



Department  
for Education

# Unique Pupil Numbers (UPN)

**A guide for schools and local authorities**

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## **Section 1 – Introduction to UPNs**

### **What is a unique pupil number?**

Introduced in 1999, the unique pupil number (UPN) identifies each pupil attending a maintained school in England. Allocated on first entry to a school/academy, the UPN is generated using a nationally specified formula and is expected to remain with a pupil throughout their school career regardless of any change in school/academy or local authority (LA).

### **When are UPNs allocated?**

UPNs are allocated at the point of a pupil's first entry into the maintained schools sector. This is usually when a pupil joins a nursery or primary school/academy (including joining nursery classes in a primary school/academy), but can be another date if entry to the maintained sector is later in a pupil's school career. The only exceptions to this will be where an LA advises that a UPN has already been allocated, for example when a child has a special educational need (SEN) statement, has been adopted or is a child at risk.

### **What is the purpose of the UPN system?**

UPNs facilitate the transfer of attainment data through the maintained school system in England. The system was introduced to enable accurate and timely data sharing between schools/academies, LAs and central government, strengthening procedures for target setting and monitoring, policy evaluation and monitoring, thereby contributing to the raising of standards.

UPNs are used within the national pupil database (NPD); an education service information source, combining school census data with the results of pupils' end of key stage assessments, external examinations and other accredited qualifications.

### **What is the national UPN formula?**

There are 13 characters in a UPN including the LA code and DfE establishment number of the school/academy allocating the UPN, and year of allocation. The combination of these characters is a simple means of guaranteeing uniqueness as no two schools/academies can allocate the same UPN to two different pupils.

Please note that a UPN is unique to the pupil to whom it is allocated. A UPN must never be re-issued to another pupil. Once a pupil's school/academy career is complete their UPN must be archived as part of their school record.

Below is an explanation and worked example of how the formula is applied to calculate the check letter:

character number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
UPN component	check letter  This letter, calculated using the digits at characters 2 - 13 verifies a UPN's validity.	LA number  A 3-digit number, unique to each LA, allocated by DfE.			DfE establishment number  A 4-digit number, unique to each school/academy, allocated by DfE.				year of allocation  A 2-digit number, comprising the last 2 numbers of the academic year in which the UPN is allocated.		serial number  A 3-digit number, unique to each UPN allocated by a school/academy in a given year.		
<i>UPN (example)</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>

Step 1. Using the example above, disregard the check letter listed as character 1 and work across the table multiplying each digit of the UPN (left to right) by its character number starting with character 2 as follows:

Character 2 multiply by 2; thus  $(8 \times 2 = 16)$

Character 3 multiply by 3; thus  $(0 \times 3 = 0)$

Character 4 multiply by 4; thus  $(1 \times 4 = 4)$

Character 5 multiply by 5; thus  $(2 \times 5 = 10)$

Character 6 multiply by 6; thus  $(0 \times 6 = 0)$

Character 7 multiply by 7; thus  $(0 \times 7 = 0)$

Character 8 multiply by 8; thus  $(0 \times 8 = 0)$

Character 9 multiply by 9; thus  $(0 \times 9 = 0)$

Character 10 multiply by 10; thus  $(1 \times 10 = 10)$

Character 11 multiply by 11; thus  $(0 \times 11 = 0)$

Character 12 multiply by 12; thus  $(0 \times 12 = 0)$

Character 13 multiply by 13; thus  $(1 \times 13 = 13)$

Step 2. Add together the result for each character, 2 to 13.

Thus;  $16 + 0 + 4 + 10 + 0 + 0 + 0 + 0 + 10 + 0 + 0 + 13 = 53$

Step 3. Take the sum total and divide it by 23.

Thus;  $53/23 = 2$  remainder 7

Step 4. Take the remainder figure, in this case 7, with reference to the table below, record its check letter. The letter corresponding to 7 is H and therefore this is the valid check letter.

0 = A	1 = B	2 = C	3 = D	4 = E	5 = F
6 = G	7 = H	8 = J	9 = K	10 = L	11 = M
12 = N	13 = P	14 = Q	15 = R	16 = T	17 = U
18 = V	19 = W	20 = X	21 = Y	22 = Z	

Please note that I, O and S have not been allocated as check letters and should never be used as such.

## Section 2 – Data protection

### What are the data protection implications of UPNs for LAs and schools/academies?

To comply with data protection legislation a number of measures have been placed on the use of UPNs to minimise any potential risks to the personal privacy of individuals and to ensure UPNs are used within the educational service only. They are:

The UPN must lapse when pupils leave maintained schooling, at the age of sixteen or older.

The UPN must be a 'blind number' not an automatic adjunct to a pupil's name. It must be held electronically and only output when required to provide information to the LA, central government or another school/academy to which the pupil is transferring. Under the Data Protection Act 1998, the UPN is designated as a 'general identifier' making its use for any purpose unrelated to education illegal. A pupil's admission number, rather than the UPN, should be used as the general pupil reference number on the admission register or paper files.

Pupils have the right to receive, on request, a copy of any information the school/academy holds about them (including their UPN), but schools/academies should not take any positive steps to inform pupils or their parents of the presence of the UPN system or give out details of a pupil's UPN unless specifically requested.

### What are the data protection responsibilities for LAs and schools/academies?

LAs and schools have a responsibility for maintaining the personal privacy of individuals for whom they hold data. This is helped by maintaining the UPN as a 'blind number' and ensuring that personal data is only transferred to those with a genuine right and requirement for its receipt. LAs are encouraged to monitor the movement of common transfer files (CTFs) on the s2s website.

Schools/academies are responsible for ensuring that:

- All pupils are allocated a UPN
- No two pupils are allocated the same UPN
- A pupil does not have more than one current UPN

- If a pupil has moved between schools/academies, all relevant information, including the UPN of the pupil, is electronically transferred to the receiving school/academy
- Pupils' UPNs are not printed or written on any reports or similar documents
- Pupils' UPNs are not disclosed to anyone without valid consent or legitimate reason

## Section 3 – Local authorities

Each LA maintains a pupil database including records of UPNs for pupils in the authority. This database is maintained through multiple sources including: data transferred during school census, CTF and end of key stage processes.

Furthermore, all LAs have access to the DfE maintained national pupil database (NPD) including centrally held UPN data, via the key to success website.

Each LA has staff dealing with school census returns and they are often the best initial point of contact for UPN queries.

### For whom do LAs have the responsibility of allocating UPNs?

LAs have the responsibility for allocating UPNs for pupils not educated in a maintained school (either temporarily or permanently), where they have not previously been issued with a UPN and fall into one of the following categories:

- Pupils with SEN statements who are in non-maintained or independent education
- Home-educated pupils and
- Permanently excluded pupils not attached to a maintained school.

The LA should allocate UPNs for this purpose using the national formula and adopting a 'dummy' school number within the 3950 – 3999 range. Allocating 'dummy' school numbers for this purpose is at the discretion of the LA and they must retain the single point of control of allocating UPNs for those pupils not educated in maintained schools. One approach that could be applied would be to use different 'dummy' school numbers for each type of unattached pupil, but there is no specific rule for this and the LA should adopt a methodology that suits their purposes.

### How do LAs generate UPNs?

LAs can make use of the [DfE UPN Generator](#) spreadsheet to generate UPNs for these pupils.

### How can UPNs be retrieved from previous schools?

Whether or not a pupil's previous school is known, where the new school/academy has been unable to obtain the UPN, their LA school census contact may be able to provide assistance through:

- their own internal database system (if the previous school/academy is in the same LA);
- via key to success and/or s2s; or
- the school census contact in the previous school's/academy's LA (if the previous school/academy is in a different LA).

Once the pupil's UPN has been retrieved, the LA will confirm this to the new school/academy via CTF or other secure transfer system used locally.

## Section 4 – LA maintained schools, academies (including free schools and alternative provision (AP) academies), pupil referral units (PRUs) and community special schools

### Are maintained establishments statutorily required to allocate UPNs to their pupils?

Yes, Section 537A of the Education Act 1996 enables the Secretary of State to require maintained schools to provide certain information, including UPNs, to LAs and the DfE including: key stage assessment information and pupil level census returns. Section 408 of the same Act enables the Secretary of State to require the transfer from school to school of pupil records, including UPNs, using CTF. Schools are legally entitled to transfer such data and do not need to seek pupils' or parents' consent to do so.

The table below provides an indicative guide as to which schools are required to allocate UPNs to their pupils:

School type	Required to allocate UPNs	
	YES	NO
Nursery school (not nursery classes in primary schools/academies)	✓	
Maintained primary school/academies (including nursery classes, early years education / pre-reception classes)	✓	
Maintained secondary school/academy	✓	
Maintained special school	✓	
Non-maintained special school	✓	
Independent school		✓
City technology college	✓	
Voluntary aided	✓	
Maintained pupil referral unit (PRU)	✓	
Non-maintained PRU		✓

## How are UPNs generated in maintained establishments?

UPNs can be generated automatically using school management information systems (MIS). Advice on the routines used to generate this data should be directed to the school's/academy's own software supplier.

Though not the preferred option because of an increased likelihood of introducing data errors, maintained establishments may manually allocate UPNs using the [DfE UPN Generator](#) as an alternative to the MIS process. This spreadsheet will generate UPNs for pupils on the basis of a school's DfE LA and establishment number. Please note that a new spreadsheet is required for each new academic year and if a school/academy starts an academic year using the UPN generator spreadsheet, it must continue to use the spreadsheet for the whole of that academic year, and not switch to allocation via management information software until September of the following academic year.

## How can UPNs be retrieved from previous schools?

For a pupil transferring from another school/academy, the previous school/academy should notify the new school/academy of the pupil's UPN. In cases where this does not occur, the new school/academy should make reasonable efforts to ascertain the child's UPN.

If a child's previous school/academy is known, the new school/academy should contact it to request the UPN (which can be transferred using the CTF). On receipt, the UPN should be recorded in the normal manner. Where the former school/academy fails to provide a pupil's UPN the receiving school/academy should inform their LA school census contact who may be able to provide assistance. Similarly, in cases where the previous school/academy is not known, the LA school census contact may be able to investigate and confirm the pupil's valid UPN.

## Section 5 – Independent schools

### Is there a statutory duty for independent establishments to allocate UPNs?

There is no statutory duty on independent schools to maintain UPNs and whilst they may use the CTF to transfer pupil records in or out of their school they do not need to include UPNs. It is, however, permissible for an independent school to allocate UPNs if they have the ability or desire to do this.

### How can an independent establishment generate UPNs?

Where independent schools have access to an MIS, UPNs may be produced automatically using programmed software routines. Software suppliers should be able to provide the relevant support to enable this.

In cases where MIS access is unavailable, independent schools may alternatively use the DfE created Microsoft Excel [UPN Generator](#) spreadsheet. Use of the spreadsheet requires LA and DfE establishment numbers. Although not directly associated with an LA, independent schools should use the LA number of the LA area within which they are physically located. LA and Establishment numbers may be accessed from the [DfE Edubase website](#). Please note that a new spreadsheet is required for each new academic year and if a school starts an academic year using the UPN generator, it must continue to use the spreadsheet for the whole of that academic year, and not switch to allocation via MIS until September of the following academic year.

### What should independent schools do with UPNs received from maintained schools/academies?

When a pupil joins an independent school from a maintained school/academy the pupil's UPN will be provided. Independent schools should keep a record of the UPN and share it as necessary if the pupil returns to the maintained school sector, but are not otherwise required to do anything with it. If an independent school does not have a UPN for the pupil, but is requested for one by a receiving maintained school, it is sufficient to advise that as an independent school it is not required to hold UPNs and therefore does not have one.

## Section 6 – Further operational guidance for all users

### What are temporary UPNs and when are they allocated?

Temporary UPNs are allocated when a school receives a pupil who is already likely to have a UPN, but the receiving school/academy does not yet know the UPN (for example, a CTF from the pupil's previous school/academy has yet to be obtained). The formula for temporary UPNs is identical to that for permanent UPNs, except that characters 11-13 are a two-digit serial number plus a letter (see check letter table in figure 2), rather than a three digit serial number, for example, G801200001**01A**. When calculating the check letter, use the table shown in figure 2 to convert the letter to a numerical value and then follow the steps detailed to calculate the check letter. Temporary UPNs should be replaced immediately the valid UPN is known.

### When should the 'former UPN' field be used?

This MIS field should only be used in one of two circumstances. Firstly, if a temporary UPN has been allocated pending retrieval of a permanent UPN, or secondly where a permanent UPN is allocated but one is subsequently identified which has already been used for the recording of Key Stage assessments. In either case, the temporary UPN or second issue of UPN should be recorded in the 'former UPN' field and the original retained for future use as the main UPN.

### When should the 'former UPN' field not be used?

If a UPN has been allocated and is then reallocated to a different child this is termed as being wrongly allocated. In such circumstances the incorrect UPN must not be recorded in the 'former UPN' field but rather replaced by a new and accurately generated UPN.

### What should be done if a pupil has more than one UPN?

In all circumstances it is standard practice to use the UPN issued by the first school the pupil attends. Unless another UPN has been used to register for Key Stage assessments the first UPN allocated to a pupil should be retained and should replace any other numbers. Where a different UPN has been used to register a pupil for Key Stage assessments, it should be kept for data continuity purposes. In such situations any additional UPN should be recorded as a 'former UPN'.

## **How should UPNs be allocated to dually registered pupils?**

In all cases pupils must have only a single UPN. Where a dual-registration agreement exists prior to a pupil's first entry to school, the school/academy holding the pupil's main registration is responsible for allocating a UPN and notifying it to the school/academy holding the pupil's subsidiary registration. Without a dual-registration agreement, responsibility for allocation of the UPN reverts to the first school/academy the pupil attends as per the standard practice for UPN allocation. Please note that with nursery pupils it is not necessarily the 'morning' school/academy that holds the main registration, but rather as standard practice, the first school/academy the pupil attends. For highly mobile children, for example, from travelling families, a UPN will be allocated by the school/academy the pupil attends ordinarily. This UPN should then be shared with each temporary school/academy, as becomes appropriate, rather than each of those schools/academies allocating temporary UPNs.

## **Should children who have been adopted be issued a new UPN?**

Yes, pupils who are adopted after they have been allocated a UPN should normally be issued with new permanent UPNs. Their previous UPN should be deleted and not recorded under 'former UPN'. Exceptionally, schools/academies and LAs may retain previous UPN information, but only if express permission has been granted by both the pupil's adopted parents and the designated manager of the LA's adoption service.

## **Should children at risk be issued with a new UPN?**

Schools/academies may receive pupils who, for their own safety have changed their identity. This will be the case for children in the witness protection programme and for those fleeing from abusive family members. As part of their new identities these pupils should be issued with new permanent UPNs, their previous UPN must be deleted and not recorded under 'former UPN'.

## **Do schools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland allocate UPNs?**

UPNs issued by Welsh schools can be fully integrated into the English system and should therefore be retained as the permanent UPN.

UPNs issued by Scottish and Northern Irish schools cannot be integrated into the English system; therefore schools must allocate new permanent UPNs to pupils transferring from Scotland or Northern Ireland.

## **What action should be taken if a pupil from overseas joins an English school/academy?**

Usually a pupil from overseas will not have been allocated a UPN and should therefore be issued a UPN by the first maintained school/academy they attend. Exceptions to this would be pupils from British forces schools, British overseas establishments or schools in the crown dependencies. In such examples schools may have issued pupils with a UPN and if this is the case their original UPN should be kept (and should be obtained via a CTF from the pupil's previous school). Even if the pupil is only entering the English education system for a limited amount of time, he or she should still be issued a permanent UPN and not a temporary UPN.

## **Can nursery schools issue UPNs?**

Nursery schools can generate UPNs from their MIS system using their DfE Establishment Number. If they do not have an Establishment Number they can ask their LA school census contact to allocate them with a 'dummy' one. Should they require any system support to generate UPNs they should contact their software supplier for assistance.

## **When are UPNs allocated for SEN pupils?**

Typically SEN statements will be issued once a child has started their school career. In such cases their UPN will be allocated by their school/academy in the usual way. Occasionally an LA may issue an SEN statement before a child commences education or where they are not attending a mainstream/maintained school. In these circumstances, the LA which issues the SEN statement will also allocate pupils' UPNs and notify schools/academies by CTF as becomes appropriate.

## **Which local agencies can UPN data be shared with?**

In the case of looked after children UPNs may be transferred to local authority social service departments. Where pupils access their education through alternative provision, their UPN must be shared with CSWP (formerly the Connexions Service), so that their progress and achievement can be tracked.

## **How should educational research requests for UPNs be managed?**

Requests for UPNs from researchers need to be treated cautiously. The data protection restrictions associated with UPNs mean that it is only possible for UPN data to be shared by CTF between schools/academies, LAs, DfE and other prescribed government

departments (OGDs). If a researcher can evidence that their work has been initiated by one of these parties then it is admissible to share data in accordance with the usual transfer controls. Where no genuine link between research and schools/academies, LAs, DfE or a prescribed OGD can be established, no UPN data must be disclosed, as to do so may put a child at risk.

## **How should UPN access requests be dealt with?**

If a person requests a UPN but has no clear parental responsibility for the child whose UPN they wish to access, this should be refused immediately. The following steps should be taken to establish access rights to UPNs:

- Verify the true identity of the person seeking the data (including their relationship to the child).
- Find out why the information is being sought.
- Identify whether the person has parental responsibility for the child in question or the person has another right to access the data.
- If the person seeking this information does not seem authorised to do so, inform the person that the school/academy or LA is unable to disclose such personal information.
- If the person still persists, contact the resident parent (or parents) or carer (or carers) of the child to request consent to disclosure.
- If consent to disclosure is given then the data may be given.
- If consent is not given then the data may not be given.

## Section 7 – Further information

General enquiries regarding UPNs may be made to DfE via [service request](#) form.

Specific enquiries regarding individual UPNs should be made to the schools census contact at your local authority.



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