School Enrolments and Numbers Annual Data Collection

Description of data collection exercise

Information on pupil enrolments is collected annually from schools, as part of what is commonly known as the schools census. This data collection exercise is an annual snapshot of pupil and school level data for each pre-school centre, nursery, special, primary, post-primary, hospital and independent school in Northern Ireland. As well as data relating to school enrolments and numbers, information in relation to attendance and school exams is collected as part of the overall school return. The collection of data is facilitated by C2k, who are responsible for the provision of ICT systems in schools.

School census data is used by policy branches within DE and by other users across the education service, most notably by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). The main driver for the school census is to create a statistical base to inform a wide range of policy areas, including: finance allocations; school estate development and planning; special education, school improvement; area based planning; healthy schools, EAL and Travellers; early years; and integrated and Irish medium schools. The data are also the basis of a number of Assembly questions and are used in the ELB auditing process.

Further users include Education and Training Inspectorate in preparation of background material for schools inspections. To reduce the burden on schools, other data needs are met as part of the exercise, such as using data collected in the exercise as the basis for information for the Common Funding Formula for schools. The date for the school census is usually the Friday of the first full working-week in October.

The content of the census is defined by DE information needs. The relevance of this is checked each year when we circulate a letter specifying the variables to be collected in that year's census and asking whether there are any changes DE branches and the Education and Library Boards would like considered for the following year. This is a stimulus for discussions on needs with individual customers. We also meet 4 times per year with LMS officers from the ELBs who give feedback on Board requirements (DE Schools Finance Branch also sit on this forum). A second forum in which we participate is the C2k Liaison Group which captures formal feedback from C2k help teams (and indirectly schools) about the experiences of schools in providing census data.

Data collected relates mainly to pupil characteristics and attributes such as year group, religion, ethnicity, special needs, etc. A full list of the variables available from the exercise is attached at Annex A. Data is collected from schools via both electronic data interchange and via paper return.   Information for primary, post-primary and special schools is collected, in the main, at pupil level, with aggregate level information available for pupils at nursery schools, voluntary and private pre-school centres, independent and hospital schools. A list of developments in the data collected, reflecting the changing needs of users, is included at Annex B.

Main Legislation

Legislation is in place to require schools to provide information in relation to school enrolments. The relevant legislation is 'The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003', Art 37, para 1 and 2

"Reports and returns

37. —

(1)   A body to which this paragraph applies shall—

(a)   make such reports and returns; and

(b)   give such information,

to the Department as the Department may reasonably require for the purposes of its functions under any statutory provision.

(2)   Paragraph (1) applies to—

(a)   a board;

(b)   the trustees of a school;

(c)   the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school;

(d)   the proprietor of an independent school;

(e)   the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;

(f)   the Staff Commission; and

(g)   the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment."

The Department is registered with the Information Commissioner as a data controller under the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

Resources

The process is currently managed by 1 Deputy Principal Statistician with 1 Assistant Statistician dedicated to the census on a permanent basis and with 1 other Assistant

Statistician dedicated to the data cleansing exercise for a period of 2 -3 months. There is further administrative support from 3 clerical staff for the period of the data collection and validation exercise (one brought in on a temporary basis during the data collection period). This is the minimum required to produce the dataset to its current standard and in the current timeframe.

Response Burden

The Department collects a range of information from schools each year. To help minimise the burden on schools, information on enrolments, attendance and exams are collected in one exercise, the annual school census

A sample survey of schools making data returns through the school census process in 2009/10 found that the average time taken by schools to complete the return was 3hours 14 minutes. This varied across school types as follows: voluntary and private pre-school centres, 57 minutes; nursery schools, 2 hours 2 minutes; primary schools, 4 hours 34 minutes; post-primary schools, 10 hours; and special schools, 1 hour.

In monetary terms, this translated to an average of £66.81 for voluntary and private pre-school centres, £106.53 for nursery schools, £189.66 for primary schools, £449.33 for post-primary schools and £39.20 for special schools in 2009/10.

The difference in time taken is affected by a number of factors, for example, the size of the school, the level of data requested and the volume of the data requested. Aggregated data are collected from nursery schools and pre-schools. Primary, special and post-primary schools all provide attendance data as well as pupil data. The higher figure for post-primary schools may be explained by the fact that they tend to be bigger schools, and thus will have more pupil records to check, and the fact that they also return exam results as part of the school census return.

A similar exercise will be conducted for the 2010/11 census.

The establishment of the new eSchools data warehouse, which allows for increased validation of school data sets against ELB data, should have the effect of reducing the burden on school in making their return. Instances where data have been recorded incorrectly will be identified and corrected on an ongoing basis, throughout the year.

Data validation and confidentiality

A number of validations are built into the reporting process in schools, so that schools can verify and correct data before it is submitted. Once data is collected from schools, it is subjected to a further set of validation checks, including checking against ELB information systems for items such as free school meals entitlement. Once the validation process is completed, the datasets are anonymised.

Sensitive data relating to individual pupils, or to small numbers of pupils, are not published or released externally. In this instance, sensitive data are considered as

religion, ethnicity, free school meals entitlement, special educational needs details, newcomer details, etc. Other details, such as pupil year group and gender, are not considered sensitive and small numbers may be published in relation to them.

Publication Details

There are two main publications issued annually in relation to school enrolments. The first, usually in December, contains some basic enrolment figures. The main press release is usually published at the end of February and contains a more detailed breakdown of figures. Additionally, a series of tables containing information from the exercise are published on the Statistics and Research part of the DE website. In accordance with Protocol 2 of the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the following individuals were granted 24-hour pre-release access to these National Statistics releases:

Minister for Education for Northern Ireland
Department of Education (DE) Permanent Secretary
DE Deputy Secretary
DE Deputy Secretary
Grade 5 Head of Performance and Planning Directorate, DE
Grade 5 Head of Education and Training Inspectorate, DE
Grade 7, Head of Schools Finance Branch, DE
Principal Information Officer, Communications Team, DE
Special Adviser to the Minister for Education

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Data collected at individual pupil level via EDI for post primary schools

Gender
Date of birth
Unique Pupil Identifier/Admission number
Pupil name (for validation only)
Pupil educated off-site but not in a school
Dual registered pupils
Religion
Ethnicity
Highest level of study (including subjects studied for validation purposes)
Free school meal entitlement
Year group
Registration group (for validation only)
SEN stage
SEN need type
Boarder
Fee payer
Date of arrival at school
In special / Irish Medium Unit
Home postcode
Country of residence (for validation only)
First language
Newcomer child with English as an additional language
'Looked after' child
Children of service personnel
Level achieved at KS2 in English and mathematics
Reasons KS2 not achieved in English and mathematics
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)
Pupils with a disability

Data collected at summary level for post primary schools

Pupils not domiciled in NI
Projected enrolments by year group
In-migration and Out-migration to NI over the past year
Number of special units in the school
Level achieved at KS3 in English and mathematics (senior highs only)
Reasons KS3 not achieved in English and mathematics (senior highs only)

Data collected at individual pupil level via EDI for special schools

Gender
Date of birth

Unique Pupil Identifier/Admission number
Pupil name (for validation purposes only)
Pupil educated off-site but not in a school
Dual registered pupils
Religion
Ethnicity
First language
Newcomer child with English as an additional language
Free school meal entitlement
'Looked after' child
SEN stage
SEN need type
Date of arrival at school
Home postcode
Country of residence (for validation only)
Year Group
Registration group
Children of service personnel
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)

Data collected at summary level for special schools

Pupils not domiciled in NI
Projected enrolments by year group
In-migration and Out-migration to NI over the past year

Data collected at individual pupil level via EDI for primary schools

Gender
Date of birth
Unique Pupil Identifier/Admission number
Pupil name (for validation purposes only)
Pupil educated off-site but not in a school
Dual registered pupils
Religion
Ethnicity
Free school meal entitlement
Pupils with parent in receipt of JSA/Income Support (nursery pupils only)
Year group
Pattern of attendance for nursery pupils
SEN stage
SEN need type
Boarder
Fee payer
Date of arrival at the school
In special / Irish Medium Unit
Home postcode
Country of residence (for validation only)

First language
Newcomer child with English as an additional language
Looked after child
Registration groups (including composite classes).
Children of service personnel
Pupils with a disability
Previous educational experience of year 1
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)

Data collected at summary level for primary schools

Pupils not domiciled in NI
Projected enrolments by year group
In-migration and Out-migration to NI over the past year
Number of special units in a school

Data collected at summary level for nursery schools

Gender
Pattern of attendance
Age
Summer birthday
Projected numbers by age and pattern of attendance
Looked after children
Class size and numbers
Pupils with parent in receipt of JSA/Income Support
Religion
Ethnicity
Newcomer children with English as an additional language
SEN stage
SEN need type
Children of service Personnel
Children not domiciled in Northern Ireland.
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)

Data collected at summary level voluntary and private pre-school centres

Number of hours of pre-school activity provided per day
Total children in centre
Number of funded children
For funded children:
                Gender
                Pattern of attendance
                Age
                Summer birthday
                Projected numbers by age and pattern of attendance

Looked after children
Class size and numbers
Pupils with parent in receipt of JSA/Income Support
Religion
Ethnicity
Newcomer children with English as an additional language
SEN stage
SEN need type
Children of service Personnel
Type of accommodation (for Travellers)

Annex B

School census year on year progress report

2006/07

EDI returns for primary and special schools introduced.

- Pupil level data available for primary schools
- New summary sheets introduced

Irish language forms and documentation introduced for IM schools/pre schools.

- Irish language documentation for all schools in IM sector

Documentation put on website

- Reference documents for schools put on website and schools emailed access links

2007/08

Changes to xml conversion procedure

- Facility for bulk conversion of files introduced

UPN for post primary pupils introduced.

2008/09

Forces children marker collected at pupil level.

UPN for primary and special schools introduced.

Attendance data collected at pupil level.

2009/10

Code for 'Roma' introduced in ethnicity variable.

Accommodation type for Traveller children collected.

2010/11

Revised language codes introduced.

Registration type – dual or single – variable introduced for primary, post primary and special school pupils.

Children educated of-site but not in a school variable introduced for primary, post-primary and special schools.