

Section 6: Developing School Policy & Raising Awareness

In order for schools and partner agencies to effectively identify and support young carers, a whole organisation model of support needs to be in place, stemming from management teams downwards.

It is the responsibility of managers in all organisations to make sure all staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to young carers and to develop effective school policies and approaches, to make sure the needs of young carers are met.

This section details some of the measures that schools and partner agencies may want to consider in order to ensure effective whole organisation procedures are in place.

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Developing a School Lead

It is recommended that each school assigns a School Lead, with specific duties and responsibilities to support young carers in school more effectively. The aim of the School Lead is to develop a framework of support which is embedded within the whole school (the role could be part of continued professional development).

In larger schools, school leads on young carers should be supported by school management teams. School management should be aware that all schools will have young carers and that these young carers have specific needs. Many young carers face enormous barriers to learning and it is vital that the leadership of the school puts in place measures to identify and support young carers proportionate to the school.

Why is the Role of School Management Teams Important?

Without identification and support, young carers are at risk of underachieving. Understanding the needs of young carers and providing them with support will help attendance, behaviour, achievement and well-being, as well as help them to reach their full potential.

Establishing a support framework for young carers based around a whole school approach is vital for removing the barriers to learning that young carers can often face. Providing the right support at the right time will help young carers experience the same educational and life experiences as their peers.

A whole school approach of support should be underpinned by policy and aim to develop a culture of understanding and respect where young carers and their families feel safe and confident to seek support. It should include how support is managed and provided, training of staff, teaching on the issues of caring and disability using relevant parts of the curriculum and wider school activities, such as assemblies, and working in partnership with other agencies. Above all, it should enable pupils who are young carers to help shape the support.

Developing School Policy

A caring role can impact heavily upon a young person, creating barriers to learning both in school and at home.

If they have not already done so, each school should consider developing a policy that recognises the needs of and outlines the provision of services for young carers. This can either take the form of a new policy developed specifically for young carers, or it can be the revision of an established policy or policies. This policy should then be monitored to make sure that it is, and continues to be effective.

The policy should reflect a whole school approach to supporting young carers, as well as detailing how your school will work alongside other professionals and agencies, including the voluntary sector, to provide a more coherent and holistic support framework.

The policy should also consider the needs of the family as a whole, including parents who may need further assistance due to mobility or communication difficulties, so that they are fully engaged with the education of their child.

Furthermore, much of the bullying experienced by young carers results from the stigma associated with certain disabilities and health conditions, such as mental ill health or substance misuse. Strong policies on bullying, inclusion and anti-discrimination, which identify young carers as a group of pupils at particular risk, can help to reduce this.

Schools may wish to update existing policies to reflect the needs of young carers.

Training and Awareness Raising

It is important that all staff within your school are trained in and understand the needs of young carers, the issues they and their families face and the barriers they experience to learning. It is recommended that staff be familiar with possible indicators, the importance of early identification and how to initiate timely support.

Young Carers consistently say that they want someone in their school with whom they can talk and share any worries and concerns. It is often a non teaching

member of staff who first becomes aware of a young carer's situation, which is why it is imperative that it is not solely teaching staff who benefit from training. Issues often arise when supply teachers encounter pupils who are young carers and they are unaware of the issues so it is wise to include them in training and awareness raising as much as possible.

Training and awareness raising should be embedded into ongoing professional development so that young carers remain at the forefront. Reminders on staff notice boards along with other prompts are also useful and a strong link with your local young carers' service will elevate young carers on the 'radar'.

In addition to an understanding and awareness of the issues faced by carers, staff should be aware of the importance of a whole school approach as well as the procedures for bringing in support from within and from outside the school. It is also useful to understand the importance of PSHE lessons and how these can help promote an understanding and awareness of the needs of young carers and their families.

It may be beneficial to utilise outside agencies, such as a local Young Carers' Service to provide support with staff training. Your school might want to consider inviting other professionals working within your school to join training sessions, and even share training with other schools in the same cluster group.

Staff training should cover:

- The barriers, issues and needs faced by young carers.
- The impact of being a young carer.
- Why young carers are often hidden and the possible indicators of a young carer.
- The importance of whole family support and of multi-agency working and what support is available both within and outside of the school.

It is also worth noting that issues may arise during training sessions for staff who have also been carers or who are currently carers. It may therefore be useful to make information available for adult carers.

Raising Awareness Amongst Pupils

Bullying experienced by young carers can sometimes be the result of the stigma associated with some disabilities, mental and physical ill-health and substance misuse. Raising awareness of young carers' issues amongst pupils in school will help young carers to gain understanding and support from their peers.

Young carers themselves have suggested that young carers issues and information on disabilities be included in PSE lessons, assemblies and other relevant parts of the curriculum.

Steps to Take Beforehand

It is strongly recommended that a whole school support system is already in place before your school actively begins to identify young carers and raise awareness of young carers amongst pupils. Raising awareness may encourage some pupils to consider issues relating directly to themselves for the first time and so it is important for them to see that support is already available before they speak to an adult. This could include:

- A named person within the school that pupils can talk to following the assembly or lesson.
- Establishing ground rules with the class to provide a safe environment should a young person identify themselves within the lesson.
- Sensitivity around case studies or materials you use, ensuring they reflect positive images of disability and the reality of being a young carer.

Challenging Stereotypes

Teaching all pupils about disabilities, mental and physical ill-health, substance misuse, the issues surrounding a caring role (in a non-sensationalist way) and providing an opportunity to challenge stereotypes will help them to understand that a caring responsibility in the home is a way of life for some people and that anyone could become a young carer. It is beneficial to teach pupils that young carers are no different to other young people and that they have the same hopes, dreams and pressures as all young people, but with the added pressures of a caring role.

Raising awareness of carers, disabilities, mental and physical ill-health and substance misuse can help create more empathy towards young carers and more understanding as to why they may sometimes seem unsociable, stressed, worried or angry. It will also help pupils acknowledge and value the complicated responsibilities that young carers can have and may explain why they can't attend clubs or why they have to rush off after school. Not only will this help remove the stigma associated with certain disabilities and illness, thus helping to prevent bullying, but it will also help young carers to talk about their responsibilities with their peers.

By embedding these issues within the curriculum, it is likely that a more accepting and understanding environment will be built over the long term, one where young carers feel safe and confident to share their stories and where they are accepted for who they are and supported by their peers.

How to Raise Awareness Amongst Pupils

- Use relevant parts of the curriculum, such as PSE/Health & Wellbeing lessons, to inform pupils of the issues.
- Use assemblies to provide opportunities to promote knowledge and understanding of disabilities, mental and physical ill-health and substance misuse in relation to the issues surrounding a caring role.
- Invite relevant local services to make presentations about topics such as mental ill-health.
- Provide information about sources of support on notice boards.
- Train peer mentors within the school.

Information for Young Carers and Parents

It is vital that both pupils and families have information about the support services available in school. Information for young carers and their families is central to the whole school approach and is essential for support. Demonstrating what support is in place clearly will not only help shape the ethos of the school, but should also encourage pupils and families to come forward and seek support.

Young carers often do not wish to self-identify. This may be because they see no benefit of going through the difficult task of doing so. Or it may be simply because they are not aware that they are young carers.

It is therefore important to provide clear, accessible and up to date information explaining the role of a young carer along with what support is available to them and their families. Pupils need to know how to access this support and be encouraged to do so.

Information must be permanently available, since anyone can become a young carer at any time, and should be available in different settings across school. It is also useful to display photos and names of key support staff.

Methods of Communication

The following methods of communication could be considered for communicating with young carers and parents:

- School notice board
- School intranet/internet page
- School diary
- Newsletters
- Assemblies
- Books and film
- Events, for example Carers Week (www.carersweek.org)

Checklist for School Lead and Leadership Teams

This document contains a list of points to help ascertain what steps your school has taken so far and what steps you could consider in the future.

Policy and Planning	Yes	No	Notes
A nominated school lead is in place and a team has been identified to support this role.			
A regular programme of awareness raising for all staff about the needs of young carers is in place.			
There is adequate and funded provision for care, personal development etc. The needs of young carers (and their families, where appropriate) are reflected in all policies and practice.			

Management	Yes	No	Notes
There are secured pastoral arrangements supporting the needs of young carers and these are linked with available support out of school.			
Appropriate communication systems are in place for the parents of young carers.			
There is reference to young carers in appropriate sections of the school policy and school development plan.			

Monitoring, evaluation and review	Yes	No	Notes
There are opportunities to develop all pupils' awareness of the needs of particular groups of vulnerable pupils, such as young carers in, for example, PSE/health and wellbeing lessons.			

Steps have been taken to ensure that young carers are given every opportunity to be fully included in school life and activities.			
Systems have been established to monitor the well being and academic progress of young carers.			
There is a robust and regular programme of self-review to monitor and revise provision for young carers.			

Policy Content Guidance

The following suggested points should be considered when creating/revising your school's policy for young carers. Please adapt these accordingly.

Current Policy	√
The school views young carers as any other pupil, but understands that they have the additional burden of caring responsibilities.	
The school will keep up to date with national and local developments and with legislation and guidance affecting young carers and their families.	
The whole school is committed to meeting the needs of young carers so that they are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school and have equal access to their education as their peers.	
A school lead will be assigned and will have special responsibility for young carers and their families.	
Training on young carer issues will be embedded in ongoing professional development for all staff.	
During the school enrolment process for new pupils, the school will identify whether: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Parent (s) or family members have disabilities or other long-term physical or mental health problems. ➤ The pupil helps to look after them and if this has an impact on their education. 	
Pupils who are young carers will be identified along with any additional needs they may have.	
The school will use and evaluate data effectively to identify and monitor the progress made by young carers.	
The school will aim to offer support to improve attendance and pupil's well-being.	
The right to pupil's and families' privacy will be respected and the school will only share information with professionals and agencies on a 'need to know basis' in order to support pupils and families.	
Information about support available for young carers and how to access it will be made clearly available to both pupils and families.	
The school recognises that young carers and their families need to receive coordinated support by the school, working in partnership where appropriate with general practitioners, young carers' services, behaviour and education support teams.	
Young Carers will be referred or signposted to other support agencies and professionals as appropriate, including the local young carers' service.	
The school will refer or signpost families to other support services when	

appropriate.	
The school adheres to the <i>Disability Discrimination Acts (1995, 2005)</i> .	
The school is accessible to parents with disabilities and/or illness, offering additional support to enable them to attend parents' evenings or other school events. Home visits will be considered where appropriate.	
The school will offer support to the young person and their family during the transition process, sharing agreed information with their new school/college lead for young carers and their families.	
Relevant aspects of the curriculum, such as PSE and health and well being lessons, will be used to encourage a positive approach from all teachers and staff working with young carers.	
The school will use the curriculum to promote a full understanding, acceptance of, and respect for, issues such as caring, disability and impairment. For example, embedding the challenges faced by young carers into PSE/health and wellbeing lessons.	
The school will consider alternatives if a young carer is unable to attend out of school activities, such as sports coaching or concerts, due to their caring role. The school will also consider lunch time detentions rather than after school ones.	
The school will allow young carers to use a telephone to call home during breaks and lunchtimes so as to reduce any worry they may have about a family member.	
Other appropriate policies, such as a bullying policy, will take young carers into account.	

A Model School Statement for Pupils and Families

At (INSERT SCHOOL NAME) we are aware that pupils in our school may well have caring roles at home.

We believe that all children and young people should have equal access to education, regardless of what is happening at home and that no child should have to take on inappropriate or excessive caring responsibilities.

When a young person looks after someone in their family who has a serious illness, disability, mental ill-health or substance misuse problem, they may need a little extra support to help them get the most out of school.

We aim to understand the issues faced by young carers. Our policy for young carers states how we will support any pupil who helps to look after someone at home.

We aim to support young carers through a whole school approach and through working with other agencies and professionals, with the understanding that support for the whole family is in the best interests of the young carer.