

# Tools to Support Services to Build and Maintain Engagement with Schools

## Step 1: Gaining an Understanding About Young Carers – Information for Governors and Head Teachers



## Key information

Young carers experience particular challenges that impact on their capacity to engage in learning.

To ensure your school's provision meets the needs of young carers and raises their attendance and attainment effectively, an essential first step is to develop your knowledge about:

- Who young carers are and what their caring role might involve.
- The likely number of young carers in each school and why so many are hidden.
- The potential impacts of caring responsibilities on a pupil's achievement, attendance and wellbeing.

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**“As a young carer you often have many worries which can limit concentration. Young carers should have someone there within school to talk to about their caring roles with confidence and trust.”**

Young carer

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- What approach schools need to take to meet the needs of young carers effectively (Phelps, D, Leadbitter, H, Manzi, D, 2010).
- Government's and Ofsted's approaches to young carers.
- Young carers' rights

### Who are young carers?

A young carer is a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person who is ill, disabled, has a mental health condition, or addiction problem.

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**“I have witnessed young carers grow from strength to strength once they are identified and support is in place.”**

A Young Carers School  
Operational Lead

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## What activities might their caring role involve?

The tasks and level of caring undertaken by young carers can vary according to the nature of the illness or disability, the level and frequency of need for care, and the structure of the family as a whole.

Young carers often take on practical and/or emotional caring responsibilities that would normally be expected of an adult. These can include:

- Practical tasks – cooking, housework and shopping.
- Physical care – lifting or helping someone use the stairs.
- Personal care – dressing, washing, helping with toileting needs.
- Emotional support – listening, calming, being present.
- Managing the family budget, collecting benefits and prescriptions.
- Medication management.
- Looking after younger siblings.
- Helping someone communicate.



You might not think that there are many young carers at your school, but pupils with caring responsibilities are not always easy to identify.

## Will there be young carers in every school?

It is likely that there will be many young carers at every school in England.

The 2011 Census identified over 177,000 young carers in England and Wales, although this is widely believed to be the tip of the iceberg.

Further research (BBC, 2010) suggests there could be 700,000 young carers in the UK, many unaware of the impact that caring is having on their lives. That means about one in 12 secondary aged pupils have caring responsibilities.

42% of young carers have said that nobody in their school was aware of their caring role (Sempik, J, Becker, S, 2013).

## Why are many young carers hidden?

- The condition of the person they care for is not obvious so people don't think that the young person needs any help.
- Young carers do not realise that they are a carer or that their life is different to their peers.
- They don't want to be any different from their peers so they don't draw attention to their caring role.
- They believe that the school will show no interest in their family circumstances.

- They want to keep their identity at school separate from their caring role.
- It's not the sort of thing they feel they can discuss with their friends.
- There has been no opportunity to share their story.
- They are worried about bullying.
- They worry that the family will be split up and that they will be taken into care.
- They want to keep caring a secret and/or are embarrassed.
- They see no reason to tell their story and don't believe that any positive action will occur as a result of doing so.

## What impact can caring responsibilities have on a pupil's achievement and wellbeing?

Caring can affect a young person's:

- Physical health: Young carers are often severely affected by caring through the night, repeatedly lifting a heavy adult, poor diet and lack of sleep.
- Emotional wellbeing: Stress, tiredness and mental ill-health are common for young carers.
- Socialisation: Young carers often feel different or isolated from their peers and have limited opportunities for socialising. A quarter of young carers in the UK said they were bullied at school because of their caring role (Carers Trust, 2013).
- Stable environment: Young carers can experience traumatic life changes such as bereavement, family break-up, losing income and housing, or seeing the effects of an illness or addiction on the person they care for.

As a result, caring responsibilities have a significant impact on a pupil's learning:

- 27% of young carers of secondary school age in England experience educational difficulties or miss school (Dearden and Becker, 2004).
- If left unsupported, young carers can continue to struggle with school and have significantly lower educational attainment at GCSE level – the difference between nine Cs and nine Ds (The Children's Society, 2013).
- Young carers are more likely than the national average not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) between 16 and 19. Of these, 75% had been NEET at least once (compared with 25% of all young people) and 42% had been NEET for six months or more (compared with 10% of all young people) (The Children's Society, 2013).



Supporting young carers will not only improve outcomes for these pupils, it will also improve your school's attendance and attainment levels.

## What approach do schools need to take to meet young carers' needs effectively?

It is vital that schools take a whole school approach to identifying and supporting young carers, and all school staff have the knowledge and confidence to identify and support pupils with caring responsibilities.

## What is the whole school approach set out in the Young Carers in Schools programme?

The Young Carers in Schools programme supports schools to adopt a whole school approach to identifying and supporting young carers, in which schools:

- **Have assigned members of staff for young carers** so that a member of the school's governing body and senior leadership team has responsibility for leading and championing the school's provision for young carers, and there is a clearly identifiable lead, responsible for day-to-day implementation.
- **Promote positive images and information** about disability, illness and young carers.
- **Give staff the information they need to identify young carers.**
- **Consult and listen to young carers**, ensuring they have time and space to talk.
- **Embed young carers in existing school systems**, monitoring and tracking their attendance, attainment and wellbeing in the same way as other vulnerable pupil groups.
- **Support and signpost young carers and their families.**

## Why is the whole school approach set out in the Young Carers in Schools programme essential to the effective identification and support of young carers in schools?

A whole school approach for young carers is vital because it:

- **Reduces stigma:** one of the main reasons young carers say they do not access support is stigma. A positive whole school ethos where young carers and their families are respected and valued by pupils, staff and the wider school community is crucial to ensuring young carers and their families feel safe and confident to access support.
- **Increases identification:** many young carers are hidden. All school staff need to know how to identify young carers to ensure they do not slip through the net.
- **Promotes self-identification:** a pupil with caring responsibilities may self-identify to any member of staff whom they feel they can talk to and share their worries and concerns with.

- **Respects young carers information:** all staff need to be aware of the school's process for sharing information about a young carer. This will help ensure that information is only shared with the appropriate consent and with a view to guaranteeing a pupil does not need to repeat their story several times. All school staff should know not to discuss a pupil's caring role in front of their peers.
- **Addresses all of the issues:** It will enable the effective delivery of flexibilities, interventions and support to raise outcomes. Teachers and support staff delivering targeted interventions, such as homework clubs, should know how to ensure these interventions meet young carers' needs, for example, that homework clubs should be run at lunchtime.
- **Creates long-term change:** a whole school approach that places young carers on a similar footing to other vulnerable pupils ensures sustainability.



Building staff understanding and responsibility for meeting the needs of young carers does not mean creating additional functionality within existing staff roles.

Rather, by being aware of how to identify and support young carers, staff will be better equipped to fulfil their existing roles within the school.

## What is Ofsted's approach to young carers?

Ofsted has strengthened its guidance in The Common Inspection Framework: Education, Skills and Early Years (Ofsted, 2015) stating on page 7 that "In making judgements, inspectors will pay particular attention to ... young carers".

The previous Schools Inspection Framework, which The Common Inspection Framework replaces, stated that inspectors may look at outcomes for young carers.

## What is the Government's approach to young carers?

Through the Care Act 2014 and Children and Families Act 2014, the Government has shown its commitment to young carers by ensuring that they are protected from inappropriate or excessive caring.

In order to ensure that the Government's commitment is achieved, children and young people who have caring responsibilities must be identified early and supported to fulfil their potential.

The Government recognises that schools have a vital role to play and are ideally positioned to identify young carers and to initiate support. Doing so will ensure they are able to fully participate in their education and have a fair start in life.

## What are young carer's rights?

Under the Children and Families Act 2014, all young carers under the age of 18 have a right to an assessment from the local authority, regardless of who they care for, what type of care they provide, or how often they provide care. The assessment needs to consider:

- Whether it is appropriate for the young carer to provide care.
- The young carer's needs for support, and their other needs and wishes.
- If any of the young carer's needs for support could be prevented by providing services to the person who is cared for, or another member of the young carer's family.

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**“ Schools have a key role in identifying and supporting all young carers ... Ofsted take particular interest in the experiences of more vulnerable children, including young carers, during inspections.”**

Edward Timpson, the Minister for Children and Families

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Under the Care Act 2014, young carers are entitled to a transition assessment to consider the support young carers may need to prepare for adulthood, and to raise and fulfil their aspirations. The assessment should take place well before the young carer is 18 so there is time to discuss and implement the required support.

The new responsibilities are placed on the local authority, but other services including schools need to play a role in identifying young carers and coordinating support for whole families.

Carers Trust's Know Your Rights Guide at [Carers.org/know-your-rights-support-young-carers-and-young-adult-carers-england](https://www.carers.org/know-your-rights-support-young-carers-and-young-adult-carers-england), is a free guide that explains the rights that young carers have and what should happen when a young person talks to the

council about being a young carer or young adult carer.

It is written for all young carers and young adult carers, especially for those aged eight to 25. Young carers and young adult carers worked with Carers Trust to ensure this is a highly useful and targeted resource for them.

## What funding is available for the development of the school's provision for young carers?

Identifying and supporting young carers is a low cost and effective way of improving the attainment of this often low achieving pupil group.

Young carers are frequently eligible for free schools meals which enables schools to claim the Pupil Premium funding. However, as the needs of young carers mean they require different types of support to other disadvantaged pupils (see Step 6, Tool 1: Checklist of support young carers might need), it is important that schools identify pupils who have caring responsibilities in order to ensure effective use of this funding stream.

Head teachers and school governing bodies are required to publish details online each year on how they are using the Pupil Premium and the impact it is having on pupil achievement. It will be important for them to show how the school is using this funding to meet the needs of eligible young carers.

Pupil Premium funding is not ring fenced. Schools can target their use of this funding towards all young carers, regardless of eligibility, provided that the performance of the eligible pupils is demonstrably improving. Using Pupil Premium funding to support all pupils who are young carers is a low cost and effective way of improving the attainment of this often low achieving pupil group.

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