
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretaries
National Education Union
(by email)

9 December 2020

Dear Mary and Kevin

Thank you for raising your concerns about the Department for Education's *Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak* statistics. You were concerned that a reference to local breakdowns of pupil attendance data in a [BBC article](#) on 1 December breached orderly release of the statistics and that the Department has failed to publish these data in a timely manner.

We are aware that the Department for Education provides local breakdowns of data on schools as management information to a range of government and local authority users to enable them to manage schools. We understand that these were the data quoted in the BBC article.

In order to prepare these data for publication on 15 December, the Department for Education told us it is undertaking more data analysis and quality assurance than it does for the management information. The Department has shared the management information as quickly as possible for operational purposes, accompanied by caveats regarding the limitations of the data and how they should be used.

This does present a risk that the data can make their way into the public domain, which can cause confusion and undermine confidence. Organisations should think carefully about doing this and consider what can be done to mitigate these risks. For example, by being clear on the reasons for the approach taken and publishing the data as soon as the organisation is able to. I welcome the [statement](#) published alongside the statistics by the Department today explaining its approach to sharing management information.

We consider it reasonable for the Department to take time to thoroughly quality assure its published official statistics and acknowledge the pressures that statisticians are under to produce extensive, timely data on schools during the pandemic. However, we do encourage the Department for Education to consider the timeliness of its publications to meet a broad range of user needs where it is practically possible. We have brought these issues to the Department's attention.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation