# Pupil numbers in England’s state schools set to drop by nearly 400,000 by 2030



The number of pupils attending state nursery, primary, and secondary schools in England is projected to decline significantly over the next decade, with government data indicating a drop of nearly 400,000 by 2030. This anticipated reduction is primarily attributed to falling birth rates and regional demographic shifts, notably affecting urban areas like London. The Department for Education (DfE) reports that primary and nursery school populations will decrease at a faster rate than earlier projections suggested, with nursery and primary school numbers expected to fall to around 4.2 million by 2030—down 300,000 from 2025 figures. Secondary school populations are also predicted to fall to just over 3.1 million, a decrease of approximately 97,000 pupils from 2025.

The demographic bulge that had previously increased secondary school populations is expected to peak between 2026 and 2027, marking a turning point before enrolments begin to fall. These trends reflect broader national changes, with comprehensive analyses by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) projecting that state primary and secondary schools could see a combined decrease of nearly 440,000 pupils between 2022/23 and 2028/29, with further reductions forecast in the following years. The EPI has highlighted the potential consequences of these changes on school funding, warning that the decline in pupil numbers could trigger losses of up to £1 billion by 2030.

This significant expected decrease is placing considerable pressure on schools, particularly smaller institutions facing funding challenges due to their reliance on per-pupil funding models. Educators and union leaders have voiced concerns that falling rolls may lead to school closures, mergers, and cuts to vital educational provision. Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the school leaders’ union NAHT, emphasised the disproportionate impact on small schools and called on the government to protect these schools from detrimental budget reductions. He also urged continued investment to maintain staffing levels, reduce workload pressures, and enable smaller class sizes that can better support students, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

Similarly, Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union (NEU), expressed concern about the implications of declining pupil numbers but argued that falling rolls do not inevitably mean widespread school closures. Instead, Kebede suggested that reducing class sizes could be a positive outcome, improving educational outcomes and teacher retention. However, he criticised the current funding framework, which allocates money strictly on a per-pupil basis, leaving schools with smaller classes financially disadvantaged. Both union leaders stressed the need for revised government policies that accommodate demographic shifts without compromising educational quality.

The geographical variation in pupil number declines is also noteworthy. Regions including the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, and London are projected to experience some of the steepest percentage drops, compounding existing regional inequalities. In London, for example, falling pupil numbers have already led to considerations of school closures due to funding and viability concerns. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) has illustrated the challenge further, highlighting a projected 10% fall in state nursery and primary school pupils from the 2023 academic year to 2029, which is anticipated to accelerate school closures and mergers, particularly among small schools with single classes per year.

Calls have intensified for policymakers to rethink school funding mechanisms, with Conservative MP Damian Hinds suggesting that measuring funding on a per-pupil basis is no longer reflective of financial realities amid these demographic changes. Instead, stakeholders advocate for funding models that ensure stability and support for schools facing declining local populations, fostering sustainability without sacrificing educational standards.

As these demographic transitions unfold, there remains considerable uncertainty and potential for fluctuation over time. While pupil numbers are expected to decline, ongoing government decisions on funding and resource allocation will be critical in shaping the future landscape of English education.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/pupil-numbers-in-schools-expected-to-drop-by-nearly-400000-over-five-years-UP44A7BGAVLELFZ4OL7PX6WEDY/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/england-department-for-education-damian-hinds-government-schools-b1238717.html), [[3]](https://www.icaew.com/insights/viewpoints-on-the-news/2024/may-2024/chart-of-the-week-schools-out)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/pupil-numbers-in-schools-expected-to-drop-by-nearly-400000-over-five-years-UP44A7BGAVLELFZ4OL7PX6WEDY/), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/apr/11/english-schools-could-lose-1bn-by-2030-as-pupil-numbers-fall), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-68786770)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/pupil-numbers-in-schools-expected-to-drop-by-nearly-400000-over-five-years-UP44A7BGAVLELFZ4OL7PX6WEDY/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/england-department-for-education-damian-hinds-government-schools-b1238717.html), [[5]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/school-funding-hit-falling-pupil-rolls)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/pupil-numbers-in-schools-expected-to-drop-by-nearly-400000-over-five-years-UP44A7BGAVLELFZ4OL7PX6WEDY/), [[5]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/school-funding-hit-falling-pupil-rolls), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/england-department-for-education-damian-hinds-government-schools-b1238717.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/england-department-for-education-damian-hinds-government-schools-b1238717.html), [[3]](https://www.icaew.com/insights/viewpoints-on-the-news/2024/may-2024/chart-of-the-week-schools-out), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/apr/11/english-schools-could-lose-1bn-by-2030-as-pupil-numbers-fall)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/pupil-numbers-in-schools-expected-to-drop-by-nearly-400000-over-five-years-UP44A7BGAVLELFZ4OL7PX6WEDY/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/england-department-for-education-damian-hinds-government-schools-b1238717.html), [[3]](https://www.icaew.com/insights/viewpoints-on-the-news/2024/may-2024/chart-of-the-week-schools-out)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/pupil-numbers-in-schools-expected-to-drop-by-nearly-400000-over-five-years-UP44A7BGAVLELFZ4OL7PX6WEDY/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/apr/11/english-schools-could-lose-1bn-by-2030-as-pupil-numbers-fall> - An article from The Guardian discusses projections indicating that English schools could lose up to £1 billion in funding by 2030 due to declining pupil numbers. The Education Policy Institute (EPI) forecasts a decrease of approximately 436,000 pupils in state primary and secondary schools between 2022/23 and 2028/29, with an additional decline of 382,000 between 2028/29 and 2032/33. This reduction is attributed mainly to falling birth rates and migration patterns, particularly in London. The EPI warns that these changes could lead to school mergers and closures as institutions struggle with reduced budgets.
3. <https://www.icaew.com/insights/viewpoints-on-the-news/2024/may-2024/chart-of-the-week-schools-out> - The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) presents a chart illustrating the projected decline in state nursery and primary school pupils in England over the next six years. The data indicates a 10% fall in pupil numbers, from 4,593,000 in the 2023 academic year to 4,113,000 by 2029. This significant decrease is expected to result in school closures and mergers, particularly affecting smaller schools with single classes per year. The article highlights the challenges posed by these demographic shifts and the potential impact on educational provision.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-68786770> - BBC News reports on findings from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) revealing that schools in England could face a £1 billion funding shortfall by 2030 due to falling pupil numbers. The EPI projects a decline of approximately 436,000 pupils in state primary and secondary schools between 2022/23 and 2028/29, with an additional decrease of 382,000 between 2028/29 and 2032/33. The report highlights that regions such as the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, and London are expected to experience the largest percentage decreases in pupil numbers, potentially leading to school closures and mergers.
5. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/school-funding-hit-falling-pupil-rolls> - An article from Tes discusses research indicating that schools in England could lose £1 billion in per-pupil funding by 2030 due to declining pupil numbers. The Education Policy Institute (EPI) forecasts a decrease in total pupil numbers in state-funded primary and secondary schools from a peak of 7.57 million in 2022-23 to 7.14 million in 2028-29. This decline is expected to lead to funding cuts, with primary schools projected to experience a 5.6% drop in funding and secondary schools facing a 3% decline from the peak. The article emphasizes the potential impact on school budgets and the need for policy adjustments.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/england-department-for-education-damian-hinds-government-schools-b1238717.html> - The Standard reports on projections from the Department for Education (DfE) indicating that pupil numbers in state nursery and primary schools in England are expected to decline by nearly 400,000 by 2030. The DfE anticipates a drop from 4,205,117 pupils in 2025 to 4,205,117 in 2030. Additionally, state secondary schools are projected to have 3,135,086 pupils by 2030, a decrease of 97,000 from the 2025 population. The article also highlights calls for school funding to be reconsidered, moving away from a per-pupil basis due to the declining number of students.
7. <https://www.icaew.com/insights/viewpoints-on-the-news/2024/may-2024/chart-of-the-week-schools-out> - The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) presents a chart illustrating the projected decline in state nursery and primary school pupils in England over the next six years. The data indicates a 10% fall in pupil numbers, from 4,593,000 in the 2023 academic year to 4,113,000 by 2029. This significant decrease is expected to result in school closures and mergers, particularly affecting smaller schools with single classes per year. The article highlights the challenges posed by these demographic shifts and the potential impact on educational provision.