

Appendix D – Temporary revised guidance on safeguarding in schools during COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

The DfE has issued updated guidance on safeguarding in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The guidance supports governing bodies, proprietors, senior leadership teams and designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) so they can continue to have appropriate regard to KCSIE and keep their children safe. It suggests where schools and colleges might consider safeguarding policy and process differently when compared to business as usual.

School policies and procedures must have regard to the updated guidance from the DfE during the COVID-19 period and ensure they are operating according to the most recent advice.

The way schools and colleges are currently operating in response to coronavirus (COVID-19) is fundamentally different to business as usual, however, a number of important safeguarding principles remain the same:

- with regard to safeguarding, the best interests of children must always continue to come first
- if anyone in a school or college has a safeguarding concern about any child they should continue to act and act immediately
- a DSL or deputy should always be available (during school hours) for staff to discuss any safeguarding concerns.
- it is essential that unsuitable people are not allowed to enter the children's workforce and/or gain access to children
- children should continue to be protected when they are online

Schools and colleges should, as far as is reasonably possible, take a whole institution approach to safeguarding. This will allow them to satisfy themselves that any new policies and processes in response to COVID-19 are not weakening their approach to safeguarding or undermining their child protection policy.

Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Schools should ensure their individual Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy has an addendum reflecting the following during this period of temporary arrangements:

- any updated advice received from the local 3 safeguarding partners
- any updated advice received from local authorities regarding children with education, health and care (EHC) plans, the local authority designated officer and children's social care, reporting mechanisms, referral thresholds and children in need
- what staff and volunteers should do if they have any concerns about a child
- the continued importance of all staff and volunteers acting and acting immediately on any safeguarding concerns

- DSL (and deputy) arrangements
- the continued importance for school and college staff to work with and support children's social workers and the local authority virtual school head (VSH) for looked-after and previously looked-after children
- peer on peer abuse - given the very different circumstances schools and colleges are operating in a revised process may be required for managing any report of such abuse and supporting victims (the principles as set out in part 5 of KCSIE should continue to inform any revised approach)
- what staff and volunteers should do if they have concerns about a staff member or volunteer who may pose a safeguarding risk to children (the principles in part 4 of KCSIE will continue to support how a school or college responds to any such concerns)
- what arrangements are in place to keep children not physically attending the school or college safe (for example, those who have been advised to self-isolate), especially online and how concerns about these children should be progressed

It is important that all staff and volunteers are aware of the new policy and are kept up to date as it is revised. The revised policy should continue to be made available publicly.

Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL)

It is important that all school and college staff and volunteers have access to a trained DSL or deputy and know on any given day who that person is and how to speak to them.

It is acknowledged that face to face DSL training is very unlikely to take place during this period. For the period COVID-19 measures are in place, a DSL (or deputy) who has been trained will continue to be classed as a trained DSL (or deputy) even if they miss their refresher training. It may be possible to access virtual training.

Every school and college will face unique challenges at this time. Where reasonably possible, the DSL (or deputy) should consider these in a child protection context and reflect them in the child protection policy as appropriate.

Inter-agency working

Meetings to discuss children at risk of harm, such as CiC reviews, CiN and child protection conferences will still be taking place via Skype telephony. As such, DSLs, or senior leaders where a DSL is not available, will be expected to attend virtual meetings where at all possible.

Vulnerable children

It is especially important during this period of COVID-19 that school staff continue to work with and support children's social workers to help protect vulnerable children.

Children and online safety away from school should any groups of children be advised to self-isolate, or a local lockdown were to occur

All schools and colleges should be doing what they reasonably can to keep all of their children safe.

It is important that all staff who interact with children, including online, continue to look out for signs a child may be at risk. Any such concerns should be dealt with as per the child protection policy and where appropriate referrals should still be made to children's social care and as required the police.

The starting point for online teaching should be that the same principles as set out in the school's staff behaviour policy (sometimes known as a code of conduct). This policy should amongst other things include acceptable use of technologies, staff pupil/student relationships and communication including the use of social media. The policy should apply equally to any existing or new online and distance learning arrangements which are introduced.

The principles set out in the guidance for safer working practice for those working with children and young people in education settings published by the Safer Recruitment Consortium may help schools satisfy themselves that their staff behaviour policies are robust and effective.

Schools should ensure any use of online learning tools and systems is in line with privacy and data protection/GDPR requirements.