



Department
for Education

Statistical Release

SFR53/2013

12 December 2013

Coverage: England

**Theme: Children,
Education and Skills**

Issued by

Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Telephone:

Press Office

020 7925 6789

Public Enquiries

0370 000 2288

Statistician

Eleanor Cotzias

Email

info@education.gsi.gov.uk

Internet

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/statistics>

NATIONAL PUPIL PROJECTIONS: FUTURE TRENDS IN PUPIL NUMBERS

This statistical release provides national projections for the number of pupils in schools by type of school and age group. Findings presented here update those published in March 2013 (SFR11/2013) using the mid-2011 based interim population projections from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

This is an Official Statistics publication which presents the Department for Education's main national level pupil projections. The statistics are presented as the latest available findings and have been released to help planning, to study trends and to inform a variety of programmes and initiatives.

The Department intends to reduce the frequency of this publication from a twice a year update to an annual update. This is because we anticipate that the change in pupil numbers between using ONS national and sub-national data will be relatively small. Pupil projections will be published every summer once ONS release their sub-national population data and the Department's Spring School Census data are available. If you have any comments on this change then please direct them to: PupilPopulation.PROJECTIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk

KEY POINTS

Projected number of pupils in schools – an overview

Overall pupil numbers¹ (aged up to and including 15²) in state-funded schools³ began to increase in 2011 and are projected to continue rising (figure 1).

Numbers in maintained nursery and state-funded primary schools⁴ started increasing in 2010 and are projected to continue rising. Between 2013 and 2017, pupil numbers in maintained nursery and state-funded primary schools are projected to increase by 8% (figure 2).

¹ Numbers are full-time equivalent unless otherwise stated (see Technical Note 5).

² All pupil numbers are as at January, by age at previous 31 August.

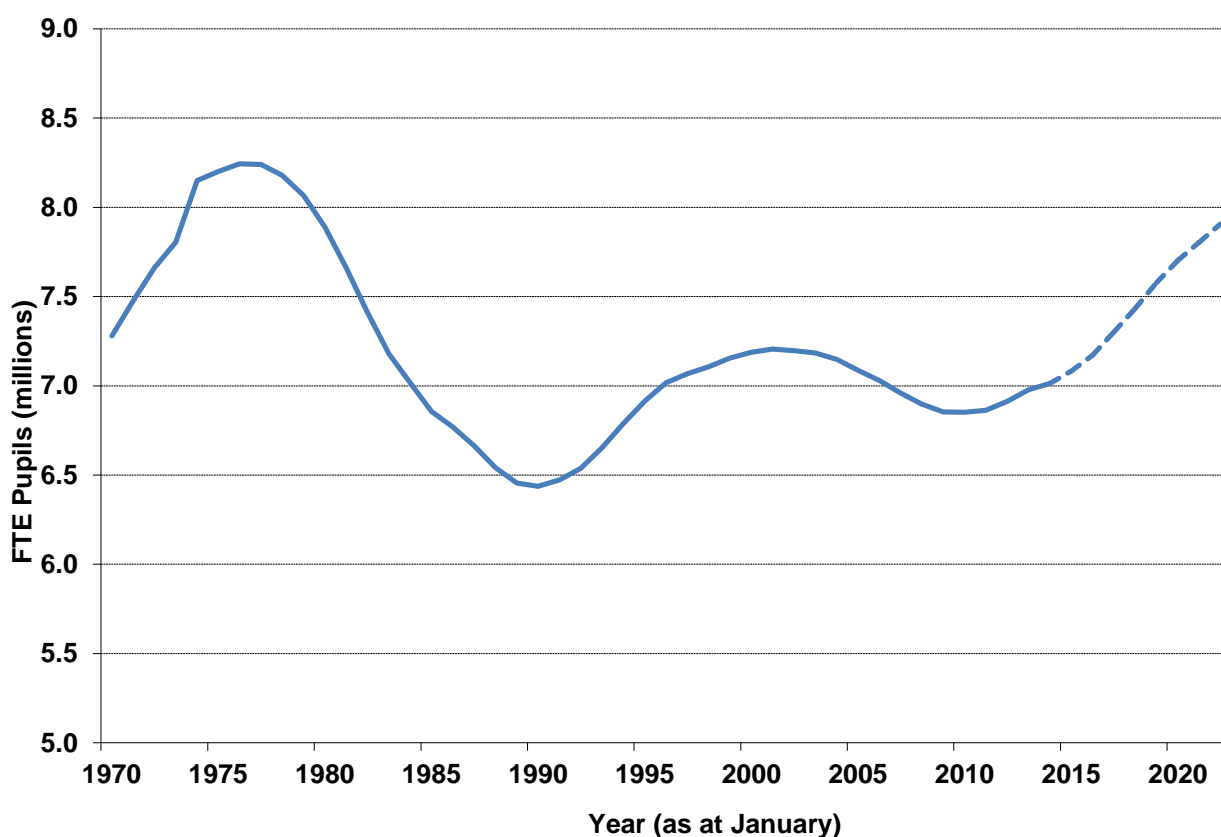
³ State-funded schools include local authority maintained schools, all types of academy, pupil referral units, City Technology Colleges, Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools.

⁴ State-funded primary schools include maintained primary schools, primary academies and primary Free Schools.

State-funded secondary⁵ pupil numbers aged up to and including 15 started declining in 2005 and are projected to continue to decline until 2015, after which the increases in primary pupil numbers will start to flow through into secondary schools.

By 2017, the number of state-funded secondary pupils aged up to and including 15 is projected to be 1% lower than in 2013. However, in 2018 pupil numbers are expected to recover to 2013 levels.

Figure 1: All state-funded schools: Full-time equivalent (FTE) number of pupils (aged up to and including 15) in England
 Years: January 1970 to 2013 (actual) – January 2014 to 2022 (projection)



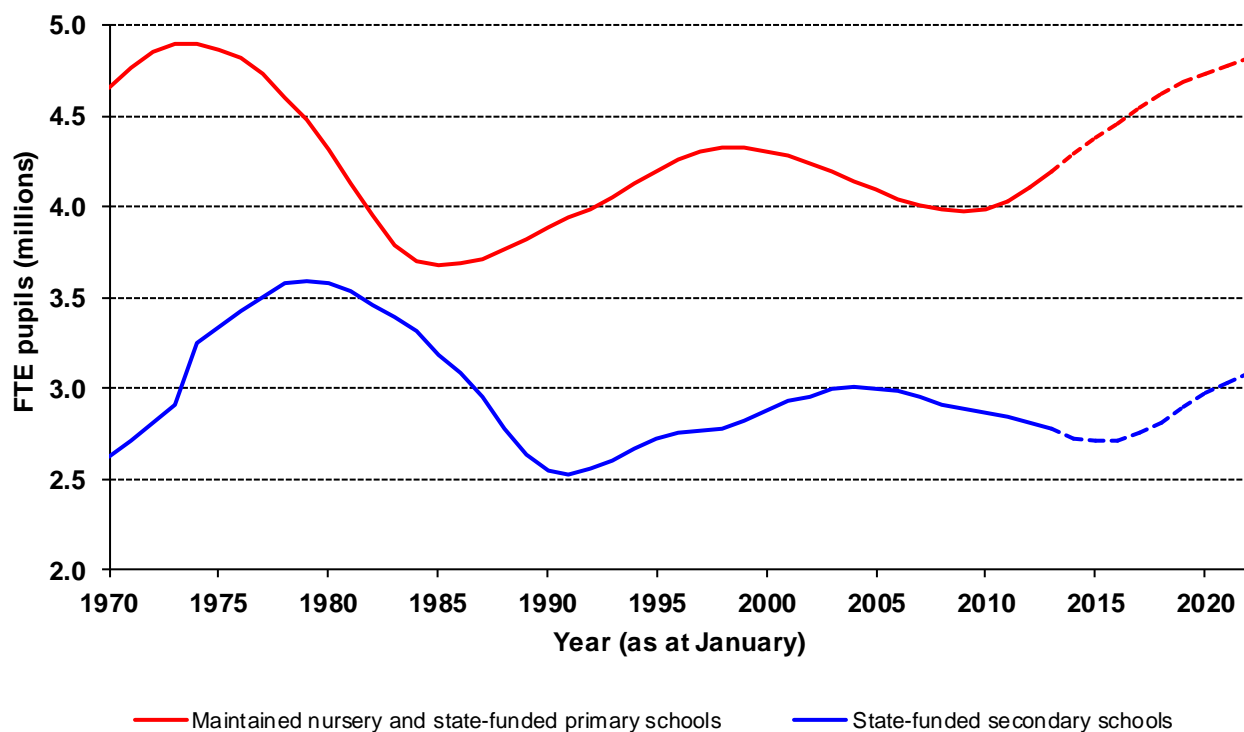
Source: School Census, School Level Annual School Census and Pupil Referral Unit Census (actuals); DfE Pupil Projection Model - PT285 (projections)

Notes:

1. Projections use the mid-2011 based interim sub-national population projections produced by the Office for National Statistics.

⁵ State-funded secondary schools include maintained secondary and all-through schools, secondary and all-through academies, secondary and all-through Free Schools, City Technology Colleges, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools. All-through special schools and special academies are not included.

Figure 2: Maintained nursery and state-funded primary and secondary schools: Full-time equivalent (FTE) number of pupils (aged up to and including 15) by type of school in England
 Years: January 1970 to 2013 (actual) – January 2014 to 2022 (projection)



Source: School Census, School Level Annual School Census and Pupil Referral Unit Census (actuals); DfE Pupil Projection Model - PT285 (projections)

Notes:

1. Projections use the mid-2011 based interim sub-national population projections produced by the Office for National Statistics.

Early years

The total *headcount*⁶ of pupils aged less than five in maintained nursery and state-funded primary and secondary schools fell every year between 1999 and 2007 before rising to 972,000 in 2013. Numbers are projected to reach a peak of 1.069 million in 2017 – an increase of 10% from 2013. Between 2017 and 2022 numbers are projected to decline.

State-funded primary schools

The full-time equivalent number of pupils of all ages in state-funded primary schools peaked in 1999 at 4.301 million and began to fall in 2000, reaching a low of 3.947 million in 2009, due to the downward trend in birth rates during the late 1990s.

Births in England have been broadly rising since 2002. In 2010, the number of pupils in primary schools began to increase. By 2017, there are projected to be 4.525 million pupils in state-funded primary schools, an increase of 8% from 2013. By 2022, the number is projected to

⁶ The tables in this release are presented as full-time equivalents. Pupil headcounts can be found in the supporting data which accompany this release.

increase to 4.793 million, 15% higher than in 2013.

The number of pupils aged 5 to 6 years in state-funded primary schools fell almost every year between 1998 and 2008, and started to rise in 2009. Numbers for ages 7 to 10 peaked in 2000 before falling each subsequent year until 2011 and starting to rise in 2012.

State-funded secondary schools

State-funded secondary pupil numbers aged up to and including 15 reached a peak in 2004, as a result of the upward trend in birth rates during the late 1980s. A change in this trend caused pupil numbers to decrease from 2005.

In 2013 the number of full-time equivalent pupils in state-funded secondary schools aged up to and including 15 was 2.780 million. By 2015 this is expected to be 2.707 million – a decrease of 3%. From 2016 onwards pupil numbers are projected to rise again. By 2018 they are projected to recover to 2013 levels.

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Table 1: State-funded schools: Full-time equivalent number of pupils (aged up to and including 15) by type of school in England: January 2002 to 2013 (actual) – January 2014 to 2022 (projection)

Table 2: All schools: Full-time equivalent number of pupils by age group and by type of school in England: January 2007 to 2013 (actual) – January 2014 to 2017 (projection)

TECHNICAL NOTES

1. This release presents the Department's main national-level pupil projections. The statistical release *School capacity: academic year 2011 to 2012* was published on 1 March 2013 (SFR01/2013) and is a separate publication using a different methodology. It includes local authorities' own forecasts of future pupil numbers, based on local-level information, such as inter-authority movement of pupils. The school capacity SFR is due to be updated in December 2013. The national pupil projections presented in the current release are produced within the Department, at national level only. They are based on the mid-2011 population projections from ONS and cover a longer time period (up to 2022) than the school capacity release (SFR01/2013). Differences in the methodologies used by individual local authorities for pupil number forecasts mean that the aggregated totals in the school capacity release will differ from the national-level projections presented here, but trends are broadly similar.

Changes from previous publications

2. This statistical release does not include tables or figures presented in previous releases concerning the effect of varying migration assumptions on pupil numbers. This is because the ONS interim population projections used for this release did not include the variant migration scenarios which are required to derive such tables and figures. ONS reinstated the migration variants in their mid-2012 based population projections, which were released on the 6 November 2013, which will enable the department to include migration scenarios in future pupil projection statistical releases.
3. As in the March 2013 release, this release does not include projections for pupils aged 16 and over. Post-16 projections were not published in March due to on-going work to reassess the existing projections for this age group. They are not published in this release because the projections that were included in previous releases were aligned to overall 16-18 participation rate projections produced for the Education Funding Agency 16-19 Funding Statement. This has been replaced with a much simpler funding letter to 16-19 education and training providers which does not include projections that are comparable with the pre-16 projections in this publication. This is a permanent change.
4. *Alternative Provision Settings*: This Official Statistic update removes dual registered pupils from schools classified as Alternative Provision Setting. This removes double counting in pupil numbers from this school type, present in previous statistical releases. Updated data was only available from 2011. This means the time series from 2002 to 2010 has been removed.

Definitions

5. *Date of count*: All figures relate to January of the year shown. For years up to and including 2013 they are firm actuals from the School Census and related censuses⁷. Figures for 2014 and later years are projected.

⁷ The related censuses are the School Level Annual School Census and Pupil Referral Unit Census. In this document "School Census" is taken to include these related censuses.

6. *Types of school:*

- “Maintained” refers to public sector schools maintained by local authorities.
- “State-funded schools” include maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, all academy types, alternative provision settings, City Technology Colleges, Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools.
- “State-funded primary schools” include maintained primary schools, primary academies and primary Free Schools.
- “State-funded secondary schools” include maintained secondary and all-through schools, secondary and all-through academies, secondary and all-through Free Schools, City Technology Colleges, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools. However, state-funded secondary schools do not include all-through special schools and special academies.
- “State-funded special schools” include maintained special schools, special academies, special Free Schools and general hospital schools.
- “Non-maintained special schools” constitute a separate category of school.
- “Alternative provision settings” include pupil referral units, alternative provision academies and alternative provision Free Schools, but not other types of alternative provision⁸.
- “Independent schools” include all schools that are not state funded, except non-maintained special schools.

More detailed definitions for all of these school types are available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/edubase/glossary.xhtml>

7. *Pupils’ age:* The breakdown by age (measured at the previous 31 August except where stated) is as follows:

- Under 5 = ages up to and including rising 5s;
- Rising 5s = pupils aged 4 at previous 31 August who became 5 by 31 December;
- Primary ages = 5 to 10;
- Secondary ages = 11 to 15;
- Post-16 = 16 and over.

8. *Part-time and full-time equivalent:* Part-time pupils are included as representing 0.5 of a full-time pupil to give totals as full-time equivalents. Until 2002, only pupils aged under 5 could be recorded as part-time. From 2003 to 2011 inclusive, state-funded schools could record part-time pupils of any age. From 2012, all pupils aged 5 to 15 as at the previous 31 August are recorded by state-funded schools as full-time, but all pupils aged under 5 or over 15, and pupils of any age in independent schools, may be recorded as part-time.

9. *Migration:* Population projections are based on estimates of the resident population. The population includes all usually resident persons, whatever their nationality. Long-term migrants are defined as individuals who change their country of usual residence for a period of at least a year, so that the country of destination becomes the country of usual residence. Pupils who are short-term migrants and are staying in England for less than a year are included in the School Census and therefore in the pupil projections and are not separately identifiable.

⁸ Only registered alternative provision settings that are directly state-funded are included here. Non-registered alternative provision settings (which can be indirectly state funded where places are commissioned by schools and local authorities) are not included.

Projection method

10. The Pupil Projection Model (PPM) produces national projections for the number of pupils by age and school type. It uses ONS population estimates and projections, information on birth registrations in England and data derived from the School Census. Population estimates and projections are modified from their original mid-year basis to simulate the definitions used in the School Census (a January count with pupils' ages as at the previous 31 August). A comparison of a series of past years of pupil numbers and population estimates provides a starting point for the PPM. School Census data inform assumptions about future proportions of the school population by type of school.
11. The PPM currently uses the most recent ONS population projections, based on the population at mid-2011. These population projections incorporate findings from the 2011 UK Census. Further information on the methodology and assumptions underlying the population projections is available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/snpp/sub-national-population-projections/Interim-2011-based/stb-2011-based-snpp.html>. These projections have been modified by the Department as described in paragraph 18.
12. The adjustments made to the PPM methodology for the March 2013 publication, to manage the effect of changes in ONS' revised population estimates for years prior to the 2011 UK Census, have also been applied to the methodology used for this release. Specifically, these changes relate to observed differences in the reported rate of population growth for older school-age cohorts before and after the Census. The applied adjustments allow a robust estimation of pupil numbers to be made. This aspect of the methodology will be kept under review for future publications.

Accuracy

13. Actual pupil counts for years up to 2013 have been derived from data collected via the School Census. The figures for 2014 and later years are projections and are subject to increasing margins of error.
14. For example, in the pupil projections that were released in March 2013 it was projected that there would be 3,590,000 pupils aged rising 5 to 10 in state-funded primary schools in January 2013. This was 0.07% higher than the actual number (a difference of 3,000 pupils). There is less certainty about the smaller categories, such as particular age bands or smaller categories of school.
15. There is also less certainty over longer projections. For example, 2006-based pupil projections projected 3,595,000 pupils aged rising 5 to 10 in state-funded schools in January 2012. This was 0.27% higher than the actual number (a difference of 10,000 pupils). Factors which may contribute to differences between projections and actual data are:
 - The underlying population trend, which depends on assumptions about births, mortality and migration;
 - Participation among pupils aged under 5 and over 15, which may differ from the rates assumed;
 - School reorganisation by local authorities, which may affect the balance between

- primary and secondary schools;
 - Variations in the proportions attending different school types, such as independent schools;
 - The introduction of new Government policy, such as the introduction of new school types.
16. Specifically with regard to pupil referral units and alternative provision, a new approach to exclusions is currently being trialled in 11 local authorities where schools will retain responsibility for provision for pupils whom they have excluded. The outcome of this trial may lead to some reduction in the future number of pupils in pupil referral units and alternative provision academies and Free Schools, and corresponding increases in the number of pupils in other types of school. As there is only limited evidence on how schools will choose to react to this policy, no forecast of the effect of this new approach has been made at present.
17. Subject to Royal Assent, there will be changes to the special educational system from September 2014 as a result of the Children and Families Bill. It is too early to quantify the effects of these changes and so they are not reflected here.
18. Pupil projections rely heavily on the population projections produced by ONS which are widely used across government for planning purposes. National population projections are National Statistics, which means they undergo regular quality assurance reviews and are produced free from political interference. The projections are produced using demographic assumptions about future levels of fertility, mortality and migration, based on analysis of trends and expert advice. The assumptions are agreed in liaison with the devolved administrations, following consultation with key users of projections in each country and advice from an expert academic advisory panel.
19. The ONS interim population projections used in these pupil projections were made in advance of revisions to estimates for earlier years. ONS therefore applied trends from the 2010-based population estimates to 2011-based population projections. This mismatch in the time series may have affected the accuracy of the population projections. In particular, it is known to have resulted in an over-projection of the number of births⁹. To correct for this, the Department has applied a downward adjustment (amounting to about 3%) to the numbers of children born after mid-2011 that were reported. ONS is aware and supportive of this approach.

Quality

20. This is an Official Statistics publication. Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs and are produced free from political interference.

Revision

21. This publication is produced using the final December 2013 PPM and there are no plans to

⁹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/snpp/sub-national-population-projections/Interim-2011-based/index.html>

make any revisions to this publication. If a revision is necessary, this will be made in accordance with the Department's revisions policy, which is published at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190767/Revisions_Policy_v3.pdf

22. The PPM is updated annually. Updated population projections are expected to be released in 2014 and will make use of data obtained from the January 2014 School Census.

User engagement

23. This publication has been designed to be used to help inform planning and for the studying of trends in pupil numbers. Please contact Eleanor Cotzias at PupilPopulation.PROJECTIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk if you have comments on the content or presentation of this release so that we can take account of your needs in future editions.

Transparency

24. As part of a Government drive for data transparency in official publications, supporting data for this release have also been published in an open standardised format.

Enquiries

25. Enquiries about the statistical first release should be directed to PupilPopulation.PROJECTIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk

26. Alternatively, enquires may be addressed to:

Education Standards Evidence and Dissemination Division
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

27. All press enquiries should be addressed to Press Office at:

Press Office News Desk
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Telephone number: 020 7925 6789