



Kids' Life and Times Survey 2026

Technical Notes

Full details of all Kids' Life and Times surveys are available at: www.ark.ac.uk/klt

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Background

The 2026 Kids' Life and Times (KLT) survey is the eighteenth carried out by ARK. ARK is a joint resource between Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and Ulster University (UU). ARK provides robust and independent evidence to support critical policy debate and informed policy making, with the overall objective of enhancing the accessibility and use of academic data and research.

Prior to the introduction of KLT, ARK ran two annual attitudes surveys: the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey for adults aged 18 years and over (1998 to date), and the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey for 16-year-olds (2003 to date). Despite a growing interest in children's rights and needs, the opinions of younger age groups had been mostly ignored when decisions were being made about many issues involving them. Conscious of this, ARK recognised the need for a regular and rigorous children's survey that would provide accessible, quality research data for the academic, voluntary and government sectors, and, also, the need to promote the participation of children in decisions that affect their lives.

Given this context, in 2007 ARK investigated the feasibility of running a survey of children in Northern Ireland and consulted with school principals, parents and children. Several survey methodologies were considered. However, to maximise coverage and response, an online survey based in schools was seen as the most appropriate, given that all primary schools in Northern Ireland have internet access as part of the Classroom 2000 (C2k) initiative (<http://www.c2kni.org.uk/>). The first KLT survey took place in 2008.

The 2026 survey builds on the success of the previous KLT surveys. While the 2026 survey utilised a new survey platform (further details below), the methodology to assess the views of Primary 7 (P7) children (aged 10-11 years) in Northern Ireland remained the same as previous years. The fieldwork for the 2026 survey was carried out between 2 March – 24 April 2026.

Acknowledgements

The KLT team would like to thank the following organisations for funding modules in the 2026 KLT survey:

- Department of Education (DE)
- Integrated Education Fund (IEF)
- Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI)

We would also like to say thank you for the help, advice and support given by the following:

- Department of Education (DE) for providing school contact details.
- C2kni for advising primary schools that the survey was available for completion.

We particularly appreciate the time and effort taken by everyone involved in each school and the P7 pupils who participated in the 2026 survey.

Technical details of the 2026 survey

Ethical Permission

Ethical permission was sought and obtained from Ulster University's Research Ethics Committee.

Target Population

The target population was all P7-age children in Northern Ireland. There were approximately 25,378 children in total which included P7-age pupils attending 815 primary schools (this included P7-age children in independent and special schools).

In December 2025 DE provided their most recent database (2024/25) containing the names and addresses of all primary schools in Northern Ireland and the number of P6 pupils in each - as the questionnaire would be completed between March and May 2026 these P6 pupils would, by then, be in P7.

Communication with Schools

On 16 February 2026 all principals of primary, independent and special schools in Northern Ireland were sent a letter providing information on the KLT survey and advising that it would be available for completion from 2 March to 17 April 2026 (the latter was subsequently extended to 24 April). The letter contained an instruction document for teachers, parental consent forms, and a summary of the findings from the KLT survey in 2025. Contact telephone numbers and email addresses were provided so that principals could contact the survey team for more information if required. While principals could request translations of the consent forms no requests were received. The letter directed principals and teachers to the KLT website where they could access the results of previous surveys and, importantly, view the content of the 2026 questionnaire. It also provided details on how to request an anonymised, confidential report based on their school's responses. Each letter included a unique three-digit identification code for that school allocated by the KLT team for administrative purposes. A link was provided to a troubleshooting document available on the KLT website.

During March/April, follow-up telephone calls were made to schools that had not participated to that point and, as in previous years, this helped to boost the response rate.

Consent

Consent to participate involved three levels:

- Firstly, the school principal agreed that the school could participate.
- Secondly, a parent or guardian of each P7 pupil within the participating schools received a consent form which they were asked to complete and return to the school if they **did not** wish their child to take part.
- Thirdly, at the start of the questionnaire, each child was asked if they agreed to take part.

Online Questionnaire

The online questionnaire was designed and administered by the ARK team in conjunction with the funders. The questions were presented in different ways to try to maintain interest, for example, clicking on words or writing in a text box. Before the survey went live, testing was done by members of the KLT team to ensure that all links/questions were working correctly.

Data were collected using Pavlovía, a secure open source survey platform for academic research. Pavlovía is based in the UK with all data held on EU-based servers. Previously, a bespoke ARK survey platform had been used, which had come to the end of its lifespan. Prior to the KLT survey taking place, Pavlovía was extensively tested to ensure it met all survey requirements, including data safety and data security policy requirements. Pavlovía is cloud-hosted on ISO 27001-certified EU servers. Data is encrypted in transit (TLS) and at rest. The platform is GDPR-compliant. Regular penetration testing takes place, and strict access controls are in place. Survey data was deleted from Pavlovía upon completion of data collection.

Completing the Questionnaire

Once the child agreed that they wanted to take part, they were asked to enter the three-digit school identification number. This number was printed on all documentation sent to the school by the KLT team. When this code was entered, the full name and address of the school appeared on the screen, and the child was asked to confirm if this was the school they attended. The class teacher or other staff members could contact the KLT team by phone or email at any stage to confirm their school identification number, or get any clarification required. No further identification codes or names of children were required.

Survey Content

The questionnaire took about 20 minutes to complete. There were no compulsory questions, allowing children to decide whether they wished to respond to each question or not.

Questions on KLT 2026 included:

- Home and family;
- School and bullying;
- Social media;
- Mental health;
- Education;
- Integration in society.

Response Rate

Fairly accurate information on the number of pupils in primary, independent and special schools is available from the database provided by DE, although the figures will not be exact given that some children will leave, or join, schools throughout the year. No independent or special schools completed the survey in 2026.¹

There were 774 primary schools with P7-age pupils on the database provided by DE, and of these 153 participated in the survey, representing 20 percent of primary schools.

There were approximately 24,899 P7-age children in primary schools. This figure was compiled using the database provided by DE in November 2025 (see details above). In total, 4,250 children logged on to the survey, a response rate of approximately 17 percent.

Table 1 – 4 present the response rate to the survey based on school Council area, management type, location and the gender of respondents. Due to rounding, columns may not always add to 100.

Table 1 presents the response rate, by school (DE and KLT) and by children (KLT), for each Council area.

¹ As no independent or special schools participated in the 2026 survey, all figures presented from this point onwards in the report exclude these schools due to their non-participation.

Table 1: Response by Council area

	Schools (DE and KLT)		Children (KLT) %
	DE %	KLT %	
Antrim and Newtownabbey	5	5	6
Ards and North Down	6	8	8
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	12	13	12
Belfast	12	9	14
Causeway Coast and Glens	9	7	6
Derry City and Strabane	8	6	5
Fermanagh and Omagh	9	11	7
Lisburn and Castlereagh	5	7	10
Mid and East Antrim	7	7	10
Mid-Ulster	12	10	9
Newry, Mourne and Down	12	18	15

Table 2 shows the response rate, by school (DE and KLT) and by children (KLT), for each school management type. As noted above, no independent or special schools took part in the 2026 survey.

Table 2: Response by type of school management²

	Schools (DE and KLT)		Children (KLT) %
	DE %	KLT %	
Controlled	44	44	46
Catholic Maintained	44	48	46
Controlled Integrated	3	3	3
Grant Maintained Integrated	3	3	5
Voluntary	1	1	<1
Other Maintained	3	1	<1

Table 3 presents the response rate, by school (DE and KLT) for the location of the school.

² This variable is not included in the dataset due to low cell counts in some categories.

Table 3: Response by school location

	Schools (DE and KLT)	
	DE %	KLT %
Urban	45	45
Rural	55	55

Table 4 presents the response rate of KLT respondents by gender.³

Table 4: Response by gender

	KLT %
Boy	49
Girl	49
Neither/I don't want to say	3

Accessing the Data

Tables of results from the 2026 KLT survey are available on the KLT website at www.ark.ac.uk/klt.

Users can also download the data in SPSS format from the website to carry out their own statistical analyses (<https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/klt/datasets/>). However, all identifying information and open-ended variables have been removed from this dataset.

Using the Data

This document is intended to provide background information on the survey and the survey methodology; if you require any further technical information, please contact us. You may also find the help section on the KLT website useful: www.ark.ac.uk/klt/help/.

The data have been tested extensively, but if you find anything that looks erroneous, please let us know. The KLT dataset should not be weighted. KLT is a freely available resource for anyone interested in the attitudes of children in Northern Ireland. We are always interested in how the findings are used and appreciate if you would let us know how you have used them.

³ DE were unable to provide data on the gender breakdown of all pupils in P7 for this year therefore it was not possible to compare the figures.

