



Department
for Education

Net Capacity Assessment (NCA)

Programme Guide

Version 2

This document provides an overview of the Net Capacity Assessment (NCA) programme.

February 2024

This document is of interest to schools, responsible bodies, dioceses, and the public.

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Introduction

About the Net Capacity Assessment programme

The Net Capacity Assessment (NCA) Programme will ensure data on the pupil capacity of schools is accurate and up to date, to support decision making by the DfE and our stakeholders about how to use the school estate and target capital funding.

The NCA tool and methodology calculates the number of children a school can accommodate, based upon the size and use of spaces available. It was originally developed in 2001 and has since been used predominantly by Local Authorities.

The original NCA tool has been updated by the DfE to reflect more modern curriculum requirements and a wider range of school types.

The NCA programme will run for 2 years from 2023. The Valuation Office Agency (VOA), will visit approximately 4,500 schools in England to collect data on pupil capacity using the updated tool. These will include:

- All secondary schools (including academies)
- All special schools

VOA are public sector property experts, with extensive relevant experience and the required specialist skills and capacity to deliver a data collection of this nature. They are also easily able to provide full geographic coverage with property assessors based in more than 30 regional offices.

About this document

This document provides a high-level overview of NCA and how it will be delivered over the next 2 years. It is intended as a guide to the NCA programme for schools, responsible bodies, and other interested parties.

Throughout this document, the words 'school' and 'schools' refer to all educational establishments covered by NCA including academies and free schools.

The Net Capacity Assessment programme

The Net Capacity Assessment (NCA) Programme will ensure accurate, up to date data on the pupil capacity of schools, to support decision making by the DfE and our stakeholders about how to use the school estate and target capital funding efficiently.

The capacity of a school is the number of pupil places available. A net capacity assessment provides a single, robust, and consistent method of assessing the capacity of schools.

The benefits of the NCA programme

Accurate data on existing capacity within the school estate is an essential for schools and responsible bodies to support decision making on published admission numbers, admission appeals, and the use of their school buildings for curriculum and estate planning.

The NCA programme will support high quality school place planning by local authorities who have a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places, as well as allowing the DfE to best target capital for new school places and make good decisions regarding new schools, expansions, and closures.

These decisions are part of the process of driving up education standards by increasing places in high quality schools. Access to local high quality school places helps support families, especially the most disadvantaged who may have limited travel options and therefore need school places close to home.

Ensuring children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have access to the right kind of school place is also very important. This programme will ensure we have an accurate picture of the existing capacity of our special schools and help target capital for new places for children with SEND to areas where it is most needed.

Schools included in the NCA programme

Government funded educational establishments providing secondary phase education, all-through schools, middle schools, and all SEND schools, will be visited by the Valuations Office Agency (VOA) during the NCA programme.

All the establishment types in the table below will be in scope for the NCA programme, regardless of age or condition.

Establishment type	Responsible body
Community schools	Local authority
Foundation and trust schools	Local authority
Voluntary-aided schools	Governing body and charitable trust (relevant diocese or diocesan board of education for Catholic or Church of England church schools)
Voluntary-controlled schools	Local authority
Academies	Academy trust (and diocese or diocesan board of education for Catholic or Church of England church schools)
Free schools, studio schools and University Technical Colleges	Academy trust (and diocese or diocesan board of education for Catholic or Church of England church schools)

Table 1: Educational establishments included in the NCA, and their responsible bodies

Information collected by the NCA programme

All usable spaces will be included in the net capacity measurement. Every space in the school buildings will be listed and measured, including separate stores, garages, and temporary buildings. This is to ensure that there is enough support space available in the school for staff, storage, and other ancillary accommodation.

What will be measured?

- all buildings on any site used by a school.
- other buildings used by the school for at least 80 % of the school week
- circulation space
- open plan areas

Measured but not included in the NCA calculation:

- early years and childcare facilities
- adult learning and skills facilities
- specially resourced facilities
- parents' or community rooms and chapels

Delivery of the NCA programme

Delivery schedule

The Valuations Office Agency (VOA) will visit schools in England over a 2-year period between 2023 and 2025.

Site visits to schools have been allocated in batches, known as tranches, roughly equivalent to school terms and holiday periods. In the first tranche around 500 schools will be visited, followed by about 800 schools in each subsequent tranche. The timing of each school's visit within this period will be determined by VOA).

Schools and responsible bodies will be able to check which of their schools are scheduled for inclusion in the programme by checking the tranche lists published on the NCA page on GOV.UK.

Tranches	Dates
Tranche 1	July – December 2023
Tranche 2	January – April 2024
Tranche 3	April – August 2024
Tranche 4	September – December 2024
Tranche 5	January – May 2025
Tranche 6	May – August 2025

Table 2: Tranches and dates of each tranche

Net Capacity Assessment Process

The NCA Programme – how it works:

1. Communication and Engagement phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Information about the programme – publication of Programme Guide and schedule of school visits (tranches)Contact from VOA – (VOA contacts school)
2. Prepare for NCA phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Send previous data – VOA request any previous NCA data and site plansConfirm site visit – VOA and school confirm site visit
3. Capture data phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Site visit – School provides access for site visit, answers queries from VOA
4. QA phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Check Data – School checks room data. VOA/DfE quality assurance
5. Report phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none">NCA report and feedback questionnaire issued to all parties

The role of the Data Collection Organisation

We have commissioned the Valuation Office Agency – VOA - to collect the data required for the NCA programme. They are responsible for arranging site visits, visiting the school sites, and collecting and recording the information on room size and usage.

The role of schools during the NCA programme

Prior to the site visit, the school will be contacted by VOA. They will be asked to:

- Confirm the site visit date and time.
- Provide existing floor plans
- Meet with the VOA property assessor at the start and end of the site visit.
- Confirm room usage with the property assessor.

The role of the Department for Education (DfE)

As well as development and refinement of the NCA Tool, DfE is responsible for strategic direction and overall management of the programme, including the performance of the Data Collection Organisation. DfE will also make sure that information about the programme is communicated effectively to stakeholders and will collect feedback throughout the programme to help make improvements.

The role of responsible bodies

Responsible bodies for schools are listed in Table 1 above, and may be the admissions authority for the school, or responsible for ensuring the suitability of the premises. They include local authorities, multi academy trusts, charitable trusts and foundations, and dioceses/diocesan boards of education.

Responsible bodies will be notified by VOA of planned visit dates for their schools and will also receive a copy of the NCA report.

The role of local authorities

All local authorities have specific responsibilities for sufficiency of school places and effective pupil place planning, and a duty to report pupil capacity for all schools in their area through the annual School Capacity (SCAP) survey. Accordingly, local authorities will receive a copy of the NCA report in all cases.

Quality assurance

The NCA data includes many Quality Assurance (QA) measures, ensuring that the programme runs as intended and that the quality of the collected assessments are of a high standard.

Published Admission Number (PAN) and capacity

The net capacity assessment of a school will provide up to date and accurate data, which will help schools to set an appropriate Published Admission Number.

Floor Plans

VOA will collect any existing floor plans from the school, responsible body and/or local authority in advance of the site visit to prepare for the data collection on site. These will be sent out with the final NCA report to help schools and responsible bodies interpret the report.

In exceptional circumstances where no floor plan of any kind exists, VOA may commission a new plan to be created. This would involve a visit to the school from an organisation who will take detailed measurements and generate floor plans.

Reports and Feedback

The NCA report will normally be available within 3 to 4 months of the site visit. The report will be shared with the school, the responsible body, the local authority, and the diocese

where appropriate. All parties will be able to respond if they identify any inaccuracies in the report and will be invited to complete and return an online questionnaire about the NCA programme, including their site visit and report.

The NCA Report for every school includes:

- Data on every room including size, room type, room use.
- A summary of how many workplaces are available based on the number, size and use of rooms.
- How the number of workplaces is adjusted to allow for appropriate timetabling needs
- The maximum and minimum capacity for the school – the capacity range.
- A final Net Capacity figure - based on a formula that takes account of the capacity range and the Published Admission Number of the school.

Further information or advice

Please contact dfe.ncaprogramme@education.gov.uk

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why have a Net Capacity Assessment programme?

A. Accurate information on pupil capacity is important as it enables effective decision making for:

- Local Authorities – strategic school place planning, additional places needed, managing surplus places, estate planning.
- Responsible bodies and schools - admission number setting, admission appeals, estate planning, timetabling and curriculum delivery.
- DfE – basic need funding for additional places, free schools planning
- All – expansions, reductions in capacity, closures, new schools

Q. Does a school / Responsible Body (RB) have to update or change their capacity figure if the NCA reports a change in pupil capacity?

A. At this stage there is no requirement for the school to automatically update their capacity figure based on the NCA outcome. We would expect the NCA to inform a discussion between the responsible body and the local authority regarding what would be an appropriate figure to report in the next annual School Capacity (SCAP) survey. If this is different to the NCA outcome, we may ask for an explanation of this, but do accept that there can occasionally be circumstances where this is appropriate.

Q. Do responsible bodies need to change the capacity figure in the Funding Agreement if the NCA reports a different figure?

A. Academy Trusts are responsible for ensuring funding agreements contain accurate pupil capacity figures. Outcomes from Net Capacity Assessments will help trusts ensure that this is the case.

Q. Why are Primary schools not included?

A. Demographic data shows that there is currently greater pressure on numbers of school places in secondary school age groups. Also, a greater proportion of primary schools are still Local Authorities (LA) maintained and most LA's will still be maintaining and updating Net Capacity Assessments for them regularly.

Q. Why can't the visits for Condition Data Collection (CDC) and NCA happen at the same time?

A. The skills and knowledge required to carry out assessments of school condition are quite different to those required for net capacity assessments. So, the visits will be carried out by different personnel and organisations. In addition, CDC is a 5-year rolling programme, whereas the proposed NCA programme is a one-off project.

However, we will take account of CDC visits when scheduling the programme and we will try to minimise disruption to schools.

Q. How long will a site visit take for a Net Capacity Assessment?

A. Most assessments will be completed within 1 to 2 days, depending on the size of the school.

Q. Is this a rolling programme?

A. No, the programme is intended as a one-off update for all secondary schools and special schools. We do plan to make schools and responsible bodies more aware of the importance of assessing capacity on a regular basis and hope to publish the tools and methodology for Net Capacity Assessments that can help with that.



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