



Department  
for Education

# **Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2019**

**Methodology document**

**June 2019**

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## About this release

This document provides an overview of the data used in the production of the Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2019 statistical publication.

It provides information on the data sources, their coverage and quality and explains the methodology used in producing the data.

It is based on the 'Office for National Statistics' [guidelines for measuring statistical quality](#).

## Feedback

We are changing the way our releases look and welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at: [Schools.STATISTICS@education.gov.uk](mailto:Schools.STATISTICS@education.gov.uk)

# About the output

## Data collection

Schools and local authorities are required to provide the Department for Education (DfE) with a school census return (using a DfE-designed survey instrument) covering a wide range of information on the characteristics of schools and the pupils within them in January each year. Additionally, independent schools, general hospital schools and alternative provision provide (via the local authority) details on the number and characteristics of their pupils at this time. Guidance on what is collected in each of the censuses can be found at the links below:

[School Census Guidance](#)

[Independent School Census Guidance](#)

[General Hospital School Census Guidance](#)

[Alternative Provision Census Guidance](#)

## Punctuality

The proposed month of publication is announced on gov.uk at least twelve months in advance and precise dates are announced at least four weeks prior to publication. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, the change and the reasons for it would be announced.

The figures in 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics' are initially available internally approximately two months after the census data collection is completed and the data has been cleaned. The pre-announced publication date is chosen in order to allow enough time to produce and quality assure all the tables in the release, but ensure that the data is still current and relates to the academic year in which it was collected.

## Compliance with Code of Practice for Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority designated these statistics as National Statistics in [October 2017](#), in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed. Since being assigned National Statistics we have continued to make improvements to ensure the release complies with the Act. These include:

- Extension of the release to include pupil characteristics breakdowns on all ages rather than just those of compulsory school age.
- More comprehensive cross-border migration underlying data.
- For the 2019 release, we have carried out a review of the coherence of the release. This has resulted in reducing the number of accompanying tables without losing any of the information published (47 tables down to 16). This included:
  - combining tables covering multiple school types to improve navigation,
  - focussing the main free school meal metric in the accompanying tables and providing the alternative metrics in the underlying data, and
  - adding national, regional and local authority level information in the underlying data and an additional dataset looking at data by school characteristics, and
  - reviewing the relevance of old school characteristic breakdowns such as admissions policy (comprehensive, selective, modern, etc.) and status of school (community, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled, etc.); and
  - produced new tables showing school characteristics at national level and infant free school meal uptake by local authority.

## Accuracy and reliability

### Data coverage, quality and validation

For the school census return, all schools that were open on school census day, 17 January 2019, were required to submit a school census return via their local authorities. Similarly, all open registered independent schools and general hospital schools were required to submit their respective returns and all 152 local authorities were required to submit their details of their alternative provision in the alternative provision census.

For the school census and alternative provision census, data were loaded directly into the DfE bespoke data collection system; COLLECT (Collections On-Line for Learning, Education, Children and Teachers). The data passed through several phases of checking and data cleaning. The data that were loaded into COLLECT were subject to a pre-agreed series of validation checks to aid the submission of accurate data. Extensive guidance and support was provided to schools and local authorities to help them ensure the data they provide was as accurate as possible. The guidance aimed to reduce the impact of any local variations by collecting data in as consistent a format as possible, and by having extensive phases of checking and sign off.

The independent and general hospital school census returns were either loaded directly into COLLECT by the schools themselves, or they submitted a paper version of the return to the department, where it was then loaded into COLLECT on their behalf. The school was then asked to check that the data had been loaded correctly into COLLECT.

### Independent School data quality 2019

In spring 2019, the department expected 2,319 schools to return data through the school level annual school census (SLASC). Data was received from 1,935 schools within the specified window for this data collection. Data received outside of this window has not been used within this publication.

Where data was not received on time, steps to impute the data have been taken as follows. This affects 384 schools.

#### Step 1 – Imputation from previous year

Where a school returned data under the same identifier (LAEstab) for 2018, this data has been rolled forward and used for 2019 without any modification. This approach has been used for 348 schools.

#### Step 2 – Imputation from previous year (new LAEstab)

Where a school can be identified under a different LAEstab number in 2018, the data has again been rolled forward from 2018 and used for 2019 without modification, except to apply the 2019 LAEstab number. This approach has been used for 3 schools.

### Step 3 – Imputation of new school, using capacity

Where a school could not be identified in a previous year (i.e. the school is new), we have used school capacity and current pupil capacity collected on get information about schools. This data shows that where available, the average current capacity of these new schools is filled to 40% of full capacity<sup>1</sup>. This rate has been applied to all of these remaining new schools. This approach has been used for 33 schools.

The average current capacity for all new schools who have returned data was at a similar level, 39%.

#### **Summary of data used from SLASC**

Year collected	Description	Number of schools	Number of pupils imputed
2019	Data returned during collection window	1,935	522,661
2018	Expected in 2019, not returned, 2018 data available under same identifiers	348	57,585
2018	Expected in 2019, not returned, 2018 data available under different identifier	3	234
2018	Expected in 2019, no data available, imputed at 40% of school capacity	33	467

#### **Characteristics**

No characteristics, such as gender, age and SEN, have been derived for the pupils in the 33 imputed schools. Where data from 2018 has been used, no modification of these characteristics has been made.

#### **Further information**

352 schools are derived from their 2018 record. 1,868 schools returned data in both 2018 and 2019 and have shown an overall population increase of 0.35%. If applying this to the population of those that have been derived from 2018 (57,764 pupils), we estimate a

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<sup>1</sup> New schools will often initially only fill the first year of each Key Stage.

potential growth of 202 pupils. This would represent 0.03% of the independent school total.

Given the low change, no uprating for expected growth has been applied to the schools derived from 2018.

## **Funding and accountability**

Data from the census are used for funding and school accountability. As the funding and accountability systems are similar for all schools it is unlikely that these cause significant bias in the data reported. As funding or accountability processes change it is possible that schools increasingly focus on ensuring certain items within the census are accurate and up to date. When such changes occur we carefully monitor the data provided by schools to try to detect changes in data caused by the changes in the funding or accountability regime.

There are no planned revisions to this Statistical Publication. However, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the Departmental revisions policy.

## **Disclosure control**

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires us to take reasonable steps to ensure that our published or disseminated statistics protect confidentiality.

The data published in this release does not reveal the identity of individuals. Where there is a single pupil with a particular characteristic, prior knowledge of that circumstance would be required to determine which pupil it is. We deliberately avoid crossing characteristics in this release, in order to ensure that knowing one piece of information about a pupil would not reveal any further information. By doing this, we can avoid suppression or rounding which means that all published tables at local or national level should be calculable from the published underlying school level data. This in turn means that the practical utility of the statistics, particularly the school level data, is not constrained.

## Use of the data

There is widespread use of data from the school census. In addition to mainstream and specialist media coverage of our statistical publications, these data are used by a range of companies. These include housing websites such as Rightmove and Zoopla, specialist publications such as the good schools guide, organisations providing data analysis services to schools such as Fischer Family Trust. The data is well used by the academic research community (e.g. Durham University), education think tanks (Education Policy Institute). It is also, used by central government (DfE, Ofsted, other government departments).

The published data are used frequently in answers to parliamentary questions and public enquiries, including those made under the Freedom of Information Act.

## Accessibility

The statistical publication text is published in pdf format so that it is accessible to all users irrespective of their choice of software. Care is also taken to ensure that the document meets accessibility guidelines. Key figures are highlighted in the publication text, which also draws out the key messages such as changes over time. Small tables or charts illustrating key figures are also included in the text.

The publication is accompanied by formatted Excel tables with clear titles which allow users to find more detail than can be provided in the text. Any important limitations or inconsistencies in the data, are mentioned in footnotes so that users do not have to refer to the text or this document. Information about how each of the individual data items is aggregated to higher levels can be found in the pupil level code sets section of the school census guidance.

Underlying data are published in flat csv format which helps enable machine readability and does not restrict users to a particular software package.



## Definitions and coverage

Definitions	<p>The pupil characteristics data in this release are submitted to the department by schools as part of the school census collection.</p> <p>The definitions of all the characteristics are listed in the <a href="#">school census guidance</a>.</p>
Coverage	<p>The submission of the school census returns, including a set of named pupil records, is a statutory requirement on state-funded schools under <a href="#">Section 537A of the Education Act 1996</a>. A census return is required for all schools in January each year. This is to ensure schools provide pupil level data in a consistent manner that can support comparisons.</p> <p>Completion of the school level annual school census by registered independent schools is a statutory requirement under the <a href="#">Education (Independent Educational Provision in England) (Provision of Information) Regulations 2010</a>.</p> <p>The submission of the alternative provision census returns, including a named set of pupil records, is a statutory requirement on alternative provision providers under the <a href="#">Education (Information about Children in Alternative Provision) (England) Regulations 2007</a>.</p> <p>All data is as reported for school census day, 17 January 2019.</p>



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