



KCSIE 2026:

Your Essential Guide to the Key Changes & Updates



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Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) is statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) that applies to schools and colleges in England.

It outlines safeguarding duties for all staff and includes references to further resources that support education settings in keeping students safe, happy and healthy.

This guide provides an overview of the main updates to the document, which come into force in September 2026. For a thorough understanding of all changes, educators are recommended to read the [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 \(For Information\) Guidelines in full](#).

Note: Quotes from the DfE explaining the reasoning for specific updates are taken from the [2026 KCSIE consultation](#).

General changes

Early Years Foundation Stage

To address a lack of awareness of the [Early Years Foundation Stage \(EYFS\) framework](#), settings where children aged 0 to 5 attend school-based nurseries or reception classes are advised to read this guidance alongside KCSIE.

Making or sharing of nudes or semi-nudes

The summary section includes a new paragraph titled “Nudes and semi-nudes, including where generated by AI”. Throughout the guidance, references to “indecent”, “nude, semi-nude” and “also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery” are replaced with “making or sharing of nudes or semi-nudes”. It refers to “the creation, sending or posting of nude or semi-nude images by young people under the age of 18.”

This includes all forms of visual content and may refer to images taken by the child themselves or those that have been digitally altered using AI, e.g., [deepfakes](#).

Data protection

The summary section includes a new paragraph on data protection, clarifying that all references to “data protection laws” means the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR and the 2025 Data (Use and Access) Act collectively.

Early help

Throughout the document, several mentions of “Early Help” are replaced with “the targeted early help level of Family Help” or “universal services and community-based early help”, in line with the [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) framework.



Changes to Part one

Safeguarding information for all staff

Format

Annex A, which previously provided a summary of Part One of KCSIE for staff who do not work directly with children, has been removed. According to the DfE, “All staff need a broader safeguarding awareness which Part one provides.”

Substantial changes

Child-on-child abuse

This is renamed as “Child-on-child abuse (including harassment and violence)” throughout the document.

Paragraphs 30-35 are updated to highlight that this can be a safeguarding issue for both the victim and perpetrator of child-on-child violence. This is intended to align with “a more trauma-informed approach to safeguarding.”

The section also clarifies that abuse is preventable, and may take the form of physical assault and threats with weapons.

Schools are instructed to be alert to when children might be at highest risk around the school day (for example: immediately after school).

Child criminal exploitation & child sexual exploitation

Paragraphs 36-42 have been expanded to acknowledge that exploitation “can be committed or facilitated by an organised network or gang, and the victim may identify as being part of this group” and that sexual abuse is commonly “committed by those previously known to the victim.”

Research shows that victims of child exploitation are sometimes criminalised for actions taken under coercion. To ensure education professionals understand this dynamic and respond appropriately, **paragraph 42** now states:

“Victims are not always recognised and can be criminalised for actions they take whilst under coercion. This remains a significant concern, as professionals continue to encounter cases where children are manipulated, groomed, and exploited without fully understanding the abuse they are experiencing.”

Footnotes are added defining “county lines” (with a link to Home Office guidance) and “organised network” (drawn from IICSA).



Substantial changes cont.

Mental health

Paragraphs 45-48 have been substantially updated. The section now notes that mental health problems may “develop into safeguarding concerns” including “self-harm, suicidal ideation or risk of suicide.”

The following potential warning signs are listed:

- Significant changes in behaviour
- Ongoing difficulty sleeping
- Withdrawing from social situations
- Not wanting to do things they usually like
- Physical signs of self-harm or neglecting themselves

Settings are reminded of the importance of early detection of risk:

“By identifying these and other potential warning signs, education staff can identify children who may be struggling with their mental health and contemplating suicide and offer support and vital early intervention.”

An additional paragraph states that in cases where staff feel a child is in danger, they should contact 999, take the child to A&E, get help from NHS 111 online, or call 111 - depending on the specific circumstances.

Serious violence

Paragraphs 49-52 have been substantially rewritten with a stronger prevention focus, guidance on weapons, and advice on peer conflict (not just indicators).

This includes instructing staff to:

- Report concerns about a child “carrying or using a weapon” to the DSL
- Be alert to times of day when children may be at highest risk
- Understand that children with disrupted education or a history of offending are at higher risk

It also makes clear that “Early, evidence-based support for those considered at risk (...) is vital. This includes access to trusted adults, social and emotional skill support, and, where available, targeted interventions.”

Language updates

Misogyny/misandry

There are increased references to misogyny in the KCSIE 2026 (11 mentions, versus 3 in the 2025 version) as this is an increasingly prevalent issue - particularly in online spaces. References to misandry have also doubled from 2 to 4.

The new guidance repeatedly highlights where misogyny/misandry intersects with harmful sexual behaviour. For example, in the normalisation of sexual harassment and child-on-child exploitation.

Financial exploitation

There are a number of new references to financial exploitation. It appears in **paragraph 20** on the list of risks staff (especially DSLs) need to consider if children are vulnerable to, and in the section on modern slavery.

Financial exploitation may take the form of fraud or **scams**. Financially-motivated sextortion is also an increasingly common type of financial exploitation, whereby victims are blackmailed online by perpetrators who threaten to release sexual or indecent images of them.

Clarifications

- **Paragraph 13** is updated to distinguish community-based early help from targeted early help delivered through Family Help, to help staff route lower-level concerns to the right tier of early help rather than defaulting to a statutory referral.
- **Paragraph 17**, covering children who may benefit from Early Help, is amended to include children who: “are ‘pregnant and/or are a parent themselves”, “have exhibited early signs of abusive, violent and/or harmful behaviours”, have “been repeatedly removed from the classroom” or “is on a part-time timetable”. This reflects Behaviour in Schools guidance and acknowledges important contributing factors to child criminal exploitation.
- **Paragraph 18** adds that in addition to recognising the indicators of “abuse, neglect and exploitation” staff should also be aware of the signs of “modern slavery.”
- The description of extra familial harms in **paragraph 20** is expanded to include “physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and stalking” in teenage relationships and “financial exploitation”.
- **Paragraph 24** on abuse now recognises that this may take the form of child-to-parent or carer abuse, which is relevant when assessing family risk.
- **Paragraph 26** clarifies that emotional abuse may include verbal abuse (e.g., criticism, belittling, name-calling).
- **Paragraph 29** has been tweaked to highlight the fact that safeguarding issues often overlap.
- The wordings of **paragraph 27 and 40** are updated to prevent confusion around the legal definition of rape in the UK, which is when a person uses their penis without consent to penetrate the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person. The example of “rape or oral sex” is replaced with “rape or penetration with an object” - the latter being a legally recognised form of sexual assault.
- Guidance around headteachers/principals considering referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in response to safeguarding concerns or allegations about other members of staff, appears earlier in the document - in **paragraph 76**. “Trainee teachers” are also now included in this context.



Changes to Part two

The management of safeguarding

Format

The Department for Education will not publish standalone guidance for schools and colleges on gender questioning children, and will instead incorporate this guidance into KCSIE. (Further details in the substantial changes section below).

Substantial changes

Sports and single-sex spaces

The guidance clarifies that it is not the role of schools and colleges to initiate action in this area, but rather they should take a cautious, understanding approach and adopt a flexible stance on gender stereotypes.

Two new sections cover single-sex sports and single-sex spaces. They clarify the legal obligations of schools and colleges, in line with the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998.

Paragraphs 95-98 confirm that schools and colleges can lawfully separate children according to their biological sex for sport. In cases where a gender questioning child makes a request relating to how they participate, if “there are no safety concerns”, settings should consider “whether supporting social transition is overall in the best interests of the child, as well as considering the impact on other children and the aim of creating safe and fair environments for children to participate in PE.”

Paragraphs 105-116 explain that when it comes to toilets, showers and changing facilities, children must not be allowed into the spaces “designated for the opposite biological sex.” In instances where a child does not want to use these spaces, “schools and colleges should consider whether they can provide an alternative.”

Schools and colleges must keep a record of any such situations and “ensure they are communicated appropriately” and regularly reviewed.

Robust cover arrangements for DSLs

To ensure safeguarding concerns can be addressed without delay, the need for robust cover arrangements for DSLs has been added at **paragraph 127**. The guidance suggests that this could include “a confidential shared mailbox or equivalent system” to ensure issues can be dealt with immediately.

Information sharing

This section (**paragraphs 138-150**) has been expanded to provide clearer criteria for when and how to share information, ahead of a new statutory information sharing duty (currently at consultation stage).

It explicitly links information sharing to serious violence risk, requiring receiving schools and colleges to risk-assess and prepare a safety plan in advance where a pupil has a history involving weapons.

It also clarifies that, in cases where children move settings, the DSL may consider sharing information beyond the child protection file if it indicates that the student may be a risk to themselves or others. It states that it would be “good practice” for DSLs at both settings to have a conversation about potential issues or concerns.



Substantial changes cont.

AI

The Online safety section is expanded to include two new paragraphs to help schools and colleges “understand safety considerations and legal responsibilities if they choose to use Generative AI.”

Paragraphs 165-166 highlight the policy paper, [Generative artificial intelligence in education](#), and [online resources](#) produced by the Chiltern Learning Trust and Chartered College of Teaching, which can support schools and colleges [to use AI safely](#).

Filtering & monitoring

The filtering and monitoring guidance (**paragraphs 171-175**) is updated to match wording in the [Filtering and Monitoring Standards](#). This includes clarification that systems should be reviewed at least once every academic year by the relevant SLT member with the help of the DSL and IT support, and that reviews should “include checks that filtering is working appropriately on all internet-connected devices in all relevant locations, and a record should be kept of these checks.”

Schools and colleges are recommended to take a more proactive approach to these systems, “particularly given the increasing risks from harmful digital content, AI generated material, and rapid changes in online behaviour.”

Mobile phone policy

The Online safety section includes a new paragraph **(168)** on mobile phone policy, confirming that “all schools should be mobile phone-free environments by default.” It provides links to two resources, [Mobile phones in schools](#) and [Creating a mobile phone-free environment: school case studies](#), which can support schools in developing a policy suitable for their setting

Boarding and Residential Accommodation

Paragraphs 197-202 include new guidance that schools and colleges must not allow a child to share overnight accommodation with a child of the opposite biological sex.

This must be considered when responding to a request for social transition, where the rule still applies. If a child doesn't want to share with a child of the same biological sex, alternative arrangements may be sought, but they “should not compromise the safety, comfort, privacy or dignity of any child.”

Substantial changes cont.

Mental health

Significant revisions have been made to the Children requiring mental health support section (**Paragraphs 224-232**). The updates focus on how mental health concerns can intersect with safeguarding duties, particularly around risks including self-harm, eating disorders and suicidal ideation.

While staff are not expected to diagnose or treat mental health issues, the guidance clarifies the important role they play in both mitigating and identifying safeguarding risks linked to mental health.

4 key roles for staff are outlined:

- Promoting good mental wellbeing and preventing the onset of mental illness
- Observing pupils and identifying early those who may be experiencing mental health problems or being at risk of developing one
- Ensuring early targeted support is provided
- Liaison with/referral to specialist services where needed

There is greater emphasis placed on early identification of risk, early targeted support and a whole school/college embedded approach.

A new paragraph also points staff toward available mental health support, both within the school (via the nationally-rolled-out Mental Health Support Teams) and externally, through resources like early support hubs and young futures hubs.

Gender questioning children

The guidance on children who are LGB or questioning their gender has grown from five short paragraphs in 2025 to over thirty in 2026.

Paragraphs 251-282 provide a full decision-making framework for requests to support "social transition" - prioritising the school's duty to all children, requiring active parental involvement (with a narrower risk exception), and treating social transition as an "active intervention" requiring particular caution, especially in primary schools.

The section introduces new legal obligations under the Equality Act and Human Rights Act, an explicit no-exceptions rule on toilets, changing rooms and accommodation, and new sections on documenting decisions, biological sex records, children "living in stealth," and detransition support.

Given the scale and the legal obligations attached to this specific guidance, leaders and DSLs should read this section in full.



Language updates

Requirements for DSL role

Paragraph 126 highlights the need for governing bodies and proprietors to ensure that designated safeguarding leads have the appropriate “skills and experience” to be able to fulfil their duties, alongside the existing requisite of “status” and “authority.”

Preventative education

Paragraph 158 on preventative education expands the description of zero tolerance culture to include “racism” and “derogatory behaviour or other forms of physical violence and conflict.”

Preventative education programmes are also expected to address “online harms such as sharing images,

the prevalence of deepfakes, pornography and misogynistic influencers and when and where to seek help.”

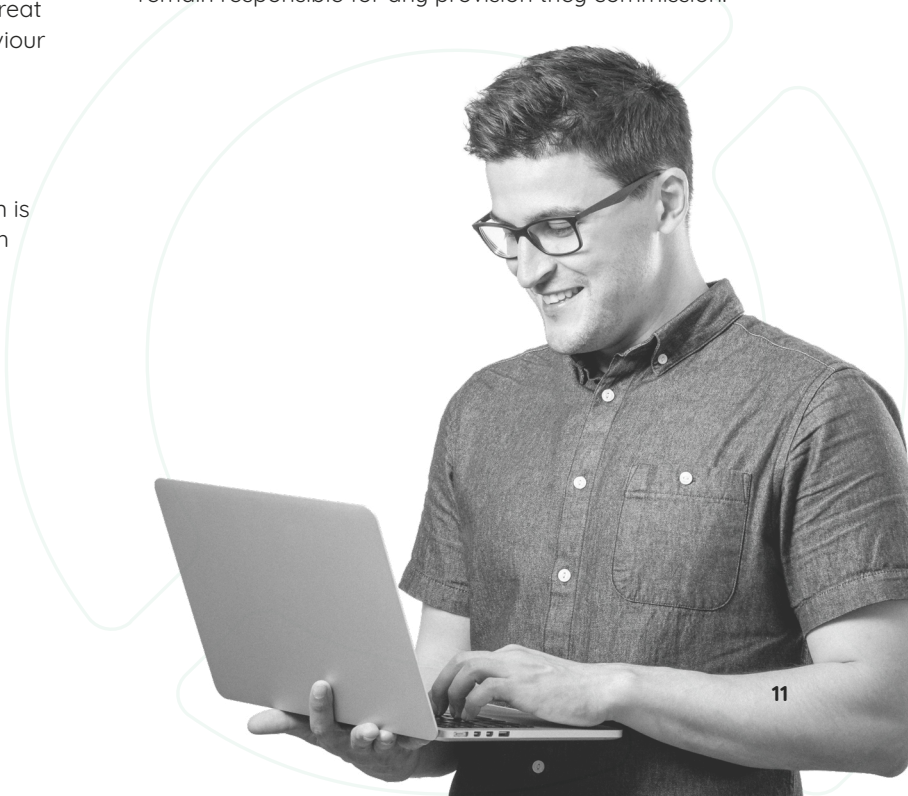
Cyber security

The section on Information security and access management now recognises cyber security as a safeguarding concern. If a child’s sensitive data is compromised by a cyber attack, it poses a risk to their safety and wellbeing.

Paragraphs 176-178 emphasise the need for schools to strengthen their cyber security systems to “reduce the risk of disruption, prevent data breaches, and mitigate safeguarding risks.”

Clarifications

- In **paragraph 163** on online safety, the definitions of the 4Cs of risk are updated to include: Content - “extreme sexual or physical violence”, Contact - “generative AI applications that simulate this”, Conduct - “sending and receiving explicit images, including those generated using AI”.
- The list of forms of child-on-child abuse that must be included in child protection policies (**paragraph 191**) now includes “physical assault and harm, or the threat of harm with a weapon” and harmful sexual behaviour “which may include misogyny/misandry.”
- “Colleges” has been removed from the section heading “The use of reasonable force in schools” (**paragraphs 203-205**) and it is clarified that reasonable force means “using no more force than is necessary for the least amount of time”, in line with the latest guidance.
- The Alternative provision section (**paragraphs 208-213**) is expanded to include a reference to the National standards for non-school alternative provision, which may be used by local authorities to develop a register of approved settings for schools to use. This is intended to “strengthen safeguarding oversight for children educated outside traditional school settings.” The guidance reiterates that schools remain responsible for any provision they commission.



Clarifications cont.

- The Virtual School Heads section includes a new responsibility: “Recognising attendance as a key factor in safeguarding, Virtual School Heads should work with local authorities to set and report on ambitious targets to improve their attendance.”
(Paragraph 242)
- There is a new section on young carers.
Paragraph 246 states: “Schools and colleges should be alert to the needs of young carers, recognising that caring responsibilities can impact on their attendance, attainment, behaviour and wellbeing. Early identification is essential to ensure young carers receive support at the right time and by the appropriate services.”
- The list of additional barriers that exist when recognising abuse, neglect or exploitation in children with special educational needs, disabilities (SEND)

or health issues has been expanded. **Paragraph 247** now includes “the need for intimate care or that these children are isolated from others” and “that these children are more likely to be dependent on adults for care” as barriers. It also clarifies that communication difficulties can mean that SEND children may not understand that what is happening to them is abuse.

- A new section clarifies guidance on safeguarding children with medical conditions. **Paragraph 250** explains that while such individuals do not necessarily require a referral to local safeguarding partners, one should be made when incidents suggest they may be at increased risk of neglect, abuse or exploitation. For example, if they are repeatedly sent to school without essential medication. Further guidance on [Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school](#) and [Allergy safety in schools](#) is referenced.

Changes to Part three

Safer recruitment

Regulated activity

Paragraph 315 updates the definition of regulated activity with children to remove the exemption previously available to supervised volunteers.

This is a direct consequence of the [Crime and Policing Act 2026](#), which requires any person volunteering in a role involving teaching, training, instructing or supervising children on more than 3 days in a 30-day period, or overnight, to be in regulated activity regardless of supervision.

This means volunteer recruitment processes that relied on the old ‘supervised = no DBS needed’ logic must be updated.

Annex E: Regulated activity (children) has now been removed from the guidance as the relevant information is covered here within Part three.

DBS checks

Several tweaks have been made to guidance on DBS processes:

- Previous references to the TRA Employer Access Service are now replaced with the DfE’s [Check a teacher’s record](#).
- A 30-calendar-day window is added for updating service checks on new certificates.
- The DBS flowchart has been removed, as it is inaccurate following the removal of the supervision exemption.
- Clarifications are made on which DBS check types apply to self-employed staff (e.g. coaches, tutors, contractors).

Any recruitment guidance or induction materials referencing the old TRA service or flowchart should be updated.

Safer recruitment cont.

Visitors to schools

Paragraph 375 now groups visitors as:

1. Professionals (educational psychologists, social workers etc.)
2. Educational visitors (guest speakers, performers)
3. Site-related (contractors, children's family members, sports day attendees).

Homestay guidance moved

The homestay guidance (previously Annex D) has been incorporated into Part three.

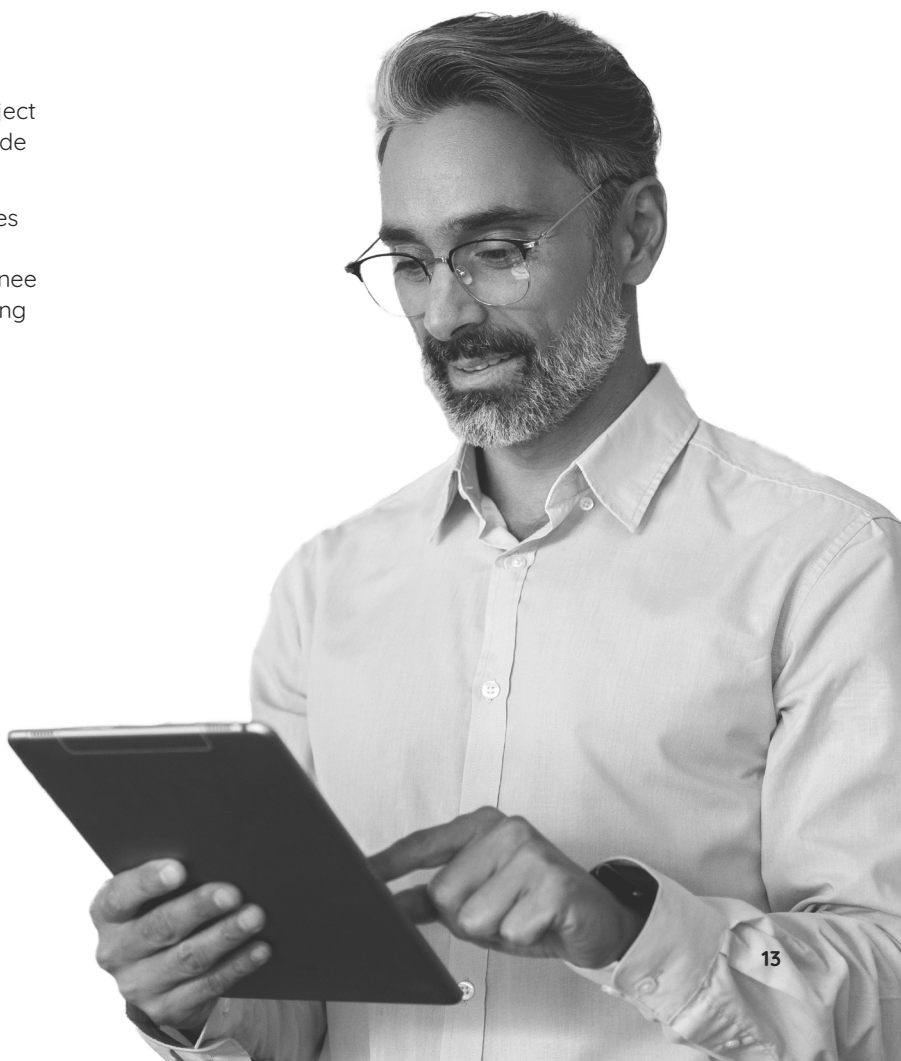
Changes to Part four

Safeguarding concerns or allegations made about staff, including supply teachers, volunteers and contractors

Allegations against trainee teachers

"Trainee teacher" is now included throughout this section, to clarify that people in this position are subject to the same procedures, should an allegation be made against them.

Paragraphs 452-456 clarify that schools and colleges share safeguarding responsibilities with third-party organisations when it comes to supply teachers, trainee teachers and contracted staff. This includes "gathering the facts and managing the safeguarding process", to support the relevant agency or business with any disciplinary action.



Changes to Part five

Child-on-child sexual harassment and sexual violence

Child-on-child sexual harassment and sexual violence

This section is restructured to “present a clearer and more progressive continuum of sexual behaviours.” It now starts with early indicators of harmful sexual behaviour and ends with sexual violence, for a more logical flow.

Paragraph 527, which lists harmful sexual behaviours that schools and colleges should be aware of, is updated to include “recognising the escalatory nature of misogyny and the benefits of early identification to support their approach to minimising the risk of HSB, sexual harassment and sexual violence.”

It also clarifies that all incidents involving the sharing of nude or semi-nude images require a safeguarding response, whether consensual or non-consensual.

Universal services and community based Early Help assessment

This replaces the section previously titled “Early Help”. The description (in **paragraph 575**) is expanded to explain that they are “Not an individual service, but a system of support delivered by local authorities and their partners working together and taking collective responsibility to provide the right provision in their area.”

Referrals to Family Help

This new section (**Paragraphs 582–592**) sits between community-based early help and statutory LA children’s social care. It refers to both targeted early help services and support and services delivered under s.17 of the Children Act 1989.

Targeted early help through Family Help is described as being “coordinated by a local authority and/or their partners” and includes parenting support, mental health support, youth services, housing and employment. It is a voluntary approach requiring the family’s consent.



Changes to Annex A (previously Annex B): Further information

The removal of Annex A, means what was Annex B (which provides further detailed guidance on a range of safeguarding issues) is now Annex A.

Cybercrime

The Cybercrime section is expanded to make schools and colleges aware that this issue “continues to represent one of the most significant and rapidly evolving threats within the United Kingdom’s (UK) crime landscape.”

Young people partake in such activity, “often without understanding the legal or ethical implications” and the impact “extends well beyond immediate financial losses, with scope to cause disruption to national infrastructure.”

Domestic abuse / Operation Encompass

This section is expanded to accommodate the new statutory duty requiring police to notify schools of domestic abuse incidents. New guidance on notification content, related DSL responsibilities and data protection has been added.

Temporary accommodation notification duty

A new section outlines the duty under the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act requires for local housing authorities to notify schools, colleges, health services and GPs when a child is placed in temporary accommodation (with appropriate consent), so schools can safeguard and support them earlier - though this doesn’t replace existing safeguarding duties or referrals to children’s social care where a child is at risk.

Serious violence

This section keeps the same structure but expands the risk-factor list to include suspension or time in Alternative Provision, early drug/alcohol use, and prior victimisation or perpetration of violence. It also adds new guidance encouraging schools to identify specific unsafe locations and times by listening to pupils and staff.

Online safety advice

The Online safety section includes three new links to address emerging digital risks and screen time:

- [Understanding and responding to AI-generated child sexual abuse material](#)
- [Financially motivated sexual extortion \(FMSE\)](#)
- [UK CMO commentary on screen time and social media map of reviews](#)

Additional support for DSLs

A number of new resources that can support DSLs in their work are referenced throughout the section. This includes:

- [Preventing and reducing serious violence Statutory Guidance for responsible authorities](#)
- [What is county lines and child criminal exploitation?](#)
- [Modern slavery: how to identify and support victims](#)

Changes to Annex B (previously Annex C): **The role of the designated safeguarding lead**

Information sharing and managing the child protection file

DSLs are instructed to share information with receiving schools, “particularly where the information would support an assessment of risk to others”, including concerns about serious violence or harmful behaviours.

If there are issues or concerns, a conversation between DSLs from both settings is recommended as good practice.

Availability

The section is updated with requirements for schools to implement robust cover arrangements, potentially including a “confidential shared mailbox or equivalent system” for when the DSL is unavailable.



Ensure your setting is ready to comply with KCSIE 2026

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 comes into effect this September.

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