

Two problems wearing the same symptom

Two in five established state primaries in England sit below 90% of capacity. The schools likeliest to be empty and the schools holding most of the empty places are not the same schools.

42.5%

of 11,893 established primaries are below 90% capacity

339,214

empty places between those 5,058 schools

£1.7bn

a year in per-pupil funding those places represent

PROBLEM ONE · ISOLATION

57.0%

of primaries with no rival within 2km are under-filled

The highest rate of any group. Isolated means rural, and rural means fewer children. 1,376 such schools are under-filled, holding 56,416 places — 17% of the total.

Demographic. No campaign fixes this.

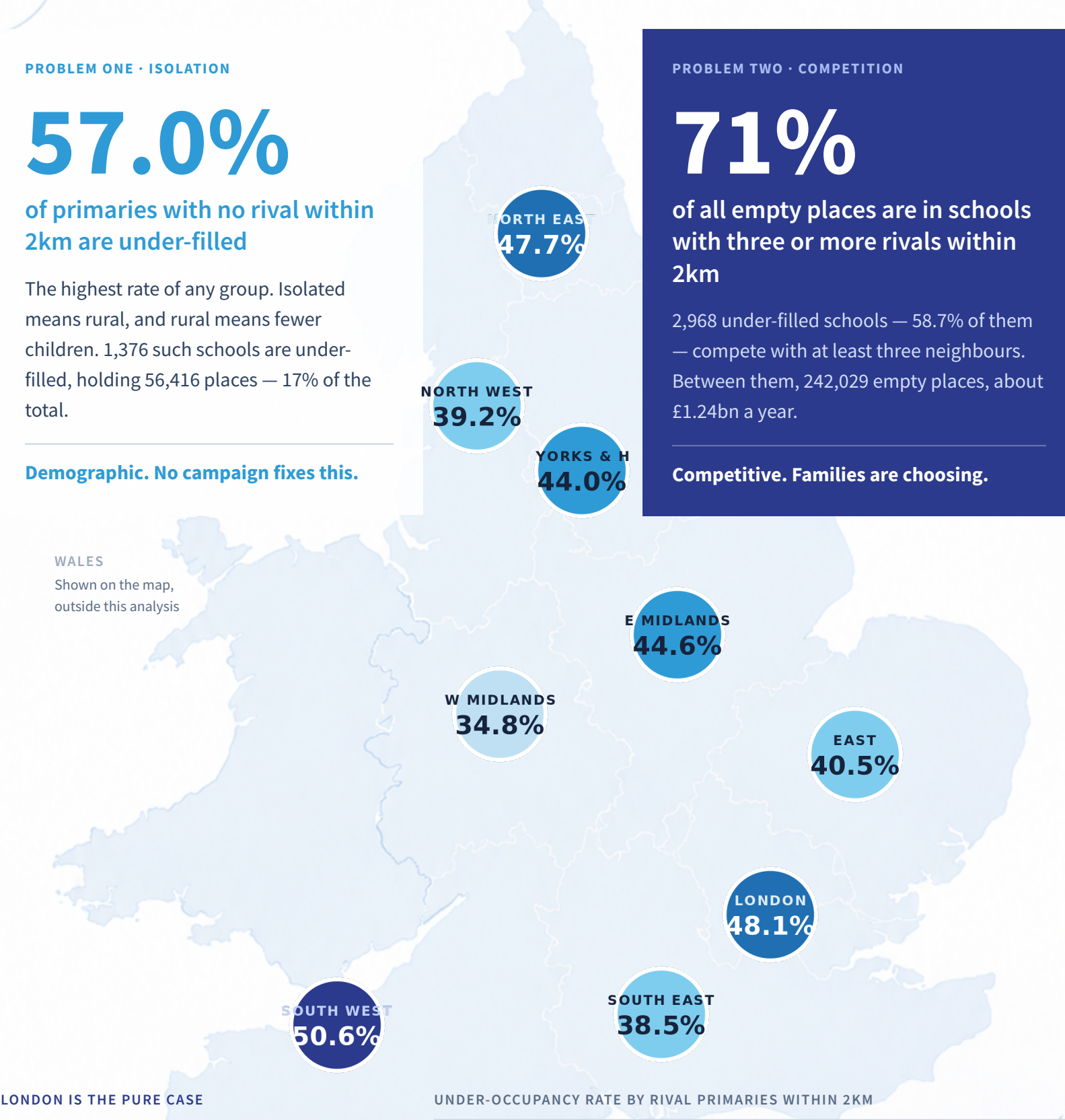
PROBLEM TWO · COMPETITION

71%

of all empty places are in schools with three or more rivals within 2km

2,968 under-filled schools — 58.7% of them — compete with at least three neighbours. Between them, 242,029 empty places, about £1.24bn a year.

Competitive. Families are choosing.



LONDON IS THE PURE CASE

99.1% of London's under-filled primaries have three or more rivals within 2km, and the median London primary has 17 others that close.

None of the capital's empty places can be blamed on a lack of nearby alternatives.

READING THE MAP

Each circle is that region's share below 90% capacity. Positions are geographic; circle size is not a value.

UNDER-OCCUPANCY RATE BY RIVAL PRIMARIES WITHIN 2KM



Risk falls as neighbours increase — then turns back up at eleven or more, where local choice becomes fierce.

WHAT IT COSTS

£261,000

a year at the median under-filled primary — 51 empty places at the 2026–27 minimum rate of £5,115 per pupil. Roughly £35,800 follows each empty Reception place across seven years.

METHOD & SOURCE

All open, state-funded mainstream primaries in England, DfE Get Information About Schools full extract, 30 July 2026. Excluded: 3,291 schools opened since September 2018, which fill one year group at a time; and 1,845 sponsor-led academies, where under-recruitment follows performance rather than visibility. Rivals counted within 2km from Ordnance Survey grid references. Occupancy is administrative capacity, not a judgement of quality — a school can be excellent and under-filled. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.