



# SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

WITH DR SANDRA WISEMAN

TUESDAY 24TH MARCH 2026 • ISSUE 170

## **Working Together 2026: What schools need to know**

### **Key safeguarding updates every school must act on**

The 2026 update to Working Together to Safeguard Children strengthens expectations around multi-agency working, early help, and family-focused practice. It aligns with wider children's social care reforms and signals a shift towards earlier, more coordinated support for families. Below is what this means in practice for schools.

#### **1. A stronger focus on Family Help**

##### **What's changed:**

- Introduction of "Family Help", bringing together early help and targeted support
- Clearer expectation to support families earlier, before crisis point

##### **What schools should do:**

- Identify need earlier and refer promptly for support
- Strengthen relationships with families
- Record early help decisions clearly on systems like CPOMS

#### **2. Multi-agency working is sharper and more accountable**

##### **What's changed:**

- Clearer expectations for Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA)
- Stronger emphasis on shared responsibility and communication

##### **What schools should do:**

- Be proactive in multi-agency meetings and escalation
- Ensure DSLs challenge appropriately when thresholds are unclear
- Evidence professional curiosity and follow-up

#### **3. A system-wide shift: safeguarding is everyone's responsibility**

##### **What's changed:**

- Reinforces that safeguarding applies to all practitioners, not just specialists
- Promotes a more inclusive, whole-system approach

##### **What schools should do:**

- Ensure all staff understand their safeguarding role
- Embed safeguarding into daily culture, not just policy
- Use training to reinforce "it could happen here"

#### **4. Earlier intervention, less waiting for thresholds**

##### **What's changed:**

- Move away from late intervention toward preventative support
- Encourages action before statutory thresholds are met

##### **What schools should do:**

- Avoid "waiting for it to get worse"
- Use low-level concerns to build a bigger picture
- Strengthen pastoral and early intervention pathways

#### **5. Stronger voice of the child and family**

##### **What's changed:**

- Greater emphasis on listening to children and families
- Expectation that their views inform decisions

##### **What schools should do:**

- Record the child's voice clearly in safeguarding records
- Demonstrate how it influences decisions and actions
- Ensure pupils know who to talk to and feel heard

#### **6. More focus on keeping families together (where safe)**

##### **What's changed:**

- Reinforces national direction: support families to stay together
- Increased use of family networks and kinship support

##### **What schools should do:**

- Work collaboratively with parents, even in complex situations
- Avoid overly punitive approaches
- Consider the wider family context in safeguarding decisions

#### **7. Clearer expectations for leadership and systems**

##### **What's changed:**

- Stronger emphasis on leadership accountability
- Focus on effective systems, not just compliance

##### **What schools should do:**

- Ensure safeguarding systems are:
  - Consistent
  - Well-recorded
  - Defensible
- Regularly audit practice, not just paperwork

#### **Key takeaway for schools**

Working Together 2026 is less about new processes and more about doing safeguarding better, earlier, and together.

#### **Quick checklist for DSLs**

- Are early help pathways clearly understood by staff?
- Is the child's voice consistently recorded?
- Are multi-agency meetings robustly challenged and followed up?
- Is your safeguarding culture proactive, not reactive?
- Do records show a clear chronology and decision-making rationale?

#### **Read:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children-2#full-publication-update-history>

#### **Attendance and Safeguarding**

##### **Children with a Social Worker: Key Messages for Schools (2026).**

##### **Attendance is a safeguarding issue**

Children with a social worker are significantly more likely to be absent, and missing school can indicate risk, harm, or unmet need.

- **Attendance = safeguarding signal**
- Persistent or severe absence may indicate neglect or wider risk
- Patterns of absence should be treated as early warning signs

##### **School action:**

- Monitor patterns, not just percentages
- Act early, don't wait for thresholds

##### **Stronger multi-agency working**

- Schools must inform social workers of unexplained absence
- Attendance should be a standing item in safeguarding discussions

##### **School action:**

- Ensure clear communication between DSL, attendance lead, and social worker

##### **Understand the child's lived experience**

Absence often reflects:

- Mental health needs
- Family instability
- SEND or unmet needs

##### **School action:**

- Use professional curiosity
- Avoid purely punitive approaches

##### **Keep the child's voice central**

- Children's views must inform decisions

##### **School action:**

- Record the child's voice
- Ask what is making attendance difficult

##### **Work with families**

- Families are key to improving attendance

##### **School action:**

- Build trust
- Offer support alongside challenge

##### **Use data to identify risk**

- Look for trends and sudden changes

##### **School action:**

- Align attendance with safeguarding records and concerns

#### **Quick DSL checklist**

- Do we treat absence as a safeguarding concern?
- Are social workers informed promptly?
- Are patterns analysed and acted upon early?
- Is the child's voice clearly recorded?

#### **Read:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-attendance-of-children-with-a-social-worker>

#### **Summer term 1 - 5-minute 'bitesize' and audio version safeguarding refresher videos**

**Forced marriage - Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> April**

**Private fostering - Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> April**

**Homelessness - Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May**

**Sexism and sexual harassment - Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May**

**Identifying young carers in school - Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May**

**Please note** that the S4S Safeguarding Office will be closed from **Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March** and will reopen on **Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2026**. If you have an urgent safeguarding query during this period, please email [Lauren.Jones@services4schools.org.uk](mailto:Lauren.Jones@services4schools.org.uk) or contact Lauren on **07908 530783**.

The safeguarding update will resume on Tuesday 15th April 2026. Wishing you all a very happy and well-deserved Easter break.

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