

Supporting learning: a personalised approach to education and support

“Treat us like other pupils but remember we have extra problems outside of school and we need extra support.”

Who is this chapter for?

- School lead or staff interested in becoming/establishing a school lead within your school
- All staff

This chapter will support schools to:

- look at, consider and address the barriers to a young carer’s learning.
- establish personalised plans to recognise a pupil’s specific needs as a young carer and their family situation, such as support to enable the pupil to complete homework and coursework.
- recognise the importance of regular communication with parents regarding the progress of their child.
- recognise the importance of provision that enables young carers to attend after school activities.
- recognise the importance of education provision for young carers whose attendance and education has been disrupted, and the need to take steps to reduce and/or remove such instances.

Synopsis

Even though young carers may share many specific barriers to their learning and achievement, each pupil’s situation will be different.

Personalised plans, devised by the school in conjunction with the young carer and their family should recognise the pupil’s specific needs as a young carer and take into account the family’s situation and how it impacts on the young person’s education.

Greater sensitivity to the individual

Most young carers say that when forced to choose between staying at home to look after a loved one and going to school, caring comes first. It is vital that schools balance taking a supportive, flexible approach with giving the pupil a consistent message that their education is important. A personalised approach to education and support can work particularly well for a young carer.



One of the founding elements to making education more personal focuses on having greater sensitivity to the individual. The White Paper *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system*¹ discusses the needs of each child and refers significantly to a “Pupil Guarantee”². Whilst it acknowledges that schools already encourage teachers to tailor their teaching to the needs of each individual pupil, it introduces a new pupil guarantee which also ensures that:

- every secondary school pupil from September 2010 receives personalised support from a personal tutor who knows them well, has an overview of their progress, and ensures any learning needs or issues are quickly addressed.
- all secondary school pupils have access to high-quality careers education and information, advice and guidance so they can make informed choices about learning, work and lifestyles and are well supported during transitions.
- every pupil goes to a school that identifies their additional needs quickly and is linked up to health and other specialist services, so they can access the help they need swiftly and easily.

The idea is that for all pupils, there will be at least one person who knows them “in the round”, not only for academic progress, but also for their personal development. This person will track the pupil’s progress more closely through the development of a personal support plan.

A good assessment of a young carer’s needs is necessary to inform a personal support plan. Personal support plans should include:

- flexibility around deadlines and extra support, for example when caring roles increase.
- an assigned member of staff to talk to.
- provision to be put into place so that young carers can access after school clubs and activities.
- additional support which is needed to overcome barriers to learning. Tutors and schools should draw support from other in-school professionals and from a wider group of practitioners.
- a review of support in the home for any pupil whose education is affected by caring responsibilities.
- a crisis or emergency plan which for some young carers may form an important part of a personal support plan.

This plan, together with a tutor’s regular communication with parents, will ensure that young carers are less likely to fall behind and schools will be able to respond more quickly if any problems emerge. It should also address any barriers that parents face which prevent them from becoming fully engaged in their child’s education.

If a pupil is struggling to keep up with their work due to their caring role, the answer should not immediately be for them to drop a subject. This is not a capability issue. Letting a young carer reduce their timetable does not provide equal access to education as their peers and this, of course, should be the overall aim. However, for some pupils this may be precisely what will make the difference between succeeding with other subjects and failing at several. As a last resort therefore, when other support has been put in and the young carer is still struggling with their



workload, dropping a subject may be an option. This should be considered carefully however. Potential benefits such as reducing coursework and giving the young carer time and space within school to complete homework or coursework (which they may be finding difficult to complete at home) should be carefully considered and balanced with the loss of a subject and singling the young carer out. Long-term implications need to be explained to the pupil and their parents in order for them to be able to make a well informed choice.

Greater sensitivity to the family

Caring and family responsibilities can sometimes be extremely variable. For some, family circumstances can often move from one crisis to another, whilst for others, situations may be stable for a long time with some periods of uncertainty and instability. As such, particular sensitivity should also be shown to the family as a whole, in order to support parents' engagement with the school and their child's learning. Schools need to be understanding of a parent's disability and how it affects them, for example they may require frequent hospital visits, or have difficulties visiting the school. The 21st Century School "Parent Guarantee"³ talks about ensuring that parents have access to a range of extended services, including information and support on parenting skills and advice on parenting issues.

Whatever a young carer's situation may be, it is also sensible for schools, together with the young carer, and preferably their parents, to develop a crisis plan to support pupils further (if and when young carers need extra help during a family emergency) and avoid any unnecessary school absence.

Other chapters to help you understand this topic

- 4 Barriers to learning faced by young carers
- 27 Crisis or emergency plans
- 28 Support for the whole family: signposting, referrals and partnership work
- 29 Access, communication and involving parents with disabilities

Key resources

As well as the tools found at the end of this chapter and those in the above suggested chapters, the following resource is key.

→ Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system

Department of Children, Schools and Families:
www.dcsf.gov.uk/21stcenturyschoolssystem

¹ *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system*. Department of Children, Schools and Families: www.dcsf.gov.uk/21stcenturyschoolssystem

² *The Pupil Guarantee*. The Department of Children, Schools and Families: <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/8356-DCSF-Pupil%20Guarantee.pdf>

³ *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system – The Parent Guarantee*. The Department of Children, Schools and Families: <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/8357-DCSF-Parent%20Guarantee.pdf>



26.1 A young carer card*

Schools might want to consider introducing a 'young carer's card'. This could be credit card sized and display the pupil's name and signature of an appropriate member of staff.

A young carer's card offers the following benefits:

- Pupils will no longer have to repeat their family situation to staff.
- It will set out any agreed situations where a young carer requires some flexibility due to their situation.

There are many situations whereby a pupil may need some flexibility, such as:

- homework and coursework deadlines.
- needing to call a parent during break times so they are not worrying about them.
- not being able to attend after school detentions.

The young carer's card should be reissued annually along with frequent reviews of the young carer's needs.

Schools should be aware that in the event a card is lost or stolen, a pupil's personal details may be compromised and therefore consider carefully how this scheme is implemented.

**As developed by The Princess Royal Trust for Carers Sunderland Carers' Centre.*