



Department  
for Education

## Statistical First Release

# National Pupil Projections - Future Trends in Pupil Numbers: July 2015

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### Secondary pupil numbers start to rise

The secondary school population has been falling since 2005 and was 2,740,000 in 2015. However, the number of pupils in state-funded secondary schools starts to rise in 2016 as a result of increases in the birth rate since 2002.

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### Secondary numbers grow throughout the projection

The secondary school population is projected to continue rising during the projection period, reaching 3,287,000 by 2024 (an increase of 20% on the 2015 population).

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### Growth of primary pupil numbers starts to slow

The primary school population has been rising since 2009 and reached 4,376,000 in 2015. However, the rate of increase is forecast to drop during the projection period due to reducing birth figures. By 2024 the state-funded primary school population is projected to be broadly stable.

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### Primary pupils numbers broadly level by 2024

The primary school population is projected to reach 4,658,000 in 2019 (an increase of 6% increase on 2015). After 2019 the pace of increase is much slower and by 2024 the population is projected to reach 4,712,000 (an 8% increase on the primary school population in 2015).

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### Nursery school population stable

The number of children projected to be in a state-funded nursery school is projected to remain stable at around 33,000 for the whole projection period.

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#### Official Statistics Publication

Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

## 1. Background and context

This statistical release provides national projections for the number of pupils in schools in England by type of school and age group. Findings presented here update those published in July 2014 (SFR23/2014), which used new (mid-2012) ONS national population projections. No new national population projections have been published since July 2014. Therefore these 2015 pupil projections have only been updated with new actual data and forecasted participation rates (e.g. what proportion of 3 and 4 year olds will attend nursery). Mid-2013 population estimates and 2013 birth data from ONS have been added into the projections model, as have January 2015 school census figures.

There are also no new variant projections from ONS. For 2013 the variant figures have been replaced by the actual mid-2013 ONS estimate. Thus the variant projections effectively start in 2014.

## 2. National pupil projections results (Tables 1-2)

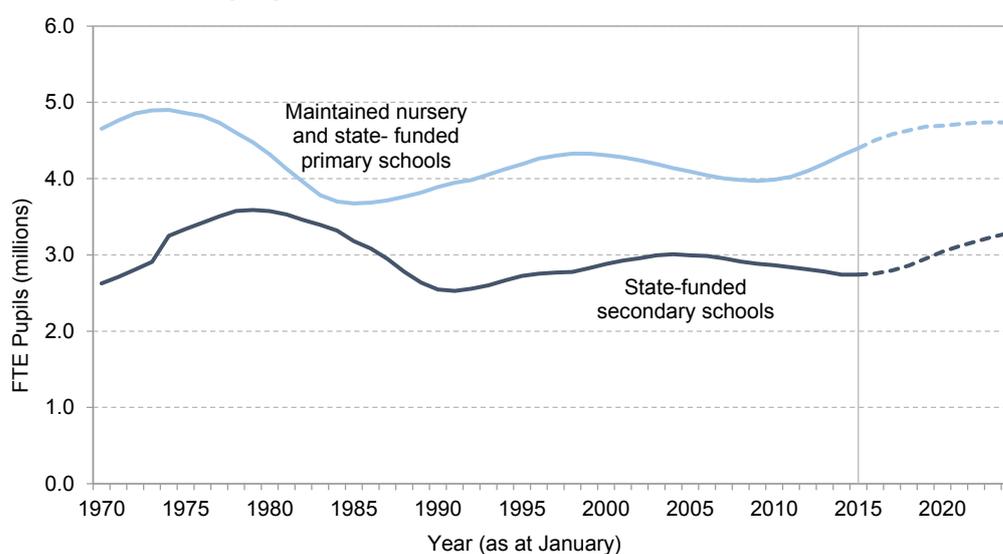
### All state-funded school types forecast to increase

All state-funded school types, Except for maintained nursery schools, are projected to show increases in pupils between 2015 and 2024. Nursery schools are forecast to retain a stable population.

### Participation rates also affect the projections

Births are the main influence on the future school population, but the proportion of the population attending school (the participation rate) also has an effect. This mostly affects the early years, as parents can choose whether to send their under 5 year olds to school. Thus an increase in the projected number of under 5s could be due to increased participation rather than an increased overall population.

**Figure 1: State-funded schools: full-time equivalent pupil numbers, actual and projected**



## Trends in pupil numbers by phase of education

The main trends by phase of education are outlined below. It should be noted these are national projections only and may mask trends at regional or local authority level.

### Early years

#### Numbers in early years provision increases until 2018

As for other ages, the number of children forecast to be in a state-funded early years setting is currently increasing. However, the drop in actual births seen in 2013 starts to feed into these figures in 2017, resulting in a projected drop in early years totals in 2018 to a full-time equivalent of 857,000.

#### Many of these children attend part-time

Education of the under 5s contains the highest proportion of part-time pupils. The headcount<sup>1</sup> of children under 5 in all state funded schools is 995,000 in 2015, rising to 1,012,000 in 2018. From 2019 onwards the total is stable at about 1,033,000.

#### Most early years pupils in primary schools

The vast majority of pupils currently, and projected to be, in an early years setting are in primary schools (804,000 out of 841,000 pupils aged under 5 in a state-funded school in 2015 are in primary school).

### State-funded primary schools

#### Recent increases in births continue to affect primary totals

The increase in births in England since 2002 started to affect the number of pupils in state-funded primary schools after 2009, when there was a low point of 3,947,000 pupils. From 2010, the actual and projected figures show an increase, reaching 4,376,000 in 2015 and 4,712,000 in 2024.

#### The increases are projected to reduce towards the end of the projection period

The peak annual rate of increase is expected to be seen in 2016, with a projected 2.4 per cent increase in the population at state-funded primary schools. The increase is then expected to reduce, as the population is affected by the lower birth numbers in 2013 and other factors. By 2023, the rate of increase is projected to have dropped to 0.1 per cent, followed by a small decrease of -0.1% in 2024.

#### 336,000 more pupils in 2024 than in 2015

The overall population in state-funded primary schools is projected to be 336,000 higher in 2024 than in 2015, when it was 4,376,000.

### State-funded secondary schools

#### Fall in secondary pupil numbers coming to an end

Secondary pupil numbers have been dropping as a result of the low birth rates in the 1990s, with the population in 2015 reaching a low point at 2,740,000. However, after that date the increase in births seen since 2002 start to feed into the secondary school population.

#### Rate of increase projected to rise

The projected numbers in state-funded secondary school are projected to show larger rates of increase for much of the projection period, as the increased births since 2002 feed into successive

<sup>1</sup> The tables in this release are presented as full-time equivalents (FTE). Pupil headcount figures can be found in the underlying data which accompany this release.

secondary years. The total is projected to reach 2,950,000 by 2019 and 3,287,000 by 2024.

**547,000 more pupils in 2014 than in 2015**

The overall population in state-funded secondary schools is projected to be 547,000 higher in 2024 than in 2015, when it was 2,740,000.

### 3. Comparison with previous projections

The main changes to the pupil projections since the July 2014 release are due to the inclusion of outturn data for pupil numbers in 2015 (taken from the School Census) and the 2013 births and mid-year population estimate figures (from ONS). There are no changes to the long-term national projections and their accompanying assumptions of births, deaths and mortality.

#### Differences in the short-term

**Slightly higher outturn pupil numbers in 2015**

Outturn pupil numbers are slightly higher than had been predicted for 2015, for both primary and secondary-aged pupils. The total number of pupils in maintained nursery and state-funded primary schools was 8,000 (0.2%) higher than predicted in the 2014 pupil projections. The total number pupils in state-funded secondary schools was 6,000 (0.2%) higher than expected.

**Small increases in short-term pupil projections**

Higher outturn pupil numbers, combined with slightly higher forecasts and participation rates for under 5s, has led to an increase in the pupil projections. By 2017 there are expected to be 31,000 (0.7%) more pupils in state-funded primary & nursery schools than previously projected, and 7,000 more (0.3%) in state-funded secondary schools.

#### Longer-term impacts

**Lower actual birth figures for 2013**

2013 actual birth data was added to the projection and showed a 4.3% drop in births from 2012. Although ONS had assumed a small drop in births in 2013, the actual drop was larger than expected.

**Projected number of nursery and primary-aged pupils is still projected to rise**

The reduced number of births in 2013 feeds into the nursery school projections from 2015, and primary shortly after. However, increases to the outturn data and under 5 forecast and participation data mean the overall state-funded primary and nursery school population is still higher than was projected in 2014. At 2023, the projected total for this school type is 55,000 higher than projected in 2014.

**Secondary pupil totals also higher than previously projected**

The projected number of pupils in state-funded secondary schools in 2024 is 20,000 higher than was projected in 2014.

## 4. Alternative scenarios for future population growth (Tables 3a-3c)

There are inherent uncertainties in projecting the future size of the pupil population. This is particularly true for early aged cohorts, which are more immediately dependent on projections of future birth rates, than for older-aged pupils.

The 2012-based principal national population projections for England produced by the ONS are the base for this projection of future trends in pupil numbers. Principal population projections are based on assumptions considered to best reflect demographic patterns at the time they were adopted. However, the ONS also produce a number of variant projection scenarios, based on alternative assumptions of future fertility, net migration and life-expectancy.<sup>2</sup> An understanding of the overall effect of the uncertainty in the population projections can be obtained by comparing the results of the principal population projections with projections based on the alternative ONS scenarios.

The national pupil projections look at the effect on the projected pupil population using the ONS variant projections which adopt: a) high and low fertility assumptions; b) high and low migration assumptions, and c) high and low population scenarios (which combine the impact of high and low fertility, net migration and life-expectancy). **These scenarios are for illustrative purposes only and are not intended to represent the upper or lower limits of projected pupil numbers.**

For the principal scenario, the variant projections in this pupil projection use as their base the same mid-2012-based ONS national population projections. Therefore the changes are limited to the effect of the new estimate and birth data for 2013 and the 2015 census data which have been added to the projection model. For all variants, the 2013 projected figures have been replaced by the mid-2013 ONS estimates, as there can be no variation in a year for which actual estimates are available.

The main findings are:

- Under the high **net migration assumption**, total pupil numbers are predicted to be 0.5% (35,000 pupils) higher by 2024, compared to the principal projection. This compares to being 0.5% lower (34,000 pupils) under the low net migration scenario.
- Under the high **fertility assumption**, total pupil numbers are predicted to be 3.6% (265,000 pupils) higher by 2024, compared to the principal projection. This compares to being 3.6% lower (259,000 pupils) under the low fertility assumption scenario.
- Under the high **population assumption**, total pupil numbers are predicted to be 4.2% (302,000 pupils) higher by 2023, compared to the principal projection. This compares to being 4.0% lower (293,000 pupils) under the low population scenario.

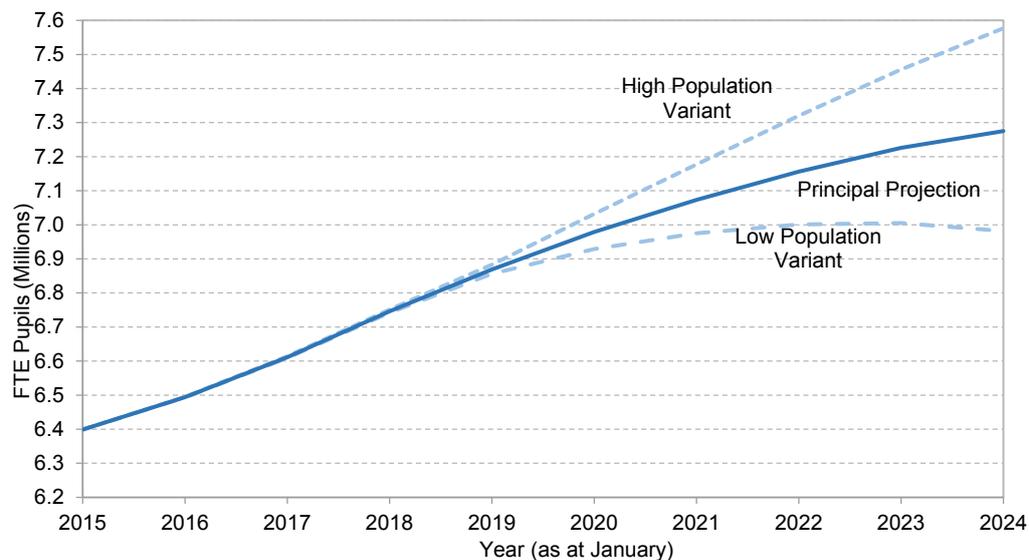
Figure 2 below shows the combined impact of the ONS high and low population assumptions (which combine varying assumptions for high and low fertility, high and low net migration and high and low life-expectancy). The chart shows that varying the scenarios does not have a

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<sup>2</sup> For further details of the ONS principal and variant national population projections, see ONS releases [here](#) and [here](#).

significant impact until 2019, as it takes several years for changes in birth rates to feed through and affect the size of the school aged population.

**Figure 2: Comparison of alternative scenarios for projected pupil numbers aged 5 to 15**

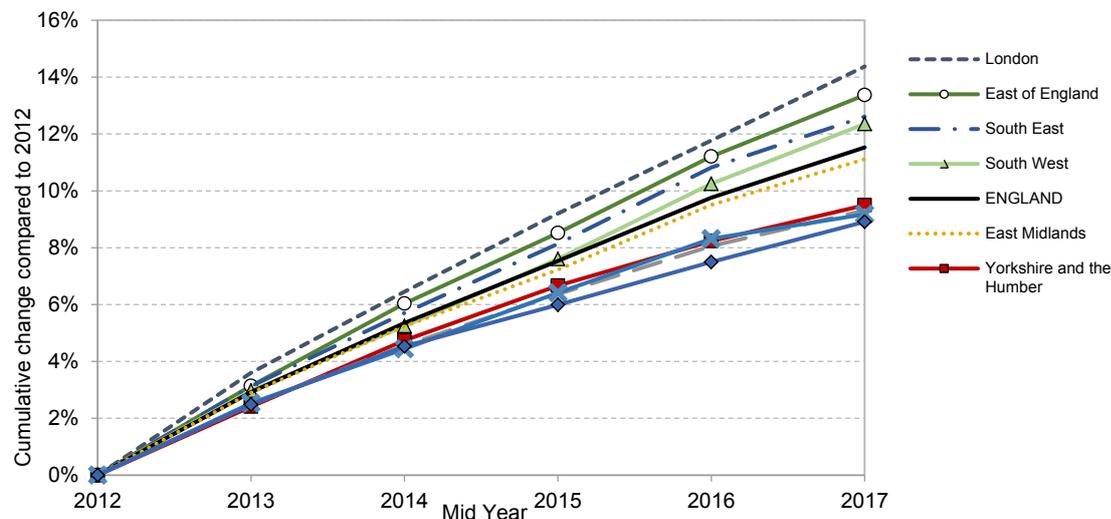


## 5. Regional trends (Figures 3a-3b)

The long-term projections of pupil numbers produced by the department are made at a national level only. ONS’s population projections provide information on the school-aged population in each region. No new regional projections have been made available since the mid-2012 sub-national projections used in the 2014 national pupil projections. Therefore Figures 3a and 3b are unchanged and are provided for context only.

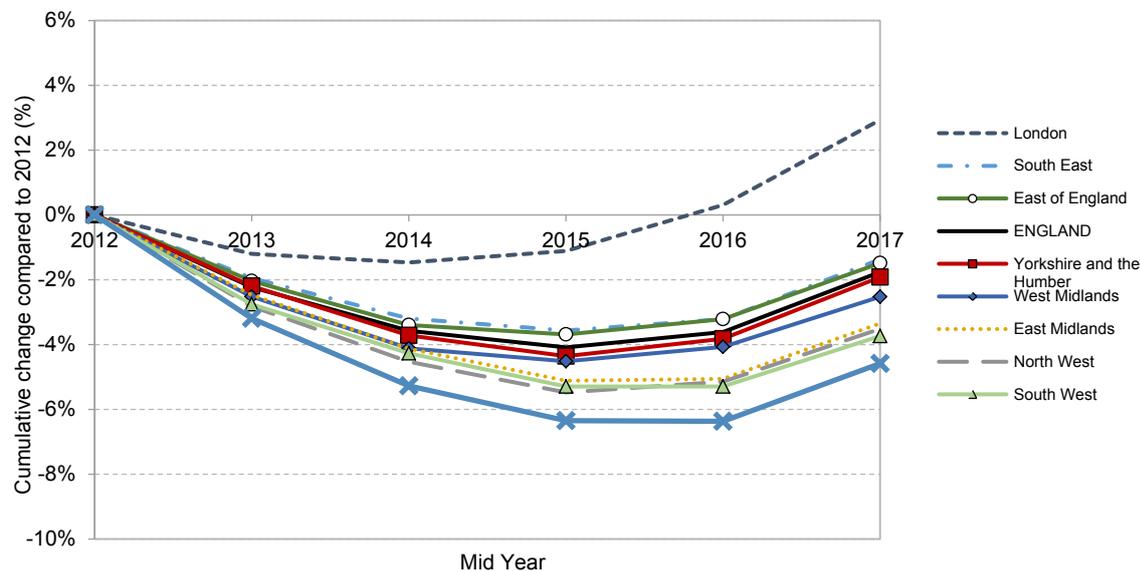
Figure 3a below shows that in 2012, all regions in England were projected to have an increase in their primary aged population (aged 5 to 10) by 2017. The increases ranged from around 14% in London to around 9% in the North West, North East, West Midlands and Yorkshire & the Humber.

**Figure 3a: Population aged 5 to 10: Percentage change compared to 2012**



In 2012, the regional population aged 11 to 15 was projected to decline in all regions in 2013 and 2014 (see figure 3b below), with stabilisation projected to occur in 2015 for London but not until 2016 for the other regions. By 2017, the secondary age population was projected to be increasing for all regions.

**Figure 3b: Population aged 11 to 15: Percentage change compared to 2012**



## 6. Consultation on plans to redesign the projections

The department is planning to review the methodology and timescale of the national pupil projections over the next few months, with the intention of implementing any changes for the 2016 pupil projections. These projections will use the ONS mid-2014 national population projections due to be released in October/November 2015.

We would like to invite users of the national pupil projection data to tell us of anything we should consider or take account of in this review. This could include the content of the projections, the time period they cover and the tables and charts produced. We would be particularly interested to receive information on any deadlines associated with your usage of the projections, either existing or potential additional uses which our publication timetable currently prevents.

Please send your comments to [PupilPopulation.PROJECTIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:PupilPopulation.PROJECTIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk) or the address at the bottom of this document by the end of September 2015.

## 7. List of tables and charts

The following tables are available in excel format on the department's statistics website:

**Table 1:**

State-funded schools: Full-time equivalent number of pupils (aged up to and including 15) by type of school in England: January 2003 to 2015 (actual) – January 2016 to 2024 (projection)

**Table 2:**

All schools: Full-time equivalent number of pupils by age group and by type of school in England: January 2008 to 2015 (actual) – January 2016 to 2019 (projection)

**Table 3a:**

State-funded schools: Comparison of the full-time equivalent number of pupils aged 5 to 15 based on varying net migration assumptions in the underlying population projections in England: January 2015 (actual) - January 2016 to 2024 (projection)

**Table 3b:**

State-funded schools: Comparison of the full-time equivalent number of pupils aged 5 to 15 based on varying fertility assumptions in the underlying population projections in England: January 2015 (actual) - January 2016 to 2024 (projection)

**Table 3c:**

State-funded schools: Comparison of the full-time equivalent number of pupils aged 5 to 15 based on varying population assumptions in the underlying population projections in England: January 2015 (actual) - January 2016 to 2024 (projection)

**Figure 1:**

Maintained nursery and state-funded primary and secondary schools: Full-time equivalent (FTE) number of pupils (aged up to and including 15) by type of school: January 1970 to 2015 (actual) – January 2016 to 2024 (projection)

**Figure 2:**

Comparison of the full-time equivalent number of pupils aged 5 to 15 based on varying the assumptions that underlie the ONS population projections in England: January 2015 (actual) – January 2016 to 2023 (projection)

**Figure 3a:**

Population aged 5 to 10 (age at mid-year): Percentage change in population size compared to 2012 by Government Office Region in England: Mid-2012 to Mid-2017. Unchanged from previous projections.

**Figure 3b:**

Population aged 11 to 15 (age at mid-year): Percentage change in population size compared to 2012 by Government Office Region in England: Mid-2012 to Mid-2017. Unchanged from previous projections.

## List of tables (cont.)

When reviewing the tables, please note the following:

<b>Date of Count</b>	Figures relate to January of the year shown. For years up to and including 2015 they are actuals from the School Census and related censuses <sup>3</sup> . Figures for 2016 and later years are projected.
<b>School Types</b>	<p><b>“Maintained”</b> refers to public sector schools maintained by local authorities.</p> <p><b>“State-funded schools”</b> include maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, all academy types, alternative provision settings, City Technology Colleges, Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools.</p> <p><b>“State-funded primary schools”</b> include maintained primary schools, primary academies and primary Free Schools.</p> <p><b>“State-funded secondary schools”</b> include maintained secondary and all-through schools, secondary and all-through academies, secondary academies and all-through Free Schools, City Technology Colleges, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools. However, state-funded secondary schools do not include all-through special schools and special academies.</p> <p><b>“State-funded special schools”</b> include maintained special schools, special academies, special Free Schools and general hospital schools.</p> <p><b>“Non-maintained special schools”</b> constitute a separate category of school.</p> <p><b>“Alternative provision settings”</b><sup>4</sup> include pupil referral units, alternative provision academies and alternative provision Free Schools, but not other types of alternative provision.</p> <p><b>“Independent schools”</b> include all schools that are not state funded, except non-maintained special schools.</p>
<b>Age (measured at the previous 31 August except where stated)</b>	<p><b>Under 5</b> = ages up to and including rising 5s.</p> <p><b>Rising 5s</b> = pupils aged 4 at previous 31 August who became 5 by 31 December.</p> <p><b>Primary ages</b> = 5 to 10.</p> <p><b>Secondary ages</b> = 11 to 15.</p> <p><b>Post-16</b> = 16 and over.</p>
<b>Part-time and full-time equivalent</b>	Part-time pupils assumed to represent half of a full-time pupil to give totals as full-time equivalents. Until 2002, only pupils aged under-5 could be recorded as part-time. From 2003 to 2011 inclusive, state-funded schools could record part-time pupils of any age. From 2012, all pupils aged 5 to 15 as at the previous 31 August are recorded by state-funded schools as full-time. However, all pupils aged under 5 or over 15, and pupils of any age in independent schools, may be recorded as part-time.

<sup>3</sup> The related censuses are the School Level Annual School Census and Pupil Referral Unit Census. In this document “School Census” is taken to include these related censuses.

<sup>4</sup> Only registered alternative provision settings that are directly state-funded are included here. Non-registered alternative provision settings (which can be indirectly state funded where places are commissioned by schools and local authorities) are not included.

## 11. Background notes on the pupil projections

### Projection Method

The Pupil Projection Model (PPM) produces national projections for the number of pupils in England by age and school type. It uses ONS population estimates and projections, information on birth registrations in England and data derived from the School Census. Population estimates and projections are modified from their original mid-year basis to simulate the definitions used in the School Census (a January count with pupils' ages as at the previous 31 August). A comparison of a series of past years of pupil numbers and population estimates provides a starting point for the PPM. School Census data inform assumptions about future proportions of the school population by type of school. The 2015 PPM, as in 2014, uses the most recent ONS population projections, based on the population at mid-2012. These population projections incorporate findings from the 2011 UK Census.<sup>5</sup>

Population projections are based on estimates of the resident population. The population includes all usually resident persons, whatever their nationality. Long-term migrants are defined as individuals who change their country of usual residence for a period of at least a year, so that the country of destination becomes the country of usual residence. Pupils who are short-term migrants, and are staying in England for less than a year are included in the School Census and are therefore reflected in the pupil projections. They are not separately identifiable.

### Relationship with School Capacity publication

This release presents the Department's main national-level pupil projections. The department's data on school capacity is produced by a different methodology and includes local authorities' own forecasts of future pupil numbers, based on local-level information, such as inter-authority movement of pupils. This data is made available as part of the underlying dataset for the basic need allocations. The most recent data was '*School capacity: academic year 2013 to 2014*' which was published on 12 February 2015 and which is available [here](#).

The national pupil projections presented in the current release are produced within the Department, at national level only. They are based on the mid-2012 population projections from ONS and cover a longer time period (up to 2024) than in the school capacity release. Differences in the methodologies used by individual local authorities for pupil number forecasts mean that the aggregated totals in the school capacity release will differ from the national-level projections presented here, but the trends in both are broadly similar.

### Changes from previous releases

As in the 2013 and 2014 releases, this release does not include projections for pupils aged 16 and over. The projections that were included in releases prior to 2013 were aligned to overall 16-18 participation rate projections produced for the Education Funding Agency 16-19 Funding Statement. This has been replaced with a much simpler funding letter to 16-19 education and training providers which does not include projections that are comparable with the pre-16 projections in this publication. This is a permanent change.

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<sup>5</sup> Further information on the methodology and assumptions underlying the ONS 2012-based population projections is available [here](#).

Consistent with the December 2013 and July 2014 publications, this Official Statistic update removes dual-registered pupils from schools classified as Alternative Provision Setting. This removes double counting in pupil numbers from this school type, which was present in previous statistical releases. For this reason the time series from 2002 to 2010 has been removed.

## **Accuracy**

Actual pupil counts for years up to 2015 have been derived from data collected via the School Census. The figures for 2016 and later years are projections and are subject to increasing margins of error. There is a greater level of uncertainty for the smaller categories, such as particular age bands or smaller categories of school. Factors which may contribute to differences between projections and actual data include:

- the underlying population trend, which depends on assumptions about births, mortality and migration;
- differences between the short term assumptions made in the mid-2012 ONS national pupil projections and actual data which has subsequently become available;
- participation among pupils aged under 5 and over 15, which may differ from the rates assumed;
- school reorganisation by local authorities, which may affect the balance between primary and secondary schools;
- variations in the proportions attending different school types, such as independent schools;
- the introduction of new Government policy.

With regard to pupil referral units and alternative provision, a new approach to exclusions is was trialled in 2014 in 11 local authorities where schools retained responsibility for provision for pupils whom they had excluded. It has not yet been confirmed whether this trial will be made permanent policy. Any change could lead to some reduction in the future number of pupils in pupil referral units and alternative provision academies and Free Schools, and corresponding increases in the number of pupils in other types of school. No forecast of the potential effect of any confirmed new approach has been made in these projections.

Pupil projections rely heavily on the population projections produced by ONS which are widely used across government for planning purposes. National population projections are National Statistics, which means they undergo regular quality assurance reviews and are produced free from political influence. The projections are produced using demographic assumptions about future levels of fertility, life-expectancy and net-migration, based on analysis of trends and expert advice. The assumptions are agreed in liaison with the devolved administrations, following consultation with key users of projections in each country and advice from an expert academic advisory panel.

## **Revision**

The Pupil Projection Model (PPM) is updated annually. This publication was produced using the final July 2015 PPM and there are no plans to make any revisions to this publication. If a

revision is necessary, this will be made in accordance with the Department's revisions policy<sup>6</sup>. Updated population projections are expected to be released in 2016 and will make use of data obtained from the January 2016 School Census and mid-2014 ONS national population projections, due out in October/November 2015.

## 8. Want more?

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Want previously published figures?	They are still available via SFR links. For the latest data, visit Statistics: Pupil Projections ( <a href="#">here</a> ).
Want more information on trends in schools, pupils and their characteristics?	Latest and previous releases of the SFR 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics', can be found <a href="#">here</a>
Want more information on population projections?	Information on population projections and the ONS projections methodology can be found <a href="#">here</a> .

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## 9. Got a query? Like to give feedback?

Any enquiries should be addressed to the following:

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If from the media	Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. 020 7783 8300
If non-media	Helen Bray IFD Analysis, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.  <a href="mailto:PupilPopulation.PROJECTIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk">Email: PupilPopulation.PROJECTIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk</a>

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<sup>6</sup>Details of the Department's revision policy can be found [here](#).



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