



Autumn 2026 School Census

Supporting Guide – Secondary Phase

REFERENCE GUIDE. Use this document for detailed definitions, collection periods, funding-sensitive items and secondary/Post-16 data rules. It does not repeat the census submission workflow.

QUICK GUIDE

Process, dates & submission

SUPPORTING GUIDE

Detailed rules & definitions

CHECKLIST

Final completion checks

1. New and changed requirements for 2026/27

1.1 Free School Meals (FSM)

From 2026/27, FSM eligibility is recorded as Targeted FSM or Expanded FSM. The distinction matters because the categories do not have the same funding consequences.

- Targeted FSM (TFSM) – pupils who meet the targeted eligibility criteria and have made a claim. This is the FSM category linked to Pupil Premium eligibility. FSM periods issued in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland are recorded as Targeted FSM.
- Expanded FSM (EFSM) – pupils who become eligible under the expanded Universal Credit criteria from 2026/27. Expanded FSM gives entitlement to a free school meal but does not, by itself, make the pupil eligible for Pupil Premium.

HOW TO RECORD A CHANGE: If a pupil remains eligible under Targeted FSM, retain the original start date. If the pupil moves from Targeted to Expanded FSM, close the Targeted period and create a separate Expanded period; do not overwrite the Targeted record. The earliest Expanded FSM start date is 1 August 2026.

For every FSM period record the start date, verification date, end date where applicable, UK country and FSM category. UK country and FSM category are compulsory from 2026/27.

AUTUMN 2026 VERIFICATION: All live FSM eligibility must be rechecked between 1 June and 1 October 2026 inclusive. The verification date records when eligibility was last checked.

AUTUMN 2026 COLLECTION PERIOD: Return FSM periods starting on or before 1 October 2026 where the end date is absent or between 22 May and 1 October 2026 inclusive.

Additional information: [DfE – Free school meals guidance](#)

1.2 Kinship Care

Collected for all on-roll pupils as at Autumn Census Day only. The field defaults to ND and should only be changed where kinship care has been identified.

- ND – Not declared (default)
- KF – formal arrangement
- KI – informal arrangement
- KU – arrangement unknown

1.3 Managed Moves

For each managed move within the collection period, record the start date, destination school URN and reason: reducing the risk of exclusion; following a period of exclusion and decision to transfer; or following review of an off-site direction placement.

1.4 Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions

AUTUMN 2026 COLLECTION PERIOD: Return suspensions and permanent exclusions with start dates between 1 January and 31 July 2026.

Maintain complete records for on- and off-roll pupils as applicable. For the Autumn Census, a permanent exclusion should only be returned once it has been upheld by the governing body or Independent Review Panel where applicable. Suspensions should include the actual number of sessions the pupil would normally have attended.

- N00836 / CS132 – Reason for Cancellation.
- N00844 – Reinstatement Date following a Cancelled Exclusion.
- N00857 / CS137 – Exclusion Review Category.
- CS010 linked to N00685, N00686 and N00687 has been updated; CS105 Exclusion Review Reason has also been updated.

Transferred from APEX: N00650 Review Date / Independent Review Panel date; N00651 Exclusion Review Result; N00652 Exclusion Reinstatement Date; N00653 SEN Expert Indicator.

Additional information: [DfE – School suspensions and permanent exclusions](#)

2. Funding-sensitive reminders

2.1 Pupil numbers

The number of pupils on roll in the Autumn Census is used in school funding arrangements. Pupils need to be on the admission register and in attendance before or on 1 October 2026 in accordance with Regulation 5 of the Education Regulations 2006.

[Education Regulations 2006 – Regulation 5](#)

2.2 Pupil Premium

Who is entitled to Pupil Premium? Pupil Premium funding is linked to Targeted FSM eligibility, not Expanded FSM. Pupils aged 4 and above in Reception to Year 11 (or aged 4 to 15 where National Curriculum year groups do not apply) can attract Pupil Premium through the FSM route when they meet the Targeted FSM eligibility criteria and a claim has been made.

Targeted FSM = free school meal + disadvantage funding. Pupils eligible for Targeted FSM can attract Pupil Premium and other disadvantage funding. From 2026/27, the Ever 6 FSM cohort is based on Targeted FSM.

Expanded FSM = free school meal only. Pupils who qualify only through Expanded FSM are entitled to a free school meal, but Expanded FSM does not attract Pupil Premium or other disadvantage funding.

Important for pupils moving categories: A pupil who was previously eligible for Targeted FSM remains in the Ever 6 FSM cohort for six years, even if they later move to Expanded FSM or cease to be eligible for FSM. Schools should therefore preserve the previous Targeted FSM period rather than overwriting it.

- Pupils receiving only Universal Infant Free School Meals are not Pupil Premium eligible through the FSM route.
- Pupils eligible only for Expanded FSM are not Pupil Premium eligible through the FSM route.

Additional information: [DfE – Pupil Premium 2026 to 2027](#)

2.3 Top-Up Funding

The Top-Up Funding indicator is used in high-needs funding arrangements, research and benchmarking. Complete it accurately for applicable pupils.

2.4 Language / EAL [used for funding]

EAL funding is triggered when a pupil is recorded in the October Census with a first language other than English. For the first three years after an EAL pupil is allocated their UPN, the pupil is eligible for funding and the funding follows the pupil.

If a pupil enters after the October Census date, funding is allocated from the April following the next October Census and still continues for three years. Funding is available for Years 1 to 11. If a pupil is recorded as EAL in Reception, funding starts in April of Year 1 and continues for three years.

3. Secondary and Post-16 data

3.1 Post-16 data and learning aims [used for funding]

Post-16 data is a combination of student-level and learning aim data items. It is used to calculate 16 to 19 funding, so incomplete or inaccurate information can directly affect the funding a school receives.

Who returns post-16 data: secondary schools with sixth forms and other in-scope settings must return the module. Schools without a sixth form do not return post-16 learning aims. Data must be returned by the school holding the student's current or main registration; for dual-registered students, the main school returns the learning aims taken at both settings.

Learning aims in scope

Current year: include learning aims for students who were on roll at any point from 1 August 2026 to Census Day, were in actual NC Year 12 or above during that period, and for whom the school wishes to claim 16 to 19 funding.

Previous year: include learning aims for students who were on roll at any point from 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026, were in actual NC Year 12 or above, and for whom the school wishes to claim 16 to 19 funding. This can include students who left before Census Day.

Key funding checks

- All students undertaking a 16 to 19 programme must have programme aim ZPROG001. Programme type identifies a study programme (01), T Level foundation year programme (30) or T Level programme (31).
- Check qualification numbers (QNs) and subject classification codes (SCCs) are valid for the academic year. Invalid qualifications can negatively affect funding.
- Planned hours are required for both on- and off-roll funded students. Returning no planned hours for a 16 to 19 funded student will negatively affect funding.
- For study programmes and T Level foundation years, record annual planned learning hours and planned employability, enrichment and pastoral hours. For T Levels, use the separate T Level planned-hours fields covering the whole programme.
- Check maths and English prior attainment and funding exemption fields. Where the condition of funding applies, failure to meet it can result in funding being removed.
- Keep learning aim start dates, planned end dates, actual end dates and statuses accurate. Learning aims submitted in error previously must not be returned again.

Interactive post-16 school census tool and COLLECT reports

Some schools risk not receiving the funding they should because of inaccurate post-16 data. The DfE interactive post-16 school census tool helps schools understand how their data is used to calculate post-16 funding and how common data errors can affect funding. It is particularly useful for business managers and staff preparing the Autumn Census.

The tool is an Excel workbook and macros must be enabled for it to function correctly. In addition, COLLECT provides post-16 reports that summarise the post-16 data in the census return and help schools identify potential issues.

All 16 to 19 funded schools and academies should use both the interactive census tool and the post-16 reports in COLLECT before submitting the final Autumn Census return.

Additional information: [DfE – Post-16 school census tool \(2026\)](#)

Post-16 funding guidance: [DfE – 16 to 19 funding rules 2026 to 2027](#)

Funding rates and formula: [DfE – 16 to 19 funding: 2026 to 2027 rates and formula](#)

2026/27 census learning aims: [DfE – School Census data items 2026 to 2027: Post-16 learning aims](#)

3.2 Learning aims submitted in error

A learning aim submitted incorrectly in an earlier census must not continue to be returned simply because it appeared previously. Correct the local MIS and return only the correct learning aim information in the next census. If a student never started an aim, delete the erroneous aim so it is not returned again. Because the Autumn Census drives funding, corrections should be made before final submission.

3.3 Qualification numbers and subject classification codes [used for funding]

Return valid qualification numbers and ensure the latest qualification data is loaded into the MIS. Subject classification codes identify pathways within qualifications; some qualifications use different codes for KS4 and Post-16. Contact the MIS supplier where matching or coding issues arise.

3.4 Unique Learner Number (ULN)

Check ULNs for pupils aged 14 and over who are in scope for the census and ensure the information held in the MIS is accurate.

4. Other data-quality checks

Attendance

AUTUMN 2026 COLLECTION PERIOD: Attendance data is collected from 6 April to 31 July 2026. Resolve missing marks before generating the final return.

Alternative Provision

AUTUMN 2026 COLLECTION PERIOD: Include placements open on Census Day and placements that ended between 21 May and 30 September 2026 inclusive. Ensure applicable placement information is complete and accurate.

Enrolment status

Check Current, Dual Main and Dual Subsidiary registration carefully. Only one school can be recorded as the main school for a dual-registered pupil.

UPNs

Resolve temporary UPNs wherever possible and use the pupil's earliest permanent UPN from an English state-funded school. Generate a new permanent UPN only where the school is certain the pupil has not previously been registered at an English state-funded school.

Additional information: [DfE – Unique pupil numbers](#)

SEN Unit / Resourced Provision

Use these indicators only where the SEN unit or resourced provision has been formally recognised by the Local Authority.

Youth Support Services Agreement

Check the current-year census specification and school privacy-notice processes for pupils in scope. Ensure the field is completed consistently with the information sought from pupils/parents and the current legal/privacy requirements.

5. Further support

[DfE – School census data items 2026 to 2027](#)

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