THE CHALLENGE

The National Pupil Database (NPD) collects information about children and learners aged 0-21 in state funded education in England. The information is never deleted from the database, even after you have left school.

There are 23 collections within the melting pot of the NPD. The database[1] comes from the information collected every term about demographics, attainment, absence and exclusion and children in need and children looked after, from the termly school census, from the annual Children in Need and Looked After Children censuses, from the the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and more in every statutory test, from Baseline, Multiplications Times Tables, SATs, through to exams for all pupils, whether attending state or private school such as GCSEs, BTECs and A-Levels and other assessments.

Identifying and sensitive data such as date of birth, home address, care status, disabilities, and exam results is shared with third-parties[2] including charities, other government departments and the media as well as private companies and university researchers.

The DfE also share this data with the police, and with the Home Office for the purposes of immigration enforcement.[3] The named data held within the National Pupil Database is from 2002 onwards, but some records go as far back as 1996. Since the data accumulates over a lifetime, the longitudinal linkage of events over the child life course is common for research with this data together with health for example.

Following complaints made about the National Pupil Database, an audit carried out by the Information Commissioner's Office in 2020 found that data protection was not being prioritised and as a result the DfE were failing to comply with Data Protection laws.[4] The ICO issued 139 recommendations for improvement but we have not yet seen any changes or communications to families two years later.

1   More about the NPD https://ijpds.org/article/view/1101. Find and explore data in the National Pupil Database https://find-npd-data.education.gov.uk/categories

2   External data shares from the DfE https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfe-external-data-shares

3   Home Office use https://news.sky.com/story/school-census-boycott-over-child-deportation-fear-11067557

4   Statement on the outcome of the ICO's compulsory audit of the Department for Education (2020) https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/news-and-events/news-and-blogs/2020/10/statement-on-the-outcome-of-the-ico-s-compulsory-audit-of-the-department-for-education/

YOUR RIGHTS

- Everyone who has been in state education in England since 1996, or has sat exams since 2002, can ask for a copy of their own record from the database.

- There is no way to opt out of the National Pupil Database but data controllers must comply with data protection laws including making sure people know what personal data will be used for before it is collected. We believe the DfE fails to do this.

"The National Pupil Database holds one of the richest educational datasets in the world."

Michael Gove MP (2012)
Secretary of State for Education

(https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm121106/wmstext/121106m0001.htm)

Write to your MP to call for change
https://defenddigitalme.org/my-records-my-rights/

More background about the data collections in detail can be read in our report the State of Data 2020 Mapping the Education Data Landscape in England

https://defenddigitalme.org/state-of-data/Contents

TAKE ACTION

- Parents and pupils are able to refuse only 3 items out of hundreds being passed on after the collection of this data for purposes beyond direct administration in the school. Schools must be able to uphold objections from parents and pupils to the collection of this data for purposes beyond direct administration in the school.

- Parents and young people can ask for a copy of their own records – do this by making a subject access request.