



Department
for Education

Alternative provision census 2026

**Business and technical specification
version 1.0**

April 2025

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Version history

Version	Comments	Date
1.0	Baselined	Nicola Berryman February 2025

This specification must be read in conjunction with the Excel workbook giving the current version of the revised [Common Basic Data Set \(CBDS\) database](#)

Assumptions made in creating this specification

A1	The census will use COLLECT as the data collection mechanism.
A2	Data Operations Division will only accept submissions in XML format. An excel template will be provided on request to convert data into the required XML format.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose, scope and audience

This specification describes the 2026 census of children placed by local authorities in non-state placed funded provision, which will enable local authorities, and those such as software suppliers working on their behalf, to prepare the necessary data and processes for compliance.

The specification covers the expected census return to the department and the validation rules which will be applied to the data submitted.

The following diagram outlines the overall scope of the collection:

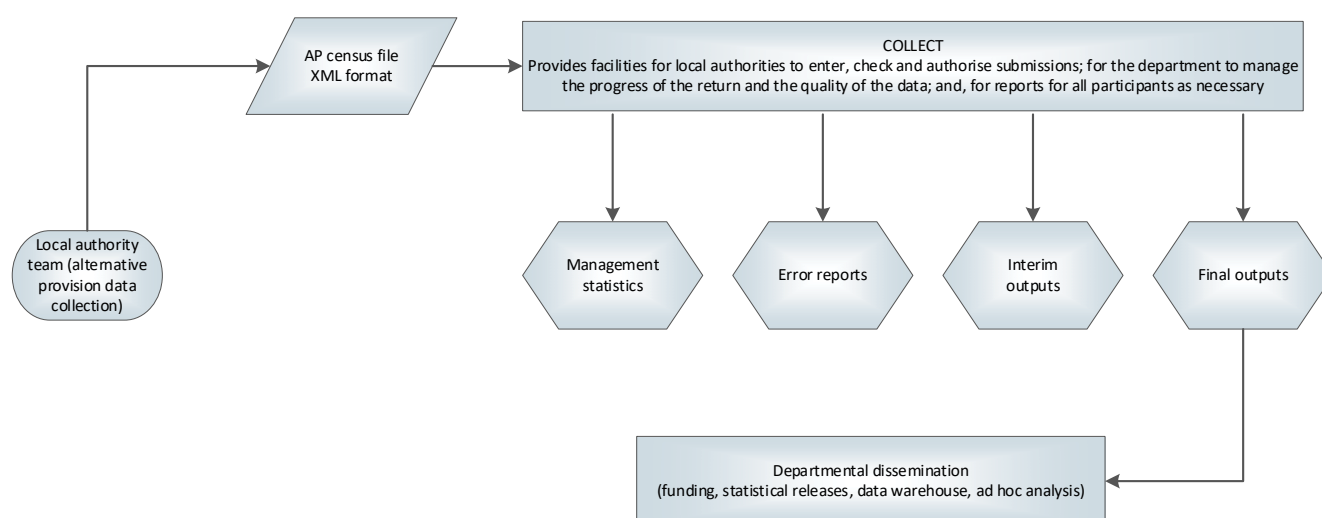


Figure 1: High-level data collection process

This requirements specification consists of:

This Word document containing a narrative and sample XML

The validations Excel workbook

The [CBDS](#) Excel workbook

The XML schemas will be supplied separately and will also be published on SLACK.

1.2 Scope of alternative provision census

The census of pupils in alternative provision is a local authority census that requires the return of individual pupil records. The census covers pupils attending non state placed school provision (e.g., a school not maintained by a local authority or not an academy or non-maintained special school) for whom the authority is paying full tuition fees or educated otherwise than in schools including pupil referral units, under arrangements made (and funded) by the authority.

Pupils should not be included in the AP census if they are included in one of the following censuses:

- the school census for maintained nursery, primary, secondary, all-through schools (including PRUs, academies and free schools) and maintained, non-maintained and hospital special schools (including AP academies and AP free schools) in England
- the annual school census for maintained general hospital schools
- the early years census
- recorded on the individual learner record ILR

Pupils at non-maintained special schools may fall within the scope of the AP census where they are local authority funded (see [paragraph 3.1\(c\)](#) below for details).

The annual AP census has a 'census date' of the third Thursday in January. Unless otherwise stated, the terms 'census date' and 'census day' in this document refer to 15 January 2026.

1.3 Census period and data collection

The 'census period' is the time from the day after the previous census day to the current census day, inclusive. For the 2026 alternative provision census, the census period is from 17 January 2025 to 15 January 2026 inclusive.

Pupil records and data collected within the census period are included within the census return on census day.

Providers are requested to provide the latest / last information available to them on census day:

- where pupils are placed by local authorities in non-state placed funded school provision, this data is to be returned
- where a pupil has concurrent placements (at more than one provider) all open placements are to be returned

- for any pupils no longer in an active placement, the last placement on record within the census period is to be returned.

1.4 Structure of the alternative provision census

The 2026 AP census consists of pupil / child level data. This is comprised of one or more modules (each module being a subset of the pupil / child level data).

1.5 Changes from 2025 census

There have been no changes since the 2025 collection.

1.6 Data privacy

The UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) provide certain safeguards regarding the use of personal data by organisations, including:

- the department
- local authorities
- schools

The UK GDPR and DPA 2018 detail the rights of those (known as) data subjects about whom data is held, such as:

- pupils
- parents
- teachers

This includes (amongst other information that we are obliged to provide):

- the right to know the types of data being held

why it is being held, and

to whom it may be communicated

For the purposes of data protection legislation, the terms 'process', 'processed' or 'processing' apply to any activity involving the personal data, such as:

- collecting
- storing
- sharing

- destroying
- etcetera – please note: this list is not exhaustive

The department provides suggested wording for [privacy notices](#) that schools and local authorities may wish to use. However, where the suggested wording is used, the school / local authority **must review and amend** the wording to reflect local business needs and circumstances. This is especially important, as data will be processed that is not solely for use within data collections. As such, to comply with UK GDPR and DPA 2018, the privacy notice should contain details of all uses of data within the school / local authority, which may include, for example, information used locally for pupil achievement tracking and (where relevant) the use of CCTV data.

The privacy notice should also include [this link](#) to the gov.uk webpage, which provides information on how the department processes data.

2. Message header

Section 4 describes two formats for the return of the data - XML or CSV. For either format, the data items required within the header are as follows:

Header
Survey collection name <Collection> will be 'APC' Description: Name of the data collection: APC
Survey term <Term> will be 'SPR' Description: SPR denotes that the collection is carried out in the spring term
Survey year <Year> will be '2026' Description: The year of the collection
Survey reference date <ReferenceDate> will be '2026-01-15' Description: The reference date is normally the day of the census or collection and is used as the baseline date from which comparisons with other dates in the return can be made
Source level <SourceLevel> will be 'L' Description: Set to L for a local authority system
LA <LEA> is the LA number Description: Standard departmental three-digit local authority number
Software code <SoftwareCode> a free format field that can be populated with whatever identifier the software supplier wishes to use Description: Software supplier reference
Release <Release>, a free format field that can be populated with whatever identifier the software supplier wishes to use to identify the release Description: A code/date (or combination) provided by the software supplier to assist in identification of the release
Serial No <SerialNo> will start at '001' and then be incremented by 1 each time a new file is prepared for submission Description: An incremented number, generated by a provider's software, enables data collection systems to identify re-submissions
Date / time <DateTime> is the date and time when the file was prepared or generated in CCYY-MM-DDThh:mm:ss format Description: Date and time of generation of the return

3. Pupil/child level

3.1 Overall description and scope

This section describes the pupil/child level element of the 2026 AP census.

Pupils in scope of the alternative provision census fall within one of the following categories:

- a) Independent school (including independent special schools)
- b) Hospital
- c) Non-maintained special school
- d) Not a school

with full details provided below in paragraphs (a) to (d)

(a) 'Independent school' refers to registered independent schools in England and Wales for whom the local authority is paying full or part tuition fees. This includes pupils attending independent schools within an authority and in another area for whom the full cost of tuition is paid for by the local authority wholly or in conjunction with social services and / or the health authorities. Do **NOT** include 'imported pupils', that is: those pupils attending an independent school in a local authority's area for whom another local authority is paying tuition fees.

(b) 'Hospital' refers to children who are in hospital and where the hospital is not a hospital school. For "hospital" and "non-maintained special schools" please include "exported" pupils, that is: those attending an establishment in another authority's area for whom your local authority is paying tuition fees. "Imported" pupils (those attending an establishment in your area for whom another local authority is paying the fees) are **excluded** from the return.

(c) 'Non-maintained special schools' comprises those pupils attending such schools in your area or another authority's area for whom your authority is paying full or part tuition fees. This includes those pupils for whom the full cost of tuition is paid for by the authority wholly or in conjunction with social services and / or the health authorities. Pupils attending an establishment in your area for whom another authority is paying the fees are **excluded** from the return.

(d) 'Not a school' covers those pupils being educated otherwise than at school or a hospital. This includes:

- groups such as those educated in community homes or units (including pupils in independent residential homes - located either inside or outside the local authority's geographical boundary - where education is provided on site and for whom the local authority is wholly responsible for their

educational provision) and where the pupil is not registered as attending a maintained school.

- Pupils taught at home only includes those pupils who are receiving local authority funding and also those arrangements made for the education of pupils in travellers' families other than those who are on roll at a school on census day. Pupils taught only at home, under whatever arrangement, may also be receiving their education from an Online Education Provider which may, or may not, be accredited with the Department for Education.
- One on one tuition is where pupils are receiving local authority funding for such tuition.
- Also included are pupils of compulsory school age, not registered at a school, who are being educated at FE colleges and for whom the local authority is financially responsible, and asylum seekers of compulsory school age attending FE colleges or with voluntary sector providers.
- Other unregistered provider is where pupils are in a local authority placement that is not registered as a school or hospital. This does not apply to AP providers that should be registered as an independent school if it meets the criteria for registration (that it provides full-time education to five or more full-time pupils of compulsory school age, or one such pupil who is looked-after or has an education, health and care plan).
- Work based placement is where pupils are placed into a local authority funded work-based placement.

Children whose parents have decided to educate them at home are **NOT** included in the return, unless the local authority is providing significant support to enable the child to attend a college of further education or another alternative provider, or to support their special educational needs.

3.2 Outline data content

The return contains five modules for each pupil as in Figure 2 below:

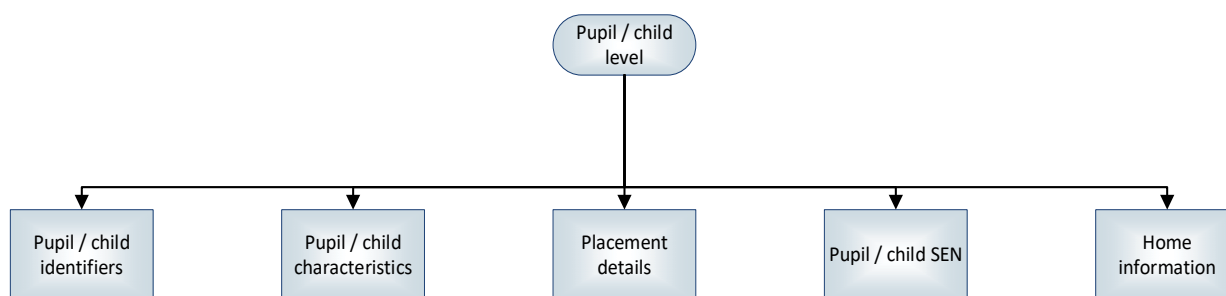


Figure 2: Pupil / child level modules

Full descriptions of the data items in each of these modules are shown in the common basic data set ([CBDS](#)).

The paragraphs below contain guidance.

Section [4.6](#) contains a sample XML message structure which shows the modular layout.

3.2.1 Pupil / child identifiers module

This module contains the pupil's unique pupil number (UPN), name, date of birth and Sex.

Where the pupil already has a UPN (many pupils in alternative provision have previously been in a mainstream school) then it is to be provided. Where a pupil has not previously been assigned a UPN, local authorities are required to generate one.

Unique learner number

Unique learner numbers (ULNs) are assigned to all students over the age of 14 in publicly funded education and training. The use of ULNs is mandatory within English schools. ULNs are allocated and managed by the [Learning Records Service](#) (LRS) and remain with the individual for their lifetime. If a student does not already have a ULN assigned to them, local authorities are required to sign the learning provider agreement which will provide local authorities with access the LRS system and enable them to issue and manage ULNs **only** for pupils receiving alternative provision and who are not associated with a school having a UKPRN and access of its own to system. These users will need to complete an [Organisation Registration form](#) to nominate a super user for the system.

3.2.2 Pupil / child characteristics module

3.2.2.1 Ethnicity

This module contains the pupil's ethnicity code and applies to all pupils in scope of the AP census. The [CBDS](#) code set provided for the return contains the department's main codes and extended codes - these are the same as those specified for the school census. Local authorities that use extended codes for pupils in schools should also use them for alternative provision. Conversely, those that use only the main codes in schools should also use only the main codes for alternative provision.

3.2.2.2 Free school meal eligibility

Universal credit transitional arrangements

To minimise the impact of the rollout of universal credit and the introduction of a net-earned income threshold to determine eligibility for free school meals, transitional arrangements have been put in place to ensure that no pupil loses a meal as a result of these changes.

FSM end dates

Consequently, it is not expected that FSM end dates will be entered by providers during the transitional period – with the exceptions being:

- where a parent has been informed of the FSM protection and they have still indicated that they do not wish the child to be recorded as FSM eligible and receive a free school meal. This should not be confused with a parent's request to end a free school meal claim with a change in their circumstances which are now protected
- where a pupil transfers from another UK country – their non-English FSM must have an FSM end date
- claimants who qualify through support under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 or the guaranteed element of the Pension Credit, their benefit(s) **will not** be replaced by universal credit and therefore the pupil's FSM entitlement **will not** be protected. They will only be entitled to a free school meal as long as they retain the benefit. In such cases where the parent has notified the school that these benefits have ended an FSM end date should be recorded
- a parent notifies the school that they no longer qualify for free school meals under the criteria for families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

Data Collected

Each of the census collections will require the inclusion of any periods of FSM eligibility since the previous census for those pupils on roll on census day. The following three data items will be used to collect this information:

- FSM eligibility start date
- FSM eligibility end date – please note this will only be expected for FSM periods where a valid exception applies
- Country of UK (this will be system generated and will not require any data entry by schools)

These data items will be collected for pupils within the scope of the collections with any periods of FSM eligibility since the last census, those with:

- a) an FSM eligibility start date on or before the current census day and no FSM eligibility end date (eligibility on-going on census day); or
- b) an FSM eligibility end date from the first day after the previous census and on or before the current census day – please note this will only be expected for FSM periods where a valid exception applies

In respect of b) the FSM eligibility end dates are between 17 January 2025 and 15 January 2026 inclusive.

Multiple FSM eligibility start and end dates falling within the period should be returned where applicable - please note this will only be expected where a valid exception applies

Pupils should only be recorded as FSM eligible if they meet the FSM eligibility criteria (in respect to family income) and make a claim.

Pupils who are **only** in receipt of a free school lunch due to the universal infant free school meal entitlement – should **not** be recorded as FSM eligible and therefore will not be eligible to receive pupil premium.

Pupil premium funding

The provision of additional funding, via the pupil premium, to those children from deprived backgrounds. This is based on their eligibility for free school meals (FSM) at any time in the last six years - known as 'FSM ever'.

Pupils may only be recorded as FSM eligible if they meet the FSM eligibility criteria (that is: in respect to family income) and make a claim.

For information on pupil premium eligibility, please see the conditions of grant documentation, which can be found [here](#).

The actual allocation of the pupil premium for 2026-27 for pupils in alternative provision will be based on pupils aged 4 to 15 as at 31 August 2025 recorded in the 2026 alternative provision census who attend: independent, non-maintained special school

and hospital; and pupils aged 4 to 15 classified as 'not in school' (see section [3.1](#)) who were recorded as known to be eligible for free school meals on any school census or AP census since spring 2020.

The department will determine eligibility for the pupil premium by matching the 2026 AP census to previous census collections in the national pupil database (NPD).

The pupil premium only covers periods of FSM eligibility experienced in England. Common transfer files (CTFs) received from schools or local authorities outside of England (for example, Wales) when children transfer to AP in England may include FSM eligibility whilst the pupil was at a school or setting outside of England. This period of FSM eligibility in a school or AP outside of England does not attract funding via the pupil premium so it is important that the FSM eligibility end date reflects the date the pupil left the school or AP outside of England and that the appropriate country code, such as Wales, is associated with the period of FSM eligibility. This will enable the department to exclude any pupils from pupil premium funding who have only experienced FSM eligibility in any country other than England and for local authorities to see in their systems that these pupils will not attract funding.

The data returned reflects the position as at census day. Where a system holds a period of FSM eligibility that matches the criteria for the return, but that period has a stored FSM eligibility end date that is after the census day, the returned version will include an FSM eligibility start date but no FSM eligibility end date. Similarly, FSM eligibility start dates returned in the census will be on or before census day - not after it. Stored start or end dates after census day could not have been known on census day and so will not be returned.

Each period of eligibility should have an associated country of UK attached to enable the department to ensure that those pupils who have only experienced periods of FSM eligibility outside of England do not attract the pupil premium.

Please note: The pupil premium allocation from the alternative provision census is paid to the local authority. Local authorities must pass pupil premium funding to non-maintained special schools (who will be registered on Get Information About Schools (GIAS)) however, for other providers, it is at the local authority's discretion on whether the provider receives this funding from the local authority or whether the local authority use the grant specifically on additional educational support to raise the standard of attainment for these pupils.

3.2.2.3 Early years pupil premium

The [early years pupil premium \(EYPP\)](#) is additional funding for early years settings to improve the education they provide for disadvantaged two, three and four year olds.

Only children **in receipt** of EYPP in census week should be recorded with early years pupil premium receipt equal to “true”.

The data collected via the AP census will be used by the department to determine the early years pupil premium allocation which the department provides to local authorities to fund their early years providers. Award of EYPP is dependent on the application by parents of eligible children to their local authority, which will use the eligibility checking service to verify their application against benefits related data.

Early years pupil premium data is required from all children aged 9 months to 3 years included on the AP census (those born between 2021-09-01 to 2025-03-31(inclusive)). Children aged 4 at the start of the academic year are eligible for the school age pupil premium and therefore are not eligible for early years pupil premium funding.

Children are eligible to receive EYPP if they are taking any of the following:

- universal (15 hours) funded entitlement.
- disadvantaged entitlement for two-year-olds.
- expanded entitlement for 9-month-olds to 2-year-olds

And meet the following eligibility criteria:

- meet the benefits related criteria equivalent to those for Free School Meals (please note: meals delivered as part of the universal entitlement are not FSM; receipt of FSM does not automatically qualify a child for EYPP¹); or
- are in the care of the local authority (in England or Wales); or
- have left care (in England or Wales) through:
 - adoption
 - special guardianship
 - a child arrangement order (formally known as a residence order)

EYPP is not payable on the extended entitlement for three and four-year-old children of working parents.

For those pupils in receipt of the early years pupil premium, the reason why is also required against the basis of eligibility field. This should be recorded as follows:

¹ Further guidance on EYPP eligibility is available in the [early years entitlements: local authority funding of providers operational guide 2025-26](#)

Code	Early years pupil premium basis for funding
RE	In receipt through eligibility for economic reasons: where they are in receipt via eligibility for the benefits related criteria for FSM
RO	In receipt through eligibility for other reasons: where they are in receipt due to eligibility for being in care or due to leaving care through adoption, a special guardianship order or a child arrangement order
RB	In receipt through eligibility for both reasons: where they are in receipt through eligibility for both economic and other reasons
RU	In receipt through eligibility for unknown basis: where the school or AP provider knows the child is in receipt of EYPP (due to receiving funding from the local authority) but does not necessarily know the reason why

There may be circumstances where a child under 3 is taking up the working parent entitlement, is eligible for EYPP and is splitting their provision across two or more settings. For these children, local authorities and providers may wish to use the parental declaration form to enable parents to indicate at which provider they are taking their EYPP entitlement and, where appropriate, pass this information onto the provider or local authorities. This is comparable to the position that exists for 3-and-4-year-olds as this information is used to determine a 'main' provider where the child will continuously benefit from provision for their first (universal) 15-hour entitlement.

3.2.2.4 Service children in education

The 'service children in education indicator' data item indicates whether a child has a parent(s) / guardian(s) who are classified as category 1 or 2 service personnel in the regular HM Forces military units of all forces; or in the armed forces of another nation and stationed in England; or have full commitment as part of the full time reserve service and exercising parental care and responsibility.

Responses will be 'Yes', 'No' and 'Refused' with an additional code of 'Unknown' to be used to indicate no response given or other reason for no information.

Note that such children would not normally be expected to be eligible for free school meals and this is reflected in the validation.

3.2.2.5 Post looked after arrangements

This data item identifies those children on roll on census day who were looked after immediately before adoption or prior to being subject of a special guardianship order, a residence order, or a child arrangement order. Those who have parental responsibility (adoptive parents, special guardians and carers) choose if they wish the local authority / provider to know their child's status and provide the necessary evidence, for example, a copy of the adoption order.

From autumn 2022, we have extended the codeset to identify where a pupil is adopted from state care outside of England and Wales. 'State care' is care provided by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other organisation whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society. The decision to declare a child's adopted from 'state care' from abroad status is to the discretion of the child's parents.

If parents choose to declare their child's status as being adopted from state care from abroad, the child must appear (to the local authority) to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. Parents will be expected to provide documentary evidence of their child's adopted from abroad status. Where there is any doubt about whether evidence provided by a parent is acceptable, the school can request advice from their Virtual School Head.

The local authority / provider will be able to record the information using the following codeset; only one value will apply to each pupil:

Code	Post looked after arrangements
N	Not declared
A	Ceased to be looked after through adoption from England and Wales
G	Ceased to be looked after through a special guardianship order (SGO) from England and Wales
R	Ceased to be looked after through a residence order (RO) from England and Wales
C	Ceased to be looked after through a child arrangement order (CAO) from England and Wales
O	Ceased to be looked after through adoption from state care outside of England and Wales

The default value will be N, not declared.

3.2.3 Pupil / child SEN module

The AP census collects pupil SEN type for all pupils with SEN, that is, those with:

- SEN provision – code 'E' – pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP)
- SEN support - code 'K' - pupils who are identified as having a special educational need and are receiving additional support but do not have an education, health and care plan

The default value will be N, no special educational need.

If no longer in placement, the SEN provision and type should reflect that at the time of the most recent placement.

3.2.3.1 Pupil SEN type

The 'pupil SEN type' data item - returned where pupil SEN is 'E' or 'K' - records the nature (type) of the pupil's special educational need. Only two pupil SEN types may be returned in the alternative provision census. These are ranked using the pupil SEN type ranking – see paragraph [3.2.3.2](#) below. Pupil SEN type codes are:

Code	Description
SPLD	Specific learning difficulty
MLD	Moderate learning difficulty
SLD	Severe learning difficulty
PMLD	Profound & multiple learning difficulty
SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health
SLCN	Speech, language and communication needs
HI	Hearing impairment
VI	Vision impairment
MSI	Multi-sensory impairment
PD	Physical disability
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
OTH	Other difficulty / disorder
DS	Down Syndrome
NSA	SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need

3.2.3.2 Pupil SEN type ranking

The 'pupil SEN type ranking' data item records the ranking of the pupil's special educational needs, as recorded in pupil SEN type. The most significant, or primary need, is ranked as '1' with any secondary need ranked '2'. Only two rankings are collected in the alternative provision census, with no two needs given the same ranking, that is, if there is more than one SEN type reported they cannot both have a ranking of '1'.

3.2.4 Home information module

This module gives information about where a pupil lives **during school term time** and will be a **UK address**. (In some cases this may be the school address).

Address data should only be provided for current addresses (where pupil address type equals C). The expectation is that schools will be able to provide a valid home address for the great majority of their pupils (including boarding pupils). Boarding pupils from abroad should be recorded with their “home” address as the address where they reside during school term time, which may be the school’s address. (If a second address is an overseas address, validation errors on the postcode can be ignored). Where a child has multiple addresses (where the child lives with both parents at different stages of the week) both addresses should be supplied.

If no longer in placement, the address should reflect that at the time of the most recent placement.

Postcode must be provided together with the remainder of the address in either BS7666 or line address format. The unique property reference number should also be provided, where available.

Depending on the nature of the address not all items are necessary - for example, an address in line address format might only consist of two out of the five-line address items. For addresses in BS7666 format the PAON and street must be present and at least one of: locality; town; administrative area; or post town.

BS7666 Format:

- SAON (secondary addressable object name)
- PAON (primary addressable object name)
- street
- locality
- town
- administrative area
- post town

Or line address format:

- address line 1
- address line 2
- address line 3
- address line 4
- address line 5

The department recognises that schools may not have enough time to convert all their pupils’ addresses to BS7666 format. Address details can be supplied in either BS7666

format or line address format, with postcode (and UPRN where available) to be supplied regardless of format used.

3.2.5 Unique property reference number

A unique property reference number (UPRN) is a unique integer identifier for every address in Great Britain and can be found in the Ordnance Survey (OS) AddressBase products. It provides a comprehensive, complete, consistent identifier throughout a property's life cycle – from planning permission through to demolition.

The UPRN is a voluntary data item to be returned alongside the full address (in either BS7666 or address line structure). However, where UPRN is not populated within systems, the data is not required to be submitted.

3.2.6 Placement module

The placement module record details of the pupil's alternative provision placement(s)

3.2.6.1 URN

The 'URN' data item records the GIAS unique reference number (URN), where available, of establishment within which the pupil has taken up an alternative provision placement.

Please note: The URN and UKPRN are mutually exclusive. Where one is returned, the other is not. Where the provider is not registered on GIAS, this field is left blank.

However, where left blank, and no UKPRN is returned, the 'AP type of setting' (see paragraph [3.2.6.3](#) below) must be completed. Where URN is completed, type of setting is left blank.

3.2.6.2 UKPRN

The 'UKPRN' data item records the UK provider register number (UKPRN), where available, of establishment within which the pupil has taken up an alternative provision placement.

Please note: The UKPRN and URN are mutually exclusive. Where one is returned, the other is not. Where the provider is not registered with UKPRN, this field is left blank.

However, where left blank, and no URN is returned, the 'AP type of setting' (see paragraph [3.2.6.3](#) below) must be completed. Where this field is completed, type of setting is left blank.

3.2.6.3 Type of setting

The 'AP setting type' data item records, where the URN and UKPRN are not available, the type of setting within which the pupil has taken up an alternative provision placement. Allowable values are shown in the table below:

Code	Description
NFE	Non-maintained further education college
OOT	One on one tuition
OTH	Other unregistered provider
WBP	Work based placement

Where type of setting is completed, URN and UKPRN must be blank. If URN or UKPRN are completed, type of setting must remain blank.

3.2.6.4 Primary reason for placement

The 'AP placement reason' data item records the primary (or main) reason for a pupil going into the alternative provision placement and why the placement into alternative provision has been commissioned. Allowable values are shown in the table below:

Code	Description
EHC	Setting named on EHC plan
MHN	Mental health need
NEW	New arrival without a school place
OTH	Other
PCC	Pregnancy / childcare
PEX	Permanent exclusion
PHN	Physical health need
YOI	Pupil in young offender institution / secure training centre

The primary reason for placement is recorded for each placement within the census period.

3.2.6.5 Date of entry into AP

The 'entry date' data item records the pupil's entry date into alternative provision. As pupils may enter into alternative provision more than once within a census period. Latest / last placement is recorded and returned in the census.

3.2.6.6 Date of leaving AP

The 'leaving date' data item records the date the pupil leaves alternative provision.

Note: planned leaving dates should not be entered and returned.

As pupils may leave alternative provision more than once within a census period. Latest / last placement is recorded and returned in the census.

3.2.6.7 Association

The 'AP association' data item records whether the placement is associate with any other services, that are not education, supporting the pupil. The default value should be set to 'NO'. Allowable values are shown in the table below:

Code	Description
YC	Yes – provision linked to a children's home
YH	Yes – provision linked to a healthcare setting
YO	Yes – provision linked to other service
NO	No – provision is not linked

3.2.6.8 Attendance pattern

The 'AP attendance pattern' data item records the pupil's planned attendance pattern at the alternative provision provider. As a pupil may attend more than one provider of alternative provision and, as such, this indicator is provider specific and records the attendance pattern at the reporting provider.

Allowable values are:

Code	Description
FT	Full time in alternative provision at this provider
PT	Part time in alternative provision at this provider

Where the pupil is in part time provision (attends fewer than 10 sessions a week in the alternative provision placement), the number of sessions must be provided.

3.2.6.9 Sessions per week

The 'AP sessions per week' data item records, where the pupil's attendance pattern is part time (PT) the pupil's planned number of sessions during the census week.

If no longer in placement, for the most recent placement, we would expect the number of sessions the pupil was usually expected to attend per week to be returned.

3.2.6.10 Hours at setting

The 'hours at setting' data item records, the pupil's planned number of hours in education provision during the census week.

If no longer in placement, for the most recent placement, we would expect the number of hours the pupil was usually expected to attend education provision to be returned.

This data item is collected on a **voluntary basis**.

3.2.6.11 URN of previous school attended

The 'previous URN' data item records the GIAS unique reference number (URN) of the school that the pupil attended prior to entering into an alternative provision placement. As this is only recorded once in the record, this should be the latest previous URN on record held by the alternative provision provider.

3.3 Coverage and timing

Pupils should be aged between 3 (as at 31 December) and 18 (at 31 August) - those pupils born between 2006-09-01 and 2021-12-31. However, pupils aged 2 (as at 31 December 2025) can be included where they are funded by the local authority.

4. Data return format

Please note example data shown in this section are for illustration purposes only.

4.1 Available format

The alternative provision census is submitted to the department in XML format, as described in this section.

For local authorities without a MIS that can output an AP census compliant XML file, the department provides a data entry spreadsheet which enables the input of file header and individual pupil record information. On completion the file is converted to XML format (using the spreadsheet) and uploaded to COLLECT.

The data entry spreadsheet is made available on the AP census channel within the [Slack forum](#) for download or can be obtained on request from the Service desk.

4.2 Data items with no values

There are three scenarios when there may be no values for particular data items. These are:

Standardised header information that is not relevant to this census. The only data item that should not be present is:

- establishment

Values contingent on the content of other data items. These items are:

- home address details (see paragraph [3.2.4](#))
- free school meal (FSM) eligibility information is not required for pupils who are not in school
- where URN is present, UKPRN and setting type are not required
- where UKPRN is present setting type not required
- leaving date to be left blank where pupil remains in AP placement

Values which are described in this specification as optional, for example. These items are:

- pupil / child middle names
- pupil / child preferred surname
- unique property reference number

In the above scenarios, the XML tag is not required to be present in the census return. For all other scenarios, a missing item or value will result in an error being generated. Within XML, an optional item that is omitted would not show a tag.

Instances may arise where all of the data items within an XML container have no value. In such cases, the XML container is not required to be present in the return. For example, if a pupil has no periods of FSM eligibility, then as well as the <FSMstartDate>, <FSMendDate> and <UKcountry> not being required, <FSMperiod> and <FSMeligibility> would also not be present.

4.3 Block entry

For suppliers creating software applications a block entry facility for fields is highly desirable in order to save time. This facility allows the user to choose a selection of pupils and specify a value to be applied to all. However, it must also allow data to be edited on an individual basis.

4.4 XML format submission

An XML submission is a single message consisting of:

A header

A repeating group containing the data for each pupil

Overall message structure
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<Message>
<Header> - see 4.5 below for details
<APpupilsChildren> - see 4.6 below for details
</Message>

4.5 XML header

A standard XML message header is required for each census file. The data items should be populated according to the guidance in Section 2. The layout is as follows:

CBDS ref	Header structure
-	<Header>
-	<CollectionDetails>
N00600	<Collection>APC</Collection>
N00601	<Term>SPR</Term>
N00602	<Year>2026</Year>
N00603	<ReferenceDate>2026-01-15</ReferenceDate>
-	</CollectionDetails>
-	<Source>
N00604	<SourceLevel>L</SourceLevel>
N00216	<LEA>999</LEA>
N00605	<SoftwareCode>Software Supplier Reference</SoftwareCode>
N00607	<Release>1.4 2017-10-11</Release>
N00606	<SerialNo>001</SerialNo>
N00609	<DateTime>2026-01-15T11:14:05</DateTime>
-	</Source>
-	</Header>

(Please note that the <Source><Estab> item, used in some departmental collections, is not used here, and is omitted).

4.6 Pupil / child XML message structure

CBDS ref	Pupil / child XML message structure	Cardinality (Note: item level elements occur only once unless otherwise stated)
-	<APpupilsChildren>	Each <Message> group contains one and only one <APpupilsChildren> group.
-	<PupilChild>	Record returned for all pupils placed with the provider within the census period – that is: from the last census to the current census day
-	<PupilChildIdentifiers>	-
N00001	<UPN>X1234567898765</UPN>	-
N00011	<UniqueLearnerNumber>1234567890</UniqueLearnerNumber>	-
N00003	<Surname>Familyname</Surname>	-
N00004	<Forename>Firstname</Forename>	-
N00005	<MiddleNames>Middlename</MiddleNames>	-

CBDS ref	Pupil / child XML message structure	Cardinality (Note: item level elements occur only once unless otherwise stated)
N00010	<PreferredSurname>Familyname</PreferredSurname>	-
N00066	<PersonBirthDate>2008-03-24</PersonBirthDate>	-
N00065	<Sex>M</Sex>	-
-	</PupilChildIdentifiers>	-
-	<PupilChildCharacteristics>	-
N00177	<Ethnicity>WBRI</Ethnicity>	-
-	<FSMeligibility>	Each <PupilChildCharacteristics> group contains 0..1 <FSMeligibility> group
-	<FSMperiod>	Each <FSMeligibility> group contains 1..n <FSMperiod> groups
N00142	<FSMstartDate>2022-10-09</FSMstartDate>	-
N00143	<FSMendDate>2025-01-20</FSMendDate>	May be missing in one and only one <FSMperiod> group
N00277	<UKcountry>ENG</UKcountry>	-
-	</FSMperiod>	-

CBDS ref	Pupil / child XML message structure	Cardinality (Note: item level elements occur only once unless otherwise stated)
-	</FSMeligibility>	-
N00639	<EYPPR>Y</EYPPR>	Applies all pupils aged 3 ONLY
N00174	<EYPPBF>RE</EYPPBF>	Applies all pupils aged 3 ONLY
N00093	<ServiceChild>N</ServiceChild>	-
N00186	<PLAA>N</PLAA>	-
-	</PupilChildCharacteristics>	-
-	<SpecialEducationalNeeds>	Each <PupilChild> group contains one and only one <SpecialEducationalNeeds> group
N00209	<SENprovision>E</SENprovision>	-
-	<SENneeds>	Each <SpecialEducationalNeeds> group contains 0..1 <SENneeds> group

CBDS ref	Pupil / child XML message structure	Cardinality (Note: item level elements occur only once unless otherwise stated)
-	<SENneed>	Each <SENneeds> group contains 1..2 <SENneed> groups
N00166	<SENtype>SLD</SENtype>	-
N00024	<SENtypeRank>1</SENtypeRank>	-
-	</SENneed>	-
-	</SENneeds>	-
-	</SpecialEducationalNeeds>	-
-	<HomeInformation>	Each <PupilChild> group contains one and only one <HomeInformation> group
-	<Address>	Each <HomeInformation> group contains 1..n <Address> groups
N00037	<PostCode>ZZ99 9XX</PostCode>	-
N00185	<UniquePropertyReferenceNumber>123456789102</UniquePropertyReferenceNumber>	-

CBDS ref	Pupil / child XML message structure	Cardinality (Note: item level elements occur only once unless otherwise stated)
-	Either	-
-	<BS7666Format>	Each <Address> group contains 0..1 <BS7666Format> group. Note that either <BS7666Format> or <LineAddressFormat> should be provided, but not both.
N00030	<SAON>2 Flat</SAON>	-
N00031	<PAON> 123</PAON>	-
N00032	<Street>Street Lane</Street>	-
N00033	<Locality>Localarea</Locality>	-
N00034	<Town>Townbury</Town>	-
N00035	<AdministrativeArea></AdministrativeArea>	-
N00036	<PostTown>Postaltown</PostTown>	-
-	</BS7666Format>	-
-	OR	-

CBDS ref	Pupil / child XML message structure	Cardinality (Note: item level elements occur only once unless otherwise stated)
-	<LineAddressFormat>	Each <Address> group contains 0..1 <BS7666Format> group. Note that either <BS7666Format> or <LineAddressFormat> should be provided, but not both.
N00040	<AddressLine1>123 Street Lane</AddressLine1>	Each <LineAddressFormat> group contains 0..1 <AddressLine1> item
N00041	<AddressLine2>Localarea</AddressLine2>	Each <LineAddressFormat> group contains 0..1 <AddressLine2> item
N00042	<AddressLine3>Townbury</AddressLine3>	Each <LineAddressFormat> group contains 0..1 <AddressLine3> item

CBDS ref	Pupil / child XML message structure	Cardinality (Note: item level elements occur only once unless otherwise stated)
N00043	<AddressLine4>Postaltown</AddressLine4>	Each <LineAddressFormat> group contains 0..1 <AddressLine4> item
N00044	<AddressLine5>Countyshire</AddressLine5>	Each <LineAddressFormat> group contains 0..1 <AddressLine5> item
-	</LineAddressFormat>	-
-	</Address>	-
-	</HomeInformation>	-
-	<PlacementDetails>	Each <PupilChild> will have 1 <PlacementDetails> group
-	<PlacementDetail>	Each <PlacementDetails> group will have 1..n <PlacementDetail> groups
N00278	<URN>999999</URN>	-

CBDS ref	Pupil / child XML message structure	Cardinality (Note: item level elements occur only once unless otherwise stated)
N00530	<UKPRN>99999999</UKPRN>	Where <URN> is present, <UKPRN> is not required
N00531	<APSettingType>WBP</APSettingType>	Where <URN> or <UKPRN> are present, <APSettingType> is not required
N00213	<APAssociation>PEX</APAssociation>	-
N00018	<EntryDate>2020-03-03</EntryDate>	-
N00212	<APPlacementReason>EHC</APPlacementReason>	-
N00211	<PrevURN>999999</PrevURN>	-
N00214	<APAttendancePattern>PT</APAttendancePattern>	-
N00215	<APSessionsPerWeek>12</APSessionsPerWeek>	Applies only where <APAttendancePattern> = PT
N00205	<HoursAtSetting>20</HoursAtSetting>	0..1 (voluntary collection)
N00019	<LeavingDate>2025-01-20</LeavingDate>	Left blank where pupil remains in AP placement

CBDS ref	Pupil / child XML message structure	Cardinality (Note: item level elements occur only once unless otherwise stated)
-	</PlacementDetail>	-
-	</PlacementDetails>	-
-	</PupilChild>	-
-	</APpupilsChildren>	-

4.7 Special notes for XML returns

The standard XML entity references should be used for the following special characters:

Character	Entity reference
Ampersand (&)	&
Left angle bracket (<)	<
Right angle bracket (>)	>
Single quote / apostrophe (')	'
Double quotes (")	"

For special characters such as é use a character reference such as 'é'. This produces a generic XML file which can be viewed as such in a suitable browser. Details of all such characters are found within the XML standard documentation - see for example [Extensible Markup Language \(XML\) 1.0 \(Fifth Edition\) \(w3.org\)](#) Section 2.2.

The department recommends that the file is given a meaningful name that includes the local authority number (the 3-digit serial number). The file extension is '.xml'. This will help users in selecting the correct file to upload to COLLECT.

5. Validation checks

An Excel workbook specifies validation rules that are applied to the data by DfE using the COLLECT system. They should also be applied, as far as possible, by local authorities prior to loading the data onto the COLLECT system and any issues resolved.

Those data items included in the tables but not appearing in the validation rules - that is, those not shown in the validation rules as "must be present" - should be supplied where available (such as: pupil's middle name).

The workbook also shows which validations are 'errors' and which ones are 'queries':

- an 'error' is a failed validation check that **must be corrected** before the return is submitted. There may be rare scenarios where a few 'errors' can be incorrectly triggered. The department will assess these scenarios on a case-by-case basis and, where appropriate, allow the 'error' to be 'OKable' in COLLECT
- a 'query' is one which **must be investigated**, and potentially corrected, as it identifies data that would usually be invalid. 'Queries' may be accepted with appropriate notepad entries. The department will accept notes at return level only



Department
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