

Background Quality Report: Enrolments at schools and in funded pre-schools education in Northern Ireland (June 2017)

Dimension	Assessment by the author
Introduction	<p data-bbox="491 338 863 371"><i>Context for the quality report.</i></p> <p data-bbox="491 376 1353 551">The Department of Education (DE) adheres to the UK Statistics Authority code of practice for official statistics and the National Statistician’s guidance on quality. This document provides a summary of how the following Enrolments national statistics publication adheres to the code in terms of quality:</p> <p data-bbox="491 577 1310 656">https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-enrolments-overview</p> <p data-bbox="491 696 1361 1261">Information on pupil enrolments is collected annually from schools in Northern Ireland as part of what is commonly known as the School Census. This data collection exercise is an annual snapshot of pupil and school level data for each pre-school centre, nursery, special, primary, post-primary, hospital and independent school. The data collected is based on enrolments as per the Friday of the first full week in October each year. The main purpose of collecting this data is to obtain the necessary information for the Common Funding Formula (CFF) which determines funding allocated to schools. School census data is also used by policy branches within Department of Education (DE) and the Education Authority (EA) to create a statistical base to inform a wide range of policy areas, including auditing, inspections, finance allocations, school estate development and planning, special education, school improvement, area based planning, healthy schools, additional needs, early years, pupil support and integrated and Irish medium schools.</p> <p data-bbox="491 1301 1361 1514">The collection of data for primary, post-primary and special schools is facilitated by C2k, who are responsible for the provision of ICT systems in schools. Each school submits an electronic return to the Department at an individual pupil level. Independent, Hospital, Nursery and pre-schools return a paper form with pupil data aggregated at a school level.</p> <p data-bbox="491 1554 1342 1906">When the data are returned to the Department, a team of statisticians are responsible for processing and validating this information. This team consists of one Deputy Principal Statistician and one Assistant Statistician dedicated to the census on a permanent basis. There is further administrative support from two clerical staff for the period of the data collection and validation. Preliminary data is issued via a statistical bulletin in December each year. Data to inform the CFF is made available to the Department in January. A more detailed statistical bulletin based on final data is released at the end of February/start of March.</p>
Relevance	<i>The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</i>

	<p>All branches in DE and EA are consulted annually about what data are collated, including any additional information to be collected or any data that is no longer required. This ensures that data meets the key users' needs. In addition to this, feedback is welcomed from customers outside DE/EA via the feedback section on our website (there is a link to this in our statistical bulletin). Contact details are also provided for the relevant statistician, should a member of the public wish to offer any feedback directly or request further analysis of data.</p> <p>In liaising and engaging with other users, there are very rarely circumstances where necessary information is not collected. In these situations, consideration is made to collecting requested data in the future if it is practical and cost-effective to do so.</p>
<p>Accuracy and Reliability</p>	<p><i>The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.</i></p> <p>Coverage of the data is 100% as all funded schools must submit a census return to avail of Departmental funding.</p> <p>As the data collected are from an administrative source and is used for schools' management information purposes, there is a basis to assume that it is within the school's benefit that the data supplied is as accurate and reliable as possible. Schools obtain data from parents by means of a data collection form, which is then keyed into the SIMS system administered by C2k. Naturally, there is scope for input error at this stage. Attempt is made to mitigate against common mistakes throughout the validation process. The validation programme for the School Census can be found in Annex 1.</p> <p>The School Census captures enrolment information on a specific day i.e. the Friday of the first full week in October. Due to the nature of taking a snapshot of enrolments on a specific day, there may be some natural under or over-coverage i.e. if pupils join a school after census day. However, it is not practical or indeed fair to all schools from a funding perspective to try and correct for discrepancies of this nature. When a pupil is counted in more than one school (due to moving around census date) an exercise is undertaken to determine which they should be allocated to.</p>
<p>Timeliness and Punctuality</p>	<p><i>Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.</i></p> <p>Data are collected as of October each year. Preliminary data are released in December of the same year, and final data are released in the following February. Given the workload to process and thoroughly validate the data to the standard required, there is no scope to release data any sooner.</p> <p>There have been no instances of data not being released as per the planned publication date.</p>
<p>Accessibility and</p>	<p><i>Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data,</i></p>

<p>Clarity</p>	<p><i>also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.</i></p> <p>A summary of the key statistics are available via the statistical bulletins released in December and February each year.</p> <p>Data tables at a Northern Ireland, Education Authority Region (prior to the formation of the EA in March 2015) and school level are available on the DE website. These data tables include commonly used and requested data, examples of which include: overall enrolments split by year, free school meal entitlement, pupils in Irish medium education, religion of pupils, newcomer pupils, special educational needs (SEN) and ethnicity. Metadata explaining the school census process and all key terms is appended to these tables. Previous years' data is included on the website also, so time series analysis is accessible.</p> <p>School level information is also available via the Schools+ function accessible on the Department website. Schools+ is entirely web based, therefore no additional software is required to access data this way. Data includes enrolments by year group, gender, SEN, free school meal entitlement, newcomers, non-domiciled pupils, looked after children, religion and ethnicity for each school.</p> <p>Key statistics broken down by various geographies are also available via the NINIS website. Metadata explaining the school census process and all key terms is appended to these tables.</p> <p>If data is not available online, users are invited to request specific data via email. These data requests are routinely answered within 15 working days. All data available is provided, the only exception being any figures deemed sensitive that are less than five which are suppressed to avoid the potential identification of individual pupils.</p>
<p>Coherence and Comparability</p>	<p><i>Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.</i></p> <p>All data is obtained directly from schools, thus guaranteeing coherence of the data. The only difference is with primary, post-primary and special schools where the data are collected electronically at a pupil level, and independent, hospital, nursery and pre-schools where the data are collected via a paper form with data aggregated at a school level. While individual pupil level data is not available for the latter, aggregated school level data is comparable across all school types.</p> <p>The only data where different sources are used is free school meal entitlement, which is supplied by the Education Authority as well as the school. The EA data is used to validate the schools' free school meal data to ensure it matches.</p> <p>The variables collected have been largely stable over the last ten years,</p>

	<p>and the methods used to collect data are the same, so data is comparable over time. A full variable list can be found at annex B, with detail of all changes over time at annex C.</p> <p>As education is a devolved issue the other UK administrations often have different approaches or different policies underlying data that is collected, for example, free school meal entitlement criteria, the process to designating pupils as having special educational needs, etc, differ across the regions. This means that making direct comparisons can be difficult.</p>
<p>Trade-offs between Output Quality Components</p>	<p><i>Trade-offs are the extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other.</i></p> <p>The main trade-off is timeliness against accuracy. The need to have data available in January to inform funding, and to finalise data in February for the rest of the Department's purposes means that timeliness is the key consideration. As such, provisional data is released in January, with the final data being released as soon as possible afterwards in February/March.</p> <p>However, accuracy is not comprised to meet these deadlines. A detailed range of validation checks (see annex A) are conducted prior to data being made available, and this list of validation checks is reviewed on an annual basis and re-prioritised depending on user needs and common errors.</p>
<p>Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions</p>	<p><i>The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.</i></p> <p>The content of the census is defined by the Department's information needs. The relevance of this is checked each year when users across DE branches and the Education Authority are consulted for additions and amendments for the following year. This is a stimulus for discussions on needs with individual customers. DE statisticians also meet several times per year with LMS (Local Management of Schools) officers from the EAs who give feedback on requirements (DE Schools Finance Branch also sit on this forum). A second forum in which we participate is the C2k Liaison Group which captures formal feedback from C2k help teams (and indirectly schools) about the experiences of schools in providing census data.</p> <p>Users of the data are surveyed annually via the NISRA Customer Satisfaction Survey. It is not possible to break down the results of the survey to those that specifically used enrolment data; however, the satisfaction levels across NISRA as a whole are very high. There is scope for any comments raised in the survey to be fed back to the team that manages the School Census to take onboard for improvements going forward.</p> <p>Users are invited in the statistical bulletins to provide feedback on the publication and to request further information if required.</p>

<p>Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden</p>	<p><i>The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.</i></p> <p>As the infrastructure to collect the data already exists, and schools need to generate much of this data for their own management information purposes, the annual operational cost is minimal year on year.</p> <p>The Department collects a range of information from schools each year. To help minimise the burden on schools, information on enrolments and attendance is collected in one exercise, the annual school census.</p> <p>Respondent burden is measured annually via a sample survey of schools making data returns through the school census process. It found that the compliance costs for all schools and voluntary and private preschool centres in 2016/17 is estimated to cost around £195,963.55 of school staff's time.</p>
<p>Confidentiality, Transparency and Security</p>	<p><i>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.</i></p> <p>Given the potentially sensitive nature of the pupil level data collected, confidentiality is something that is taken very seriously. Data is transferred securely via the school's SIMS system to a secure web exchange. The data are then downloaded from the web exchange to a secure server, which only statistical staff has access to.</p> <p>Sensitive data relating to individual pupils, or to small numbers of pupils, are not published or released externally. In this instance, sensitive data are considered as religion, ethnicity, free school meal entitlement, special educational needs details, newcomer details, etc. For this data, any figures that are less than five are suppressed, and an adjacent figure in a column or row in any table with a total is counter-suppressed to avoid the potential identification of individual pupils. Other details, such as pupil year group, are not considered sensitive and small numbers may be published in relation to them.</p>

Annex A

Validation checklist for school census 2016/17

Stage	What it entails	2016/17	
		Timeframe	Who responsible
Initial electronic school validations	Checking primary, post-primary and special school files on a school by school basis as they come in. Check against last year's data for key vars, check no missing data, year group by age, missing addresses, learning support centre pupils and classes – key funding variables only	Census day – end of Oct/early Nov	GT / PM / AB
Nursery and pre-school keying	Keying nursery and pre-school forms. Processing electronic forms. Checking any errors or incomplete data with schools	Census day – mid Nov	AB/NT
Duplicate pupils	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Merge across UPN and check for no double Cs, all dual reg with an M and an S (i.e. change Cs and Ss, check Cs and Ms). 2. Combine primary, pp and special files. Create combined DOB/forename and DOB/surname vars 3. Check that any S has a matching M. 	Mid/late Nov	PM
Highest level of study	New HLS variable and syntax allows this validation to be done along with main post primary data. Check anything that is a non-GCSE/A Level to figure out if it should be recorded as a level 2 or level 3, and assign correct year group.	Nov-Dec	GT / PM
Templates produced	Board templates populated – year, part-time, special unit, forces, traveller/Roma, care, newcomer, IM, FSM data – all with the exception of fsm to be final at this point.	Late Nov	GT / PM
Free school meal validations	Data match against Census data and EA data. Send to EA fsm totals and a list with pupils that need added/removed, and pupils not appearing on census returns. EA to confirm changes and SRT to make them. EA to advise schools to get in touch with SRT to confirm all changes.	Nov-Jan	PM (matching) / AB / NT (contacting schools)
Nursery and pre-school postcodes	Keying postcodes, processing electronic versions for nursery and preschools	Late Oct - Dec	AB / NT
KS2	Run all files, aggregate with C file to ensure full coverage of year 8s.	Dec	GT / PM
Dec stat bulletin		Mid-Dec	GT / PM
Class size and special unit check	Check to see that classes look reasonable in terms of years they span and/or fit the class name description and they don't look too small.	Nov as part of initial validations (with additional check in Jan if necessary)	PM
Address validation	Match addresses against Pointer to get X and Y co-ordinates. Any addresses with no match should be checked against last year's data, and validated XY taken if not changed. Remaining addresses sent through to LPS to validate.	Dec-Feb	PM

EOTAS	Process manual EOTAS forms Checking with home schools about missing EOTAS pupils	Jan-Feb	PM
Year groups Y13s	Creating the cyear actual variable – checking that all y12s have GCSE as HLS and are in y12 classes, y13s are studying A Level and are in y13 classes and y14s are A2 pupils only	Jan-Feb	PM
Dual reg pupils	Checking for differences between data for Ms and Ss, check any issues with schools.	Jan-Feb	PM
Feb stat bulletin		End Feb	GT / PM

Annex B

Data collected at individual pupil level via EDI for post primary schools

Gender
Date of birth
Unique Pupil Identifier/Admission number
Pupil name
Pupil educated off-site but not in a school
Dual registered pupils
Religion
Ethnicity
Highest level of study (including subjects studied for validation purposes)
Free school meal entitlement
Year group
Registration group (for validation only)
SEN stage
SEN need type
Boarder
Fee payer
Date of arrival at school
In learning support centre
Type of Learning Support Centre
In Irish Medium Unit
Home postcode
Country of residence (for validation only)
First language
Newcomer child
Date recorded as a Newcomer
Date ended as a Newcomer
'Looked after' child
'Looked after' child living arrangements
'Looked after' child responsible health trust
Children of service personnel
Level achieved at KS2 in English and mathematics
Reasons KS2 not achieved in English and mathematics
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)
Pupils with a disability
Educational maintenance allowance
Pupil has a Personal Education Plan (PEP)
Level of Study (pupils in years 11 – 15 only)

Data collected at summary level for post primary schools

Pupils not domiciled in NI
Projected enrolments by year group
In-migration and Out-migration to NI over the past year

Number of special units in the school
Level achieved at KS3 in English and mathematics (senior highs only)
Reasons KS3 not achieved in English and mathematics (senior highs only)

Data collected at individual pupil level via EDI for special schools

Gender
Date of birth
Unique Pupil Identifier/Admission number
Pupil name
Pupil educated off-site but not in a school
Dual registered pupils
Religion
Ethnicity
First language
Newcomer child
Date recorded as a Newcomer
Date ended as a Newcomer
Free school meal entitlement
'Looked after' child
'Looked after' child living arrangements
'Looked after' child responsible health trust
SEN stage
SEN need type
Date of arrival at school
Home postcode
Country of residence
Year Group
Registration group
Children of service personnel
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)
Educational maintenance allowance
Pupil has a Personal Education Plan (PEP)
Registered with a Sure Start project
Previously attended a Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 year olds

Data collected at summary level for special schools

Pupils not domiciled in NI
Projected enrolments by year group
In-migration and Out-migration to NI over the past year

Data collected at individual pupil level via EDI for primary schools

Gender
Date of birth
Unique Pupil Identifier/Admission number
Pupil name
Pupil educated off-site but not in a school

Dual registered pupils
Religion
Ethnicity
Free school meal entitlement
Pupils with parent in receipt of JSA/Income Support (nursery pupils only)
Year group
Pattern of attendance for nursery pupils
SEN stage
SEN need type
Boarder
Fee payer
Date of arrival at the school
In Learning Support centre
Type of Learning Support Centre
In Irish Medium Unit
Home postcode
Country of residence
First language
Newcomer child
Date recorded as a Newcomer
Date ended as a Newcomer
Looked after child
'Looked after' child living arrangements
'Looked after' child responsible health trust
Registration groups (including composite classes).
Children of service personnel
Pupils with a disability
Previous educational experience of year 1
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)
Pupil has a Personal Education Plan (PEP)
Registered with a Sure Start project
Previously attended a Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 year olds

Data collected at summary level for primary schools

Pupils not domiciled in NI
Projected enrolments by year group
In-migration and Out-migration to NI over the past year
Number of special units in a school

Data collected at summary level for nursery schools

Gender
Pattern of attendance
Age
Summer birthday
Projected numbers by age and pattern of attendance
Looked after children
Class size and numbers
Pupils with parent in receipt of JSA/Income Support

Religion
Ethnicity
Newcomer children
SEN stage
SEN need type
Children of service Personnel
Children not domiciled in Northern Ireland.
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)
Disability

Data collected at pupil level for nursery schools

Home postcode

Data collected at summary level voluntary and private pre-school centres

Number of hours of pre-school activity provided per day

Total children in centre

Number of funded children

For funded children:

Gender
Pattern of attendance
Age
Summer birthday
Projected numbers by age and pattern of attendance
Class size and numbers
Pupils with parent in receipt of JSA/Income Support
Religion
Ethnicity
Newcomer children
SEN stage
SEN need type
Children of service Personnel
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)
Disability

Data collected at pupil level for voluntary and private pre-school centres

Home postcode

Annex C

School census year on year progress report

2006/07

EDI returns for primary and special schools introduced.

- Pupil level data available for primary schools
- New summary sheets introduced

Irish language forms and documentation introduced for IM schools/pre schools.

- Irish language documentation for all schools in IM sector

Documentation put on website

- Reference documents for schools put on website and schools emailed access links

2007/08

Changes to xml conversion procedure

- Facility for bulk conversion of files introduced

UPN for post primary pupils introduced.

2008/09

Forces children marker collected at pupil level.

UPN for primary and special schools introduced.

Attendance data collected at pupil level.

2009/10

Code for 'Roma' introduced in ethnicity variable.

Accommodation type for Traveller children collected.

2010/11

Revised language codes introduced.

Registration type – dual or single – variable introduced for primary, post primary and special school pupils.

Children educated of-site but not in a school variable introduced for primary, post-primary and special schools.

2011/12

Extended use of Common Transfer File mechanism for transfer of pupil information between primary and post primary schools.

2012/13

No changes.

2013/14

Accommodation type for 'looked after' children collected.

Responsible Health Trust for 'looked after' children collected.

Home postcode for children in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres collected.

Newcomer start date collected for pupils in primary, special and post-primary schools.

2014/15

Disability information collected from nursery schools and voluntary and private preschool centres.

Newcomer end date collected for pupils in primary, special and post-primary schools.

2015/16

Personal Education Plan information collected for pupils in primary, post primary and special schools.

Pupil registered with a Sure Start project

Pupil previously attended a Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 year olds collected for pupils in primary and special schools.

2016/17

Level of study variable for pupils enrolled in years 11 – 15.

Online form used by Voluntary and Private Preschool Centres to return data.

Excel form used by Nursery schools to return data.

2017/18

Type of Learning Support Centre

SIMS extended to EOTAS centres to facilitate electronic collection