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Reporting year 2025

National pupil projections

This is the latest release

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Produced by	Department for Education

This annual release provides national projections for the number of pupils in schools in England by type of school and age.

These statistics are calculated based on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) population estimates and projections, monthly birth registration data up to and including 2023, and school census data up to and including January 2025.

The pupil projections use the most recent ONS data available:

- ONS population estimates, which last year were rebased back to 2011 to take account of the 2021 Census
- ONS [latest mid-2022 based projections \(opens in a new tab\)](#), which now also take account of the 2021 Census

These mid-2022 based projections include the results of the 2021 census, updated long term fertility and mortality assumptions, and alternative scenarios (variant projections). These ONS projections assume a higher long-term international migration, lower future fertility, and longer life expectancy than in the previous (2021-based interim) national population projections.

The latest long-term international migration provisional release was published after the ONS population estimates and projections used in

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our modelling. It showed that for the calendar year ending December 2024 indicated long-term net migration is down by almost 50% compared to December 2023. This follows a 20% reduction seen in year ending June 2024 (compared to the year ending June 2023), which is taken account of in ONS's population projections. We have not made any adjustments as a result of the new migration data and continue to use the principal projection variant, as the impact of using the low migration variant is minimal and there is still uncertainty around future migration.

For more information, please see the methodology document.

All projections are subject to uncertainty as they depend on the information available at any given moment in time and cannot allow for future changes in demographic behaviour.

Due to the increased uncertainty in long-term net migration assumptions, pupil projections in this release are published up to 2030, rather than up to 2035 as would be the standard. The previous model published in 2024 only projected to 2028 due to increased uncertainty in longer term fertility assumptions at that time, therefore there are some references to 2028 in this publication when making comparisons.

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Summary

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Number of pupils

4,205,117

in nursery & primary schools by 2030, an expected fall of 300,000 from the population in 2025

► nursey and primary schools 2030 projection

Number of pupils

3,135,086

in secondary schools by 2030, an expected fall of 97,000 from the population in 2025

► secondary schools 2030 projection

- The population attending primary and nursery schools peaked in 2019 and the figures have been gradually falling since then. This is primarily due to the number of births generally falling since 2012.
- Since 2018, the population in secondary schools had been steadily increasing by around 2% a year until 2023 where it then slowed down to a 1.3% increase in 2024. The latest census shows a 0.1% decrease in 2025. Projections data indicate that the secondary school population is likely to have plateaued between 2024 and 2025, will remain at a similar level until 2026, and is then projected to start declining slowly. This is two years earlier than the peak projected last year but may be subject to change if pupil numbers bounce back, fluctuate, or plateau for a few years.
- The population in state-funded special schools has seen year on year increase of 6% between 2018 and 2022 and 5% since 2023. Projections data indicate that numbers are expected to peak in 2026 - 2027.
- The number of children in alternative provision schools dropped substantially in 2021 (by 18%) and 2022 (by a further 9%) as the pandemic reduced the opportunities to refer children. Figures returned to the approximate pre-pandemic levels in 2024 and increased a further 5% in 2025. Projected figures are expected to peak in 2026 – 2027 then gradually fall. However, the level of change seen in 2021 and 2022 that is used in the modelling means that this projection is more uncertain than usual.

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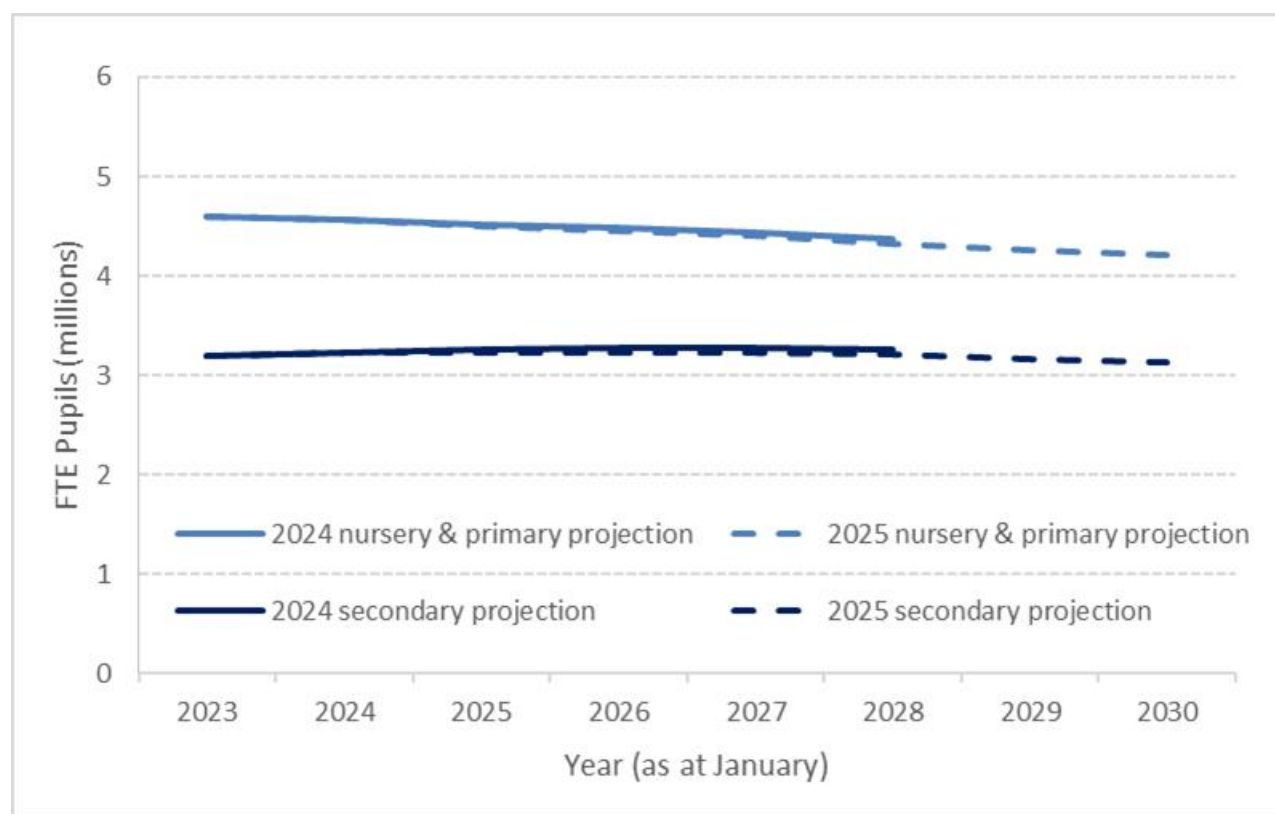
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National pupil projection results and comparison to previous model results

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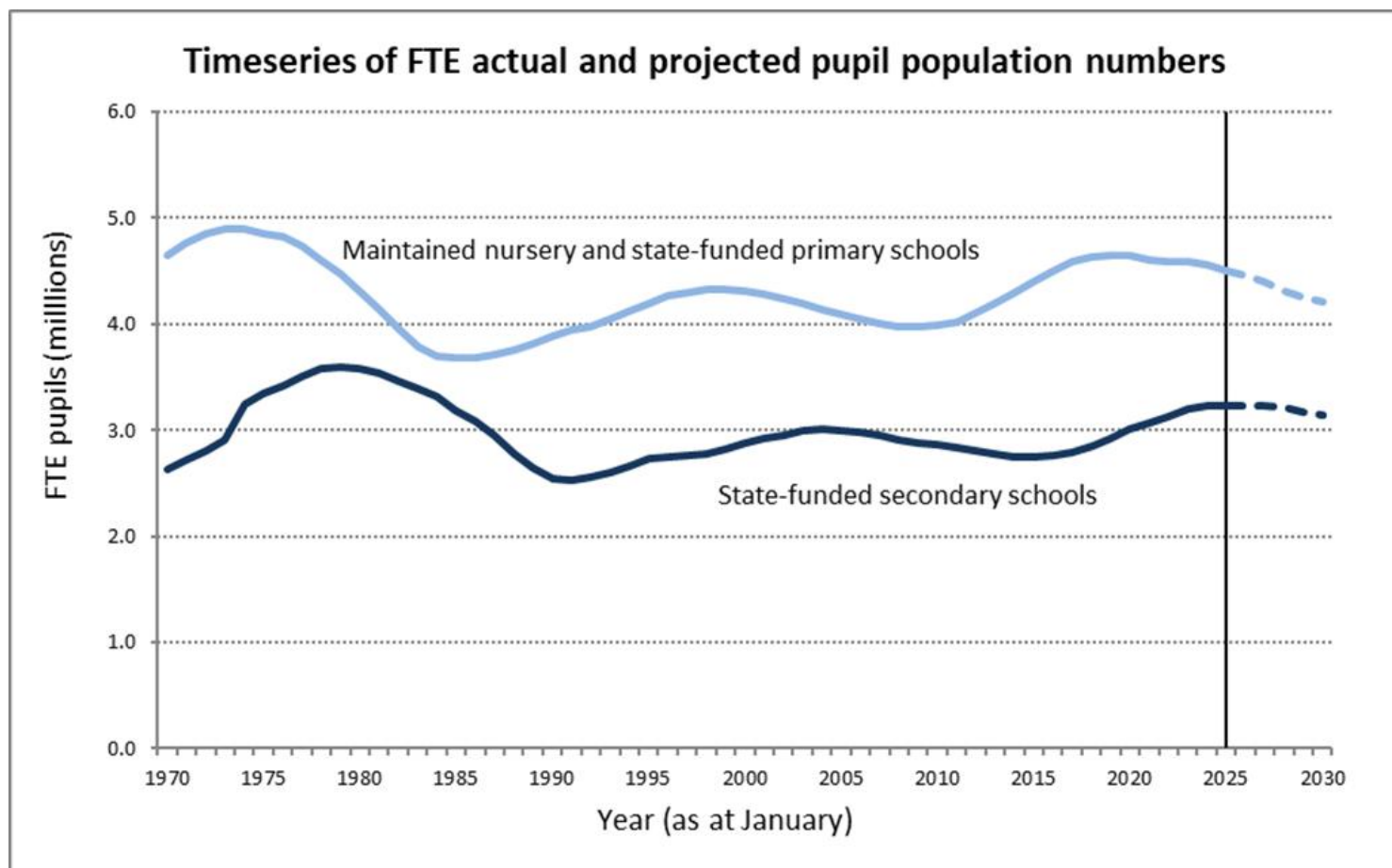
Comparison of the results from the 2024 and 2025 pupil projection models



- Figures are reported as full time equivalent (FTE) unless specified otherwise.
- In this release, projections are only provided up to 2030 due to the increased uncertainty in migration assumptions. The projection model previously published in 2024 only provided data up to 2028 due to the increased uncertainty in fertility assumptions from 2029 onwards.
- The 2024 model showed a state-funded school population of 7,779,000 by 2028 (down 2.2% from 2024). The current model, still showing a decline, projects a population of 7,694,000 by 2028 (down 3.2% from 2024), which is 85,000 (1.1%) fewer pupils than the previous projection for 2028.
- In 2025, the actual population in state-funded schools was 7,899,000. By 2030, this is projected to decrease by 395,000 (5.0%) to 7,504,000.

- The latest figures from the January school census showed that there has been a decrease of around 60,000 (0.7%) pupils across all school types from the previous year. There are fewer pupils in primary schools this year compared to last year, with little change to pupil numbers in state-funded secondary (when all through schools are included), AP schools, special schools and non-maintained schools. This is primarily driven by demographic changes, following a peak of births in 2012, as children reach secondary school age and lower numbers of pupils are moving into primary school age.

Historical and projected pupil numbers (up to and including age 15 at the start of the academic year) by main school type, England



Early years

- Early years calculations include 4-year-olds in reception class, which almost all children attend, as well as the younger ages where participation in the state-funded sector is much smaller and there are more part-time pupils.
- The FTE population of under 5-year-olds in state funded education is projected to be 771,000 in 2030. This is a 4.0% decrease from the actual figure for 2025 (803,000).
- This projected population decrease is due to lower births seen in 2023 and 2024 (mid-year to mid-year), and continued lower births projected by ONS up to and beyond the 2030 time period presented in this publication. Compared to the 2024 projection model, which projected a 4.4% (36,000) decrease in 5-year-olds between 2024 and 2028, the current model projects a faster decrease of 6.5% (53,000) over the same period. One reason for this could be that the migration assumptions in the latest ONS population data has

resulted in fewer women of childbearing age than previously projected.

State-funded nursery & primary schools

- The overall pupil population in these school types is projected to be 4,205,000 in 2030. This is 300,000 (6.7%) lower than the actual population in 2025 (4,505,000).
- The revised projection for 2028 of 4,319,000 pupils represents a 5.4% fall from 2024; this is 38,000 lower than the previous forecast, as last year’s projection showed a 4.5% fall over the same period.
- The nursery & primary population is therefore still projected to drop and is doing so at a faster rate than previously projected.

State-funded secondary schools

- The secondary school population is projected to be 3,135,000 in 2030. This is 97,000 lower than the actual school population reported in the 2025 school census of 3,232,000.
- The revised projection for 2028 of 3,208,000 secondary pupils represents a 0.8% fall from 2024, and is 55,000 (1.7%) lower than last year’s projections which reverses the previously projected 0.9% increase over the same period.
- The pattern of change in the secondary school population seems to indicate that it plateaued between 2024 and 2025, will remain at a similar level until 2026, and is then projected to start declining slowly. This suggested plateau is earlier than the peak in 2026 projected last year but will be subject to change if pupil numbers bounce back, fluctuate, or continue to plateau in future years.
- The actual number of secondary school pupils in 2025 fell slightly as more pupils moved out of the secondary phase than moved in. Changing historical birth rates and trends in net migration are likely driving factors.

Actual (2025) and projected pupil numbers by school type, England (thousands)

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
State-funded nursery & primary schools	4,505	4,456	4,399	4,319	4,254	4,205
year on year change		-49	-57	-80	-65	-49
State-funded secondary schools	3,232	3,233	3,226	3,208	3,172	3,135
year on year change		1	-7	-18	-36	-37
State-funded special schools	146	149	151	150	149	148
year on year change		3	2	-1	-1	-1
Alternative provision settings	16	16	16	16	16	16
year on year change		0	0	0	0	0
Total state-funded schools	7,899	7,854	7,792	7,694	7,590	7,504
year on year change		-45	-62	-98	-104	-86

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Components of change

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There are several elements which affect the results of the projections. The key elements, and how they affect the results, are detailed below.

Births

- The number of births feed directly into the projections but also affect how births are projected in the future.
- The birth rate increased for over a decade until 2012, after which it dropped notably. Birth rates have been generally dropping ever since, except for a slight rise in 2021 that was related to the pandemic.
- The fertility assumptions used by ONS in the production of their mid-2022 population projections have been updated and projected total fertility rate is lower than in previous rounds of projections.

Participation rates

- These are calculated based on the number of pupils attending school (from the school census) measured against the total population figures.
- It is therefore important to use population estimates and projections that accurately reflect the overall population size, now the 2021 Census results are available.
- The participation rates are particularly important in the early years. Parents can choose whether to send their children aged under 5 to a school setting instead of, or in conjunction with, formal or informal childcare.
- The participation rates for each school type are projected into the future as the basis of the calculations of projected numbers.
- These rates are affected by any unusual patterns in the underlying total population or the school census data. For example, the large drop in the number of children recorded as attending state-funded alternative provision in 2021 (18% lower compared to the 2020 school census) would have reduced the participation rate for that school type significantly in that year.
- Recent data from the school census is showing that in January 2025 there was a decrease of around 60,000 pupils in schools compared to the same period last year. This is primarily driven by demographic changes rather than pupils leaving state education for other settings. The large birth cohort from 2008 to 2012 has started to move out of the secondary phase and we have continually seen lower numbers of pupils moving into the primary phase.

Immigration

- Direct immigration of pupils born outside the UK historically has only had a small effect on the school age population. However, the latest estimates of long-term net migration (December 2024) which is down by 50% compared to the same period last year, are likely to be a contributing factor in the fall in pupil numbers reported in the 2025 school census. As ONS noted in their publication, the Home Office has reported in its [monthly visa statistics \(opens in a new tab\)](#), that recent decreases in work-related and study-related immigration are related to [policy reforms \(opens in a new tab\)](#) early in 2024 that restricted most overseas students from bringing family members to the UK, [restricted care workers from bringing family members \(opens in a new tab\)](#) and [increased salary thresholds \(opens in a new tab\)](#) for those on Skilled Worker visas.
- Migration can have a larger effect on the birth rate, as historically fertility rates are reported to be higher for women who are resident in the UK but were born outside the UK. For more information on this see the methodology section.

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Source data

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These pupil projections have been produced using ONS rebased population estimates, that take account of the 2021 Census and mid-2022 population projections.

The ONS population projections, which are the base for these pupil projections, are created using assumptions of the level of future fertility, migration, and life expectancy. However, there are uncertainties in the calculation of these components. As such, ONS produce several projections (called variants) based on alternative assumptions.

The National Pupil Projections are produced using the principal projection variant, in line with the ONS national population projections and due to the uncertainty around future migration. The table below shows the effect of key alternative variant projections on the pupil projections, and further data is available as part of this release.

Note: the primary age projections are most affected because the fertility changes feed into the lower age ranges more quickly.

Population of primary and secondary age, across state funded schools, across state funded schools, by 2030 under the variant projections, England

Projection	population in 2030		difference to principal	
	nursery & primary age	secondary age	nursery & primary age	secondary age
principal	4,341	3,162		
low fertility	4,280	3,162	-61	0
high fertility	4,376	3,162	34	0
low migration	4,283	3,137	-59	-25
high migration	4,391	3,184	50	21
low population	4,221	3,137	-120	-25
high population	4,425	3,184	84	21
migration category*	4,292	3,142	-50	-20

Source: national population projections (2022 model). Figures in 000s

Nursery and primary age: pupils up to 10

Secondary age: pupils aged 11 to 15

*variant that uses special-case migration assumptions to highlight impact of short-term change in international migration.

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Further information

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More information on the school census data which forms the start of the pupil projection model, and the differences seen in 2025, can be found in the publication 'Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics' published on [Explore Education Statistics \(EES\)](#).

More information on the source data used in the production of this projection can be found in the methodology document.

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