The School Places Challenge 2019
“Good schools are the bedrock of our society, and there can be no room for error”

Mark Robinson, Scape Group chief executive
Executive summary

This report provides an up to date assessment of the school places challenge across the United Kingdom. This is the fourth edition of this analysis from Scape Group.

This year, we analysed publicly available primary and secondary school pupil projection numbers to identify how many additional schools and classrooms would be needed across the UK, to allow enough school places to be created to meet the growing population of school-age children.

Our findings show that, despite efforts to increase school building over recent years, local authorities still face an uphill battle. The stark reality is that the number of children needing a school place will continue to increase across the whole of the UK. England will have 385,031 more pupils by 2021/22, with Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales expecting to have an additional 33,179 pupils between them by 2020/21.

At the same time, despite ex-Chancellor George Osborne ring-fencing funding for schools, funding for the education sector has declined by 4.6 per cent between 2015 and 2020. Existing schools are feeling the pressure. Some Multi-Academy Trusts have issued warnings, as funding fails to keep pace with costs and inflation, and thousands of children now face a 4.5 day week as some schools close their doors early to save money.

Against the backdrop of Brexit, school funding has slipped down the agenda. Building new schools must be a top priority for the government, and greater efforts should be made to unlock finance which can enable local authorities to deliver new schools and classrooms to meet demand in time.

However, with 640 new schools needed across the UK over the next couple of years to meet current projections, government, local authorities and developers need to make a concerted effort to work innovatively and collaboratively. If a step change does not take place quickly, the effect on education standards and the wider economy will be felt for generations to come.

Mark Robinson
Scape Group chief executive:

“As with many critical issues that desperately need political attention, education has dropped down the agenda as government bodies focus on Brexit and our future position with the rest of the world. Every part of the UK needs to build more schools, and local authorities nationwide will be feeling the strain.

We must collectively focus on delivering a strategy and solutions which not only provide high-quality, modern spaces for teaching and learning but also offer our colleagues in local authorities cost certainty, value for money and timely delivery.

Technologies such as offsite construction will play an essential part in that.

In March, record numbers of children missed out on their first choice of secondary school, and appeals against secondary school offers have doubled in six years. This issue is likely to be exacerbated in the coming years if we do not think and act more creatively now. Good schools are the bedrock of our society, and there can be no room for error.”

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385,031
more pupils in England by 2021/22

33,179
more pupils in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales by 2020/21

↓4.6%
decline in funding for the education sector between 2015 and 2020

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1Please see methodology
2Time for Change – the end of austerity, Trades Union Congress, March 2018
3School announces plan to close all lunchtime every Friday to save money, The Telegraph, June 2017
4School announces plan to close all lunchtime every Friday to save money, The Telegraph, June 2017
5National Offer Day: Record numbers to miss out on first choice for secondary school places, The Telegraph, Victoria Ward, March 2019
The UK’s school places challenge

The UK faces a major task when it comes to making sure there are enough school places to meet the growing demand.

Although the bulk of the demand for additional school places comes from England, for both primary and secondary schools, the issue affects the whole of the UK.

Education represents the second largest element of public service spending in the UK behind health and is equivalent to around 4.3 per cent of national income. The level of UK education spending has risen significantly in real terms during the 21st century, growing particularly fast from the late 1990s through to the late 2000s, before falling from 2010 onwards.

Local authorities across the UK are acutely aware of the challenge that they face. But in an age of continued austerity – faced with inflation and rising costs beyond their control – local authorities’ ability to deliver more with less is close to breaking point.

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Scotland
- 13,600 extra school places
- 4.8% all pupil growth
- 435 new school classrooms needed
- 13 new schools needed
By 2020/21

Northern Ireland
- 7,332 extra school places
- 9.4% all pupil growth
- 293 new school classrooms needed
- 8 new schools needed
By 2020/21

Wales
- 12,247 extra school places
- 7.8% all pupil growth
- 408 new school classrooms needed
- 12 new schools needed
By 2020/21

England
- 385,031 extra school places
- 5.5% all pupil growth
- 12,835 new school classrooms needed
- 640 new schools needed
By 2021/22

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England faces a significant challenge as the school-age population is set to increase by 5.5 per cent over the next two years. There will be 385,031 more school-age pupils in the UK by 2021/22, which equates to 12,835 additional primary and secondary school classrooms, the equivalent of 640 new schools.

But the shift in demand has changed. Local authorities have made great strides in increasing the number of primary schools over the last couple of years, mainly by making sure that developers build new schools through Section 106 agreements. When Scape conducted this research in 2016, the UK was experiencing annual growth of 2.4 per cent. The expected number of additional primary school pupils has slowed to 0.8 per cent growth per year, with 342 new primary schools required by 2021/22.

However, as these children progress from primary to secondary education, we must now turn our attention to building new secondary schools. There will be 313,164 additional secondary school pupils looking for places in the next two years, then there are today. This is an increase of over 9 per cent on the current number. To meet demand, local authorities will have to build 10,439 new classrooms or 298 new secondary schools.

However, to deliver extra school places in the necessary timeframe, local authorities must be given a toolkit to succeed. Crucially, additional funding, support and resources are needed.
Local authorities are feeling the squeeze

Local authorities hold the unique responsibility of providing enough school places for residents. No other body in England shares this duty. At a local level, faced with an impending boom in pupil numbers, many local authorities are feeling significant pressure.

Birmingham City Council is faced with the most substantial projected increase, with Manchester City Council coming in a close second. Both cities can expect more than 12,000 extra secondary school pupils by 2021/22. Between them, they will need to build the equivalent of 53 new schools by 2021/22.

It is not just densely populated cities which are affected. London’s commuter belt is also experiencing a significant strain. Essex, Kent, Surrey and Hertfordshire all rank within the top ten areas which will be most impacted by the growth of the school-age population.

Even though councils are legally responsible for making sure that the demand for school places is met, the process for establishing and funding schools is often outside councils’ control. Local authorities have no direct control of free schools, grammar schools or academy places, despite the fact these types of schools make up the bulk of the current government’s school places strategy.

If local authorities could play a greater role in judging and approving free school proposals, they could ensure that new schools are established where there is the greatest need, in a way that supports local population growth.

Some local authorities believe that the government is delivering free schools in areas where demand is lower, while other areas face crippling shortages. Taxpayers’ money could be better used refurbishing and extending existing schools in order to meet demand in the right places.

While central government is making funding available for building free schools, local authorities are reporting a shortfall in their own education funding and schools’ spending per capita has fallen by eight per cent since 2010. The Local Government Association recently reported that some local authorities are even borrowing tens of millions of pounds to make sure their children have places in permanent school buildings.

On the other hand, a number of local authorities will see very limited school-age population growth, and for some, the number of primary and secondary school pupils under their jurisdiction will actually decline. As we have seen in previous years, remote locations such as the Isles of Scilly, Isle of Wight and Cumbria all fall within the top ten local authorities with enough school places to meet current demand.

If local authorities could play a greater role in judging and approving free school proposals, they could ensure that new schools are established where there is the greatest need, in a way that supports local population growth.
Spotlight on Birmingham

Birmingham City Council will see the largest increase in pupils by 2021/22. They will need to build 111 new primary school classrooms, 319 new secondary school classrooms, or a total of 25 new schools to meet demand from the additional 12,904 school-age children expected to be living in Birmingham.

Birmingham is the second largest city in the country by population, with over 1.1m residents, 23 per cent of whom are children. In the coming years, thousands of primary and secondary school pupils are likely to be affected by the shortfall of places, as the city struggles to keep pace with demand.

In a bid to tackle the current demand for additional school places, as of March 2018, Birmingham City Council plans to deliver 1,035 new school places by the next academic year (2020/21). In addition to this, school building in Birmingham is being bolstered by plans to build facilities for the upcoming Commonwealth Games, which is being held in the city in 2022. Alongside the desire to transform the Athlete’s Village into 1,400 homes after the games, contractor Lendlease will also be building a new secondary school for 1,260 pupils, which is due to open in 2021.

Birmingham also benefits from being part of the West Midlands Combined Authority. This offers significant opportunity for a more collaborative approach to school building across all local authorities that make up the combined authority. Devolving further powers and allocating fairer funding to the combined authority could help ensure there are enough school places across the whole region.

### Birmingham City Council

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<tr>
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<th>Number of extra school places required by 2021/22</th>
<th>All pupil growth % by 2021/22</th>
<th>New school classrooms required by 2021/22</th>
<th>New schools needed by 2021/22</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary schools</td>
<td>3,342</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary schools</td>
<td>9,562</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>All school-age pupils</td>
<td>12,904</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
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In the coming years, thousands of primary and secondary school pupils are likely to be affected by the shortfall of places, as the city struggles to keep pace with demand.

11.7% secondary school pupil growth by 2021/22

2.9% primary school pupil growth by 2021/22

12,904 additional school places required by 2021/22
Spotlight on London

The pressure on school places in the capital has been a long-standing issue for the city’s residents, and parents are finding it increasingly difficult to get their children into their first, second or even third choice of school. In March 2019, a record 33,000 children missed out on their first choice of secondary school in London9.

Overall, London will have an extra 68,260 primary and secondary school pupils in the next two years, a 6.6 per cent increase on the current number. This breaks down to 7,550 new primary school children and 60,149 new secondary school children. Secondary schools in particular will feel the strain as they try to cope with increasing pupil numbers.

The London Borough of Havering will face the biggest challenge, with pupil numbers due to increase 11.3 per cent by 2021/22. This equates to the need for 93 new primary school classrooms and 59 new secondary school classrooms by 2021/22, or 15 extra schools.

On the other hand, the London Borough of Haringey will experience the smallest rate of growth of all London’s boroughs. In fact, it is projected that there will be 155 fewer school-age pupils living in the borough in two years’ time. This breaks down to a 4.3 per cent fall in primary school pupils (962 fewer), but a 5.4 per cent increase in secondary school pupils (712 extra). On balance, this means that only one new school will need to be built.

The London boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Merton and Islington are among the top places to live for the availability of school places in the capital. If they do have to build any new schools, this would only be one in each borough.

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9Secondary school places 2019: ‘Record numbers to miss out on first choice on National Offer Day, Evening Standard, Sophia Sleigh, February 2019
The number of primary school pupils entering the education system in Scotland is set to fall. With 19,700 fewer primary school pupils by 2020/21, there is no requirement for new primary schools.

However, the primary school pupils that entered into the system five years ago are due to progress to secondary school in the next couple of years, putting pressure on S1 (the equivalent of KS3 in the English education system) across the country. By 2020/21 there will be an additional 13,600 secondary school pupils, a 4.8 per cent increase on current numbers, which will require the equivalent of 453 extra classrooms or an additional 13 schools to accommodate them.

Aberdeen City Council will experience the biggest increase in secondary school pupils in the next two years – with an additional 1,400 pupils (a 17.5 per cent increase), equating to the need for an additional 47 classrooms.

Edinburgh City Council also needs an additional 47 classrooms as pupil numbers will climb by 7.5 per cent by 2020/21. The council has agreed on a £1bn package of spending as part of a four-year Change Strategy. This includes a £66.7m investment in new or refurbished primary or secondary schools to help meet current need.

Education and training in Scotland are devolved to Scottish Parliament, with Holyrood providing funding to local authorities across the country. The Scottish government’s Schools for the Future programme, which began in 2009, is investing more than £1bn into the delivery of 117 new schools to help meet the growing demand for secondary school places in Scotland.
Wales’ challenge

Wales is not expected to experience any growth in primary school pupils in the next year, so the projections suggest no new primary schools are needed.

However, the country will see 12,248 more pupils enter the secondary school system by 2020/21. This represents an eight per cent increase on the current number of pupils attending secondary school and will place a huge strain on education providers. To alleviate this problem, 408 secondary school classrooms, or 12 new secondary schools will need to be built.

As well as fighting with a growing secondary school population, Wales is also battling school closures. Nearly 200 schools have closed in Wales (and only 69 have opened) since 2013 as the education landscape changes and local authorities struggle with budget cuts. All but two of Wales’ 22 local authorities – Swansea and Newport – have closed schools in the past five years. Although it is currently projected that Wales will need 12 new schools, if schools continue to close, this figure could become much higher.

Meanwhile, new schools and improvements to existing school buildings are being financed through the 21st Century Schools Programme, an initiative that is jointly funded by the Welsh government and local authorities. This is a long-term strategy for Wales’ educational estate. The second phase of investment announced in 2017 dedicated £2.3bn to rebuilding or updating more than 100 schools and college buildings which are deemed to be reaching the ‘end of their life’.

Despite the Welsh Government actively encouraging local authorities to embrace Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), such as offsite techniques, the uptake has been very limited.
Northern Ireland’s challenge

Northern Ireland is also not expecting to experience an increase in its primary school-age pupils, but it is expected to see a 9.4 per cent uplift in the number of secondary school pupils looking for a school place by 2020/21.

This equates to the need for 7,332 school places – the equivalent of 293 new school classrooms or eight new schools.

Meanwhile, current schools are struggling. The cost of maintaining school buildings has skyrocketed and schools in Northern Ireland are set to overspend their budgets by about £33m in 2018/19.

Due to the reduced capital available to the Department of Education in the coming years, we can no longer presume that whenever a new school is needed, one will be built. But it’s not all doom and gloom. Northern Ireland’s Department of Education announced in May 2018 that up to £60m would be made available to 25 existing schools for much-needed accommodation upgrades. Funding of between £500,000 and £4m is available through the current School Enhancement Programme for projects aimed at refurbishing or extending existing buildings.

While more school places are needed in some areas, one in three rural primary schools do not have enough pupils to be sustainable, and the Department for Education has plans for a number of mergers to improve sustainability within the existing school network. Taking a combined approach which integrates both primary and secondary schools, is one solution for tackling the peaks and troughs in school numbers, especially in rural areas.

Combining primary and secondary schools creates holistic, multi-functional facilities and classroom spaces that can be adapted to meet the demands of different age groups at different times.

The cost of maintaining school buildings has skyrocketed and schools in Northern Ireland are set to overspend their budgets by about £33m in 2018/19.
Case study

North Uist

Improved education facilities for a close-knit community

**Solution**

Working collaboratively with the school, Robertson’s local Gaelic-speaking site team applied their extensive knowledge of what makes a successful school to create a beautiful, fit-for-purpose building. With its bright, spacious and modern interior design, the new school provides a pleasant, inspiring learning environment for children, staff and visitors.

**Outcomes**

Despite its remote location, over 73% of the project labour force lived within 20 miles of the site, securing vital jobs for the local island community. Throughout the project, students and staff at the school were encouraged to get involved and we supported the upskilling of the local community through a range of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.

**“As headteacher, I can say that working with Robertson’s staff has been a positive and anxiety free experience for me and for all involved in the life of the school. This has been a job well done!”**

*Sarah Jane MacSween*

Headteacher, North Uist Primary School
Case study
Kineton High School Science Faculty

Striking, beautiful and unusual – a real focal point for the whole school

At Kineton High School, Warwickshire County Council asked Lungfish Architects to replace seven dilapidated mobile classrooms with a specialist science block for the whole school to use. Delivered in partnership with Jeakins Weir and Scape Group, Lungfish designed this project with the school’s aspirations in mind - to engage pupils and lay the foundations for future growth.

Requirements
Dramatically improving its educational facilities and attracting new sixth-form students are Kineton High School’s top priorities. So, in addition to the new science faculty and in preparation for the school’s future growth, Lungfish designed the whole site so that this phase can be easily mirrored, creating even more inspiring learning spaces. The school hopes to add a further eight-classroom building once additional funding is secured.

Solution
Providing seven specialist labs and one multi-use classroom, the new science block is an incredibly practical building – with one big difference. The upper floors have been given iridescent cladding that catches the light and changes colour during the day. As well as including a canopied plaza where students can meet, the designs also allowed for extensive refurbishment to parts of the existing school buildings - converting old labs, improving access and making circulation spaces brighter.

Outcomes
The iconic new science block has become a real talking point for the whole school and community. The most significant development at Kineton High for 40 years, this modern learning environment has given the school state of the art STEM (Science, Maths, Engineering and Technology) facilities, fully supporting the school’s aspirations and expectations of learning and achievement in these subjects. Following the project, the school recorded their best science results ever.

“At Lungfish, we believe that an education-first approach to designing schools is essential. We all have a responsibility to challenge ourselves for better, more efficient, innovative and smarter schemes. Good engagement, collaboration and ongoing conversations help us to do just that. By understanding the challenges for each client early in the process and maintaining communication throughout, we can collaboratively achieve a successful outcome.”

Richard Daw
Associate director, Lungfish Architects
“It has provided a modern environment for the teaching of science, one of our most successful curriculum areas of the school... The building itself is inspirational, changing colour during the day as the sun moves around the sky.”

Siona Robinson
Headteacher
Our recommendations

1. Offsite construction
The adoption of offsite construction as the main method of building for all new schools and extensions would mean that they are built quicker than by using traditional methods. If modular can grow in scale, building schools will become more efficient and cost-effective.

2. Fairer funding for local authorities
A fairer education funding model for local authorities, which ensures that they can work with central government to set budgets that reflect local need. In particular, local authorities should play a part in judging and approving free school proposals to make sure that new schools are established where they are most needed.

3. Collaboration
Greater collaboration between councils and developers to ensure that secondary schools are built in major urban extensions and developments first, through agreements between developers seeking planning permission and the local planning authority (Section 106 agreements), so that the area is prepared to meet increased demand.
Summary

Mark Robinson
Scape Group chief executive:

“Although the growth of our pupil population has begun to slow down in recent years, we still have a big issue on our hands and the government must treat the UK’s school places challenge as a top priority. While the Brexit fallout has created a vast amount of uncertainty, knowing your child will be able to get a local primary or secondary school place should be a constant.

The current government believes free schools are the answer, but I would argue that this standpoint has been born out of ideological stubbornness, rather than a genuine effort to tackle the school places crisis. Deploying government resources to existing school structures instead would enable local authorities to refurbish and extend current schools. Not only would this provide additional school places, but it would be a much more efficient use of taxpayers’ money.

England will have 385,031 more pupils by 2021/22, and Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales can expect to have 33,179 more pupils between them by 2020/21. With demand continuing to grow, it is vital that we focus on solutions that will allow us to create additional school places quickly and resourcefully, without compromising on quality. Offsite technology is one answer.

While the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) started its push for modular four years ago, only 70 schools have been built using offsite construction so far. Modern Methods of Construction not only allow quick construction but can also cost local authorities significantly less. Until the government takes more pragmatic action, they cannot claim to be safeguarding the futures of the UK’s young people.

A cohesive national strategy for the use of modular to build new schools could significantly reduce the amount of time it would take to provide areas with much-needed school places, making sure our school estates are fit for the future.”

While the Brexit fallout has created a vast amount of uncertainty, knowing your child will be able to get a local primary or secondary school place should be a constant.
In Scotland we are seeing a significant amount of construction activity across the education sector. Local authorities are putting substantial effort into tackling the school places challenge, one that we are committed to supporting them with.

As this report states, local authorities will benefit significantly by engaging with organisations such as Scape to find a faster route to market. That has been the case in Tayside, where the client worked with Scape on the delivery of North East Campus and Coldside Campus – two state-of-the-art facilities built by Robertson which will truly stand the test of time. Collaboration of this type is hugely effective, with a joined-up approach required if we are to ensure a brighter future for school pupils.

It’s common sense that investing in future generations is the best policy for safeguarding our economy, yet the reality is that education funding continues to be cut. It’s crucial that the public and private sectors take a collaborative approach to protect the future of our country through the education of our children.

The challenge is for councils to provide cost-effective, high quality schools, often within short timescales, while still meeting full compliance, not compromising on standards of education and demonstrating long-term social value. Perfect Circle continues to provide solutions to this challenge, supporting the drive for better school places as an integral part of Scape Group’s innovative framework procurement.

At Perfect Circle, our design teams embrace the adoption of a ‘kit of parts’ approach utilising repeatable, standardised, offsite manufactured structural and building service components, many of which are pre-assembled. This allows some customisation to accommodate constrained sites, individual teaching pedagogies and space utilisation. Standardisation also permits national supply chains for bulk discounted procurement.

In order to continuously improve, contractors and consultants are constantly looking to drive up cost efficiency through increased collaboration, BIM pre-coordination and project performance feedback to seek out further cost savings and value realisation.

We have used innovative build methods to create spaces for the next generation to learn across the UK.

Collaboration of this type is hugely effective, with a joined-up approach required if we are to ensure a brighter future for school pupils.

It’s crucial that the public and private sectors take a collaborative approach to protect the future of our country through the education of our children.

We will be able to work to eradicate the growing epidemic regarding the lack of school spaces for our children. We need to act now.
Methodology

Data for the England-based research was obtained through the Department for Education’s 2018 School Capacity and forecast tables statistics, available through GOV.UK.

Data for the Scotland-based research was obtained through The Scottish Government’s website; Local authority level pupil projections: primary and secondary school pupil numbers by local authority; 2015 to 2021.

Data for the Welsh-based research was obtained through Stat Wales, Pupil Projections, available through the Welsh Government’s website.

Data for the Northern Ireland-based research was obtained through Department of Education’s Schools and pupils by District Council 2017/18 and School population – projections (2017/18 version) statistics.

The number of extra classrooms and schools predicted in this research is based on there being 30 pupils in both a primary and secondary class, seven classrooms in a one-form entry (1FE) primary school and 35 classrooms in a secondary school. This equates to a total of 210 pupils per primary school and 1,050 pupils per secondary school. This data does not take into account current capacity in individual schools or current school building plans in individual areas.

About Scape Group

Scape Group is a public sector organisation, dedicated to creating ongoing efficiency and social value via the built environment. Scape and its subsidiaries offer fully managed frameworks, property services, innovative design solutions, community investment opportunities and joint ventures.

By bringing together the strongest teams from the public and private sectors, Scape’s rapidly deployed, highly measurable and collaborative approach delivers value for money and quality buildings while stimulating local economic growth and community enrichment.

Scape operates with a buying capacity of £13bn and has helped to deliver over 12,000 public sector projects with more than 1,800 currently in progress. For the past three years, Scape Group was named the ‘Best Client to Work With’ at the annual Construction Enquirer Awards.