

KCSIE 2026: KEY CHANGES – AT A GLANCE

Safeguarding Information in 'Part One'



Governing bodies and proprietors should make sure that all staff, including those who do not work directly with children, read 'Part one' of the guidance.

'Part one' also details that staff should understand the full range of support in their local area, from Family Help right up to child protection and care Safeguarding Information in 'Part One'

DSL Q - Do we have clear safeguarding oversight of all pupils in alternative provision, including regular communication and monitoring arrangements?

Information Sharing and DSL Duties



The guidance strengthens expectations for DSL cover, requiring robust arrangements during absence, including illness or leave. Schools should ensure safeguarding concerns continue to be received and acted upon promptly, for example through a confidential shared mailbox or equivalent monitored system.

Schools should use professional judgement to ensure information shared is relevant, proportionate, clearly presented and appropriately contextualised, while ensuring important safeguarding information is not omitted. The focus should be on what the receiving setting genuinely needs to know to safeguard the child and others.

Where information indicates a risk to the child or others, including concerns relating to serious violence or weapons, the receiving school must assess the risk and have appropriate safety and support plans in place. The guidance highlights the importance of direct communication between DSLs where safeguarding concerns exist.

DSL Q - What arrangements are in place to ensure safeguarding oversight continues when the DSL is absent?
How are DSL-to-DSL conversations used to support safe transitions between settings?

Children who may Need Support



Children who may need support now includes those who are:

- pregnant or parents themselves,
- on part-time provision or disrupted education otherwise,
- exhibiting early signs of abusive, violent and/or harmful behaviours
- repeatedly removed from the classroom, including multiple suspensions
- at risk of honour or faith-based abuse

DSL Q - Does your tracking of vulnerable children cross reference any records for attendance, behaviour, or health?
Are you building the picture of the 'whole child' to assess their needs and put support in place?

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Abuse



- The updated definitions for abuse recognise that children may also cause harm to other family members, often referred to as child to parent or care giver abuse.
- The guidance details verbal abuse as a form of emotional abuse, including persistent criticism, belittling and name-calling.
- Child-on-child abuse is now recognised as a safeguarding issue for both the victim and the alleged perpetrator, and is preventable through early identification and support.
- Signs of teenage relationship abuse also includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, stalking and financial exploitation.

DSL Q - Have policies been reviewed with the correct definitions, so that all staff can recognise the signs of abuse?

Mental health



The guidance makes explicit the links between mental health difficulties and safeguarding concerns, including self-harm, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, suicide risk and children making plans to end their lives. Staff are recognised as being well placed to identify warning signs and should receive appropriate training to support early identification and evidence-based interventions.

Schools are expected to promote positive mental wellbeing, identify emerging concerns, provide early targeted support and liaise with specialist services where needed, through a mental health lead and/or strong links to Mental Health Support Teams. Where a child is considered to be at immediate risk, staff are expected to seek urgent help by calling 999, using NHS 111's mental health service, or arranging immediate attendance at A&E.

DSL Q - What training have staff received, or will receive, to help them identify mental health concerns early and understand when these become safeguarding concerns?

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)



Under the Crime and Policing Act, 2026, there is now a mandatory duty for practitioners working with children to report child sexual abuse to the police.

In KCSIE 2026, it is recognised that exploitation may be committed or facilitated by gangs or organised networks, and children should be treated as victims as they are unable to consent to exploitation and may not recognise they are being abused or trafficked. Staff need to be aware that this may constitute as modern slavery.

DSL Q - Do staff understand their referral responsibilities?
What training has taken place around CCE and CSE to support staff awareness?

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Serious Violence



Physical harm is expressly recognised as including serious physical assault, serious harm and threats involving weapons. Staff are expected to report any concerns that a young person is carrying, or intends to carry, a weapon to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

The DSL must assess the risk to both the individual and others, taking account of wider information and contextual concerns. The guidance requires a structured response that includes assessing risk, implementing support plans, considering measures to de-escalate peer conflict, recognising heightened risks associated with exclusion, alternative provision and offending, and providing early, evidence-based intervention.

DSL Q - How do you balance safeguarding, disciplinary action and information-sharing with parents/carers and external agencies in weapon-related incidents?

Child-on-Child Sexual Harassment, Harmful Sexual Behaviour and Sexual Violence



Part Five has been substantially restructured to reflect a progressive continuum from developmentally expected behaviour through inappropriate and problematic behaviour, harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), and ultimately sexual violence. The guidance places greater emphasis on understanding HSB, recognising risk and need, and ensuring a whole-school approach that includes staff training, preventative education, clear policies and established links with specialist support services before incidents occur.

The guidance highlights the importance of early identification and challenge of misogyny and misandry, recognising that these attitudes can escalate into harmful sexual behaviour, sexual harassment and sexual violence if left unaddressed. It also provides greater clarity around developmental expectations, age differences, puberty, power imbalances and consent, making clear that a younger child can abuse an older child and that non-consensual contact may constitute sexual assault. A clear distinction is made that a child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity, and the age of consent 16.

All incidents involving nude or semi-nude images, including AI-generated content, now require a safeguarding response, regardless of whether they appear consensual or non-consensual as both are illegal. Schools are expected to take a proportionate approach, taking account of age, developmental stage, coercion, exploitation and wider vulnerabilities when determining the appropriate response.

The guidance also strengthens expectations around support for children displaying harmful sexual behaviour, recognising that they may themselves have experienced abuse or trauma and require appropriate intervention and support. Alongside supporting victims, schools should ensure arrangements are in place to assess risk, safeguard all children involved and access specialist services where needed.

DSL Q - What training, interventions and specialist support are available for both victims and children displaying harmful sexual behaviour, and how do we assess and manage ongoing risk?

How do we ensure all incidents involving nude or semi-nude imagery, including AI-generated content, receive a proportionate safeguarding response that takes account of age, consent, coercion, exploitation and vulnerability?

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Children questioning their gender and requests for social transition



This has been one of the most significant changes to KCSIE 2026, so settings should ensure they take note.

Structured Approach

The guidance introduces a formal framework for responding to requests relating to social transition. Schools should take time to understand a child's views, experiences and any underlying vulnerabilities, while maintaining flexible approaches that avoid gender stereotypes.

Decision-Making and Record Keeping

Schools should not initiate social transition and individual staff should not make changes informally. All requests, decisions and the reasons for them should be documented, with decisions reviewed where appropriate.

Parental Involvement and Safeguarding

Parents and carers should be involved from the outset and their views given appropriate consideration. However, where parental involvement could increase risk, the DSL should determine the most appropriate safeguarding response.

Welfare and Legal Considerations

Social transition is described as an active intervention requiring a careful, evidence-informed approach, with particular caution expected in primary schools. Decisions must consider the welfare and best interests of both the child and other pupils, alongside schools' safeguarding, equality and human rights obligations.

Biological Sex and Practical Arrangements

Schools must accurately record a child's biological sex and ensure relevant staff are aware where necessary. The guidance also sets expectations around toilets, changing facilities, residential accommodation and sport, with any alternative arrangements supported by appropriate risk assessment and recorded rationale.

Living in Stealth and Detransition

Specific safeguarding consideration should be given to children who are living in stealth, where others may be unaware of their biological sex, due to the additional complexities and vulnerabilities involved. Schools should also provide appropriate support and safeguarding oversight for children who wish to fully or partially detransition. seek urgent help by calling 999, using NHS 111's mental health service, or arranging immediate attendance at A&E.

DSL Q - How can we be assured that requests relating to social transition are being managed consistently, safely and in line with the new guidance, with decisions clearly evidenced, appropriately reviewed and focused on the welfare of all children involved?

What changes to policies, procedures and training are needed?

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www.servicesforeducation.co.uk/safeguarding
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Sport, Toilets, Changing Facilities and Residential Accommodation



The guidance introduces new requirements relating to sport, changing facilities, toilets and residential accommodation, linked to safeguarding responsibilities and requests for support with social transition.

Schools may separate pupils for sport on the basis of biological sex where this is lawful, including for reasons of safety or fairness, and should consider requests relating to social transition within this framework.

Schools must not allow pupils to use toilets or changing facilities designated for the opposite biological sex. Separate toilet facilities must be provided for boys and girls aged eight and over, and pupils aged 11 and above must not be required to undress in front of pupils of the opposite biological sex. Where a gender-questioning child does not wish to use facilities designated for their biological sex, schools should consider appropriate alternative arrangements that do not compromise single-sex provision, ensure safeguarding risks are assessed, and maintain clear records that are regularly reviewed.

The guidance also makes clear that children must not share overnight accommodation with children of the opposite biological sex on residential visits, in boarding provision or other overnight arrangements. Schools should consider their safeguarding duties and legal obligations when allocating sleeping arrangements and, where required, explore appropriate alternative arrangements while maintaining compliance with safeguarding and equality requirements.

DSL Q - Do our arrangements for sport, toilets, changing facilities and residential visits comply with the new guidance while protecting the safety, dignity and welfare of all pupils?

What process do we follow when a gender-questioning child requests alternative arrangements, and how do we ensure decisions are risk-assessed, documented, communicated and regularly reviewed?

Have staff responsible for PE, trips, residential visits and pastoral support been trained on the new expectations and their safeguarding responsibilities?

Managing allegations



The guidance strengthens expectations around managing safeguarding concerns and allegations involving supply teachers, trainee teachers, volunteers, contractors and other third-party staff.

Schools and colleges share safeguarding responsibilities with the relevant agency, business or training provider, but remain responsible for gathering facts, assessing risk and leading the safeguarding response. The third-party organisation will usually lead any employment or disciplinary process, with teacher training providers expected to follow the same procedural principles as supply agencies.

DSL Q - How do we ensure safeguarding responsibilities are effectively coordinated between the school and external agencies or providers?

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Recruitment, DBS Checks and Regulated Activity



Regulated Activity

From 1 September 2026, the Crime and Policing Act 2026 removes the supervision exemption. This means volunteers who teach, train, instruct, care for or supervise children more than three days in a 30-day period, or overnight, will be carrying out regulated activity even if they are supervised.

Volunteers and DBS Checks

The main impact is on volunteers, with more roles now requiring an enhanced DBS check with children's barred-list information. Schools must ensure checks are obtained for both new volunteers and existing volunteers whose role becomes regulated activity as a result of the change. Where volunteers work across multiple settings, organisations should coordinate responsibility for obtaining the check.

Contractors, Trainees and Visitors

The guidance clarifies that schools must ensure contractors, self-employed individuals, trainee teachers and professional visitors have the appropriate level of DBS check for the work they undertake. For self-employed individuals, schools can either obtain a check themselves or verify a certificate obtained by the individual at the required level.

Safeguarding Responsibilities

Work experience and allegation-management processes have been updated to reflect the revised definition of regulated activity. Where safeguarding concerns arise about contractors or trainee teachers, schools are expected to take the lead in managing allegations alongside employers or agencies. The duty to refer to the DBS explicitly applies to both staff and volunteers, including where an individual resigns or ceases volunteering before formal action is concluded.

Other Changes

The guidance confirms that individuals can join the DBS Update Service within 30 days of a certificate being issued. The previous statutory guidance annex relating to the supervision exemption has been removed as it is no longer required.

DSL Q - Are there any existing volunteers whose status will change under the new legislation, and what is our plan to ensure compliance by September 2026?

Have our safer recruitment, visitor and work experience procedures been updated to reflect the new definition of regulated activity?

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Online Safety, AI and Digital Safeguarding



The guidance strengthens online safety expectations and places greater emphasis on teaching pupils about emerging online harms, including deepfakes, pornography, misogynistic influencers, online exploitation, cybercrime and the safe use of AI. The expanded four Cs framework now includes harmful interactions with generative AI, AI-generated explicit content and self-generated intimate images created or shared using AI.

The guidance adopts the term "making or sharing nudes and semi-nudes" and confirms that all incidents require a safeguarding response. The definition now explicitly includes photographs, videos, livestreams, digitally altered images, deepfakes and wholly AI-generated images, with responses expected to be proportionate to age, development, consent, coercion, exploitation and vulnerability.

Schools are expected to understand and manage the safeguarding, legal, ethical, data protection and intellectual property implications of generative AI. There is also a clear expectation that schools should be mobile-phone-free environments by default, supported by appropriate policies and procedures.

Online safety oversight has been strengthened, with cyber resilience and the protection of personal information recognised as safeguarding responsibilities. Filtering and monitoring systems must be reviewed at least annually by the responsible senior leader, supported by the DSL and IT team, with checks covering all internet-connected devices and relevant locations and records retained as evidence. The DSL's responsibilities and staff safeguarding training should also include an understanding of filtering and monitoring arrangements and how concerns are escalated

DSL Q - How can we be assured that pupils are receiving effective education about emerging online risks, including AI-generated content, deepfakes, nudes and semi-nudes, misogyny and cybercrime?

Are filtering, monitoring and mobile phone arrangements are effective, regularly reviewed and identifying online risks in practice?

What schools should do next:

- ☒ Include these updates in September safeguarding training and DSL briefings
- ☒ Review policies and procedures particularly for: Safeguarding and Child Protection, Behaviour, Online Safety, Safer Recruitment, Volunteers, Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Gender Questioning Children / Equality Guidance.
- ☒ Plan out regular briefings across the year to revisit key topics.

Note: This document is a short summary of the current version of KCSIE 2026, published on 1 September 2026. It does not replace reading the full statutory guidance. Settings should verify implementation decisions against the final published KCSIE 2026 and any linked statutory guidance or legislation.