

Key changes introduced in Keeping children safe in education 2026

A summary of the statutory guidance for schools and colleges in England

September 2026

Background

This statutory guidance sets out what schools and colleges in England must do to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The guidance is directed at:

- governing bodies of maintained schools, nursery schools and colleges
- proprietors of independent schools and non-maintained special schools
- management committees of pupil referral units (PRUs)
- senior leadership teams.

The 2026 edition of the **Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) guidance** was published for information only on 7 July 2026. Further changes were made on 1 September 2026 when it came into force and replaced the previous edition of the guidance. This briefing sets out the key additions in KCSIE 2026 (DfE, 2026).

Part one: safeguarding information for all staff

What school and college staff need to know

This section provides new information on the process for community-based Family Help assessments, including the criteria for referrals to: Family Help support and services; and local authority children's social care. New information was also added around how staff should be alert to the signs and impact of prejudice-based harm, including racism, faith-based prejudice and other forms of discrimination.

Support before statutory intervention

This section includes further examples of when a child may benefit from additional support, including: the child being pregnant and/or a parent themselves; the child exhibiting early signs of abusive, violent and/or harmful behaviours.

Abuse, neglect and exploitation

The guidance references child to caregiver abuse as a form of abuse staff should be aware of and clarifies that verbal abuse can be a form of emotional abuse.

The definition of **Sexual abuse** has also been updated from 'forcing or enticing a child...' to 'forcing, **causing** or **inciting** a child...'. It specifies that children can be sexually abused within the family, an institution or a community setting and often know the person carrying out the abuse. It also clarifies that there are **specific offences relating to abuse of children under 13**, who can never provide valid consent to sexual activity and **specific offences relating to abuse of children under 16**, regardless of whether they agreed to that activity.

Safeguarding issues

The guidance clarifies that safeguarding issues often overlap. The information on **Child-on-child abuse (including harassment and violence)** has been expanded to include:

- the times when children might be at highest risk around the school day, such as immediately after school
- reference to misogyny
- reference to how this type of abuse is a safeguarding issue for all children involved
- information on the preventable nature of child-on-child abuse, including the importance of recognising behaviours and indicators early
- information on how child-on-child abuse can include discriminatory behaviour, including racism and faith-targeted abuse. Staff should recognise the impact this has on children's wellbeing and it should be considered within safeguarding practice where appropriate.

The **Child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual exploitation (CSE)** section highlights how:

- this type of harm can be committed or facilitated by an organised network or gang and children may identify as part of one of these groups
- most sexual abuse is committed by someone known to the victim
- children are not always recognised as victims and can be criminalised for actions they take while under coercion.

The **Mental health** section clarifies that all staff should be aware that mental health problems can develop into safeguarding concerns. The guidance stresses that only appropriately trained professionals should attempt to diagnose mental health problems, but that education staff play an important role in recognising the warning signs and identifying children who may be struggling with their mental health.

Schools and colleges should make sure that any mental health support or interventions they offer are evidenced as safe, effective and appropriate for the need and phase of education.

Under **Serious violence**, the guidance has been updated to highlight that:

- serious violence is an ongoing safeguarding concern and may involve physical assault, the carrying or use of weapons, and potential criminal exploitation
- concerns about a child carrying, using or intending to use a weapon should be reported to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), who should carry out a risk assessment
- schools play a key role in protecting children from violence, and staff should be aware of the signs and risk factors
- targeted interventions such as mentoring or therapeutic support are key.

Children in need

The guidance notes that qualified lead practitioners who are not social workers can lead work with families up to and including section 17. Local authorities, with their safeguarding partners and any relevant agencies, should set out who can act as a lead practitioner in supporting children and their families under section 17.

Part two: the management of safeguarding

Sport

This new section applies to schools, further education institutions and 16-19 academies. It sets out:

- appropriate criteria for single-sex sport, including when schools and colleges can separate children according to their biological sex without discriminating against them on the basis of their sex, in line with the [Equality Act 2010](#).
- information around supporting gender-questioning children to socially transition in the context of their participation in sports and PE.

Regulations and safeguarding requirements relating to school premises

This new section applies to schools, further education institutions and 16-19 academies. It sets out information on **Toilets** and **Changing rooms and showers**.

Toilets

- Schools must not allow children into toilets designated for the opposite biological sex. This includes where schools are responding to requests to support social transition for children who are questioning their gender.
- Schools must provide separate toilets for boys and girls aged 8 and over, apart from where a mixed-sex toilet is in a room intended for use by one pupil at a time and is lockable from the inside. Schools should assess the safeguarding risks of mixed-sex toilets and plan accordingly.
- If a gender-questioning child does not want to use the toilet designated for their biological sex, schools should consider whether they can provide an alternative toilet facility, without compromising single-sex toilet provision. Schools should keep a clear record of these situations, communicate them appropriately and review them regularly.

Changing rooms and showers

- Schools must not allow a child aged 11 years or older at the start of the school year to undress in front of a child of the opposite biological sex.

- Schools must provide suitable changing accommodation and showers for pupils who are aged 11 years or older at the start of the school year, considering age, numbers, sex and any special requirements they may have.
- When responding to a request to support social transition, schools must not allow a child to access changing rooms designated for the opposite sex.
- If a gender-questioning child does not want to use the changing rooms and showers designated for their sex, schools should consider whether they can provide an alternative changing or washing facility without compromising the provision of single-sex facilities. This could be achieved by using a separate fully enclosed room or by using existing facilities at separate times. Schools should keep a clear record of these situations, communicate them appropriately and review them regularly.

Whole school and college approach to safeguarding

The guidance explains how schools and colleges should promote an inclusive, anti-discriminatory culture where racism and other forms of discriminatory behaviour are recognised, challenged and addressed as part of their safeguarding responsibilities.

The designated safeguarding lead

The guidance sets out that schools should implement robust cover arrangements for periods when the DSL is unavailable due to illness, leave or other circumstances. Arrangements could include a confidential shared mailbox or similar system to make sure safeguarding concerns are received, monitored and acted on without delay.

Information sharing

The guidance on information sharing has been expanded to clarify that:

- when deciding what information to share, schools should consider the relevancy of the information, what the receiving setting needs to know and whether the information is clearly presented and suitably contextualised
- staff should use professional judgement to make sure that any information shared is focused and proportionate
- where a pupil is changing settings and information indicates a risk to others and/or the individual pupil, the receiving school is responsible for assessing risk and putting a safety and support plan in place; the DSLs from both settings should have a conversation where there are concerns.

Online safety

- This section includes new guidance and resources to support schools to understand safety and legal requirements around their **use of generative AI** in teacher-facing and pupil-facing materials.
- All schools should be mobile-phone free environments and schools are expected to have a **mobile phone policy** and relevant procedures making clear how this is implemented in their setting.
- The section highlights that schools should carry out a review of **filtering and monitoring** systems at least once a year. The review should include checks that filtering is working appropriately on all devices connected to the internet. A record should be kept of these checks.

Boarding and residential accommodation

This new section applies to schools and colleges covered by part 6 of the **Equality Act 2010**. It sets out that these institutions:

- must not allow a child to share overnight accommodation with a child of the opposite biological sex

- must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010, their safeguarding obligations and other relevant regulations and standards when allocating sleeping arrangements such as dormitories, tents or shared rooms
- should make alternative arrangements if a child does not want to share a room with another child of the same biological sex
- should consider the section in this guidance on 'considering requests for support with social transition' where a child's concern reflects a request for support with social transition.

Children requiring mental health support

This section has been updated to clarify that the role of education staff is not to diagnose mental health problems, but that staff can help to fulfil four key roles:

- promoting good mental wellbeing and preventing the onset of mental illness
- observing pupils and identifying early those who may be experiencing or at risk of developing mental health problems
- making sure early targeted support is provided
- liaising with and referring to specialist services where needed.

Education staff should also make use of support from their respective Mental health support team (MHST), which are being rolled out to schools and colleges.

Virtual school heads

The guidance highlights that virtual school heads should recognise attendance as a key factor in safeguarding and work with local authorities to set and report on targets to improve school attendance.

Young carers

This new section sets out how schools and colleges should be alert to the needs of young carers and recognise that caring responsibilities can impact attendance, attainment, behaviour and wellbeing. It highlights that early identification is key to making sure young carers receive support at the right time from the right services.

Safeguarding children with medical conditions

This new section sets out information on incidents relating to a child or young person's medical condition. The guidance highlights that a safeguarding referral would only be needed where an incident indicated that a child might be at increased risk of neglect, abuse or exploitation because of their medical condition. For example, this might occur where relevant medical information is not provided to a school or where children are repeatedly sent to school without essential medication.

Children who are questioning their gender

This section is focused on circumstances where a child or their parent has raised a request to the school relating to social transition. Schools should take time to understand the thoughts and feelings of children who are questioning their gender and be professionally curious about the child's experiences, including potential vulnerabilities. Schools should consider adopting policies that maintain flexibility and avoid rigid rules based on gender stereotypes.

Considering requests for support with social transition

- Members of staff should not adopt any changes relating to social transition unless a decision has been made by the school following involvement from the child's parents or carers.
- Schools should make sure that the decision-making process around requests for support with social transition is documented and records are kept.

- Schools should consider whether pupils would be best supported by a policy on social transition which explains the steps the school would take.

Schools and colleges have statutory duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children

- As a first step when considering a request for support with social transition, schools should consider what is in the best interests of the child and other children.
- In most cases, this would be carried out in conjunction with the child's parents or carers, with referral to clinical evidence and advice where relevant.

Parents and carers should be actively involved and their views treated with importance

- The views of the child's parents or carers should be properly considered. In circumstances where involving parents or carers would put the child at a greater risk than not involving them, the school should involve the DSL to determine what action should be taken.
- Schools should explore how best to support conversations with parents and carers, including offering for a staff member to be present or speak to parents and carers on the child's behalf.
- In cases where a child speaks to a staff member about their feelings but does not ask the school to make any changes around support with social transition, there is no reason to share this information any further unless there is a related safeguarding risk.

Accommodating social transition is an active intervention so schools and colleges should take a very careful approach

- Schools should take a very careful approach in relation to social transition. **The Cass Review** acknowledged that there is a lack of good evidence on the long-term impact of social transition on young people.
- Primary schools should exercise particular caution, and the guidance expects support for full social transition in these settings to be agreed very rarely. The Cass Review acknowledges that older children will generally have greater agency to make their own decisions.

Schools should comply with obligations under the Equality Act and Human Rights Act when considering requests for support with social transition

- Where a policy may place a child who is questioning their gender at a disadvantage relative to other children, schools should consider the following:
 - does the policy have a legitimate aim (such as safeguarding or fairness in sport)?
 - is the policy a proportionate means of achieving that legitimate aim?

Discussing constraints on social transition

- Schools should sensitively discuss any constraints to social transitioning, highlighting that supporting social transitioning does not include allowing access to toilets, changing rooms or residential accommodation designated for the opposite sex.
- Schools must be conscious of the rights of pupils and staff in relation to their religion or belief.

Reviews

- Schools and colleges are legally required to record a child's biological sex accurately wherever it is recorded. Schools should make sure that all relevant staff are aware of a child's biological sex.

Children living in stealth

- Schools should keep in mind that some children who socially transition before puberty will be 'living in stealth,' meaning other pupils and/or staff may be unaware of their biological sex.
- Schools should be aware of the vulnerabilities of children who have fully socially transitioned from an early age and may be living in stealth.

Support for children who wish to detransition

- In circumstances where a child wants to fully or partially reverse a request that has been previously agreed, schools should work closely with parents or carers and relevant experts to make sure that children in this position are supported.

Part three: safer recruitment

Regulated activity

In line with the **Crime and Policing Act 2026**, this section removes the supervision exemption from guidance around regulated activity. This means that work carried out in specified places by supervised staff or volunteers now falls under regulated activity.

Contractors

This section clarifies the types of DBS checks self-employed people are now able to apply for.

Volunteers

This section has been rewritten to remove the supervision exemption and reflect further changes to regulated activity in line with the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

- Any person volunteering in a school or college in a role that involves teaching, training, instructing or supervising children for more than 3 days in a 30-day period or overnight is now in regulated activity. This requires schools to obtain enhanced DBS with barred list checks or work with other relevant settings where the person is volunteering to decide who applies for the check.
- Schools must also obtain enhanced DBS with barred list checks for existing volunteers who now fall under regulated activity.
- Where schools are also subject to the **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework**, volunteers cannot begin working within the setting covered by the EYFS framework until the setting has received the volunteer's enhanced DBS certificate including barred list information.
- In cases where volunteers do not fall under regulated activity, schools should undertake a written risk assessment and use professional judgement to decide which checks, if any, are required. The guidance sets out what this risk assessment should consider.

The **Adults who supervise children on work experience** and **Duty to refer to the disclosure and barring service** sections have been rewritten to reflect the revised definition of regulated activity in the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

➤ **[Read our summary of the Early Years Foundation Stage \(EYFS\) framework](#)**

Part four: safeguarding concerns or allegations made about staff, including supply teachers, trainee teachers, volunteers and contractors

Supply teachers, trainee teachers and all contracted staff

The guidance clarifies that schools and colleges need to share safeguarding responsibilities with third party organisations in cases where there is an allegation against an individual from a third party agency.

Schools and colleges remain responsible for gathering the facts and managing the safeguarding process while working closely with the employment agency or business, which will usually lead on any disciplinary action.

Part five: child-on-child sexual harassment and sexual violence

This chapter has been re-ordered and rewritten to highlight the progressive continuum from harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) to sexual violence.

Understanding harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), sexual harassment and sexual violence

This section clarifies that all incidents involving the sharing of nude or semi-nude images require a safeguarding response, whether they are consensual or non-consensual. Schools should take a proportionate approach that considers the age, development and circumstances of the children involved, as well as any elements of coercion, exploitation or vulnerability.

Universal services and community based early help assessment

This section has been retitled from its previous title of 'Early help' and includes an expanded description of universal services and community-based early help.

Referrals to Family Help – including targeted Early help and local authority children's social care

This new section sets out when referrals to Family Help and targeted early help may be appropriate, as well as including information from the previous edition of the guidance on making referrals to local authority children's social care.

Annexes

Annex A: further information is Annex B from the 2025 edition of the guidance, with the following additions:

- updates to the cybercrime, domestic violence, operation encompass and serious violence sections
- a new section on the 'Temporary accommodation notification duty'.

Annex B: role of the designated safeguarding lead is Annex C from the 2025 edition of the guidance, with the following additions:

- expectations around DSL cover arrangements when the DSL is unavailable
- further details on information sharing guidance
- updated CCE and CSE indicators and operation encompass duties.

A full list of changes in Keeping children safe in education 2026 can be found in **Annex C**.

References

Department for Education (DfE) (2026) **Keeping children safe in education**. [Accessed 03/09/2026].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>>

Department for Education (DfE) (2026a) **Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework**. [Accessed 03/09/2026].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>>

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