



Colehill First School

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Collecting and Recording of Pupil's Ethnic Background

What parents need to know about the collection of ethnic background data on pupils in schools This leaflet is intended to explain why schools collect data on the ethnic background of their pupils and how the data will be used.

Why are schools collecting this information? Schools have collected information on the ethnic background of their pupils since 1990. This is one element of data that schools must report as a statutory requirement to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). This is reported through the Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census (PLASC) each January.

Surely schools already have this information?

The ethnic background categories used in the past have been changed. The new categories are based on those used in the 2001 National Population Census.

Is this exercise only for ethnic minority groups?

This is for all pupils. Everyone belongs to an ethnic group. Data can bring to light surprising results about how different groups perform and achieve. Ethnic monitoring can help schools, local education authorities and Government identify the needs of all pupils, whatever their ethnic background, and make sure they receive the support they need to achieve their full potential. Without effective ethnic monitoring on a local and national basis, the particular needs of any group could remain unknown.

Who will use this information?

Schools and Local Authorities will use the information to find out whether particular ethnic groups are not achieving as well as they might and whether additional support is needed.

The DCSF needs information to help them plan and allocate resources to raise standards of all pupils. It also helps the DCSF to see how far schools and local education authorities are successfully meeting the needs of particular groups of pupils. There is evidence from research that some ethnic groups do not do as well as others and that patterns of achievement vary between boys and girls. Accurate national information will help to keep track of changing patterns in education, helping the Department to identify trends and plan more effectively.

Who else will have access to information about my child?

Schools, Local Authorities and the DCSF are all bound by the Data Protection Act. This means that they cannot reveal information held on your child to a third party. Safeguards are in place to make sure that it will not be possible to identify individual pupils in any published statistical data.

How will the information be used?

Analysing this information can help schools monitor and improve their own practices and also celebrate the success achieved by their pupils. Schools will be able to use this information to:

- see how well different groups perform in examinations.
- monitor exclusions and attendance to make sure that no single group is missing out on school.
- make sure that they are treating all pupils fairly.

Do I have to give this information every year?

No. This information is usually collected when children start school. The new computerised records mean that it should not be necessary to ask for it again. On this occasion, all schools are collecting the information in order to introduce the new categories from the DCSF. From time to time you may be asked to check the information for accuracy. This will provide you with an opportunity to change the entry if you wish. You can also ask to see the personal data the school holds at any time and ask for information on ethnic background to be removed or changed.

Why has my child's school asked him/her to provide this information?

The Information Commissioner (formerly the Data Protection Registrar) has advised that young people aged 11-15 are mature enough to decide their own ethnic identity. You may wish to discuss the issues raised in this leaflet with your child before they complete the form. Young people aged 16 and over can make their own decision. Individuals have the right to ask to see the personal data the school holds on them and ask for information on ethnic background to be removed or changed.

What do parents and pupils gain from this?

Potentially everyone gains. Schools can better understand and identify the needs of individual pupils and groups of pupils. They can also plan and target resources and support more effectively. Parents and pupils gain if schools have more reliable information about the achievement of their pupils and any barriers to success. DCSF can better understand local needs and target resources more effectively.

Why are you not collecting information on religion?

Many schools do collect information on religion. DCSF recognise that the national ethnic categories do not address every aspect of an individual's sense of identity. There is a limit to the amount of information that can be collected on a national basis. The national set of categories that the DCSF is introducing is therefore confined to one that tells us about ethnicity.

WIMBORNE
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DATA PROTECTION ACT

Schools, Local Authorities and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (the government department which deals with education) all hold information on pupils in order to run the education system, and in doing so have to follow the Data Protection Act 1998. This means, among other things, that the data held about pupils must only be used for specific purposes allowed by law. We are therefore writing to tell you about the types of data held, why that data is held, and to whom it may be passed on.

The **school** holds information on pupils in order to support their teaching and learning, to monitor and report on their progress, to provide appropriate pastoral care, and to assess how well the school as a whole is doing. This information includes contact details, National Curriculum assessment results, attendance information, characteristics such as ethnic group, special educational needs and any relevant medical information.

From time to time we are required to pass on some of this data to the Local Authority (LEA), to another school to which the pupil is transferring, to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and to Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) which is responsible for the National Curriculum and associated assessment arrangements.

The **Local Authority** uses information about pupils to carry out specific functions for which it is responsible, such as the assessment of any special educational needs the pupil may have. It also uses the information to derive statistics to inform decisions on (for example) the funding of schools, and to assess the performance of schools and set targets for them. The statistics are used in such a way that individual pupils cannot be identified from them.

The **Qualifications and Curriculum Authority** uses information about pupils to administer the National Curriculum tests and assessments for Key Stages 1 to 3. The results of these are passed on to DCSF in order for it to compile statistics on trends and patterns in levels of achievement. The QCA uses the information to evaluate the effectiveness of the National Curriculum and the associated assessment arrangements, and to ensure that these are continually improved.

The **Department for Children, Schools and Families** uses information about pupils for statistical purposes, to evaluate and develop education policy and to monitor the performance of the education service as a whole. The statistics (including those based on information provided by the QCA) are used in such a way that individual pupils cannot be identified from them. The DCSF will feed back to LEAs and schools information about their pupils where they are lacking this information because it was not passed on by a former school. On occasion information may be shared with other Government departments or agencies strictly for statistical or research purposes only. Pupils, as data subjects, have certain rights under the Data Protection Act, including a general right of access to personal data held on them, with parents exercising this right on their behalf if they are too young to do so themselves. If you wish to access the personal data held about your child, then please contact the relevant organisation in writing:

- Mr A Turrall, Headteacher, Colehill First School;
- Simon Cull at Strategic Services, The Education Directorate, Dorset County Council, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ;
- the QCA's Data Protection Officer at QCA, 83 Piccadilly, LONDON W1J 8QA;
- the DCSF's Data Protection Officer at DCSF, Caxton House, Tothill Street, LONDON SW1H 9NA.