

Managing safeguarding risk: Additional guidance for Nottinghamshire Schools during COVID-19 Crisis

Revised Risk Assessments

The Covid-19 Crisis has impacted upon the ability of schools to carry out their duty to safeguard all pupils on roll through the usual daily contact. This will have required Headteachers, DSLs and SENCOs to reflect upon where the present situation may create additional risks for vulnerable children including those with CPP, CIN, EHAFs, EHCPs and those pupils deemed to be vulnerable by the school.

Whilst pupils in these groups are currently allowed to access care in school many families have chosen to keep their children at home, which has necessitated the development of remote monitoring and revised risk assessments. The following simple RAG system may help to clarify which pupils are most at risk.

RAG Rating	Threshold
RED	<p>Pupil should be attending school or agreed provision daily:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguarding concerns increased due to lack of attendance or agreed provision Welfare of the child/ young person and family is likely to be severely negatively impacted upon without support of the school or agreed provision
AMBER	<p>Through the use of 'reasonable endeavours' the pupil is able to be supported within the home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguarding concerns can be monitored using an appropriate format where necessary, e.g digitally, online, by drive by visits, telephone, to enable the child to access learning and remain safe and healthy (including mental health and personal wellbeing). Social Care have agreed, if involved.
GREEN	<p>Pupil is able to be supported within the home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupil can be cared for safely in the home setting at the present time with telephone contact only. Social Care have agreed, if involved.

Continuation of usual safeguarding processes

The local processes for responding to safeguarding concerns are detailed in The Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership's *Pathway to Provision (Version 8)*. Whilst the measures put in place to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the level and nature of contact which schools are having with their pupils, the thresholds for reporting serious safeguarding concerns have not changed.

Colleagues in Children's Social Care continue to visit and stay in contact with families where there are known safeguarding risks, including where Child Protection plans are in place, and where children have been designated as 'Children in Need'. In these open cases the school will be expected to continue to work closely in partnership with the Social Worker as part of the multi-agency team supporting the child.

When the government made its decision to close schools for the provision of education, schools were required to make childcare provision for the children of keyworkers, as well as for those pupils deemed to be 'vulnerable' where the risks of infection from being in school were outweighed by the risks to the child's wellbeing by remaining at home. (See *Safeguarding in schools update 31.03.20*). The determination of this balance of risk is not an exact science; it takes into account a range of risk and protective factors, both historical and current, and recognises that these change over time. So, any decisions need to be kept under review. Where a decision is made to allow a child to remain at home, the risks inherent in that decision may be mitigated by the school maintaining frequent contact with the child and their parent or carer.

Since the partial closure of schools, many Headteachers and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) have worried about the impact that being at home may be having on some pupils who they deem to be vulnerable. These worries may be about the child's emotional wellbeing, their susceptibility to online abuse, or to other forms of harm. In the past, when such a child had been attending school on a daily basis, the school was able to reassure itself of the child's ongoing safety and wellbeing, including when there has been a history of domestic violence, substance misuse, or challenging behaviour within the family. Now, with most children not attending school on a daily basis, how should a school respond to such worries?

- As before, where a school has good reason to believe that a child has been harmed, or is at risk of being harmed, the school should make a referral to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Headteachers and DSLs will already be aware of the evidence that is required to support a referral to the MASH.

"If a practitioner has a new safeguarding concern regarding a child, or considers that a child is in need of specialist support from the children's social care in line with the threshold criteria outlined on page 12 (of *Pathway to Provision*), they should contact the MASH. If a practitioner working with a child, young person or family has immediate concerns about child protection, they should contact the MASH urgently, without delay. If you believe that a child is in immediate danger, call the police immediately on 999." *Pathway to Provision*

- Where a school recognises that a referral to the MASH is not appropriate, but where the child's family has agreed that they might benefit from support, a referral to the Early Help Unit (EHU) is appropriate.

Concerns arising during the current crisis that do not meet usual thresholds

However, where a school has concerns about a child's possible wellbeing, but insufficient evidence to justify a referral to the MASH, and no consent from parents for an EHAF, there are several actions which a school can take:

- Seek to clarify the basis on which the concerns about the child's wellbeing are held. This might include discussing these concerns with the child's parents or carers, and/or use the *Carrying out a contextual safeguarding structured conversation* framework to discuss the concerns with a colleague. This framework has been designed to help Headteachers, DSLs and others to think carefully about the concerns they have about a child's wellbeing, and thereby consider whether these concerns are likely to meet the threshold for a referral to the MASH, to the EHU, to another support service, or whether it is appropriate for the school itself to take further actions and 'hold' the concerns. The guidance behind this contextual safeguarding framework recommends careful consideration through a 'structured conversation' with a colleague either within the school, or with peer support from another Headteacher or DSL.

"There is no substitute for sound professional judgement, effective inter and intra-agency communication and good evidence-based practice..." *Pathway to Provision*

- Put in place arrangements to increase the protective factors around the child. Whilst partial school closures have been in place, many schools have maintained regular contact with children deemed vulnerable, with the level of this contact being proportionate to the level of concern which the school has about the child's wellbeing.

Since the partial closure of schools, some Headteachers and DSLs have contacted the MASH to discuss concerns about a child's potential wellbeing in the absence of being able to make regular contact with the child or their parent/carer. In the most extreme cases, the parent/carer has refused to answer phone calls, respond to texts and emails, and not appeared at the door. In such circumstances a referral to the MASH without evidence of significant risk of harm would not be appropriate, and nor would referral to the Family Service, unless the school had reason to believe that the parent/carer would be more likely to respond to contact from them. It is a common misconception that social workers or members of the Family Service have any more right of access to someone's home than, for example, a teacher.

'Holding' concerns about a child's wellbeing is difficult when the parent/carer is not responding to contact. The Local Authority is aware that this can be emotionally challenging and frustrating. Do work together with local colleagues, perhaps other Headteachers or DSLs in your hub, to share scenarios of concern. During the Covid Crisis we have arranged for the SEMH team to work with you on this issue in your localities, to allow you to discuss your concerns about the well-being of pupils. Their contact details can be found at the end of this guidance document.

School leaders have developed a range of measures to encourage the parent/carer to maintain contact with the school:

- Make phone calls and leave positive phone messages at different times of the day
- Text or email daily
- Try to make contact using the second emergency contact number provided by the family, via a known relative, or via another service who you know are also involved with the family
- Message that someone, ideally someone familiar to the child, will be driving past the front gate at a given time, and ask that the child and their parent can come to the door. This could be to drop off learning resources, certificates, positive messages, rewards etc
- If the child is eligible for Free School Meals, use the 'drive by' as the means by which the voucher can be delivered
- Write formally, explaining the duty of care which the school has towards all children on the school roll, making clear what 'next steps' the school will make if the parent/carer does not make contact with the school.
- If you have information that leads you to believe that any child may be at heightened risk of harm e.g. knowledge about mental health needs, substance misuse or domestic violence, and you have made unsuccessful stringent and concerted efforts to communicate with the family, it is likely that the threshold for referral to the MASH will have been met. In these circumstances please inform the family that unless they respond to you immediately, you will need to contact the MASH to request Social Care/Police involvement.

Do keep copies of all amended risk assessments, records of contacts, and attempted contacts.

References

- *Contextual safeguarding: Reflective practice & structured conversations*. Guidance for schools. (14.01.20)
- *Carrying out a contextual safeguarding structured conversation*. Proforma to use to support the structured conversation. (undated)
- *Contextual safeguarding: Risk & protective factors*. Grid to support the structured conversation. (10.09.19)
- *Covid-19: Safeguarding in schools update*. Updated local guidance to schools following the issuing of central government safeguarding guidance. (31.03.20)
- *Pathway to Provision (Version 8)*. Multi-agency Thresholds Guidance for Nottinghamshire Children's Services. December 2018.

- *Safeguarding Children: Indicators of possible abuse or neglect.* NSCP.
www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/nscp
- *Helpline statement.* Guidance to professionals in responding to concerns about domestic violence. (09.04.20)

SEMH Team Contact details

Rushcliffe, Broxtowe, Gedling,

Team Manager	Alison Blackmore	07824 544832	alison.blackmore@nottscc.gov.uk
SHNK	Janet Tyers	07944 465443	janet.tyers@nottscc.gov.uk
Gedling	Emma Dolan	07766 364453	emma.dolan@nottscc.gov.uk
South Broxtowe	Zena Argent	please email	zena.mays@nottscc.gov.uk
Rushcliffe	Jonathan Smith	0115 9772497	jonathanS.smith@nottscc.gov.uk

Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Newark, Mansfield

Team Manager	Tracy Ayers	07795 801820	tracy.ayers@nottscc.gov.uk
Ashfield	Lucie Keeling	07789 944232	lucie.keeling@nottscc.gov.uk
Bassetlaw	Sue Sparks	07702 170809	sue.sparks@nottscc.gov.uk
Mansfield	Alison Hardwick	07492 062195	alison.hardwick@nottscc.gov.uk
Newark /Southwell	Caroline Crisi	please email	caroline.crisis@nottscc.gov.uk
Ollerton/Rainworth	Sarah Angell	07970 597747	sarah.angell@nottscc.gov.uk