

# Young Carers and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026



What Schools, Trusts and Governors  
Need to Know

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# SAFEGUARDING BEGINS WITH UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE CHILD

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 continues to identify young carers among the children for whom school and college staff should be particularly alert to the potential need for additional support. In the 2026 guidance, this now sits within the broader section “Support before statutory intervention”.

This does not mean that being a young carer is, in itself, an indication that there is a safeguarding concern. Instead, it reinforces the importance of recognising that caring responsibilities may form part of the wider picture of a child’s needs, experiences and family circumstances.

A child may be supporting someone with a physical illness or disability, mental ill health, substance use or another significant need. The nature and extent of that support will vary considerably. For some children, caring may have little or no identifiable impact on their education or wellbeing. For others, responsibilities at home may interact with attendance, sleep, emotional wellbeing, learning or participation in school life.

The significance for schools lies in understanding the individual child rather than making assumptions based on the label “young carer”.

**Recognition should lead to understanding — not assumption.**

## What the Guidance Says

KCSIE 2026 places young carers within its broader section on “Support before statutory intervention”. It states that any child may benefit from support before statutory intervention and identifies young carers among those for whom staff should be particularly alert to the potential need for additional support.

This sits within KCSIE’s wider child-centred and coordinated approach to safeguarding, which emphasises identifying concerns and ensuring children and families receive the right help at the right time.

## What This Means for Young Carers

For schools, the continued recognition of young carers within KCSIE 2026 should not mean automatically viewing young carers through a safeguarding lens. It should mean ensuring that caring responsibilities are not overlooked when considering what may be affecting a child and what, if anything, they may need. Where a young carer is identified, schools may need to consider:

- What is the nature and extent of the child’s caring responsibilities?
- What impact, if any, is caring having on their education, wellbeing or development?
- Have their responsibilities or family circumstances changed?
- Does the child or their family need additional help or support?
- Does information about caring contribute to a wider picture of need or safeguarding concern?

The answer will not be the same for every young carer. The appropriate response should be based on the individual child, their circumstances and the information available.

**The question is not simply: “Is this child a young carer?”  
It is: “What does being a young carer mean for this child?”**

# IDENTIFICATION IS THE BEGINNING, NOT THE END

Recognising that a child may need additional support is only the starting point. Knowing that a child is a young carer cannot, on its own, tell us what they are experiencing or what support, if any, they may need.

Young carers are not a single, uniform group. Caring responsibilities can vary in their nature, frequency and impact. Family circumstances can also change, meaning that a child who appeared to be managing well may experience greater pressure at another point in time.

The words “young carer” tell us something important about a child’s life. They do not tell us the whole story.

**Identification provides information. Understanding gives that information meaning.**

## WHAT THE GUIDANCE SAYS

KCSIE 2026 identifies young carers among the children for whom staff should be particularly alert to the potential need for additional support. The guidance makes clear that support before statutory intervention should be considered in response to a child’s individual needs and circumstances.

## What This Means for Young Carers

Knowing that a child is a young carer should be the beginning of understanding their individual experience, not the end of the conversation.

Schools may need to consider:

- What does the child’s caring role involve?
- How frequent or demanding are their responsibilities?
- What impact, if any, is caring having on their education, wellbeing or development?
- Have their responsibilities or family circumstances changed?
- What support is already in place, and what does the child say they need?

For some young carers, little or no additional support may be needed. Others may benefit from practical adjustments, family help or specialist support. Where information raises wider concerns, schools should follow their established safeguarding procedures.

**The question is not only whether a child is a young carer. It is whether we understand what caring means for them.**

# RESPONDING TO THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD

KCSIE 2026 recognises that young carers may need additional support, but this does not create a single response for every young carer. The significance of caring responsibilities will depend on the individual child, their circumstances and any impact on their welfare.

For some young carers, the appropriate response may be understanding and support within school. Others may need additional help for themselves or their family. Where information gives rise to a safeguarding concern, schools should follow their established safeguarding procedures.

The response should be determined by the child's needs and circumstances — not by the label "young carer".

**Recognise the caring responsibility. Understand the individual child. Respond to the need.**

## WHAT THE GUIDANCE SAYS

KCSIE 2026 makes clear that staff should act immediately if they have concerns about a child. Staff should follow their school or college's child protection policy and speak to the designated safeguarding lead, or a deputy, about their concerns.

The appropriate response will depend on the individual circumstances and the nature of any need or concern identified.

## What This Means for Young Carers

Identifying caring responsibilities should help schools consider what, if any, response is appropriate for the individual child.

Depending on their needs and circumstances, this may include:

- appropriate support within school;
- additional help for the child or family;
- working with other services where appropriate; or
- following safeguarding procedures where concerns are identified.

**Identification should inform the response. It should not determine it.**

# FROM GUIDANCE TO PRACTICE

KCSIE 2026 continues to identify young carers among the children for whom staff should be particularly alert to the potential need for additional support. For schools and colleges, this provides an opportunity to consider how caring responsibilities are recognised and understood within existing safeguarding practice.

This does not require every young carer to be treated in the same way. It requires an approach that enables staff to recognise caring responsibilities, understand the individual child and respond appropriately to their needs and circumstances.

The aim is not to create a separate safeguarding pathway for young carers. It is to ensure that caring responsibilities are not missing from the wider picture.

## QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS, TRUSTS AND GOVERNORS

- Do staff understand who young carers are and how caring responsibilities may form part of a child's wider circumstances?
- Do staff know what to do if a child shares that they have caring responsibilities?
- Once a young carer is identified, how does the school seek to understand their individual needs and circumstances?
- Are changes in a child's circumstances considered when reviewing the support they may need?
- Are staff clear about when school-based support, additional help or safeguarding action may be appropriate?
- How confident are leaders and governors that young carers are recognised and understood within the school's wider safeguarding approach?

## HOW DAACSS CAN HELP

Derbyshire All Age Carers Support Service can support schools to strengthen the identification and support of young carers through:

- young carer awareness training for school staff;
- guidance and resources to support identification;
- support to develop a whole-school approach;
- practical resources for young carers and education settings; and
- advice on connecting identified young carers with specialist support.

## ABOUT THIS BRIEFING

This briefing interprets Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 through the lens of young carers. It considers how the guidance's approach to support before statutory intervention, alongside its wider safeguarding principles and expectations, may inform the recognition, understanding and support of young carers in education.

It should be read alongside the full statutory guidance.

## KEY SOURCES

Department for Education. *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026*.

Department for Education. *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026*.