

Annex to Child Protection policy – version 1.0

Child protection during the COVID-19 measures

Context

The way schools and colleges are currently operating in response to coronavirus (COVID-19) is fundamentally different to business as usual. Most children are no longer in a school setting and staff numbers have been affected by the outbreak.

Schools have been asked to provide care for children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home.

This Annex to our Child Protection policy sets out details of our safeguarding arrangements for:

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Version control and dissemination

This is version 1.0 of this annex. It will be reviewed by our DSL or a deputy DSL on a weekly basis as circumstances continue to evolve or following updated Department for Education advice or guidance. It is available on the school website here www.wathengrange.com and is made available to staff by email.

We will ensure that on any given day all staff and volunteers in attendance will be aware of who the DSL and deputy DSLs are and how staff and volunteers can to speak to them.

Safeguarding priority

During these challenging times the safeguarding of all children at our school – whether they are currently at home or in attendance – continues to be our priority. The following fundamental safeguarding principles remain the same:

- the best interests of children continue to come first
- if anyone in our school has a safeguarding concern, they will act immediately

- a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or deputy DSL will always be available
- no unsuitable people will be allowed to gain access to children
- children should continue to be protected when they are online.

Current school position

Our school is currently designated as 'on standby'. Staff are working from home and providing regular wellbeing calls to students and parents/carers as well as providing work to all students which can be returned by email or post. The school site is accessed by named staff on an occasional basis for maintenance and accessing any returned work/photocopying work for students.

All staff and volunteers attending on site from outside our school will complete an induction to ensure they are aware of safeguarding risks and know how to act if they have concerns.

Safeguarding partners' advice

We continue to work closely with our safeguarding partner Warwickshire County Council, and we will ensure this annex is consistent with their advice. This will include expectations for supporting 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. The current advice is below.

The advice for responding is as follows from Warwickshire Safeguarding Team:

- All parents of pupils at the school should have been notified that the school subscribes to OE.
- It should therefore not be a surprise for school to make contact in the current COVID-19 circumstances if the child/ren in the family subject of the OE alert are not currently attending school.
- NB if the child/ren are still attending school because they are in one of the defined vulnerable groups or their parent/s are key workers, the response should be what it usually is, i.e. provision of kind support in school, sensitivity, a trauma-informed response to unusual behaviour/presentation, a call home if the DSL thinks that would be useful and appropriate and/or because they are concerned about the child's response or presentation in school.
- For children who are not currently attending, I would advise that the DSL makes a call to the family and speaks to parents. The DSL would need to make a judgement based on their knowledge of the family and the information in the alert about which parent they speak to. If it is clear that one parent is the victim and the other the perpetrator of domestic abuse, it would be helpful to speak to the victim if at all possible and maybe offer the opportunity of a contact in another way (i.e. online) or conversation via a different number (e.g. the parent's mobile number) or at another time.
- In essence, I would advise telling them "*We have received this alert, I am ringing just to check how things are, is everybody well, may I ask if the child/ren are*

OK?". I would keep the conversation as positive and upbeat as possible with due sensitivity to the parent's apparent level of distress, reassuring them that the school is simply fulfilling its statutory obligation to promote every child's welfare and ensure that children are safe, both physically and emotionally.

- Do not at any stage apologise for making the call. Explain as sensitively but firmly as possible that the school has a duty to follow up concerns, it is not a choice and it is most certainly not the school prying into private family life. It is, as stated above, the school fulfilling its duty in these exceptional circumstances when children cannot attend school to promote children's welfare.
- Obviously, the DSL would need to adapt that 'script' according to their knowledge of the family/parents and the tone of the response from the parent that they are speaking to.
- If at all possible, the DSL should ask the parent if the DSL - or another member of staff who has a positive working relationship with the child/ren - could speak to or arrange a video chat with the child/ren. Assure parents again that this is not the school investigating or interfering, it is simply the school fulfilling its duty to promote the welfare of pupils and wanting to let the child/ren know that staff at school are thinking about them and concerned for their welfare.

When talking to the child/ren, most DSLs and teachers have established expertise in communicating with children so are well placed to plan and structure such a conversation. However, suffice to say that the chat should not reference the domestic abuse incident directly unless the child raises it as an issue. It should simply be a kind chat with the child along the lines of:

- *How are you?*
- *What have you been doing while you've been off school?*
- *What fun things have you done?*
- *How are you finding it being at home all the time and not being able to go out?*
- *Is there anything else you'd like to talk to me about?*

If the child chooses to refer to the domestic abuse incident, the DSL or MoS should listen and respond supportively in the normal way.

If the school is having direct contact with children for online teaching purposes, the above could be structured around that in the same way that kind support is normally provided in the context of normal teaching and the school day.

All conversations in relation to OE alerts should be recorded as usual using the school's normal safeguarding recording system (green forms, CPOMS, My Concern or whatever).

In the event that the DSL becomes concerned that the child/ren is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, they should follow their usual safeguarding procedures.

Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities for safeguarding in our school remain in line with our Child Protection Policy.

If possible, our DSL and at least one deputy DSL will be available on site during the school day. Where this is not possible, we will:

- have a trained DSL or deputy DSL available by phone and/or online video; or
- ensure we have access to a trained DSL or deputy DSL from another school or college by phone and/or online video.

Where our DSL or a deputy DSL cannot be on site, then in addition to one of the above options we will also ensure a senior leader from the school takes responsibility for co-ordinating safeguarding on site.

The designated safeguarding leads (DSL) for child protection are Mick Finnie/Rob Maddox

Contact details: email: mick.finnie@wathengrange.com

Contact details: email: robert.maddox@wathengrange.com

The deputy designated lead(s) is Cheryl Marsden

Contact details: email: c.marsden@wathengrange.com

Vulnerable children

Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with EHC plans.

Those who have a social worker include children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after by the local authority. A child may also be deemed to be vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need or otherwise meet the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

There is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend school, so long as they do not have underlying health conditions that put them at risk. Where a parent does not want their child to attend school, and their child is considered vulnerable, we will discuss this with the social worker and explore the reasons for this directly with the parent.

Those with an EHC plan will be risk-assessed in consultation with the local authority and parents to decide whether they need to continue to be offered a school place in order to meet their needs, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home. This could include, if necessary, carers, therapists or clinicians visiting the home to provide any essential services. Many children and young people with EHC plans can safely remain at home.

We will encourage our vulnerable children and young people to attend a school, including remotely if needed.

Senior leaders in our school, especially the DSL (and deputies) know who our most vulnerable children are, and they have the flexibility to offer a place to those on the edge of receiving children's social care support.

We will continue to work with children's social workers and the local authority virtual school head (VSH) for looked-after and previously looked-after children.

Increased vulnerability or risk

Negative experiences and distressing life events, such as the current circumstances, can affect the mental health of pupils and their parents. Staff will be aware of this in setting expectations of pupils' work where they are at home. Where we are providing for children of critical workers and vulnerable children on site, we will ensure appropriate support is in place for them.

Our staff and volunteers will be aware of the mental health of children and their parents and carers and will contact the DSL or a deputy if they have any concerns.

Attendance

Where a child is expected but does not arrive at school, we will follow our attendance procedure and attempt to contact the family. If contact cannot be made, the DSL or a deputy DSL will be informed.

The DSL or a deputy will attempt to contact the parents through various methods, such as telephone, FaceTime, Skype or by contact a relative in the first instance. If contact cannot be made or if the DSL or a deputy DSL deems it necessary, we will undertake a home visit or ask an appropriate agency to do so. A risk assessment will be carried out before any such visit is made to ensure staff the family are not put at risk.

Where a vulnerable child does not take up their place, we will notify their social worker.

Reporting concerns about children or staff

The importance of all staff and volunteers acting immediately on any safeguarding concerns remains. Staff and volunteers will continue to follow our Child Protection procedures and advise the DSL of any concerns they have about any child, including those who are not attending school.

The varied arrangements in place as a result of the COVID-19 measures do not reduce the risks that children may face from staff or volunteers. As such, it remains extremely important that any allegations of abuse made against staff or volunteers attending our school are dealt with thoroughly and efficiently and in accordance with our Allegations Against Staff Policy.

Staff training and induction

For the duration of the COVID-19 measures, our DSL and deputy DSLs are unlikely to receive their refresher training. In line with government guidance, our trained DSLs and deputy DSLs will be classed as trained even if they cannot receive this training.

All current school staff have received safeguarding training and have read Part One and Annex A of Keeping Children Safe in Education. When new staff are recruited or volunteers join us, they will receive a safeguarding induction in accordance with our Child Protection Policy.

If staff from another setting attend the school site then, in line with government guidance, we will not undertake any additional safeguarding checks if the setting providing those staff confirm that:

- the individual has been subject to an enhanced DBS and children's barred list check and, that in the opinion of that setting, nothing resulted from those checks that provided any caused for concern
- there are no safeguarding investigations into the conduct of that individual
- the individual remains suitable to work with children.

Safer recruitment/volunteers and movement of staff

It remains essential that people who are unsuitable are not allowed to enter the children's workforce or gain access to children.

When recruiting new staff, we will continue to follow our Safer Recruitment policy.

In response to COVID-19, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has made changes to its guidance on standard and enhanced DBS ID checking to minimise the need for face-to-face contact.

For volunteers we will continue to follow the checking and risk assessment process set out in paragraphs 167 to 172 of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019. Under no circumstances will a volunteer who has not been checked be left unsupervised or allowed to engage in regulated activity.

It is essential from a safeguarding perspective that we are aware, on any given day, which staff/volunteers are on our school site and that the appropriate checks have been carried out on those individuals. We will continue to maintain our single central record (SCR) during these measures to ensure we have this awareness.

Peer on peer abuse

We recognise that children can abuse their peers and our staff are clear about the school's policy and procedures regarding peer on peer abuse. All peer on peer abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously. We also recognise that abuse can still occur during a school closure or partial closure and between those children who do attend the school site during these measures.

Our staff will remain vigilant to the signs of peer-on-peer abuse and will follow the process set out in our Child Protection Policy, which can be accessed on our website.

Online safety

It is likely that children will be using the internet and engaging with social media far more during this time. Our staff are aware of the signs of cyberbullying and other online risks and our filtering and monitoring software remains in use during this time to safeguarding and support children.

Our staff will follow the process for online safety set out in our Child Protection Policy.

Staff who interact with children online will continue to look out for signs a child may be at risk. If a staff member is concerned about a child, that staff member will follow the approach set out in this annex and report that concern to the DSL or to a deputy DSL.

New children at the school

Children may join our school from other settings. When they do, we will seek from those settings the relevant welfare and child protection information. This is relevant for all children that join us, but it will be especially important where children are vulnerable.

For vulnerable children we will ensure we understand the reasons for the vulnerability and any arrangements in place to support them. As a minimum we will seek access to that child's EHC plan, child in need plan, child protection plan or, for looked-after children, their personal education plan and know who the child's social worker (and, for looked-after children, who the responsible VSH is).

Ideally this will happen before a child arrives but where that is not possible it will happen as soon as reasonably practicable.

Any exchanges of information will ideally happen at DSL (or deputy) level, and likewise between special educational needs co-ordinators/named individual with oversight of SEN provision for children with EHC plans. However, it is acknowledged this may not always be possible. Where this is the case our school senior leaders will take responsibility.

The DSL will undertake a risk assessment based on the information received, considering how risks will be managed and which staff need to know the information.

Supporting children not in school

Where the DSL has identified a child to be on the edge of social care support, or who would normally receive additional pastoral support in school, they will ensure that a communication plan is in place to support that child. Details of that plan will be recorded in the safeguarding file for that child. It will be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains current during these measures.