



Department
for Education

Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2017

Methodology document for SFR28/2017

June 2017

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About this release

This document provides an overview of the data used in the production of the Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2017 statistical first release.

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

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

Feedback

We are changing the way our releases look and welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at: infrastructure.statistics@education.gov.uk

About the output

Data Collection

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

[School Census Guidance](#)

[Independent School Census Guidance](#)

[General Hospital School Census Guidance](#)

[Alternative Provision Census Guidance](#)

Punctuality

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

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

Changes to the tables

The tables on special educational needs (SEN) which were published in this release in 2016 will be made available in the 'Special educational needs in England' statistical release due to be published on 27 July 2017

The cross-border movement matrix underlying data tables will be added to this release at a later date.

Accuracy and reliability

Data coverage, quality and validation

For the school census return, all schools that were open on school census day, 19 January 2017, were required to submit a school census return via their local authorities. Similarly, all open registered independent schools and general hospital schools were required to submit their respective returns and all 152 local authorities were required to submit their details of their alternative provision in the alternative provision census.

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

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

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

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

Disclosure Control

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

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

Use of the data

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

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

Accessibility

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

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

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

Definitions and coverage

Definitions

The pupil characteristics data in this release are submitted to the department by schools as part of the school census collection.

The definitions of all the characteristics are listed in the [school census guidance](#).

Coverage

The submission of the school census returns, including a set of named pupil records, is a statutory requirement on state-funded schools under [Section 537A of the Education Act 1996](#). A census return is required for all schools in January each year. This is to ensure schools provide pupil level data in a consistent manner that can support comparisons.

Completion of the school level annual school census by registered independent schools is a statutory requirement under the [Education \(Independent Educational Provision in England\) \(Provision of Information\) Regulations 2010](#).

The submission of the alternative provision census returns, including a named set of pupil records, is a statutory requirement on alternative provision providers under the [Education \(Information about Children in Alternative Provision\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#).

All data is as reported for school census day, 19 January 2017.



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