



# SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

WITH DR SANDRA WISEMAN

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## What schools need to know - New National Strategy on Child Poverty

On 5th December 2025, the government published its long-awaited Child Poverty Strategy, a wide-ranging plan aimed at reducing child poverty across the UK, improving living standards for families, and boosting children's life chances.

For schools, this represents a potentially major shift both in terms of the support available for pupils and families, and the role schools may play in helping deliver that support.

### Key measures that affect schools and pupils

Here are the main aspects of the strategy with direct relevance to schools, pupils, and families:

- **Expanded Free School Meals (FSM):** From the start of the 2026 school year, every pupil whose household receives Universal Credit (UC) will be eligible for free school meals regardless of parental income outside UC.
- **Free breakfast clubs:** The strategy provides funding for schools in England to offer free breakfast clubs for primary-aged children.
- **Support to reduce essential living costs:** Measures include expanded support for childcare costs, increased payments under the Healthy Start scheme (for pregnant women and young children), improved access to discounts for heating costs, and reforms to maintenance/payment systems, all aiming to ease financial pressure for families.
- **Holistic and long-term approach:** The strategy combines income support, cost lowering, and strengthened local services (childcare, family support hubs, etc.). It also introduces a framework for monitoring "deep material poverty" going beyond income to consider whether families can afford basic essentials (food, heating, housing, children's needs) for a sustained period.

The government estimates that, by 2030, the strategy could lead to 550,000 fewer children living in relative low income (after housing costs) compared with current projections, making this the largest reduction in child poverty seen under a single Parliament.

### What this means for schools - Opportunities and considerations

For schools, the strategy offers both opportunities to better support pupils and responsibilities to respond thoughtfully. Here are some key implications:

- **Increased demand for FSM and breakfast clubs:** With free school meals and breakfast clubs extended to more children, schools may see a surge in take-up. Planning will be needed for hall space, staffing, nutrition standards, and funding to ensure quality provision.
- **Better attendance, wellbeing and engagement:** For pupils from families under financial strain, reliable access to nutritious meals and early-morning breakfast could improve concentration, attendance, behaviour, and overall wellbeing, which supports educational attainment.
- **Stronger relationship with families:** Schools could become even more central hubs for support, referring or signposting families to local support services (childcare, benefits advice, family hubs).
- **Potential for additional pastoral and safeguarding responsibilities:** As more families access financial and social support, schools may need to monitor and support non-academic needs (e.g. housing instability, food insecurity, health).
- **Need for communication and equity awareness:** Schools should proactively communicate changes to families (e.g. eligibility for FSM under UC), ensure that stigma is avoided, and make sure vulnerable or newly eligible pupils are supported.

Read: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/child-poverty-strategy>

Read: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-half-a-million-children-to-be-lifted-out-of-poverty-as-government-unveils-historic-child-poverty-strategy>

## What schools should know - New "Best Start" Family Hubs arriving from 2026

The government has published new guidance for the rollout of Best Start Family Hubs, set to begin from April 2026. These Hubs are designed to provide a single, joined-up access point to a wide range of services for families, from pregnancy, early years, and childcare to support for older children and families up to age 19 (or 25 for children with additional needs).

For schools, this initiative could be a game-changer, offering new ways to connect with families, support children's wellbeing, and work alongside local services to improve outcomes.

### What are Best Start Family Hubs - The basics

- **Family Hubs bring together services from health, education, social care, and community groups,** including parent support, childcare advice, speech and language development, counselling, and SEND support.
- **They use a whole-family, relationship-centred approach:** not just focused on early years, but supporting families through different stages, from pregnancy, infancy, early years, to teenage years and beyond.
- **Hubs are designed to be inclusive and accessible,** both physically (in community buildings, existing children's centres, or other public buildings like libraries or leisure centres) and virtually/online, to reach families who might struggle to access support otherwise.

### Why it matters for schools

Here's how the Best Start Hubs could intersect with the work of schools, especially primary and early-years settings:

- **Easier access to family support for pupils,** families dealing with health, financial, housing or other difficulties could get support via the hubs, reducing stressors that affect children's learning and wellbeing.
- **Early identification and intervention:** Hubs include support for children with additional needs (SEND), plus early-years health, speech/language, home-learning advice, which can help identify needs early and ease children's transition into school.
- **Improved school-community partnerships:** Schools, Hubs, health services, and community organisations will ideally work together, enabling smoother communication and more holistic support for pupils and families.
- **Support for parents/carers:** Parenting advice, emotional-wellbeing support, childcare support, and practical help can reduce family stress, which tends to improve children's stability, attendance, behaviour and readiness to learn.
- **Reducing inequalities:** Because Hubs are prioritised for disadvantaged or high-need areas, this initiative could help narrow gaps in opportunity, early development, and school readiness, helping all children start school on a more equal footing.

### What schools could do to get ready and engage

- **Connect with your local Hub,** once established, make contact with the local Family Hub to understand what services will be available and how families at your school can access them.
- **Inform parents/carers,** include information about the Hubs in newsletters or during parent meetings so families are aware of additional support available (childcare, health, parenting, SEND, etc.).
- **Collaborate on transitions,** for children entering reception or moving between stages, work with Hubs to support early-years development and smooth transitions (especially for children with SEND or additional needs).
- **Use Hub support to complement school provision,** when families face issues beyond education (health, housing, wellbeing), signpost them to Hubs rather than trying to manage everything internally, this may lead to better support and less burden on school staff.
- **Monitor and feed back,** keep track of how many families at your school use the Hub services and whether it helps with attendance, wellbeing, early-years outcomes, feedback can inform local planning and school strategy.

### Read:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-family-hubs-and-healthy-babies-guidance-for-local-authorities>

## Supporting families under pressure - What schools should know about Parenting Through Adversity

The "Parenting Through Adversity (11-18)" Practice Guide, published by Foundations, sets out evidence-based advice on how to support families with children or young people aged 11-18 who face adversity. "Adversity" can include factors such as socio-economic disadvantage, parental stress or poor mental health, family instability or other challenges that may impact a family's capacity to parent.

For schools, the Guide offers a roadmap to understanding how targeted parenting and family-support interventions, beyond standard school-based support can contribute to children's wellbeing, social and emotional development, behaviour and overall success.

### Key findings from the Guide – What works

According to the Guide, well-designed parenting support programmes for families facing adversity can lead to multiple positive outcomes. Benefits include:

- Strengthened parenting skills and confidence.
- Improved parent-child relationships and overall family functioning.
- Reductions in challenging behaviours from children and young people, including anti-social behaviour, behavioural issues, or internalising difficulties such as anxiety, withdrawal or low mood.
- Reduced parental stress and better parental mental health, which can help stabilise family life and improve capacity to support children.

### Read:

<https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/parenting-through-adversity-11-18/>

## Forthcoming free safeguarding webinars for Autumn term 2 2025

Trauma - Tuesday 16th December

Spring term 1 2026

Knife crime - Tuesday 13th January

Neglect - Tuesday 20th January

FGM - Tuesday 27th January

Eating disorders (Bitesize webinar) - Tuesday 3rd February

Children with a family member in prison (Bitesize webinar) - Tuesday 10th February

### Reminder:

The S4S Safeguarding office will be closed from Friday 19th December and re-open on Monday 5th January 2026. The Safeguarding update will be back on Tuesday 6th January 2026.

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