

## School Population Projections, 2023/24 based - June 2025 [r]

The Department of Education (DE) has today, published 2023/24 based School Population Projections for Northern Ireland. These projections are produced annually (with the exception of 2022/23-based projections).

These projections estimate pupil numbers across various school phases in Northern Ireland until 2033/34. They are primarily informed by birth and population forecasts produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

The methodology incorporates recent demographic and educational trends, such as increased retention beyond the minimum school leaving age and patterns in pre-school education participation. Additionally, the projections reflect a range of (annually reviewed) assumptions provided by policy branches within the Department of Education, ensuring alignment with current and anticipated policy directions. These are listed as footnotes to the table.

These projections are not forecasts and do not attempt to predict the impact of future policy changes. Demographic behaviour is inherently uncertain and therefore projections will inevitably differ to a greater or lesser extent from actual future population. Projections become increasingly uncertain as they go forward into the future.

### Key Facts and Figures – All comparisons are based on actual data from 2023/24 and projected data from 2033/34:

- Across all school phases, pupil numbers are projected to decline by 12.6% by the 2033/34 academic year.
- The pre-school education sector is projected to experience a 18.8% decline in enrolment. In addition to this overall decrease, a shift in enrolment patterns is anticipated, with an increase in full-time places and a corresponding reduction in part-time provision. These changes are driven by the implementation of the [Pre-School Standardisation Programme](#).
- Enrolment in primary and preparatory schools (year 1 – year 7) is projected to decline by 20.4%.
- Post-primary school enrolments are projected to decline by 9.2%.
- In contrast to overall declining enrolments, the number of pupils in special schools and specialist provisions within mainstream is projected to increase by 69.2% by 2033/34, representing an additional 7,631 pupils. However, it is important to note that this sector is relatively small, and percentage changes can therefore appear more pronounced. As a result of this growth, the special education sector is expected to account for 6.01% of the total school population, up from 3.10% in 2023/24
- The projected declines in school enrolments are consistent with general population trends. Between 2023 and 2033, the population of children aged 3 to 17 is expected to decrease by 12.2%, according to 2022 based [NISRA population projections](#). When broken down by age group, the data show a 16.2% decline among 3-year-olds, a 18.0% decline among those aged 4 to 10, and a 10.1% decline among those aged 11 to 15. Conversely, an increase of 4.9% is projected for the 16 to 17 age group over the same period.

Note: r = revised. Figures were revised on 12 June 2026 to correct an error in the summation of the 'Other Secondary Total', and consequently the 'Post-Primary Total' and 'Total All Sectors', for

2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2023/24. This revision affected the projected decline for all schools and post-primary by 2033/34.