



Department
for Education

School preference (child level) data collections 2015

**Information for local authorities on the
submission of 2015 secondary and
primary level school preference and offer
data**

November 2014

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at [service request form](#).
This document and the technical specification for the data can be downloaded from the DfE website via: [school preferences data collections](#)

1 Section A: Summary of collection

1.1 Scope of this document

This guide provides local authorities with information about the statutory 2015 secondary and primary school preferences and offers child-level data collections. It is intended to assist local authorities with returning the required data to the Department for Education (DfE, or 'the department') and provides information on the scope of the two collections, the data that should be included in the respective secondary and primary returns, and the mechanism for submission.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the relevant instructions on how to use the department's COLLECT web-based system and also the technical specification.

1.2 Background to the school preference data collection

For a number of years the department collected from local authorities annual secondary school admissions data, at local authority level, detailing the applications and offers made for entry into secondary school, as at the 1 March national offer day. In 2014 the introduction of a separate primary level national offer day (16 April) and amendments to the relevant legislation (see section F) enabled the collection to be extended to primary school applications and offers. Two separate collections are now held, one each for applications relating to entry into the local authority's main entry point for secondary and primary schools.

Also in 2014 the collection was amended to collect the data on a child level basis, with personal information for each child and detail of each school they requested and the school, if any, they were offered. A figure for the total number of either a) secondary or b) primary school places available within the local authority is also provided.

The new data will help the department to identify areas where preference rates are in need of improvement and to monitor progress in increasing choice and competition for good secondary and primary schools. It will also enable more in-depth analysis to understand the reasons why parents make the school choices they do for their children.

2 Section B: Content of the collection and applications to be included in the return

Each year parents apply to their local authority for a place for their child and are invited to list a number of preferences as to which school they would prefer.

The local authority will have gathered information on the child as well as the schools requested and offered and will therefore need to include in the collection:

- Personal details (UPN, surname, first name, middle names, date of birth and gender);
- Home postcode and address details (either BS7666 or line address format);
- The LA code and Estab of each preference expressed, in preference order;
- The LA code and Estab of the school offered;
- Whether the application was made online (True/False/blank);
- Whether the record is for a child who did not make an application but to whom the local authority has decided to make an offer (True/False);
- Whether none of the child's preferences could be met (True/False/blank).

For further details of these requirements see section C.

Further information on which applications for a school place should be included is given here:

1. Common application process

All applications made to the local authority by parents using the common application form (CAF) should be included in the local authority's return as long as the following additional conditions are met. Information on children that the local authority has entered into their admissions dataset to record (for their own purposes) that a child has not had a CAF submitted on their behalf because they are registered for another form of schooling (eg a private school or home-schooling) is not required.

2. On time applications

Only those applications which the local authority treated as if they were on time should be included. Applications which arrived after the closing date should only be included if they were treated by the local authority as on time – that is, that they were considered for, and allocated a place at, either secondary or primary school at the same time as the on-time applications.

However, if an application was late and some of the schools named within it are prepared to consider the application as on-time (ie will consider that child under their admissions criteria at the same time as the on-time applicants) then the whole application should be considered as on-time, and therefore should be included.

3. Schools in another local authority

Each local authority must record the details of applications by and offers to all applicants living in their area (home applicants). This will include applications made by home applicants for schools in another local authority area. A local authority whose school has offered a place to an applicant who lives in another local authority should not record this application and offer, as it will be recorded by the home local authority.

4. Withdrawn applications

If a parent withdraws their application before an offer is made, their application should not be included in the return.

5. Non-applicant offers

Children for whom no application for a school place was made, but to whom the local authority has made an offer of a school place, should be included in the return with details of the offer made. These records will not be used in any calculation of the local authority's preference rates.

6. Middle schools

Middle schools will be part of the admissions process applicable to whether they are deemed to be primary or secondary schools, and will be processed as such within the local authority. If as a result of having middle schools a local authority has more than one admissions year at either primary or secondary level they are required to submit preference and offer data at the appropriate level in respect of the year which has the most places available. For example, if a local authority has 3,000 places available as part of the common admissions process for entry into year 7, and 1,000 places for entry into year 9, then only the figures for year 7 should be provided in the secondary level return.

7. All through schools

Applications for entry into all-through schools should be recorded as part of the admissions process within which they are made and processed. Thus children applying, as part of the primary admissions process, for entry into the first year of the all-through school will be recorded in the primary return. Children applying via the CAF to enter the school at the secondary entry point for the local authority (normally year 7) will be recorded in the secondary return. Children already attending the school who are automatically provided with a place at secondary level, and did not have to complete a CAF, should not be included.

8. New free schools

Free schools in their first year of operation can choose whether to participate in the common application process or whether to accept applications and administer their

own applications directly. If a new free school within the local authority administered their own admissions then they should not be included in the local authority's return.

9. Additional preferences

If (for example) a local authority allows most parents to express four preferences but allows a small number of parents to express five preferences owing to their particular circumstances, those parents who expressed five preferences should be counted as if they expressed four preferences. If they are offered a place at their fifth preference school, this should be counted as if they were offered a place at their fourth preference school.

The department uses the data that local authorities submit on the number of preferences expressed (between three and six) to work out how many preferences each local authority offers. If the parents that expressed five preferences were not counted as if they had expressed four preferences, it may result in the published data stating that the authority offered five preferences when it would be more appropriate for it state that the authority offered four preferences.

10. Preference offered

The highest preference offer should be recorded in all cases, regardless of whether that offer was subsequently accepted or whether that offer was later withdrawn.

11. Schools listed twice

If an applicant lists a school twice then the second listing should be removed and any lower ranked preferences moved up accordingly. However, if a school has two forms of entry – for example if 10 per cent of their places are available for music students, selected via an aptitude test – then a 'dummy' establishment number should be used for the selective application and the school's main establishment number used for the non-selective application.

The same method should be used to record applications for boarding places at a predominantly day school, and for the second site of 2-site schools which share a single establishment number. In all cases the appropriate main or dummy establishment number must be used to record any offer made.

Details of the dummy code used, the school it applies to and the reason for its usage, must be recorded in return level notes.

12. SEN children

Any child who has an SEN statement, which lists the school to which they will be made an offer, should not be included in the return. However, non-statemented children where the parents can express preferences as to which school they would like their child to go to, and where those preferences will be considered alongside other applicants on national offer day, can be recorded as normal.

13. Appeals

An appeal against the school offered can only be instigated once the offer has been made to the parents, and they have 14 days to decide whether to appeal. This application and offers return is based on national offer day and therefore any appeals will not have been logged at that point. They should therefore be ignored.

14. Re-expressing preferences

Only the preferences listed on the original CAF should be counted when assessing whether an offer is to one of the preferred schools. If the parents have been allowed to re-express preferences, and one of these was offered, then the offer should be considered against the original preferences and the NoPreferenceMet field set at 'True'.

3 Section C: Further detail on the information to be included

Regs Sch 2 paragraph:	Field	Description	Additional notes
1	DFE Number	3 digit number allocated to each local authority with education responsibilities	
2	LA Name	Name of local authority	
3	Report date	<p>For the secondary return 1 March (or the next working day where 1 March is not a working day).</p> <p>For the primary return 16 April (or the next working day where 16 April is not a working day).</p>	The report date should refer to the relevant national offer day.

Regs Sch 2 paragraph:	Field	Description	Additional notes
n/a	National Curriculum year of admission	<p>The National Curriculum (NC) year to which the data relates.</p> <p>At secondary level the NC year will be Year 7 for most local authorities, but may be different for the minority of local authorities with a 3 tier school system.</p> <p>At primary level this will be reception year (R) in most cases.</p> <p>In either return, where there is more than one year of admission, eg to middle school and upper school, records should be provided for children entering the largest admission year only.</p>	<p>In previous years, if data for more than one admissions year was provided by a local authority, only that for the largest intake was entered into the dataset and included in the SFR. Therefore the requirement to only submit a single year's data will not affect the information reported on each local authority or the time series dataset.</p>
4	Sum of admission numbers	<p>The total number of secondary or primary school places available in the area of the authority for the entry year for which a return is being made. To include all places available, whether allocated through national offer day or not.</p>	<p>The planned admission number (PAN) figure for all schools should be used, regardless of whether any of their places were not available to national offer day applicants (eg because they were allocated to an SEN pupil with a statement).</p>

Regs Sch 2 paragraph:	Field	Description	Additional notes
n/a	Child level data	Individual data should be submitted for every child where either a) an application for a school place was submitted on their behalf (regardless of whether an offer was made), or b) where no application was made but the authority decided to make an offer of a school place. The information provided for each child (see below) will allow the department to calculate the total number of offers, preference offers etc. at local authority level.	<p>Children with an SEN statement that names a school should not be included in this return.</p> <p>Do not count any applications which were treated as late applications. However, it is acceptable to include any applications which arrived after the application closing date but which the local authority treated in the same way as on time applications (see section B).</p>
5a-h	Personal details	<p>For each child, provide their personal details, consisting of:</p> <p>Surname, first name and middle name (if any);</p> <p>UPN (if any);</p> <p>Date of Birth;</p> <p>Gender;</p> <p>Home address;</p> <p>Admissions entry year group (see NC year of admissions details above).</p>	<p>It would be expected that secondary level pupils would have a UPN number, although there may be exceptions. At primary level, the children will generally not have a UPN but, where one has been allocated, it should be provided.</p> <p>The address must include the home postcode and then the address in either B7666 or line format. If provided in B7666 then PAON, street and at least one of locality, town or administrative area, or post town should be provided. If provided in line format then at least two address lines must be provided – all in addition to the postcode.</p>

Regs Sch 2 paragraph:	Field	Description	Additional notes
6	Online applications	For each applicant, whether their application was submitted online (Y/N/blank).	Whether the parent submitted the application online (Y) or via a paper form (N). If no application was made for the child, but the local authority has decided to make them an offer, this field should be left blank.
7	Preferences expressed	For each child for whom school preferences were expressed on their application, provide the LA Code and DfE Estab number of each preference in the rank order in which they were submitted.	<p>For each applicant, no school should be listed as a preference more than once. See section B for potential exceptions to this rule.</p> <p>The number of preferences entered should be no more than the number allowed by your authority (between three and six).</p>
8a-c	Offers	<p>For each child, state (Y/N) whether an application was made on their behalf in the NonApplicantOffer field.</p> <p>Where an offer was made to a child, submit the LA Code and DfE Estab number of the offer.</p>	<p>Some local authorities, if they are aware of children who are of an age to enter secondary or primary school, but for whom an application has not been received, will make them an offer of an available place at one of their schools. This is not expected to be a common occurrence.</p> <p>It is expected that the vast majority of applicants will receive an offer of a school place.</p>

Regs Sch 2 paragraph:	Field	Description	Additional notes
9	No preference offer	For each applicant, state (Y/N/blank) whether the offer made was of one of their preferred schools.	<p>For this field – NoPreferenceMet - a positive (Y) response is required when no preference offer could be made to the applicant. If an offer of a preferred school was made the entry should be N.</p> <p>Where no application was made for the child, but the local authority has decided to make them an offer, this field should be left blank.</p>
Other			
	Subject	Description	
A	Time limit for submitting return	You can submit your return up to five working days after national offer day – ie by the end of Friday 6 March for the secondary return and Wednesday 22 April for the primary return. However, the return must be based on the position on national offer day	
B	Which offers to include in the return	All offers made must be included, whether they are of a preferred school or not and even if you are aware that the parents are intending to turn the offer down.	

Regs Sch 2 paragraph:	Field	Description	Additional notes
C	Establishment numbers	<p>All establishment numbers listed in your return will be checked against a list of current schools. If any schools in your return do not yet have an establishment number – for example a school opening in September – then a dummy establishment number must be used (e.g. 9901). A note must also be added to your return with details of the school it relates to. If the school is in a neighbouring LA then the correct dummy establishment number should be obtained from the LA where the school is based or from the PAN London Authority.</p> <p>Some schools have a limited number of places restricted to those who pass an aptitude test or have a certain number of boarding places. As applicants can apply for both routes into the school – for example to take a music test (for a music aptitude place) and through the general admissions criteria – a dummy establishment number will need to be used for the preference relating to the aptitude test or for a boarding place. The school’s own establishment number can then be used for the general admission preference.</p> <p>Schools with a single establishment number but which have two separate sites, which can be applied for separately, should use a dummy establishment number in the same way for the second site. Wherever possible the same number should be used as in previous years.</p> <p>Where an applicant has requested both routes into such a school and is made an offer of one of those routes, the correct establishment number must be used to record the offer. For example, if the applicant has listed both sites of a two-site school and has been offered a place at the second site, then their offer should be recorded with the appropriate dummy establishment number.</p>	

4 Section D: Providing information about the local context

If your local authority has any comments on this collection that could help the department to interpret their return they would be welcomed. These can be sent to the department by email using: school.preference@education.gsi.gov.uk. This email address must NOT be used to query what should be included in your return. These should be submitted via the [service request form](#).

Alongside the routine checks the data will undergo when submitted to COLLECT¹, the department will carry out additional verification on the data submitted including checking it against the data submitted for the previous year. Therefore, it would be particularly helpful if local authorities could provide an explanation of instances where their data is significantly different from the previous year's, or tell us of any new free schools in your local authority who did not take part in the common admissions process.

Any such contextual information should be provided to the same deadline as the data collections – Friday 6 March for secondary and Wednesday 22 April for primary.

¹ For details of the validation checks see the technical specification (available via the [school preference data collection webpage](#))

5 Section E: Submitting the data

5.1 Methodology

The data will need to be submitted via [COLLECT](#) (Collections On-Line for Learning, Education, Children, and Teachers) from the department's website. This is the route by which a number of data collections from local authorities and schools are sent securely to the department.

Sections C and D and the technical specification (available via the [school preference data collection webpage](#)) give details of the data which is required to be provided. Once you have generated and checked the data, through your MIS system, the data should be loaded and submitted in COLLECT. Note local authority level totals do not need to be provided.

Details of how to set up COLLECT access are found in Annex A. A separate COLLECT guide will be published separately giving details of how to submit the school preferences datasets.

5.2 Coverage

Every child for whom an application for a school place has been submitted (regardless of whether an offer was made), and every child where no application was submitted but the local authority decided to make an offer of a school place, should be included in the return (other than children with an SEN statement).

5.3 Deadline

Local authorities are required to submit the data within five working days of national offer day. In 2015 the secondary national offer day falls on Monday 2 March and data should be submitted by the end of Friday 6 March. The primary offer date is Thursday 16 April and data should be submitted by the end of Wednesday 22 April. Note the data should reflect the position as on offer day, not on the day on which it was submitted (if later).

5.4 Validation checks

On loading of your local authority's data the COLLECT system will automatically run a number of verification checks and you will receive an error notification if any of them fail and the data requires amendment. You may also receive a query notification, to ask you to check certain figures to ensure they are correct – for example, where the values look unusual but could logically still be correct in some situations.

If this occurs you will need to correct the errors in the data and then resubmit the data to the department until all the error notices are no longer present. If the corrections have been successful, COLLECT will show no further error notices and the data can be authorised. If any queries do not require amendments, COLLECT has the functionality for local authorities to add a note to the data item, specifying that it is correct.

5.5 Further checks

Additional sense checks will be undertaken by the department and where there are concerns or queries about the figures, the department will contact the local authority concerned to ask for further information. This may result in rejecting the submissions for changes to be made. We will aim to complete these additional checks by 13 March (secondary return) or 30 April (primary return).

As described in section D, if there is anything about your local authority's data, at either secondary or primary level, which you think may give the department cause to query the figures, then a note should be entered in COLLECT or a [service request form](#) submitted. An example of this would be if, at secondary level, you are returning figures for a different NC year to that submitted previously (for example because of a move away from a middle school system).

5.6 Authorisation

For each return, once the data has been checked and accepted by the department the status on COLLECT will change to Authorised and your local authority's return will be complete.

5.7 Further assistance

The helpdesk will be available by email if you have any queries about this collection. They can be reached by submitting a [service request form](#) or, for queries concerning COLLECT, by submitting a query at [Service feedback form](#)

5.8 September submission

Previously a local authority could choose to submit an additional collection in September. Now a September collection is neither required nor requested by the department.

6 Section F: The regulations

The [Information as to Provision of Education \(England\) Regulations](#) 2008 (SI 2008/4) (as amended by The Information as to the Provision of Education (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2013) require local authorities to submit (separately) data on secondary and primary school applications made and offers met in relation to children resident in their area. Data should be provided for all schools types who are part of the common admissions process, including community, foundation, voluntary controlled and voluntary aided schools and academies. Free schools, which are academies, should be included but are allowed to opt out of the common admissions process in their first year if required. Where information is available on applications to a new free school then it should be included if at all possible.

Regulation 5 requires a local authority to provide the Secretary of State with two reports containing the information specified in Schedule 2 to the regulations, for a) secondary school applications and b) primary school applications. The secondary school report should report on applications made and offers met on 1 March each year (or, in any year in which 1 March is not a working day, on the next working day) containing information correct as that date. The primary school report should report on applications made and offers met on primary level offer day of 16 April each year, again containing information correct at that date (or next working day if appropriate).

In each case the information should relate to applications for admission to a) secondary school or b) primary school during the school year commencing in the August or September of that calendar year.

Schedule 2 specifies the information to be contained in each report.

7 Section G: Uses and publication of the data

The recent changes to the data collection allows the department to obtain more detailed datasets about school preferences and offers, from which statistics at local authority level can be calculated. Having access to the underlying data also makes it easier for the department to ensure the accuracy of the statistics produced regarding children receiving first, second preference and so forth offers.

Although the data is collected at pupil level, the department continues to publish school application and offer data at local authority level, as before.

The preference rates for all local authorities are published in an annual Statistical First Release (SFR) which, from 2014, included separate tables of application totals and preference rates for both secondary and primary applications.

The data is also used to inform departmental policy making on school choice and access. The child level data gives additional detail which will bring significant benefits in terms of monitoring progress in increasing choice and competition and identifying areas where improvement can be made. The additional primary level collection also allows these benefits to be realised for primary school provision.

The data allows local authorities and admission forums to compare outcomes with previous years, or to compare themselves with areas with similar characteristics, and will contribute to local discussion on how to improve the system and provision of places for parents.

This has been possible for secondary level applications for several years. Primary level data will, in 2015, be published for the second time which will allow such comparison between applications and offers in 2014 and 2015.

Annex A

Requesting COLLECT access

The method for LAs to submit their data to the DfE is via COLLECT, our centralised data collection and management system, which is available at <https://collectdata.education.gov.uk/CollectPortalLive/Login.aspx>. A separate COLLECT guide to the school preference collections will also be made available to help you use the system to complete and submit your return. This will be available [online](#).

User names and passwords for COLLECT are managed by the [Secure Access](#) system. Your local authority has a designated approver(s) who can allocate access to departmental systems that use Secure Access, including COLLECT. Therefore you should contact the Secure Access approver(s) in your local authority if you need a username and password to submit data for the school preference collections.

More information is available on the [Secure Access help screen](#).

You can also get help using the [Secure Access service request form](#).



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