Thank you for your letter of 31 January, addressed to the Secretary of State, about the impact that being a young carer can have on their education. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area.

Young carers are the unsung heroes of the care system and make an enormous contribution to their families, providing support for the people they love. Many carers are proud of their role and say they feel it helps them develop a sense of responsibility as well as learning useful life skills. It is important, however, that they are protected from excessive or inappropriate caring responsibilities that could have a negative impact on their development, education and access to wider opportunities.

Consistent identification of young carers remains challenging, with many being ‘hidden’ and therefore unrecognised and/or unsupported. The reasons for this are complex but may include the notion that caring is perceived within the family as normal. Additionally, some families are reluctant to disclose caring responsibilities due to a fear of stigmatisation or concerns about the risk of intervention by social services.

The department collects limited information on young carers through the annual Children in Need Census. However, we are determined to ensure that individuals get the support they need and are able to live a full life beyond their caring responsibilities.

To ensure that young carers do not take on inappropriate levels of caring, the government has changed the law to improve how young carers and their families are identified and supported. If a local authority (LA) considers that a young carer may have support needs, it must carry out an assessment under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The LA must also carry out such an assessment if a young carer, or the parent of a young carer, requests one – regardless of who they care for or what type of care they provide.
The new provisions, under The Young Carers’ (Needs Assessment) Regulations 2015, can be viewed at: tinyurl.com/uwhc8du. The regulations work alongside provisions for assessing adults in the Care Act 2014 and require LAs to look at the needs of the whole family when carrying out a young carer’s needs assessment. This means that when a child or young person is identified as a young carer, the needs of everyone in the family will be considered, triggering both children’s and young people’s (and adults’) support services into action. The assessment will take into account why a child is caring, what needs to change and what would help the family to prevent children or young people from taking on this responsibility in the first place.

The benefits of schools identifying and supporting young carers are clear, and schools will monitor attendance of all children closely. It is important that head teachers and governors are allowed the freedom to exercise their welfare responsibilities in the most appropriate way, according to the individual needs of all their pupils. Where a child’s absence, achievement or wellbeing is of concern, the school will wish to raise this in the best interest of the child’s education. Schools have a duty to inform the LA of any child who fails to attend school regularly and together they will consider the individual circumstances of each case and take the appropriate course of action to ensure the child receives consistent education.

I hope this information is helpful and I would like to thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]

Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families