

National child measurement programme 2012/13

Information for schools

For: Head teachers

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The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) is a voluntary programme that primary care trusts (PCTs) are responsible for delivering. This advice is primarily for:

School leaders, school staff and governing bodies in state-maintained schools and academies.

It may also be useful for:

Local authorities and parents.

It explains the purpose of the programme and what schools can do to support delivery of the programme locally. If you have queries about the NCMP, you can email the Department of Health at ncmp@dh.gsi.gov.uk.

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1. Summary

- 1.1 The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) is an annual programme, delivered by primary care trusts (PCTs), which involves measuring the height and weight of all schoolchildren in reception and year 6. Currently, over 99% of eligible state-maintained schools across England, including academies, participate in the NCMP.
- 1.2 Delivering the NCMP provides vital information that enables the NHS to plan for and invest in key services to tackle obesity and its wider determinants. It also helps to raise parents' awareness of overweight and obesity, its consequences and healthy lifestyle choices. This is why, from April 2013, NCMP will transition from PCTs to local authorities and will become a mandatory function.
- 1.3 Data from the NCMP shows that, on average, 23% of children entering primary school are overweight or obese. For children leaving primary school, this proportion increases to 34%.¹ Children who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop illnesses such as type 2 diabetes and to go on to experience weight and health problems in adolescence.
- 1.4 Overweight and obesity does not just endanger health; it can also affect a child's attendance at school, their learning and their academic achievement, and it may necessitate additional staff training to ensure that children with health conditions can be appropriately supported during the school day.
- 1.5 Support from schools is crucial to success in delivering the NCMP. This guidance provides information for school leaders, staff, governing bodies and academies on key tasks that schools can help with to ensure the smooth running of the programme in your school.

¹ NHS Information Centre, *National Child Measurement Programme: England, 2010/11 school year*, December 2011: www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/003_Health_Lifestyles/ncmp%202010-11/NCMP_2010_11_Report.pdf

2. Overview of the NCMP

What is the NCMP?

- 2.1 Every year, over 1 million children in reception and year 6 have their height and weight measured, in schools, as part of the NCMP. The NCMP is an annual programme delivered by PCTs and involves, on a voluntary basis, over 99% of eligible state-maintained schools, including academies.
- 2.2 Information collected through the NCMP is returned, in an anonymous form, to the Health and Social Care Information Centre (acting on behalf of the NHS to collect and analyse health data), where it is analysed and a report summarising local and national data is then published. This high-quality data is used by local areas to inform the delivery of services to tackle child obesity and nationally to track trends in child obesity levels over time and to inform policy.
- 2.3 Individual height and weight measurements are also shared with each child's parents. This helps to encourage parents to monitor their child's growth and to adopt healthier lifestyle behaviours. Because many children in England are now overweight, we know that parents and health professionals cannot tell, just by looking at a child, whether or not they are a healthy weight: overweight has become more normal. This is why taking an objective measurement through the NCMP and sharing that information with parents is important.

Why should schools participate?

- 2.4 National data from the NCMP shows that, on average, nearly 23% of children entering primary school are overweight or obese. For children leaving primary school, this proportion increases to nearly 34%.¹ Children who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop a variety of illnesses, such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular

problems, respiratory illnesses, joint and movement problems, and psychological disorders, in childhood and later life. But health is not the only issue; overweight children could also be affected by:

- teasing or bullying;
- behavioural problems stemming from anxiety or depression; and
- avoidance of active play or learning opportunities in school sport and PE. This can have an impact on:
 - a child's attendance, as they may need to miss school for medical appointments or treatment;
 - a child's learning and academic achievement; and
 - staff training and expertise, as staff will need to provide extra support to children with health problems arising from overweight and obesity (for example, type 2 diabetes), to ensure that they manage their condition effectively during the school day.

- 2.5 Supporting the delivery of the NCMP in your school ensures that vital information is available to inform the planning, delivery and targeting of services commissioned by PCTs to prevent and manage overweight and obesity in children – and in turn address the issues set out above.

- 2.6 Information on school overweight and obesity prevalence, compared with local or regional averages, can be shared with schools. This school data, in conjunction with action taken by the PCT, can be used to make a real difference in preventing the continued increase of overweight and obesity in children from reception to year six, benefiting not only the health and well-being of pupils but also their learning and achievement in school.

3. The role and responsibilities of PCTs

- 3.1 From 1 April 2013, local responsibility for delivering the NCMP will transition to local authorities as part of the Government's public health reforms. In the meantime PCTs will remain responsible for implementing the programme, following the process shown in Figure 1. In doing so, they will continue to be responsible for:
- **Ensuring that a healthcare professional oversees implementation** of the programme.
 - **Securing the class-list information on children in reception and year 6**, including school name, unique reference number, pupil name, sex, date of birth, ethnicity code, home postcode, home address and home telephone number, by liaising either directly with schools or with the local authority.
 - **Developing and disseminating a pre-measurement letter to parents.** The NCMP is operated on an opt-out basis; therefore, PCTs must ensure that parents are given adequate opportunity to withdraw their child from the programme. Some areas do this by liaising with schools to disseminate a letter through the pupil post; see Annex 1 for an example of this letter.
 - **Raising awareness of the programme among parents, school leaders and staff, children and governors.** Many NCMP leads will seek to include short articles in school newsletters, provide governors with information and deliver assemblies to ensure parents, children and teachers understand what the programme involves and why it is done. An example of information about the programme which may be conveyed through these activities is included in Annex 2.
 - **Planning the logistics of measuring children's height and weight** and liaising with schools to arrange appropriate days and times when measuring will be undertaken.
 - **Taking the height and weight measurements** of children in reception and year 6.
 - **Returning the data collected**, in an anonymous form, to the Health and Social Care Information Centre.
 - **Providing parents with feedback**, within six weeks of measurement, either in the form of a letter (see Annex 3 for an example letter) and/or through a telephone call. The feedback provides parents with individually tailored information on their child's height, weight and body mass index (BMI) centile classification (underweight, healthy weight, overweight, very overweight), together with signposts to sources of support and advice.
 - **Providing schools with feedback** on how overweight and obesity prevalence in your school compares with the local or regional average.

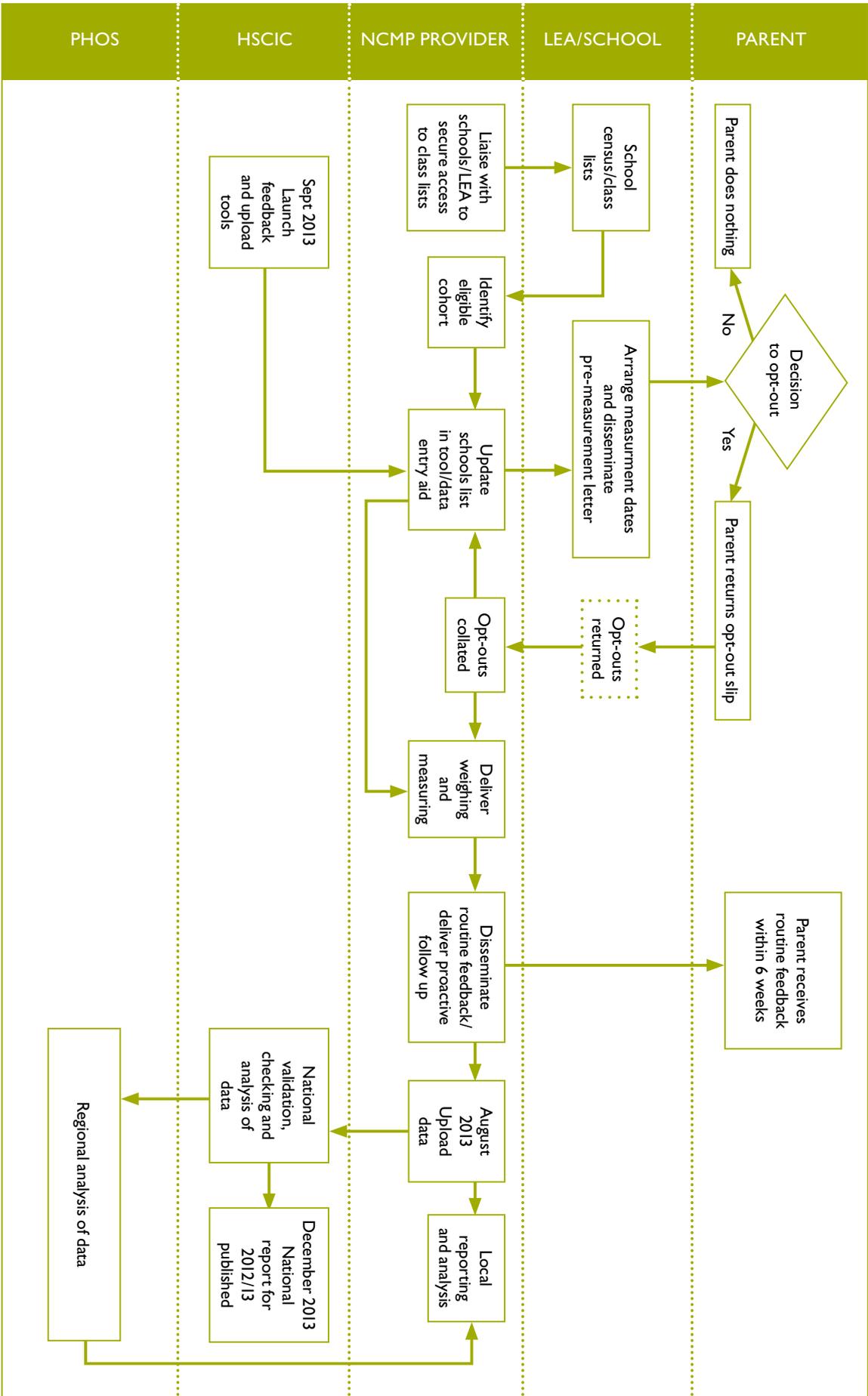


Figure 1 Overview of the NCM and the key delivery elements

4. Supporting delivery of the NCMP in your school

- 4.1 Delivery of the NCMP is the responsibility of your local PCT. However, in areas where schools have been able to support the programme, this has helped to secure successful delivery and minimise disruption. Therefore, local NCMP leads may contact your school to ask for your help by:
- **Providing them with a class list for all children in reception and year 6**, containing the school name, unique reference number and the name, sex, date of birth, ethnicity code, home postcode, home address and home telephone number of each pupil.
 - **Letting them know if there are any children on the class list who are not eligible to participate in the height and weight measurement exercise** because they are unable to stand unaided; doing so will ensure that the NCMP lead can seek to make alternative arrangements for these children.
 - **Facilitating the dissemination of the pre-measurement letter.** The PCT is responsible for ensuring that parents are given a reasonable opportunity to opt their child out of the programme and may seek your support to disseminate a pre-measurement letter through the pupil post. An example of this letter is included in Annex 1.
 - **Letting the PCT know if any parents have opted their child out.** Although parents will be asked to let the PCT know if they have chosen to opt their child out, some parents may respond directly to the school; therefore, relaying this information to the NCMP lead will ensure that parents' wishes are respected.
 - **Confirming a convenient day and time for NCMP staff to come into the school** to measure the reception and year 6 children's height and weight.
 - **Raising awareness of the NCMP:** delivery of the NCMP has been really successful in areas where governors, parents and children have a good understanding and awareness of the programme and its importance. Therefore, the local NCMP lead may liaise with you in order to: facilitate an assembly where the NCMP lead can talk to the children about the programme; put up posters on the NCMP around the school; include an article on the NCMP in a school newsletter; and share information on the programme with governors.
 - **Providing a room where children's height and weight can be measured** and supervising the movement of children to and from the measurement area. It is important that each child's height and weight is measured in privacy, without being seen or heard by other pupils. Therefore, schools will need to identify a private area, with adequate space and appropriate flooring (i.e. level, non-carpeted flooring to ensure that scales give an accurate reading), in which measurements can be taken. If a separate room is not available, a screened-off area can be used.

Annex 1: Specimen pre-measurement letter to parents and carers

This letter may be provided by PCTs, to be sent via the school's pupil post to all parents and carers of children eligible for inclusion in the NCMP 2012/13. PCTs may make changes to the letter to suit local needs; however, the wording shown in bold in the letter should be followed closely because this sets out the legal requirements for the programme and the intended use of the data, and due effort must be made to inform parents and carers of this. The Department of Health recommends that PCTs enclose a copy of the leaflet for parents and carers, 'Why your child's weight matters', with this letter.

Measuring the height and weight of children in reception and year 6

The NHS needs to have a good understanding of how children are growing across the country, so that the best possible health services can be provided for them. As a result, every year, all children in England in reception and year 6 have their height and weight checked. This important programme is now in its eighth year.

Your child's class will take part in this year's measurement programme.

The measurements will be supervised by trained staff from your local NHS primary care trust (PCT). The measurements will be done in a private area away from other pupils. Children who take part will be asked to remove their shoes and coats and will be weighed in normal indoor clothing.

Routine data, such as your child's name, sex, address, postcode, ethnicity and date of birth, will also be collected. This information will then be used within the PCT to help us understand and plan interventions for weight-related problems for children in your area. We may store the information on your child's health record. No child's height or weight measurements will be given to school staff or other children.

The records of children's heights and weights will be submitted for analysis in a way that means your child cannot be directly identified. National and local level summaries of the data will be published. All information and results will be treated confidentially.

Once your child has had their height and weight checked, your local NHS will share your child's results with you.

A leaflet called 'Why your child's weight matters' is enclosed to provide more information about the National Child Measurement Programme and tips on healthy eating and being active.

Opting your child out of the programme

If you are happy for your child to be weighed and measured, **you do not need to do anything**. If you do not want your child to take part, please let your local NHS know by writing to or telephoning them using the contact details at the top of this letter. Children will not be made to participate if they do not want to.

Yours faithfully

Director of
Public Health

Director of
Children's Services

Annex 2: Questions and answers on the NCMP

1. What is the NCMP?

Every year, throughout England, children in reception and year 6 have their height and weight measured as part of the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP). If you have a child in one of these years, you should receive a letter from your local NHS with more information about the programme.

Trained staff from your local NHS weigh and measure the children in their clothes at school. The staff will take care to ensure that the measurements are done sensitively and in private, and children's results will not be shared with teachers or other children.

2. Why are you doing this programme?

The NCMP provides our area with important and useful information about the rates of child obesity in our local population and enables us to put in place programmes to support families with overweight children where they are needed.

Parents have said that they want to receive this information about their child, and that is why we started sharing results with parents after doing the measurements. Without this information, parents may be left in the dark and without the chance to change things if they want to.

3. Why is it important for all eligible children to take part?

Every child measured is contributing to the national and regional picture of how children are growing. The more children who take part, the clearer that picture will be. The information collected helps your local NHS to plan and provide better health and leisure services for the children in your area.

Additionally, you can receive your child's measurement results along with information about whether they are a healthy weight for their age and tips on healthy lifestyles.

4. Will parents be given their child's results and what will the results tell them?

How parents get their child's result will depend on how the programme is run in your area. Most areas will send parents a letter with their child's result after the measurements. If parents do not automatically receive a result letter, they can ask their local NHS for their child's results.

The result letter should include advice and support on leading a healthy lifestyle and who to contact for further information.

5. What happens to the results?

Results from all the schools in your area will be gathered together and held securely by your local NHS. Some details will be sent to the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) (an organisation that collects information on health on behalf of the NHS) – but these will not include details that could identify your child. The information will be used by your local NHS to help reduce levels of child obesity in your area. The HSCIC will use the information to assess levels of child obesity across the country and see how the levels are changing over time.

6. Why is a healthy weight important?

Research shows that modern living can make it difficult to be a healthy weight, but we know that maintaining a healthy weight is important for staying happy and healthy and reduces the chances of becoming ill later in life.

Annex 3: Specimen result letter to parents and carers

Most PCTs use this letter template when sending children's NCMP results to their parents and carers. PCTs can edit the letter to suit local needs. We recommend that a copy of the leaflet 'Top tips for top kids' is enclosed with this letter when sending it to parents. This version of the letter is for PCTs that are routinely sending results to parents. PCTs will use a slightly different letter if they are providing feedback on request only.

«PCTName»

«Address_Line1»

«Address_Line2»

«Address_Line3»

«PCT_Postcode»

Telephone: «PCT_Telephone»

Email Address: «PCTEmail»

Private and confidential

Parent / Carer of «Child_Firstname» «Child_Surname»

«Child_Address1»

«Child_Address2»

«Child_Address3»

«Child_Postcode»

[Date]

NHS Number [Optional]

Dear Parent/Carer,

We recently measured your child's height and weight at school as part of the National Child Measurement Programme. A letter about this was sent to you before the measurements were taken. Your child's results are shown below.

Your child's results:				
Date measured	Date of Birth	Height	Weight	Body-mass index centile
«DateofMeasurement»	«DateofBirth»	«Height2»	«Weight2»	«BMIPercentile2»
(see table overleaf)				

(Child summary paragraph goes here [see page 3])

Yours sincerely,

«PCTLeadContact» («PCTLeadContactTitle»)

What is Body-mass index (BMI) centile?

BMI centile is a good way of finding out whether a child is a healthy weight and is used by health care professionals.

By comparing your child's weight with their height, age and sex, we can tell whether they're growing as expected. This is something you may have done when your child was a baby, using the growth charts in the Personal Child Health Record.

Once your child's BMI centile has been calculated, they will be in one of four categories:

	BMI centile range
Underweight	below 2nd BMI centile
Healthy weight	between 2nd and 90th BMI centile
Overweight	Between 91st up to 97th BMI centile
Very Overweight (doctors call this clinically obese)	At or above 98th BMI centile

Most children should fall in the healthy weight range, with fewer than one in ten in the overweight or very overweight range.

Research shows that children who are overweight or very overweight have higher risk of ill health during childhood and in later life.

Some medical conditions or treatment that your child is receiving may mean that BMI centile is not the best way to measure for your child. Your GP or other health professional caring for your child will be able to discuss this with you.

For more information about BMI centiles, visit www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/healthyweightcalculator.aspx.

Underweight

Your child's result is in the underweight range.

We wanted to let you know your child's result because it is an important way of checking how your child is growing.

Many underweight children are perfectly healthy, but sometimes it can mean they have a health problem.

Some parents find it helpful to re-check their child's BMI after a few months, to see if they have moved into the healthy range as they grow. You can do this using the Healthy Weight tool at www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/healthyweightcalculator.aspx

If you would like to speak to us about your child's result, please phone the number at the top of this letter.

Healthy

Your child's result is in the healthy range.

We wanted to let you know your child's result because it is an important way of checking how your child is growing.

Children of a healthy weight are more likely to grow into healthy adults. To keep growing healthily, it is important that your child eats well and is active.

Some parents find it helpful to re-check their child's BMI after a few months, to see if they remain in the healthy range as they grow. You can do this using the Healthy Weight tool at www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/healthyweightcalculator.aspx

Many parents have found the tips in the enclosed leaflet and at www.nhs.uk/change4life useful in helping them make changes to help their child grow healthily. If you would like more advice about your child's eating or activity, visit www.nhs.uk/change4life, or phone the number at the top of this letter.

Overweight

You may be surprised that your child's result is in the overweight range.

It can sometimes be difficult to tell if your child is overweight as they may look similar to other children of their age, but more children are overweight than ever before.

Research shows that if your child is overweight now, they are more likely to grow up to be overweight as an adult. This can lead to health problems. So this measurement is an important way of checking how your child is growing.

Many parents have found the tips in the enclosed leaflet and at www.nhs.uk/change4life useful in helping them make small lifestyle changes to keep their child in the healthy weight range.

Some parents also find it helpful to re-check their child's BMI after a few months, to see if they have moved into the healthy range as they grow. You can do this using the Healthy Weight tool at www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/healthyweightcalculator.aspx

If you are concerned about the result and would like further information and to find about local activities, please phone us on the number at the top of this letter. **[If PCT is proactively following up overweight children: We will also contact you soon to offer you further information].**

Very overweight

Your child's result is in the very overweight range. Doctors call this clinically obese. We wanted to let you know your child's result because it is an important way of checking how your child is growing.

Children who are very overweight are more likely to have health problems at a young age, such as high blood pressure, early signs of type 2 diabetes and low self-confidence. Later in life, they are more likely to have illnesses like heart disease and some types of cancer.

Small lifestyle changes started now can help your child to grow healthily. Many parents have found the tips in the enclosed leaflet and at www.nhs.uk/change4life useful in helping them make changes to help their child grow healthily.

Some parents also find it helpful to re-check their child's BMI after a few months, to see if they have moved towards the healthy range as they grow. You can do this using the Healthy Weight tool at www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/healthyweightcalculator.aspx

If you are concerned about the result and would like further information, please phone us on the number at the top of this letter. **[If PCT is proactively following up overweight children: We will also contact you soon to offer you further information].**