National pupil projections – future trends in pupil numbers: July 2018

Quality and methodology information document

July 2018

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Introduction

This document provides background information on the 'National pupil projections – future trends in pupil numbers (July 2018)' statistical first release. It explains the concepts and methods used to calculate the figures and provides an overview of the data sources and other relevant information.

Projection methods

The Pupil Projection Model (PPM) produces national projections for the number of pupils in England by age and school phases and types. It uses ONS population estimates and projections, information on birth registrations in England and data derived from the School Census.

The 2018 PPM uses the most recent ONS population projections, based on the estimated population at mid-2016, as well as ONS's monthly birth figures for 2016. The 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).

Census data up to and including 2018 is used to create participation rates, calculated as a series of historic census totals measured against population estimates. These provide a starting point for the PPM, with the school census data informing assumptions about future proportions of the school population by type of school. Separate figures, both historically and into the future, are calculated for part time and full time pupils.

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, and in such cases their 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.

Key drivers to change in the projections

These pupil projections are based on ONS's national population projections, alongside participation rates, and therefore are directly affected by the assumptions made by ONS. Changes in the population who are of school age is largely driven by an increase in the birth rate rather than direct immigration. However, that birth rate is in turn affected by any increase in the number of children born to non-UK born women (compared to those born to non UK-born women). The number of children born to non-UK born women increased by around 75 per cent between 2002 and 2013 (the years in which many children currently in schools were born), although this was a period of increased births generally.

However, after a decade of increases the total number of births in England dropped in 2013 and have remained stable in the three years since. ONS's short-term birth assumptions in their 2016 national population projections were reduced as a result of these changes.

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. It provides forecasts by national curriculum year group whereas these national pupil projections forecast by actual age.

The school capacity data is published annual as an official statistical release. The most recent data was 'School capacity: academic year 2016 to 2017' which was published on 15 March 2018 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-2016 population projections from ONS and cover a longer time period (up to 2027) 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.

Change from previous projections

As for the last few years, this release does not include projections for pupils aged 16 and over. The projections 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.

Consistent with the July 2014 onwards publications, this release takes out dual-registered pupils from schools classified as alternative provision settings. This removes double counting in pupil numbers from this school type, which was present in previous statistical releases. For this reason, the alternative provision data from 2002 to 2010 has been removed.

Accuracy

Actual pupil counts for years up to 2018 have been derived from data collected via the School Census. The figures for 2019 and later years are projections and are subject to

increasing margins of error. There is a greater level of uncertainty for smaller and more detailed 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-2016 ONS national pupil projections, and used in the model, and their mid-2015 population estimates data which was incorporated into the 2017 model;

- 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 policies affecting schools or population.

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.

Revisions and further information

The Pupil Projection Model (PPM) is updated annually. This publication was produced using the final July 2018 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

The ONS national population projections which are used as a base for these pupil projections are updated every two years. Any pupil projections produced in 2019 will therefore also use the mid-2016 ONS population projections, but with the addition of 2017 ONS mid-year estimated population figures, 2017 births and January 2019 school census data.

Department for Education

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