



Keeping Children Safe in Education Consultation February 2026

Your guide to the changes

Introduction

After two years of minimal changes, this 2026 bumper consultation document collates many factors that have shaped practice for the last couple of years. The consultation incorporates some of the planned changes with the enactment of the Children’s Wellbeing & Schools Bill and integrates the much-awaited guidance around children who are questioning their gender. This has led to a much longer document, now just topping 200 pages.

It is a consultation at this stage and the Department for Education (DfE) are looking for quite comprehensive feedback by 22nd April on around 9 areas - from the physical structure of the document to whether the guidance reflects current safeguarding practice. Following the pattern of previous years, we anticipate a draft KCSiE26 in mid-summer with the final statutory guidance published on 1st September.

As always, we have three webinars walking you through the changes and will be gathering feedback from this to share with the DfE through the consultation. Choose a date and click on a link below to reserve your space.

Friday 27 February

Monday 9 March

Monday 23 March

Gone is the Part 1 summary in Annex A – all staff are now expected to read Part 1 in full. Safeguarding Network will share an audiobook version of Part 1 when it reaches draft stage and as previously, we plan to share London Grid for Learning’s links to translated versions later in the year. Our [KCSiE Knowledge Check](#) will be an invaluable tool in ensuring the range of changes have been properly heard and understood, and our [membership materials](#) provide lots of support in achieving this.

The DfE have also proposed a [one page quick reference guide](#) to Keeping Children Safe in Education Part 1 with core principles, what staff need to know and with an emphasis on information sharing, notes on recording, staff behaviour and whistleblowing. Staff will still need to read Part 1 in full.

Working in the community and with other agencies

One of the biggest challenges in deploying KCSiE26 will be in widening the knowledge base of all staff about the range of early help, child in need, child protection, care, disability and youth secure support available to children in need of additional support. The move to schools having more responsibility for non-statutory interventions is reinforced to an extent – the importance of those close to children intervening early is well understood and this document places a greater emphasis on support before statutory intervention through universal services.

Throughout the document there has been a change in terminology in relation to what we currently know as Early Help. The document renames the overarching principle to Family Help (and adopts the traditional definition of Early Help) and also suggests that more detailed information can be found in Working Together, however we have found there is only one reference to the term "family help" in the latest Working Together. Whilst there remain 46 references to the term "early help" it is likely an updated Working Together will also be published.

The KCSiE consultation then proposes that under Family Help there are two strands, community-based early help (the collective support offered by schools, colleges, health visitors, early years settings and community groups) and targeted early help (the more focused approach partnership-based support developed in local areas). Alongside this reference is made to the role of qualified lead practitioners (who are not necessarily social workers) in para 61 who should be referenced in local assessment and support protocols (para 65). However there is no further information about who may be considered qualified lead practitioners, with Working Together not mentioning the word "qualified" as yet.

Children who are pregnant or a parent themselves, and those who exhibit early signs of abusive, violent or harmful behaviours are added to the list requiring additional support.

There continues to be an emphasis on improving information sharing and Part 1 now includes a direct link to the ICO guidance on [Sharing information to safeguard children and young people in the education sector in the UK.](#)

Effective Referrals to Children's Services training

A Practice Guide to the Child Protection Process training

Definitions

While there are many changes of emphasis through the descriptions of abuse and neglect in the guidance, the safeguarding processes themselves remain largely consistent (although with a greater emphasis on the National Referral Mechanism, below). There is no duty for mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse as previously suggested – this remains under discussion in the Children’s Wellbeing & Schools Bill and may yet make its way into the final document.

There are, however, clarifications around definitions on many issues, including terminology and clarifications, drawn from societal, organisational and students’ learning and experiences in recent years, along with an explicit recognition that safeguarding issues often overlap. Safeguarding Network’s website has a detailed resource page on every topic in KCSiE26, including up-to-date definitions and links to KCSiE throughout. It’s a great free resource for staff and Safeguarding Network members have bite-size staff training packs, scenarios, quizzes and handouts on every topic. We have linked each of the areas to the wider resources on our site should you require further information or training:

- **Child on Child abuse** (paras 29-35) now includes harassment and violence (particularly serious physical assault and harm, and the threat of harm with a weapon). Staff have a responsibility to report to their DSL “whether these concerns are thought to have taken place on or off site”, with schools asked to have a particular focus at times of highest risk (e.g. at the end of the school day). Misogyny is specifically mentioned as a potential part of a culture where there is insufficient healthy challenge. There are new requirements for staff to see child on child abuse as a risk to both victim and alleged perpetrator, and that staff should recognise this is preventable with “timely, evidenced based support” preventing children from going on to commit abuse or violence. There is recognition that child on child abuse is not always from boys to girls, although it remains more likely (para 185) and an explicit recognition that child-on-child abuse is a safeguarding issue for both the victim and the alleged perpetrator (para 32).

[Resources](#)

[Incel Resources](#)

[Training](#)

Definitions

- **Children who are lesbian, gay or bisexual** are considered separately to children who are questioning their gender. LGBTQ+ young people may be vulnerable to discriminatory bullying, and schools should take steps to prevent this, with appropriate sanctions in place (para 244).

Resources

- **Teenage relationship abuse** has a particular focus around physical, sexual, emotional abuse and stalking (para 20).

Resources

- The importance of early identification and effective work with **Young Carers** has been flagged in Part 2 (para 239).

Resources

- The guidance recognises the additional vulnerability of children with **SEND or health issues** adding they may not understand what is happening to them is abuse, they may receive intimate care or they may be isolated from others (para 240). Children's medical conditions are not in themselves indicators of being at safeguarding risk. If there is a clinical incident the DSL should consider whether this triggers a safeguarding duty in line with [Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school](#) (para 243).

Resources

Training

- **Indecent images** - The framing of nude and semi-nudes has been amended throughout to a "self-generated intimate images and/or videos including those generated using AI e.g. deepfakes".

Resources

- The indicators for **emotional abuse** indicators now include verbal abuse such as persistent criticism, belittling or name calling.

Resources

Definitions

- **Sexual abuse indicators** - There is a correction around the indicators of assault by penetration, removing oral sex and adding penetration by an object.

Resources

- Where children have **family members in prison** there is a stronger focus on the experiences of children, the increased likelihood of absence, exclusion, mental ill health, substance misuse and success in education training and employment in later life. The guidance includes the [Prisoners' Families Helpline](#) as a resource and emphasises the importance of support for these children.

Resources

- **Alternative education** - The [voluntary national standards for non-school alternative provision](#) are highlighted in para 204. It is suggested Local Authorities use the standards to build a register of suitable settings for use by schools, but KCSiE reiterates children placed in such provision remain the responsibility of the school and that they should be taking the necessary actions, due diligence and checks to ensure they are meeting students' needs.

Resources

Training

- **Domestic abuse** - [Operation Encompass](#), a measure focused solely on domestic abuse, has had a significant impact across the country. Annex A notes that [in November 2025 the Police were given a legal duty](#) to notify a child's educational setting and the local authority where they have reason to suspect a child may be a victim of domestic abuse, whether connected to a household, present at the time Police attended or not, and whether they are in the household temporarily or permanently. While there are no new responsibilities on schools, they are in a uniquely supportive position for some children to provide timely, informed support. [Free key person training](#) is available to schools and annex A sets out in detail the referral procedure. An amendment to the annex goes on to remind schools of the 2023 statutory guidance on [controlling and coercive behaviour](#).

Resources

Definitions

- So-called honour-based abuse has been renamed in the guidance to **Honour or faith-based abuse**.

Resources

- When a **safeguarding concern arises or an allegation** is made, the head teacher now must consider whether to make a referral to the LADO. This now specifically includes concerns about trainee teachers (para 75) and schools here will follow the same guidance as for supply agencies (para 450).

Resources

Training

- **Preventative education** and its role in developing a zero tolerance culture around sexism, misogyny, misandry, homophobia, biphobia and sexual/violence and harassment has been expanded to include racism, derogatory behaviour and other forms of physical violence and conflict (para 153).

Resources

Training

- The recent **Mobile phones in schools guidance** is referenced in its own section, summarising the requirement that pupils do not have access to their mobile phones.
- The shift in approach to the **reasonable force guidance** is reflected in that such incidents should be 'limited', for the least amount of time, and dependent on the circumstances. This arguably brings the guidance in line with case law and other areas of regulation where there are clear requirements around restraint being both necessary and proportionate.

Resources

Resources

Resources

- The old Annex D on **Host families** has largely been removed or integrated into the guidance (para 403-408).

Resources

Online safety

There are updated online safety expectations to align with future government digital policies. This will also be reflected in other documents such as the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework and Working Together to Safeguard Children. In particular, age and stage appropriate teaching should be offered around “understanding online harms such as sharing images, the prevalence of deepfakes, pornography and misogynistic influencers and when and where to seek help” (para 153). This theme is further developed in the expansion of the definitions of the four C’s of online safety now including extreme sexual or physical violence (content), simulated harmful online AI interactions (content), and making, sending or receiving self-generated intimate images using AI (conduct) (para 158).

Annex A comments on the rise in **cybercrime** and the likelihood of some young people engaging in this activity without understanding the legal or ethical implications.

There are resources available with a link to the DfE policy paper on Generative artificial intelligence (AI) in education, together with the Chiltern Learning Trust and Chartered College of Teaching online resources to help staff use AI safely and effectively (paras 160-1). There is also a link to the Oak National Academy and CEOP materials to support lessons and curriculum development (para 155).

The filtering and monitoring requirements have also been boosted with governors asked to review the effectiveness of arrangements at least once a year. A log should be kept that filtering works on all devices in all relevant locations (para 166).

The oversight of online safety has been clarified (paras 170-172) with continuing emphasis on the Cyber security standards for schools and colleges with additional resources added from the National Education Network and DfE guidance Plan technology for your school.

Resources

Training

Modern slavery, Exploitation, County Lines, and Serious Violence

Staff will now also need to be aware of risk around the risk of **financial exploitation and modern slavery**. There is particular reference (para 35 and others) to the impact of organised networks in CCE and CSE and that suspicious children have been moved for the purpose of exploitation may constitute modern slavery, so should lead to both modern slavery and child protection referrals. The approach to young people who are being exploited is strengthened, removing the reference to the potential of them being treated as offenders and stating clearly they should be treated as victims.

In Annex A the sections on CCE, CSE and County Lines make clear that the child protection processes and national referral mechanism (NRM) should be both followed where there is potential for it to be modern slavery. In the section on the NRM there is an addition to remind schools that children referred through the NRM have access to an Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) to advocate on their behalf and support their recovery.

Resources

The section on **serious violence** as a continuing safeguarding concern (48-51) has been substantially updated. An expectation is placed on staff to report concerns a young person may be carrying (or intending to carry) a weapon to the DSL who must “assess the risk and take appropriate action”. Schools are seen as key agencies in the identification of these concerns, and para 49 sets out disrupted education, exclusion, time in alternative provision, and offending history as particular risks.

The issue is explored further in Annex A. The guidance suggests taking advantage early of “teachable moments” following emergent issues, and recommends mentoring or therapeutic support. In Annex A there is a new expectation that schools listen to children and staff to try to understand where young people may congregate before and after school and where serious violence may occur. They are expected to work with other agencies to understand this risk and co-ordinate a collective response at the end of the school day. There is no link in the consultation but access to the [Youth Endowment Fund’s EPIC tool can be found here](#).

Resources

Harmful sexual behaviour, sexual harassment and/or sexual violence

Part 5 around child-on-child sexual harassment and sexual violence has been reviewed with a greater emphasis on understanding harmful sexual behaviour, the escalatory nature of misogyny and the benefits of earlier intervention in this space (para 521).

The guide sets out “The umbrella term ‘harmful sexual behaviour’ (HSB) is widely used in child protection and applies to behaviour occurring online, face-to-face, or both” (para 525). “When assessing HSB, the ages and developmental stage of the children involved is critical. Sexual behaviour between children may be considered harmful if there is a significant age difference, typically more than two years’ difference or if one is pre-pubescent and the other is not. However, a younger child may also abuse an older child” (para 526).

There is already an expectation that the DSL and deputies have a good understanding of HSB – the 2026 guidance expands on the links to training, supporting preventative education, the policy framework and whole school approach (para 527). There are other changes in this section to aid clarity, focus on risk and needs (rather than just risk), and capture the progression of harmful sexual behaviour to sexual violence.

[Resources](#)

[HSB Training](#)

[SVSH E-Learning](#)

Mental health

The links between mental health and self-harm, eating disorder, suicidal ideation and children making plans to end their life are made explicit (it is positive that youth suicide is now explicitly captured in the guidance), and the guidance states staff are well placed to recognise the warning signs set out in para 45. We highly recommend staff receive training in this area.

Training

A specific expectation is placed on staff to call 999, 111 or take the young person to A&E if they feel a child is in danger (para 47).

This is reiterated in Part 2 which sets the expectation most schools will have a mental health lead (para 221) and recommends close links with the Mental Health Support Team (para 223). The guidance spells out 4 key roles for education staff (para 220):

- Promoting good mental wellbeing and preventing the onset of mental illness.
- Observing pupils and identifying early those who may be experiencing mental health problems or being at risk of developing one.
- Ensuring early targeted support is provided, and
- Liaison with/referral to specialist services where needed.

There are links to the Anna Freud Targeted support toolkit, NHS Every Mind Matters and Hub of Hope resources to support this work in schools and colleges.

Resources

Children who are questioning their gender

The KCSiE26 consultation includes the much-delayed statutory guidance on gender questioning children in line with the Supreme Court decision last year. There are six pages of guidance notes (paras 245-275). The guidance sets out a careful approach with schools taking time to understand the thoughts and feelings of children questioning their gender and be aware of the range of factors they may be experiencing, including mental health, psychosocial needs, relationships and discriminatory bullying (para 248). Policies should maintain flexibility and avoid rigid rules based on gender stereotypes (para 249) and consider whether they should set out the steps they follow when a child requests support with social transition.

Paragraph 251 states: “Schools and colleges should not initiate any action regarding social transition; this guidance applies where a child or their parent has made a request. Members of staff should not adopt any changes relating to social transition unless a decision has been made by a school or college in consultation with parents or carers.”

Schools should work within the following principles, set out in more detail in paragraphs 255 to 268, and that the school’s approach with any student should be kept under review (para 271-2):

- Schools and colleges have statutory duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children.
- Parents and carers should be actively involved and their views treated with importance.
- Accommodating social transition is an active intervention so schools and colleges should take a very careful approach.
- Schools and colleges should comply with obligations under the Equality Act and Human Rights Act when considering requests for support with social transition.

The guidance recognises this will sometimes mean constraints on what they can offer and should be patient and sensitive in their discussions with children (para 269). Schools will appropriately sanction bullying but will also be respectful of the rights to religion and beliefs. The guidance suggests using names rather than pronouns.

Children who are questioning their gender

Staff should always be aware of young people's biological sex and should note this accurately wherever it is recorded (para 273). Where a young person is "living in stealth" the DSL should be involved due to the difficulties and complexities involved (para 274).

The guidance does set out children may not use toilets designated for the opposite biological sex, there should be separate toilet facilities for boys and girls over eight years old (excepting individual toilets in a room that can be locked from the inside) and schools should consider providing an alternative toilet facility where required. Schools should record the rationale for this, with a safeguarding risk assessment for any mixed sex arrangements (e.g. such toilets should open directly onto public areas such as corridors (paras 106-110).

Children in Year 7 and above should not be allowed to undress in front of other children of the opposite biological sex. If a child does not want to use changing areas or showers designated for their biological sex alternatives should be considered, such as another lockable, fully enclosed room or staggering changing times (paras 111-115).

KCSiE26 also has a new section on choice and single sex groups in sport (paras 95-97) stating schools can separate children according to their biological sex, particularly around safety but sometimes around fairness. Where safety is not the driving factor schools will need to consider this as "a request for support with social transition". The guidance also now refers to how some children may be "living in stealth" and factors to consider, as well as the need to consider the needs of children who want to detransition.

Boarding & Residential accommodation is addressed in a new section across paras 191-196. Children of different biological sexes must not share overnight accommodation and schools and colleges must pay attention to the various legal requirements on them when deciding sleeping arrangements. Again, where a child does not want to share accommodation with a child of the same biological sex "alternative arrangements should be sought where possible" and consideration may be given to considering requests for social transition.

Colleges outside the FE sector are exempt from some of these requirements.

Increased requirements on the DSL and Safer Recruitment

Paragraph 125 adds to the requirement for DSLs to have status and authority and states they should also have the appropriate skills and experience. Paragraph 126 and Annex B set out new expectations that there are robust cover arrangements for the absence of the DSL (e.g. illness or leave). There should be a confidential, shared mailbox for the DSL and arrangements to ensure there is no breakdown in safeguarding activity at such times.

An additional consideration has been added to transitions to consider sharing information with a new school or college where this might impact on the safety of the pupil or of others, especially in respect of serious violence or harmful behaviours. It is “good practice for a conversation to take place” between the DSLs where there are concerns.

Annex C reiterates in several places that training for the DSL should also apply to deputy DSLs.

An additional expectation on virtual school heads has also been added to “set and report on ambitious targets to improve [LA’s] ... attendance” rates (para 235).

The section on types of DBS checks (before para 308) has been removed to avoid duplication, and the flow chart of criminal record checks (before para 320) has been improved. Paragraph 320 reminds applicants they can join the DBS update service not just on application but within 30 days of the certificate’s issue date. A simple single central record template has been added at paragraph 345.

Types of visitors to schools are clarified in para 369, but without changes to guidance. There are improvements to the wording of the section on supervising children on work experience but no substantive changes (para 399).

**DSL Support
Programme Training**

**DSL New to the
Role Training**

**DSL Refresher
Training**

New resources

There are six new resources in Annex A:

- [What is county lines and child criminal exploitation?](#) - Missing People advice.
- [SafeCall](#) - Missing People - SafeCall is a national free, confidential and anonymous helpline and support service for young people and family members that are affected by missing, county lines and criminal exploitation. Confidential support and webinars are also available to professionals.
- [County Lines Support and Rescue | Catch22](#) - A specialist support and rescue service for young people and their families who are criminally exploited through county lines. (The service currently operates from London, Merseyside, the West Midlands, West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester).
- [Understanding and responding to AI-generated child sexual abuse material: guidance from the National Crime Agency's CEOP Education programme in collaboration with the Internet Watch Foundation.](#)
- [Financially motivated sexual extortion \(FMSE\): guidance for education settings on FMSE from the National Crime Agency's CEOP Education programme.](#)
- 2019 UK CMOSs' advice - [UK CMO commentary on screen time and social media map of reviews](#) - GOV.UK.
- The [Educate against hate resources](#) have an additional paragraph to remind schools the resources are regularly updated (page 172).

Have your say

This is a draft and still under consultation. Leadership teams should be aware of the following and have prepared policies for implementation in September 2026 that reflect:

- integration of guidance relating to gender-questioning children and its inclusion within statutory processes.
- clarified wording and understanding of early help and family help and assessments.
- clarification and expansion of terminology in policy and reference documents.
- revised annex structures to ensure policy cross-referencing is correct.
- updated training modules for all staff to reflect the changes.
- updated training for DSL staff.

Be aware that there may be differences in the final version that reflect changes to online safety and/or DSL responsibilities in line with other pending guidance documents and that consultation responses may refine or revise the proposed content.

The consultation closes on 22nd April.

Safeguarding Network is [running free webinars](#) on the KCSiE26 consultation and will be feeding back our findings to the DfE.

[View the draft document for consideration in consultation.](#)

[The government consultation document can be found here.](#)

Implementation support

There are huge changes within this document, but Safeguarding Network will help schools, colleges and early years settings across the country with the changes from the consultation through to the implementation of the final version in September.

With our **Essentials** membership, for just **£329+vat a year, you will get...**

- Access to webinars on key topics such as the implementation of the guidance for children who are gender questioning, the changes through the Children's Wellbeing & Schools Bill and webinars on the changes to KCSiE as it is updated.
- An audiobook of Part 1, together with links to LGfL's helpful translations once they are published. We believe it is critical that staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities.
- A suite of resources to deploy with briefings for staff on the changes to KCSiE this year together with access to our KCSiE Knowledge Check to ensure the message has been embedded for just 99p+vat per member of staff.
- An implementation tool for KCSiE26 with suggested wording for policy adaptations, recommendations around each of the changes and an action plan to follow and share with SLT and governors or trustees.
- In-depth presentations, scenarios, quizzes and support materials around every area in Keeping Children Safe in Education, including all the above updates. Our two-year staff safeguarding training curriculum is always up to date and designed to easily slip into staff meetings once a month.
- Free membership of the Association of Child Protection Professionals (worth £330) with access to their resources and the education special interest group so you're part of the interagency discussion as the new multi-agency teams come into being.
- Free use of SWGfL's Whisper anonymous reporting tool (worth up to £450) for the rest of this academic year so your students have clear and open ways to share their concerns about serious violence, bullying, sexual harassment or assault and get personalised help with other concerns. This tool is particularly impressive in that schools can still contact the anonymous student with advice.
- Free, initial advice on any aspect of the new guidance through our telephone and email helpline service.

Our **Enhanced** service adds half-termly self-assessment tools to move beyond compliance to best practice, while for just **£99+VAT per year, governors** get tools to help with oversight, support and challenge of their safeguarding and senior leadership teams.

Finally, our gold standard **supervision** service and **school or college safeguarding reviews** provide support, challenge, care and clarity about how your setting keeps children safe this year.

If you'd like to talk through any of our support offer, please visit our [website](#), drop us an [email](#) or pick up the phone on 01803 862 336.

Building confidence in safeguarding



ABOUT US

Safeguarding Network is here to support you and your staff. Our value for money memberships are perfect for DSLs and their teams, governors and senior leadership teams in early years, primary, secondary, further education, and SEND across individual settings or Trusts.

Build safeguarding confidence in your setting using our time-saving monthly training materials covering every area of KCSiE, including expert resources, INSET Packs, discounted training courses and E-Learning.

We also offer bespoke supervision, safeguarding reviews, and consultancy services.



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TRAINING

Using our network of trainers we provide courses either virtually or face to face providing that greater level of detail.



E-LEARNING

Safeguarding Network has a number of e-learning courses that can either be accessed as part of your subscription or as standalone courses.



SAFEGUARDING DEVELOPMENT REVIEWS

We take a developmental view as opposed to an audit. Our approach is to provide a clear understanding of the strategic and operational complexity and dynamic nature of safeguarding within your school.



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<https://safeguarding.network>