



Department
for Education

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Dear Ed

Temporary Suspension of National Statistics Designation for Characteristics of Children in Need Statistics 2016-17

I would like you to consider a temporary suspension of the National Statistics badging for the Department for Education's statistics on the Characteristics of Children in Need 2016-17.

The Department has collected and published data on the characteristics of children in need for a number of years. This information is collected from local authorities and is published on an annual basis on the department's website.

As part of our ongoing programme of reviewing the quality of our statistics, we have found an issue with the way that the current process handles cases where a referral is made to a local authority before the end of the reference period, but where no initial decision is made during that period. This process leads to an over count of children in need, which is not fully consistent over time. Our initial assessment is that the overcount is likely be in the order of 5%.

We are in a position to show the impact of this overcount on two affected measures in the publication for the past 3-4 years, however disentangling the effect across all metrics will require a more thorough review. The next publication is due to be released on 2nd November. The team are working hard to resolve this issue and conduct a more systemic review of the data process that underpin these statistics. It is my judgement that this process is unlikely to be completed to a suitable quality before the planned publication date.

Although the statistics are currently designated as National Statistics, it is my assessment that, given the concerns over this issue, I would be unable to provide the assurance specified under the guidance on quality assurance of administrative data. I therefore feel that the most appropriate course of action would be to seek temporary de-designation of the Characteristics of Children in Need statistics. This would include our statistical first release document and the underlying Excel tables.

Section 14 of the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 states that we are unable to de-designate our own outputs from National Statistics without the UK Statistics Authority determining that the statistics do not comply with the Code.

We remain confident that the difficulties faced should be resolved going forward and we will, of course, make it clear to users of the statistics that this issue has emerged and set

out our plans for addressing it. Once we are satisfied that the data is of sufficient quality, I will write a further letter asking for the temporary suspension of the National Statistics badging to end.

I would be happy to discuss any of these matters further if you would like more details.

Neil McIvor, Chief Data Officer and Head of Profession for Statistics, Department for Education

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ND McIvor', with a long, sweeping flourish extending upwards and to the right.