

## Safeguarding children during Coronavirus (COVID-19)

### Context

This additional guidance is based on DfE advice published on 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 – please see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people> and <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 appendix addresses how the school will apply the safeguarding and child protection policy in order to safeguard all pupils/students during COVID-19. It applies both to the minority of children who are attending school and the majority who will be staying at home pending further government advice.

### Vulnerable children

From 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the government asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and asked schools to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend. Children who absolutely need to attend are those children of workers critical to the COVID-19 response and children defined as vulnerable as follows:

- Children who have a social worker, including 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\*\*.
- Children and young people up to the age of 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans\*.
- Other children who the Designated Safeguarding Lead considers to be vulnerable, including those children who may be in receipt of early help; were previously the subject of child protection or child in need plans; were previously looked after; or whose situation and wellbeing at home may become unsafe or insecure if they do not attend school.

\*The DSL will undertake a risk assessment in consultation with the local authority and parents/carers to determine whether children with an EHC plan need to continue to be offered a school or college 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.

- \*\*It may also be necessary and appropriate to undertake a similar risk assessment in relation to children with social workers. However, the school will provide a place for any child with a social worker:
  - if the social worker requires a place to be provided; and
  - the child's parents/carers are willing to send the child to school; and

- the child does not have an underlying health condition that puts them at increased risk.

In circumstances where the school considers a child to be vulnerable and eligible to attend school but a parent/carer does not want to bring their child to school, the DSL will explore the reasons for this directly with the parent/carer. If the child has a social worker, the DSL will liaise with the social worker and seek to involve them in the discussion with the child's parents/carers.

Where parents/carers are concerned about the risk of their child contracting COVID19, the DSL will discuss those anxieties with the parent/carer following the advice set out by Public Health England. If the child has a social worker, the DSL will liaise with the social worker and seek to involve them in the discussion with the child's parents/carers.

NB eligibility for free school meals in and of itself will not be the determining factor in assessing vulnerability for these purposes.

In line with advice from Warwickshire County Council, the school will create and maintain an up-to-date register/database of all pupils/students who are considered vulnerable as above.

The register/database will contain the names and contact details of the child's parents/carers; other significant family members; social workers; family support workers; and any other key professionals including health professionals and youth justice workers. The register/database will be accessible to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and all deputy designated safeguarding leads including by secure access for DSLs who may need to self-isolate and/or work from home.

The school will assess the level of vulnerability of each pupil/student on the register/database using the RAG rating format as below. This will support the DSL to identify those children that need to be offered the opportunity to attend school (this must include all children with a social worker), those that can be supported by regular contact from a DSL and those whose attendance might be inconsistent and who may therefore need additional contact and support.

The RAG rating criteria are:

Red - most at risk of harm or neglect (will include all children subject of a child protection plan); and all children who are looked after

Amber - a moderate risk of harm, but with some protective factors (will include those with a Child in Need plan and/or being supported by a family support worker)

Green - some concerns or unmet needs; or have been red or amber and need monitoring.

Every child on the vulnerable children register/database will be allocated to a named DSL who will be responsible for ensuring that the identified level of support and contact is provided.

DSLs will record all contacts and outcomes with vulnerable children and their families in the usual way so that those records are visible to colleague DSLs and can be reviewed in regular DSL meetings.

## **Attendance monitoring**

If the school has any eligible children in attendance, the daily attendance sheet will be submitted to the DfE by 12 .00pm using the pro forma:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-attendance-recording-for-educational-settings>

If the school has closed, the return will be submitted once as required by the DfE.

For any vulnerable child who is due to attend school and who does not attend, the school will follow the normal absence management procedure. As a minimum, a text message will be sent home in relation to each eligible on each day of absence. If the DSL is concerned about the child's level of vulnerability, a decision will be made about whether a home visit is appropriate or if a phone call will suffice; and the necessary frequency of such contact for each day of absence

In relation to **all children subject of child protection plans and who are looked after** who do not attend school, the DSL or designated teacher for children who are looked after will **liaise closely with Children's Social Care**. A shared decision may be made that as long as one practitioner has seen the child, that will suffice as a safe and well check, but the DSL will log any such decision and all home visits undertaken.

In any event, **the social worker must be informed about any child subject of a child protection plan, child in need plan or who is looked after who does not attend school on the first and (subject to the agreement reached with the social worker) each subsequent day of absence.**

For each child identified as vulnerable but who the DSL considers can be safely cared for at home (NB this will not include any child with a child protection plan, child in need plan or who is looked after without written agreement with the child's social worker), the DSL will identify the nature and frequency of contact the child will need to reassure the DSL of their safety and wellbeing. This might include phone calls, text contact, Skype or home visits.

## Home visits

Any home visit must be risk assessed. If agreed that a home visit is necessary, it should be undertaken by two members of staff.

It is unlikely that home visits will be frequent. If they are undertaken, they will be subject of a risk assessment based on the following guidelines:

- (1) The DSL will speak to the child's parents/carers to establish whether any member of the household has symptoms of COVID-19; has been diagnosed; or is self-isolating.
- (2) Home visits will be undertaken by two members of staff, one of whom will be a DSL. NB It would be expected that any member of staff who has an underlying health condition/vulnerability would be at home self-isolating. For the absence of doubt, no such member of staff will therefore undertake home visits.
- (3) The DSL will inform the parents/carers of the plan to undertake a home visit and that visiting staff will need to see and speak to the child through a window.
- (4) Staff undertaking home visits must wear gloves and avoid contacting metal surfaces with their bare skin. They will knock on the door of the house with covered hands. After knocking on the door, they will step back from the door.

- (5) Visiting staff will ask to see and talk to the child through a window; and will aim to keep the conversation as upbeat and positive as possible.
- (6) Staff are advised not to enter households but simply to check that the child is well by a conversation through a window, maintaining the recommended social distance of 2 metres.
- (7) However, if undertaking a home visit, staff must actually see the child.

If a family is self-isolating and/or it is difficult/not appropriate to carry out a home visit subject to the risk assessment, the DSL will consider whether technology can be used to see the child, e.g. via Skype or other means of video chat. If carrying out Skype/video chat, this should be agreed with parents/carers prior to any call being made.

All school policies including the child protection, staff behaviour and ICT acceptable use policies must be followed at all times both in face to face and electronic communication with pupils and parents/carers. No staff member should use their own ICT or telephone equipment; or private message children; or video conference with a child directly other than via school-owned equipment subject to parental agreement as above.

Where concerns for a child at home reach the threshold for significant harm, a referral must be made to Children's Social Care/Police as per normal safeguarding procedures. For that reason, all DSLs must have access to MASH and other key agency phone numbers and children's details even when working from home.

## **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)**

The DSL and Deputy DSLs are as named in the main policy.

The DSL or a deputy DSLs will be readily accessible via telephone or online video contact, e.g. when working from home. All staff will be provided with contact details in order to be able to contact a DSL without any difficulty. All staff have access to the rota which shows which Safeguarding Leads are due in school, working from home or on their Easter break.

All staff will take responsibility for Safeguarding whilst on site.

All DSLs will have remote access to the register/database of all vulnerable children and other safeguarding records when working off site.

The DSL team will liaise with MASH, Social Care, family support workers and other key safeguarding partners as normal, whether working in school or working remotely. When working from home, DSLs will be accessible via access to their school Email account.

The DSL team will continue to attend – either in person or virtually – child protection conferences; core group meetings; strategy meetings; child in need meetings; children who are looked after reviews; and early help meetings.

If the school closes and pupils need to attend another school in accordance with local/hub arrangements, the school will maintain its overarching responsibility for safeguarding the child. The DSL will be responsible for liaising with the receiving school in order to share information from the register/database of vulnerable children and to advise the receiving school about how best to respond to new/emerging concerns. The DSL must be informed by the receiving school about any

new incidents or concerns and agreement must be reached and recorded about whether the DSL or a DSL in the receiving school is best placed to discuss issues with parents/carers, contact social workers, make referrals etc.

## **Reporting a concern**

All staff and volunteers continue to have a responsibility for safeguarding children and will report any safeguarding concerns about children to a DSL in the normal way as set out in the main policy.

Staff should have access to the normal safeguarding recording format (e.g. green forms, CPOMS) when working off site including when working from home.

Staff and volunteers are reminded of the need to report any concern immediately and without delay.

In the unlikely event that a member of staff cannot access the normal safeguarding recording format (whether green forms, CPOMS or something else) remotely, they will contact the DSL via Email (cc to at least one other DSL and the headteacher) to inform them that they need to share a concern. This will ensure that the concern is received.

Where a member of staff or volunteer is concerned about the behaviour of an adult working with children in the school, they should inform the headteacher as normal using a yellow form. If the notification needs to be made when the reporting individual is offsite, this should be done verbally and followed up with an Email to the headteacher on the same working day.

As normal, any concerns about the headteacher should be reported to chair of governors.

## **Safeguarding training and induction**

The DfE recognises that DSL training is very unlikely to take place whilst the threat of the COVID-19 virus remains and government guidance in relation to large gatherings and social distancing is relaxed.

DfE guidance states that 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.

The DSL will communicate any new or revised safeguarding advice, guidance, requirements, arrangements or information in writing to all staff and volunteers.

Where new staff or volunteers are recruited, they will continue to be provided with a safeguarding induction.

If adults from another school or setting are redeployed to work at the school during the COVID-19 virus, the school will take into account DfE supplementary guidance and will accept portability of pre-employment checks as long as the current employer confirms in writing that:

- the individual has been subject to an enhanced DBS and children's Barred List check; and
- there are no known concerns about the individual's suitability to work with children; and
- there is no ongoing disciplinary investigation relating to that individual

Upon arrival, all such redeployed staff will be given a copy of the school's safeguarding and child protection policy, staff behaviour (code of conduct) policy, behaviour policy, the school's safeguarding recording and reporting procedures and confirmation of DSL details and arrangements.

## **Safer recruitment/volunteers and movement of staff**

The school will maintain its commitment to ensuring that only suitable people are given opportunities to work with children at the school. Any recruitment during COVID-19 will therefore be undertaken following the normal safer recruitment processes subject to the school's policy, local authority guidance and advice and Part 3 of *Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE 2019)* [KCSiE].

Safer recruitment principles also apply to the recruitment of volunteers, subject to KCSiE.

Whilst acknowledging the challenge of the current national emergency, it is essential from a safeguarding perspective that the school is aware, on any given day, which staff/volunteers are in the school and that appropriate checks have been carried out, especially for anyone engaging in Regulated Activity. As such, the school will continue to maintain the single central record as outlined in KCSiE.

## **Online safety**

The school is committed as always to providing children with a safe environment in which to learn. That includes online learning. The online filtering (in relation to school-owned devices) and monitoring systems will be in operation as normal. The school is unable to filter activity on devices not owned by the school. Parents may find it useful to refer to <https://www.internetmatters.org/blog/parental-controls/broadband-mobile/> for guidance on putting some restrictions in place to keep children safe.

Where pupils/students are using ICT equipment in school, appropriate supervision will be in place as normal.

## **Children and online safety away from school and college**

The school will ensure that online learning tools and systems are used in line with privacy and data protection/GDPR requirements.

The school recognises that school is a protective factor for children and young people and that the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 virus may well affect the mental health of some pupils/students and/or their parents/carers.

All staff will maintain as awareness of those issues in communications with children and their parents/carers including when setting expectations of pupils' work when they are at home.

## **Supporting children not in school**

Any child on the school's register/database of vulnerable children who it has been decided does not need to attend school; cannot attend school due to a risk to their own health or the health of another member of their household; or whose parents/carers are unwilling to send them to school will have an identified plan of support that will be overseen by a named DSL and recorded on the child's safeguarding file.

The plan will include regular communication with the child's named social worker or family support worker where there is one. A record of all communications\* with the child, parents/carers and practitioners in partner agencies will be made (\*including telephone calls, Emails, other online communication, video conversations and virtual meetings).

The school will work closely with all stakeholders to maximise the effectiveness of any communication plan in order to safeguard the child.

This plan must be reviewed regularly (at least once per week) by the allocated DSL in discussion with at least one other member of the DSL team, using regular/planned DSL team meetings as appropriate.

## **Supporting children in school**

The school will continue to be a safe space for all children who attend during the COVID-19 virus. Whenever the school is open and to maximise safety, the headteacher will ensure that appropriate numbers of staff are on site and that staff to pupil ratio numbers are appropriate.

The school will ensure that government guidance for education and childcare settings in respect of social distancing and advice from Public Health England in respect of handwashing and other protective measures to limit the risk of spreading COVID19 is followed regularly and robustly.

All children attending school will be provided with appropriate emotional support, bespoke to their needs, assessed vulnerability and circumstances.

Where the school has concerns about the availability of critical staff to work in school – particularly members of the DSL team, SENCo, designated teacher for children who are looked after and first aiders – those concerns will be raised with the Head Teacher without delay.

## **Peer on peer abuse**

The school recognises that a revised process for managing any report of peer on peer abuse and supporting victims may be required during the COVID-19 virus when only a relatively small number of children will be attending school.

Where the school receives a report of peer on peer abuse, it will follow the principles as set out in part 5 of KCSIE and as outlined in the main policy as closely as possible.

The school will listen and work with all children involved, their parents/carers and any multi-agency partner required to ensure the safety and security of alleged victims, alleged perpetrators and all other children attending the school.

Concerns and actions must be recorded on the child's safeguarding file and appropriate referrals made by the DSL.

## **Support from the local authority**

The Education Safeguarding service will be available as usual for advice and support via 079 6622 4286 or 01926 742525; or [adrianover@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:adrianover@warwickshire.gov.uk); and will also provide further

updates and information from Warwickshire Safeguarding and the local authority as necessary and appropriate.