

Safeguarding Awareness Week 2026:

Monday 18 May – Friday 22 May 2026



Equality and Diversity UK

A Strategic Call to Governors

From Compliance to Culture – Leading Safeguarding with Purpose



Equality and Diversity UK

www.equalityanddiversity.co.uk

Foreword

Safeguarding is not a policy. It is not a checklist. It is not a moment in time.

It is a **culture** lived, felt, and experienced by every child, every day.

As governors, you hold one of the most powerful levers in education: **strategic oversight**. You are not in the classroom, but your decisions shape what happens in it. You are not delivering interventions, but you determine whether systems are strong enough to protect the most vulnerable.

During **Safeguarding Awareness Week 2026**, we are reminded that safeguarding must move beyond compliance and into **intentional, proactive culture-building**. Schools today face increasing complexity digital risks, mental health challenges, contextual safeguarding concerns, and widening inequalities.

As highlighted in this year's focus, safeguarding now demands:

- Clear and consistent systems
- Confident, well-trained staff
- Strong leadership oversight
- Practical, embedded approaches to early intervention

This is where governance matters most.

This document is written **from one governor to another**—to challenge, inspire, and strengthen your role in ensuring that safeguarding is not something your school *does*, but something your school *is*.



Key Message: Safeguarding is Strategic Leadership

Safeguarding is not operational alone; it is **strategic**.

As governors, your role is to ensure:

- Safeguarding is **embedded, not bolted on**
- Vulnerable pupils are **seen, heard, and protected**
- Systems are **proactive, not reactive**
- Culture reflects **safety, belonging, and inclusion**

At its core, safeguarding is about one thing:

Every child feeling safe enough to learn, grow, and thrive.



Governors' Strategic Safeguarding Responsibilities

Your role is not to “do safeguarding”, it is to **assure, challenge, and lead**.

1. Ensure a Robust Safeguarding Framework

- Policies are up-to-date, compliant, and **lived in practice**
- Safeguarding aligns with:
 - Statutory guidance (e.g. *Keeping Children Safe in Education*)
 - The Ofsted framework
- Clear reporting structures exist and are understood by all

2. Hold Leaders to Account

Ask strategic questions:

- How do we know safeguarding is effective?
- What evidence shows early intervention is working?
- Where are the gaps and what are we doing about them?

Governors must move beyond “receiving reports” to **interrogating impact**.

3. Champion a Safeguarding Culture

Safeguarding is not the DSL's responsibility alone.

Governors must ensure:

- All staff feel confident to act
- Concerns are taken seriously
- There is a **no-blame culture** focused on learning and improvement



4. Monitor Vulnerable Groups Through an EDI Lens

Safeguarding and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are inseparable.

Ask:

- Which pupils are disproportionately affected?
- Are we recognising intersectionality (e.g. race, SEND, poverty, gender)?
- Are some children “invisible” within our systems?

Safeguarding must reflect **equity, not equality**.

5. Ensure Pupil Voice is Central

Ofsted is clear:

Safeguarding is effective when children feel safe.

Governors must ensure:

- Pupils know how to report concerns
- Their voices shape safeguarding practice
- Systems reflect real lived experiences not assumptions



Safeguarding Through an EDI Lens

Safeguarding that is not inclusive is **not effective safeguarding**.

Key Considerations:

- **Race and safeguarding:** Are behaviours misinterpreted due to bias?
- **Neurodiversity:** Are communication needs understood, or are behaviours mislabelled?
- **Gender and identity:** Are LGBTQ+ pupils safe and supported?
- **Poverty and vulnerability:** Are contextual risks recognised?

Strategic Governor Questions:

- How are we addressing unconscious bias in safeguarding decisions?
- Do safeguarding records show patterns linked to protected characteristics?
- Are adjustments made proactively for neurodivergent pupils?

EDI is not an “add-on” it is **core to safeguarding practice**.



Key Safeguarding Issues Governors Must Understand

The safeguarding landscape is evolving. Governors must be informed about:

1. Online and Digital Harms

- Exploitation through social media
- Cyberbullying and online grooming
- Exposure to harmful content

2. Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Rising anxiety, self-harm, and emotional distress
- Impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences

3. Contextual Safeguarding

- Risks outside the home (community, peer groups, exploitation)
- County lines, gang involvement, and criminal exploitation

4. Peer-on-Peer Abuse

- Sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour
- Normalisation of inappropriate behaviours

5. Attendance and Hidden Harm

- Persistent absence as a safeguarding indicator
- Children missing education (CME)

6. Staff Confidence and Capacity

- Staff may know *what* to do, but lack confidence in *how* to act
- Training must be ongoing, practical, and reflective



Ofsted Expectations: What Governors Must Know

Ofsted places safeguarding at the heart of inspection.

Inspectors will look for:

- A **strong safeguarding culture**
- Staff who are **confident and knowledgeable**
- **Timely and appropriate action** taken on concerns
- Evidence that **children feel safe**
- Effective **record-keeping and follow-up**

For governors, this means:

- You must be able to **articulate safeguarding impact**
- You must demonstrate **challenge and oversight**
- You must ensure safeguarding is **everyone's responsibility**

Actions for Governors: Moving from Awareness to Impact

Immediate Actions:

- Review safeguarding reports with an **EDI lens**
- Meet with the DSL to understand real challenges
- Ensure safeguarding is a **standing agenda item**

Medium-Term Actions:

- Commission **deep dives into vulnerable groups**
- Embed **pupil voice into governance structures**
- Strengthen **training for governors and staff**

Long-Term Actions:

- Build a **proactive safeguarding culture**
- Align safeguarding with **whole-school strategy**
- Ensure continuous **evaluation and improvement**



Final Executive Summary: The Power of Governance in Safeguarding

Safeguarding is not about perfection. It is about **relentless commitment**.

As governors, you may never see the full impact of your work but it is there:

- In the child who speaks up because they feel safe
- In the staff member who acts because they feel confident
- In the system that prevents harm before it happens

You are not just overseeing safeguarding.

You are **protecting childhoods**.

You are **shaping cultures**.

You are **saving lives**.

Let this Safeguarding Awareness Week be more than a moment. Let it be a turning point where governance steps fully into its power, and safeguarding becomes not just compliant, but **exceptional**.

