Department for Education

School Capacity (SCAP) Survey 2025

Guide for local authorities

May 2025

Contents

Summary

How local authorities should collect and submit data for the annual school capacity survey.

The annual school capacity survey (SCAP) collects information on:

- School capacity: primary, secondary, and specialist provision[1] capacity for the current academic year.
- Pupil number forecasts:
    - for primary mainstream, pupil number forecasts for the next 5 academic years;
    - for secondary mainstream, pupil number forecasts for the next 7 academic years;
    - for primary specialist placements, pupil number forecasts for the next 5 academic years; and
    - for secondary specialist placements, pupil number forecasts for the next 7 academic years.
- Planned places: plans for changes to the number of primary and secondary places for the next 3 academic years

SCAP is a statutory collection, except where stated in this guidance.

We publish the data you provide in the school capacity statistical releases.

The collection opens on **Monday 2 June 2025**.

You must submit your SCAP return by **Friday 25 July 2025**.

We advise you to start loading your data no later than **Friday 11 July 2025.**

For questions about this guidance or any issues you are unable to resolve email the Pupil Place Planning Data Team at SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk for advice.

[1] For special schools and special educational needs units and resourced provision in mainstream schools only.

Who this publication is for

This guidance is for:

Local authority staff involved in compiling and submitting data for SCAP.

Changes from the previous survey

Details of what's changed since the last survey:

- **There have been no changes to the collection itself, the data requirements, or the COLLECT system**, however, we have simplified the language used in this guidance to make it easier to read and follow.
- We have added some more examples in the ‘Recording capacity by year group’ section.
- We have added more to the forecast data required and methodology sections to better explain the concepts and processes.
- For those new to forecasting or for LAs reviewing their methodology, we have been more explicit in our advice.
- We have indicated areas that may be queried during the data cleaning process (not an exhaustive list).
- **There have been no changes to the sections and ordering of this guidance.**

Which schools to include

Explains which schools are in scope for SCAP

Mainstream schools

Survey returns must include mainstream schools with capacity in any of the year groups from reception to year 11 on **1 May 2025**. This includes:

- local authority maintained schools
- academies, including:
    - free schools
    - city technology colleges
    - university technical colleges
    - studio schools

Survey returns must exclude:

- nursery schools and nursery units within schools
- pupil referral units and alternative provision settings
- mainstream independent schools
- 16-19 establishments

Special schools (capacity return)

Survey returns must include special schools with capacity in any of the year groups from reception to year 11 on **1 May 2025**. This includes:

- local authority maintained special schools
- special academies, including special free schools
- non-maintained special schools[2]

Survey returns must exclude:

- nursery schools and nursery units within schools
- pupil referral units and alternative provision settings[3]
- independent special schools
- 16-19 establishments

[2] Whilst LA commissioning processes for NMSS may differ from other state-funded schools, for the purposes of this collection NMSSs are considered to be state-funded as they are maintained by way of a funding agreement with the Secretary of State and receive capital funding directly from the DfE for the purposes of condition and general maintenance.

[3] Due to local variation in alternative provision delivery models, we are not collecting capacity data on alternative provision settings as part of SCAP25. However, the DfE will keep this position under review for future collections.

How to determine net capacity

Explains how to calculate the net capacity for reporting to the school capacity survey.

The method used to calculate the net capacity figure that is reported in the school capacity survey depends on whether the school is a local authority maintained school, an academy, or a special school.

The net capacity of a school will not always equal exactly the sum of the capacity by year groups, for a variety of reasons. The 'Recording Capacity by year group' section gives more details.

For mainstream schools, **you should not record capacity figures in SCAP that are lower than indicated by a Net Capacity Assessment or the Funding Agreement**. We will only accept lower net capacity figures in exceptional circumstances where the reduction is likely to be long-term. For example, where a school operates below net capacity for a period as part of a strategy to improve school performance. We would expect this to have been discussed between the relevant Regional Director, local authority, academy trust, and DfE Pupil Place Planning team as appropriate. You should record details of such cases when prompted in the notes section.

Capacity for local authority maintained schools

The net capacity of a maintained school is calculated using a net capacity assessment (NCA). This is based on the net area of all buildings that are available to that school. It should also include:

- all extra places that have been added to the school (even though they may not yet be in use);
- any classrooms that have been mothballed; and
- non-teaching space that has been re-designated as a classroom.

Further guidance on calculating the net capacity of schools is available.

Capacity for academy schools

We would usually expect the capacity of an academy reported in the school capacity survey to be based on the capacity recorded in the school's funding agreement, which in turn should have been based on the most recent net capacity assessment.

Where an NCA has been carried out, either through the Department for Education's (DfE) NCA programme or by some other means, this net capacity figure should be reported in SCAP.

If using an academy's funding agreement as the source of capacity information and a change has been or is to be made to the physical capacity of the school, you must take account of this change in the total net capacity figure reported in SCAP. When changing physical capacity, trusts should first consult the guidance for making significant changes and follow the process where required to gain approval for the change. Whether approval is needed or not, in all cases trusts should take action to amend the capacity figure in their funding agreement and on Get Information about Schools.

Where changes to an academy funding agreement have not yet been made, you may find the following examples helpful in completing the SCAP capacity return.

If the number on roll in a school is higher than its capacity, you must enter an explanation prior to submission, which we will review during the data cleaning process.

Example 1: An academy has reduced its Published Admission Number (PAN) below that stated in the funding agreement, but no buildings have been removed or re-purposed.

Funding agreement capacity	PAN	PAN x number of year groups	Number on roll	SCAP capacity
750	120	600	598	750

The reduction or limiting of PAN should have been carried out in accordance with the admissions code but does not require a deed of variation to the funding agreement nor a change to the capacity reported in SCAP. The physical space continues to be available. You should continue to record the funding agreement capacity as the net capacity in your return.

The capacity by year group fields should reflect the lower PAN of 120 for the year groups which were admitted under the lower PAN of 120.

Example 2: An academy has its PAN set above that indicated by the funding agreement, but no buildings have been added. The number on roll continues to be lower than the funding agreement.

Funding agreement capacity	PAN	PAN x number of year groups	Number on roll	SCAP capacity
750	180	900	654	750

An increased or high PAN may be possible where numbers on roll are low in upper year groups. There is no certainty that the physical space could accommodate the total number indicated by the PAN multiplied by the number of year groups.

You should continue to record the funding agreement capacity as the net capacity in SCAP. The capacity by year group should reflect the higher PAN of 180 for the year groups which were admitted under the higher PAN of 180.

However, if the academy is confident that higher PAN can be accommodated across all year groups and they will continue to set PAN at this level in the long-term, this higher capacity can be reported in SCAP and they should seek to amend the capacity figure in the funding agreement.

Example 3: An academy has its PAN set above that indicated by the funding agreement, but no buildings have been added. The number on roll reflects higher admission numbers.

Funding agreement capacity	PAN	PAN x number of year groups	Number on roll	SCAP capacity
750	180	900	897	900

The number on roll consistently reflects uptake of the higher PAN. There is a high degree of certainty that the physical space can accommodate the total number indicated by the PAN multiplied by the number of year groups.

The PAN multiplied by number of year groups should be recorded as the net capacity. The capacity by year group should reflect the higher PAN. The trust should seek to amend the capacity figure in the funding agreement.

Example 4: An academy's admissions are higher than the funding agreement capacity figure and PAN.

Funding agreement capacity	PAN	PAN x number of year groups	Number on roll	SCAP capacity
750	180	900	1025	900

As the academy is under no obligation to admit above PAN or the funding agreement capacity, the higher admission numbers reflected in number on roll are uncertain and should not be used to determine capacity. However, there is a high degree of certainty that the physical space can accommodate the total number indicated by the PAN.

You should record the PAN multiplied by the number of year groups as the net capacity in your return. The capacity by year group should reflect the higher PAN.

You should record notes to explain the pupils in excess of capacity, particularly for academies in areas of school place pressure. We may undertake further investigation with the academy trust in these cases.

Example 5: An academy with a sixth form has its PAN set above the capacity indicated by the funding agreement but no buildings have been added. The numbers on roll continue to be lower than the funding agreement capacity figure.

Funding agreement capacity	**PAN**	**PAN x number of year groups**	**Number on roll**	**SCAP capacity**
900 including 100 sixth form (implying 160 each for years 7-11)	170 (years 7-11)	950 including 100 sixth form	891 including 51 sixth form	900

There is uncertainty on whether the physical space could accommodate the total number indicated by the PAN multiplied by the number of year groups plus sixth form. The higher PAN for years 7-11 may only be able to be accommodated by temporary use of sixth form capacity.

You should continue to record the funding agreement capacity as the capacity in your return. The capacity by year group for years 7-11 should reflect the higher PAN of 170.

You should report a sixth form capacity using the guidance on calculating sixth form capacity.

Example 6: An academy no longer admits or has never admitted to the sixth form, but the funding agreement contains a 6th form capacity. No changes have been made to the building since the funding agreement was set. There are two examples here, one where PAN is higher than the funding agreement intended, and one where PAN is at the funding agreement level.

Funding agreement capacity	PAN	PAN x number of year groups	Number on roll	SCAP capacity
750 which includes 150 sixth form	135	675	682 (0 in 6th form)	750 (0 sixth form)
750 which includes 150 sixth form	120	600	598 (0 in 6th form)	750 (0 sixth form)

For the purposes of SCAP, the closure or non-opening of a 6th form will not change the physical net capacity of a school. Removal of the sixth form provision should have been carried out in accordance with the admissions code and significant change process.

You should continue to record the full funding agreement as the net capacity in your return. The capacity by year group for years 7-11 should reflect the PAN.

Where the sixth form is no longer operating, a zero can be entered in the sixth form capacity field.

Capacity for sixth forms/post 16

SCAP includes a field for sixth form capacity and a field for the calculation method used. We would not expect these fields to change between surveys unless there has been a physical change, or a new measurement method used (e.g. as a result of an updated NCA or an NCA has been carried out for the first time).

The school's total net capacity figure should include the sixth form capacity. The sixth form capacity field should reflect the number of places out of the overall net capacity related to the sixth form.

Option 1: Net Capacity Assessment (Preferred method)

Use the data within the net capacity assessment tool to calculate the sixth form capacity. The data required are:

- net capacity
- number of age groups
- average sixth form stay on rate
- year 12 admission, if applicable

To calculate a sixth form capacity figure: take the net capacity and deduct the mainstream year group PAN multiplied by number of year groups.

Option 2: Funding agreement (for academies)

Use the post-16/sixth form pupil capacity reported in the academies funding agreement.

Funding agreements can be found under the workforce and finance section of the school performance service.

Examples 5 and 6 in the 'Capacity for academy schools' relate to sixth form places.

Other options for calculating capacity

If options 1 and 2 are not suitable, you may use one of the following methodologies. If you use one of these methodologies, we may ask for information about why options 1 and 2 are not suitable.

Only use these options if it will result in a significantly different but more accurate sixth form capacity measurement than using options 1 or 2. If the sixth form capacity determined by any of the following options are similar (e.g. within 10%) to that under options 1 or 2, then please report the sixth form capacity using options 1 or 2.

Option 3: PAN or capacity by year group-based measure

Subtract the total capacity by year groups for years 7 to 11 from the overall school capacity to leave a nominal sixth form capacity.

This method is not acceptable where you know that the school is operating at a substantially lower PAN than the capacity in the NCA or funding agreement.

Option 4: typical operating style

Use knowledge of your schools' typical operating style. For example, if you have had a conversation with the school and they have stated their sixth form capacity, which may differ from other methods but suits their operating style.

Only use the typical operating style if it better reflects 6th form capacity that is significantly different to options 1, 2 or 3.

Option 5: Other options for calculating sixth form capacity

If you use a method not listed and it results in the same figure that would have been reached via options 1 to 4, then report that method rather than 'other'.

If you chose this option, add a note to COLLECT to inform us how you calculated the capacity.

We would not expect you to use this option if you have used any of options 1-4 in previous SCAP returns.

Capacity for specialist provision

This is the third year we are collecting capacity data for special schools and SEN units and resourced provision within mainstream schools. Special schools sit outside the admissions code and have a duty to admit pupils for whom the school is named in their EHCP. We recognise that some special schools will not have previously attempted to assess or define their available capacity. For the purposes of reporting capacity data in SCAP, LAs should refer to the following sources of information.

LAs should report the total available specialist capacity. We are not requiring LAs to report capacity for different types of SEN provision or categories of need.

Recommended Option – Special School Net Capacity Assessment

The DfE has produced a new Special School Net Capacity Assessment Tool, designed to support local authorities to calculate the total pupil capacity of a special school. The tool has been designed to resemble the mainstream net capacity assessment tool used for mainstream schools, but with adaptions to reflect the additional complexity and space requirements of specialist provision.

Use of the Special School NCA tool is not compulsory, but we would strongly encourage any LAs seeking to establish the capacity of a special school for the first time to use the new tool as a guide. The tool is currently available as a ‘Beta’ version and we expect to continue to refine and develop the tool over time based on feedback from local authorities. Any LAs seeking access to the Special School NCA tool should email SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk to receive the latest copy of the tool and guidance.

As the Special School NCA tool remains a ‘Beta’ version, it is intended as a guide for available capacity in line with relevant space standards. It may not necessarily reflect capacity in use or appropriately reflect every school’s unique circumstances. Ultimately, it is for LAs to determine whether a Special School NCA accurately reflects the capacity of the school in question, or whether it may be more appropriate to rely on alternative sources of information when reporting the capacity of the school in question.

Other Sources of Special School Capacity Information

If a special school NCA is not available, LAs can use other sources of data. In rough order of preference, these data sources include (but are not limited to):

- Any capacity figure for the school that may have been agreed as part of a significant change request, either as a prescribed alteration to a maintained school or as part of request for a significant change to an open academy.
- The school's 'planned number of places' as per the schools funding agreement (academies only)
- The number of 'funded places' as agreed as part of ESFA's High Needs Place Funding process (academies and institutions funded by ESFA directly only)[4]
- Typical operating figure – any capacity figure that may be used or understood locally e.g. to help inform pupil placements and local strategic planning.
- A school's self-reported capacity as captured in Get information about Schools

LAs should specify the source of each special school's capacity information in the relevant field.

We expect LAs and schools to work co-operatively to establish an appropriate capacity figure that best reflects the available capacity in that institution. For their part, schools should endeavour as far as is practical to support any LA efforts to establish an agreed capacity figure for their school, for example by facilitating access to conduct a net capacity assessment.

LAs and schools should note that the capacity information reported in SCAP is intended for planning purposes only. It does not have any wider statutory implication in respect of special schools' responsibilities under the 2014 Childrens and Families Act (i.e. it has no legal bearing on whether a particular placement at said school may or may not be appropriate), or in respect of any statutory 'prescribed alteration' that may apply, or any other relevant legislation. If a local authority and a school cannot agree a mutually acceptable capacity figure then DfE will take the LA's determination of the school's capacity as final for the purposes of the SCAP25 collection as the responsibility for ensuring a sufficient supply of places rests with local authorities.

LAs do not need to provide a breakdown of capacity by year group. For all-through schools, LAs should provide capacity split by primary and secondary. See 'Recording separate primary and secondary capacity' section. For secondary schools, LAs should attempt to report the capacity available for post-16. See 'Recording sixth form/post 16 capacity' section.

SEN Units & Resourced Provision

SEN units & resourced provision are forms of specialist provision found within mainstream schools. They are distinct from instances where pupils with or without an

[4] Only where funded places are reflective of capacity. If using 'places funded' LAs should ensure that this does not result in a reported capacity higher or lower than that which could be accommodated in practice.

EHCP may be receiving special educational provision **solely in mainstream classes** (with or without additional SEN support or assistance of High Needs revenue top-up funding). Some LAs may not locally make a clear distinction between SEN units, resourced provision, or other forms of support in mainstream classes, or may use alternative terms for equivalent types of provision (Enhanced Resource Bases etc.). For the purposes of SCAP, formal SEN units and resourced provision are defined as follows:

- SEN units are special provisions within a mainstream school where the children are taught mainly within separate classes.
- Resourced provision is where places are reserved at a mainstream school for pupils with a specific type or types of SEN, but who are taught mainly within mainstream classes but require a base and some specialist facilities around the school.
- SEN Units and resourced provision will generally:
    - receive additional funding from the local authority specifically for the purpose of the provision.
    - cater for a specific type or types of SEN (e.g., autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties etc.).
    - are usually for pupils with statements or EHC plans (but could include pupils with SEN but without a statement or plan[5]).

Other indications that a particular form of special provision in mainstream settings might be consider a formal SEN units and resourced provision, is that they will generally be 'reserved' for pupils with (or awaiting) an EHCP, and placements will usually be commissioned by the LA through the EHCP process, rather than accessed by pupils utilising standard admission arrangements. They will generally sit outside the school's mainstream PAN (though exact arrangements may differ from school to school). Finally, SEN units and resourced provision will generally receive dedicated additional funding to support the specialist nature of the provision, usually in the form of receiving High Needs place funding for a certain number of specialist places, as part of the LAs local high needs funding process.[6]

LAs will need to determine the capacity of any SEN units and resourced provision within mainstream schools, though utilising a full NCA assessment may not be appropriate unless the SEN unit operates in practice as a fully self-contained unit. Key sources of capacity information for SEN units and resourced provision are likely to include:

- The recorded capacity of any SEN unit or resourced provision in the academy's funding agreement (academies only)

[5] Generally, only where such a pupil is awaiting or undergoing an EHCP assessment.

[6] See High Needs Funding Operational Guidance for more information on place vs top-up funding of SEN units and resourced provision.

- The number of ‘funded places’ agreed with the local authority as part of the LA’s high needs place funding process.
- A typical operating figure – any capacity figure that may be used or understood locally e.g. to help inform pupil placements and local strategic planning.
- The maximum number of EHCP pupils the provision could accept before it would impact the schools ability to admit pupils without EHCPs up to its stated mainstream PAN.
- The capacity of any SEN units or resourced provision as captured in Get information about Schools.
- Alternatively, local authorities may need to request this information from schools directly.

LAs do not need to provide a breakdown of SEN units or resourced provision capacity by year group. For all-through schools, LAs should provide capacity split by primary and secondary. See ‘Recording separate primary and secondary capacity’ section.

The capacity data required and how to add the data to COLLECT

Information on adding your school capacity data.

Submit the school capacity data using the COLLECT system which can be accessed using DfE Sign In. Guides for local authorities submitting data using COLLECT are available.

The school level data within the school capacity return should reflect the position as at 1 May 2025.

The list of schools and associated capacity data are prepopulated based on the lists confirmed with you in Spring 2025 and the capacity figures you provided in SCAP 2024. Any updates to this list will be from information on the Get Information About Schools system.

Recording updates to school list in COLLECT

If you have updates to the list of schools, you will need to make them in the COLLECT system.

To view the data for a school and/or update the record you will need to click on the school name. This will highlight the selected school in blue. You can then click the 'Edit' button to make the following changes.

Schools converted to academy status

For any listed schools that have since converted to academy status, you only need to change a few fields. After selecting the school, mark the school as closed. Then set the value of the 'close existing school and preserve data to create a new school (overnight)' field to 'true'.

After the overnight update, the school will appear in the 'new school' section. You can then change the governance and any of the other school details which need to be updated.

Schools that have merged

For any schools which have merged, you will need to close one or more schools and update the details of the remaining school(s). You should mark one or more of the existing schools as closed. For the remaining school(s) mark as closed and set the 'close existing school and preserve data to create a new school (overnight)' field to 'true'.

After the overnight update, you will need to update the 'new school' section to reflect the school details and combined capacity. This includes updating the:

- school name
- establishment number
- governance code
- net capacity
- capacity by year group

New schools

For any completely new schools not already in the list (not including those created by academy conversion or amalgamation), add these in the ‘new schools’ section. This includes new schools resulting from a split or other school re-organisations where data are not transferred between schools.

You must complete all data fields for the school, including the number on roll as at May 2025.

Closed schools

For any completely closed schools, mark them as closed.

Split site schools (mainstream only)

Where a school is split between different planning areas because it operates from different sites, report each site separately in the appropriate planning area. The capacity data reported should relate to each separate site.

We will prepopulate any split site previously reported using information from the previous survey. Report the main site using the school’s establishment number and report any ancillary sites using an artificial establishment number beginning with 99. This will raise a query within COLLECT. In response to the query, state the real establishment number of the school.

Use the split site indicator field for all sites.

If you are reporting a split site for the first time, you must complete all data fields for any ancillary sites in the ‘new schools’ section, including the number on roll as at May 2024. The capacity details of the main site in the ‘existing schools’ section should also be edited to be specific to the main site. See instructions in the ‘Recording updates to school list in COLLECT’ section.

This does not apply to special schools.

Recording net capacity

Each school must have a value in the net capacity field. We would not expect a significant number of schools to lose capacity each year. If a school has significantly reduced capacity since the previous collection, you must add a note in COLLECT to explain why. We may ask for further details during the data cleaning process.

Maintained schools

For local authority maintained schools, report the capacity as at 1 May 2025.

This should be based on an up-to-date net capacity assessment for each school, and not on how many children the school admits or the sum of deemed capacity by year group. An up-to-date net capacity assessment could be one carried out as part of a regular programme of updates, or one that has been carried out as a result of changes to the building or its use. We would not consider a net capacity assessment to be up to date if changes that affect pupil capacity have been made to the building or its use since the assessment was carried out.

The net capacity should exclude any SEN unit or resourced provision capacity, which should be recorded in the relevant separate fields. The net capacity assessment automatically excludes SEN unit or resourced provision capacity. Do no deduct any SEN unit or resourced provision capacity from the capacity calculated by a net capacity assessment.

If you are aware of an upcoming change to a school's capacity, you should still record the capacity as at 1 May 2025. If appropriate, report details of the upcoming change in the Planned Places return.

We may query if the reported net capacity has changed and/or is not in line with other data sources. See 'Common queries' section.

Academies

We would usually expect the capacity of an academy reported in SCAP to be based on the capacity recorded in the school's funding agreement, which in turn should have been based on the most recent net capacity assessment.

Where an NCA has been carried out, either through the Department for Education's (DfE) NCA programme or by some other means, this net capacity figure should be reported in SCAP.

This should exclude any SEN unit or resourced provision capacity, which you should record in the relevant separate fields. The capacity recorded in the funding agreement should have been based on the most recent net capacity assessment before the school converted, which automatically excludes SEN Unit or resourced provision capacity. Do

not deduct any SEN unit or resourced provision capacity from the capacity recorded in the funding agreement.

Funding agreements can be found in the workforce and finance section of the school performance tables or the academy trust website. **You must confirm capacity details with your academies to check they are up to date.**

Where an academy has repeatedly operated an admission number higher than the capacity figure in the funding agreement (and repeatedly admitted up to that higher admission number), and you expect it will continue to do so, report the academy's capacity as the 2024/25 published admission number (PAN) multiplied by the number of year groups.

Any decrease in admissions not involving a physical change to the building should be carried out in accordance with the Admissions Code, and you should continue to report the capacity based on the funding agreement.

Where physical alterations are made to buildings that will reduce net capacity, the academy/trust should follow the guidance on 'Making significant changes to an academy' to seek approval to amend the capacity figure in their funding agreements. A Net Capacity Assessment may be required. Until the physical capacity has been removed or an NCA has been carried out, you should continue to report capacity at the higher level.

Further examples on academy capacity are available in the 'How to determine net capacity' section of this guidance.

New or expanded schools

For new or expanded schools as well as for schools filling up the built capacity year-on-year, net capacity should reflect the final intended total built capacity, even if it is still filling up or based on a temporary site with limited capacity.

Free schools

For free schools, you should report the final intended capacity of the school as per the funding agreement, even if it is still filling up or based on a temporary site with limited capacity.

This should exclude any SEN unit or resourced provision capacity, which you should record in the relevant separate fields.

For free schools that opened in September 2024, capacity information has been prepopulated for you based on the funding agreement.

We will only expect you to make changes to this information if you think this is incorrect or if there has been a change to the final intended capacity of the school.

Special schools

For all special schools, report the available capacity as at 1 May 2025. As detailed the ‘How to determine net capacity’ section, this can be based on the most suitable method for the school, such as a special school net capacity assessment, funding agreement, or typical operating figure.

If you are aware of an upcoming change to a school’s capacity, you should still record the capacity as at 1 May 2025. If appropriate, report details of the upcoming change in the Planned Places return.

Recording separate primary and secondary capacity

Where the school (mainstream or special) is a middle or all-through school, you must also complete both the primary and secondary capacity fields to show how the capacity is split between the phases.

The combined figures must equal the net capacity of the school.

Do not complete these fields for only primary and only secondary schools.

For mainstream schools only, this should exclude any SEN unit or resourced provision, which you should record in the relevant separate primary and secondary fields.

For middle and all-through special schools, or SEN units and resourced provision in middle and all-through mainstream schools – if the capacity by primary and secondary is not known, then LAs should make the best approximation they can based on the information available (e.g. split by current numbers on roll in each phase).

Recording sixth form/post 16 capacity

Make sure you include sixth form or post-16 capacity within the total capacity figure for any school with post-16 provision. Where sixth form or post-16 capacity is provided, we may use this data to consider the impact of under-populated sixth forms.

For mainstream schools only, sixth form or post-16 capacity should exclude any SEN unit or resourced provision capacity in that sixth form/post-16 provision.

If you report a figure for sixth form capacity, please select the method used to calculate the capacity from the drop-down list. Unless inappropriate for a given school, report the sixth form capacity based on funding agreement or net capacity assessment. If you choose to use another method, we may query your reason for not using one of these two methods. Further guidance on sixth form capacity is available in the ‘How to determine net capacity’ section of this guidance.

For special schools with post-16 places, if the post-16 capacity is not known, then LAs should make the best approximation they can based on the information available (e.g. current numbers on roll).

Recording SEN unit/resourced provision capacity

You should NOT include the capacity of SEN units and resourced provision in the school's total capacity figure. The capacity of any SEN units and resourced provision within mainstream schools should be determined in line with the guidance set out in the 'Capacity for specialist provision' section.

For primary and secondary schools, report all SEN unit and resourced provision under 'SEN Unit Capacity' and 'RP Capacity' respectively.

Where the school with a SEN unit or resourced provision is a middle or all-through school, you must complete both the primary and secondary capacity fields to show how the total capacity is split between the phases. You must also complete the total SEN unit and RP capacity fields. If the capacity by primary and secondary is not known, then LAs should make the best approximation they can based on the information available (e.g. split by current numbers on roll in each phase).

Recording capacity by year group (mainstream only)

Capacity by year group should relate to the number of places available in each year group as at 1 May 2025. Usually, this will be the published admission number (PAN) for that year's cohort but may vary if accommodation was added or removed later (see section on 'New schools and schools where net capacity has changed').

Include any bulge classes (whether they were added at the point of entry or later) in this figure.

If a small number of additional pupils were admitted over PAN through appeals, you do not need to add this to the capacity by year group.

For mainstream schools only, this should exclude any SEN unit or resourced provision capacity.

Capacity by year group will be prepopulated using the information provided in the previous SCAP, rolled forward by 1 year (for example, the previous year 7 capacity will now be in year 8). You will only need to enter capacity by year group for the missing year(s) of entry to the school, unless any changes have been made to capacity in other year groups. You must record a capacity figure for each year group from reception to year 11 that has pupils on roll.

The sum of capacity by year group (year groups reception to 11 plus 6th form capacity) will not necessarily equal exactly the total capacity, for a variety of reasons. For example:

- An academy PAN reduction is unlikely to reduce the capacity in the funding agreement but will be reflected in the capacity of the year group(s) which have been affected by the PAN reduction.
- A bulge class accommodated in space not intended for long-term teaching, such as a library, would be reflected in the capacity by year group total but may not increase net capacity.
- A new school opened at a lower PAN than originally intended. It has now filled and is no longer classed as a new school. PAN remains at the lower level and can be reported in the capacity by year group, however net capacity must be reported as the original final intended capacity.

PAN changes without changes to net capacity

PAN changes where net capacity is not changing should only be reflected in the capacity of the year group(s) that have been affected so far. You should still report the original PAN for year groups that entered the school prior to the change. Only if net capacity has changed should all year group capacities be changed (see section on ‘New schools and schools where net capacity has changed’)

For year groups which have had their pupil numbers limited for operational reasons to a number below the PAN that was in place at the time the cohort was admitted, the year group capacity recorded should be the PAN that was in place at the time the cohort was admitted. When entering the data on COLLECT, state in the notes for the affected year groups the limited year group capacity.

The reduction or limiting of PAN should have been carried out in accordance with the admissions code but does not require a deed of variation to the funding agreement nor a change to the capacity reported in SCAP.

New schools and schools where net capacity has changed

For new or expanded schools or schools filling up the built capacity year-on-year, capacity by year group should be specified for and reflect all year groups that will be served by the final intended total built capacity. This applies to any cohorts which have already been admitted, even if they were admitted with a reduced PAN. We will query capacity by year group which appears to show year on year growth of capacity in use rather than final intended capacity by year group.

For presumption schools that opened in September 2024, capacity by year group information has been pre-populated for you from DfE data.

There may be occasions where a school opened with a lower PAN than was initially intended, has now filled up, and a decision has been made to keep the PAN low. In these cases, the lower PAN can now be reported across all year group capacities. Net capacity remains at the original final intended capacity unless accommodation has been removed.

Where school capacity has reduced, record the final intended capacity for each year group.

Free schools

For free schools, you should report the final intended capacity by year group of the school as per the funding agreement, even if it is still filling up or based on a temporary site with limited capacity. For free schools that opened in September 2024, capacity by year group information has been pre-populated for you from their funding agreement. We would only expect you to make changes to this information if there has been a change to the final intended capacity by year group of the school.

Recording pupil numbers on roll

The numbers on roll information for each school will be prepopulated for all existing schools from the number of registered pupils on the most recent spring school census. All full-time and part-time pupils in designated nursery classes are excluded from the prepopulated number on roll.

The final SCAP dataset (and our published tables) will use the more up to date data from the summer school census.

If you are entering details in the ‘new schools’ section, you will need to provide the numbers on roll for each year group for that school. This should include any year 14 pupils, as recorded on the 2025 summer school census.

Recording net capacity method

Please report the method used to calculate net capacity. Where a net capacity assessment has been used to calculate net capacity, please also report the date on which the net capacity assessment was completed. The reporting of these data is voluntary. The completion of these data will improve our understanding of the application of the net capacity assessment and funding agreement data currently held, reducing communication required during data cleaning and informing future collection requirements.

Using the Excel templates to upload data

You can use the Excel XML template provided to upload the capacity data to COLLECT . We cannot accept the Excel template via email.

The data collection service desk will send out the templates in late May 2025 to the nominated contact for your local authority. The service desk will issue the templates via

the secure School to School (S2S) system. If you have issues with S2S, contact the service desk using the service request form.

Common queries

Query: Unexpected school establishment number

This query usually appears where an incorrect establishment number has been used. Check that you have used the establishment number that was in operation on 1 May 2025.

This query will always appear for the ancillary sites of any split site schools, as dummy establishment numbers have to be used. Please enter in the notes that this is a split site.

You must give details in the notes for any schools in your SCAP return that are not present in the Get Information About Schools system.

Query: The total of the capacity by year group fields does not match total capacity (mainstream only)

We would expect the total capacity to be roughly equal to the sum of the capacity of each year group.

Check you have correctly reflected any expansions or contractions to the size of the school. For example, if you have added a 1FE expansion to a primary school, raising the total capacity by 210 places, the capacity of each year group should have increased by roughly 30.

If the same query appeared for the school in SCAP 2024, the note will be prepopulated for you. If your situation has changed, update the note.

Query: The number of pupils is in excess of capacity

We would expect it to be difficult to fit many pupils into the school above its capacity. Check if you have forgotten to record an increase to the capacity of the school.

It may be that the school does manage to accommodate extra children, for example by:

- using non-teaching spaces as classrooms, or
- classrooms being able to fit a few extra children into each class than whole school capacity would suggest.

You will need to explain the reason for the number of pupils being in excess of capacity in the note you attach to the query. If the same query appeared for the school in SCAP 2024, the note will be prepopulated for you. If your situation has changed, update the note.

Query: Capacity of the school has decreased.

In areas where there is pressure on places, we would usually expect that capacity remains static or increases year on year, and that places would not be removed. If capacity has reduced in areas of place pressure, please provide an explanation in the notes.

In areas where numbers on roll are falling or there is no place pressure, we still require you to note the reasons for any reductions, so that we can quality assure the data and collate the information for future reference. If demand starts rising again and there is a future pressure on places, we will need to be able to review the notes for context.

Note: please refer to the guidance on how to determine net capacity.

Query: There has been a change in the year R or year 7 capacity.

In order for us to distinguish between PAN changes and bulge classes in the year of entry, please indicate which applies. Please also indicate if capacity has changed for any other reason.

The forecast data required (mainstream only)

What you have to include

Your forecasts must reflect the **actual number of pupils that you expect to have to provide a mainstream place for**, in each academic year in each planning area. This should be based on the total number of pupils you **expect will attend the** schools in that planning area, rather than where pupils are residents. We will query any forecast methodology which appears to be based solely on residency.

Where you have sixth form provision in secondary schools you will need to ensure that you have entered forecast data for years 12 and 13. If you expect any year 14 pupils, include these together with your year 13 forecasts.

Do not include pupils attending nursery or special schools or pupils attending nursery or SEN units attached to mainstream schools.

Do not include a margin in your forecasts to reflect spare places that you need to manage in-year admissions, mobility, or parental choice. You can include your expectations about pupils arriving during the year. Most authorities do this based on their experience of in-year arrivals.

Where forecast demand is higher than the capacity in a planning area, we expect this excess demand to be 'redistributed' to another planning area or areas with available places, where pupils could reasonably attend school. This could be, for example, where pupils cannot secure a place in their local school and are allocated a place elsewhere, or where pupils are travelling to non-local schools that then become full.

You should 'redistribute' pupils based on your knowledge of patterns of pupil attendance.

You should not reflect any temporary redistribution of pupils which you do not expect to continue. This could be because of, for example, excessive home to school distances, transport issues, or pending projects to add places in the preferred planning area.

Where there is no prior knowledge of established patterns of pupil attendance, you should reflect the excess demand in the planning area of its origin or another planning area with available space that you think pupils could reasonably attend.

Redistribution must be applied where needed because your planning area forecasts must reflect the actual number of pupils that you expect to have to provide a mainstream place for in that planning area, as mentioned at the start of this section.

If a planning area is on a local authority border, you will need to check with the neighbouring authority to ensure that they have sufficient capacity to accommodate all the projected pupils who you expect to be redistributed to the neighbouring authority. This is to ensure the pupil redistribution will not create a pressure in the neighbouring planning area where that LA is not responsible for providing places.

Future school changes

Where you are restructuring your school landscape (for example, from three to two tier education systems) you should aim to record your forecasts based on the structure that will be in place in each of the forecast years. The corresponding capacity changes should also be reflected in your Planned Places return. You should then record a note in COLLECT to notify us that a restructure is taking place. There are exceptions to this, particularly for single school planning areas or where the situation is complex. Please contact SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk for advice where needed.

If you are expecting to introduce a new planning area or hoping to change your planning area structure in the future, you should record the pupil forecasts in the most appropriate planning area that currently exists. You must record forecasts of pupil numbers for existing schools in the planning area in which they currently sit.

You should forecast for new free school provision where you are confident that the project will go ahead and that it will affect the school landscape in your authority. Include a note to explain this.

Split site schools

Where a school is split between different planning areas because it operates from different sites, please include the forecasts for each site in the relevant planning area.

Housing developments

Your pupil forecasts should only include expected pupil yields from housing developments that have a high probability of being delivered within the period of the forecasts. In most cases such developments will have full planning permission. If you believe a development that does not have full planning permission will proceed and will yield pupils within the forecast period, we expect that development to be present in the relevant planning authority's latest five-year land supply. You should explain the inclusion of such housing developments, as we may review the evidence on the site's deliverability to test the suitability of the development in your forecasts.

New housing developments may generate additional pupil forecasts, but you should be careful to avoid double-counting pupil yields which are already factored into your

forecasts by default through cohort progression or migration. In addition, as part of your forecast, you should consider what proportion of the pupil yield may come from within the same planning area as the development.

If there are existing parameters for new housing in your forecasting models, we would only expect to see a change if there is a demonstrable increase in the rate at which new housing is being delivered. In this case, an appropriate figure should be determined for the additional yield.

Pupil forecasts from housing developer contributions and Housing Infrastructure Fund

Housing developer contributions (HDC) include new school places secured from developers through Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy. A small number of local authorities have also received or expect to receive funding from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) for the provision of new or extended schools.

Forecasts of places to be funded through these should reflect the number of school places that will be created using this funding, or by developers in lieu of funding, from academic year 2025/26 onwards. Further guidance on securing developer contributions is available.

You must include these funded places in your main forecasts but also report them separately in the relevant sections of the forecast template and on COLLECT. This will enable the DfE to split these places from the main forecasts for funding purposes.

You must include places provided by any projects that will use, or are expected to use, either of these funds.

Where HDC funds have been received but not assigned to a project you should estimate the date of delivery and quantity of places to be delivered, and report these in the return.

Where you expect these funds to fund places within the forecasting period, but have not yet received the funds, please include an estimated number of places.

Where this funding supplements an existing project, the number of pupils in these funded places should relate only to the proportion of places generated through HDC and HIF. There are many ways you can do this. For example, you may calculate the number of HDC places based on the amount the developer advised they would fund per place. You could also look at the project as a whole and calculate the proportion of places attributed to HDC or HIF and the number of places this created.

If you have contributed HDC funding to a centrally-funded free school, you should not include these places as part of your HDC forecast.

Where you have included these funded places in one forecast year, they should appear in future forecast years, along with any extra places added in those future years.

You should split HDC or HIF forecasts across year groups unless you are certain they apply to only one year group.

Usually, we do not expect the forecasts for these funded places to follow the pupils through the school system, as HDC funded places are usually for a specific school or expansion . The exception to this is when bulge classes are funded through HDC or HIF.

We expect any HDC or HIF funded places in the first three years of your forecast return to be present in your planned places return.

Example of how to forecast pupils attending housing developer funded places

In 2026/27, a new 1FE school is opening. Of the 210 places, 35 places have been funded by the developer . As this does not relate to a specific class, the places have been apportioned across all year groups (5 places per year group). Once the HDC places are built, they will be available in all subsequent forecast years.

In 2028/29, a 15 place per year group expansion has been funded from HDC, creating 105 places in total. The places are again spread across all year groups creating 15 places per year. These places are in addition to the 5 places per year group to be created in 2026/27, resulting in 20 places being reported in each year group in 2028/29 and each academic year after.

Table 1: Example Housing Developer Contribution forecasts

Academic year	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
2025/26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2026/27	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	35
2027/28	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	35
2028/29	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	140
2020/30	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	140

Forecasting methodology (mainstream only)

Explains potential methods to establish a forecast methodology for reporting to the school capacity survey.

There is separate guidance available on forecasting pupil numbers for specialist placements.

You are responsible for providing forecasts of mainstream pupil numbers to the DfE as part of SCAP. This provides local authorities and the DfE with key information for capital programmes, as well as providing the DfE with information to support basic need capital allocations and for its Pupil Place Planning Advisers to fulfil their role in supporting local authorities to fulfil their duty to secure sufficient school places.

Assessing the accuracy of previous forecasts

Before producing a new set of forecasts, you should assess the accuracy of your previous forecasts to identify and correct any issues. You can do this by comparing your previous forecasts to actual pupil numbers. You should consider the accuracy of your forecasts at overall local authority level, as an overall sense check. Inaccuracies at LA level may indicate systematic issues across one or more planning areas. You should also consider the accuracy of your forecasts at planning area and year group levels to target particular areas for improvement. If your LA level forecasts seem accurate but there are issues at planning area level, this may mean that some apportioning is not quite right or that re-distribution has not been applied properly (see the 'What you have to include' section).

You can calculate a measure for the accuracy of historic forecasts as: (Forecast pupil number minus actual pupil number) divided by Actual pupil number multiplied by 100

This will give you a figure for the percentage over forecast or under forecast. For example, if the calculation results in a figure of 3, this means there was a 3% over forecast. Similarly, a figure of -2 means a 2% under forecast.

The threshold for what counts as accurate can depend on how volatile the trend in pupil numbers is, whether you are looking at LA or planning area level, and whether you are looking one year ahead or further out. Generally, anything within + or - 2% can be considered accurate. Beyond that, in areas of fluctuating pupil numbers or at times of changes in trends, a slightly higher threshold may be appropriate. It is worth checking the latest school places scorecards for the national average LA level forecast accuracy one year and three years ahead. This dashboard will also allow you to review the forecast accuracy of LAs similar to yours.

This value will enable you to test whether inaccuracies exist. You can then investigate your forecasting methodologies in further detail to find the possible source of the

inaccuracy. It could be down to fluctuations in the input data, such as higher or lower than expected in year admissions, entry year numbers on roll, or underlying population data. It could also be down to the assumptions you made, such as housing yield, build-out rates, migration patterns. Fluctuations in input data do not usually need any methodology adjustments, but if your assumptions are leading to under or over forecasting, then you should consider whether better evidence is available to inform and change the assumption. For example, if you forecast cohort growth of 2% per year per year group, but this has never materialised and there is no evidence to indicate housing developments will produce this cohort growth, then we would expect this to be moderated down to reflect historical trends.

You should consider how accuracy changes the further ahead you project. For example, you should consider how accurate your forecasts historically have been in each of the five years ahead. If your methodology has not changed, you can do this by looking at previous SCAP returns and comparing to the latest actual numbers on roll. If your methodology has changed, this is harder to do, but is possible by running the new methodology using historical data. In considering changes in forecast accuracy over time, you will be able to check whether any changes you have made are having an impact and allow you to adjust your assumptions appropriately.

Forecasting year group pupil numbers

Reception

There are many methods that can be used to forecast reception pupil numbers. We recommend that you use population-based data to obtain the best estimate of the number of children that currently live in your local authority. This is essentially the pool of children that will form your reception cohorts. In addition to this underlying population, you will also need information on cross-border movement and migration to enable you to form your forecasts for reception intakes. These factors can be applied individually to population data, however, we recommend using historic year R uptake ratios applied directly to your population data. See ‘Example of forecasting reception pupil numbers’ section.

Potential sources of population data include:

- Office for National Statistics - Live Birth Data
- GP registration data
- Early Years census data

For the final year of reception forecasts required, some of the children will not have been born at the time that you produce your forecasts. You will need to either use a different methodology for the final year R forecast, or produce a population estimate to feed into your existing methodology. Producing a population estimate may involve a simple roll-forward or may involve using different sources of population or birth data, for example

monthly births data or the latest NHS data. We recognise the final year of the forecast will inherently be more uncertain.

Non-intake year groups

A suggested, and our recommended, method for calculating forecast pupil numbers for year groups which are not the intake year of the school is to use a cohort progression technique.

This is based on the premise that the number of children in a given year group at a school will increase/decrease according to historical trends as they move into the next year group in the next academic year. See the ‘Example of forecasting non-intake pupil numbers’ section for a worked example.

Year 7 or other intake year pupil numbers

For other intake years, you could use either the method described for reception pupils or the method described for non-intake year groups. For example, for year 7, the underlying ‘population’ is the year 6 cohorts relevant to each school or planning area and the cohort progression is the year 7 uptake factor.

Other factors

The process described above is intended to give a basis for forecasts and is based largely on historical trends continuing. It may be that in your local authority, you need to make some adjustments to account for specific situations.

Migration

Changes to historical migration patterns as a result of foreseeable events should be considered. Only include factors that have a degree of certainty and/or that indicate a long-term shift in trends, to avoid introducing volatility. Example factors to take account of could be:

- an expected increase in inward/outward migration to/from a local area;
- a change in general migration patterns; or
- a known influx of arrivals.

Be mindful that in some cases, children will already be in school and included in the numbers on roll data. We encourage LAs to provide accurate projections of population growth based on trends, evidence, and projected future growth. LAs should take care not to over-project the impact of migration. We will challenge forecasts if we feel there is evidence of over-estimated pupil numbers.

We are aware that some factors will be ‘known unknowns’, for example the number of overseas children and asylum seekers. There will be different things to consider with

each migration route, for example: the rate of arrivals, the timeframe they are anticipated to arrive in, and how long children are expected to remain in the country/area. We expect forecasts to include these children only where there is a high degree of certainty around these things, and where numbers can sensibly be interpreted at an LA and planning area level. We do not expect to see forecasts changing on the basis of speculation.

Where a significant influx of arrivals is included under the conditions above but are expected to leave again within the forecast period, we would expect to see any step change or peak in your figures to revert to near normal levels within the forecast period.

Housing

One situation where you may wish to adjust your forecasts is to account for inflow of pupils due to new housing being built. Housing developments can have a significant impact on the demand for places in individual planning areas, or across entire local authorities.

The pupil forecasts you submit in SCAP should only include expected pupil yields from housing developments that have a high probability of being delivered within the period of the forecasts. In most cases, such developments will have full planning permission. If you believe a development that does not have full planning permission will proceed and will yield pupils within the forecast period, we expect that development to be present in the relevant planning authority's latest 5-year land supply. Wherever this is the case we may test the suitability of inclusion of such housing developments in SCAP forecasts by reviewing evidence on the site's deliverability and assessing delivery against previous 5-year land supply plans in the relevant planning authority.

The data you collect on housing developments is likely to come from many different sources. It should be as detailed as possible, enabling you to identify:

- Number of units
- Housing size and mix
- Location
- Completion timescale

In forecasting for housing developments, you should consider patterns of movement to these developments. You should consider if new developments are likely to be populated by families moving in from outside your local authority. If so, it is important to ensure that you only count these pupils once and are not added both as part of your 'housing yield' calculation and as inward migrants, where these are counted separately.

If new developments are more likely to be populated by local families moving a short distance, consider who will fill the houses they move out of. If there is a lot of local movement, consider that some of the pupils who move into the new developments might remain in their existing school places. This could mean the effect of the new development on school place need is spread over a wider area.

One thing to consider is the rate at which houses are built in the area. If this is fairly steady over time (i.e. housing stock increases by x% each year) then it is likely that the pupil yield will already be captured in a migration factor or cohort progression rate. It is only if the speed of house building changes (up or down) that you may need to adjust your forecasts to take account of this. Consider the following examples:

1. A planning area has a large new housing development, which has planning permission but has not yet started. It is on the edge of the town and the planning area has not recently experienced significant levels of housing being built. It would be reasonable in this scenario to include all the forecast yield in future forecasts (assuming of course that the local authority's yield calculation already has a factor for local children taking up residence in the housing development)
2. A planning area has planned housing developments of around 800 units per year. This is following a period of similar levels of housing over the last five years. This means that many of the 'number on roll' figures used in the baseline forecasting already include cohort growth from housing. If the local authority was to include all pupil yield from each of the 800 units in future years, they may well be double counting, as the basic method is already accounting for this growth.

Where there is a demonstrable increase in the rate at which new housing is being delivered, you should determine an appropriate additional yield figure above that already included in the forecasting models.

Office for National Statistics core projections model

As part of a wider review of the school capacity collection, the DfE commissioned the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to develop a model to project local authority and planning area pupil numbers. The model is based upon nationally available data such as births and school census returns. It therefore provides a 'core' projection that does not include local factors such as changes to housing yield, or planned school changes, which may influence local authorities' forecasts.

The methodology used in the model is described in the core forecasting tool itself.

The model will be available at the beginning of June 2025.

Core Forecasting Tool

We have provided the core forecast in an Excel based forecasting tool. The tool uses the same Excel XML template local authorities currently complete for the school capacity forecast blade.

Local authorities can use the tool in two ways,

1. Comparing to local authority forecasts and identifying factors which may contribute to forecast differences.

2. Modifying the core forecast to account for local factors.

Use of the forecast model

The model was tested by running forecasts from a historical base year (2017/18) using only the data that would have been available at the time, allowing the accuracy of the model to be assessed and compared with forecasts from the SCAP return. In many cases, the SCAP forecast was more accurate than the core forecast, suggesting that local factors had been applied and had improved the forecast. Equally there were many cases where the core forecast was more accurate than the SCAP forecast, possibly due to methodology problems such as including extra factors that are already accounted for within the cohort progression ratios.

It is intended that the core model will help within the forecasting process in the following ways:

- Providing a baseline figure to local authorities for comparative purposes
- Aid common understanding of the factors that influence the forecast for a particular planning area
- Potentially highlight where it may be possible to improve the methodology used for certain planning areas
- Help identify where forecasts may need to be reviewed

Some of these benefits may be realised over time, as data is built up for the core forecasting model over several years.

Validation

You should monitor your forecasting process rigorously to ensure it is fit for purpose and produces results that are accurate and based on sound evidence.

It is essential that forecast figures are as you intended in your methodology. Make sure that you use appropriate formulas, and that the correct data are referenced. You may wish to focus on one or two examples and work all the way through your forecast model to ensure that you can see that each step is working in the way intended and that the outcome is logical.

You should perform quality assurance checks on the input data you use for your forecasts to ensure it is fit for purpose. The underlying assumptions you use in your forecasts should be realistic and evidence-based.

It is important to compare current forecasts to those of previous years to identify significant changes and ensure they make sense. For example, is an overall increase in pupil numbers the result of an increase in a particular year group, or planning area, and does this match your expectations?

You should also compare your forecasts to other data sources, for example data on admission applications for the upcoming September.

You should work closely with neighbouring local authorities, particularly where there are significant cross border flows. For example, your projections may need to consider planned changes to school organisation in neighbouring authorities. You should check that your understanding of cross border flows matches that of your neighbours. For example, if you are forecasting significant inward migration from a neighbouring local authority, is this also reflected in their forecasts, or are pupils being counted twice?

If you are outsourcing your forecasting, you should still carefully sense check the outputs and review the reason behind any changes to previous forecasts.

Example of forecasting reception pupil numbers

The following describes a suggested method for forecasting pupils in the reception year group.

Population data

Suppose you receive the following data for registrations at GP surgeries.

Table 2: Example GP registration data

Academic year	Age group	GP registrations
2021/22	Aged 4 as at 31st August 2021 (birth in 2016/17 academic year)	514
2022/23	Aged 4 as at 31st August 2022 (birth in 2017/18 academic year)	516
2023/24	Aged 4 as at 31st August 2023 (birth in 2018/19 academic year)	520
2024/25	Aged 4 as at 31st August 2024 (birth in 2019/20 academic year)	536
2025/26	Aged 4 as at 31st August 2025 (birth in 2020/21 academic year)	540
2026/27	Aged 4 as at 31st August 2026 (birth in 2021/22 academic year)	556
2027/28	Aged 4 as at 31st August 2027 (birth in 2022/23 academic year)	580
2028/29	Aged 4 as at 31st August 2028 (birth in 2023/24 academic year)	602
2029/30	Aged 4 as at 31st August 2029 (birth in 2024/25 academic year)	To be estimated

You will need to estimate an underlying population figure for those aged 4 at 31st August 2029, as some of these children will not yet be born. You can do this by using historical information about changes in population and assume trends will continue. You should use the historical data that you think will best reflect the trends carrying forward.

- If GP registration data fluctuates, then taking an average or weighted average of the last few years may be best.
- If GP registration shows an increasing or decreasing trend, it may be more appropriate apply the average annual rate of change to get the final year's estimate. If trends are nearing their maximum or minimum values, we would advise caution with this method.
- You may also feel that simply using the previous year's figure again for the final year is the best option, particularly if there is large fluctuations or high uncertainty.

You can test your estimation method using the historical data, to see how accurate the calculation would be compared to the known values.

Table 3 shows an example of how to apply a weighted average to estimate the final year of GP registrations. The weights have been chosen for illustrative purposes only.

- Calculate the difference in population size between each year, as shown in table 3.
- Next, take a weighted average to give more weight to the most recent years. For example, for illustration only, if you wanted to apply a weight to 3 for the most recent year, a weight of 2 for the year before, and a weight of 1 for three years ago (a combined weight of 3+2+1=6), the calculation would be: ((22×3)+(24×2)+(16×1))/6= 130/6=21.67
- Assume that the population for 2029/30 will be 21.67 higher than the previous year, which when rounded gives 624.

Table 3: Example growth in GP registration data

Academic Year	GP registrations	Increase in population size of
2025/26	540	
2026/27	556	16
2027/28	580	24
2028/29	602	22
2029/30 estimated	624	21.67

Calculate uptake factor

The next step is to calculate an uptake factor to determine what proportion of the children in your underlying population will require a mainstream, state-funded school place. In this example, the underlying population is those registered with a GP.

You may wish to base this on historical uptake. To determine the uptake factor for each year, calculate the actual number of pupils in reception as a proportion of the total number of children of the appropriate age in your population data. For example, if there were 200 4-year-old children in the population as at 31 August 2023 and 164 children in your reception cohort in 2023/24, the uptake factor would be 164 divided by 200 times 100, which equals 82%.

The points in the year at which you take a measurement for number of reception pupils on roll will depend on things such as where your highest point might be or for what point you have a data series for.

Consider whether applying the historical uptake factor is accurate. You may wish to consider whether over the past few years the historical uptake factor has been stable or volatile, or shown a trend, and whether that trend is likely to continue.

Table 4 provides an example of reception year uptake factors.

Table 4: Example GP registration data compared to actual pupil numbers

Academic year	GP registrations	Actual Year R numbers	Uptake factor
2021/22	514	430	83.7%
2022/23	516	443	85.9%
2023/24	520	448	86.2%
2024/25	536	455	84.9%

Apply your chosen uptake factor

For each year of your forecast, multiply the number of children of the appropriate age from your population data by the uptake factor you calculated in the previous step.

In this example, we can see that the uptake factor is relatively stable over time, at about 85%. You could therefore apply last year's uptake factor of 84.9% or the rounded average of 85% to the future data to give final forecast figures for the reception year group. Table 5 shows the forecast that results from applying the rounded average uptake to GP registration data.

Table 5: Example GP registration data turned into forecasts using an uptake factor

Academic year	GP registrations	Uptake factor	Calculation	Forecast pupils
2025/26	540	85%	=540*0.85	459
2026/27	556	85%	=556*0.85	473
2027/28	580	85%	=580*0.85	493
2028/29	602	85%	=602*0.85	512
2029/30	624	85%	=624*0.85	530

Example of forecasting non-intake pupil numbers

To forecast using a cohort progression technique, you will need data on the current pupil numbers in each year group in each school or planning area. We would advise forecasting at planning area level rather than school level, to avoid the fluctuations in parental preference. If forecasting at school level, you should ensure your forecasts also make sense when aggregated to planning area level and test their accuracy against historical planning area data.

It may be more robust to base pupil number forecasts on the cohort progression seen over a number of years. This example uses the past four years of pupil number data for a planning area to calculate cohort progression ratios for each year group in each academic year.

You should consider whether using the most recent ratio, an average, a weighted average, or a trended figure is the most appropriate. If there are recent changes to cohort progression ratios that you expect to continue, then you may not want to use historical ratios. You could also use a weighted average of historical ratios to give more weight to recent trends. Alternatively, you may know of upcoming changes that will mean trends will change.

Table 6 gives data for pupil numbers in the current academic year and each of the last three years.

Table 6: Example historical actual pupil numbers

Academic year	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
2021/22	430	432	435	480	478	470	469
2022/23	443	440	437	486	485	472	471
2023/24	448	456	443	492	495	485	471
2024/25	455	460	458	509	510	495	488

To calculate cohort progression ratios, divide each pupil number by the number of pupils who were in that ‘cohort’ the year before. So, for example, divide the number of pupils in Year 1 in 2022/23 (440) by the number of pupils in Reception in 2021/22 (430), to get the ratio 1.023.

Table 7 shows these ratios for each year group and each year. It also shows the average, an illustrative weighted average (using weights of 1 for 2022/23, 2 for 2023/24, and 3 for 2024/25), and an illustrative trend projection (which takes the average annual changes and applies it to the final year).

Similar to estimating the final year R forecast, an average or weighted average is most suited to fluctuating patterns. A trend projection is most suited for clear increasing or decreasing trends, but only up to the point that the maximum or minimum is reached.

This is particularly important for cohort progression rates, as there will be a limit to how many pupils realistically join or leave a cohort. Where trends are increasing or decreasing and there is some uncertainty, simply using the previous year's figure may be the best option.

You can test your estimation method using historical data to assess the accuracy of the chosen method compared to the known values.

Table 7: Example historical cohort progression ratios

	Year R to Year 1	Year 1 to Year 2	Year 2 to Year 3	Year 3 to Year 4	Year 4 to Year 5	Year 5 to Year 6
2022/23	1.023	1.012	1.117	1.010	0.987	1.002
2023/24	1.029	1.007	1.126	1.019	1.000	0.998
2024/25	1.027	1.004	1.149	1.037	1.000	1.006
Average	1.026	1.008	1.131	1.022	0.996	1.002
Weighted average	1.027	1.006	1.136	1.026	0.998	1.003
Trend projection	1.029	1.000	1.165	1.051	1.007	1.008

In this example, progression from Year 2 to Year 3 and from Year 3 to Year 4 shows a clear pattern (cohort progression ratios are steadily becoming higher, indicating that more children are joining this planning area at those year groups). You should consider what might be behind this where you see this is the case. For example, this might be the result of there being a poorly performing junior school in an adjacent planning area and resulting pupil movement away from that school into this area. A trend projection might be more suitable for these year groups, but before applying this you should consider whether you believe this pattern is likely to continue.

The next step is to apply the calculated cohort progression rates to your current pupil numbers. Multiply the rate you chose for Year R to Year 1 progression by the current number of pupils in Year R to get a figure for the number of Year 1 pupils expected next year. You can then apply the Year 1 to Year 2 rate to this figure to get a figure for Year 2 pupils the year after, and so on.

Table 8 shows the results of applying the weighted average cohort progression to each year, although you may decide to use a trend projection for Years 3 and 4 if you think demand will continue to increase. Year R figures for 2025/26 onwards are the results of the reception forecast calculated earlier.

Table 8: Example forecasts when applying average historic cohort ratios

	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
2022/23 actuals	443	440	437	486	485	472	471
2023/24 actuals	448	456	443	492	495	485	471
2024/25 actuals	455	460	458	509	510	495	488
2025/26 forecast	459	467	463	520	522	509	496
2026/27 forecast	473	471	470	526	534	521	511
2027/28 forecast	493	485	474	534	539	533	523
2028/29 forecast	512	506	488	539	548	538	534
2029/30 forecast	530	526	509	555	553	547	540

Adding forecast data to COLLECT (mainstream and special)

Information on adding your pupil forecast data

You should submit your pupil forecast data using the COLLECT system, which can be accessed using DfE Sign In. Guides for local authorities submitting data using COLLECT are available.

You must provide forecasts of pupil numbers broken down by year group for each mainstream and specialist planning area in your local authority.

Specialist planning area names and numbers will be provided by the DfE. They will be LA wide and will relate to the types of provision (SEN units and resourced provision, Special schools, Independent special schools, and Alternative provision) – see 'Forecasting demand for SEN provision' for more details. Note: this is a wider list of provision than is required for the capacity return.

Primary forecasts must contain data for academic years 2025/26 to 2029/30 and cover year groups reception to year 6.

Secondary forecasts must contain data for academic years 2025/26 to 2031/32 and cover year groups 7 to 11. You must also include forecasts for year groups 12 and 13 for planning areas that contain schools that have sixth forms.

Primary specialist placements forecasts must contain data for academic years 2025/26 to 2029/30 and cover year groups reception to year 6. Secondary specialist placements forecasts must contain data for academic years 2025/26 to 2031/32 and cover year groups 7 to 11. They do NOT need to include years 12 to 13, even if schools in the planning area have post-16 provision.

Forecast methodology statement

The methodology statement should set the figures in context. This is important since projection methodology varies from one local authority to another.

You must provide comprehensive information, including how you have checked and quality assured your forecasts. We may ask for further detail, including requesting a copy of your forecasting model. If you include rates (for example, cohort survival rates, progression rates or pupil yield rates) that you apply to existing cohorts or housing data, please explain how you have calculated these.

Before we will accept your data, we must be satisfied with the robustness of your forecasts.

Your forecast methodology should include information on cross-border flows, with confirmation that you have checked import and export assumptions with neighbouring local authorities.

There is a section to cover how you have arrived at your specialist placements forecast (for further detail on potential forecast methodologies, please see the stand-alone Forecasting demand for SEN provision guidance).

You should send your forecast methodology in a Word document, using the template provided, to SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk.

Using the Excel templates to upload data

You can upload your forecast data to COLLECT using the Excel XML template we provide. We cannot accept the Excel template via email.

The data collection service desk will send out the templates in late May 2025 to the nominated contact for your local authority. The service desk will issue this via the secure School to School (S2S) system. If you have issues with S2S, contact the service desk using the service request form.

Common queries

Query: Cohorts not progressing as expected

For example, comparison of Year 3 forecast in 2025/26 to Year 4 forecast in 2026/27.

We would normally expect most pupils in Year X in one year to progress on to Year X+1 in the same planning area the next academic year.

Check the forecast you have submitted is a true reflection of how pupils progress through the school years in that planning area. It may be that you do expect large fluctuations in cohorts, for example if:

- large housing developments are planned in the planning area, and you expect a significant increase in children joining schools above the standard entry year;
- there is a drop or increase every year at a specific cohort due to schools with unusual age ranges.

You will need to explain this in the note you attach to the query.

Query: Fluctuations in pupil numbers year on year

For example, comparison of Year 7 forecast in 2025/26 to Year 7 forecast in 2024/25.

We would not normally expect large fluctuations in pupil numbers year on year, as we would expect schools to take a relatively stable number of pupils each year.

Check the forecast you have submitted does not contain any mistakes.

It may be that the planning area does experience large fluctuations, for example, because it is rural and birth rates are highly variable.

You will need to explain this in the note you attach to the query.

Query: Forecasts vastly different to current number on roll

You will also need to provide an explanation where there is a significant difference between the pupil forecast in the final forecast year and the current number on roll.

The planned places data required and how to add the data to COLLECT (mainstream only)

Information on adding your planned places data

You should submit planned places data using the COLLECT system, which can be accessed using DfE Sign In. Guides for local authorities submitting data using COLLECT are available.

You must provide details of local plans to add to or remove places from net capacity, broken down by year group for each school, for the next 3 academic years:

- 2025/26
- 2026/27
- 2027/28

Any recorded planned changes to net capacity should be carried out in accordance with the guidance for LA maintained schools and academy trusts.

What you have to include

You should include places related to any project undertaken by the school, local authority, or MAT where the following three criteria all apply.

1. Where mainstream school net capacity is being added or removed

   You should include all places:

   - from locally funded projects that are being added or removed from net capacity, irrespective of how much they cost (including zero cost projects)
   - added from presumption free schools which are expected to open in the next three years

   You should not include:

   - changes to admission numbers unless these will also result in a change in capacity in the net capacity assessment or academy funding agreement
   - SEN or nursery places, even if they use basic need funding

2. Where the addition or removal of places is not centrally funded

   You should not include changes in places resulting from projects that are funded by:

   - the Priority School Building Programme
   - a centrally delivered free school programme (includes free schools, UTCs and studio schools)
   - the Condition Improvement Fund

- the Selective Schools Expansion Fund
- the capital scheme for voluntary-aided schools
- the school rebuilding programme
- the School-based nursery capital grant

You should also not include whole school academy closures.

If you are providing supplementary funding or places to any of these centrally funded programmes, then you should record the number of places that relate to that supplementary funding only. If you record the total, we will ask you to correct the data.

If you are awaiting a decision on whether a new free school will be opened in your authority and have had to plan a contingency in case the free school does not open, only include this if you plan to bring in the contingency regardless of the outcome of the free school decision.

3. Where you have a high degree of certainty that the project will go ahead.

   We would normally expect this to be where funding has been committed, for example where the local decision-maker has signed off the capital plans or where contracts have been let.

   For presumption free schools, we would also normally expect the provisional opening date of the school to have been set.

Report places under the first full academic year in which the places will be available. This should be based on the date when places are built, rather than when they are due to fill with pupils.

If the places will not be available in September for the start of a given academic year, record the project under the following academic year. For example, if the places will be built by November 2025 or February 2026, record this in the academic year 2026/27.

An exception to this might be changes to school reorganisation, for example moving from a three tier to two tier structure. This depends on the timing and structure of the change. If you need help reflecting changes to school reorganisation, please contact us at SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk.

Recording Added Places

In the planned places return, you must only report future increases to net capacity that are not bulge classes. I.e. where the additional places will remain in the year group, rather than moving through with a specific cohort. For example, a project to increase the size of Key Stage 1 (reception to year 2) accommodation in a primary school.

Report added places cumulatively. For example, if 15 places are added in years 7 to 11 in 2025/26, and a further 15 places in 2026/27, then a total of 30 places should be reported in years 7 to 11 in 2026/27 and 2027/28.

Do not report PAN increases unless the change increases net capacity or exceeds the funding agreement capacity.

For added places that relate to schools which are due to open during the planned places timeframe, please state the final intended planning area of the school. Where the establishment number of the school is not known please use an artificial establishment number, such as 9999.

Recording Removed Places

Report any works which remove physical capacity from the school, for example, the demolition of a block or removal of temporary classrooms.

Please do not report whole school academy closures.

Record removed places as negative figures.

Do not report PAN decreases unless the change decreases net capacity.

Recording Bulge Class Places

Report any additional capacity that will provide places for a cohort and that will move through the school with this cohort. For example, a project to accommodate a one-off additional form of entry.

We would expect to see this move through the school in your data. For example, if there are 30 places in year 7 in 2025/26, we would then expect to see those places in year 8 in 2026/27.

Do not include bulge classes in the planned places return that are already in operation and so are included in the capacity return.

Using the Excel templates to upload data

You can upload your planned places data to COLLECT using the Excel XML template we provide. We cannot accept the Excel template via email.

The data collection service desk will send out the templates in late May 2025 to the nominated contact for your local authority. The service desk will issue the templates via the secure School to School (S2S) system. If you have issues with S2S, contact the service desk using the service request form.

Examples

Example 1:

One school is planning a 1 FE expansion which will be ready to start filling up from September 2025, while another school will remove 5 places per year group due to internal reconfiguration from 2026/27.

Added Places for School 1:

Academic year	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
2025/26	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
2026/27	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
2027/28	30	30	30	30	30	30	30

Removed Places for School 2:

Academic year	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
2025/26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2026/27	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5
2027/28	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5

Record added and removed places in the first year they in which they are built or removed. Added and removed places should be permanent so the places shown in 2025/26 must also be shown in 2026/27, and so on.

Example 2:

Secondary school 1 took a bulge class of 30 in Year 7 in September 2024, the bulge class will be in Year 8 in 2025/26. The bulge class that entered the school in September 2024 should not be included in the planned places return. The bulge class that entered the school in September 2024 will be reflected in the capacity by year group data in the capacity return, as the bulge class is in operation in the school on 1 May 2025.

Secondary school 2 will accommodate a Year 7 bulge class of 60 from September 2026:

Bulge class places for school 2:

Academic year	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
2025/26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2026/27	60	0	0	0	0	0	0
2027/28	0	60	0	0	0	0	0

Example 3:

A secondary school is becoming an all-through school and will start admitting to year R in September 2025. Currently it admits 7FE to year 7 and does not have a sixth form. From September 2025 it will admit 3FE in year R and 5FE for year 7. Secondary capacity will therefore reduce by 2FE in September 2025.

As the school currently admits 7FE to year 7, the capacity by year group in the capacity return is reported as 210 for year groups 7 to 11, as this is the capacity as at 1 May 2025.

In the planned places return, when recording added places, you should show the new primary places on a gradual basis. You should also record the primary planning area that this school will be in.

Academic year	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
2025/26	90	0	0	0	0	0	0
2026/27	90	90	0	0	0	0	0
2027/28	90	90	90	0	0	0	0

When recording removed places, you should show the reduction in capacity for secondary year groups on a gradual basis, as the existing pupils who entered the school at the time of the higher PAN will still be there.

Academic year	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
2025/26	-60	0	0	0	0	0	0
2026/27	-60	-60	0	0	0	0	0
2027/28	-60	-60	-60	0	0	0	0

Common queries

Query: The number of places added or removed are only for a single year group

We would normally expect non-bulge projects to add or remove net capacity to affect multiple year groups in a school.

Check that you have recorded future places as built rather than when they are due to fill up with pupils.

You will need to explain this in the note you attach to the query.

Commentary

Information on completing your commentary template

Email your completed commentary templates to SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk.

As part of SCAP, you must complete a place planning commentary template. It provides information to help the analysis of areas with pupil place planning pressures and areas with spare places. It also gives context to the high needs data submitted under SCAP.

The commentary must link to each of your planning areas, identifying any local pockets where school capacity is an issue (shortfalls or surpluses) or where there are whole new schools planned.

Use the commentary to explain:

- where there is planned action to secure additional capacity or remove capacity, indicating if it is temporary or permanent, if in new schools or expansions (for additions), and if/how the space has been repurposed (for removals);
- any other significant changes to capacity, when they would be implemented and how this would affect the places available;
- any plans that would significantly impact available capacity.

Make sure any references to specific schools include their 4-digit establishment number so that we can match up the information easily.

We will compare the commentary for each planning area against the data you have provided in capacity, forecast, and planned places. If the commentary does not appear to match what your data shows, we may ask for further clarification to check your data is accurate.

Examples might be where:

- you have said an area has high growth or housing developments, but your forecasts do not appear to show this increase;
- your data indicates a future pressure in a planning area, but the commentary does not mention this;
- you have said a school will provide temporary accommodation for a bulge class from September 2025, but there are no places recorded;
- you are planning significant removal of places for conversion to early years or SEN provision.

For SCAP25, it would be useful for us to know if additional Basic Need capital funding will be necessary to deliver places by September 2029, above the amounts already published at Basic need allocations - GOV.UK. This will enable us to gather more context on where capital funding may or may not be needed given the nationally declining pupil population.

Accessing, submitting, and checking a return

How to access the COLLECT data collection system, send us your school capacity survey data, check your data, and resolve any errors

Accessing the data collection systems

You should use the COLLECT data collection system to submit data on:

- Capacity
- Forecasts
- Planned places

Access COLLECT via DfE Sign In.

For issues accessing COLLECT or technical problems while using COLLECT, contact the data collection service desk using the service request form.

Checking your data

We will email your nominated contact a Quality Assurance (QA) checklist. This list provides a guide on checking your data before submission.

As well as using this list, you should check the data as it is entered. Accurate data entry and completion of this list will reduce the number of questions that we may need to ask you.

COLLECT includes a reports feature which allows you to view and download output reports containing your data. The COLLECT system refreshes overnight, so any data that you input will not show on the output reports until the following day.

Use these output reports alongside the QA checklist to help you address any issues with your data before you submit it.

Submitting your return

You will need to arrange for your own internal review of your data before submitting it to us.

You will be unable to submit your returns if you have not addressed all error messages.

When responding to a query within COLLECT, make sure the note is against the query itself and not the return as a whole.

If you are unable to resolve any errors, email SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk for advice. Make sure you give details of the error and the school or planning area to which it relates.

You must submit all data using the online systems. We cannot accept email copies of the downloaded spreadsheets or output reports.

Email accompanying information to SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk. It should include:

- the commentary
- the forecast methodology using the latest template (if not submitted via the COLLECT system).

You should submit your data by **Friday 25 July 2025**.

Your return will only be considered complete when you have provided all elements.

Director of Children's Services (DCS) sign-off

After submission, we will quality assure your data. When this process is complete, we will provide you with a template for DCS sign off.

We expect DCS sign off to happen around December 2025, once the checks on all local authorities have been completed.

Department for Education

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