

# Travel to School in Scotland

Hands Up Scotland Survey 2020:  
National Summary Report - Provisional release

25 February 2021



## Executive Summary

The Hands Up Scotland Survey is an annual survey of school pupils and nursery children in Scotland. The survey is designed to provide reliable and up to date information on mode of travel to school in Scotland. The question posed to all school pupils and nursery children is, 'How do you normally travel to school?' with a choice of travel modes.

This is a provisional report on the data collected during the September 2020 survey<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this release is to enable users to have early access to the dataset to help understand the impact of coronavirus on travel to school at a national and local authority level.

A full report will be published in early summer, with additional commentary and analysis including updates to response rates as per the September 2020 pupil and teacher census data when it becomes available.

### 2020 Results – All schools (exc. nursery children)

- 51.2% of school pupils said they normally **travel to school in an active way**. This represents a 3.4 percentage point (pp) increase from 2019 (47.8%) and the highest level of active travel to school in the past ten years.
  - **Walking** to school has increased by 3.8pp from 41.0% in 2019 to 44.8% in 2020.
  - **Cycling** to school has decreased by 0.3pp from 4.1% in 2019 to 3.8% in 2020.
  - **Scotering or skating** to school has decreased by 0.1pp from 2.7% in 2019 to 2.6% in 2020.
- 24.3% of school pupils said they normally use a form of **private motorised transport** to travel to school. This represents a 1.2pp decrease from 25.5% in 2019.
  - Being **driven to school in a car** has decreased by 1.0pp from 23.8% in 2019 to 22.8% in 2020.
  - Travel to school by **taxi** has decreased by 0.2pp from 1.7% in 2019 to 1.5% in 2020.
- The proportion of school pupils normally travelling to school by **bus** decreased by 1.9pp from 16.0% in 2019 to 14.1% in 2020, the lowest level of the past ten years.
- The proportion of school pupils **travelling to school by park and stride** has decreased by 0.3pp from 10.2% in 2019 to 9.9% in 2020.

### Numbers of pupils and schools responding

- In 2020, 405,917 school pupils and 32,688 nursery children took part in the survey. This represents 66,700 fewer school pupils and 2,864 fewer nursery children than in 2019.

<sup>1</sup> Full time schooling resumed from the 11th August 2020, with all schools open by the time of data collection in September. Over August and September, Scotland was in phase 3 of the road map out and through the coronavirus crisis, with an increasing number of services across a variety of sectors opening up. There were localised coronavirus outbreaks during these months where greater restrictions were applied than elsewhere in the country. For instance, there were greater restrictions in Aberdeen City between the 6th – 24th of August.

- In 2020, 1,771 schools and 1,108 nurseries took part in the survey. This represents 210 fewer schools and 20 fewer nurseries than in 2019.
- While the survey received fewer responses overall this year, we still believe this dataset to be comparable with previous years. The coronavirus is expected to have influenced this drop in response rate.

# 1 Introduction

The Hands Up Scotland Survey is an annual survey of school pupils and nursery children in Scotland. The survey is funded by Transport Scotland and is a joint project between Sustrans and Scottish local authorities.

The specific aims of the survey are to:

- Meet central and local government needs for policy-relevant data on mode of travel to school in Scotland
- Be understandable and useful to stakeholders and so lead to a high level of use of the Hands Up Scotland Survey data
- Produce high quality data in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics<sup>2</sup>.

The Hands Up Scotland Survey has been providing insights into journeys to school for more than a decade and is the largest national dataset on school travel in Scotland. The decision to publish the 2020 results as a provisional release on 25 February 2021 is to enable users to have early access to the dataset to help understand the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on travel to school at a national and local authority level. This provisional release allows users, in conjunction with other information, to evaluate school travel in the context of wider travel behaviour during the coronavirus pandemic. The provisional release ensures that the Hands Up Scotland Survey continues to be relevant and useful, and helps to support public policy actions on travel guidelines during the coronavirus pandemic.

Supplementary National Results tables, including a breakdown of results at a local authority level and data collected from 2008 to 2020 can be downloaded from Sustrans' website:

<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/scotland/hands-up-scotland-survey>

For the purposes of this report, trends in the data are analysed for the last ten years, with the baseline year in this report being 2011.

Greater detail on the methodology of the Hands Up Scotland Survey can be found in the *Hands Up Scotland Survey 2019: National Summary Report*<sup>3</sup>.

A full publication will follow in early summer, which will include pupil and school response rates relative to the September 2020 pupil roll and number of school values reported in Scottish Government education statistics. In this release the Hands Up Scotland Survey 2020 pupils and school response rates are based on the pupil rolls and number of schools as of September 2019.

<sup>2</sup> The Hands Up Scotland Survey is guided by the three pillars laid out in the updated 2018 Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which are **'trustworthiness'**, **'quality'** and **'value'**. The primary aim of Official Statistics in Scotland is to provide an accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive and meaningful picture of the economy and society to support the formulation and monitoring of economic and social policies by government and others. For more information refer to <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/the-code/>

<sup>3</sup> Refer to [https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/6692/hands-up-scotland-survey-2019\\_national-summary-report.pdf](https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/6692/hands-up-scotland-survey-2019_national-summary-report.pdf)

## 1.1 Data collection

Data collection for the Hands Up Scotland Survey occurs annually in the second week of September. In 2020, data collection took place between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of September<sup>4</sup>.

All 32 local authorities in Scotland are invited to take part in the Hands Up Scotland Survey. The survey is designed to capture school travel patterns of all pupils enrolled in nursery, primary, secondary, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and independent schools in Scotland.

The question asked is, ‘How do you normally travel to school?’, with the following eight response options:

- Walk
- Scooter/skate
- Park & stride
- Taxi
- Cycle
- Bus
- Driven (car)
- Other

The survey can be conducted on a class-by-class or whole-school basis. The number of pupils present is recorded, and pupils are asked to raise their hand for one of the response options only.

## 1.2 Changes to data collection in 2020

The coronavirus pandemic prompted the following changes to guidance on conducting the Hands Up Scotland Survey:

- Schools and local authorities were instructed that survey materials and completed forms be shared electronically (e.g. digital copies sent by email) with, and within, schools rather than sharing physical paper copies. This was to prevent the risk of transmission of coronavirus, and to align with Scottish government guidance<sup>5</sup>.
- We clarified that, when asking “How do you normally travel to school?”, the question is referring to travel to school since returning to school in August 2020, rather than how they travelled prior to lockdown. It was advised that if a pupil/group of pupils feel unable to answer the question “How do you normally travel to school?”, they could be prompted with “Since you have been back to school, which way do you travel to school most of the time?”, but that the prompt should only be used if it is clear that they have not understood the “How do you normally travel to school?” question.
- This guidance was added in response to the fact that travel to school had ceased at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020<sup>6</sup> and resumed from the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020<sup>7</sup>, with all schools fully open by the time of data collection in September.

<sup>4</sup> Data from schools conducting the survey within a grace period of 1 week either side of the official survey week was accepted and included in the analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to ‘Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020’ (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-preparing-start-new-school-term-august-2020-version-2/>)

<sup>6</sup> Refer to <https://www.gov.scot/news/update-on-school-closures-and-exams/>

<sup>7</sup> Refer to <https://www.gov.scot/news/schools-to-re-open-full-time/>



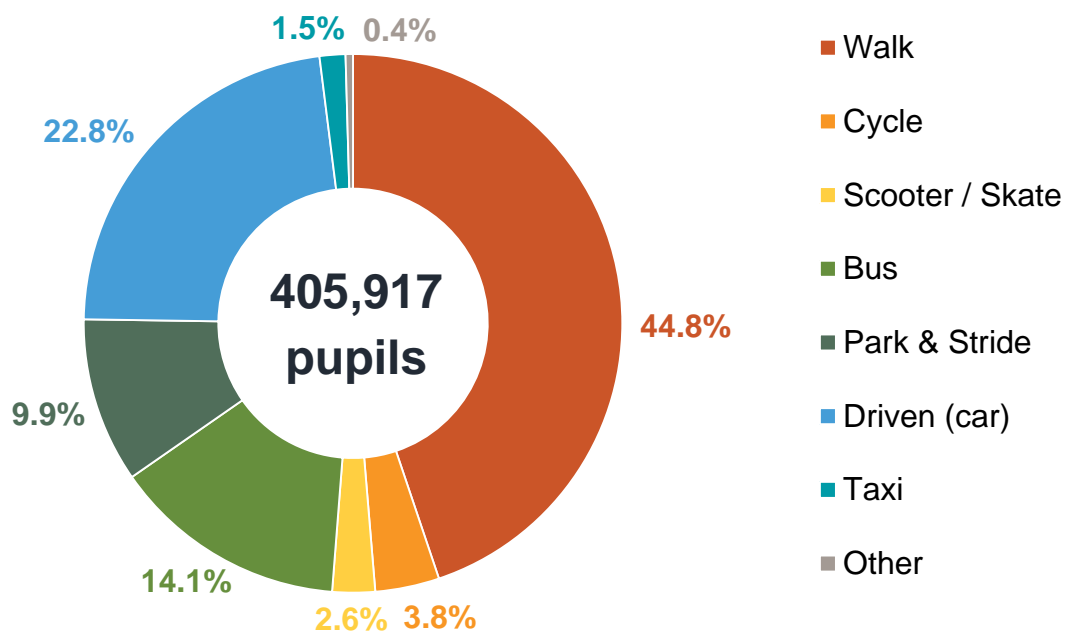
## 2 2020 Results

This section of the report details the results from the 2020 Hands Up Scotland Survey. Care should be taken when interpreting results between school types due to considerable variation in pupil response numbers.

The category 'all schools' (405,917 pupils) includes primary (263,399 pupils), secondary (136,922 pupils), SEN (1,335 pupils) and independent (4,261 pupils) schools. The category 'all state schools' (401,656 pupils) includes primary, secondary, and SEN schools only. Nursery data is presented separately as the number of nursery school respondents (32,688 children) has more than tripled since data was first collected.

### 2.1 All school results

**Chart 2-1: National travel modes: proportion of participating pupils travelling by different modes (all school pupils responses exc. nursery children), 2020**



#### Active travel

51.2% of pupils (207,993) across all schools surveyed in 2020 said they normally travel to school in an active way, without any form of motorised transport. Of the active modes, walking was the most frequent mode of travel with 44.8% of pupils (181,978) saying they normally walk to school. 3.8% of pupils (15,622) said they normally cycle to school and 2.6% (10,393) said they normally scooter or skate.

#### Public sustainable travel

14.1% of pupils (57,207) surveyed in 2020, said they normally travel to school by bus.

#### Multi-mode travel

9.9% of pupils (40,208) surveyed in 2020, said they normally park and stride to school.

### Private motorised travel

24.3% of pupils (98,712) surveyed in 2020 said they normally travel to school using only a private motorised mode of transport. 22.8% of pupils (92,426) said they are normally driven to school (via a private car), and 1.5% (6,286) normally travel to school by taxi.

### Other

0.4% of pupils (1,797) indicated they travel to school by other means.

## 2.2 Nursery results

### Active travel

46.3% of nursery children surveyed in 2020 said they normally travel to nursery in an active way, without any form of motorised transport. Of the active modes, walking was the most frequent mode, reported by 40.1% of nursery children. 3.5% of nursery children said they normally cycle to nursery, and 2.8% said they normally scooter or skate.

### Public sustainable travel

2.1% of nursery children surveyed in 2020, said they normally travel to nursery by bus.

### Multi-mode travel

3.7% of nursery children surveyed in 2020, said they normally park and stride to nursery.

### Private motorised travel

47.6% of nursery children surveyed in 2020, reported normally travelling to school by private motorised transport, 47.0% driven by car and 0.6% by taxi.

### Other

0.3% of nursery children surveyed in 2020, indicated they travel to nursery by other means.

## 2.3 All state school comparison

### Active travel

In 2020, primary school pupils reported the highest level of active travel to school out of all school types, at 55.3%, followed by secondary school pupils at 44.8%. 46.6% of primary school pupils reported normally walking to school compared to 42.8% of secondary and 2.2% of SEN school pupils. 5.0% of primary school pupils reported normally cycling to school compared to 1.8% of secondary school pupils. 3.8% of primary school pupils reported normally scootering or skating to school compared to 0.2% of secondary school pupils and 0.0% of SEN school pupils.

### Public sustainable travel

In 2020, secondary school pupils reported the highest levels of bus usage, at 30.9% of pupils, compared to 30.3% of SEN pupils and just 5.3% among primary school pupils.

## Multi-mode travel

In 2020, 12.1% of primary school pupils reported park and stride as their usual mode of travelling to school, compared to 5.3% of secondary school pupils.

## Private motorised travel

Secondary school pupils in 2020 reported the lowest levels of travel to school using private motorised transport of all school types, at 18.1%. This is less than the 27.1% of primary school pupils and 62.4% of SEN school pupils who reported normally doing so. 7.3% of SEN pupils are normally driven to school in a car, compared to 16.8% of secondary and 25.6% of primary school pupils. 55.1% of SEN pupils reported normally using a taxi to travel to school. Neither primary (1.4%) nor secondary (1.3%) school pupils reported high levels of normally using a taxi to travel to school in 2020.

## Other

4.8% of SEN pupils indicated that they travel by other means. Primary and secondary pupils reported lower levels of travel by other means at 0.1% and 0.9%, respectively.

## 2.4 State and independent school comparison

### Active travel

In 2020, pupils in state schools reported higher active travel levels compared to independent schools, with 51.6% of state school pupils either walking, cycling, scootering or skating, compared to 21.5% of independent school pupils. This trend is true of each active mode of travel. For state schools, 45.1%, 3.9% and 2.6% of pupils reported normally travelling to school by walking, cycling and scootering or skating, respectively, compared to 17.2%, 2.9% and 1.5% of independent school pupils.

### Public sustainable travel

14.1% of state school pupils reported normally travelling to school by bus compared to 10.0% of independent school pupils.

### Multi-mode travel

9.8% of state school pupils reported normally travelling to school using multiple modes, compared to 23.0% of independent school pupils.

### Private motorised travel

24.1% of state school pupils normally travel to school using private motorised modes compared to 42.9% of independent school pupils. A higher proportion of independent school pupils normally travel to school by car (42.3%) than state school school pupils (22.6%). 1.6% of state school pupils reported normally travelling to school by taxi compared to 0.6% of independent school pupils.



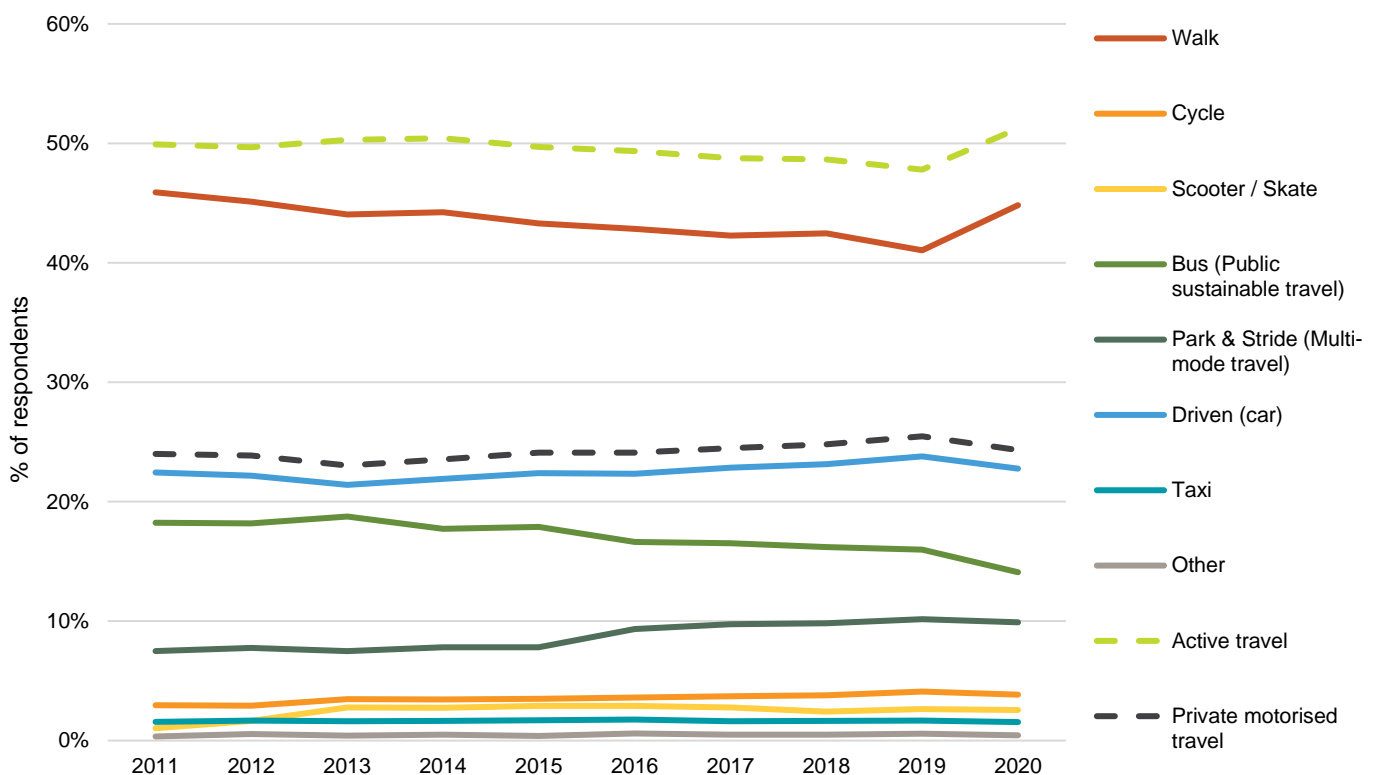
### 3 Trends in the 2011-2020 results

In this section, trends in the broad travel categories (active travel, private motorised travel, public sustainable travel, multi-mode travel, other) are broken down by school type, and the trends in individual modes are described for all schools (exc. nursery) collectively.

A number of factors may impact on school travel behaviour from year to year (e.g. weather conditions, school mergers, closures and relocations) as well as policies and schemes introduced by central government, local government or individual schools. In 2020, Coronavirus was a significant additional factor.

Percentage point change has been calculated based on the rounded figures presented in this summary report<sup>8</sup>. Care should be taken when interpreting results as response rates have varied considerably between years and also between school types.

**Chart 3-1 National travel modes and categories: all schools (exc. nursery), 2011-2020<sup>9</sup>.**



#### 3.1 Active travel

Since 2011, active travel to school has remained the most frequently reported mode of travel to school in Scotland and is at its highest level of the past ten years at 51.2%.

<sup>8</sup> To calculate percentage point change based on unrounded figures, please refer to the relevant tables in the Hands Up Scotland Survey National Results data tables, available from Sustrans' website, available at: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/scotland/hands-up-scotland-survey>

<sup>9</sup> Active travel is the combination of Walk, Cycle and Scooter / Skate. Private motorised travel is the combination of Driven (car) and Taxi.

In 2011, 49.9% of pupils in all schools (exc. nursery) reported travelling actively to school. This percentage has fluctuated, reaching 50.4% in 2014, falling to 47.8% in 2019 and rising to 51.2% in 2020 by 3.4pp.

- Nursery and primary schools have shown a downward trend in active travel since 2014 but in 2020 both have increased by 3.3pp and 4.0pp respectively from 2019.
- In secondary schools active travel increased by 1.9pp from 2019 to 44.8% in 2020. Independent schools have increased by 0.9pp from 2019 to 21.5% in 2020. Both school types show their highest levels of active travel to school of the past ten years rising from 43.3% and 18.5% respectively since 2011.
- Active travel in SEN schools has been fairly consistent over the past ten years<sup>10</sup>.

## Walking

Following a steady decline from 45.9% in 2011 to 41.0% in 2019, there has been a 3.8pp increase in the proportion of pupils walking to school in 2020 (44.8%).

## Cycling

The survey has recorded an increasing trend in cycling over the past ten years, from 3.0% in 2011 to 3.8% in 2020. However, in 2020, cycling has decreased by 0.3pp from 2019 (4.1%).

## Scooter/skate

The percentage of pupils who say they normally scooter or skate to school increased from 1.0% in 2011 to 2.9% in 2015. Since 2016 there has been a decreasing trend. The proportion of pupils reporting to scoot or skate to school has dropped 0.1pp from 2.7% in 2019 to 2.6% in 2020.

## 3.2 Public sustainable travel (bus)

The proportion of pupils using the bus has steadily decreased over the past ten years, from 18.2% in 2011 to 14.1% in 2020. Since 2015, bus use has fallen every year, with 2020 levels dropping by 1.9pp compared to 2019, and showing the lowest reported bus use of the last ten years.

- Bus use in primary, secondary, and independent schools has been declining over the past ten years. This decrease has continued between 2019 and 2020, with primary schools at 5.3% (-0.9pp), secondary schools at 30.9% (-2.3pp) and independent schools at 10.0% (-3.9pp) in 2020.
- Bus use in SEN and nursery settings has varied over the past ten years. Since 2019 bus use in nurseries has decreased by 0.8pp to 2.1% in 2020, and has increased by 1.1pp to 30.3% in SEN schools.
- All individual school types, except for SEN schools, recorded their lowest levels of bus use of the past ten years.

<sup>10</sup> Specific values are not reported here due to there being several years of suppressed data for cycling and scooter/skate for SEN schools

### 3.3 Multi-mode use (park and stride)

The proportion of pupils travelling to school by park and stride has shown an overall upward trend over the past ten years from 7.5% in 2011 to 9.9% in 2020. However, this has decreased by 0.3pp since 2019 (10.2%).

- Levels of park and stride among nursery children have fluctuated between a high of 4.5% (in 2016) and a low of 3.7% (2020) over the past ten years.
- Following a steady rise in park and stride among primary school pupils, from 9.6% in 2011 to 13.1% in 2019, there has been a 1.0pp drop to 12.1% in 2020.
- Since 2011, the proportion of secondary and independent school pupils using park and stride has fluctuated but overall shows a general increasing trend. In secondary schools park and stride has risen from 4.0% in 2011 to 5.3% in 2020, up 0.5pp from 2019. In independent schools it has risen from 3.9% in 2011 to 23.0% in 2020, up 5.4pp since 2019.

### 3.4 Private motorised travel

Levels of pupils in all schools (exc. nursery) travelling to school using private motorised transport have increased from 24.0% in 2011 to 24.3% in 2020, down 1.2pp since 2019 (25.5%).

- The proportion of nursery children travelling to nursery using private motorised transport is higher in 2020 (47.6%) than in 2011 (47.1%), but has dropped by 1.9pp since 2019 (49.5%).
- Among primary school pupils, reported use of private motorised transport is at its lowest level of the last ten years at 27.1%, a 2.0pp decrease since 2019.
- Private motorised travel among secondary school pupils has increased from 16.6% in 2011 to 18.1% in 2020, a 0.1pp increase on 2019 levels and the highest of the past ten years.
- Between 2011 and 2020, levels of private motorised travel in independent schools have fluctuated. However, this has decreased by 2.3pp between 2019 (45.2%) and 2020 (42.9%).
- In 2020, SEN school pupils reported the highest proportion of private motorised travel at 62.4%. This is a 23.0pp increase since 2011 (39.4%) and a 2.7pp increase since 2019 (59.7%), however, levels have varied considerably between years.

#### Driven (car)

The proportion of pupils being driven to school has increased from 22.4% in 2011 to 22.8% in 2020. Although there was a decline in the proportion of pupils being driven to school between 2011 and 2013, there has since been an increasing trend, up to 23.8% in 2019. In 2020, this declined for the first time in four years, reducing by 1.0pp.

#### Taxi

Taxi use has remained fairly consistent over the past ten years, typically ranging between 1.6% and 1.8%. However, in 2020 this has dropped to 1.5%, a 0.2pp decrease from 2019.

### 3.5 Other travel

The percentage of pupils in all schools (exc. nursery) travelling to school by other modes has varied between 0.3% and 0.6% over the past ten years. In 2020 it is 0.4%, a 0.2pp drop from 2019

- The percentage of SEN pupils that reported travelling by other means has increased from 1.1% in 2011 to 4.8% in 2020 (a 4.2pp decrease from 2019), however levels have varied considerably. It is possible that 'other' in the context of SEN schools refers to local authority taxis or other transport provided by the local authority or school.

## 4 Response rates

Due to the earlier timing of this provisional release, the September 2019 pupil roll and number of schools from Scottish Government education statistics have been used to calculate the pupil and school response rates<sup>11</sup>. For the full release, these figures will be updated to reflect the September 2020 school roll and number of schools<sup>12</sup>. There is little year on year variance in the school census figures so the rates reported in this provisional release are still expected to have a high degree of accuracy<sup>13</sup>.

While the survey received fewer responses overall this year, we still believe this dataset to be comparable with previous years. The coronavirus is expected to have influenced this drop in response rate, but the full extent of its impact is not known.

### 4.1 Schools

In 2020, a total of 2,879 schools and nurseries took part in the Hands Up Scotland Survey. All 32 local authorities in Scotland participated. The survey was sent to 2,576 schools and 2,973 nurseries, either directly from their local authority officers (electronically) or via an email link sent by the online survey platform. Of this, the survey was sent to 2,494 state schools.

A total of 1,771 schools and 1,108 nurseries took part in the survey. This represents 210 fewer schools and 20 fewer nurseries than in 2019. The number of schools responding to the survey is the lowest, and the number of nurseries responding to the survey is the third highest, of the last ten years.

1,756 state schools took part in the survey, representing 70.4% of all state schools (exc. nursery) in Scotland, the lowest response rate of the last ten years. In the last ten years, state school responses as a proportion of all state schools (exc. nursery) in Scotland increased from 73.1% in 2011 to 81.1% in 2015. Between 2016 and 2019, levels varied between 76.0% and 79.1% of all state schools responding.

**Table 4-1: National response rates: number and proportion of schools responding to the survey, 2020.**

School type	Number of schools which received survey	% of all schools in Scotland which received survey <sup>14</sup>	Number of schools which returned data	% of schools receiving survey which returned data	% of all schools in Scotland which returned data
Nursery	2,973	N/A	1,108	37.3%	N/A
Primary	2,005	100.0%	1,502	74.9%	74.9%
Secondary	359	100.3%	226	63.0%	63.1%
SEN	130	100.0%	28	21.5%	21.5%
Independent	82	N/A	15	18.3%	N/A
<b>All state schools (exc. nursery)</b>	<b>2,494</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1,756</b>	<b>70.4%</b>	<b>70.4%</b>
<b>All schools (exc. nursery)</b>	<b>2,576</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>1,771</b>	<b>68.8%</b>	<b>N/A</b>

<sup>11</sup> Data on both the number of schools and their pupil roll are available for state primary, secondary and SEN schools.

<sup>12</sup> This is based on the annual pupil and teacher census conducted in September 2020. This will be published on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2021 and be available from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-level-summary-statistics/>

<sup>13</sup> For example, between 2018 and 2019 there was a 0.28pp drop in the total number of primary, secondary and SEN schools.

<sup>14</sup> One secondary school not listed in Scottish Government educational statistics was surveyed.



## 4.2 Pupils

Responses were received from 405,917 school pupils and 32,688 nursery children, amounting to 438,605 responses overall. This represents 66,700 fewer school pupils and 2,864 fewer nursery children than in 2019.

The total number of pupils from all schools (exc. nursery) responding to the Hands Up Scotland Survey has varied year by year, but decreased from 427,104 in 2011 to 405,917 pupils in 2020. Of the past ten years, the highest number of pupil responses was 487,147 in 2014, and the lowest number of responses was that in 2020.

401,656 state school pupils took part, which equates to 57.6% of all state school pupils enrolled in Scotland. The number and proportion of state school pupils responding to the survey follows a similar trend to the total number of pupils from all schools (exc. nursery), and has fluctuated year by year, decreasing from 424,829 (63.5%) in 2011 to 401,656 (57.6%) in 2020, with a high of 70.9% (480,155) in 2014.

**Table 4-2: National response rates: number of pupils responding to the survey by school type, and proportion of respondents from the total roll of each school type, 2020.**

School type	Number of pupil respondents	% of Scottish state school roll
Nursery	32,688	N/A
Primary	263,399	66.0%
Secondary	136,992	46.9%
SEN	1,335	19.4%
Independent	4,261	N/A
<b>All state schools (exc. nursery)</b>	<b>401,656</b>	<b>57.6%</b>
<b>All schools (exc. nursery)</b>	<b>405,917</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>All schools and nurseries</b>	<b>438,605</b>	<b>N/A</b>

## 5 Enquiries

For media enquiries relating to the information contained in this, or any other Hands Up Scotland Survey documents, please contact Sustrans' Press Office on 0131 346 3010 or email: [Press@sustrans.org.uk](mailto:Press@sustrans.org.uk)

Non-media enquiries about Hands Up Scotland Survey should be made to Sustrans' Hands Up Scotland Survey team, Sustrans Research & Monitoring Unit, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5EZ or email: [HandsUpScotland@sustrans.org.uk](mailto:HandsUpScotland@sustrans.org.uk)

### About Sustrans

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

**Join us on our journey.** [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

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