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Department for Education

Academic year 2025/26

Schools, pupils and their characteristics

School and pupil statistics for England including age, gender, free school meals (FSM), ethnicity, English as additional language (EAL), class size.

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Accredited official statistics 
Department for Education

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Headline facts and figures

Count of pupils of all ages

8,920,227

All schools in England - decrease of 112,200 from 2024/25

What is count of pupils of all ages?



Number of schools

24,499

All schools in England - increase of 20 from 2024/25

What is number of schools?



Percentage of pupils

26.5

Eligible for free school meals - up from 25.7 in 2024/25

What is FSM?



Average class size

25.9

Infant classes - decrease of 0.3 from 2024/25

What is average class size?



The number of pupils in schools in England has decreased

There has been a decrease of 112,200 (1.2%) pupils across all school types from the previous year, with a total of over 8.9 million pupils. This includes all state-funded and independent schools. The number of schools has increased slightly, by 20 to 24,499.

Free school meal eligibility continues to increase

26.5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, up from 25.7% in 2024/25. This represents over 2.2 million pupils.

Almost 1.6 million infant pupils were recorded as taking a free school meal on census day

Over 1.2 million pupils received a meal through the Universal Infant Free School Meals policy. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of pupils taking lunch on census day from 88.2% to 88.4%.

The average class size for infant pupils (reception, year 1 and year 2) has decreased

Infant class size has decreased slightly to 25.9 from 26.2 in 2024/25; this is the lowest infant class size since 2008/09. There is a statutory limit of 30 pupils in an infant class.

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Schools and pupils

State-funded **primary schools** and state funded **secondary schools** – Primary schools typically accept pupils aged 5-10 and secondary schools aged 11 and above, who take pupils of all compulsory school ages. These schools include academies and free schools and are included in the totals for secondary schools.

State-funded **special schools** – these are schools which provide tailored provision for pupils with special educational needs.

Alternative provision (AP) is defined in the [Alternative Provision Statutory Guidance \(opens in new tab\)](#) as education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a suspension; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour. These placements are typically for children unable to attend a mainstream or special school.

Where this publication refers to **state-funded AP schools**, this includes pupil referral units or alternative provision academies or free schools. Local authorities can also fund places not maintained by the local authority. Alternative provision is covered in more detail in the “State-funded AP schools and alternative provision” section below.

Independent schools and non-maintained special schools – these are registered schools which do not receive government funding. They often charge fees for pupils to attend.

State-funded nursery schools – these are local authority-maintained schools that focus exclusively on the early years. Other nurseries, such as private and voluntary nurseries, are not included in the school census. Schools with a nursery attached will complete the school census as a school rather than as a nursery.

There are just over 8.9 million pupils in January 2026, a decrease of 112,200 from last year

There are fewer pupils in primary, secondary and independent schools this year compared to last year. This is primarily driven by demographic changes, following a peak of births in 2012, as children move through secondary school age and lower numbers of pupils are moving into primary school age.

The primary and secondary populations are projected to continue decreasing to the end of the projection period in 2030 (see the department's [pupil projections](#) release).

The number of pupils in state-funded AP schools has decreased by 0.5% to 16,600. The number of pupils in state-funded AP schools is similar to pre-pandemic levels. AP schools typically have high mobility with pupils having shorter spells than in other schools.

The number of pupils in state-funded and non-maintained special schools has increased by 4.8%, to 178,000, continuing the trend of increases seen in recent years.

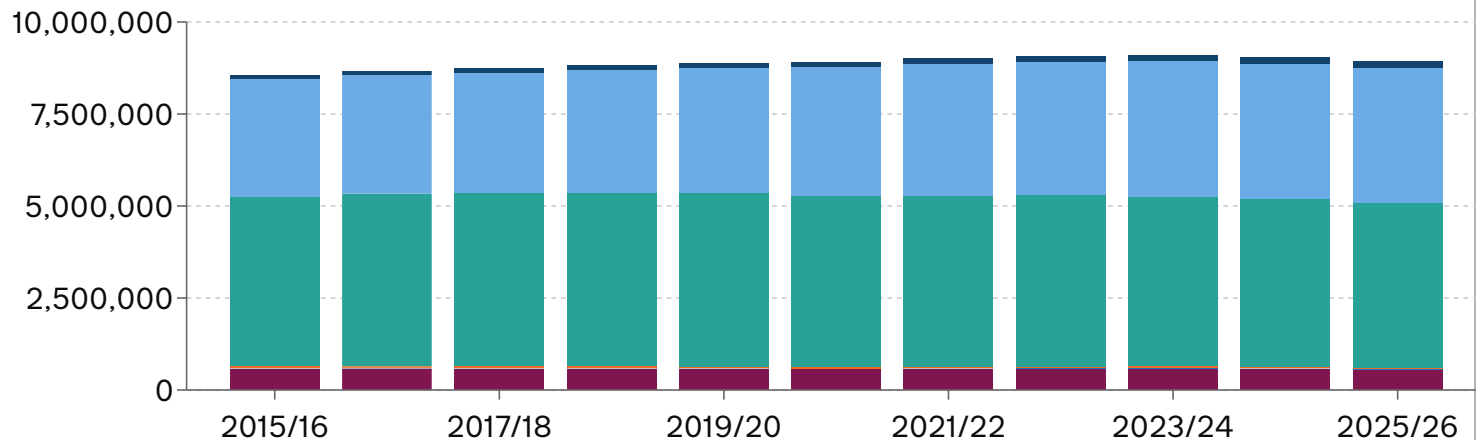
The number of pupils in independent schools has decreased by 3.8% to 560,300, declining for the second consecutive year. Pupils in independent schools account for 6.3% of the school population.

The number of schools has increased

There are 20 more schools in England in 2025/26 compared to 2024/25. This was due to increases in some phases (2 more secondary schools, 12 state-funded special schools and 41 independent schools) and decreases in others (1 AP school, 3 nursery schools and 31 primary).

Chart

Table

[Export options](#)**Number of pupils, by school type, 2015/16 to 2025/26**

- State-funded special school
- State-funded secondary
- State-funded primary
- State-funded nursery
- State-funded AP school
- Non-maintained special school
- Independent school

Footnotes

1. Totals include state-funded nursery, primary, secondary, alternative provision (AP) schools and special schools, and non-maintained special schools. Does not include independent schools nor general hospital schools. This is because independent and hospital schools submit an aggregate school level census that does not include characteristics breakdowns such as ethnicity, age and language.
2. Prior to 2023/24 schools were required to record pupils' gender, which was coded as male /female and reported in the publication as boys/girls. From 2023/24 the variable has been clarified to reflect the pupil's legal sex and is both recorded and reported as male/female. The figures are reported here as constituting a single time series.

Source: School Census

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

[Explore data](#)

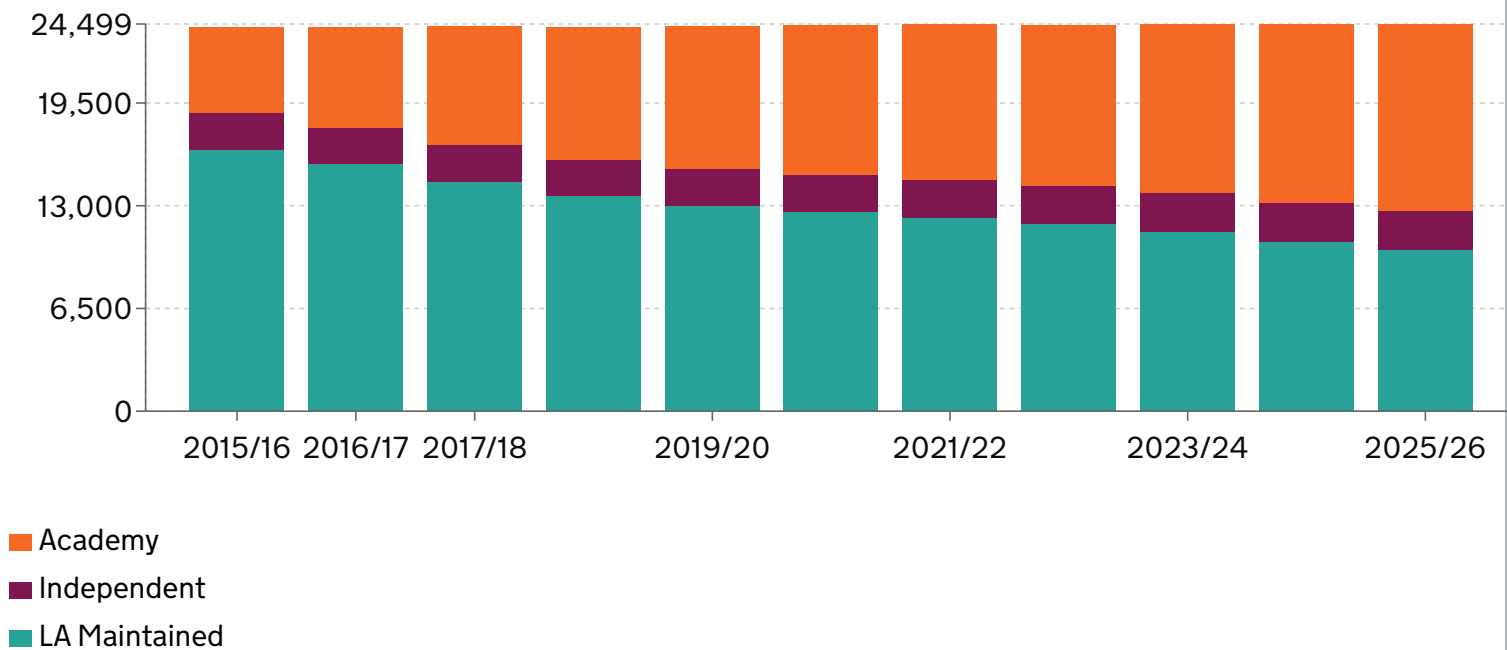
The number of pupils attending academies (including free schools) has continued to grow, along with the number of academies. While 48.2% of all schools were academies, over half of all pupils (60.4%) were attending an academy. At January 2026:

- 48.8% of primary schools are now academies or free schools, accounting for 49.9% of the primary school population.
- 83.9% of secondary schools are academies or free schools, accounting for 83.6% of secondary school pupils.
- 53.1% of state-funded special schools are academies or free schools, accounting for 49.7% of special school pupils

For up-to-date information on open academies, free schools, studio schools and UTCs, see [monthly transparency data \(opens in new tab\)](#).

Chart

Table

[Export options](#)**Number of pupils attending by type of school, 2015/16 to 2025/26****Footnotes**

1. Totals include state-funded nursery, primary, secondary, alternative provision (AP) schools and special schools, and non-maintained special schools. Does not include independent schools nor general hospital schools. This is because independent and hospital schools submit an aggregate school level census that does not include characteristics breakdowns such as ethnicity, age and language.
2. Prior to 2023/24 schools were required to record pupils' gender, which was coded as male /female and reported in the publication as boys/girls. From 2023/24 the variable has been clarified to reflect the pupil's legal sex and is both recorded and reported as male/female. The figures are reported here as constituting a single time series.

Source: School Census

Explore and edit this data online

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Information on the total compulsory time pupils spend in school in a typical 5 day week is now collected in the January school census. For information on the data collected, please see the [school census guidance \(opens in new tab\)](#).

Information on school hours (time) has been published in the underlying school data file and can found under additional supporting files.

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State-funded AP schools and alternative provision

Alternative provision is defined in the [Alternative Provision Statutory Guidance \(opens in new tab\)](#) as education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a suspension; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour. These placements are typically for children unable to attend a mainstream or special school.

This section details all pupils in state funded AP schools, as well as placements made by schools in AP settings (state- and non-state-funded) as well as LAs in non-state-funded provision.

- a) **State-funded alternative provision schools** - includes pupil referral units, AP academies and AP free schools and the data is collected through the school census. This includes placements arranged by local authorities and by schools.
- b) **School arranged alternative provision** - Data on alternative provision arranged by schools was collected in the school census from Spring 2023. This includes full or part-time education arranged by schools.
- c) **Local authority funded alternative provision in non-state-funded provision collected via the alternative provision census.**

This includes placements in non-state-funded provision when:

- i) LA arrange education for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; using their Section 19 powers.
- ii) LAs make educational provision for children and young people with Education, Health and Care plans under their duties in the Children and Families Act.

Non-state-funded provision includes non-maintained special schools, independent schools, independent special schools, FE colleges and unregistered alternative provision settings.

This may include some pupils who are included in the school census or school level annual school census, for example where the local authority is funding a placement in a non-maintained special school or independent special school.

There are expected to be some overlaps between these groups. This includes pupils attending pupil referral units, who also have other alternative provision either arranged by the school, or local authority funded alternative provision. It is therefore **not advised to sum across the totals in each section**.

State-funded alternative provision (AP) schools

This includes pupil referral units, alternative provision academies and free schools.

The number of pupils in state-funded AP schools has decreased by 0.5% to 16,600. This includes pupils placed by schools and LAs, and whose sole or main registration is in a state-funded AP school. The number of pupils in AP decreased between 2017/18 and 2021/22, but has since increased and returned to 2017/18 pupil numbers.

A third (66.1%) of pupils in AP schools are male; this proportion has been decreasing since 2021/22.

Pupils who are eligible for free school meals are disproportionately represented in AP schools, with 65.4% compared to 26.5% in the overall school population.

There are a further 11,200 dual subsidiary enrolments in state-funded AP schools. It should not be assumed that this equates to 11,200 pupils as it is possible for a pupil to have multiple dual placements.

[▶ Export options](#)**Number of state-funded AP schools and number of pupils attending, by type of school, 2021/22 to 2025/26**

		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Count of pupils of all ages	Total	11,684	13,191	15,866	16,643	16,555
	Academy alternative provision converter	2,617	3,041	3,977	4,565	5,126
	Academy alternative provision sponsor led	1,114	1,323	1,546	2,036	1,950
	Pupil referral unit	6,774	7,470	8,874	8,572	7,925
Number of schools	Total	338	335	333	334	333
	Academy alternative provision converter	78	78	83	88	95
	Academy alternative provision sponsor led	28	29	29	33	35
	Pupil referral unit	182	177	170	159	149

[Show full screen table](#)[Data symbols ?](#)**Footnotes**

1. Totals include state-funded nursery, primary, secondary, alternative provision (AP) schools and special schools, and non-maintained special schools. Does not include independent schools nor general hospital schools. This is because independent and hospital schools submit an aggregate school level census that does not include characteristics breakdowns such as ethnicity, age and language.
2. Prior to 2023/24 schools were required to record pupils' gender, which was coded as male /female and reported in the publication as boys/girls. From 2023/24 the variable has been clarified to reflect the pupil's legal sex and is both recorded and reported as male/female. The figures are reported here as constituting a single time series.

Source: School Census

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

[Explore data](#)

School arranged alternative provision

This includes open placements at census day where a school has arranged alternative provision for a pupil.

There were 28,300 pupils in school arranged AP at January 2026. The most common reason recorded for schools arranging AP was off-site placement for behavioural support (50.0%). Of the pupils in school arranged AP:

- 37.4% had an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan and a further 37.5% were in receipt of special educational need (SEN) support.
- 62.0% were male.
- 57.0% were eligible for free school meals.

[Export options](#)

School arranged alternative provision, by type of setting and placement reason 2025/26

	Total	Education setting with URN	Non-maintained further education college	One on one tuition	Other unregistered provider	Registered provider with UKPRN	Placement
Total	28,273	10,061	347	4,762	9,013	3,281	
Placement Reason							
Medical condition (mental health need)	5,709	1,778	44	1,531	1,627	654	
Medical condition (physical health need)	722	326	5	174	140	75	
Off-site placement for behavioural support	14,134	5,850	208	1,674	4,285	1,682	
Other	7,038	1,927	90	1,362	2,508	861	
Permanent exclusion (where still going through the review process)	602	141	no data	12	440	6	
Suspension	68	39	no data	9	13	3	

[Show full screen table](#)[Data symbols ?](#)

Source: School Census

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Local authority arranged placements in non state-funded alternative provision

This includes placements in non-state-funded provision when:

- i) LA arrange education for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; using their Section 19 powers.
- ii) LAs make educational provision for children and young people with Education, Health and Care plans under their duties in the Children and Families Act.

This includes open placements at census day where the pupil is in a local authority funded AP setting.

There are more placements than pupils, as pupils can have multiple placements.

The number of placements in AP has increased by 21.9% to 72,800 in 2025/26. The number of open placements has more than trebled since 2017/18. The majority of LA funded placements (69.9%) are in an education setting, and the most common reason for placement is that the setting was named on an EHC plan (76.9%).

By pupil characteristics:

- As in previous years, most placements are for males (69.0%). However, there has been a year on year reduction in this proportion, from 76.5% in 2017/18.
- Pupils in these placements have a lower rate of free school meal eligibility (25.2%) than the overall school population (26.5%).

[▶ Export options](#)**Reason for placement in local authority-arranged alternative provision,
2023/24 to 2025/26**

	Number of placements			Percentage of placements		
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Total	48,133	59,678	72,768	100.00	100.00	100.00
Mental health need	799	669	966	1.66	1.12	1.33
New arrival without a school place	746	898	818	1.55	1.50	1.12
Other including pregnancy/childcare	5,536	7,999	11,430	11.50	13.40	15.71
Permanent exclusion	1,797	3,021	3,159	3.73	5.06	4.34
Physical health need	263	334	410	0.55	0.56	0.56
Pupil in young offender institutes / secure training centres	40	63	59	0.08	0.11	0.08
Setting named on EHC plan	38,952	46,694	55,926	80.93	78.24	76.86

[Show full screen table](#)[Data symbols ?](#)

Source: Alternative Provision Census

Explore and edit this data online

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[▶ Export options](#)**Alternative provision - local authority arranged placements, number of placements by setting type, 2023/24 to 2025/26**

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Total	48,133	59,678	72,768
Education setting with URN	36,646	43,877	50,860
Non-maintained further education college	804	541	564
One on one tuition	5,275	7,062	8,667
Other unregistered provider	3,043	4,621	6,952
Registered provider with UKPRN	2,068	3,331	5,571
Work based placement	297	246	154

[Show full screen table](#)[Data symbols ?](#)

Source: Alternative Provision Census

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Free school meals eligibility

Children in state-funded schools in England are entitled to receive free school meals if a parent or carer were in receipt of any of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided they were not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and had an annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits)

Pupils in families with no recourse to public funds (NPRF) can also be eligible for free school meals – see here for further information: [Providing free school meals to families with no recourse to public funds \(NPRF\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/providing-free-school-meals-to-families-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds-nprf). (opens in new tab)

Children in nursery schools are eligible if they meet the criteria and attend for full days, or if part time, receiving education before and after the lunch break. Pupils are still eligible for free school meals in school in sixth form, but not sixth form college or further education.

Since 1 April 2018, transitional protections have been in place which will continue during the roll out of Universal Credit. This has meant that pupils eligible for free school meals on or after 1 April 2018 retain their free school meals eligibility even if their circumstances change. Prior to the pandemic, this had been the main driver in the increase in the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals as pupils continue to become eligible but fewer pupils stop being eligible.

Any pupil gaining eligibility for free school meals after 1 April 2018 will be protected against losing free school meals until March 2025. After March 2025, any existing claimants that no longer meet the eligibility criteria at that point (because they are earning above the threshold or are no longer a recipient of Universal Credit) will continue to receive free school meals until the end of their current phase of education (i.e. primary or secondary).

In June 2024, the government announced that Free School Meal entitlements will expand from the 2026/27 academic year. This release refers to the January 2026 school census, therefore presented statistics do not reflect the new eligibility arrangements. Further details on the policy are available at: [Free school meals: guidance for local authorities, local-authority-maintained schools, academies and free schools - GOV.UK \(opens in new tab\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/free-school-meals-guidance-for-local-authorities-local-authority-maintained-schools-academies-and-free-schools).

The number of pupils eligible for free school meals has continued to increase

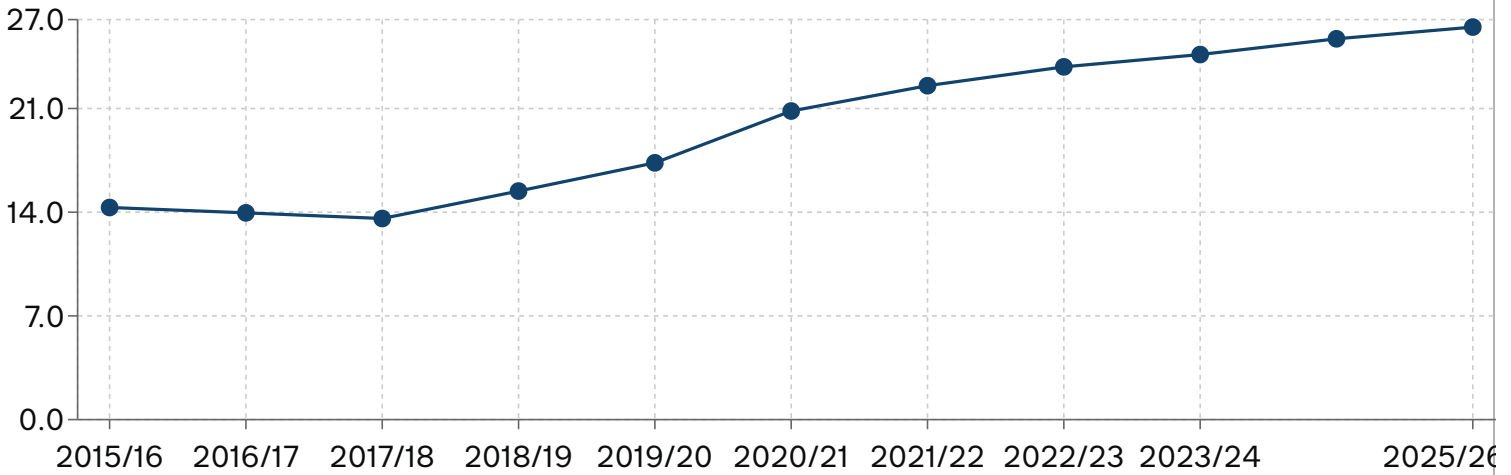
In January 2026, over 2.2 million pupils were eligible for free school meals, 26.5% of all pupils. This is an increase of 43,100 since January 2025 when 2.2 million (25.7%) pupils were eligible for free school meals and continues the increasing trend that began in 2018/19.

The continuing year on year increase in the number and rate of pupils eligible for FSM reflects the continuation of the transitional protections described above. There is an increasing number of pupils who are FSM eligible as pupils flow on to free school meals when becoming eligible, but protections mean pupils do not flow off in similar quantities.

Chart Table

[Export options](#)

Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, 2015/16 to 2025/26



● Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals

Footnotes

1. Totals include state-funded nursery, primary, secondary, alternative provision (AP) schools and special schools, and non-maintained special schools. Does not include independent schools nor general hospital schools. This is because independent and hospital schools submit an aggregate school level census that does not include characteristics breakdowns such as ethnicity, age and language.

Source: School Census

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

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Free school meal eligibility varies by region

The North East has the highest rate of free school meal eligibility (33.0%) and the South East and East of England have the lowest rates (21.1%).

All regions had an increase in the rate of free school meal eligibility, but London had the largest increase of 1.3 percentage points, to 29.2% of pupils.

Chart Table

[Export options](#)

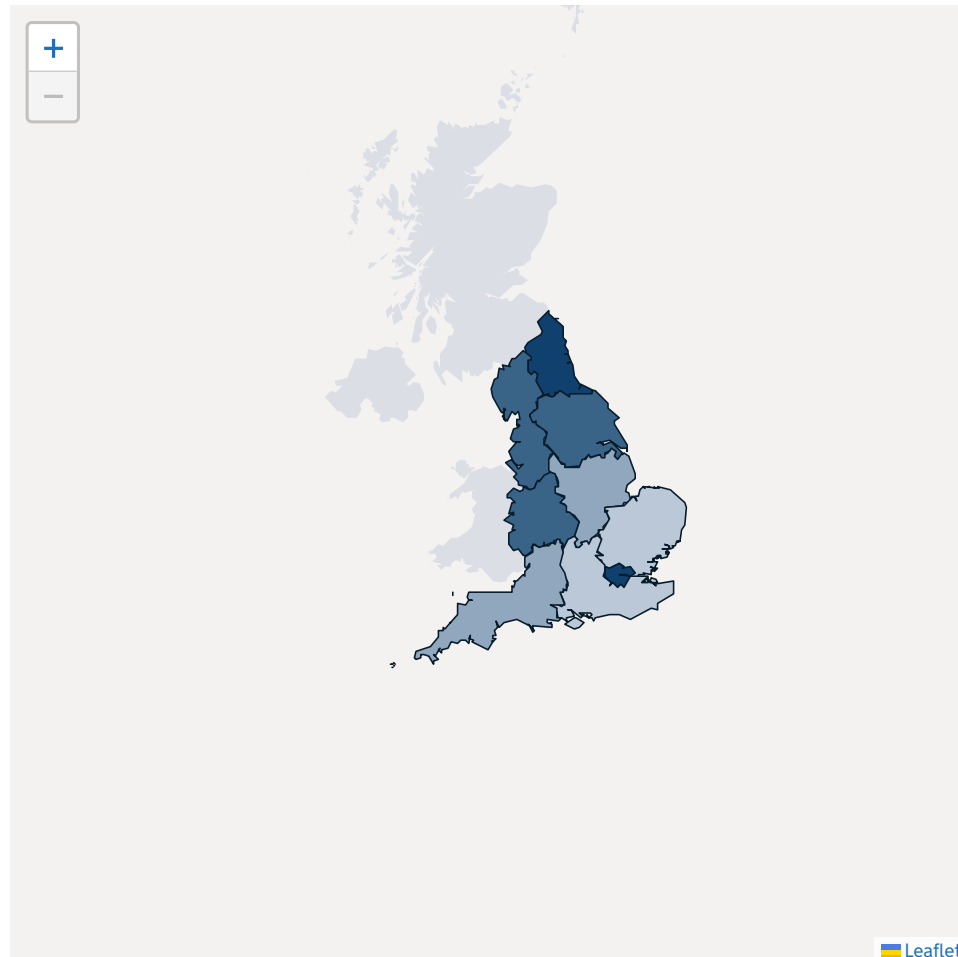
Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals

1. Select data to view

Percentage of pupils (All pupils, FSM eligible, 2015/16) ▾

2. Select a Region

None selected ▾



Footnotes

1. Totals include state-funded nursery, primary, secondary, alternative provision (AP) schools and special schools, and non-maintained special schools. Does not include independent schools nor general hospital schools. This is because independent and hospital schools submit an aggregate school level census that does not include characteristics breakdowns such as ethnicity, age and language.
2. This map uses the boundary data Regions England BUC 2022/12

Source: School Census

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

[Explore data](#)

Free school meal eligibility varies by national curriculum year group

FSM eligibility rates are highest for pupils during the years of compulsory schooling; reception to year 11. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals peaks among pupils of national curriculum year 6 - in 2025/26 it was 31.6% - and declines throughout the later national curriculum years. Please note that national curriculum years contain primary, secondary, non-maintained special schools, state-funded special schools and state-funded alternative provision schools.

The percentage of pupils in reception who are eligible for free school meals has declined for the fourth year running and the percentage of pupils in years 8 and 9 who are eligible has seen the largest increase of 1.8% from 2024/25.

There are high rates of FSM eligibility among pupils in year 14, however there has been a slight decrease from 2024/25. This is a small cohort including pupils retaking the final year of key stage 5. Pupils not following the National Curriculum are also a small group who attend some special schools.

[▶ Export options](#)**FSM Eligibility by National Curriculum Year Group 2015/16 to 2024/25**

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
NC year group	Early 1	no data	2.0	2.5	5.2	4.0	4.1	5.9	2.8
	Early 2	no data	4.5	3.7	3.7	3.6	4.6	4.0	4.4
	Nursery 1	5.3	5.0	4.6	4.7	4.9	6.1	6.3	6.1
	Nursery 2	7.2	6.9	6.4	6.6	6.8	8.3	8.7	8.6
	Reception	14.3	14.0	13.7	14.4	15.0	18.8	18.8	18.1
	Year 1	14.5	14.2	13.9	16.4	17.6	21.8	22.5	22.4
	Year 2	15.3	14.2	13.8	16.2	18.8	23.0	24.2	24.6
	Year 3	16.0	15.7	15.1	17.4	20.1	24.5	26.1	27.1
	Year 4	15.9	15.6	15.2	17.5	19.9	24.0	26.7	27.9
	Year 5	15.9	15.4	15.0	17.4	19.8	23.5	26.0	28.3
	Year 6	15.7	15.4	14.9	17.1	19.5	23.2	25.4	27.6
	Year 7	15.4	15.1	14.7	16.7	19.0	22.3	24.6	26.3
	Year 8	15.1	14.8	14.3	16.1	18.3	21.6	23.9	25.8
	Year 9	14.8	14.4	14.0	15.6	17.5	20.8	23.0	25.0
	Year 10	14.4	14.0	13.5	15.1	16.9	19.9	22.1	23.9
	Year 11	13.7	13.5	13.0	14.4	16.1	19.1	21.1	22.9
	Year 12	8.1	7.9	7.6	8.8	9.6	11.5	12.9	13.7
Year 13	7.1	6.9	6.5	7.5	8.5	10.1	11.3	12.3	
Year 14	26.0	26.0	27.3	31.1	32.6	35.2	36.4	37.8	
Not followed	36.5	36.3	37.7	36.9	34.7	33.6	33.0	40.1	

[Show full screen table](#)[Data symbols ?](#)

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Footnotes

1. Totals include state-funded nursery, primary, secondary, alternative provision (AP) schools and special schools, and non-maintained special schools. Does not include independent schools nor general hospital schools. This is because independent and hospital schools submit an aggregate school level census that does not include characteristics breakdowns such as ethnicity, age and language.

Source: School Census

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Free school meals eligibility varies by ethnicity

Rates of FSM eligibility in 2025/26 were highest among pupils in the Traveller of Irish heritage ethnic group (68.9%) and Gypsy/Roma ethnic group (62.6%). Rates were lowest among pupils of Indian and Chinese ethnic groups, both at 7.6%.

[▶ Export options](#)**Percentage of pupils FSM eligible**

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	202
Ethnicity Minor	White - White British	13.5	13.4	13.0	14.9	16.8	20.0	21.6	
	White - Traveller of Irish heritage	62.5	61.8	57.6	57.8	60.2	63.5	63.3	
	White - Irish	14.4	14.0	13.1	14.8	16.5	18.6	20.5	
	White - Gypsy/Roma	31.7	31.0	30.4	33.5	36.9	47.2	51.9	
	White - Any other White background	8.7	7.8	6.8	8.0	9.5	12.9	15.1	
	Unclassified	16.6	15.9	15.1	16.5	18.8	22.7	25.1	
	Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	28.1	27.7	26.7	30.1	33.4	38.8	41.5	
	Mixed - White and Black African	22.7	21.6	19.8	22.7	25.4	30.2	32.7	
	Mixed - White and Asian	15.4	15.0	13.6	15.1	16.5	19.3	20.5	
	Mixed - Any other Mixed background	18.8	18.0	16.9	18.9	20.8	24.6	26.3	
	Black - Black Caribbean	26.9	25.8	24.9	28.5	32.0	37.6	40.5	
	Black - Black African	24.0	22.1	19.8	22.5	25.3	30.5	32.5	
	Black - Any other Black background	25.2	23.6	21.1	24.4	27.4	32.8	35.6	

Asian - Pakistani	18.9	17.9	15.6	17.0	18.5	22.5	24.3	
Asian - Indian	6.1	5.6	4.8	5.3	5.8	7.2	7.5	
Asian - Chinese	6.7	6.4	5.9	6.8	7.6	9.2	7.8	
Asian - Bangladeshi	23.6	22.2	19.1	20.7	21.9	27.4	29.3	
Asian - Any other Asian background	12.0	11.7	10.9	12.7	14.4	18.1	19.9	
Any other ethnic group	23.1	22.4	20.8	23.6	26.2	31.7	34.7	
Any other Black background	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	no
Any other Asian background	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	no

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[Data symbols ?](#)

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Footnotes

1. Totals include state-funded nursery, primary, secondary, alternative provision (AP) schools and special schools, and non-maintained special schools. Does not include independent schools nor general hospital schools. This is because independent and hospital schools submit an aggregate school level census that does not include characteristics breakdowns such as ethnicity, age and language.

Source: School Census

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

[Explore data](#)

Universal Infant Free school meals (UIFSM)

The table below shows the number of pupils who took a free school meal on census day and the total number of infant pupils.

Almost 1.6 million infant pupils were recorded as taking a free school meal on census day, of which over 1.2 million are not normally eligible for FSM through the criteria above but received them under the Universal Infant FSM policy. The proportion of infant pupils taking a free school meal on census day rose to 88.4% in 2025/26, from 88.2% in 2024/25, continuing the increasing trend since 2022/23.

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Ethnicity

38.7% of pupils are from a minority ethnic background

Those pupils of all school age who have been classified according to their ethnic group and are of any origin other than White British are defined as being of minority ethnic background in this release.

Across all school types, 38.7% of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is an increase of 0.7 percentage points since 2024/25, continuing the increasing trend throughout the series. This varies by school type:

- 38.9% in primary schools (up from 38.4% in 2024/25)
- 38.7% in secondary schools (up from 37.8% in 2024/25)
- 32.4% in special schools (up from 32.0% in 2024/25)
- 24.2% in AP schools (down from 25.4% in 2024/25)

These figures do not include those where ethnicity is unclassified.

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First language

78.0% of pupils were recorded as having a first language known or believed to be English

A pupil is recorded to have English as an additional language if they are exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English. This measure is not a measure of English language proficiency or a good proxy for recent immigration.

21.6% of pupils were recorded as having a first language known or believed to be other than English. This is an increase of 0.2 percentage points from 2024/25, continuing the increasing trend recorded since 2020/21.

This varies by school type; from 7.1% in AP to 30.6% in nurseries. In primary schools, the percentage recorded as having a first language other than English has increased from 23.4% to 23.8% while in secondary there has been an increase from 19.2% to 19.3%, following further small increases in recent years.

Numbers may not sum to 100%, due to a small number of pupils with an unclassified language.

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Young carers

89,800 pupils were identified as being a young carer in 2025/26

Data on young carers was collected in the school census for the first time in 2022/23, and this is the fourth publication of information on young carers in the series.

The young carer indicator identifies, for those children on roll on spring census day, whether they have been identified as a young carer either by the school (including where the pupil self declares) or by parent or guardian.

Section 17ZA of the Children Act 1989 says a young carer is a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (which isn't a contract or voluntary work).

All schools (except nursery, independent and hospital schools) must send this information as part of the Spring school census but the recording and handling of the information is at the school's discretion. 56% of schools recorded no young carers in 2025/26, down from 69% in 2024/25.

Young carers carry immense responsibility in providing care and support at home but their own needs may remain 'hidden' from wider view. The increased pressures young carers have faced due to the pandemic has further highlighted the need to improve formal identification of this cohort in schools, understand their needs and to provide early help as outlined in statutory guidance on [keeping children safe in education \(opens in new tab\)](#).

[Working together to safeguard children \(opens in new tab\)](#) also outlines how school and college staff should be particularly alert to the potential need of early help for students who have taken on caring responsibilities.

89,800 pupils were identified as being known to be a young carer in 2025/26, an increase of 25,300 from 2024/25. Increases in the first few years of data collection should be treated with caution as this is likely to be a result of the data item becoming established within the school census collection, rather than reflecting a true increase in young carers. For information, the Office for National Statistics also [publishes information on unpaid care \(opens in new tab\)](#).

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Class size

Large Classes - An infant class is described as 'large' when it exceeds the statutory limit of 30 pupils. There are no formal policy restrictions on any other class sizes.

Lawful and unlawful infant classes - The [School Admissions \(Infant Class Sizes\) \(England\) Regulations 2012 \(opens in new tab\)](#) prescribe certain limited circumstances in which pupils may be admitted as lawful exceptions to the infant class size limit of 30 for one-teacher classes. This means that a class of, for example, 32 pupils is lawful if two or more of those pupils have been admitted under lawful exceptions. If fewer than two have been admitted as lawful exceptions then the class is termed 'unlawful'.

Classes taught by one teacher - The figures below represent classes taught by one teacher only, and therefore do not total to the overall number of pupils across the year groups.

The average class size for infant classes has slightly decreased

The average infant class size was 25.9, a decrease of 0.3 since 2024/25. Between 2020/21 and 2023/24, average infant class sizes were stable following a period of decreases.

The number of pupils in large classes has decreased from 47,500 to 39,500 which represents 2.7% of all pupils in infant classes. Infant classes cover reception and key stage 1 (years 1 and 2) and class sizes are subject to the large class limits outlined above. For further information on class sizes, see the featured table, [Infant classes by size of class, England, 2023/24 to 2025/26](#).

The average class size in key stage 2 has decreased

The average class size decreased to 27.6, the number of pupils in large classes has decreased from 439,000 to 413,900, representing 18.8% of pupils in key stage 2 (pupils in years 3 to 6).

For further information on class sizes, see the featured table, [KS2 classes by size of class, England, 2023/24 to 2025/26](#).

Primary school class size has slightly decreased and secondary has slightly increased

The average primary class size has decreased slightly by 0.3 to 26.1 following a period of stability between 2020/21 to 2023/24. Average secondary class size has increased slightly by 0.1 to 22.6.

Further information - Pupil to teacher ratios

Pupil to teacher ratios (PTR) are published in the [School workforce in England](#) release. The PTRs are calculated as the number of pupils reported in the January School Census divided by the number of teachers reported in the November School Workforce Census. This demonstrates the size of the workforce in relation to the size of the learner population. A decrease in PTR means that there are fewer pupils per teacher.

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Contact us

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Phone: 0370 000 2288

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