

Research Briefing
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Young carers in education

Summary

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has [described an informal/unpaid carer](#) (PDF) as: “...someone who provides unpaid help to a friend or family member needing support, perhaps due to illness, older age, disability, a mental health condition or an addiction”, as long as they are not employed to do so.

In terms of young carers, the [NHS describes a young carer as someone under the age of 18](#), who helps to look after a family member or relative with a disability, illness, mental health condition, or drug or alcohol problem.

If the carer is in school, they might have access to counselling. In England, they might also be eligible for additional Pupil Premium funding, which goes directly to their schools. Being a young carer doesn't itself confer entitlement to the Pupil Premium, but young carers who are or who have been eligible for free school meals will attract the funding.

In further education, students in England with caring responsibilities might be able to access [discretionary bursary support for people aged 16 to 19](#). However, they cannot claim Carer's Allowance.

A carer in higher education may be eligible for additional support through the UK's respective student finance systems.

1

Experiences of school

The Department for Education (DfE) publishes data on the number of young carers in schools, and on school attendance rates in England. This is a new data collection, relying on caring status being identified by the school, or disclosed by either a parent or the child or young person themselves. As a result, some young carers may not be identified.

The [DfE's school census in January 2024](#) estimated there were around 54,000 state-funded school pupils known to be young carers; this is around 0.6% of all pupils.¹

The [latest school absence data for a full academic year is for 2022/23](#). In this year:

- The overall absence rate for young carers was 12%, meaning they missed slightly more than one school day a fortnight, on average. The overall rate for pupils who are not young carers was lower, at 7%.
- 39% of those known to be young carers were persistently absent, meaning that they missed one school day every fortnight, or more, on average. The rate for pupils who are not young carers was again lower, at 21%.²

Some further information is available from surveys.

1.1

Carers Trust survey 2023

In March 2023, the Carers Trust published [a survey on the experiences of young carers](#), which was carried out between 21 November 2022 and 15 January 2023. Around 1,100 young carers (aged between 12 and 25 years old) responded to the survey.

On education, the survey found:

- Around a third of young carers (33%) reported they “always” or “usually” struggle to balance caring with school, college or university work.

¹ Department for Education, [Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2024](#), published June 2024, main text

² Department for Education, [Academic year 2022/23. Pupil absence in schools in England, 21 March 2024](#), main text

- 28% of young carers reported they either “never” or “not often” had someone at school, college, or university who understood about them being an unpaid carer.
- 40% said they either “never” or “not often” get help from school, college, or university to balance their work with caring.³

[In the 2022 survey](#), 46% of young and young adult carers said their education was suffering due to the impact of the pandemic.⁴

1.2 Other survey data

There is some other survey data available, but this is now several years out of date.

Children’s Society 2013 report (which analysed the findings of the DfE’s [Longitudinal Study of Young People in England](#)) found:

- Around 1 in 20 young carers missed school because of caring responsibilities.
- Young carers had significantly lower educational attainment at GCSE level, the equivalent to nine grades lower overall than their peers (such as the difference between nine B grades and nine C grades).
- Young carers were more likely than the national average to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) between the ages of 16 and 19.⁵

[DfE-commissioned research](#), published in January 2017, collected survey evidence from young people and their parents. This compared the experience of young people with caring responsibilities (aged 5 to 17) to those with no such responsibilities. On schooling, some of the findings of the surveys were:

Most parents across both the face to face and comparison surveys reported their children were happy at school and considered they were attending well and performing better than average. [...]

Just over half (55%) of parents of young carers reported their child had been absent from school at least a few times in the last year compared to around one third of parents in the comparison survey. Further, 12% of parents of 12 to 15-year-old carers were aware that their child had fallen asleep at school at

³ Carers Trust, [Being a young carer is not a choice; it's just what we do](#), March 2023, p12-14

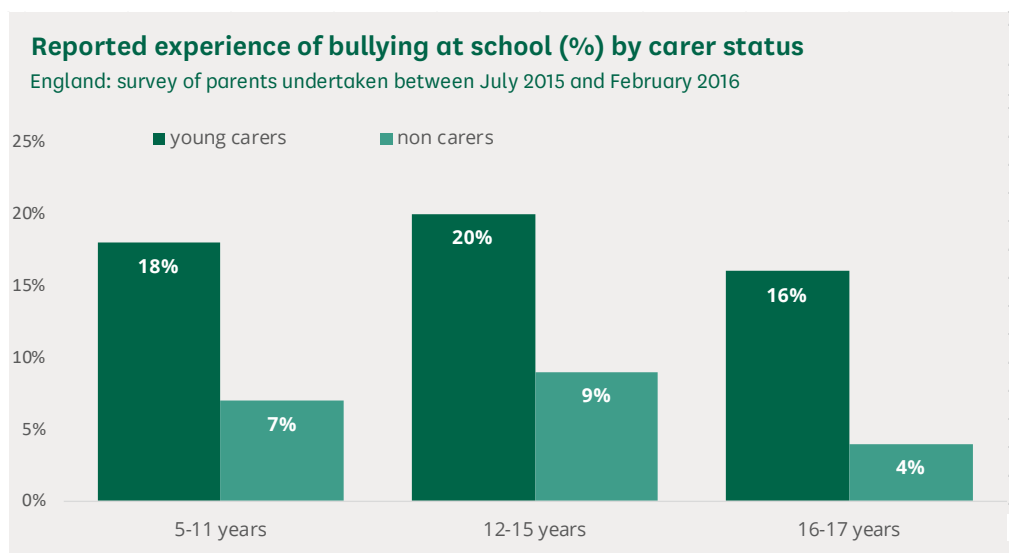
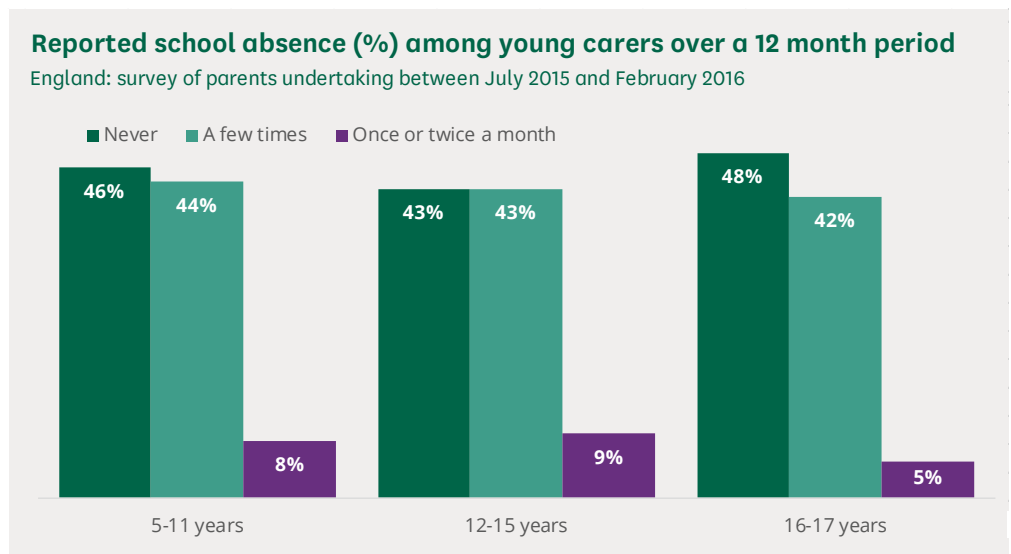
⁴ The survey had 571 carers aged 12-25 from across the UK respond; Carers Trust, [It's harder than anyone understands: The experiences and thoughts of young carers and young adult carers](#) (PDF), March 2022, p13-14

⁵ The Children’s Society, [Hidden from view. The experience of young carers in England](#) (PDF), May 2013

least a few times in the last 12 months compared to only 3% of parents of children the same age in the comparison group. [...]

When asked about being late for school, absenteeism and falling asleep, young people in both surveys were more likely than the parents to report all these occurrences [...].

Of concern also is the higher rate of experience of bullying reported by the parents of young carers. [...] It is well established from other studies, including the qualitative research that forms part of this programme, that young carers are vulnerable to bullying from peers because they are perceived as different or their family, which may contain a sick or disabled adult, is not understood.⁶



Source (both charts): DfE, [The lives of young carers in England. Omnibus survey report Research report](#), January 2017

⁶ Department for Education (DfE), [The lives of young carers in England. Omnibus survey report Research report](#) (PDF), January 2017, ps9-10, 33

1.3

Support in education

Pupil Premium (England)

The Government has cited research suggesting around 60% of young carers aged 14 to 16 were eligible for free school meals (FSM).⁷ Children in England who are eligible for FSM, or who have been eligible at any point in the last six years, ('Ever 6') attract the Pupil Premium. This is extra funding for schools to support the education of disadvantaged children. The annual value of the pupil premium in the 2024/25 financial year is £1,480 per primary-aged pupil and £1,050 per secondary-aged pupil.⁸

Young Carers in Schools Programme

The [young carers in schools programme](#), run jointly by Carers Trust and The Children's Society, works with schools across England. It shares good practice and provides training and support to local authorities and young carers' services to increase the identification of young carers in their area and to increase school engagement.

Other parts of the UK

Information about support for young carers in schools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can be found online:

- [Education Scotland website section on supporting young carers in education](#)
- [Dewis Wales website section on young carers](#)
- [NI Direct website section on young carers and support at school](#)

Further and higher education

In England, eligible young carers aged 16 to 19 in further education may be entitled to a discretionary 16 to 19 bursary. This is extra money intended to remove barriers to learning. Government guidance to schools and further education providers on administering the bursaries makes clear they should encourage young carers to apply:

Young people with caring responsibilities, for example, caring for a parent or other relative, may be reluctant to say so because of fear of being stigmatised. You should ensure confidentiality to reduce these concerns, publicise the

⁷ PQ 243309 [[on Young People: Carers](#)], 23 April 2019

⁸ Education and Skills Funding Agency, [Pupil premium 2024-25: technical note](#), 22 February 2024

availability of help from the bursary fund and encourage young carers to apply where they have a financial need.⁹

Information on financial and other support for further education in the rest of the UK can be found at:

- Care Information Scotland, [‘Help for carers who work or study’](#)
- NI Direct Website article, [‘Carers and learning’](#)
- [Student Finance Wales website](#) (general information, not specific to carers)

Higher education students living in England who have caring responsibilities for children can apply for funding to help with childcare, in addition to mainstream student loans.¹⁰ Some students with adult dependants who meet eligibility criteria may qualify for an [Adult Dependants’ Grant](#). This is non-repayable and in the 2024 to 2025 academic year, the maximum amount will be £3,438.

The [Office for Students \(OfS\), which regulates higher education in England, has published guidance on carers](#).¹¹ In March 2023, the OfS launched an [Equality of Opportunity Risk Register](#). It focusses on students least likely to experience equal opportunity in higher education and makes reference to young carers in six of the key sector risks set out in the register.¹² Higher education providers are expected to refer to the register when writing [access and participation plans](#), which set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.

Many higher education institutions have adopted carers policies to support students who are carers as part of their equality agenda. Carers policies aim to allow flexibility for student carers and make sure they are not disadvantaged by their caring responsibilities.

Further information about support for higher education students with caring responsibilities in other parts of the UK can be found online:

- Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), [Student carers/ Living costs grant](#)
- [Student Finance Wales, Adult Dependants’ Grants](#)
- Student Finance Northern Ireland’s [collection on undergraduate support](#)

⁹ Department for Education, [16 to 19 Bursary fund guide 2023–24](#), 18 May 2024

¹⁰ House of Commons Library, [Childcare support for students](#)

¹¹ Office for Students, [Carers](#), July 2020

¹² Office for Students, [Equality of Opportunity Risk Register](#)

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