Department for Education

Children in need census 2026 to 2027

Business and technical specification

Version 1.3, October 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1. Scope

This specification describes the children in need (CIN) census 2026 to 2027. This data collection covers all local authorities in England, who are expected to provide data on all cases and episodes for the period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027.

The data consist of child-level information for those children in scope, showing their characteristics and information about their assessments. The majority of children in need will be up to 19 years old but there will be a few exceptions where children's social care services are providing support to older persons. The collection covers the following groups:

- Those children who are deemed to be in need during the data collection period; This will include unborn children who have been identified as potential children requiring services;
- Those children for whom there is a child protection plan (CPP) at any time during the period;
- Children who were referred to children's social care services but for whom no further action is taken after initial consideration or assessment.
- Children who were the subject of pre-proceedings which started during the data collection period

1.2. Variations

The paragraphs above describe most records within the return. Local authorities are asked to note the following variations in the requirement:

1.2.1. Unborn children

For an unborn child the following requirements apply:

- Applicable data are 'LAchildID; expected date of birth; sex; ethnicity; CIN details (all fields); child protection plans (all fields)
- Sex should = U (not been recorded/not known/not been registered/unborn)
- Ethnicity should be 'NOBT' (information not yet obtained)
- Disability information is not required

Please note that it is possible that there is more than one unborn child with the same details other than the 'LAchildID'.

1.2.2. Looked after children who are adopted and remains a child in need

If a looked after child is adopted during the collection year and the child remains a child in need, the local authority must submit two separate unlinked records for that child.

The first (pre-adoption) record should record the child's CIN details as they were when they were a looked after child:

- CIN closure date will match the date of the court's adoption order;
- Reason for closure will contain code RC1 (adopted)

The second (post-adoption) record for that same child must contain new child identifiers:

- A new 'LAchildID'
- A new UPN which should have been assigned to the child by the school. Do not record the child's pre-adoption UPN under former UPN
- Referral date will match the date of the court's adoption order.

1.2.3. Looked after children who are adopted and cease to be a child in need

If a looked after child is adopted and at that point ceases to be a child in need then the second, post-adoption record (as detailed above) is not necessary. If a child doesn't remain in need, the CIN closure date can be up to a month after the adoption date.

The second (post-adoption) record-type could be provided in subsequent years, if the child starts a new episode of need.

1.2.4. Referral no further action

If a referral is received about a child, but no action is taken, then the following requirements apply:

The child identifiers module should contain:

- 'LAchildID'
- Date of birth or expected date of birth
- Sex

The child characteristics module should contain:

- Child ethnicity

One CIN details module should be supplied containing:

- Referral date
- Referral no further action flag with a value of true or 1
- Source of referral

There should be no other activities recorded in the CIN details module. As with a referral that leads to action, if a single referral is about more than one child, then a separate record is required for each child.

1.2.5. Child moves into your local authority who is the subject of a CPP

If a child moves permanently into your local authority, having been the subject of a child protection plan in another local authority (sometimes referred to as ‘transfers in’), the data requirements are:

- Apart from CIN details, all modules are required in full including details of the new child protection plan
- For the CIN details module, the following items only are required:
    - In all cases, referral date, primary need code, and referral no further action with the value of false or 0
    - If the case was closed during the census year the CIN closure date and reason for closure are also required
    - The initial child protection conference (CPC) date must be completed within the CIN details module, and not in the section 47 module.

The referral date should be the date on which formal notification is received from the originating local authority.

The receiving local authority should convene a child protection conference within 15 working days of being notified of the move (that is, referral date). The date of this child protection conference should be recorded within the CIN details group and not within the section 47 group. This is to allow us to distinguish between conferences due to a child moving and other conferences.

If notification is received from another local authority of a child in need who has not been the subject of a child protection plan, then the case is treated as any other referral for the purposes of the children in need census, and information on assessments and section 47 enquires are required as described in section 5.4.

1.3. Audience and references

This document has been developed to support local authorities and their software suppliers of local authority management information systems (MISs). It should be read in conjunction with:

- Common basic data set (CBDS) (which can be accessed via the following link common basic data set;
- [CIN 2026 to 2027 guide v1-0 – when available];
- [CIN-Census2027-v1-0.xsd – when available];

The common basic data is a database comprising all levels, all modules, all data items and all code-sets within the one spreadsheet. This spreadsheet makes use of filters and hyperlinks to navigate around. The filters make it possible to view extracts of the common basic data set for use in specific collections, including children in need 2026 to 2027. All the items relating to this specification can be found on CBDS by filtering on the column headed children in need census 2026 to 2027 of the data definitions worksheet.

The children in need census collection guide will be available electronically under census documents.

A revised version of the government's statutory guidance, 'Working together to safeguard children', was initially published in July 2018 and was most recently updated in December 2023. As previously advised, from the 2020 to 2021 census onwards XSLT will only be provided when there has been significant change from the previous collection. XSLT will not be provided for the 2025 to 2026 collection.

1.4. Changes from the 2025 to 2026 specification

- All through: Dates and links updated
- New module for 2027: **Pre-Proceedings and FGDM**

The new module includes 10 new mandatory data items (See sections 5.9, and 6.3 of this specification, the 2026-27 CIN Guide, and CBDS 1331 for further details.

1. N00826 <PPStartDate>

   The date of the legal planning meeting/panel or other decision-making forum (e.g. management/leadership decision) where the LA made the decision to commence pre-proceedings. This date must fall within the reporting year.

2. N00827 <LBPSentDate>

   The date the 'letter before proceedings' was sent to parents/those with parental responsibility. This date must fall within the reporting year. In the event there are multiple parents or separated parents who may have been informed at

different times, enter the date of the earliest letter. This date must be on or after <PPStartDate>

3. N00828 <FGDMMeetingOffer>

   Confirmation of whether a Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meeting was offered in the letter before proceedings.

4. N00829 <FGDMMeetingFac>

   Confirmation of whether a Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meeting was facilitated in the pre-proceedings period following the offer made in the letter before proceedings.

5. N00830 <InitialPPMeetingDate>

   The date of the first effective pre-proceedings meeting with parents following the legal meeting/panel that decided to commence pre-proceedings. This date must fall within the reporting year and be on or after <PPStartDate>

6. N00831 <ReviewMeetingsCount>

   The total number of review pre-proceedings meetings that took place with parents, following the initial pre-proceedings meeting, excluding the initial pre-proceedings meeting and including all review meetings which fell within the reporting year.

7. N00832 <StepDecisionDate>

   The date of the legal meeting, panel or management/ leadership decision that agreed to end pre-proceedings to either step down or step up, i.e. to initiate care proceedings. This date must be on or after <PPStartDate> and must fall within the reporting year.

8. N00833 <PPOutcome>

   A record of the outcome of pre-proceedings

   New Codeset CS131

   a) decision made to initiate care proceedings

   b) decision made to step down

   c) other

9. N00834 <CourtAppDate>

   Enter the date that the LA submitted the application to the court to begin care proceedings. This date must fall within the reporting year. This date must be on or after the <StepDecisionDate>

10. N00835 <LetterInitCPDate>

Enter the date that the letter to initiate care proceedings was sent to parents. If care proceedings have not been issued, please leave this blank. This date must be on or after <CourtAppDate> and must be within the reporting year. In the event there are multiple parents or separated parents who may have been informed at different times, enter the date of the earliest letter.

- Added Appendix A to clarify how LAs who have moved to a single workflow between targeted early help (TEH) and CIN should record certain scenarios

1.5. Definitions

MIS: Within this document the term MIS (management information system) is used in a generic sense as the source system, or systems, where the data are normally maintained and from where they are exported. In most cases this will be the local authority's social care electronic case management system.

Census year: Within this document census year always refers to the period 1 April 2026 through 31 March 2027, inclusive.

1.6. Important note on this version

Version 1.0 is the base lined version of the 2026 to 2027 specification (see version history for details) Later versions implement minor amendments (see version history details). This is version 1.3.

2. Assumptions

Assumptions made in creating this specification:

A1	Each local authority will provide a single file containing all data.
A2	Where appropriate the data specification has used e-Gif data standards
A3	The census will use COLLECT (Collections On-line for Learning, Education, Children and Teachers) as the data collection mechanism
A4	The Department for Education (DfE) will only accept submissions in XML format
A5	For most local authorities the electronic case management system will be the primary source of data

3. Coverage and timings

To complete the census all local authorities will be required to capture the data attributes specified for the year from 1 April 2026 until 31 March 2027 inclusive. Submission of data to the Department for Education (DfE) will occur between 1 April and 31 July 2027.

4. Data standards

It is the long-term strategy of the DfE to adopt the e-GIF standards to support the transfer of data across other public sector bodies and government departments. This specification has been developed with those standards in mind; where deviations occur explanation notes have been provided.

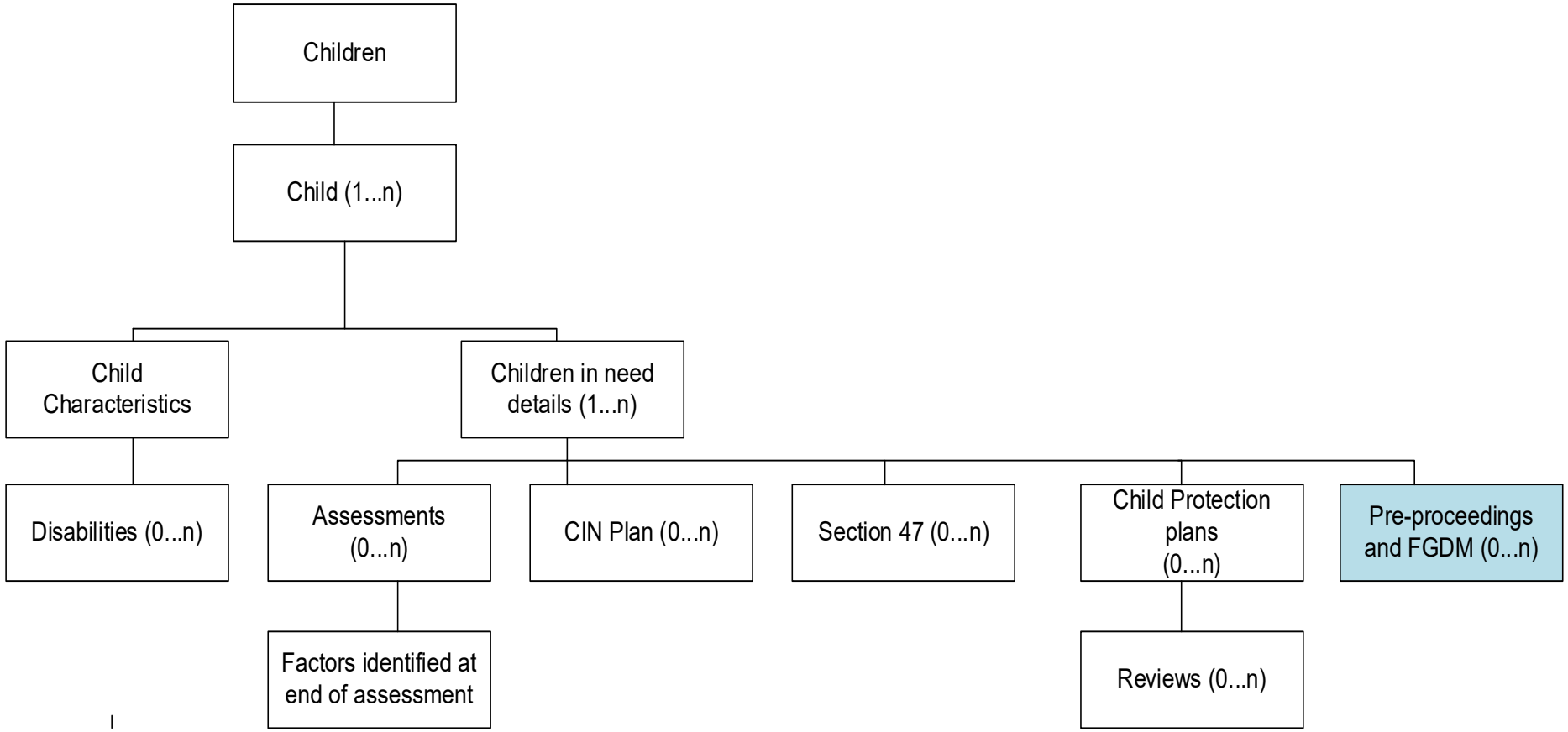
5. Structure and guidance

Data items have been included in the same containers (modules) as those used for CBDS and school census for consistency purposes. For example, sex conceptually belongs to the child identifiers module. So sex is one data item (amongst others) within the child identifiers module.

5.1. Child level

The children in need census for 2026 to 2027 will contain the modules: child identifiers, child characteristics, children in need details, assessments, CIN plans, section 47, child protection plans, and a new module, pre-proceedings and FGDM. Each module is described in the following paragraphs.

The number of instances of each module per child is shown in the following children in need 2026 to 2027 logical data model.


Children
Child (1...n)
Child Characteristics
Children in need details (1...n)
Disabilities (0...n)
Assessments (0...n)
CIN Plan (0...n)
Section 47 (0...n)
Child Protection plans (0...n)
Pre-proceedings and FGDM (0...n)
Factors identified at end of assessment
Reviews (0...n)

5.2. Child identifiers

5.2.1. Module description

A set of standard identifiers, required to identify children and to match children from the children in need census to the children looked after data collection and to the national pupil database (NPD).

5.2.2. Module composition

This contains the standard identifiers ('LAchildID, UPN, DOB and sex'). The UPN (unique pupil number) should be provided as well as the 'LAchildID' to provide a primary and secondary key (as the UPN will not be available for some children). The 'LAchildID' is as defined in the children looked after collection. It is unique within the return from one local authority.

Where the child is not of school age the UPN is not required (but may be provided if available). However, children of school age are expected to have a UPN. The UPN is optional for referral no further action cases.

UPN unknown (optional for referral no further action cases or for children not of school age) allows local authorities to include a reason for a missing UPN within the return preventing queries after the data has been submitted. This specification includes validation that will show a query for every instance of a missing UPN for a child who is school age unless a UPN unknown reason is provided that is not UN1 (i.e 'Child is not of school age and is not yet assigned a UPN'). Those local authorities not returning a valid UPN unknown reason should provide a return level note to explain why UPNs are missing.

Date of birth is mandatory for all children born before 1 April 2027 and the expected date of birth is mandatory for unborn children (see paragraph 5.6 for more details). Please note that users may wish to retain the expected date of birth on their systems, but it must not be included within the census return if the date of birth is present. (see also validation rule 8525 in annex A).

A date of death item is required (where applicable) as it shows where children's social care services continue to be provided after a child has died. The final case closure date should also be provided; this may be after the date of death if the case remains open for investigation and review procedures after the child dies.

5.2.3. Cases to include

Provide one record per child in scope.

5.3. Child characteristics

5.3.1. Module description

This module includes the child's ethnicity and disability.

5.3.2. Module composition

The ethnicity data item uses the coding specified in the CBDS.

Children should be reported as disabled if they are disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. Multiple disabilities should be recorded if applicable. An entry of none should be recorded if the child has no disability.

Feedback in previous years has been that some local authorities have had difficulty providing the specific disability type, although MISs should more easily be able to tell whether a child has a disability or not. If this is the case for your local authority, we will continue to allow local authorities to record all children with a disability under the code DDA (other DDA). If a local authority is going to do this, they will need to make it clear in their COLLECT notes that this has been done so we can analyse the data appropriately.

5.3.3. Cases to include

Provide one record per child.

5.4. CIN details

5.4.1. Module description

This module contains information on all children in need episodes open during the census year including primary need code, referral and closure dates, and source of referral.

A child can have more than one episode of need in the year. This module, therefore, must include details for each of the children in need episodes active or reviewed during the period. This includes episodes that started prior to the data collection period, but that remained open at 1 April 2026. The section on cases to include below provides full rules to identify all cases in scope.

5.4.2. Module composition

For the minimum data required in this module, please see the notes at the end of this section.

The data item, referral no further action, is included in this module. Where no action is taken the flag should be set to true or 1, otherwise set the flag to false or 0. Section 5.6 describes what should be included in other modules in this case.

The reason for closure code RC8 should be used by local authorities to categorise a case for a child who they assess as not in need following a referral, and for whom they do not provide services and whose case is subsequently closed. It should not be used for any other reason.

The reason for closure code RC9 should be used by local authorities to categorise a case for a child who they assess as not in need following a referral, and for whom they do not provide services, but is subsequently referred to early help and whose case is then closed.

The RC8 and RC9 codes are different from cases that were closed at the referral stage when the referral no further action flag is used. Codes RC8 and RC9 should not be used for cases that were closed prior to assessment.

For each new referral dated 1 April 2015 onwards, the source of referral must be recorded from a pick list of source codes. Only one category may be picked from the list. Where there is more than one referral for the same child on the same day, the first referral should be recorded and it is this referral source that should be recorded for the census. Sources of subsequent referrals should be recorded separately that is, in relation to the specific referral. The data should be returned each year the episode remains open. In future censuses we would like to collect this data only in the year the referral was made, however we will need to monitor matching rates between children in need censuses until the matching rate is good enough for this to be done.

5.4.3. Cases to include

The principal reason for including an episode is that it is active at some point during the census year.

The return must include at least one CIN details module per child. The following episodes should be included:

a) If the episode is open at 1 April 2026; or

b) If the referral date occurs within the census year:

For a) and b) include referrals where no further action was taken.

The items to populate for each episode vary depending on which of the above criteria has resulted in their inclusion, see notes below.

Where criteria a) or b) above mean that an episode is included, then all the dates that allow any relevant key indicators to be calculated must be included. This means that if:

- An assessment starts and/or ends within the census period, the assessments group must be completed;
- A section 47 enquiry starts and/or ends within the census period, the section 47 enquiries group must be completed, including any dates prior to 1 April 2026.

Although the above groups may include dates prior to 1 April 2026, they must not include dates after 31 March 2027 apart from target end dates and internal review dates.

Primary need code N0 was devised to distinguish children whose case is closed after assessment and no further action taken, from children in need. However, local practitioners may assign a need code to children at the start of assessment and not change it (as the closure itself would indicate the child was not a child in need). For this reason, primary need codes other than N0 (not stated) are possible for Referral NFA cases and the validation will check for a valid or missing code.

The data collection allows for referrals to be followed by more than one section 47 enquiry. For this reason, these groups may repeat within the census's data structure so that multiple instances can be included. Please note however that these activities should not overlap. The census will validate the data provided and query any overlaps that are included.

The data collection allows for variations in process. The following is therefore the minimum valid content for one instance of the CIN details module.

In each instance, a referral is a request for children's social care services from someone not currently in receipt of them from the local authority. Do not include new information received on already open cases as a referral.

Either option A

For a 2026 to 2027 referral that leads to further action:

- the referral date
- the primary need code
- one assessment actual start date,
- the referral no further action flag with a value of false or 0
- source of referral

Or option B

For a 2026 to 2027 referral that does not lead to any further action:

- the referral date
- the referral no further action flag with a value of true or 1
- source of referral

Note: For option B, a no further action case is only where the initial consideration of the referral means that no action is taken. This is not the same as a case that is closed

following assessment. These cases should use RC8 and set referral no further action flag to false.

5.4.4. General notes on dates

Actual start dates are the date the assessment actually started and these can be any day (working or not).

The census only asks for dates, and not times.

Referral dates and CIN closure dates can be any day (working day or not).

Some MISs allow local authorities to record extra statutory days (ESD) as additional holidays. The DfE should be informed of any ESDs so that they can be taken into account in calculations and validations. These can be regarded as non-working days and excluded from any working day calculation, as long as the ESD is implemented locally as a non-working day across the local authority. In those local authorities where one or both of the ESDs are taken at the choice of individual members of staff, ESDs should not be taken into account.

5.4.5. Additional information on target dates

The return of assessment target dates is no longer required due to the removal of initial and core assessment modules. The internal review point date in the assessments module remains optional as in 2025 to 2026. Return of an initial child protection conference target date also remains optional.

The majority of local authorities will expect their MIS to calculate target dates automatically either as part of the system's workflow or as a reporting function when extracting data for the census. In calculating target dates the following points should be taken into account:

- Non-working days such as bank holidays or extra statutory days (ESDs) are treated the same as weekends in any working day calculation;
- Working days are evaluated as whole days. This means that the target date does not take into account the time of day on which the activity started. Close of business on the target day is the time by which the activity would be expected to be completed;
- Some target dates will fall beyond the end of the census year. These should still be included;
- Internal review date on the assessment module should be the local authority's own locally set date.

The date of the child protection conference appears twice within the XML file. In most cases the conference will be held as part of a section 47 enquiry and the data should be shown within the section 47 group and should not be included at the CIN details level.

For a transfer in case, the date of initial child protection conference should appear at the CIN details level only and not within the section 47 group (see 5.6D note b).

The assessment authorisation date should be the date an assessment was authorised by the team manager and this can be any day (working or not). Assessments are deemed to be completed once the assessment has been discussed with the child's family (or carer(s)) and the team manager has viewed and authorised the assessment.

5.5. Assessments group

5.5.1. Module description

Local authorities carrying out continuous assessments can record their data appropriately in the assessment module.

5.5.2. Module composition

The group consists of:

- Assessment actual start date;
- Assessment internal review date (optional);
- Assessment authorisation date;
- Factors identified at assessment.

5.5.3. Cases to include

The assessment actual start date must be filled in for all assessments groups. If the assessment authorisation date falls after the end of the census year, it should be left blank.

The factors identified at assessment module within the assessments module, allows for multiple contributing factors to be recorded per assessment. All factors that are known about at the end of the assessment which compromise the ability to parent, or are potential risk factors to the child, should be recorded. This applies to all assessments completed within the 2026 to 2027 year. The information should be recorded at the end of the assessment and all relevant factors should be reported from the list provided.

Note: Assessments should be completed within 45 working days of referral. Internal review dates are optional and will be determined locally by the needs of the child and the nature and level of the harm being suffered.

5.6. CIN plan dates group

5.6.1. Module description

This module contains information on CIN plan dates. A child can have one, more than one or no CIN plan(s) – but can only have one at a time.

5.6.2. Module composition

The CIN plan start date and the CIN plan end date.

5.6.3. Cases to include

This module is required where any of the following conditions apply:

- A CIN plan start date and/or end date fall within the census year;
- The plan was already open at the start of the year, that is, there is a CIN plan start date for the episode, even if it is before the census year
- If neither of the above applies the module may be omitted.

5.7. Section 47 enquiries group

5.7.1. Module description

This module contains information on section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences (ICPCs). During section 47 enquiries an initial child protection conference (ICPC), if held, should take place within 15 working days of the start of the section 47 enquiry.

5.7.2. Module composition

- Section 47 enquiry actual start date;
- Initial child protection conference target date (optional);
- Date of initial child protection conference;
- Initial child protection conference not required.

5.7.3. Cases to include

Each section 47 group will comprise one of the following:

Case type	Detail
Either type 1: For a section 47 enquiry that does not lead to any further action	- the section 47 enquiry actual start date - the ICPC not required flag with a value of true or 1
Or type 2: For a section 47 enquiry where the initial child protection conference has taken place	- the section 47 enquiry actual start date - the initial child protection conference target date (optional) - the date of initial child protection conference - the initial child protection conference not required flag with a value of false or 0
Or type 3: For a section 47 enquiry that the initial child protection conference has not yet taken place	- the section 47 enquiry actual start date - the initial child protection conference target date (optional) - the initial child protection conference not required flag with a value of false or 0

Note: The initial child protection conference target date (optional data) should be 15 working days after the section 47 enquiry start date.

Note: In the instance type 2 above, the date of initial child protection conference should only be completed in the section 47 group and not in the instance in the CIN details module. The instance in the CIN details module should only be used when a child who is the subject of an existing child protection plan transfers into your local authority (see also section 5.6).

5.8. Child protection plans

5.8.1. Module description

This module contains information on child protection plans (CPP). A child can have one, more than one or no child protection plan(s) but can only have one at a time. A child not in need cannot have a child protection plan.

5.8.2. Module composition

The module contains the following fields:

- the child protection plan start date
- the child protection plan end date
- the initial and latest category of abuse
- plan review date
- the number of previous child protection plans

The specification allows more than one plan review date to be provided. All reviews within the year should be included along with, for cases open at 1 April 2026, the last review date in 2025 to 2026. The final review date in 2025 to 2026 is required to calculate whether all reviews in 2026 to 2027 were carried out within the required timescales.

If the case is closed, the latest category of abuse should be taken as when the case closed or if the case is ongoing, it should be as at 31 March 2027. The initial category of abuse records the assessment made at the time the plan commenced and does not change. Both items use the same code set.

This module is repeatable.

5.8.3. Cases to include

This module is required where any of the following conditions apply:

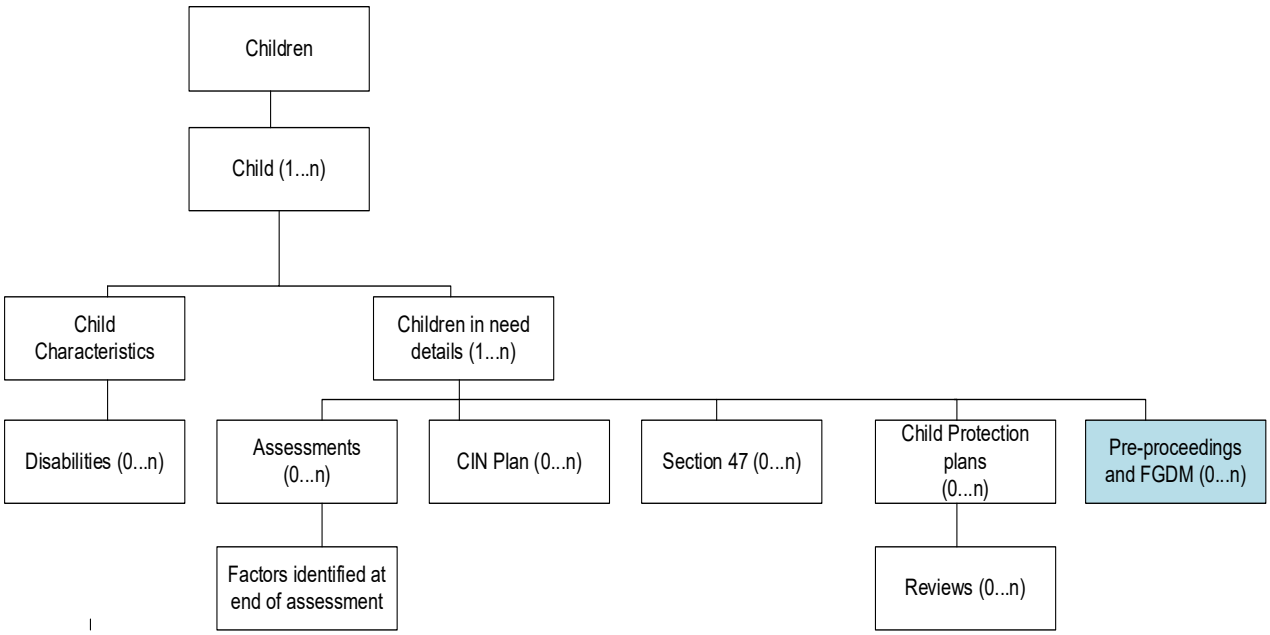
- A child protection plan start date and/or end date fall within the census year;
- The plan was already open at the start of the year, that is, there is a child protection plan start date for the episode, even if it is before the census year.
- If neither of the above applies the module may be omitted.

A child can have more than one child protection plan, but these plans should not overlap, that is a second child protection plan should not be started if an extant child protection plan is ongoing. The census will validate the data provided and query any overlaps that are included.

The child protection and referrals (CPR3) return included numbers of children by placement code and legal status (part B, tables 3 and 4). These items only apply to looked-after children. DfE will replicate these aggregates by matching children in need data to the children looked after data and hence these data items are not included in the children in need census.

5.9. New for 2026-27: Pre-proceedings and Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)

5.9.1. Module Structure and Description



Pre-proceedings are a key part of a child's journey through the family justice system. Pre-proceedings refer to the formal stage before care proceedings are initiated, where local authorities work intensively with families to address concerns, aiming to avoid the need for court intervention and children being separated from their families. Capturing data on this important process will ensure disparities and trends can be analysed and areas for improvement identified.

This new module is informed by learning from local innovation projects, including Warrington Borough Council's work on improving children's social care pre-proceedings data. Warrington piloted a structured approach to capturing and analysing data on pre-proceedings, which has helped to identify patterns in decision-making, timeliness, and outcomes for children. Their work has demonstrated the value of consistent data in improving practice, supporting families earlier, and reducing the need for care proceedings.

In addition, through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, we are legislating to require all local authorities to offer a family group decision-making meeting to all parents, or those with parental responsibility, whose children's cases have reached the pre-proceedings stage. Family group decision-making (FGDM) is a term used to describe a voluntary process that enables a family network to come together and make a family-led plan in response to concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing, working alongside skilled professionals. Evidence suggests that FGDM can be an effective way of diverting children from care proceedings when used at pre-proceedings.

The inclusion of pre-proceedings and FGDM data in the Children in Need census from 2026–27 reflects a growing recognition of the need for better national insight into how these processes are used across local authorities.

5.8.2 Cases in scope

To keep burdens to a minimum for year 1 of this collection, please include only cases where pre-proceedings were started during any part of the year from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027. In further years, we will look to include cases that were already open before the collection year begins.

5.8.3 Cohort

This module does not introduce a new cohort of children. Instead, it adds a new layer of information about children already within the CIN cohort. That is, it is the Department's expectation that all children in pre-proceedings should already be captured in the CIN census. This module identifies which of those children have progressed to the pre-proceedings stage.

5.8.4 Multiple episodes of pre-proceedings

This module can be entered more than once for a particular child record, if that child has had more than one episode of pre-proceedings during the reporting year.

6. Local authority data returns

6.1. Data return formats

A submission file from a local authority should be provided in an XML file structure as described below. Within XML, an item or module that is omitted (for example, UPN or child protection plan module) should not show any tags.

6.2. Header details

Section 6.3 describes formats for the return of the data in XML format. The data items required within the header are as follows. The header follows the DfE standard header for data collections, although <Term> and <Estab> are omitted as not relevant to this census.

Data item	XML tag	CBDS reference	Description
Collection name	<Collection>	N00600	Name of the data collection. Will be 'CIN'
Year	<Year>	N00602	The year of the collection. Will be '2027'
Reference Date	<ReferenceDate>	N00603	The reference date is normally the day of the census or collection. It is used as the baseline date from which comparisons with other dates in the return can be made. Will be '2027-03-31'.
Source Level	<SourceLevel>	N00604	Should be set to 'L' for a local authority system
LA	<LEA>	N00216	Three digit local authority number as used by education departments.
Software Code	<SoftwareCode>	N00604	Software product identification. Suppliers may use their own system name, or use a value of 'Local Authority'
Release	<Release>	N00607	Software release number. Optional free-text item which suppliers are requested to use if possible. In some cases, it is useful to trace problems with returns back to a specific software release, for example where upgrades have been provided but not installed.

Data item	XML tag	CBDS reference	Description
Serial Number	<SerialNo>	N00606	An incremented number generated by a provider's software, which enables data collection systems to identify re-submissions. Will start at '001' and then be incremented by 1 each time a new file is prepared for submission.
Date/Time	<DateTime>	N00609	Date and time of the generation of the return in CCYY-MM-DDhh:mm:ss format.

6.3. XML schema

6.3.1. XML format submission

An XML submission will be a single message consisting of

- A header;
- A series of repeated nodes containing data on one or more funded children.

Children in need census 2027 – overall message structure:

CBDS number	XML element
	<Message>
	<Header> - see below for details
	<Children>
	</Message>

6.3.2. XML header

A standard XML message header is required for each census file. The data items should be populated according to the guide in 6.2.

Children in need census 2027 - header structure:

CBDS number	XML element
	<Header>
	<CollectionDetails>
N00600	<Collection>CIN</Collection>
N00602	<Year>2027</Year>
N00603	<ReferenceDate>2027-03-31</ReferenceDate>
	</CollectionDetails>
	<Source>
N00604	<SourceLevel>L</SourceLevel>
N00216	<LEA>201</LEA>
N00605	<SoftwareCode>Local Authority</SoftwareCode>
N00607	<Release>ver 3.1.21</Release>
N00606	<SerialNo>001</SerialNo>
N00609	<DateTime>2027-05-23T11:14:05</DateTime>
	</Source>
	</Header>

Standard CBDS header items <Term> and <Estab> are not shown above. These items are not required in this data collection and should be omitted by suppliers.

6.3.3. Child XML message structure: children in need census 2026-27

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
		This column contains notes on repetition. Item level elements can be assumed to occur once only, unless otherwise stated
	<Children>	
	<Child>	Each <Children> group contains 1..n <Child> groups
	<ChildIdentifiers>	Each <Child> group contains one and only one <ChildIdentifiers> group
N00097	<LAchildID>DfEX0000001</LAchildID>	
N00001	<UPN> A123456789123</UPN>	0..1
N00002	<FormerUPN> X98765432123B </FormerUPN>	0..1
N00135	<UPNunknown>UN3</UPNunknown>	
N00066	<PersonBirthDate>2016-03-25</PersonBirthDate>	Should complete either Date of Birth or Expected Date of Birth but not both
N00098	<ExpectedPersonBirthDate>2027-010-13</ExpectedPersonBirthDate>	Should complete either Date of Birth or Expected Date of Birth but not both
N00783	<Sex>F</Sex>	

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
N00108	<PersonDeathDate>1080-10-08</PersonDeathDate>	0..1
	</ChildIdentifiers>	
	<ChildCharacteristics>	Each <Child> group contains one and only one <ChildCharacteristics> group
N00177	<Ethnicity>WBRI</Ethnicity>	
	<Disabilities>	Each <ChildCharacteristics> group contains 0..1 <Disabilities > group Only unborn children should have no Disabilities group
N00099	<Disability>HAND</Disability>	Each <Disabilities> group contains 1..n <Disability> item. A single value of 'NONE' appears if the child has no disabilities
	</Disabilities>	
	</ChildCharacteristics>	
	<CINdetails>	Each <Child> group contains 1..n <CINdetails> group
N00100	<CINreferralDate>1070-10-06</CINreferralDate>	

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
N00152	<ReferralSource>1A</ReferralSource>	One and only one category
N00101	<PrimaryNeedCode>N4</PrimaryNeedCode>	
N00102	<CINclosureDate>1071-02-27</CINclosureDate>	
N00103	<ReasonForClosure>RC1</ReasonForClosure>	
N00112	<ReferralNFA>false</ReferralNFA>	
N00110	<DateOfInitialCPC>1070-12-06</DateOfInitialCPC>	Only to be used in this module for transfers in
	<Assessments>	Each <CINDetails> group contains 0…n <Assessments> groups
N00159	<AssessmentActualStartDate>1070-06-03</AssessmentActualStartDate>	
N00161	<AssessmentInternalReviewDate>1070-06-22</ AssessmentInternalReviewDate>	0..1
N00160	<AssessmentAuthorisationDate>1071-07-18</ AssessmentAuthorisationDate>	0..1
	<FactorsIdentifiedAtAssessment>	
N00181	<AssessmentFactors>2A</AssessmentFactors>	Each <FactorsIdentifiedAtAssessment> group contains 1..n <AssessmentFactors> items

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
	</FactorsIdentifiedAt Assessment>	
	<Assessments>	
	<CINPlanDates>	Each <CINDetails> group contains 0..n <CINPlanDates> groups
N00689	<CINPlanStartDate>1071-01-24</CINPlanStartDate>	1..1
N00690	<CINPlanEndDate>1071-01-26</CINPlanEndDate>	0..1
	</CINPlanDates	
	<Section47>	Each <CINdetails> group contains 0..n <Section47> groups
N00148	<S47ActualStartDate>1070-06-02</S47ActualStartDate>	
N00109	<InitialCPCtarget>1070-06-23</InitialCPCtarget>	
N00110	<DateOfInitialCPC>1070-06-17</DateOfInitialCPC>	To be used in this module for all cases except transfers in
N00111	<ICPCnotRequired>false</ICPCnotRequired>	
	</Section47>	

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
	<ChildProtectionPlans>	Each <CINdetails> group contains 0..n <ChildProtectionPlans> groups
N00105	<CPPstartDate>1070-02-17</CPPstartDate>	
N00115	<CPPendDate>1071-03-14</CPPendDate>	
N00113	<InitialCategoryOfAbuse>PHY </InitialCategoryOfAbuse>	
N00114	<LatestCategoryOfAbuse>PHY </LatestCategoryOfAbuse>	
N00106	<NumberOfPreviousCPP>10 </NumberOfPreviousCPP>	
	<Reviews>	Each <ChildProtectionPlans> group contains 0..1 <Reviews> group
N00116	<CPPreviewDate>1071-02-15</CPPreviewDate>	Each <Reviews> group contains 1..n <CPPreviewDate> items
	</Reviews>	
	</ChildProtectionPlans>	
	<PreProceedingsandFGDM>	Each < PreProceedingsandFGDM> group contains 0..n <PreProceedingsandFGDM> groups
N00826	<PPStartDate>2026-09-09</PPStartDate>	

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
N00827	<LBPSentDate>2026-09-20</LBPSentDate>	
N00828	<FGDMMeetingOffer>1</FGDMMeetingOffer>	
N00829	<FGDMMeetingFac>1</FGDMMeetingFac>	
N00830	<InitialPPMeetingDate>2026-09-28</InitialPPMeetingDate>	
N00831	<ReviewMeetingsCount>3</ReviewMeetingsCount	
N00832	<StepDecisionDate>2026-12-01</StepDecisionDate>	
N00833	<PPOutcome>A</PPOutcome>	Codeset CS131
N00834	<CourtAppDate>2026-12-18</CourtAppDate>	
N00835	<LetterInitCPDate>2027-02-05</LetterInitCPDate>	
	</PreProceedingsandFGDM)>	
	</CINdetails>	
	</Child>	
	</Children>	

6.3.4. 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 &#233. 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) section 2.

There is no naming convention for the XML file; however we recommend that the name should be meaningful to a user attempting to locate the file. Spaces in the file name are not a problem. The file extension should be .xml.

6.4. Data validation rules

This section specifies validation rules that are applied to the data by DfE, using COLLECT. 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. Validation rules are supplied in annex A, which is an MS Excel spreadsheet provided alongside the main specification. 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 (for example child’s UPN). The spreadsheet (annex A) also shows which validations are errors and which ones are queries. An error is a failed validation check that must be corrected. A query is one which must be investigated, and potentially corrected, as it identifies data that would usually be invalid. Where a validation rule is identical to one that is specified for the school census or school workforce collections, the same sequence number is used. Otherwise, new sequence numbers are used.

Where an item occurs more than once for the same child, suppliers must ensure that the validation checks against that item are applied to each instance. This should happen whether the item recurs multiple times within a single module, for example, <Disability>, or the item is within a module that may occur more than once, for example, <CINdetails>.

Syntax:

- Validation checks are expressed as conditions that must be true (errors) or that should be true (queries). The error message shows what is displayed if the condition fails;
- Data items are indicated using the XML tag with the CBDS number in parentheses, for example <LAchildID> (100379);
- Data groups are indicated using the XML tag only, for example <Assessments>;
- Single dates or date ranges are sometimes defined in relation to <ReferenceDate>, which is from the XML header;
- Date ranges also use [Start_of_Census_Year], which is not an item within the XML, but which has a constant value for this census of 2026-04-01. If this is calculated as (<ReferenceDate> minus one year plus one day) within MISs, then this will future proof some of the validation, since the reference date for CIN will always be the 31 March at the end of the census year;
- Date ranges also use [Period_of_Census], which is not an item within the XML, but which has a constant value for this census of 2027-04-01 to 2027-03-31 inclusive;
- Notes, in italics, are explanatory and non-normative.

Please note there should be no negative values allowed.

6.5. Re-submission guidance

When re-submissions are required the serial number in the header must be incremented by the provider's software. We have also assumed that the whole file will be re-submitted. Note that a re-submission will delete and replace all the data contained in the previous submission.

Appendix A: Family First Partnership Programme CIN Census Reporting

Moving towards a single workflow while maintaining reporting requirements for two separate cohorts (Section 17 and Targeted Early Help), may cause anomalies and issues with the validation and submission of statutory returns.

The following issues are those that we have anticipated will be the most challenging and have made specific agreements for the CIN Census:

Scenario 1

When a child's needs change from TEH to S17 but a new assessment is not considered necessary.

In this scenario there may well be a very good reason why another assessment is not necessary, but the CIN Census requires an assessment following a referral. The main reason is likely to be because an assessment has already been completed and so another one is deemed to not be required.

For the purpose of the CIN Census return, the following fields will be impacted:

<CINReferralDate> A new referral is not being made, as Family Help is seamless and children can move between TEH and CIN. Record the TEH referral date as the CIN referral date.

<AssessmentActualStartDate> A Family Help Assessment has been completed, so a new one is not required. Record the start date of the TEH assessment.

<AssessmentAuthorisationDate> Record the end date of the TEH assessment.

<AssessmentFactors> If not already recorded as part of the Family Help Assessment, assessment factors in relation to that assessment need to be provided using the Case Discussion and Decision Form.

Scenario 2

When a child's needs change from TEH to S17 and a Family Help Assessment is already underway.

At any time whilst an assessment is being undertaken for a child at TEH level a situation could arise where those needs escalate, and a manager now decides that the needs level should be S17.

For the purpose of the CIN Census return, the following fields will be impacted:

<CINReferralDate> A new referral is not being made, as Family Help is seamless and children can move between TEH and CIN. Record the TEH referral date as the CIN referral date.

<AssessmentActualStartDate> A Family Help Assessment is in progress, so a new one is not required. Record the start date of the current TEH assessment.

<AssessmentAuthorisationDate> Record the end date of the TEH assessment (once completed).

<AssessmentFactors> If not already recorded as part of the Family Help Assessment, assessment factors in relation to that assessment need to be provided using the Case Discussion and Decision Form.

Scenario 3

A child's needs level changes from S17 to TEH and a Reason for Closure Code is required.

This issue will not be relevant to all case management systems. The issue exists if a case management system only captures the Reason for Closure code when a referral is closed. The referral won't be closing until the child's needs levels have reduced from TEH to no longer needing family help.

For the purpose of the CIN Census return, the following fields will be impacted:

<CINClosureDate> Record the decision date to step down from S17 to TEH as the CIN Closure Date

<ReasonForClosure> Record the relevant reason for closure, which should be 'RC7 - services ceased for any other reason, including child no longer in need'.

Version history

Version number	Update	Author, team and date
V0-1	Initial quality assurance version. Main changes are highlighted in yellow • All through: Dates and links updated • Some sections reordered and small amendments made for clarity New Module (Module 5) for 2027. See also CBDS RFC 1331 for further details of these changes. This module includes the 10 mandatory data items listed below N00826 <PPStartDate> N00827 <LBPSentDate> N00828 <FGDMMeetingOffer> N00829 <FGDMMeetingFac> N00830 <InitialPPMeetingDate> N00831 <ReviewMeetingsCount> N00832 <StepDecisionDate> N00833 <PPOutcome> N00834 <CourtAppDate> N00835 <LetterInitCPDate> <PPOutcome> applies a new code set CS131 a) decision made to initiate care proceedings b) decision made to step down c) other	Simon Summers, COG – October 2025

Version number	Update	Author, team and date
V1-0	This is the base lined version of the specification	Simon Summers, COG – November 2025
V1-1	Added Appendix A to clarify how LAs who have moved to a single workflow between targeted early help (TEH) and CIN should record certain scenarios	Simon Summers, COG; December 2025
V1-2	Correction to typo in XML schema (p.35)	Simon Summers, COG; January 2026
V1-3	<ReferralNFA> (N0012) moved to its correct location in the XML structure (p.32)	Simon Summers; COG; October 2026

Department for Education

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