, the Ministry must rediscover its functions as strategist and regulator, and not confine its action to preventive initiatives rolled out in some regional education authorities, such as, for example, in the context of the fight against the flu epidemic.

Drastically reduce and cover institutional absences

Each year, the cost of teacher absences amounts to nearly €4 billion, more than a third of which is due to the functioning of the education system itself, the main cause of short-term absences, which are poorly covered in secondary education. The Court considers that, in general, the difference between regulatory service obligations (RSO) and annual working hours expected from teachers as public sector employees (1,607 hours), leaves sufficient time slots for absences due to the institution not to be attributed to teaching time. The introduction of an annual fixed number of hours of teaching cover and the enhanced remit of the head teacher, together with the inclusion of teaching cover in teachers' tasks (a recommendation made by the Court in 2017), would provide a solid basis for short-term cover. The health crisis has also reminded the Ministry of the need to provide all levels of the educational institution with a general framework for the development of administrative continuity plans in order to improve the monitoring of teachers' activities.

[Read the report](#)

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