

Important information on the school census

The school census is used for the purpose of improving and promoting the education and well-being of children in England. It helps us to make sure we are allocating funds where they are needed and that no groups of children are missing out on the education they deserve.

This year we asked schools for additional information on the nationality, country of birth and English language proficiency of pupils. You may be aware that the collection of this data has resulted in some concerns from parents and questioning as to the process and purpose behind it.

This new data will help us understand a range of factors, allowing us to better plan to meet needs within the school system. For example, what extra support we may need to provide to schools with high numbers of children who don't speak or understand English sufficiently to access the curriculum, whether particular groups of pupils are making good progress with their education, or where there is evidence of good practice with children of different nationalities that could be shared. Understanding trends in migration and the associated needs in the school system helps us ensure that all children, wherever they are from, have the best possible education.

The Department recognises that schools are data controllers in their own right and therefore we do not normally advise schools on their collecting and processing of personal data, or regulate their compliance with the Data Protection Act. We do, however, wish to equip schools to explain to parents what personal data they collect, why it is collected, who it is shared with and what it is used for.

With this in mind, we have updated our guidance regarding the collection of data, and highlighted what we hope are helpful points below:

- Parents may wish to decline to provide the following information about their child: nationality, country of birth, ethnicity, first language and whether they are the child of someone in the Armed Services. In cases such as this, the school can record such data as 'refused'.
- For these data items, schools should only record information that is provided by a parent / guardian or pupil (where a pupil is deemed mature enough to have capacity to consent to sharing their personal data with others).
- In line with the Equalities Act 2010, schools should avoid selectively asking subsets of parents or pupils who share a particular characteristic to complete this information in a different manner to other parents or pupils. Further information on schools' responsibilities under the Equalities Act is available [here](#).
- Parents are not required to share any documentary evidence of a pupil's country of birth or nationality, and schools should not request to see any child's passport or birth certificate, for the purposes of the census.
- Parents can decide to retract nationality and country of birth information previously provided. Further information on this can be found in our [updated guidance](#).