

10 March 2015

Unlawfully Large Infant Class Size Statistics

Dear Ed,

I am writing to you concerning the National Statistics status of unlawfully large infant class size statistics. These statistics have been published in June each year as part of a wider range of statistics in a DfE Statistical Release “Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics” which has National Statistics status.

Following publication last year, several users raised queries about the accuracy of the latest numbers and upon looking at these queries, the then Head of Profession took the decision to suspend publication of these statistics pending a more thorough investigation of the data.

Our investigation into the quality of these statistics initially involved informal discussions with local authorities and academies who had returned data indicating unlawfully large infant classes. In September 2014 we asked those local authorities and academies to check and amend their data (if appropriate). We analysed this data and found that:

- There had been retrospective adjustments to class structures (i.e. moving pupils between classes) rather than adding exception reasons as we had requested. This introduces doubt that the class structures now reflect activity on census day.
- Schools and local authorities demonstrated a lack of understanding of the exception recording process and the current way of recording exceptions makes it difficult for Local Authorities and schools to record these correctly.
- There is strong reason to believe that this problem of under-reporting of exceptions has affected statistics in 2012 and 2013 as well as 2014.

The investigation has concluded that the statistics on unlawfully (and lawfully) large infant classes, including the exception reasons, cannot be relied upon nor can the September follow-up collection.

The investigation also concluded that differences in how these data are captured (particularly the exception reasons) compared to the rest of the

information in the publication means that the other statistics on class sizes are unaffected and are of good quality.

These data remain the only information on unlawfully large infant class size statistics. As this is an area of considerable interest, it is important that the information is in the public domain alongside all relevant information for users on the quality of these statistics. I therefore propose to publish these statistics as a separate “Technical Note” on our website and not as part of the main bulletin. I recommend that this separate document no longer has National Statistics status until the action plan outlined in the Technical Note has been completed and the impact reviewed. I expect we would be in a position to have these statistics reassessed against the Code of Practice towards the end of this year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Iain Bell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the 'i' in "Iain".

Iain Bell

Director for Data and Education Standards Analysis