



**Government White Paper:
Every Child Achieving and Thriving
February 2026**



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SAFEGUARDING
MATTERS**

Based on the Government's 2026 School's White Paper: Every Child Achieving and Thriving

Purpose of this Briefing

To provide DSLs, senior leaders, and governors with a concise overview of the white paper's reforms and the implications for safeguarding culture, systems, and practice in schools.

The Government's white paper sets out key themes that are particularly relevant to the area of safeguarding:

A More Inclusive, Consistent SEND System

The white paper sets out a decade long reform programme to create a more coherent national SEND system.

Safeguarding implications:

- Earlier identification of need becomes a statutory expectation, not a “best endeavour”.
- DSLs must ensure safeguarding and SEND processes are tightly aligned, especially around unmet need, behaviour, and vulnerability. This means evidence-based practice around identifying needs quickly and offering support at the earliest opportunity.
- Schools will be expected to evidence how they reduce escalation to crisis through early intervention.

Strengthened Early Help & Multi-Agency Working

The reforms emphasise earlier, more coordinated support for families and children.

Safeguarding implications:

DSLs will need to demonstrate proactive engagement with early help pathways.

- Expect increased scrutiny of how schools contribute to multi-agency assessments and planning. In connection with the important messages of KCSIE there continues to be a huge emphasis on the need to identify needs early and act preventatively with children and their families in line with the changing offer around early help - community based early help and best start family hubs. This also means evidence-based practice around interventions offered and their impact and rationale for escalation.
- Chronologies and cumulative risk analysis will become even more important. DSLs will need to ensure effective record keeping and rationale for decision

making including evidence of how early intervention has not been engaged with or effective.

Workforce Expansion & Capability

The white paper commits additional teachers and a stronger specialist workforce.

Safeguarding implications:

- More staff does not automatically mean safer practice - DSLs must ensure new staff are trained, supervised, and confident in safeguarding responsibilities. This also means identifying the difference between a SEND need and a safeguarding one.
- Increased specialist capacity (e.g., SEND specialists) should support earlier identification of vulnerability and reduce safeguarding escalation.

Behaviour, Attendance & Pastoral Reform

The white paper reinforces expectations around consistent behaviour cultures and improved attendance.

Safeguarding implications:

- Persistent absence will continue to be treated as a safeguarding risk.
- DSLs must ensure attendance monitoring is integrated with safeguarding systems. This means demonstrating why persistent absence is a risk to the child and family and what steps have been taken to offer intervention and services and why it has not been effective.
- Behaviour incidents must be analysed for underlying need, vulnerability, or exploitation risk. Again, being able to highlight the connection between attendance, behaviour and risk.

Curriculum Reform & Wider Children's Outcomes

A stronger focus on literacy, numeracy, and curriculum consistency is intended to reduce long-term disadvantage.

Mission North East will focus explicitly on radically improving outcomes for white working-class children and young people, in communities where attainment gaps are too often accepted as inevitable. It will bring together clusters of schools facing similar challenges, diagnose shared barriers to progress and develop a clear strategy for sustained improvement, backed by strong leadership and practical support.

Safeguarding implications:

- Vulnerable learners may require additional support to access curriculum reforms.

- DSLs should ensure pastoral and academic teams share information effectively to identify children at risk of disadvantage, disengagement or exploitation.

DSLs Safeguarding Practice

There are a number of increased expectations being placed on Designated Safeguarding Leads from the White Paper.

Strengthened Recording & Analysis

- Expect greater emphasis on cumulative risk, patterns of concern, and early Identification.

DSLs should review whether current systems allow for:

- Clear chronologies
- Analytical, not descriptive, recording
- Evidence-based decision-making

This is not a new expectation but a reminder for DSL's to constantly review their CPOMS/My concern system to check it is being used effectively, tabbed appropriately and information recorded is factual and not subjective.

Closer Integration of SEND & Safeguarding

Many safeguarding concerns will be reframed through the lens of unmet need.

DSLs should ensure joint planning with SENDCOs, especially around:

- Behaviour
- Mental health
- Non-attendance
- Family stressors

This means evidencing that DSL's co-ordinate an approach to safeguarding that includes all staff with a responsibility around behaviour, attendance, SEND and pastoral responsibilities meeting regularly (supervision) and discussing vulnerable children. It also means understanding that if the above factors exist this reduces the protection and safety of children and highlights the need for early intervention as soon as possible.

Increased Multi-Agency Expectations

The White Paper talks explicitly about Education being the fourth partner in effective multi agency working. If and when this happens the role of the DSL will become more strategic in implementation.

- Schools will be expected to contribute more consistently to early help and statutory processes.

DSLs should prepare for:

- More requests for reports
- More involvement in planning meetings
- Greater accountability for follow-through

Staff Training & Confidence

Training must reflect:

- Early identification of SEND and vulnerability
- Professional curiosity
- Online safety and digital harm
- Child-on-child abuse
- New staff must receive robust induction.

The expectations around staff in schools for safeguarding will be covered in all training provided by HH: Safeguarding Matters. With opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Governance & Oversight

Governors will need clear, regular updates on:

- Emerging risks
- SEND-safeguarding integration
- Attendance and behaviour trends
- Early help engagement

The expectations for Governors in schools for safeguarding will be covered in Governor training provided by HH: Safeguarding Matters. With opportunities for reflection and discussion.

DSL's as Strategic Leaders and Influencers

If Education becomes the fourth partner this means that the role of the DSL will become even more strategic and therefore this relies on DSLs:

- Being able to interpret data patterns, trends and concerns whilst also demonstrating how effective intervention is and whether it needs to be escalated. This also means that DSL's need to ensure that all staff are effectively recording, acting timely and are also empowered to seek intervention appropriately before escalating to the DSL.
- Ensuring whether they are a single school or part of a trust, appropriate governance structures are in place, that guarantee that each school or trust is working effectively and collaboratively with all partners.
- Being instrumental in leading an effective safeguarding culture that is built on the power of connection. That children belong in school and that they matter, so that professional curiosity through meaningful and connected relationships is well embedded in school's everyday practices. So that children can thrive and that all their needs are met. This means a safeguarding culture beyond compliance which is something that HH: Safeguarding Matters has always championed.

Recommended Actions for Schools

Initial

- Review safeguarding and SEND policies to ensure alignment with the white paper.
- Strengthen attendance - safeguarding links.
- Audit recording systems for cumulative risk visibility.
- Update staff training to reflect new expectations.
- Consider implications for the school's SEF.

Medium Term

- Review pastoral systems to ensure early identification of need.
- Strengthen DSL collaboration structures with behaviour, attendance and SENDCO.
- Develop or refine early help pathways and multi-agency engagement processes.
- Provide governors with an update on the proposed changes.

Summary for DSLs to Share with Staff

- Early identification of need is now a central expectation.
- Attendance and behaviour concerns must always be viewed through a safeguarding lens.
- Professional curiosity remains essential.
- Safeguarding culture needs to create connection and belonging for children.
- Recording matters - small concerns build the bigger picture.
- Safeguarding and SEND are inseparable in the new system.

The Department for Education's School's White Paper "Every Child Achieving and Thriving" sets out an ambitious reframing of education for children. This includes wider educational opportunities and experiences, stronger inclusion, value and belonging for children, a better integrated SEND system and a safeguarding culture that is beyond compliance.

For customers of HH: Safeguarding Matters these are some of the discussions we have had for many years around Safeguarding being an integral part of school life and not a checklist.

The expectations set out by the Government's paper are already an essential part of the DSL Experienced Training provided by HH: Safeguarding Matters where we take a more reflective look at the ever-changing role of the DSL as a strategic influencer and how school culture is constantly evolving.

Further updates and changes to any required documentation will be coming over Summer Term ahead of the new academic year 2026/2027 and in line with the expected changes to KCSIE 2026.

[Every child achieving and thriving - GOV.UK](#)