

[Home](#) ▾ [Education, training and skills](#) ▾ [Pupil wellbeing, behaviour and attendance](#)  
 ▾ [School attendance and absence](#) ▾ [Children missing education: exploration of census data](#)



Research and analysis

# Children missing education

Published 19 May 2025

## Applies to England

[Contents](#)

[Background](#)

[Caveats](#)

[Findings](#)

[Next steps](#)

## Background

In May 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) published the first statistics, collected from local authorities, on estimated numbers of [children missing from education \(CME\)](#) and [elective home-educated \(EHE\) children](#). The first academic year of data provided was 2022/23.

However, the quality and reliability of this data relies on local authorities collecting this information, a process which has not been mandatory previously. For this reason, we decided to explore whether we could get more realistic estimates of children missing education by comparing the ONS population census from March 2021 with the DfE school census from the 2021 spring term (January to February 2021).

The census data was acquired through the Integrated Data Service (IDS), provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

We compared the numbers of mandatory school age children (those aged 5 to 15 at the start of the academic year) in the ONS population census from March 2021 with the DfE school census for the 2020/21 academic year.

## Caveats

There are some notable caveats with this data. Firstly, for the DfE school census, the home local authority is only collected for pupils of maintained schools.

Therefore, for independent schools, we had to use the local authority of the school that pupils attended as a proxy. There could be some crossover for independent schools if pupils living in one local authority attend school across the border in a neighbouring local authority.

Secondly, the data collection time points are slightly different because the ONS population census was collected in March 2021 and the DfE school census for spring 2021 is collected in January to February 2021. Moreover, although filling out the ONS population census is mandatory, there are still variations in response rates across local authorities.

We cannot compare the resulting CME estimates directly with those collected by the DfE from each local authority (LA), as these LA collections first started being collected in the 2022/23 academic year.

## Findings

Unfortunately, as shown in [the tables published alongside this commentary](#), some data quality issues prevent us from using this data for its intended purpose. In some local authorities, the number of pupils on roll from the DfE school census is higher than in the ONS population census. Even after taking elective home-educated children into account, the discrepancies should not be as high as they are. We can see, from the DfE-published CME and EHE estimates, the approximate number of EHE children in each local authority. These estimates are from a later time period, but we would not expect them to fluctuate wildly enough year to year to account for

these size differences. The discrepancy could be due to several factors, such as certain local authorities having more children who are not reported in the ONS population census for various reasons.

## Next steps

More accurate estimates of CME/ EHE children might become available in future if the [Children Not in School \(Registers, Support and Orders\) Bill](#) becomes law. The Bill proposes that local authorities should be required to keep an up-to-date register of children who are of compulsory school age and are not educated at full-time schools. The Bill also proposes that local authorities should provide support to home-educating families if they request it. It would be considered an offense for a person who is served with a School Attendance Order to fail to comply with that order (if the local authority considers the home education to be insufficient).

[↑ Back to top](#)

---

## Help us improve GOV.UK

To help us improve GOV.UK, we'd like to know more about your visit today. [Please fill in this survey \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

### Services and information

---

[Benefits](#)

[Births, death, marriages and care](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

### Government activity

---

[Departments](#)

[News](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Transparency](#)

[How government works](#)

[Get involved](#)

---

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#)

[Terms and conditions](#) [Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#)

[Government Digital Service](#)

**OGI**

All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



[© Crown copyright](#)

