

## COVID-19: Safeguarding in schools update

### **Introduction**

The government has made the decision to close schools for the provision of education, and further to direct people not to leave their home except for limited reasons. This is a key aspect of the government's social distancing policy aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19. Schools and settings have been asked to make childcare provision for a limited number of children and young people, identified as being either the children of keyworkers, thereby enabling these keyworkers to continue with their vital work, or children with significant additional needs whereby the risks associated with them not accessing provision during the day outweigh the risks associated with them mixing with others outside of the home. For some children and young people, receiving provision during the day is a protective factor from harm.

The changes to the operation of schools brought about by the government's response to COVID-19 has created the need for all schools and settings to review their Child Protection policy and practices in the light of these changes. The government's most recent guidance on safeguarding in schools can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers/coronavirus-covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>

This updated Local Authority guidance has been prepared by myself as Safeguarding Children in Education Officer, alongside colleagues in Children's Social Care, and in the wider Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership. It is not a comprehensive summary of the government's updated guidance, which should be read in full, nor is it a replacement for previously issued national or local guidance on safeguarding in schools. Notwithstanding this additional guidance, the requirements on all schools and partners as laid out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) remain in force. This guidance will help you to write a tailored addendum to your own Child Protection Policy for 2019-20.

The way schools and colleges are currently operating in response to 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 be available
- 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.

### **Revised schooling arrangements**

Educational settings (not including childcare) are being required to complete a short form to notify the Department for Education about their status regarding coronavirus (COVID-19). This form asks those running institutions to confirm whether their setting is open and, if so, provide information about numbers of pupils and staff attending. The completed form is submitted by noon of each weekday, thereby allowing for a record of attendance to be maintained.

The DfE is asking local authorities to maintain an overview of the provision being made available and accessed within its jurisdiction, and to coordinate access to this provision where a school or setting is not able to staff provision for the number of children and young people who are required to access it. The local authority's safeguarding responsibilities have not been

altered by these changes, in fact, the changes require that the local authority and the wider Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership is more vigilant to the potential for children to come to harm as a result of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Reviewing children and young people who are at risk of harm**

The government's latest guidance on identifying those children and young people identified as vulnerable can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

Review your school's Vulnerable Children's list to identify:

- i. Children subject to a Child Protection Plan,
- ii. Children subject to a Child in Need Plan,
- iii. Children for whom an extended period of time at home will present an additional risk to the child,
- iv. Children who are Young Carers

In each child's case:

1. Clarify where the children deemed to be vulnerable will be living during the period of the school's partial closure and discuss with parents the need to respond to calls.
2. Review **with** the child's parent/carer, social worker, and other professionals actively involved with the child:
  - a) the balance of risk and protective factors of the child remaining at home, with those of them accessing childcare on the school site, and
  - b) based on the level of need/concern, determine a plan for 'checking in', and this checking in should include at least a phone call, and preferably a video call. The frequency of this checking in will vary from 1-3 days, but contact will be no longer than every 3 days.
3. Make and maintain a record of this decision and of any ongoing contact on the school's usual recording system, and ensure that contact details of parents and carers, social worker and any multi-agency professional working with the child are up-to-date and recorded on the school's recording system
4. The checking-in conversation will ascertain:
  - a) By speaking to the parent/carer that the child is happy and well, to ascertain if the parent has any concerns or worries, and to clarify who if any in the household is showing symptoms of COVID-19, and
  - b) By speaking to the child, that they appear to be well and that they say that they are well. Ask specifically if they are eating and sleeping and maintaining social distance, and if they have any concerns or worries.
5. Where a Head Teacher/Senior DSL is concerned about a child's safety and wellbeing, and where the child is not accessing provision in school, consideration should be given to extending an invitation to the child to access provision at school.
6. Where concerns for the safety of a child at home escalate, a referral should be made to Children's Social Care or if at immediate risk to the Police. Similarly, if you are not able to make contact with the child and their parent/carer, try again, review the risk assessment and if appropriate call Children's Social Care and the Police.

### **Safeguarding implications for a school making childcare provision on its site**

The school or setting making provision should apply the setting's usual safeguarding protocols, or where these have to be varied, the revised protocol should be published on the school's website. All staff and volunteers need to be made aware of any amendments to the safeguarding policy, and these amendments need to be made publicly available.

As and when 'hubs' are established to make childcare provision for children and young people from a number of schools, the host school must clarify who is the Senior DSL to whom any and all safeguarding concerns should be reported. This Senior DSL for the setting, or their deputy, will be available for consultation to any of the members of staff delivering the provision, including staff who may be accompanying a child from a different school or setting. This consultation need not be face-to-face, but it does need to be readily available.

Schools and settings acting as 'hubs' will need to be able to demonstrate that those with Senior DSL and DSL responsibilities have accessed an appropriate level of safeguarding training in accordance with KCSiE (2019), and our own Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership procedures.

In making provision for children and young people on your school site, where possible make arrangements to keep primary and secondary pupils apart.

Where children are accessing provision on a school site other than the school where they are a registered pupil, their current Head Teacher/Senior Designated Safeguarding Lead (Senior DSL) need to ensure that any necessary safeguarding information is shared with the Senior DSL for the provision which the child is accessing, in order to ensure they are fully conversant with the child's safeguarding needs, potential risks and any child protection or CiN plans in place. This is particularly important if the child is not accompanied by a member of their own school's staff.

### ***Other general safeguarding advice***

The Senior DSL must ensure that remote access (working from home) to the school's safeguarding recording system is possible and that a laptop/iPad is available for each member of the DSL team.

Discuss with neighbouring schools about DSL cover in the case of sickness.

Remind Teachers to only use approved contacts methods – no social media groups etc

Where a school receives Operation Encompass/Domestic Violence notification emails the in-box should be checked on a daily basis and appropriate actions taken.

The DSL team must meet weekly, via Skype Business, to discuss the status of each child they are working with, and where necessary seek advice.

We advise in accordance with statutory guidance that you always act in the 'best interest of the child'

### ***Key documents and links***

Since the publishing of the government's updated advice on safeguarding in schools, a number of organisations including schools have created policy templates and other resource tools to support them in their work. The best of these will be uploaded onto the two main sites used by Nottinghamshire's schools to access recommended safeguarding materials, namely:

- The safeguarding section of Schools' Portal
- The NSCP website, in section *resources/schools*

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