



**KINGSTON
CARERS
NETWORK**

**YOUNG
CARERS
PROJECT**

Education Professionals Toolkit

September 2026





About Kingston Carers Network (KCN)

Founded over 30 years ago, we are the only charity in the borough providing dedicated support to unpaid carers of all ages.

We exist to ensure carers are recognised, valued and enabled to live and care well.

We do this by providing tailored information, advice and support to unpaid carers.

We also advocate for improvements to local services to better meet their needs.

About this toolkit

This toolkit is aimed at anyone working in the education sector.

If you work in education, you are likely to have regular contact with young carers.

You therefore have a vital role to play in identifying and supporting young carers and helping them access local services.

This toolkit aims to help you do this.





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1. Who are young carers?





Who are young carers?

A young carer is someone under the age of 18 who provides support to a family member or friend who could not manage without their help.

They may be caring for someone who has a disability, a physical or mental illness or a substance use problem.

A child or young person can become a carer suddenly – following an accident or diagnosis for example – or their caring responsibilities might gradually develop and increase over time.

Many children and young people do not necessarily identify themselves as being a carer, which can provide a barrier to them accessing relevant services and support.



Roles of an unpaid carer

Caring responsibilities can be highly varied and highly unpredictable, covering all aspects of practical, personal and emotional care:

- Shopping, cooking, cleaning
- Managing medicines or money
- Providing personal care
- Helping get people out the house
- Keeping an eye on someone
- Providing emotional support
- Advocating for their loved one



Young Carers in Kingston

Over a fifth (22%) of people are currently providing unpaid care in the UK. This means that there could be as many as 37,477 unpaid carers in Kingston.

There are estimated to be around 1 million young carers in the UK. This means there are roughly 2 young carers in every classroom.

Kingston Carers Network has nearly 800 young carers registered with our service, but we estimate there are more than 2,000 young carers in the borough.





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2. The impact of being a young carer



How it can feel to be a young carer

- Lonely
- Angry
- Frustrating
- Stressful
- Tiring
- Anxious



Impact on school attendance



- Young carers are missing on average 23 days of school every year – that's more than a month in total.
- Almost half of young carers at secondary school are 'persistently absent'.
- Only 46% of teachers think their school provides the support young carers need, while 23% of young carers say they get no support at all.

Further information

[Caring and classes: the education gap for young carers \(Carers Trust, 2024\)](#)

Impact on school attainment



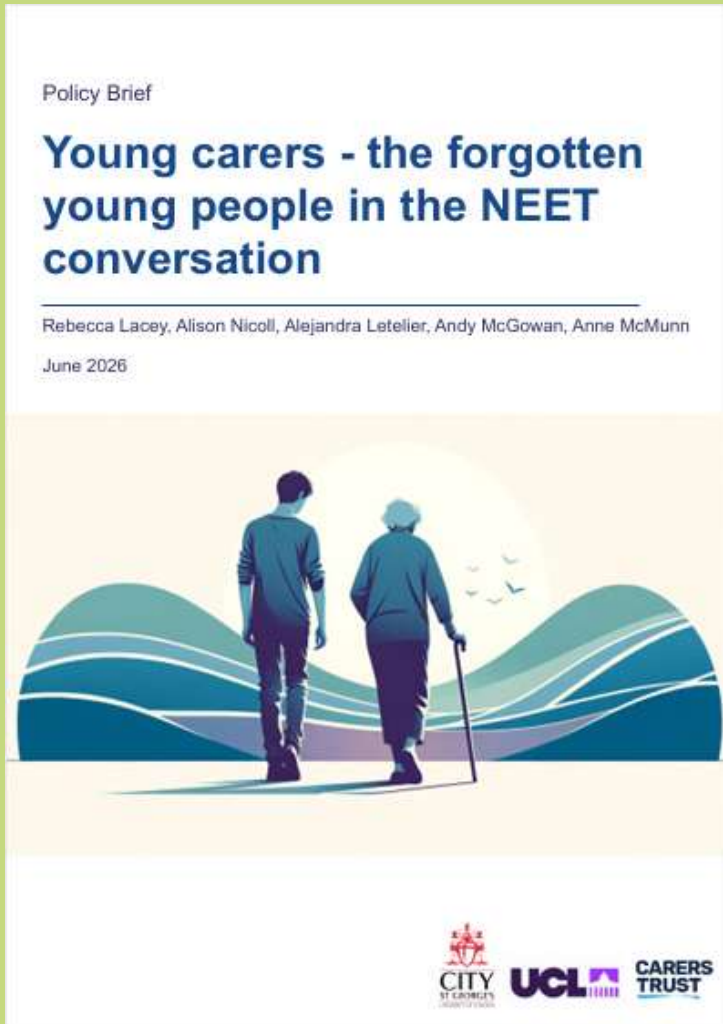
- Fewer than half of young carers (49%) left primary school this year with the expected standard of reading, writing and maths
- Fewer than half (46%) of young carers left secondary school with 5 GCSE passes including English and Maths. They are 25% less likely than their peers without caring responsibilities to achieve this academic milestone.
- Just half of young carers (51%) finished school with GCSE passes in English and Maths, compared with 65% of non-young carers.

Further information

[Caring and classes: Young carers and attainment inequalities \(Carers Trust, 2025\)](#)



Impact on future life chances



Young carers are more than twice as likely as their peers to be persistently not in employment, education, or training (NEET) for a period of two years or more.

Young carers are also:

- 40% less likely to complete a further education (FE) qualification,
- 31% less likely to attend higher education (HE), and
- 37% less likely to achieve a degree-level qualification.

Further information

[Young Carers' Next Steps Policy Brief](#)



Impact on health

NHS England identified caring as a social determinant of health in 2021 following a review of the GP Patient Survey:

“[Carers] are also twice as likely as non-carers to experience poor physical and mental health, with these outcomes exacerbated by social isolation, poor information and support, and financial stress.”

Further information

[Caring as a social determinant of health](#)
(Public Health England, 2021)

- One third of young carers report having a mental health problem, including higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem and happiness.
- Young carers, who are missing out on extracurricular sports and exercise, may also be less fit and more likely to have weight problems.
- 3 in 10 adolescent young carers in the UK have thought about self-harming.



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3. Young Carer identification and support



Barriers to identification

- **Familial responsibility:**
“It’s just what I do.”
- **Shame or stigma**
associated with caring or the disability/illness of their cared for.
- **Evolving journey of caring:**
which can happen overnight or be a gradual process
- **Absence of a clinical diagnosis** such as ADHD or autism





Barriers to identification

The latest data from the Schools Census shows that 89,803 young carers were recorded by schools across England, an increase of 25,328 on the previous year.

However, this still a significant under-representation of young carers in England.

Whilst schools in Kingston have shown year on year improvements identifying and recording young carers, the latest figures are significantly below the estimated number of young carers living in the borough (>2,000).

2026 Schools census	Number of Young Carers recorded by Kingston Schools	% of Total Pupil Population
Primary	219	1.7%
Secondary	273	2.1%
Alternative	6	1%

	Number of Young Carers recorded by Kingston Schools	% of Total Pupil Population
2026	498	1.9
2025	354	1.3
2024	266	1

Source: DfE Schools Census (2026)



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4. Young carer legislation and guidance



Legislation



The Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a number of reforms to the way that care and support for adults with care needs are met. It requires local authorities to adopt a whole system, whole council, whole family approach, coordinating services and support around the person and their family, and considering the impact of the care needs on the whole family; including children.

Further information

[Care Act 2014](#)

[Care Act Factsheets](#)

[Children and Families Act 2014](#)

[Young Carers Needs Assessment Guidelines 2015](#)

[Young Carers Wellbeing \(Children's Society\)](#)

Care Act 2014:

"Children should not undertake inappropriate or excessive caring roles that may have an impact on their development. A young carer becomes vulnerable when their caring role risks impacting upon their emotional or physical well-being and their prospects in education and life." (Section 2.50).

Children and Families Act 2014:

"A local authority in England must assess whether a young carer within their area has needs for support and, if so, what those needs are, if (a) it appears to the authority that the young carer may have needs for support, or (b) the authority receives a request from the young carer or a parent of the young carer to assess the young carer's needs for support." (Section 96).



OFSTED Education Inspection Framework (EIF) 2025

The updated *Inspection Toolkit* now includes young carers as a measure of a school's commitment to inclusion, safeguarding and personal development.

Supporting young carers is not just a requirement for settings wishing to meet strong or exceptional standards; it is now an "expected standard".

Further information

[New OFSTED Framework: how schools and colleges can support young carers \[Carers Trust, 2025\]](#)

[State-funded Schools Inspection Toolkit \(September 2026\)](#)



OFSTED Requirements

Area	Inspection Requirement
Attendance and Behaviour Page 35	"This evaluation area considers... the impact of the school's work on the attendance, behaviour and attitudes of all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being, such as young carers. "
Attendance Page 37/38	"In gathering evidence about attendance, inspectors consider the extent to which ... pupils attend well, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well being, such as young carers ... Leaders and staff pay close attention to the needs of the groups of pupils listed above, so that they attend regularly and come to school on time."



OFSTED Requirements

Area	Inspection Requirement
Behaviour, including bullying Page 38/39	"In gathering evidence about behaviour, including bullying, inspectors consider the extent to which ... leaders recognise that bullying takes various forms, and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, SEND, or because a pupil is adopted, in care or has caring responsibilities ; it might be motivated by actual differences between pupils, or perceived differences."
Grading Attendance and Behaviour Page 41/42	"Any reasonable adjustments or adaptations to attendance and/or behaviour strategies are timely and appropriate, including for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who face barriers to their learning and/or well-being, such as young carers. Any interventions are timely, well chosen and targeted."



OFSTED Requirements

Area	Inspection Requirement
Inclusive personal development and well-being Page 49/P50	"In gathering evidence about inclusive personal development and well-being, including pupils' SMSC development, inspectors consider the extent to which: all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being, such as young carers , benefit from high quality personal development opportunities."
Grading personal development and well-being Page 51/52	"The personal development programme is an entitlement for every pupil. Leaders track participation. They take steps to ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being, for example young carers , can participate appropriately. Reasonable adjustments or adaptations are made for them."



Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026

The updated statutory guidance *Keeping Children Safe in Education* comes into effect from 1 September 2026.

The guidance now includes for the first time an explicit reference to young carers.

Further information

[Keeping children safe in education 2026
Statutory guidance for schools and colleges
\(DfE, 2026\)](#)

Young Carers (paragraph 246):

“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 including additional support from external partners, or local authority and health services.”

Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2026



The updated statutory guidance *Working together to improve school attendance* comes into effect from 1 September 2026 and similarly includes an explicit reference to young carers for the first time.

The guidance applies to maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities.

Further information

[Working Together to improve school attendance 2026 \(DfE, 2026\)](#)

Pupils who are young carers (paragraph 53):

“Some pupils may have responsibilities at home as a young carer which can increase barriers to regular attendance. Young carers must be recorded in the school census and where a pupil’s caring role may be contributing to absence, schools should work in partnership with the pupil and their parents to understand barriers to attendance and to put appropriate support in place.

Where needs extend beyond the school gates, schools should work with the local authority to facilitate access to support through local early help arrangements and other relevant organisations....”

Expectations for schools



Develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance (paragraph 23)

*“Recognise that absence is a symptom and that improving pupil’s attendance is part of improving the pupil’s overall welfare. This can be achieved by prioritising attendance in strategies on attainment, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, supporting pupils with medical conditions or disabilities, safeguarding, wellbeing, and support for disadvantaged students including use of pupil premium and **support for young carers** and children with a social worker.”*

Regularly analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place (paragraph 45)

*“Schools should decide which cohorts of pupils should be included in their data analysis based on their context and school population. This may include: boys and girls, year groups, pupils with special educational needs or disabilities, pupils with a social worker or who are looked-after by the local authority, **pupils who are young carers**, pupils eligible for free school meals, and any pupils from backgrounds (including ethnicities, religions or beliefs, or sexual orientations where applicable) in the school community that have, or have historically had, lower attendance than their peers.)”*



Expectations for governing bodies

Recognise the importance of school attendance and promote it across the school's ethos and policies (paragraph 75)

*"...Ensuring high aspirations are maintained for all pupils, but that processes and support are adapted to the individual needs of particular pupils. This includes those with long term illnesses, special educational needs and disabilities, pupils with a social worker, **pupils who are young carers** and pupils from cohorts with historically lower attendance such as those eligible for free school meals."*

Regularly review attendance data, discussing and challenging trends, and helping school leaders focus improvement efforts on the individual pupils or cohorts who need it most (paragraph 78)

"...Paying particular attention to attendance of pupil cohorts within their school(s) that have historically had poor attendance or that face entrenched barriers to attendance. This should be specific to the school's context, but may include pupils who have a social worker, pupils who are young carers, are from a background or ethnicity where attendance has historically been low, have a long-term medical condition, special educational needs or a disability, or are eligible for free school meals."



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5. Local commitments to young carers



Kingston All Age Carers Strategy

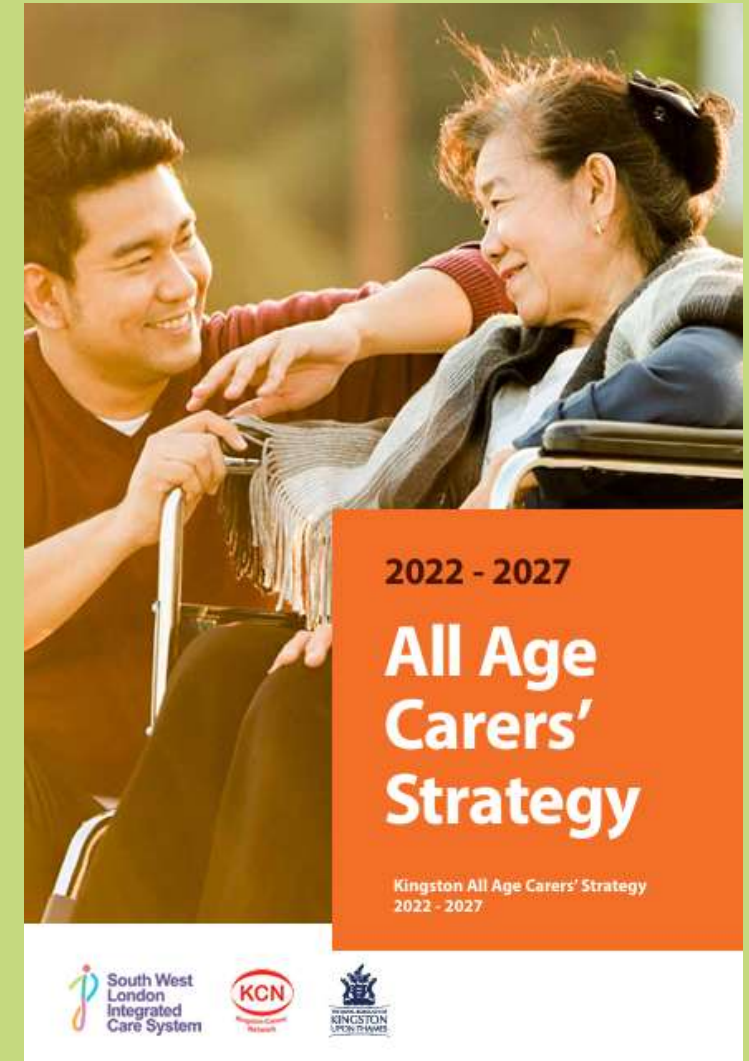


[Kingston's All Age Carers Strategy \(2022-2027\)](#) was co-produced by young and adult carers across the Borough. It aims to paint a picture of what it is like to be an unpaid carer in Kingston, what is important to carers, what issues they are facing, what is working well and more importantly what can be improved.

The priorities for young carers are:

- Making sure nobody feels alone
- Helping young carers to stay physically and mentally well
- Identifying other young carers
- Helping young carers have a break from their caring role
- Aiding access to financial support

The Young Carers Action Group (coordinated by Achieving for Children and Kingston Carers Network) oversees delivery of the young carer priorities in the strategy.



No Wrong Doors for Young Carers MOU



Signed by Directors of Adult Social Care and Children's Services in June 2025.

Kingston Council's Adult Social Care and Achieving for Children signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in June 2025. The MOU commits services to work together to identify, assess and support young and young adult carers.

'No Wrong Doors' principle: young carers and their families should not be turned away or redirected when they approach a service for support.

Systems wide approach: recognises needs for different services to work together to support young carers.

Whole family approach: should consider needs of entire family, not just young carer.



Young Carers Covenant

CARERS TRUST

The Young Carers Covenant

We are committed to a fair future for all young carers and young adult carers

We agree that:

Young carers and young adult carers are children and young people first; they should be recognised and listened to.	No young carer or young adult carer should take on caring roles which are inappropriate, excessive, or which negatively impact their life opportunities, health or wellbeing.
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We are committed to a future where all young carers and young adult carers:

Are identified at the earliest opportunity ✓	Are able to thrive in education ✓
Can access and succeed in employment/training opportunities ✓	Have time for themselves ✓
Are safe and secure ✓	Can access support for themselves and their family ✓
Feel they have choices in their lives ✓	Have good physical and mental health ✓
Can access and benefit from the rights they have ✓	Live free from poverty ✓

The Young Carers Covenant sets out 10 outcomes that young carers have defined themselves as being key to their health and wellbeing, education and future prospects.

Local signatories to the Young Carers Covenant include:

- ✓ Achieving for Children
- ✓ Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames Council
- ✓ Kingston and Richmond NHS Foundation Trust
- ✓ Kingston Carers Network
- ✓ Sir Ed Davey MP

Further information

[The Young Carers Covenant – Carers Trust](#)



Neighbourhood Health in Kingston

Unpaid carers have been identified as one of three 'golden threads' underpinning neighbourhood health delivery in Kingston:

"Ensure unpaid carers of all ages are explicitly recognised as providers of care to be considered within each agreed priority area. This means making their needs and perspectives a defined responsibility in all priority areas rather than focusing on engagement alone."

Kingston and Richmond Provider Alliance, 2026





Founding partner: #ChampionYoungCarers

We're proud to be a Founding Partner of the #ChampionYoungCarers campaign - a growing movement started by MYTIME Young Carers that brings together campaigners, charities and groups to call for meaningful support for young carers in every school.

We join their call for every school in England to appoint a Young Carer Champion (also referred to as a 'Young Carer Lead').

[You can add your support by signing this petition.](#)





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6. The role of schools and education professionals





The role of education professionals

Schools and education professionals have a critical role in identifying and supporting young carers, including helping them to access wider services within the local community.

Here are five key areas of action to create carer friendly school environments (see right and next slide for more detail).

These actions will help ensure you meet the requirements of the new OFSTED inspection framework.

Your school's 5-step guide to Supporting Young Carers

1. Identify a Young Carer Lead
2. Raise Awareness Across the School
3. Identify Young Carers
4. Record and Monitor
5. Provide Flexible Support



Five-Step Guide

1. Identify a Young Carer Lead	✓ Appoint a member of staff as Young Carer Lead/Champion to coordinate support for young carers across the school ✓ Ensure they have dedicated time, access to training and Senior Leadership Support
2. Raise Awareness across the school	✓ Use assemblies, PSHE lessons, and parent/guardian communications to raise awareness (see Young Carers in Schools website for templates) ✓ Train all staff (teaching and non-teaching) to identify signs of caring responsibilities
3. Identify Young Carers	✓ Add questions about caring responsibilities to enrolment forms and data collection ✓ Create safe opportunities for pupils/families to share information



Five-Step Guide

4. Record and Monitor	✓ Use your Management Information System to flag young carers (see MYTIME's Guide) ✓ Monitor attendance and attainment ✓ Use the data to implement early support and intervention, such as mentoring or referral to local young carers services
5. Provide Flexible Support	✓ Offer lunchtime clubs and trips, and mentoring schemes tailored to their needs Include young carers in wellbeing programmes and provide access to counselling or peer support ✓ Extend homework deadlines or provide academic support (during the school day) for pupils affected by their caring role ✓ Offer lunchtime homework support or detentions to avoid conflict with caring duties ✓ Liaise with external agencies (local carers service/local authority) to coordinate support

Signs to look out for

Young carers don't always look like they are struggling. Some may be quiet and withdrawn, some may be highly responsible, independent and high-achieving, whilst others may display challenging or disruptive behaviours, which can sometimes be misunderstood as simply being 'naughty' or difficult.

Signs a pupil may have caring responsibilities:

- **Behaviour** – Very quiet, withdrawn, disruptive or challenging, highly mature, people pleaser, avoids asking for help, regularly checking phone during school hours.
- **Attendance and Punctuality** – Frequently late or absent, regularly needs to leave school early or arrive late, difficulties attending trips, clubs or extracurricular activities, worrying about getting home on time.





- **Academic** – Difficulty concentrating, distracted, homework incomplete or late, decline in academic performance, tiredness or falling asleep in class, missing deadlines, forgetting equipment
- **Emotional** – Meltdowns, difficulty managing/regulating emotions, anger, regular low mood
- **Social** – Isolated, anxious, struggles to maintain friends, missing out on school trips or extra curricular activities.
- **Physical Appearance** – regularly tired and lacking energy, uniform unkept, losing/adding weight, poor hygiene

These signs may indicate that something more is happening at home — be curious, start a conversation and connect the pupil to support.



How to approach a potential young carer

- Open the conversation – don't wait for a pupil to come forward, particularly if they are withdrawn or high-achieving as they often go under the radar.
- Start with what you've noticed: *"I've noticed you seem really tired recently. Is everything okay?"*
- Ask gentle, open questions rather than directly assuming they are a young carer:
 - *"What time did you get to bed last night?"*
 - *"Is this a regular occurrence?"*
 - *"What's making it difficult to get enough sleep?"*
- Listen without judgement and give the pupil space to talk.



- Look for patterns or changes over time and log relevant observations.
- If further concerns arise, follow safeguarding procedures and alert the appropriate member of staff.
- Make support easy to access — implementing a designated Young Carer Lead at your school might make students more open to seeking that direct support.
- Consider general conversations during form time/wellbeing sessions to create opportunities for pupils to self-identify.





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7. Local carer services and support





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To ensure that young carers (5-18 years) have the support they need to learn, develop and thrive and to enjoy positive childhoods.

Current services:

- Term-time after school sessions
- Holiday respite activities
- One-to-one mentoring
- Targeted family support
- Young adult carers peer support (18-25)





Local support

- [**Achieving for Children \(AfC\) – Young Carers**](#) – Local authority children's services
- [**TAG Young Carers Group**](#) – Local support and activities for young carers.
- [**Express CIC**](#) – Support and activities for autistic people and their families.
- [**SKY Café**](#) – Community café and activities for young people.
- [**Kingston Parent Carer Forum**](#) – Support and representation for parents and carers of children and young people with additional needs or disabilities.



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8. Further information and resources





Young Carers in Schools

This is a joint initiative between The Carers Trust and The Children's Society offering formal accreditation to schools who meet the Young Carers in Schools (YCiS) standards.

Further information

[Young Carers in Schools](#)



Young Carers Illustration Project

Working alongside primary school-aged young carers, including young carers supported by Kingston Carers Network, the Young Carers Illustration Project aims to increase representation of young carers in children's literature.

Author and illustrator Ana Graça has developed two books and accompanying resources for KS1 age groups that can be [downloaded here for free](#).





National support

- [YoungMinds](#) – Information and advice about young people's mental health, with support and resources for parents and carers.
- [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service \(CAMHS\)](#) – Specialist mental health support and services for children, young people and families.
- [Tellmi](#) – Anonymous, moderated peer support where young people can share experiences, ask questions and access support.
- [Kooth](#) – Online mental health and wellbeing support, including resources, peer support and access to mental health practitioners.
- [Sibs](#) – Information, support and resources for children and young people who have a brother or sister with a disability, long-term illness or other additional needs.



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Contact us

418 Ewell Road
Surbiton
KT6 7HF

020 3031 2757
kingstoncarers.org.uk
[Make a referral](#)



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