

Young Carers and the school census

An England briefing analysing the results of the Spring 2024 school census in relation to young carers.

About Carers Trust

Carers Trust works to transform the lives of unpaid carers. It partners with its UK-wide network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes, raise awareness, and influence policy. Carers Trust hosts the Young Carers Alliance, a network of over 200 organisations and 700 individuals committed to improving identification and support for young carers and young adult carers. Carers Trust’s vision is that unpaid carers are heard and valued, with access to support, advice and resources to enable them to live fulfilled lives.

Young carers and the school census

Young carers were added to the school census for state schools for the first time in January 2023 following campaigning by Carers Trust, The Children’s Society and other members of the Young Carers Alliance over many years. They were also added to the school-level annual school census for independent schools as of 2024.

The 2024 results of the school census in relation to young carers

In the 2024 school census 53,976 pupils were recorded as a young carers, representing an increase of 14,993 from last year.

It should be noted that this figure is a significant under-representation. In 2024, 72% of schools recorded having no young carers (compared with 79% in 2023). This means that the 53,976 young carers recorded in the school census were from just 28% of schools. If the numbers from those schools were replicated equally across the remaining 72% of schools, then the number of young carers identified through the school census would be 192,771 in England.

There were an average of 337 young carers per local authority identified (up from 260 in 2023). The breakdown is as follows (the percentage in brackets indicates the proportion of that cohort who were recorded as young carers).

NB - There were significant increases in the total headcount in state-funded special schools and Alternative Provision, which is why the number of young carers recorded has significantly increased, but the proportion of pupils who are young carers has decreased:

	Primary Schools	Secondary schools	State-funded special schools	Alternative Provision
2024	21,001 (0.5%)	32,473 (0.9%)	411 (0.3%)	89 (0.6%)
2023	15,441 (0.3%)	23,261 (0.6%)	238 (0.4%)	41 (1.4%)

Variations across areas

Whilst the national proportion of pupils recorded as young carers was 0.6%, there was again a significant geographical variation.

As in 2023, the highest number of young carers recorded was in Kent where 3,501 pupils were recorded as young carers. There were 16 local authority areas who recorded fewer than 50 young carers.

Number of young carers recorded - The top 10 local authorities

Local authority	Number of young carers recorded	Percentage of pupil population	Total pupil population
Kent	3,501	1.4	251,669
Surrey	2,777	1.7	163,651
Suffolk	2,223	2.1	104,140
Essex	2,155	1	223,458
Norfolk	2,076	1.8	118,931
Hampshire	2,024	1.1	183,671
Cambridgeshire	1,519	1.7	91,406
Manchester	1,350	1.4	93,994
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	1,314	2.5	53,035
Lincolnshire	1,199	1.1	108,513

There are significant variations in the number of pupils per local authority, and so it is important to also look at the proportion of young carers recorded.

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole again had the highest proportion of pupils recorded as young carers, with 2.5% identified (1,314 young carers). By contrast, there were five local authorities with similar population sizes who only recorded 0.1% of pupils as young carers (and all recorded fewer than 65 young carers across their schools).

Highest proportion of young carers recorded - The top 10 local authorities

Local authority	Percentage of pupil population recorded as young carers	Number of young carers recorded	Total pupil population
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	2.5	1,314	53,035
Suffolk	2.1	2,223	104,140
Halton	2	374	18,586
Plymouth	1.9	730	39,081
Norfolk	1.8	2,076	118,931
Bedford	1.8	578	31,677
Torbay	1.8	354	20,119
Surrey	1.7	2,777	163,651
Cambridgeshire	1.7	1,519	91,406
Swindon	1.7	640	37,469

How do the 2024 figures compare with 2023?

Whilst it is positive that an additional 15,000 young carers have been recorded in this year's school census (representing a 38% increase), it is extremely concerning that 72% of schools still recorded having zero young carers.

On average, local authorities saw a 49% increase in the number of young carers recorded in their area (however the average is 38% if you do not include the areas where fewer than 50 young carers were recorded in 2023).

There were nine local authorities who more than doubled the number and proportion of young carers recorded this year. There were also nine local authorities who increased the number of young carers recorded this year by more than 500 compared to 2023.

There were however also 16 areas where the number of young carers recorded decreased since 2023.

Why is it important for schools to be recording who their young carers are?

Research consistently shows the significant impact that caring responsibilities can have on the educational experience and outcomes of children.

By properly recording pupils on schools management information systems, it means that it is much easier to monitor key educational metrics for young carers such as attendance and attainment, at both a local and national level.

As a result of young carers being added to the school census in 2023, it was possible to review the 2022-23 attendance figures for the 38,983 young carers recorded last year. The figures were extremely stark. The rate of persistent absence (missing 10% or more of school) for young carers was 39% - nearly double that of pupils without caring responsibilities (21.1%). The average attendance amongst young carers was 87.7% - five percentage points lower than the attendance rate for pupils not recorded as young carers (92.7%).

Carers Trust's latest report into the experiences of young carers and young adult carers, *'Being a young carer is not a choice; it's just what we do'* found that 1 in 3 young carers and young adult carers said they struggle to balance caring with education. A cross-European study of young carers also found that 37% of young carers said their performance had suffered as a result of caring responsibilities, and 36% reported being bullied specifically about caring.

In terms of longer-term educational outcomes, a UCL-Carers Trust research collaboration found that young carers are 38% less likely to obtain a university degree; with those caring for more than 35 hours per week being 86% less likely.¹

Carers Trust believe it is essential that schools are recording young carers on their pupil management systems, and regularly reviewing their attendance and attainment alongside other groups of potentially vulnerable pupils.

¹ Baowen Xue, Rebecca E. Lacey, Giorgio Di Gessa, Anne McMunn; Does providing informal care in young adulthood impact educational attainment and employment in the UK?, *Advances in Life Course Research*, Volume 56, 2023,

Carers Trust's recommendations

The 2024 school census results showed progress in the recording of young carers, but the fact that 72% of schools still recorded zero young carers, coupled with the stark attendance figures for young carers showed more action is urgently required. In order to improve identification, recording and support for young carers, Carers Trust makes the following recommendations for the next Government:

- The Department for Education should work with key stakeholders to **produce targeted communications/guidance around identification, recording and supporting of young carers within education** for schools, young carer services and local authorities
- All education settings should be required to have a **Young Carers Lead** and a **Young Carers Policy**.
- Schools should be provided with **dedicated funding to support the educational outcomes of young carers**.
- The Government should **commit to scaling up initiatives to improve identification for young carers** and young adult carers in education.
- Ahead of the new requirements of the updated statutory attendance guidance, Working Together to Improve School Attendance, **young carers should be added to the daily attendance reporting** so that local authorities can monitor their attendance in real-time.
- The Department for Education should carry out **further analysis of the school census data** in relation to young carers and then include young carers data within the 'Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England' report
- Schools and local authorities should work with their local young carers service to **improve identification and also local data-sharing** in relation to young carers
- Ofsted should ensure that young carers are included within their **inspection framework** and specifically acknowledge the identification and support of young carers within inspection reports
- The needs of young carers should be **included within the initial teacher training curriculum** for all teachers.

To find out more

The school census data relating to young carers can be found [here](#). You can find a spreadsheet containing the full breakdown of numbers of young carers recorded by local authority area at www.carers.org/schoolcensus.

To find out about support available for schools to improve their ability to identify and support young carers, visit the **Young Carers in Schools website** – www.youngcarersinschools.com.

If you have further questions, you can contact Andy McGowan, Policy and Practice Manager at Carers Trust – amcgowan@carers.org.