



# SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

WITH DR SANDRA WISEMAN

TUESDAY 12TH MAY 2026 • ISSUE 175

## Crime and Policing Act 2026: What schools need to know

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 received Royal Assent on 29th April 2026 and introduces a wide range of reforms aimed at tackling serious violence, anti-social behaviour, child exploitation and violence against women and girls. While much of the legislation is focused on policing and criminal justice, several areas are directly relevant to schools, safeguarding teams and education leaders.

### Child criminal exploitation and safeguarding

One of the most significant developments for schools is the strengthened focus on child criminal exploitation (CCE). The legislation introduces new offences targeting adults who exploit children for criminal purposes, alongside new preventative orders designed to disrupt exploitative behaviour before further harm occurs.

For schools, this reinforces the importance of:

- recognising early indicators of exploitation
- understanding links between county lines, coercion, missing episodes and peer association
- maintaining robust information-sharing with safeguarding partners
- recording contextual safeguarding concerns clearly and chronologically
- ensuring pupils understand grooming, coercion and exploitation risks

Schools should also review how staff identify pupils who may be vulnerable to exploitation due to attendance concerns, exclusion, social isolation, SEND, family instability or online contact with unknown individuals.

### Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse

The Act introduces a new statutory duty requiring certain professionals working with children and young people to report child sexual abuse when they become aware of it. It also creates a criminal offence of intentionally preventing someone from making such a report. Although detailed implementation guidance is still expected, schools should begin considering:

- how concerns are escalated internally
- staff confidence in identifying child sexual abuse
- whistleblowing procedures
- record-keeping expectations
- safeguarding training relating to professional curiosity and low-level concerns
- leadership oversight of safeguarding culture

DSLs may wish to review whether current systems ensure that concerns cannot be minimised, delayed or overlooked.

### Knife crime and offensive weapons

The legislation strengthens powers relating to offensive weapons and increases penalties connected to knife-related offences. This forms part of the government's wider "Safer Streets Mission" to reduce knife crime and serious violence. Schools should consider whether current safeguarding and behaviour procedures sufficiently address:

- carrying or possession of weapons
- contextual safeguarding risks outside school
- local community violence
- pupil vulnerability to gang affiliation
- transition points and vulnerable peer groups
- preventative education through PSHE and safeguarding curriculum

There may also be implications for risk assessments, site security and partnership working with local police and violence reduction teams.

### Online abuse and AI-generated child abuse material

The Act includes measures to address AI-generated child sexual abuse material and online exploitation. New offences target the creation and distribution of AI-generated abuse content and related instructional material. This highlights the growing need for schools to ensure online safety education reflects emerging technology risks, including:

- AI-generated imagery
- manipulated images and deepfakes
- online coercion
- sextortion
- image-based abuse
- online grooming

Schools should review filtering, monitoring and online safety curriculum provision to ensure emerging harms are addressed proactively.

### Anti-social behaviour and community safety

The Act introduces new "Respect Orders" aimed at addressing persistent anti-social behaviour.

Although primarily community-focused, schools may see increased partnership expectations with local police and safeguarding partners where pupils are involved in repeated anti-social behaviour, community incidents or violence outside school. This may reinforce the importance of:

- contextual safeguarding approaches
- early intervention
- attendance monitoring
- family support
- multi-agency working

- trauma-informed responses rather than purely punitive approaches

### Implications for safeguarding leadership

The wider direction of travel across the legislation aligns closely with recent updates to safeguarding guidance, including the strengthened multi-agency expectations within Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026. Schools should anticipate continued emphasis on:

- robust safeguarding culture
- timely information sharing
- clear safeguarding records
- early identification of vulnerability
- contextual safeguarding
- exploitation awareness
- staff training and professional curiosity
- partnership working with police and safeguarding agencies

DSLs and governors may wish to schedule time over the coming months to review policies, training programmes and safeguarding procedures in light of the new legislation and forthcoming statutory guidance updates.

Read:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/crime-and-policing-act-2026>

Read:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/biggest-shake-up-in-decades-to-tackle-local-crime>

## Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Annual Report 2024-25: What schools need to know

The latest annual report from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel highlights continuing concerns around child mental health, parental mental health, extrafamilial harm and the importance of professional curiosity. The report analyses 330 serious safeguarding incidents and 82 Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews from across England. Several key themes are particularly relevant for schools.

### Mental health remains a significant safeguarding factor

The report identifies increasing concerns around children with mental health needs, alongside the impact of parental mental ill health on children, particularly younger children. Schools are often the professionals who see children most regularly and may notice changes in presentation, behaviour, attendance or emotional wellbeing first.

### Extrafamilial harm continues to grow

Children continue to face risks beyond the home, including criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, bullying, peer abuse and online harm. The report reinforces the importance of contextual safeguarding approaches and strong multi-agency working.

### Professional curiosity is critical

Reviews repeatedly identified missed opportunities where professionals did not fully explore concerns, challenge explanations or recognise cumulative risk. Schools should continue promoting a safeguarding culture where staff feel confident to question, escalate and record concerns clearly.

### Information sharing and recording matter

The report highlights the importance of timely information sharing, accurate chronology building and effective multi-agency communication. Clear safeguarding records, detailed DSL oversight and robust follow-up remain essential.

### Vulnerable children can become less visible

The Panel continues to warn that children who are absent, persistently missing, isolated or less visible to services are at greater safeguarding risk. Attendance, inclusion and maintaining trusted relationships remain important protective factors.

Read:

<https://childsafeguarding.independent-panel.uk/publication/annual-report-2024-25/>

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

**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 22<sup>nd</sup> May and will reopen on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 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 'Weekly Safeguarding Update' will resume on **Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2026**.

## Summer term 2 - 5-minute 'bitesize' and audio version safeguarding refresher videos

**FGM - Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June**

**CCE and serious violence - Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June**

**CSE - Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> June**

**Domestic abuse - Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June**

**Radicalisation and extremism - Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> July**

**Child abduction and community safety incidents - Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July**

**KCSIE 2026 - Date to be confirmed**

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