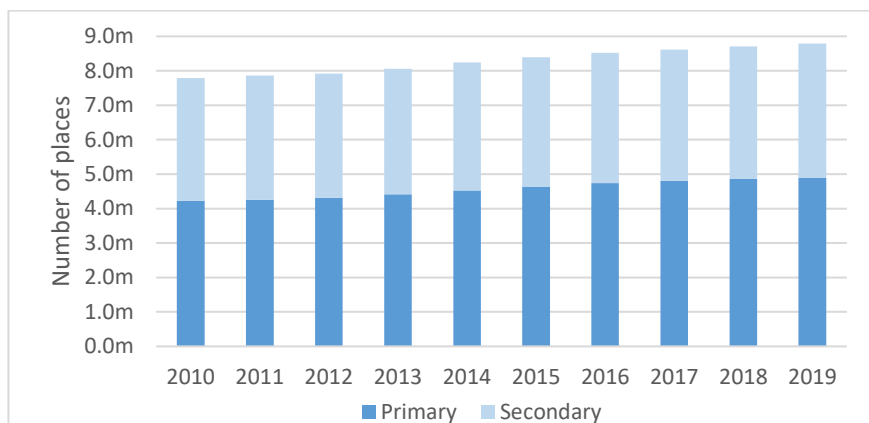




## School Capacity in England: academic year 2018/19

26 March 2020

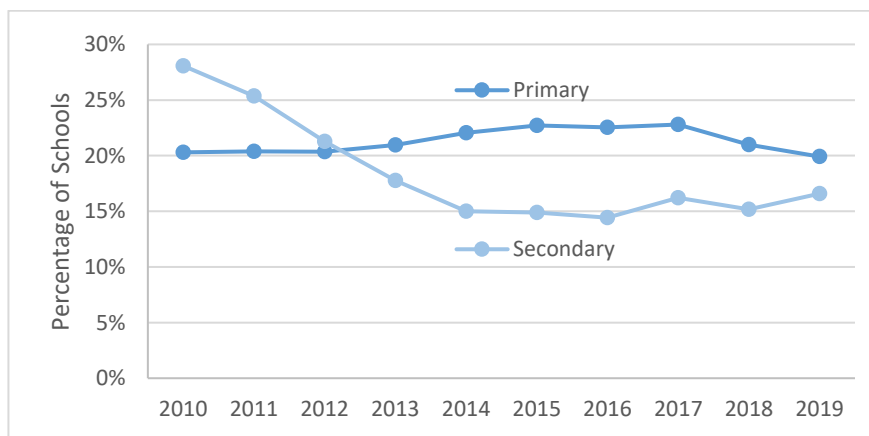
### Capacity: Over 1 million school places added since 2010



There has been a net increase of 1 million additional school places since 2010: 670,000 primary (as deemed) places, 330,000 secondary (as deemed) places (see [definitions](#)).

Between 2018 and 2019, 80,000 places were added to the school estate (30,000 primary places, 50,000 secondary places).

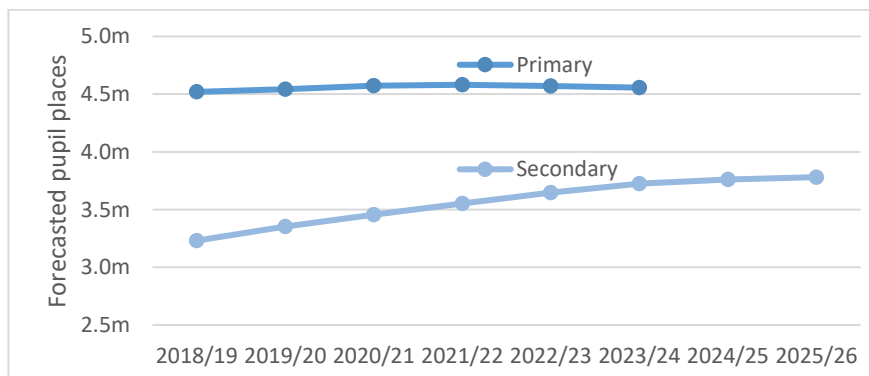
### Percentage of schools at or over capacity continued to fall for primary although increased at secondary, reflecting recent increases in pupils reaching secondary age



The percentage of primary schools that are at or over capacity in 2019 is 20%, down from a high of 23% in 2017. The percentage now reflects those seen in 2010 - 2012.

The percentage of secondary schools that are at or over capacity in 2019 is 17%, up slightly on 2018 but still significantly down from 28% in 2010 (when the series started).

### Local authority pupil forecasts: Demand for secondary places continues to rise



Local authority forecasts submitted to DfE suggest primary pupil numbers may peak in 2021/22 and then level off.

Local authorities expect secondary pupil numbers to continue to rise as the increase previously seen in primary pupil numbers continues to move through the secondary phase.

## Contents

|     |                                                           |    |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1.  | About this release .....                                  | 3  |
| 2.  | School Capacity.....                                      | 4  |
| 3.  | Pupil Forecasts .....                                     | 6  |
| 4.  | Local Authority Additional Places.....                    | 7  |
| 5.  | Place Planning Estimates .....                            | 7  |
| 6.  | School sixth form capacity: experimental statistics ..... | 8  |
| 7.  | Accompanying tables.....                                  | 8  |
| 8.  | Further information .....                                 | 8  |
| 9.  | Official Statistics .....                                 | 9  |
| 10. | Technical information.....                                | 9  |
| 11. | Get in touch .....                                        | 10 |

# 1. About this release

This release reports on school capacity information in state-funded primary and secondary schools in the academic year 2018/19, as of 1 May 2019. Data are as reported by local authorities in the annual School Capacity (SCAP) Survey.

Information is included on:

- The numbers of primary and secondary school places;
- Unfilled school places and pupils in places that exceed their school's capacity;
- Local authorities' pupil forecasts up to 2023/24 at primary level and 2025/26 at secondary level;
- Planned places to 2021/22;
- Comparisons of forecasts with capacity to estimate the future number of places needed;
- Experimental statistics collected on sixth form capacity in schools

Findings in this report are at a national level though information at regional and local authority level are included in the accompanying tables. School level information for capacity, and planning area level (see [definitions](#)) information for forecasts, planned places, and estimates of places needed, are also provided in the release's underlying data section.

The numbers in this document are rounded to the nearest thousand for pupil level figures (or to the nearest ten thousand where appropriate) and to the nearest ten for school level numbers. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Actual numbers are provided in the accompanying tables.

## In this publication

The following tables are included in the statistical release:

- School Capacity 2019 Main tables
- School Place Planning 2019 tables
- School Sixth Form Capacity 2019 - Experimental statistics

The accompanying School Place Planning 2019 Technical Guidance provides information on the data sources, their coverage and quality, and explains the methodology used in producing the School Place Planning tables.

## Relationship with National Pupil Projections publication

This publication includes local authorities' own forecasts of future pupil numbers, based on local-level information, such as inter-authority movement of pupils. The department's main national-level pupil projections are produced by a different methodology within the department, at national level only, and are published annually as an official statistical release. The most recent data was 'National-level pupil projections: July 2018 (2019 update)' which was updated on 11 July 2019 and which is available [here](#). They are based on the mid-2016 population projections from ONS and cover a longer time period (up to 2027) than in the school capacity release. They provide national pupil forecasts by actual age whereas this publication provides local authority forecasts by national curriculum year group. 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, but the trends in both are broadly similar.

## Feedback

We are changing how our releases look and welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at [SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk](mailto:SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk)

## 2. School Capacity

### Places added

The overall net change in capacity (see [definitions](#)) reflects both increases and decreases in capacity within schools. Between 2018 and 2019, there has been a net increase of 33,000 primary places and 49,000 secondary places – 83,000 in total.

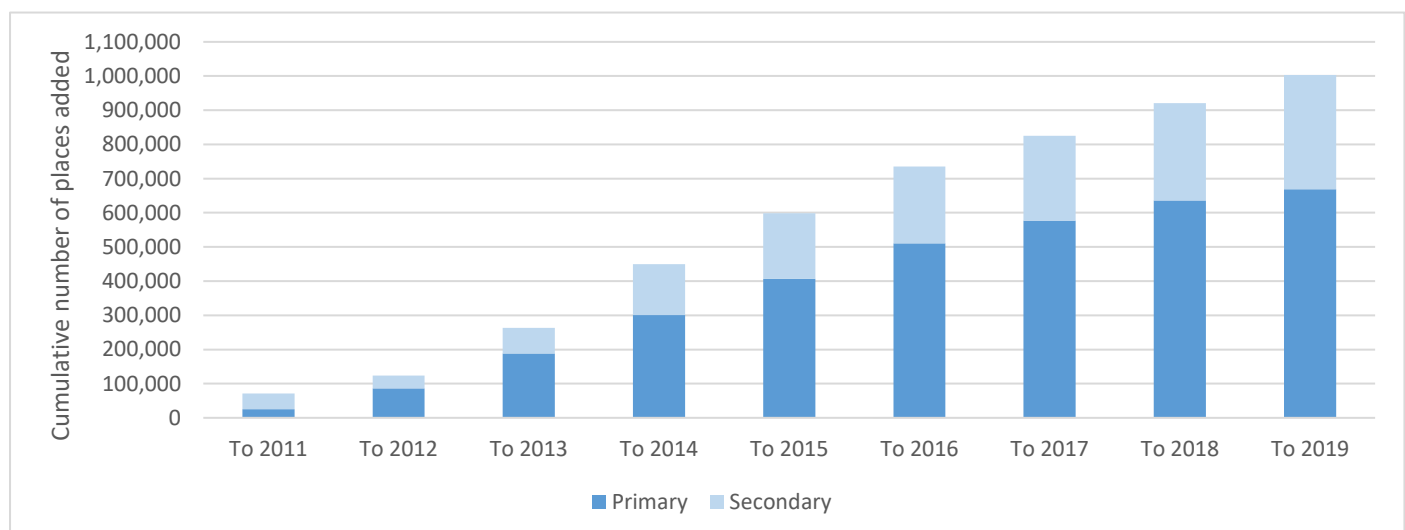
The rate of primary places being added continues to slow, matching the slower increase in actual primary pupil numbers (see figure 6 in [local authority pupil forecasts](#)). This is expected as the large birth cohort from 2008 to 2012 moves through the primary phase and into secondary, where the rate of places added also continues to increase. Secondary places have increased at a faster rate than actual secondary pupil numbers over recent years, in preparation for this large birth cohort, leading to a longer term increase in the proportion of secondary schools with unfilled places (see figure 5 in [unfilled places](#)).

**Figure 1: School capacity year on year change**

| Year | Number of primary places | Primary year on year change | Number of secondary places | Secondary year on year change |
|------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2010 | 4,228,000                | -                           | 3,563,000                  | -                             |
| 2011 | 4,253,000                | 26,000                      | 3,609,000                  | 46,000                        |
| 2012 | 4,314,000                | 60,000                      | 3,601,000                  | - 8,000                       |
| 2013 | 4,416,000                | 102,000                     | 3,637,000                  | 37,000                        |
| 2014 | 4,528,000                | 112,000                     | 3,712,000                  | 75,000                        |
| 2015 | 4,634,000                | 106,000                     | 3,756,000                  | 44,000                        |
| 2016 | 4,738,000                | 104,000                     | 3,788,000                  | 32,000                        |
| 2017 | 4,804,000                | 66,000                      | 3,811,000                  | 23,000                        |
| 2018 | 4,863,000                | 59,000                      | 3,848,000                  | 37,000                        |
| 2019 | 4,896,000                | 33,000                      | 3,898,000                  | 49,000                        |

Combined with all the changes in previous years, there has been a net increase of 1,003,000 additional places since 2010, consisting of 669,000 primary places, and 334,000 secondary places. Places in middle schools and all through schools are reported as deemed (whether primary or secondary), and secondary places include those in school sixth forms.

**Figure 2: School capacity cumulative change since 2010**



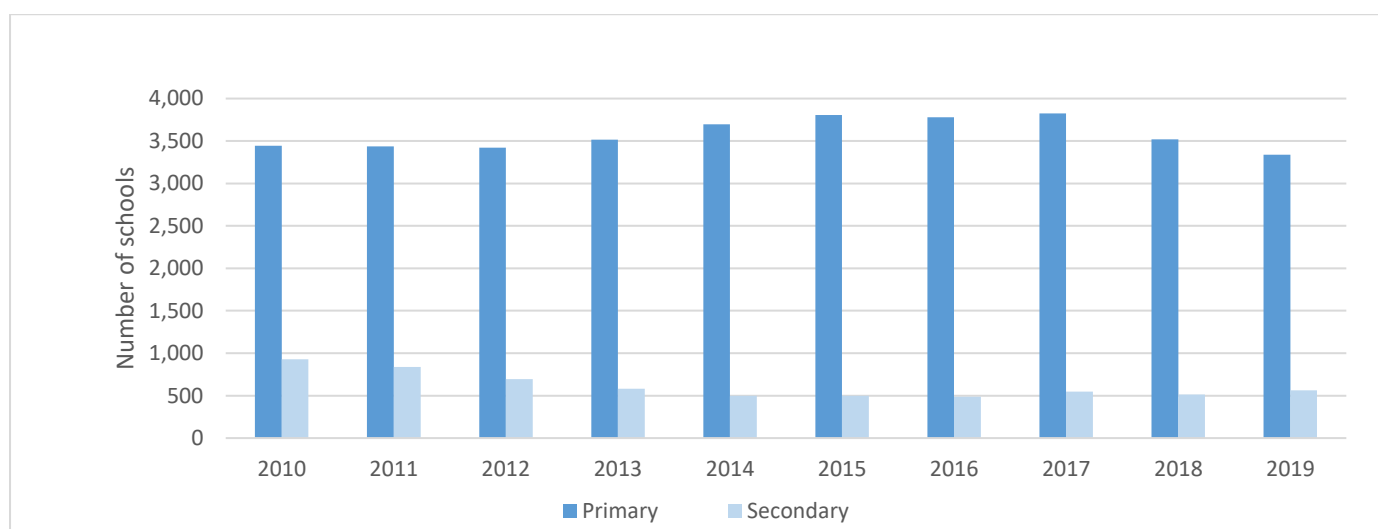
## Schools that are at or in excess of capacity

A school is identified as at or in excess of capacity when their number on roll (see [definitions](#)) is greater than or equal to capacity. Number on roll figures are taken from the summer (May 2019) census, except for new schools (including schools that have become academies) where figures are based on data gathered from the school capacity (SCAP) survey.

The number of state-funded primary schools that were at or in excess of capacity decreased slightly to 3,340 schools (20%) in May 2019 from 3,520 schools (21%) in May 2018. This is the lowest number of primary schools operating at or in excess of capacity during the past decade.

For state-funded secondary schools, the number of schools that were at or in excess of capacity increased to 560 schools (17%) in May 2019 from 510 schools (15%) in May 2018. However, this is still significantly lower than the 930 secondary schools operating at or in excess of capacity in May 2010.

**Figure 3: The number of schools that were at or in excess of capacity**



## Pupils in places that exceed their school's capacity

Where the number on roll is higher than a school's capacity, the number of pupils in places that exceed their school's capacity is the difference between number on roll and capacity.

The number of pupils in places that exceed their school's capacity (primary and secondary) has significantly decreased to 50,000 in 2019, from 97,000 in 2010

In primary schools, there were 25,000 pupils in places that exceed their school's capacity. This 7% decrease from the 27,000 pupils in 2018 continues the long-term decrease of primary pupils in places that exceed their school's capacity

In secondary schools, there were just under 25,000 pupils in places that exceed their school's capacity in 2019. This is a 12% increase from the 22,000 in 2018. There has been a slow increase in secondary pupils in places that exceed their school's capacity over more recent years.

## Unfilled places

The number of unfilled places is the extent of capacity above number on roll. Therefore, a school is identified as having unfilled places if the capacity is higher than the number of pupils on roll.

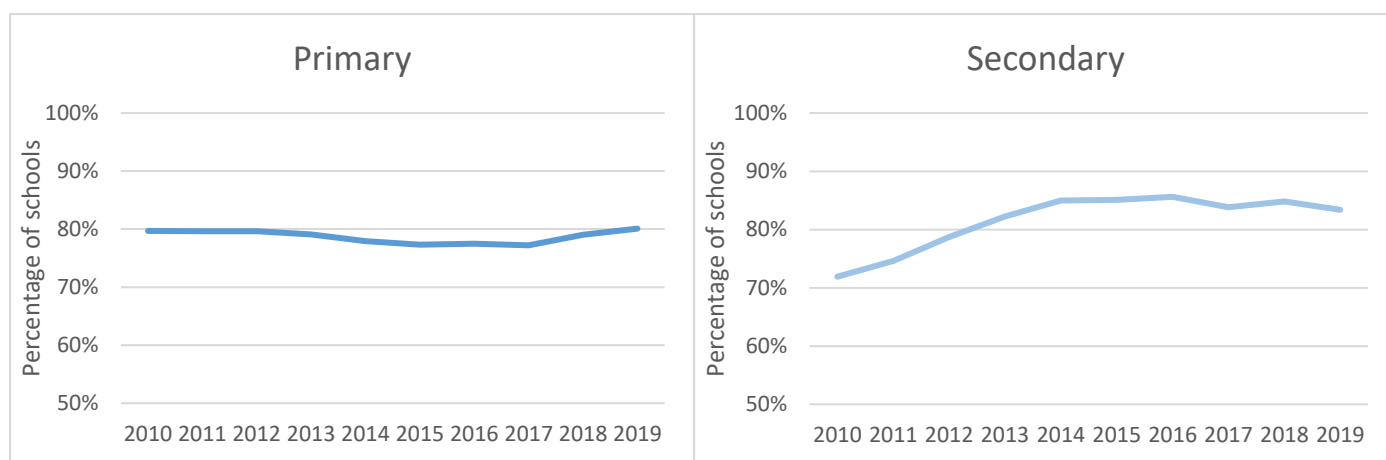
For primary and secondary schools, the total number of unfilled places has increased over recent years, to 1.1 million places in 2019 (13% of total school places available) from 814,000 places in 2010 (10% of total school places available).

In 2019, there were 482,000 unfilled places in primary schools, an increase of 3% from 2018 and 5% more than in 2010. In secondary schools there were 621,000 unfilled places in 2019, a decrease of 3% from 2018, although still significantly higher than the number of unfilled places in 2010 (355,000).

As of May 2019, 80% of primary schools had one or more unfilled places. This increased slightly in 2019 but has been relatively static at between 77% and 80% since 2010. The percentage of secondary schools with one or more unfilled places decreased to 83% in 2019 from 85% in 2018, although has seen a longer-term increase from 72% in 2010.

Unfilled places can be evidence of local authorities having planned ahead for future need, as the increase in pupil numbers at primary level is now moving into secondary level and will continue to do so over the coming years. Unfilled places can also be attributed to the building of whole new schools, which fill up from the bottom, leaving space in the upper years until those year groups work their way through. In some areas, low or declining need for places will also contribute to the number of unfilled places.

**Figures 4 and 5: Percentage of schools with unfilled places**



### 3. Local Authority Pupil Forecasts

Each local authority uses their local knowledge to generate pupil forecasts, which reflect the number of pupils they expect to provide a place for in each academic year. These forecasts include places which are funded through housing developer contributions (HDC).

Local authorities provide forecasts 5 years ahead for primary pupils (from reception to year group 6) and 7 years ahead for secondary pupils (from year group 7 through to sixth form).

The forecast number of primary pupils continues to rise until 2021/22. However, the rate of increase in the forecast number of primary school pupils looks to slow, leading to a forecast decline between 2021/22 and 2022/23 of 11,100 pupils. In contrast, the forecast number of secondary school pupils continues to increase, with an increase of over 120,000 pupils forecast between 2018/19 to 2019/20 alone. Beyond that, there is still strong growth, but this slows to a forecast increase of around 19,000 pupils between 2024/25 and 2025/26.

As with all forecasts, the level of accuracy is expected to reduce as forecasts are made further into the future and care should be taken when using forecasts from the later years.

These national pupil forecasts will differ from the national pupil projections published annually by the Department for Education (See [data coverage and quality](#)).

**Figure 6: Actual numbers and forecasts of primary and secondary pupils to 2025**



## 4. Local Authority Planned Places

Local authority planned places are the number of places local authorities plan to add or remove, where funding has been committed. Additional places include the number of permanent additions, temporary bulge places (see [definitions](#)) and, for the first time, places to be removed. Local authorities may add and remove places to manage their school estates as necessary according to future demand. Local authority planned places exclude those created through centrally funded DfE programmes such as Free Schools.

Local authorities have reported that they are planning to create 118,000 additional places by 2021/22. Local authorities also plan to create 11,000 temporary bulge places to accommodate large cohorts and remove 20,000 places by 2021/22. Taken all together local authorities are planning a net increase of 109,000 places.

## 5. Place Planning Estimates

The place planning tables show the estimated number of places needed in order to meet future demand. These tables are provided for readers interested in planning school place provision.

These estimates factor in existing capacity reported at 1 May 2019, additional capacity from local authorities planned places, and additional capacity being provided through centrally funded programmes (e.g. Free Schools). This capacity is then compared with the forecasts provided by the local authorities. The starting premise of the estimates is that identification of forecast need and identification of the corresponding capacity is carried out at planning area level (see [definitions](#)) and national curriculum year group level, i.e. places have to be available in the correct planning area and year group. Further information on how these estimates are calculated, how to interpret them and their limitations is provided in the technical guide (School Place Planning Tables 2019: Technical guidance).

Two versions of the place planning tables are provided in this publication. The first version (tables B1-B4) identifies places needed only, setting aside spare places identified within the calculation. This acknowledges that pressure in one part of a local authority cannot necessarily be offset by spare places in

another area. The second version (tables B5-B6) retains spare places within the calculation, and allows for examination of the extent of spare places alongside places needed. This is because it is useful to know the extent of any spare capacity in neighbouring planning areas when making an overall assessment of the places required in an area. The national and regional figures for the second version are not provided as they would be unrepresentative and therefore meaningless, because pockets of demand and pockets of spare places are lost in the aggregation.

According to the data provided at 1 May 2019 and the analysis applied, an estimated 27,000 primary places were needed across England in order to meet demand in academic year 2019/20. Alternatively, looking further ahead, an estimated 53,000 primary places are needed across England to meet demand for academic year 2023/24. This translates to between 6,000 and 7,000 primary places needed each year. The profile at secondary shows a growing rate of need for places up to 2023/24, with an estimated total of 77,000 places needed in order to meet demand. This translates to an annual need between 8,000 and 12,000 extra places to 2021/22 rising to between 19,000 and 21,000 places needed each year to 2023/24.

**Care should be taken with interpretation of these estimates. Please refer to the technical guidance.**

## 6. School sixth form capacity: experimental statistics

Sixth form capacity in schools was collected for the second time in the 2019 School Capacity survey, as a voluntary field. These statistics are still considered experimental as there may be limitations due to incomplete coverage and the requirement for further operational testing. In particular, any comparisons with statistics in the previous publication should be treated with caution as changes from year to year may not reflect actual changes in figures, but may simply indicate improvements in data quality. 80% of local authorities with at least one school with pupils on roll in year groups 12, 13 or 14 submitted complete data compared to 65% in 2018.

They are, however, useful to assess capacity in sixth forms attached to schools and have been published for transparency purposes. Where sixth form capacity data was submitted, the sixth form number on roll is lower than the sixth form capacity for 87% of schools.

Table C1 shows the number of school sixth form places by local authority in England. A local authority may have submitted sixth form capacity for all their schools, some of their schools or none of their schools. These potential outcomes have been footnoted in the table.

## 7. Accompanying tables

The following tables and underlying data are available in Excel format on the department's statistics website (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-capacity-academic-year-2018-to-2019>):

- School Capacity 2019 Main tables (A1-A7)
- School Capacity 2019 Main tables underlying data
- School Place Planning 2019 tables (B1-B6)
- School Place Planning 2019 underlying data
- School Sixth Form Capacity 2019 - Experimental statistics (C1)
- School Sixth Form Capacity 2019 underlying data

## 8. Further information

Previous releases can be found at: [Statistics: school capacity](#)

## 9. Official Statistics

These are Official Statistics and have been produced in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

This can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs,
- are well explained and readily accessible,
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

The Department has a set of statistical policies in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

## 10. Technical information

### Data collection

1. Information in this release has been derived from 3 data sources.
  - a) School Capacity survey – an annual survey returned by local authorities that collects capacity and forecast information (further detail in the School Capacity survey guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-capacity-survey-2019-guidance-for-local-authorities>).
  - b) School Census – a termly census of all schools in England, used to provide number on roll figures.
  - c) Central Programmes data – administrative data about the provision of places through centrally funded programmes (further detail in the School Place Planning Technical Guidance).

### Data coverage and quality

2. All the data submitted by local authorities in the School Capacity survey have undergone a thorough data cleaning process with validation at source and at the department. Anomalies have been raised with local authorities to check that the guidance has been followed. Except where noted in the tables, all data has been signed off by local authority Directors of Children's Services (or equivalent roles) as complete and accurate.
3. Forecast data is generated by local authorities based on their own data and local knowledge. These forecasts are challenged extensively during data cleaning processes. There are variations in the forecasting methodologies and data sources used across local authorities. This means there is the potential for local anomalies within the methodology. As with any forecast figures, there will be variation between the forecasts and the subsequent actual pupil numbers. Forecasting accuracy measures are calculated and published for each local authority in the School Place Scorecards. The School Place Scorecards can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/school-places-scorecards>
4. Forecasting accuracy is derived retrospectively, once actual pupil numbers for the forecast data become available. Most local authorities' forecasting accuracy tends to be within +/-1% one year ahead.
5. The national pupil forecast figures will differ to the National Pupil Projections published annually by the Department for Education due to methodological and timing reasons. Local authorities supply the department with their own low-level planning area forecasts using their own methodologies that are based on a variety of local factors (including ONS data on live births, local migration patterns, pupil yield from housing developments and data provided by local health bodies). These are then added together to create the national figures shown here. National Pupil Projections are calculated at national level only and are based on ONS age-based projections, adjusted for school years; they also use historic population and birth data from ONS and the department's school census figures.
6. Local authority planned places are based on local authority estimates.

## Definitions

7. For capacity, schools are reported as deemed. Therefore, for a middle-deemed primary school all capacity is counted as primary and for a middle-deemed secondary or all-through school all capacity is counted as secondary. Sixth form places are included in the total secondary capacity. Pupil forecast data is split by phase, so primary includes year groups R - 6 only, and secondary includes year groups 7 - 14.
8. Planning areas are groups of schools, often (but not exclusively) in a similar geographic area, reflecting patterns of provision. The planning areas for primary are different to the planning areas for secondary.
9. Number on roll is the number of sole and dual main registered pupils attending a school as reported via the school census. Number on roll (actuals) within the forecast tables are based on the January 2019 census. Number on roll figures within the capacity tables are taken from the summer (May 2019) census, except for new schools (including schools that have become academies) where figures are based on data gathered during the School Capacity survey. Number on roll relates to pupils in reception year group and above.
10. For maintained schools (local authority funded), capacity is defined by a physical measurement, and calculated in the net capacity assessment. Academies are not required to complete a net capacity assessment. Therefore, their final net capacity is reported as per their funding agreement (subject to any information that the local authority holds in addition).
11. Free Schools are reported at their final intended capacity and in their final intended planning area. The capacities of local authority maintained schools are reported as built and ready-to-use.
12. Bulge places are temporary places used to accommodate large cohorts. They move through the school as the cohort progresses.

## Users of this data

We know that there are a wide range of users of the data from this publication, including Local Authorities, free school proposers, academic researchers, policy teams, ministers and other Government departments.

## 11. Get in touch

### Media enquiries

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### Other enquiries/feedback

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Email: SCAP.PPP@education.gov.uk



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for Education

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enquiries [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

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reference: School Capacity: Academic year 2018 to 2019: Commentary



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