

**COGNITA**



DOWNSEND  
SCHOOL

**Safeguarding  
and  
Child Protection  
Policy**

including knowledge base and processes

**England  
March 2026**

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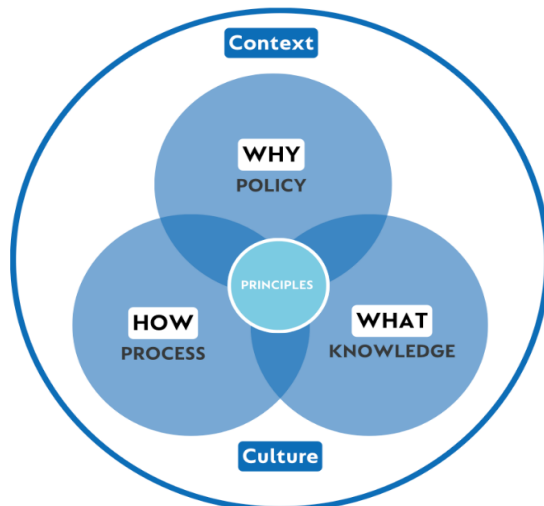
Procedures and guidance that support schools to implement effective and successful safeguarding:

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# Part 1: Safeguarding in our school

## A Introduction

Establishing a strong culture of care for our pupils is our number one priority. This policy provides the framework for this to be lived and is divided into three main parts (see visual).



### WHY – Policy

Our commitment and guiding principles to safeguarding.

### WHAT – Knowledge

The knowledge we need to know to effectively engage with our safeguarding processes.

### HOW – Process

The processes required to ensure effective safeguarding in our schools.

Whilst these areas provide the basis for our work, there are two other essential elements to consider: context and culture.

### Context

Each school serves a distinctive community. Whilst there are universal principles and processes in safeguarding, an individual school community may also have specific contextual features that impact the safeguarding risks and considerations for pupils. These will in turn influence a school's approach to the implementation of policy.

### Culture

School culture is the collection of values, expectations and practices that guide and inform the work of all members of a school community. Language, action, and behaviours tell you about the culture in a school. The safeguarding policy is important, but only when actively lived every day in the culture of the school. Safeguarding is a shared responsibility for every member of the school community. Creating a strong safeguarding culture is essential to providing the most effective environment for our pupils to thrive in all aspects of their development.

## **B Commitment**

We are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare, physical and mental health, and safety of each pupil. We will do this by creating and maintaining an open, inclusive, caring, and supportive atmosphere where each pupil may thrive and develop physically, socially, emotionally, and academically. It is our responsibility to ensure that all pupils have equal rights to be protected from harm and abuse and the right to feel safe.

This includes:

- Proactively teaching pupils about safeguarding
- Ensuring that systems and processes are in place to protect pupils; and
- Acting in the best interests of the pupil

## **C Principles**

Our principles of safeguarding are universal and apply to all Cognita schools. They have been developed by the Cognita Regional Safeguarding Leads and take account of the International Taskforce for Child Protection, the United Nations Rights of the Child, and globally leading practice.

1. Everyone has a responsibility to support the protection of pupils.
2. All staff will be educated in understanding the types and indicators of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and the consequent duty of care they hold to notice any potential harm to pupils.
3. All staff will adopt a child-centred approach within a whole family focus, working in partnership with parents/carers as far as possible. Staff will be empowered to act in the best interests of the pupil to protect them from harm and take appropriate actions if any concerns arise. The pupil's welfare is paramount.
4. All staff will know our pupils well and offer timely support to those who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, an adverse childhood experience.
5. All pupils will be empowered to be able to voice their opinions, and to share their thoughts and beliefs within the safe environment of the school. Pupil's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to.
6. All pupils will be educated to be aware about how to manage risk, identify harmful behaviours, and seek help when needed.
7. All adults who work with or for the school will have been safely recruited.
8. Effective safeguarding is anti-discriminatory and anti-racist. Staff should understand and be sensitive to factors, including economic and social circumstances, ethnicity and disability, which can impact pupils and families' lives.

## D Scope

This policy applies to all pupils in the school, including those in the Early Years.

This policy applies to all pupils, living in any circumstances, including at home with their birth parents or other family members, in kinship arrangements including private fostering, special guardianship, children who are adopted and looked after children who may live with foster carers or in residential settings.

It applies to all adults in the school, including in the Early Years: teaching, non-teaching, pastoral, support, peripatetic, contract staff and ancillary staff, agency/supply staff, volunteers, non-school based Cognita staff and any other adults working at the school. All references in this document to "staff" or "members of staff" should be interpreted as relating to the aforementioned, unless otherwise stated.

This policy applies to all pupils and staff when on the school site, and when the pupils are being educated off-site and/or undertaking an educational visit. It also applies to pupils who are on an exchange and being hosted by the school.

This policy also applies to all third parties who run activities in school on behalf of the school.

## E Definitions and Terminology

### Definition of safeguarding

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined for the purposes of this policy as:

- providing help and support to meet the needs of children as soon as problems emerge
  - protecting children from maltreatment (abuse, neglect and/or exploitation); whether that is within/outside the home or online
  - preventing impairment of children's physical and/or mental health or development
  - ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
  - taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes\*
- Outcome 1: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
  - Outcome 2: Children and young people are safe in and outside their homes
  - Outcome 3: Children and young people are supported by their family network\*\*
  - Outcome 4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

\*As set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework (2023)

\*\*A family network can be a blood-relative, or a non-related connected person, such as a family friend or neighbour

### Definition of child protection

Child protection is *part* of the safeguarding process and is defined for the purpose of this policy as activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suspected of suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. This includes harm that occurs inside or outside the home, including foster care and residential care, as well as online.

## Definition of a child

A child is an individual who is under 18 years old.

The word 'child (ren)' is used throughout this policy to mean all children, whilst the word 'pupils' is used when referring to children who attend our school.

## Terminology

'RSL' refers to the Cognita Regional Safeguarding Lead (Europe and USA)

'DSL' refers to the school's named Designated Safeguarding Lead

'DDSL' refers to the school's named Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead

'DO' refers to the local authority Designated Officer

'DE' refers to the Cognita Director of Education (Europe)

MD' refers to the Cognita Managing Director of the school

'HoHR' refers to the Cognita Head of Human Resources

'ERM' refers to the Cognita Employee Relations Manager (UK)

'CEO' refers to the Cognita Chief Executive Officer (Europe and USA)

'ECMS' refers to an Electronic Case Management System used for safeguarding recording

'Cause for Concern' form refers either the document from the internal Toolkit/ECMS input

## F Key Contacts

School contacts	
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Carolyn Potter
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads (DDSLs)	Laura Fisher
Any other staff trained to DSL level	Kirsry Buckland
Designated Practitioner with responsibility for safeguarding in early years (where appropriate)	Carolyn Potter
Deputy Designated Practitioner with responsibility for safeguarding in early years (where appropriate)	Laura Fisher
Inclusivity Champion	Chantael Clayton
Designated Lead for Children not Cared for by their parents	Carolyn Potter
Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Lead	Carolyn Potter

Head of School/Headteacher	Laura Fisher
Executive Principal/Headteacher	Rebecca Tear

<b>Cognita contacts</b>	
Regional Safeguarding Lead (Europe and USA)	Alison Barnett alison.barnett@cognita.com
Regional Director of Education (Europe)	Sarah Reynolds sarah.reynolds@cognita.com
Managing Director (Governance oversight, including Safeguarding)	James Carroll James.carroll@cognita.com
Cognita (proprietor) board member for safeguarding and Group Chief Education Officer	Dr Simon Camby simon.camby@cognita.com
Group Legal Counsel	Jayne Pinchbeck jayne.pinchbeck@cognita.com
Whistleblowing Officer	Jamie Delaney whistleblowingofficer@cognita.com

Note: The Cognita Regional Safeguarding Lead (RSL) (Europe and USA) is a role which supports the development of effective safeguarding practice within the Cognita family of schools and is not intended to replace, in any way, the statutory referral and reporting requirements.

<b>Local Authority Contacts</b>	
Our school follows the safeguarding protocols and procedures of our Safeguarding Partners	Surrey County Council <a href="http://www.surreyscb.org.uk">www.surreyscb.org.uk</a> Jane Dufton – Service manager – Schools Relationships and Support. Email <a href="mailto:jane.dufton@surreycc.gov">jane.dufton@surreycc.gov</a>
The local authority Children’s Services	Surrey Safeguarding Children’s Partnership C-SPA (Children Single Point of Access) 0300 470 9100 option 3 (Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm) Email: <a href="mailto:cspa@surreycc.gov.uk">cspa@surreycc.gov.uk</a>
The local authority Children’s Social Care referral team	Surrey Safeguarding Children’s Partnership C-SPA (Children Single Point of Access) Phone: 0300 470 9100 (Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm) <b>Out of hours phone: 01483 517898 - emergency duty team.</b> Email: <a href="mailto:cspa@surreycc.gov.uk">cspa@surreycc.gov.uk</a>
The local authority Family Help team	<a href="mailto:earlyhelp.schools@surreycc.gov.uk">earlyhelp.schools@surreycc.gov.uk</a> or <a href="mailto:cspa@surreycc.gov.uk">cspa@surreycc.gov.uk</a> Landline: 0300 470 9100 Emergency Duty Team: 01483 517898 <a href="#">Surrey Early Years &amp; Childcare Services   Surrey Education Services</a>
The local authority Designated Officer for child protection (sometimes still referred to as the LADO)	<b>Phone:</b> 0300 123 1650, 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday Email: <a href="mailto:LADO@surreycc.gov.uk">LADO@surreycc.gov.uk</a>

The local authority Prevent Lead/Officer	Lara Bowen Email: <a href="mailto:larabowen@surreycc.gov.uk">larabowen@surreycc.gov.uk</a>
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<b>Police</b>	
Police emergency	999
Local police non-emergency	101

<b>Location of safeguarding and child protection documents in school</b>	
<i>List the documents – from statutory/ external agencies and school documents</i>	Head's Office

<b>UK National Contacts for across the region</b>	
NSPCC 24/7 Helpline	Tel: 0808 800 5000 Email: <a href="mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk">help@nspcc.org.uk</a>
NSPCC Text line	88858
NSPCC Child Line	Tel: 0800 1111
NSPCC FGM helpline	Tel: 0800 028 3550 Email: <a href="mailto:fMDhelp@nspcc.org.uk">fMDhelp@nspcc.org.uk</a>
NSPCC Whistleblowing helpline	Tel: 0800 028 0285 (8am – 8pm) Email: <a href="mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk">help@nspcc.org.uk</a>
DfE Prevent helpline for schools & parents	Tel: 020 7340 7264 (non-emergency) Email: <a href="mailto:counter.extremism@education.gsi.gov.uk">counter.extremism@education.gsi.gov.uk</a>
The Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF)	Tel: 0800 1000 900 Email: <a href="mailto:help@stopitnow.org.uk">help@stopitnow.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk">www.parentsprotect.co.uk</a>
National Bullying Helpline	Tel: 0845 22 55 787
UK Safer Internet Centre helpline for School Staff	Tel: 0844 381 4772 Email: <a href="mailto:helpline@saferinternet.org.uk">helpline@saferinternet.org.uk</a>
Internet Watch Foundation hotline for reporting criminal content	<a href="http://www.iwf.org.uk">www.iwf.org.uk</a>
Educate Against Hate	<a href="http://educateagainsthate.com">http://educateagainsthate.com</a>

<b>Local agencies/organisations</b>	
Surrey Education Partnership	<a href="http://Surreyeducationservices.surreycc.gov.uk">Surreyeducationservices.surreycc.gov.uk</a>
Surrey SEND Local Officer LSPA	Tel: 0300 200 1015 <a href="http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/children/support-and-advice/localoffer/contact">www.surreycc.gov.uk/children/support-and-advice/localoffer/contact</a>
Surrey Family Information Service	<a href="http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/children/support-and-advice/families">www.surreycc.gov.uk/children/support-and-advice/families</a>

## G Roles and Responsibilities

This section will outline the following:

- A. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
- B. Specific safeguarding roles in our school
- C. The Proprietor's role and responsibilities

### A Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

In our school, safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. No single person can have a full picture of a pupil's needs and circumstances. If pupils and their families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who encounters them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information, and taking prompt action.

To fulfil this responsibility effectively, all staff should make sure their approach is child centered within a whole family focus. This means that they should consider, always, what is in the best interests of the child, whilst considering the needs of all parties.

**All staff** have the following responsibility to:

- Read and understand this policy including all knowledge base documents
- Contribute to providing a safe environment in which all pupils can learn and flourish
- Be aware that pupils may not feel ready or know how to tell someone that they are being abused, exploited, and/or neglected, and/or they may not recognise their experiences as harmful
- Know what to do if a pupil tells them that they are being abused, neglected, and/or exploited and/or if they are experiencing sexual harassment and/or sexual violence
- Know what to do if they are concerned about the behaviour or conduct of staff in the school
- Manage the requirement to maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality
- Know about Online Safety (including the filtering and monitoring systems that are in use)
- Refer any safeguarding concern about pupils to the DSL or the Deputy DSL
- Refer any safeguarding concern about staff to the Headteacher, or in their absence the Regional Safeguarding Lead/Head of HR/Managing Director
- Refer any safeguarding concern about the Headteacher to the Head of HR/Regional Safeguarding Lead/ Managing Director
- Be aware of the local Early/Family Help process and their role in it; and identify pupils who may benefit from Early/Family Help
- Be aware of the process for making a referral to Children's Social Care and understand the role they might be expected to play in statutory assessments
- Be aware of the process of making a referral to the Police and understand the role they may be expected to play in any criminal investigation
- Be aware of the process of making a referral to Prevent and understand the role they may be expected to play in any enquiries

### B. Specific safeguarding roles in the school

#### Designated Safeguarding Lead

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is the senior member of staff responsible for leading safeguarding in the school. The DSL **must** be a member of the school leadership team (SLT). The DSL takes the lead

responsibility for safeguarding and child protection in the school (including online safety within which there is filtering and monitoring) and their role description explicitly reflects this.

## Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead

The school can appoint any number of Deputy DSLs. Their role is to support the DSL in their safeguarding role. Whilst the *activities* of the DSL can be delegated to DDSLs, the ultimate lead responsibility for child protection must remain with the DSL, and this lead responsibility must not be delegated. The Deputy DSLs are trained to the same level as the DSL and their duties of the Deputy DSLs are reflected explicitly in their role descriptions.

### Support for the DSL

The DSL will be given the time, funding, training, resources, and support to provide advice and support to other staff on child welfare and child protection matters, to take part in Strategy Discussions and any other inter-agency meetings (see WTSC 2026 Chapter 3), and/or to support other staff to do so, and to contribute to the assessment of pupils.

There are 4 key elements to the DSL role:

1. Manage referrals to external agencies
2. Work with others in other agencies, including the Safeguarding Partners
3. Training, knowledge and skills
4. Raise awareness of safeguarding within the school staff group

### 1 Manage referrals

The DSL is expected to:

- know and understand the threshold for which services can be obtained in their local authority (found in the threshold document published by the Safeguarding Partners)
- refer cases of suspected abuse to the local authority children's Social Care as required (including Early/Family Help)
- support staff who make referrals to local authority children's Social Care (including Early/Family Help)
- refer cases to the Channel programme where there is a radicalisation concern as required, in collaboration with the school Prevent Lead and/or support staff who make referrals to the Channel programme
- refer cases where a staff member is dismissed or has left due to risk/harm to a child to the Disclosure and Barring Service as required (in collaboration with HR team who will lead)
- refer cases where a crime may have been committed or likely to be committed to the Police as required
- refer pupils to external mental health agencies/signpost parents to organisations/professionals when there are concerns about a pupil's emotional wellbeing and/or mental health, in collaboration with the school Wellbeing/Mental Health Lead (s)
- follow up and escalate referrals as needed if not satisfied with the agency response, plus make re-referrals if the pupil's situation does not improve despite intervention/lack of parental engagement

### 2 Work with others

The DSL is expected to:

- act as a point of contact with the three Safeguarding Partners\*
- liaise with the Headteacher to inform them of safeguarding issues, especially ongoing enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 and Police investigations

- as required, liaise with the “case manager” (in relation to allegations against adults) and the Designated Officer(s) at the local authority for child protection concerns in cases which concern a staff member (see below- Allegations)
- liaise with staff (especially pastoral support staff, Wellbeing/Mental Health Lead (s), school nurses, IT technicians, and SENCOs) on matters of safety and safeguarding (including online and digital safety) and when deciding whether to make a referral by liaising with relevant agencies
- act as a source of support, advice and expertise for all staff
- promote supportive engagement with parents and/or carers in safeguarding and the welfare of pupils, including where families may be facing challenging circumstances

\*A statutory Safeguarding Partner in relation to a local authority area in England is defined under the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) as:

(a) the local authority

(b) an integrated care board for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area

(c) the chief officer of Police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area

Note: Education (the school) is known as a ‘relevant agency’.

### 3 Training

Please also see Section H for training requirements.

The DSL (and any deputies) must undergo training to provide them with the knowledge and skills required to carry out their role, including multi-agency working.

This training must be updated **at least every two years**.

Where available, DSLs and DDSLs should access this training via their Local Authority/Safeguarding Partners in order to make local links and understand local processes, including thresholds. Where this is not available, the DSL/DDSL will liaise with the RSL to identify alternative suitable training to the same level; this may be in person /online training.

The DSL and Prevent Lead must undertake the government Prevent awareness training sessions. This is in addition to the Preventing Radicalisation Awareness training that all school staff undertake every 3 years.

The DSL must undertake Online Safety training on an annual and ongoing basis. This will likely be the same training offered to all pupil-facing staff created centrally, but also comprise any additional training that they identify.

The DSL must undertake Safer Recruitment training every 2 years (see Safer Recruitment Policy).

In addition to the formal training set out above, the DSLs knowledge and skills should be refreshed via informal updates (this might be via e-bulletins, meeting other DSLs off/online, or simply taking time to read and digest safeguarding developments) at regular intervals, as required, and at least annually, to allow them to understand and keep up with any developments relevant to their role so they:

- understand the assessment process for providing early help and statutory intervention, including local criteria for local authority children’s Social Care referral arrangements and threshold documents published by the Safeguarding Partners
- have a working knowledge of how local authorities conduct a child protection case conference and a child protection review conference and be able to attend and contribute to these effectively when required to do so
- ensure each member of staff has access to, and understands, this policy, especially new, part-time staff, and/or agency staff

- are alert to the specific needs of those pupils who are subject to a child in need plan, those subject to child protection plans, those who are 'looked after' or who have been 'previously looked after', those with special educational needs, and young carers
- learn how to maintain high aspirations for vulnerable pupils, promoting their educational outcomes by knowing the welfare, safeguarding and child protection issues experienced by them and the potential impact on their attendance, engagement and achievement
- understand how to support teaching staff to feel confident providing additional academic support/reasonable adjustments for vulnerable pupils who need or have needed a Social Worker, recognising the lasting impact on educational outcomes, even when statutory agencies have ceased involvement
- understand relevant data protection legislation and regulations, especially the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (2026)
- understand the importance of information sharing, both within the school, and with the three Safeguarding Partners, other agencies, organisations, and practitioners
- are able to keep detailed, accurate, secure written records of concerns and referrals
- understand and support the school, in collaboration with the school Prevent Lead, with regards to the requirements of the Prevent duty and are able to provide advice and support to staff on protecting pupils from the risk of radicalisation
- are able to understand the unique risks associated with online safety and be confident that they have the relevant knowledge and up to date capability required to keep pupils safe whilst they are online at school, including knowledge of the school's filtering and monitoring systems and processes
- can recognise the additional risks that pupils with SEN and disabilities (SEND) face online, for example, from online bullying, grooming and radicalisation and are confident they have the capability to support pupils with SEND to stay safe online
- can recognise the additional risks that pupils who are LGBTQ+ (or perceived to be by others) and/or are gender questioning (or perceived to be by others) face online, for example, from online bullying, grooming and radicalisation and are confident they have the capability to support these pupils to stay safe online
- have oversight of attendance, including those pupils who have unexplained absence, are persistently absent from education, potentially missing education, moving to be home educated, and/ or on a sponsored visa
- obtain access to resources and attend any relevant or refresher training courses; and
- encourage a culture of listening to pupils, having an understanding their views and taking account of their wishes and feelings, among all staff, in any measures the school may put in place to protect them.

#### 4 Raise awareness

The DSL should:

- ensure that the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy is known, understood, and used appropriately by staff
- ensure the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy is reviewed annually (as a minimum) after the central review, the procedures and implementation are updated and reviewed regularly, and work with the proprietor/RSL regarding this
- ensure the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy is available publicly and parents/carers are aware of the fact that referrals to children's Social Care or the Police about suspected abuse or neglect and/or exploitation may be made and the role of the school in this
- ensure that online safety training is provided as part of regular staff updates, including updating them around the school's filtering and monitoring systems and processes
- link with the local Safeguarding Partners to make sure staff are aware of any training opportunities and the latest local policies on local safeguarding arrangements, including thresholds for service

- help promote and monitor educational outcomes of vulnerable pupils by sharing the information about the welfare, safeguarding and child protection issues that these pupils, including those with a Social Worker, are experiencing, or have experienced, with teachers and school leadership staff
- ensure that the school, and their staff, know who vulnerable pupils are, understand their academic progress and attainment and maintain a culture of high aspirations for this cohort; supporting teaching staff to identify the challenges that pupils in this group might face and the additional academic support and adjustments that they could make to best support them.

### Availability

During term time the DSL (or a deputy) will always be available (during school hours) for staff in the school to discuss any safeguarding concerns. Whilst generally speaking the DSL (or deputy) will normally be available in person, the Headteacher will define what “available” means and whether in exceptional circumstances availability via work phone and/or Microsoft Teams. It is the responsibility of the Headteacher and DSL to arrange adequate and appropriate cover arrangements for any out of hours/out of term activities.

## C The Proprietor’s role and responsibilities

Cognita is the proprietor of the school.

As proprietor, Cognita will comply with all duties under legislation and will always take into account statutory guidance, ensuring that all policies, procedures and training are effective and comply with the law at the time.

It is the responsibility of the proprietor to:

- Ensure that all staff having contact with pupils read Part One of KCSIE
- Ensure that all staff working in the school but not necessarily having direct contact with pupils read Annex A of KCSIE
- Ensure that all staff follow the requirements of this Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Ensure relevant staff have due regard to the relevant data protection principles, which allow them to share (and withhold) personal information, as provided for in the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR (2026)
- Ensure that mechanisms are in place to assist staff to understand and discharge their role and responsibilities, as set out in Part One of KCSIE
- Designate a senior board member to take leadership responsibility for safeguarding arrangements
- Ensure that all safeguarding arrangements take into account the procedures and practice of the local authority as part of the multi-agency procedures set up by the Safeguarding Partners
- Ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are in place in order for appropriate action to be taken in a timely manner to safeguard and promote pupil’s welfare
- Ensure that each school works in line with local multi-agency procedures
- Ensure that the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy is updated annually and made available via the school website
- Provide a Staff Code of Conduct and IT Policy
- Ensure that all responsibilities are followed regarding Children Absent from Education and Missing Education, using the Children Missing Education Statutory guidance (2025)) and Working Together to Improve Attendance (2024);
- Ensure that all schools follow the principles of the Prevent Duty, including the requirement to undertake an annual risk assessment
- Instruct schools to hold more than one emergency contact number for each pupil (and advise that these are reviewed regularly by schools)

- Ensure that schools hold names addresses, and telephone contacts for all those who have Parental Responsibility for a pupil on roll
- Ensure that schools report to their local authority the removal of a pupil from the school roll in line with statutory and local authority guidance, including mid-year and those moving to be home educated
- Ensure that all schools monitor the attendance of all pupils, paying attention to those that have unexplained, persistent and/or prolonged absence; go missing from education; and/or those on sponsored visas (reporting any changes as per policy to the UKVI department)
- Ensure that all staff undergo safeguarding and child protection training (including online safety which, amongst other things, includes an understanding of the expectations, applicable roles and responsibilities in relation to filtering and monitoring) at induction – this must be in line with advice from the local Safeguarding Partners
- Recognise the expertise staff build by undertaking safeguarding training and managing concerns on a daily basis
- Ensure that appropriate filters and monitoring systems are in place to keep pupils safe online and that the DfE filtering and monitoring standards are met; and consider the number of and age range of their pupils, those who are potentially at greater risk of harm and how often they access the IT system along with the proportionality of costs versus safeguarding risks
- Ensure that they have the appropriate level of security protection procedures in place in order to safeguard their systems, staff and pupils, and review the effectiveness of these procedures periodically to keep up with evolving cyber-crime technologies
- Ensure that pupils are taught about safeguarding, including online safety.

The proprietor ensures that an annual review of safeguarding arrangements is conducted. This includes a written report which is presented to the Cognita Board.

## H Training Requirements

Training enables staff to fulfil their duty to safeguard pupils.

All training requirements are according to the most recent Cognita Training Matrix (internal document).

### Mandatory training

#### Induction

Prior to any contact with pupils, all new staff (including those with governance oversight) must be given a mandatory induction, which includes familiarisation with child protection responsibilities and the procedures to be followed if anyone has any concerns about a pupil's safety or welfare.

As part of their induction, **all** new school employed staff (including those with governance oversight) must be provided with and have read:

- KCSIE 2025 – Part One and Annex B (contact with pupils) and/or Annex A (no contact)
- Online Safety (which, amongst other things, includes an understanding of the expectations, applicable roles, and responsibilities in relation to filtering and monitoring)
- This Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Code of Conduct (including staff/pupil relationships and communications)
- IT Policy
- Group AI Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Children Absent from Education, Children Missing Education, and Attendance Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy

- Behaviour Policy
- Preventing Extremism and Radicalisation Policy
- Use of Reasonable Force, Restrictive Intervention and/or Restraint Policy (incorporating searching, screening and confiscation)

New staff must be informed of the names and roles of the DSL, DDSLs, and the RSL. They should also be informed of the names of their school MD and Head of HR.

All new staff and any agency/supply staff must be made aware that they are not to ever use their personal mobile phone/other personal devices when on the school site where pupils are present, and that they are required to wear the relevant coloured lanyard for staff at all times when on the school site.

### Annual Safeguarding Refresher

All staff employed in school must receive face to face annual safeguarding and child protection training from the DSL via the Safeguarding Refresher presentation (created centrally by the RSL), usually at the commencement of the academic year, in addition to any other presentation/information that the DSL has prepared for the school.

### Basic Safeguarding Children training

All staff employed in school must complete their online basic Safeguarding Children awareness training when they newly start work in the school as part of their induction. This must be updated every three years or less.

NB: DSLs, DDSLs, and Headteachers are not required to undertake the above Basic level training as they complete DSL/Advanced level training respectively (see below).

[Agency/Supply/Peripatetic teaching staff](#) must show evidence of Basic Safeguarding training undertaken within 3 years, prior to attending the school for the first time, and must receive a Safeguarding Induction prior to first contact with pupils.

### DSLs and DDSLs

(see above section G)

DSLs and DDSL must undertake DSL level training a minimum of every 2 years. This will ideally be via their local authority but if this is not available, the online equivalent approved by the RSL.

In addition to the formal training set out above, the DSLs knowledge and skills should be refreshed via informal updates (this might be via e-bulletins, meeting other DSLs off/online, or simply taking time to read and digest safeguarding developments) at regular intervals, as required, and at least annually, to allow them to understand and keep up with any developments relevant to their role.

### Executive Headteachers, Headteachers, Principals, and Heads of School

Those in the above roles must complete Advanced Safeguarding training similar to the level of the DSLs every 3 years (this is currently created and delivered by the RSL in person/online).

### Safer Recruitment

Executive Headteachers, Headteachers, Principals, Heads of School, DSLs and any other staff member directly involved in recruitment, must undertake training every 2 years (see Safer Recruitment Policy).

### Preventing Radicalisation

All school employed staff must complete online Prevent training every 3 years.

The Preventing Radicalisation Lead and DSL (only, although any staff member can access) must complete additional Prevent training via the government online sessions (see Preventing Radicalisation Policy).

### Female Genital Mutilation

All school employed staff who have contact with pupils must complete online FGM training every 5 years.

### Looked After Children (including Previously Looked After).

The Designated Teacher for Looked After Children for the school will undertake training every 3 years; this is currently centrally arranged through TES by the RSL.

### Online Safety

All staff who have direct contact with pupils must complete the Online Safety training. This training is centrally created by the RSL and self-served by the DSL/DDSL in school.

### Non-Mandatory training

#### Updates and CPD

All staff will also receive 'drip drip' bitesize safeguarding and child protection updates/training, including online safety training, regularly *throughout the year*. This is created and cascaded by the RSL, DSL, DDSL and/or external specialist. This will ensure that all staff have the relevant skills and knowledge to safeguard pupils effectively. Topics covered may include information related to knowledge base documents. Format and content of any resources/presentations/training sessions can be decided by the school safeguarding team.

Many additional non-mandatory CPD training sessions have been created by the RSL ready for DSLs to self-serve in school as required.

#### Drug and Alcohol Awareness (need-led assessment).

This training is created and/or arranged by the RSL. It should be updated every 3 years.

#### Mental Health Awareness (Children) (need-led assessment).

This training is created and/or arranged by the RSL. It should be updated every 3 years.

#### Third-party contractors

It is good practice for those employed as third-party contractors who work regularly in school with the opportunity for contact with pupils to have Basic Safeguarding training, at a level appropriate to their role. This training should be arranged by their employers not the school.

## I Information sharing

This policy adheres to the principles and advice in the UK government guidance Information Sharing for Practitioners (2024).

Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare and protect the safety of children. Information sharing is vital in identifying and tackling all forms of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation. No single person can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances, so effective sharing of information between schools, local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment, and service provision to keep children safe. Staff must not assume that someone else will pass on information that they think may be critical to keep a child safe.

The Data Protection Act (2018) and GDPR (2026) do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe and promoting the child's welfare. 'Safeguarding of children and individuals at risk' is a processing condition that allows schools to share special category personal data. This includes allowing schools to share information with external agencies without parental consent where there is good reason to do so, provided that there is a lawful basis to process any personal information required. The legal bases that may be appropriate for sharing data in these circumstances could be "legal obligation" or "public task", which includes the performance of a task in the public interest or the exercise of official authority, and that the sharing of information will enhance the safeguarding of a pupil in a timely manner. It would be legitimate to share information without consent where: it is not possible to gain consent; it cannot be reasonably expected that a safeguarding practitioner gains consent; and, if to gain consent would place a pupil at risk. School staff should, therefore, be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess,

and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of pupils, whether this is when problems are first emerging and/or a pattern is developing (for example, persistent school absences, going missing, or receiving unexplained gifts or new possessions), or where a pupil is already known to the local authority children's Social Care. Sharing information about any adults with whom that pupil has contact, which may impact the pupil's safety or welfare, is also critical.

Schools should be particularly alert to the importance of sharing information when a pupil moves from one local authority into another, due to the risk that knowledge pertinent to keeping a child safe could be lost. Should a pupil be open to Social Care in the authority in which they reside, but moves permanently to another local authority area, the original local authority should ensure that all relevant information is shared with the receiving local authority as soon as possible. The school should liaise, as required, with both authorities until the handover has been completed.

Further details on information sharing can be found in: [Data Protection: Toolkit for Schools](#).

[Information Sharing Advice for Safeguarding Practitioners \(2024\)](#).

## **J** Policy Review

This policy is updated annually by the school, after first being centrally reviewed by the RSL.

Updates to the policy draw on feedback from safeguarding staff in schools across the region and are also informed by any shared learning from the region/other regions.

Changes will also reflect any new government guidance or legislation.

The policy is then shared with all staff through the annual safeguarding declaration process, with training provided throughout the year to support and sustain learning and awareness.

## **K** Governance Arrangements

Governance is undertaken on behalf of the Cognita Board (Cognita Holdings Limited). Group-wide arrangements are in place, and the Group Chief Education Officer holds responsibility for these arrangements. The arrangements outline clear lines of accountability and responsibility for all aspects of safeguarding which are executed and reported in the following four ways:

### School

Reviews in individual schools by an Independent Safeguarding Reviewer (annual)

### Region

Safeguarding data reporting from each school to the regional team (termly)

Regional Safeguarding Assurance Board Meetings (termly)

### Group

Regional Annual Safeguarding Report and Annual Safeguarding Governance Meeting

Those with governance oversight should be aware of their obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010 (including the Public Sector Equality Duty) and the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for the schools they support. They should also be aware of the obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018, and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) requirements which place

duties on organisations and individuals to process personal information fairly and lawfully and to keep the information they hold safe and secure.

### Human Rights Act 1998

The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that everyone in the UK is entitled to and contains the Articles and protocols of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (the Convention) that are deemed to apply in the UK. It compels public organisations to respect and protect an individual's human rights when they make individual decisions about them. Under the HRA, it is unlawful for schools to act in a way that is incompatible with the Convention. The specific convention rights applying to schools are:

- Article 3: the right to freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment (an absolute right)
- Article 8: the right to respect for private and family life (a qualified right) includes a duty to protect individuals' physical and psychological integrity
- Article 14: requires that all of the rights and freedoms set out in the Act must be protected and applied without discrimination
- Protocol 1, Article 2: protects the right to education.

Being subjected to harassment, violence and or abuse, including that of a sexual nature, may breach any or all of these rights, depending on the nature of the conduct and the circumstances. Further information (including on absolute and qualified rights) can be found at Human Rights | Equality and Human Rights Commission ([equalityhumanrights.com](http://equalityhumanrights.com)).

### Equality Act 2010

According to the Equality Act, schools must not unlawfully discriminate against pupils because of their sex, race, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, or sexual orientation (protected characteristics). Whilst all of the above protections are important, in the context of safeguarding, this guidance, and the legal duties placed on schools in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils, those with governance oversight and proprietors should carefully consider how they are supporting their pupils with regard to particular protected characteristics - including disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and race.

Provisions within the Equality Act allow schools to take positive action, where it can be shown that it is proportionate, to deal with particular disadvantages affecting pupils with a particular protected characteristic in order to meet their specific need (s), this includes the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils, including those with long-term conditions. A school could, for example, consider taking positive action to support a girl if there was evidence that they were being disproportionately subjected to sexual violence or sexual harassment. Guidance to help schools understand how the Equality Act affects them and how to fulfil their duties under the act can be found at Equality Act 2010: advice for schools - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)). For further information Equality Act guidance | Equality and Human Rights Commission ([equalityhumanrights.com](http://equalityhumanrights.com)).

See below for gender- questioning children and UK government guidance.

### Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is found within the Equality Act. The PSED places a general duty on schools to have, in the exercise of their functions, due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation (and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act), to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those pupils who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. The duty applies to all protected characteristics and means that whenever significant decisions are being made or policies developed, specific consideration must be given to the equality

implications of these such as, for example, the need to eliminate unlawful behaviours that relate to them such as sexual violence and sexual harassment, misogyny/misandry and racism. This is one reason why good record-keeping and monitoring of all forms of abuse and harassment is essential.

## **L Legal considerations**

Our safeguarding and child protection policies, processes and knowledge base are built upon and support the 1989 international legal framework - the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **Specific legal context (not limited to)**

- Children Act (1989; 2004)
- Children and Social Work Act (2017)
- Sexual Offences Act (2003)
- Domestic Abuse Act (2021)
- Equality Act (2010)
- Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984)
- Human Rights Act (1998)
- Education Act (2002)
- The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations (2019), made under sections 34 and 35 of the Children and Social Work Act (2017)
- Health and Care Act (2022)
- Online Safety Act (2023)
- Children and Families Act (2014)
- UK GDPR (March 2026)

## **M Related documentation**

This policy should also be read in relation to the most recent version of the following documents which underpin this policy and best practice across the region:

### National government guidance documents (UK):

- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations (2014)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) (2025)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026)
- Working Together to Improve Attendance (2024)
- Prevent Duty Guidance: for England and Wales (2023)
- Disqualification under the Childcare Act (2018)
- What do to if you are worried a child is being abused – Advice for practitioners (2015)
- Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (2025)
- Use of Reasonable Force, Restrictive Interventions and Restraint (2025)
- Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (2026)
- Gender Questioning Children (2023, revision pending)

Any references to national guidance made within this document are in relation to the versions listed above. The school will always refer to the above statutory guidance as the benchmark for all safeguarding practice and decision making, whilst adhering to local authority procedures.

### Internal Cognita school documents:

- Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Drug and Alcohol Policy

- IT Policy
- Group AI Policy
- Exclusion Policy
- Early Years – Use of Mobile Phones, Cameras, and Devices Policy
- Preventing Extremism and Radicalisation Policy
- Safer Recruitment Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Use of Reasonable Force, Restrictive Interventions, and/or Restraint, incorporating Screening, Searching, and Confiscation Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
- Children Absent in Education, Children Missing Education, and Attendance Policy
- Child Supervision, Lost, and Missing Policy
- RSE Policy
- Group Safeguarding Governance and Oversight Policy

## **N Teaching children about safeguarding**

The school is committed to proactively teaching pupils about safeguarding, including online safety, as part of our approach to offering a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum. Pupils need knowledge and skills that will enable them to make informed and ethical decisions about their wellbeing, health and relationships. High quality, evidence-based teaching of relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) can help prepare children for the opportunities and responsibilities of adult life, and can promote their moral, social, mental and physical development. Effective teaching will support pupils to cultivate positive characteristics including resilience, self-worth, self-respect, honesty, integrity, courage, kindness, and trustworthiness. Effective teaching will support prevention of harms by helping pupils understand and identify when things are not right.

Relationships education compulsory for all pupils receiving primary education and relationships and sex education (RSE) compulsory for all pupils receiving secondary education. Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) continue to be compulsory in independent schools.

The government RSHE guidance to be implemented on 1st September 2026 can be found [here](#).

Until 31<sup>st</sup> August 2026, [this](#) current guidance will be followed.

The safeguarding curriculum is taught across the school in the following way:

The school is committed to proactively teaching children about safeguarding, including online safety, as part of our approach to offering a broad and balanced curriculum. Through ongoing work with the children, we aim to build resilience so that every child knows that we are a ‘telling school’, and that speaking up about any concern is valued and actively promoted. This includes raising a concern about themselves or about another child(ren).

Safeguarding in our school is taught in the following way:

Through a well-planned programme of safety education using resources from NSPCC *Pants* as well as linking into national initiatives such as Safer Internet Day. We also empower children to speak up. We use the PSHE and Jigsaw materials/programme to deliver the curriculum.

Relationships education is compulsory in all primary schools.

Our approach to this is Relationships education is taught through our PSHE curriculum and assemblies.

We actively promote the view that children should feel able to raise any concerns that they may have. This includes when they have a concern about another child. We take the following measures to ensure that children know how to raise a concern: children are taught how to deal with situations they do not like with their peers and they know that they can always talk to an adult. Taking into account the age of our children, worry and colour monsters are used to help children articulate their feelings, and ensure they have a medium to use to show their concerns. Circle times are also a platform to share feelings and concerns in an open forum

We actively promote the view that children should feel able to raise any concerns that they may have. This includes when they have a concern about another child. We take the following measures to ensure that children know how to raise a concern: Taking into account the age of our children, for our Early Years children the Worry and Colour Monsters are used to help children articulate their feelings and have a medium to show their concerns. For our Key Stage 1 children the Zones of Regulation are used to promote how they are feeling. Circle times for all year groups are also a platform to share feelings and concerns in an open forum.

### Parents/Carers

The school will proactively engage parents/carers and make sure they are aware of what is being taught to pupils in RSHE, and consult with them when developing and reviewing the RSHE Policy. The school will show parents/carers a representative sample of the resources that they plan to use, enabling parents/carers to continue conversations started in class, and should ensure that parents/carers are able to view all curriculum materials used to teach RSHE on request. Other steps may include inviting parents/carers into school to discuss the curriculum content and the importance of RSHE for wellbeing and safety, inviting them to discuss any concerns, and supporting parents/carers in managing conversations with their child (ren) about RSHE topics.

### Resources

DfE advice for schools: teaching online safety in schools

UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) guidance: Education for a connected world

UKCIS guidance: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people

The UKCIS external visitor's guidance helps schools to ensure the maximum impact of any online safety sessions delivered by external visitors

National Crime Agency's CEOP education programme: Thinkuknow

Public Health England: Every Mind Matters

## **O Online Safety**

## Introduction

Technology often provides the platform that may facilitate harm. All staff should be aware of the unique risks to pupils associated with online safety, and that technology is a significant component in many safeguarding and wellbeing issues, for example, the part that online use can play in grooming children and facilitating and/or causing harm. Staff should also be aware that there may be an overlap between online and offline risk of harm.

Whilst some tasks are able to be delegated to other members of the safeguarding team or other interested and knowledgeable staff, DSLs are responsible for overseeing online safety in schools (including understanding the filtering and monitoring systems in place). They must raise awareness for staff, accordingly, including but not limited to, filtering and monitoring systems, cyber-bullying, child sexual/criminal exploitation, radicalisation, sexually coerced exploitation, and sexual predation, including online grooming.

## Areas of risk

There are 4 main areas of risk associated with technology and online safety:

### 1 Content:

being exposed to illegal, inappropriate, or harmful material, for example: pornography, racism, misogyny, self-harm, suicide, anti-Semitism, radicalisation, extremism, misinformation, disinformation (including fake news) and conspiracy theories.

### 2 Contact:

being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users for example: peer to peer pressure, commercial advertising and adults posing as children or young adults with the intention to groom or exploit them for sexual, criminal, financial or other purposes.

### 3 Conduct:

personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of (or causes) harm for example, making, sending and receiving explicit images (e.g. consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes and/or pornography, sharing other explicit images and online bullying

### 4 Commercial:

risks such as online gambling, inappropriate advertising, phishing, and or financial scams (including sexually coerced exploitation). If pupils, pupils or staff are at risk, please report it to the Anti-Phishing Working Group (<https://apwg.org/>), CEOP and/or the IWF.

## Risk assessment

Technology, and risks and harms related to it evolve and changes rapidly. The school must carry out an annual review of their approach to online safety, supported by an annual risk assessment that considers and reflects the risks their children face (using the 360 safe website OR the LGfL online safety audit).

## Filtering and Monitoring

Whilst considering their responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils and provide them with a safe environment in which to learn (whatever their age and stage of development), those with governance oversight centrally and at the school will be doing all that they reasonably can to limit pupil's exposure to the above risks from the school's IT system.

As part of this process, the school has appropriate filters and monitoring systems in place. These are reviewed centrally by the IT and cyber security departments who are responsible for ensuring schools have the appropriate level of security protection procedures in place in order to safeguard their systems, staff and

pupils. These teams review the effectiveness of these procedures annually to keep up with evolving cyber-crime technologies. For a full and more detailed description of the school's filtering and monitoring systems, please see our IT Policy. All staff must be familiar with the latter policy.

Those working centrally for Cognita have reviewed the:

Cyber security standards for schools which were developed to help schools improve their resilience against cyber-attacks. The appropriateness of any filtering and monitoring systems will also be informed in part, by the risk assessment required by the Prevent Duty (see Preventing Radicalisation and Extremism Policy).

'Plan technology for your school - GOV.UK to self- assess against the filtering and monitoring standards and will make any needed changes, as and when required.

Generative AI: product safety expectations which supports schools to use generative artificial intelligence safely and explains how filtering and monitoring requirements apply to the use of generative AI in education. For a full and detailed description of our use of AI, please see the AI Policy.

Whilst it is essential schools ensure that appropriate filters and monitoring systems are in place, they should be careful that "over blocking" does not lead to unreasonable restrictions as to what pupils can be taught with regard to online teaching and safeguarding. The school will ensure that the leadership team and relevant staff have an awareness and understanding of the provisions in place and manage them effectively and know how to escalate concerns when identified. All staff should understand their role in preventing, identifying and responding to harm caused by its use.

Many pupils have unlimited and unrestricted access to the internet via mobile phone networks (i.e. 3G, 4G and 5G). This access means some pupils, whilst at school, may potentially sexually harass their peers via their mobile and smart technology, share indecent images: consensually and non-consensually (often via large chat groups), and view and share pornography and other harmful content.

Schools will always work with parents/carers to support them to address their child's online activity as needed. Please see our Behaviour Policy for more information about pupil mobile phones.

Due to the age of our children, they do not have unrestricted access to the internet and all access to digital devices whilst at school is closely monitored. Due to the age of our children, mobile phones are not permitted. Internet Safety is taught through our PSHE curriculum and Internet Safety Day, educating the children about what to do if they see something that worries them, as well as encouraging positive, responsible and safe use when using any digital device. A culture of tolerance and respect is encouraged. Parents receive updated guidance during onsite information events and regular updates via newsletters.

## **Pupils**

Pupils will be taught about how to keep themselves safe online, including being aware of potential risks within the curriculum in an age-appropriate way. For more information, please see our RSE Policy.

## **Parents/Carers**

The school will use parental communications to reinforce the importance of pupils being safe online. Parents/carers may be supported to understand what systems the school uses to filter and monitor online use. The school will update parents/carers regularly about what their children are being asked to do online in school, including the sites they will be asked to access, and with whom they may be interacting with online.

## **Resources**

More information around teaching online safety, can be found [here](#).

Additional information to support schools to keep their children safe online (including when they are online at home) is provided in KCSIE (2025).

## **P Child's Voice**

We actively promote the view that pupils should feel able to raise any concerns that they may have. Through our ongoing work with them, we aim to build resilience so that every pupil knows that we are a 'telling school', and that speaking up about any concern is valued and actively promoted. This includes raising a concern about themselves or about another.

Legal duties under the Equality Act (2010) will be complied with, including putting special provision in place to support dialogue with pupils who may not be able to convey their wishes and feelings as they may want to. This might include, for example, those who have communication difficulties, unaccompanied children, refugees, those pupils who are victims of modern slavery and/or human trafficking and those who do not speak English or for whom English is not their first language.

Staff will maintain a child-centred approach for pupils who are babies, recognising their specific vulnerabilities and ensuring that their needs and experiences are actively considered and represented. This includes, but is not limited to, interpreting non-verbal and pre-verbal cues, observing interactions, and remaining professionally curious, particularly when relying on parent or carer accounts.

Please see below for more information in Part 2.

We take the following measures to ensure that pupils know how to raise a concern:

At Little Downsend we foster a safe and open environment ensuring the children understand who to go to if they have a concern. We provide clear and accessible support should a child need to raise a concern. We reinforce a positive message by validating their concern and that it is good to seek help. We follow up by providing ongoing support if needed and communicating with parents and guardians.

## **Q Safer Recruitment**

Our school prioritises embedding a culture of safer recruitment as part of our strategy for preventing harm to pupils. Statutory procedures for checking the suitability of staff and volunteers who work with pupils are always followed (see Safer Recruitment Policy).

## **R Working in partnership with parents/carers**

Staff will work in partnership with parents/carers, in all situations other than when to do so may increase risk to a child; in these situations, the school will be directed by external statutory agencies. This partnership approach sits within a whole family culture in which the needs of all members of the family are explored as individuals and how their needs impact on one another is drawn out.

Staff will recognise, engage, and work with pupils and parents/carers who may present as unwilling or unable to engage with interventions/advice. It is recognised that engaging safely in some suggested interventions may be more challenging, such as those pupils and parents/carers experiencing abusive behaviour within their own intimate relationships, which may include domestic abuse and/or coercive or controlling behaviour, teenage relationship abuse, and 'honour' abuse including forced marriage and female genital mutilation, or abuse related to faith or belief.

Four principles underpin our work with parents/carers:

1. Effective partnership working with parents and carers happens when school staff build strong, positive, trusting, and co-operative relationships by:

- approaching families and their wider family networks with empathy, respect, compassion, and creativity
- avoiding reinforcing family shame, suffering, and blaming
- using strength-based approaches, working with parents/carers to identify what is working well and how their strengths could support them to effect positive change
  - ensuring they work sensitively with parents/carers (and pupils) to identify and understand the impact of adversity and trauma in their lives. They seek to understand how adversity and trauma might manifest and affect pupils and parents' engagement and adapt their response with care and compassion
  - adapting their responses to meet the diverse needs of parents/carers, including fathers and male carers, and the specific challenges being faced, including parents/carers of disabled children, and where harm is outside the home (see below)
  - ensuring they understand the families' background, ethnicity, religion, financial situation, ability, education, sex, ages and sexual orientation, and potential barriers these create in seeking and accessing help and support
  - being alert and recognising where parents/carers may not be acting in the best interest of the pupil or where pupils may be experiencing abuse, neglect, and exploitation as a result of actions by parents/carers, or other individuals in their lives
  - being mindful of negative stereotypes when making decisions which might lead to false assumptions

2. Verbal and non-verbal communication should be respectful, non-blaming, clear, inclusive, and adapted to pupil's, parents'/carers' needs. Staff should ensure that all materials provided to pupils, parents/carers, and families are jargon free, developmentally appropriate and in a format that is easily understood.

Where appropriate, material provided to pupils and parents/carers should be made accessible and translated into their first language if necessary. Professional interpreters should be provided where needed. Schools should not need to rely on family members or partners for interpretation services, including British Sign Language.

3. Staff should empower parents/carers to participate in decision-making to support and protect pupils by:
- creating a culture of “no surprises”, for example, making parents/carers aware of who will attend meetings and discussions, if the pupil will be invited to participate, and the format of the meeting or discussion
  - explaining that parents/carers may be able to bring a family member, a friend or supporter to meetings, where appropriate, needed and agreed by the school
  - giving parents/carers adequate preparation at every stage, relevant information, a safe and appropriate environment for participation and suitable access arrangements
  - signposting parents/carers to sources of help and support available locally or through the local authority (see below)
  - helping parents/carers to understand what the issues are and how these impact on the pupil, what decisions could be made, what changes need to be made, why and how, timescales and possible outcomes

4. Staff must involve pupils, parents/ carers in designing processes that affect them. They value their contributions, expertise and knowledge reflecting them in intervention design and continuously seek feedback from them to inform improvements. Schools will also use feedback from pupils and parents/ carers to reflect on their own practice.

## **S Multi Agency Working Arrangements (MASAs)**

For more information about our approach to multi- agency working, please see WTSC 2026 Chapter 2 and below in Part 3.

Protecting children from abuse, neglect and exploitation requires multi-agency join-up and cooperation at all levels. Robust local multi-agency arrangements help to ensure that information about a child and their family is shared effectively, likelihood of harm is correctly identified and understood, and that all children and families receive targeted services that meet their needs in a coordinated way. This includes looked after children.

In the UK, the way that the school and agencies involved in safeguarding work together is known as Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASAs)\*. The three Safeguarding Partners are responsible and

accountable for MASAs in their local area. By law, the Safeguarding Partners must jointly, and make widely available an annual report detailing the activity they have undertaken, focusing on multi-agency priorities, learning, impact, evidence, and improvement. This includes evidence of the impact of the work of any 'Relevant Agencies' i.e. schools (see below)

The purpose of MASAs is to ensure that, at a local level, organisations and agencies (including schools) are clear about how they will work together. This means:

- there is a clear, shared vision for how to improve outcomes for children locally across all levels of need and all types of harm
- when a child is identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm there is a prompt, appropriate and effective response to ensure the protection and support of the child
- organisations and agencies are challenged appropriately, effectively holding one another to account
- the voice of children and families combined with the knowledge of experienced practitioners and insights from data, provides a greater understanding of the areas of strength and/or improvement within arrangements and practice
- information is sought, analysed, shared, and broken down by protected characteristics to facilitate more accurate and timely decision-making for children and families, and through this the identification of groups of children who may be disproportionately over- or under-represented in services, to understand outcomes for different communities of children
  - effective collection, sharing and analysis of data enables early identification of new safeguarding risks, issues, emerging threats, and joined-up responses across relevant agencies, including the identification of groups of children who may be disproportionately over- or under-represented in services, so that services are adapted to address these issues
- senior leaders promote and embed a learning culture which supports local services to become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- senior leaders have a good knowledge and understanding about the quality of local practice and its impact on children and families

### Relevant Agencies

The school, including early years provision (where offered), whilst not being one of the three Safeguarding Partners, nevertheless is known as a 'relevant agency' and therefore must act in accordance with the local safeguarding arrangements in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of our pupils.

The school is vital to the successful delivery of MASAs, and plays a significant and often statutory role, thus there is a duty to ensure school functions are discharged via working in collaboration with other agencies. Schools are often best placed in building relationships, identifying concerns and providing direct support to pupils. Staff may be the first trusted adult to whom pupils report safeguarding concerns.

As part of this responsibility in MASAs, the school should:

- have a clear understanding of its responsibilities in relation to safeguarding pupils, and how it will discharge them
- co-operate with Safeguarding Partners to improve, implement, and monitor effectiveness of the local safeguarding arrangements
- share information and data about safeguarding issues and concerns affecting pupils to contribute to local priorities
- ensure local MASAs are fully understood, and rigorously applied within the school, including responding to safeguarding audits of quality and compliance, as requested by the local authority and/or local Safeguarding

Partners. This is to ensure that policies are consistent with the local MASAs and relevant legislation and/or regulations.

Where offered by the Safeguarding Partners, Heads, DSLs and DDSLs will engage in locally organised education sub- groups, training, networks, and practitioner forums.

\*Pupils may reside in more than one local authority, and as such, the school may work alongside a number of Safeguarding Partners and adhere to procedures under varying MASAs; should the pupil require support/a referral to children's Social Care, the school must use the procedures and threshold documents for the authority in which the pupil resides.

## Part 2: Knowledge Base

- A. Categories of abuse: Physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect
- B. Domestic Abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour
- C. Child on Child Abuse
- D. Sexual violence and sexual harassment
- E. Child Criminal Exploitation
- F. Child Sexual Exploitation, including group CSE
- G. Financially Motivated Sexual Exploitation
- H. AI Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material
- I. Sharing nudes/semi-nudes
- J. Honour Based Abuse
- K. Forced Marriage
- L. Female Genital Mutilation, Virginity testing, Hymenoplasty, and Breast Flattening
- M. Faith/belief-related Abuse
- N. Behavioural indicators in children
- O. Behavioural indicators in adults
- P. Grooming
- Q. Radicalisation
- R. Adverse Childhood Experiences
- S. Mental Health
- T. Children who may have specific vulnerabilities
- U. Stages of early intervention and child protection
- V. Contextual Safeguarding
- W. Signposting to further information

### A Categories of Abuse

The term 'maltreatment' or 'abuse' is often used as an umbrella term for harm caused to a child through abuse, neglect and/or exploitation. All staff should be aware of indicators of abuse, neglect, and/exploitation so that they are able to identify pupils who may need help or protection.

Exercising professional curiosity i.e. not relying on parent/carer accounts, and knowing what to look for is vital for the early identification of possible harm occurring so that staff can identify pupils who may be in need of help or protection.

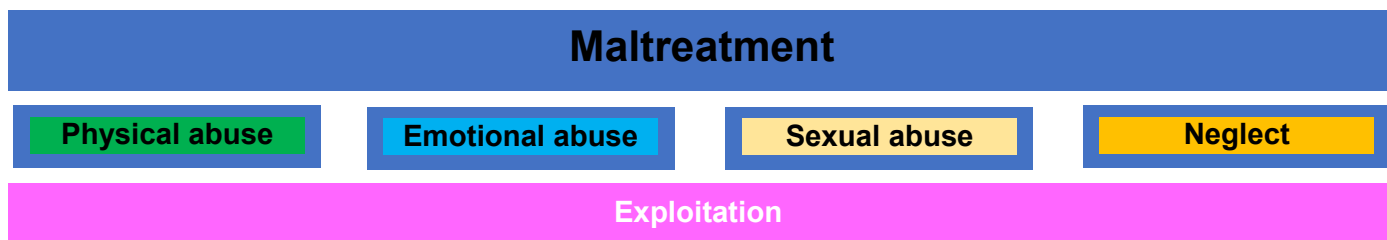
Somebody may abuse, neglect, and/or exploit a child by:

- inflicting harm on them
- by failing to act to prevent harm to them

Children may be abused, neglected and/or exploited:

- in a family or in an institutional or community setting
- online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline harm
- by those known to them or, more rarely, by others not known to them
- by an adult (s) or by another child (ren)

Abuse and safeguarding issues are rarely standalone events that can be covered by one definition or label. In most cases, multiple issues will overlap with one another. However, most guidance refers to there being four main categories of abuse: physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect (WTSC 2026). This policy will now explore these categories below.



### Physical abuse

Physical abuse is a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Signs of physical abuse can include:

- injuries to parts of the body where accidents are unlikely, such as thighs, back, abdomen
- respiratory problems from drowning, suffocation, or poisoning
- untreated or inadequately treated injuries
- bruising which looks like hand or finger marks or caused by an implement
- cigarette burns, human bites
- scarring, scalds, and burns

### Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the *persistent* emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only as far as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child from participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, although it may occur alone.

Signs of emotional abuse tend to be behavioural rather than physical (see below).

Emotional abuse can also be present when they are exposed to parental conflict that is frequent, intense and unresolved.

## Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example rape or oral sex), or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse.

Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children. The sexual abuse of children by other children is a specific safeguarding issue known as child-on child abuse and is explored below.

Signs of sexual abuse displayed by children may include:

- pregnancy
- sexually transmitted infection/diseases
- pain/itching/bleeding/bruising/discharge to the genital area/anus/mouth
- urinary infections
- difficulty walking, sitting or standing
- persistent sore throats
- stomach-ache
- sexualised behaviour, statements, and language that are not age appropriate.
- re-enacting sexual acts with items or other children
- reluctance/keenness to undress
- over familiarity, and/or no caution when going to strangers
- reluctance to interact with certain adults (although please remember that some children will still have 'normal' and often warm interactions with abusing parents, especially if they are younger or have developmental/learning difference)
- wetting after being dry
- soiling/smearing

## Resources

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse has free evidence-based practice resources to help professionals working with children and young people to identify and respond appropriately to concerns of child sexual abuse. They have also introduced resources to help education professionals identify and respond to concerns of child sexual abuse and abusive behaviours.

[Supporting parents and carers: a guide for those working with families affected by child sexual abuse](#)  
Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse

## Neglect

Neglect is the *persistent failure* to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy, for example, because of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing, and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate caregivers)
- or ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Signs of possible neglect include the child being:

- underweight or is small for their age, or their weight deteriorates
- very overweight for their age
- poorly clothed, with inadequate protection from the weather
- often absent from school for no apparent reason; or persistently arrive late
- regularly left alone, or in charge of younger brothers or sisters

### **Early Years**

Pupils in the early years stage are particularly vulnerable to abused, neglected and/or exploited, and may present differently to older children\*. Warning signs often appear as a pattern over time rather than one single incident (although this can also occur).

Therefore, staff must:

- maintain a child-centred approach, ensuring that the pupil's needs and experiences are actively considered and represented in assessments and decision-making. This includes interpreting non-verbal and pre-verbal cues and observing interactions between the pupil and their parents/carers
- be professionally curious, particularly when relying on parent/carer accounts of injuries/illness
- be vigilant to any changes in presentation
- consider and know the wider family network, including fathers and male carers, kinship carers, and others providing day-to-day care, recognising that multiple adults may be involved in the pupil's life

\*For more information on recognising signs and indicators of abuse in children in the Early Years stage, please read [this NSPCC Learning](#).

## **B Domestic abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour**

### **Domestic Abuse**

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) introduced the first ever statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognises the impact of domestic abuse on children, as victims in their own right.

Under the statutory definition, both the person who is carrying out the behaviour and the person to whom the behaviour is directed towards must be aged 16 or over and they must be "personally connected" (as defined in section 2 of the 2021 Act). who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

Children can be victims of domestic abuse in their own right if they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse and are related to either victim or perpetrator of the abuse, or either the victim or perpetrator of the abuse has parental responsibility for that child.

They may also experience domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse).

Domestic violence and abuse may be a single incident or pattern of incidents, and/or a course of conduct which can encompass a wide range of abusive behaviours, including:

a) physical or sexual abuse

b) violent or threatening behaviour

c) controlling or coercive behaviour (see below)

d) economic abuse

e) psychological, emotional, or other abuse such as 'honour' abuse, faith- or belief-based abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation or reproductive coercion, harassment and stalking.

### Impact

Exposure to domestic abuse and/or violence can have a serious, detrimental and long-term impact on a child's health, wellbeing, development, and ability to learn. In some cases, a child may blame themselves for the abuse or may have had to leave the family home as a result. Emotional abuse can also be present when a child exposed to parental conflict that is frequent, intense and unresolved (see above).

Operation Encompass operates in all Police forces across England. It helps Police and schools work together to provide emotional and practical help to children and families where abuse is happening. The system ensures that when the Police are called to an incident of domestic abuse, they notify the school under their statutory duty to do so where pupils:

- are connected to a household where the Police have attended a domestic abuse incident
- are physically present at the incident
- are not physically present during the incident
- might reside in another household temporarily or permanently

This Police notification ensures that the school has up-to-date relevant information about the pupil's circumstances and can enable immediate support to be put in place, according to the pupil's needs. Operation Encompass does not replace statutory safeguarding procedures. Where appropriate, the Police and/or schools should make a referral to local authority children's Social Care if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare. More information about the scheme and how schools can become involved is available on the Operation Encompass [website](#).

Operation Encompass provides an advice and helpline service for all staff members from educational settings who may be concerned about children who have experienced domestic abuse. The helpline is available from 8am to 1pm, Monday to Friday on 0204 513 9990 (charged at local rate).

### National Domestic Abuse Helpline

Refuge runs the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, which can be called free of charge and in confidence, 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247. Its [website](#) provides guidance and support for potential victims, as well as those who are worried about friends and loved ones. It also has a form through which a safe time from the team for a call can be booked.

### **Controlling or coercive behaviour**

Controlling or coercive behaviour is a form of domestic abuse and is included in the definition of domestic abuse in section 1(3)(c) of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

In 2015, the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour was introduced under Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act as a criminal offence.

Controlling or coercive behaviour is a pattern of abuse (on two or more occasions) that involves multiple behaviours and tactics used by a perpetrator to (but not limited to) hurt, humiliate, intimidate, exploit, isolate, and dominate the victim. It is an intentional pattern of behaviour used to exert power, control, or coercion over another person and can also be present in teenage relationships or between a child and adult.

Controlling or coercive behaviour is often committed in conjunction with other forms of abuse and is often part of a wider pattern of abuse, including violent, sexual, or economic abuse.

Children can be used to control or coerce the victim, for example, by frustrating child contact and/or child arrangements, telling the children to call the victim derogatory names or to hit the victim, or by threatening to abduct the children.

This pattern of abuse causes fear, serious alarm and/or distress which can lead to a substantial adverse effect on a victim's day-to-day life. This can have a significant impact on children and young people

Section 68 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into force on 5 April 2023 and removed the 'living together' requirement for the controlling or coercive behaviour offence, which means that the offence applies to partners, ex-partners or family members, regardless of whether the victim and perpetrator live together.

More information about controlling or coercive behaviour, including the impact on children can be found in the Controlling or coercive behaviour: statutory guidance and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

## C Child on Child Abuse

Please see [Part 3 -Process for information related to managing situations involving child on child abuse.](#)

Child on child abuse is any form of abuse/exploitation perpetrated by a child towards another child. Abuse is abuse, exploitation is exploitation, and child on child abuse must be taken as seriously as abuse, neglect and/or exploitation by an adult.

All staff must:

- be alert to possible indicators of safeguarding concerns which may indicate child on child abuse and understand their role in preventing, identifying, and responding to it.
- acknowledge that even if there are no reports of child on child abuse it does not mean it is not happening in the school; it may be the case that it is just not being reported by pupils
- know that pupils are capable of abusing their peers and other pupils, and that abuse can occur in intimate personal relationships between peers and other children
- never dismiss abusive behaviour as a normal part of growing up, 'banter' or 'just having a laugh' and should not develop high thresholds before taking action.

Child on child abuse can take many different forms, including, but not limited to:

- bullying (including cyber-bullying)<sup>1</sup>
- relationship abuse<sup>2</sup>, often referred to as 'teenage relationship abuse'.
- domestic violence<sup>3</sup> including coercive or controlling behaviour
- child sexual exploitation<sup>4</sup>, including group child sexual exploitation (see below)
- youth and serious youth violence<sup>5</sup>
- 'upskirting' (see below)

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the school's Anti-Bullying Policy.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.disrespectnobody.co.uk/relationship-abuse/what-is-relationship-abuse/>

<sup>3</sup> This type of abuse relates to abuse between children aged 16 and 17 who are or have been intimate partners or family members. The abuse includes but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.

<sup>4</sup> This is a form of sexual abuse where children are sexually exploited for money, power or status. This abuse can be perpetrated by other children or by adults. It can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults. In some cases, children are persuaded or forced into exchanging sexual activity for money, drugs, gifts, affection or status. Consent cannot be given, even where a child may believe they are voluntarily engaging in sexual activity with the person who is exploiting them. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact and can happen online.

<sup>5</sup> Serious youth violence is any of the most serious offences where the victim is aged 19 or below, including murder, manslaughter, rape, wounding with intent and causing grievous bodily harm. Youth violence also includes assault with injury offences.

- harmful sexual behaviour<sup>6</sup> (see below)
- gender-based violence<sup>7</sup>
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party
- sexual violence (such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault; this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence)
- sexual harassment (including sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse)
- stalking
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nude images and or videos\*
- financially motivated sexual extortion
- creating or sharing AI generated child sexual abuse material
- 'hazing', which is a form of initiation into a group that involves humiliating, degrading or dangerous tasks and behaviours

These categories of abuse rarely take place in isolation and often indicate wider safeguarding concerns. For example, a teenage girl may be in a sexually exploitative relationship with a teenage boy who is himself being physically abused by a family member or by older boys. Equally, while children who abuse may have power over those who they are abusing, they may be simultaneously powerless to others. Staff should be aware that there may be multiple perpetrators and/or victims, and not consider that only one pupil abuses another in isolation.

\*Sharing nudes/semi nudes via imagery/videos can, but does not always, constitute abusive behaviour. All incidents should be responded to in accordance with this policy and process contained in Part 3-Process.

### Protected Characteristics

Child on child abuse is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example, on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, special educational needs and/or disability, or because a child is looked after, is adopted or has caring responsibilities. It might be motivated by actual differences between children, or perceived differences. All incidents of child-on-child abuse, both physical, verbal, and emotional, on the basis of protected characteristics must be taken extremely seriously.

### When does behaviour become abusive/exploitative?

It can be difficult to distinguish between abusive and/or exploitative behaviour, which should be dealt with in accordance with the procedure set out below, and behaviour which does not constitute abuse and/or exploitation.

Factors which may indicate that behaviour is abusive and/or exploitative include:

- a) where it is repeated over time and/or where the perpetrator (s) intended to cause serious harm
- b) where there is an element of coercion or pre-planning
- c) where there is an imbalance of power, for example, as a result of age, size, social status or wealth.

This list is not exhaustive, and staff should always use their professional judgment and discuss any concerns with the DSL, who in turn should seek guidance from the RSL where needed.

### How can staff identify victims of child-on-child abuse?

Identifying child on child abuse can be achieved by being alert to changes in a pupil's well-being and to general signs of abuse and/or exploitation. Signs that a pupil may be suffering from child-on-child abuse overlap with those relating to other types of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation – see indicators, earlier in this document.

<sup>6</sup> This is any sexual behaviour by a child or young person which is outside of developmentally "normative" parameters. This can (but does not always) include abusive behaviour such as sexual assaults.

<sup>7</sup> This is violence that is directed against one gender as a result of their gender.

Signs can include, but are not limited to:

- unexplained, persistent and/or prolonged absence from school
- disengaging from classes, or struggling to carry out school related tasks to the standard staff would ordinarily expect from the individual pupil i.e. a change
- physical injuries (often with inconsistent accounts)
- having difficulties with their mental health and/or emotional wellbeing
- becoming withdrawn, shy, experiencing headaches, stomach aches, anxiety, panic attacks, suffering from nightmares or lack of sleep or sleeping too much
- new (or increased) access to drugs and/or alcohol use
- changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a way that is not appropriate for the pupil's age including sexualised behaviours
- change in health needs, including sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy
- changes in social groups
- avoidance of certain areas of school or community
- reluctance to go home

This list is not exhaustive and the presence of one or more of these signs does not necessarily indicate child on child abuse.

#### Are some children particularly susceptible/vulnerable ?

Any child can be affected by child-on-child abuse and/or exploitation; however, research suggests that:

- Child on child abuse is more prevalent amongst children aged 10 and older, although it also affects younger children, including by way of harmful sexual behaviour.
- Children who are particularly vulnerable to abuse /exploitation or to abusing/exploiting others include those who have
  - (i) witnessed or experienced abuse, exploitation or violence themselves
  - (ii) suffered from the loss of a close family member or friend (recent or historical)
  - (iii) experienced considerable disruption in their lives.
- as stated above, children with protected characteristics, but especially those with SEN/D and those who are LGBTQ+ or gender questioning/transitioning are particularly vulnerable child on child abuse, often in the form of bullying (both direct and online).

Risks can be compounded where children lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open. The school will endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced and provide a safe space for these groups of vulnerable pupils to speak out or share their concerns with trusted members of staff.

#### How prevalent is child on child abuse?

Recent research suggests that child-on-child abuse is one of the most common forms of abuse affecting children. For example:

- 25% children had experienced some kind of aggression at least once or twice in the past three months and 12.1% indicated they had been victims of bullying (Spain)
- 20% and 25% of child sexual abuse is committed by other children (Australia). In the UK, this figure is closer to 35%.

- 41.3% of boys and 28.3 % of girls, who participated in a cross-national study reported that they were involved with bullying over two or three times per month either as bullies, as victims or as bullies/victims. Another study conducted in a sample of 369 children reported a percentage of 22.8% of victims in primary schools (Greece).
- 42% of pupils report being subjected to harassment by peers in secondary school (India).
- 9% of young people have received sexual threats online from people their age in the last year (Australia)
- 29% have witnessed people their age making sexual threats, for example unwanted sexual behaviour or violence, in the last year (Denmark, Hungary and the UK).
- 10% of female higher education pupils in a partnered relationship report experiencing intimate partner violence (United States)

All staff should therefore understand, that even if there are no reports of child-on-child abuse in school, it does not mean it is not happening, it may be the case that it is just not being reported by pupils.

Staff should therefore assume and take the approach that child on child abuse is occurring, be vigilant at all times, and act accordingly.

#### How does the school raise awareness of, and reduce the risk, of child-on-child abuse?

Staff are trained on the nature, prevalence, and effect of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify and respond to it. The school actively seeks to prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by educating pupils and staff, challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse, encouraging a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the school community, and responding to all cases of child-on-child abuse and any cases of bullying or cyber-bullying promptly, fairly and appropriately.

Pupils are educated about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse via abuse via our PSHE curriculum and British Fundamental Values.

They are told what to do if they witness or are victims of such abuse, the effect that it can have on the victims and the possible reasons for it, including vulnerability of the perpetrator. They are regularly informed about the school's approach to such issues, including its zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of bullying and child on child abuse, including sexual violence and sexual harassment (see below).

## **D Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment**

Please see [Part 3-Process for more information related to managing situations involving sexual violence and/or sexual harassment](#).

Child on child abuse can include two specific forms, known as Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and may overlap; they can occur online and face-to-face (both physically and verbally) and are never acceptable. Sexual violence and sexual harassment can happen anywhere, and all staff working in the school are advised to maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here', assume that it is happening, and act accordingly.

All staff should understand that even if there are no reports in their school it does not mean it is not happening, it may be the case that it is just not being reported.

Staff should consider the importance of understanding intra familial harms and any necessary support for siblings following incidents involving sexual harassment and/or violence

### Impact

Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment wherever and however it happens, may find the experience stressful and distressing. This will, in all likelihood, adversely affect their educational attainment and will be exacerbated if the alleged perpetrator(s) attends the same school.

It is important that schools consider sexual harassment in broad terms. Sexual harassment creates a culture that, if not challenged, can normalise inappropriate behaviours and provide an environment that may lead to sexual violence.

Sexual Violence includes sexual offences

**Rape:** A person (A) commits an offence of rape if: he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

**Assault by Penetration:** A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of her/his body or anything else, the penetration is sexual, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

**Sexual Assault:** A person (A) commits an offence of sexual assault if: s/he intentionally touches another person (B), the touching is sexual, B does not consent to the touching and A does not reasonably believe that B consents. (Schools should be aware that sexual assault covers a very wide range of behaviour so a single act of kissing someone without consent or touching someone's bottom/breasts/genitalia without consent, can still constitute sexual assault.)

Sexual Harassment refers to 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature'.

This can occur *online* (including, but not limited to non-consensual sharing of images, making sexual comments on social media) and *offline* (including but not limited to making sexual comments, sexual taunting or 'jokes' and physical contact, for example, brushing against someone deliberately or interfering with their clothes).

### Upskirting

'Upskirting' is where someone takes a picture under a person's clothing (not necessarily a skirt) without their permission and or knowledge, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks (with or without underwear) to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress, and/ or alarm. Anyone of any gender, or sexual orientation can be a victim or perpetrator.

It is a criminal offence under the Voyeurism (Offences) Act (2019)

### Who perpetrates sexual violence and/or harassment?

Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment can:

- occur between any two children, or a group of children against one individual or group
- be perpetrated by a child of any age against a child of any age
- be perpetrated by a child of any sexual orientation against a child of any sexual orientation
- include behaviour that exists on an often-progressive continuum and may overlap
- be online and offline (physical or verbal)
- can take place within intimate personal relationships between children

Any report of sexual violence or sexual harassment must be taken seriously. Staff should be aware, that according to research, it is more likely that girls will be the victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment and more likely it will be perpetrated by boys. However, staff must always maintain an open mind.

### Vulnerabilities

Children with Special Educational Needs (SEND) are potentially more vulnerable, and there may be barriers in recognising abuse in this group of pupils. In addition, pupils who LGBTQ+ or are perceived by their peers to be LGBTQ+, and similarly those who are gender questioning may potentially be more vulnerable (see above).

### Signs and Indicators

All staff should be aware of the indicators which may include, but not be limited to;

- increased absence from school, including truanting or going missing
- a change in friendships or relationships with older individuals or groups
- a significant change or decline in performance
- a significant change or decline in presentation
- signs of self-harm and/or suicidal ideation or a significant change/decline in wellbeing
- signs of physical assault or unexplained injuries
- unexplained gifts or new possessions

### Our approach to Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

The school will apply the principles set out in the above document when considering its approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment between pupils.

In this school we will:

- not accept or tolerate sexual violence and sexual harassment, or upskirting
- not downplay or consider that these types of behaviours are 'banter', an 'inevitable part of growing up' or hold the view that 'boys will be boys', knowing that to do so may normalise inappropriate behaviours may create an unsafe culture where children feel less able to come forward with concerns
- encourage early intervention to avoid potential escalation
- challenge inappropriate physical behaviour (potentially criminal in nature), such as grabbing bottoms, breasts and genitalia, pulling down trousers, flicking bras and lifting up skirts
- challenge inappropriate verbal behaviour, such as making sexist comments, innuendo or taunting
- align with their Behaviour Policy with regards to imposing sanctions for inappropriate behaviour, including sexual harassment and/or sexual violence
- embed training and education on these issues within a strong pastoral system
- adopt a planned *and sequenced* programme across the whole curriculum including age-appropriate content around: consent, gender roles, stereotyping and equality, healthy relationships, and power imbalances in relationships
- develop and encourage forums that enable pupils to talk about issues openly
- have clear and accessible systems in place for pupils to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously
- act in the best interests of all pupils involved, reassure victims that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe. A victim will never be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting sexual violence or sexual harassment

- manage any disclosure, either from the pupil who has suffered abuse or from other pupils, giving the victim(s) as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed and any support that they will be offered. This will however need to be balanced with the school's duty and responsibilities to protect them and other pupils
- carry out a risk and needs assessment for pupils affected by sexual violence or sexual harassment, including both the victim and alleged perpetrator- this may be informed by risk assessments completed/advice by external services
- engage with both the victim's and the alleged perpetrator's parents or carers when there has been a report of sexual violence The exception to this rule is if there is a reason to believe informing a parent or carer will put a pupil at additional risk.

## Resources

The [HSB toolkit](#) from The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is designed for parents, carers, family members and professionals, to help everyone play their part in keeping children safe. It has links to useful information, resources, and support as well as practical tips to prevent harmful sexual behaviour and provide safe environments for families.

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation in collaboration with the Home Office, has also developed '[Shore Space](#)', an online resource which works to prevent harmful sexual behaviour. Shore Space offers a confidential chat service supporting young people who are concerned about their own or someone else's sexual thoughts and behaviour.

The NSPCC provides free and independent advice about HSB: NSPCC Learning: Protecting children from harmful sexual behaviour and NSPCC - Harmful sexual behaviour framework.

Beyond Referrals | Contextual Safeguarding provides a school self-assessment toolkit and guidance for addressing HSB in schools.

The [Preventing harmful sexual behaviour in children - Stop It Now](#) provides a guide for parents, carers and professionals to help everyone do their part in keeping children safe, they also run a free confidential helpline.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance has developed [guidance](#) and [training for schools](#) about [Sexual and Sexist bullying](#).

Schools should also consider the potential impact of social media in facilitating the spreading of rumours and exposing victims' identities. The principles described in [Childnet's cyberbullying guidance](#) could be helpful.

Additional information on confidentiality and information sharing is available at [Safeguarding Practitioners Information Sharing Advice](#)

## **E Child Criminal Exploitation, including serious violence**

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) is where an individual and/or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate, exploit, and/or deceive a child into any criminal activity;

- (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants; and/or
- (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator; and/or
- (c) through violence or the threat of violence.

The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual.

CCE does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

CCE can include children being forced to work in cannabis factories, forced to shoplift or pickpocket, or to threaten other young people.

An individual or group may also 'create' a debt for the child involved. This is known as 'debt bondage'.

Debt bondage is when someone forces or pressures a child to do things, saying that the child owes them money or drugs or something else they've been given. Sometimes the child may be told they are in debt without being given a reason, or as an excuse to threaten them.

The child might be forced:

- Work for someone to pay them back
- Deliver packages or hold onto things
- Do something sexual or send images
- Commit crimes or take part in something illegal
- Hurt someone or do other jobs for the group

It is important to note that the experience of girls who are criminally exploited can be very different to that of boys. The indicators may not be the same, however professionals should be aware that girls are at risk of criminal exploitation too. It is also important to note that both boys and girls being criminally exploited may also be at higher risk of sexual exploitation.

All staff should be aware of indicators which may signal that pupils are susceptible and/or at risk from, and/or are involved with, serious violent crime. These can include but are not limited to:

- increased absence from school, including truanting and going missing
- a change in friendships or relationships with older individuals and/or groups
- a significant change/ decline in academic performance
- a significant change/decline in presentation
- signs of self-harm, suicidal ideation, or a significant change/decline in wellbeing
- unexplained gifts or new possessions
- signs of physical assault or unexplained injuries

### Cuckooing (criminal takeover)

Note: 'A child cannot give their consent for their dwelling to be used in this way' (WTSC 2026).

Cuckooing is when criminals take over someone's home to use it as a base for crime. The victim's home may be used for: dealing drugs; storing weapons; sex work; other illegal activities. By using the victim's home, the criminal hopes they can avoid the Police. Criminals usually target vulnerable people. The victim may feel too frightened to tell anyone. They may still care about the criminal and see them as a friend. Some of these things could be a sign of cuckooing. For more information about cuckooing, please see [here](#).

### County Lines

CCE also involves children and young people being coerced into moving drugs or money across the country; in the UK this is commonly referred to as County Lines.

County Lines usually occurs through engaging children into gangs and using them to carry money or drugs from urban areas to suburban and rural areas, market, and seaside towns.

### Resources

More information can be found in the UK government guidance KCSIE (2025), in the Home Office's 'Preventing youth violence and gang involvement' and its 'Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines guidance'.

Further information on the signs of a child's involvement in county lines is available in guidance published by the Home Office here.

County Lines Toolkit For Professionals - The Children's Society in partnership with Victim Support and National Police Chiefs' Council.

### Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit

## **F Child Sexual Exploitation, including group-based CSE**

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse (see above) and occurs where an individual and/or group takes advantage of an imbalance in power to coerce, manipulate, exploit and/ or deceive a child into sexual activity.

Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources. In some cases, the abuse will be in exchange for something the victim needs or wants and/or will be to the financial benefit or other advantage (such as increased status) of the perpetrator or facilitator.

CSE can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults. The abuse can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse. It can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence, both to the child and/or someone they know.

Victims can be exploited even when activity appears consensual as they may not realise that they are being exploited/harmed, and it should be noted that exploitation as well as being directly physical, can also be facilitated and/or take place online or a combination of offline/online exploitation and harm.

CSE can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16-and 17-year-olds, who can legally consent to have sex. It can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity and may occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge (e.g. through others copying videos or images they have created and posted on social media). The latter can be of the actual victim child, or those stating that the content is of the actual child, when it is not. Either way, this is exploitation and has harmed a child. The above CCE indicators can also be indicators of CSE, as can:

- children who have older boyfriends or girlfriends; and
- children who suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant.

### Group-based child sexual exploitation

Group-based CSE is defined as two or more individuals (whether identified or not) who are known to (or associated with) one another and are known to be involved in or to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children. Being involved in the sexual exploitation of children includes e.g. introducing them to other individuals for the purpose of exploitation, trafficking a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation, taking payment for sexual activities with a child or allowing their property to be used for sexual activities with a child, etc. This can be perpetrated within or beyond the family, by both children and adults, and groups can be organised or loosely linked.

### Resources

For more information, see [Child Sexual Exploitation: Guide for Practitioners](#)

## **G Financially Motivated Sexual Extortion**

Increasingly, children are being sexually coerced and exploited for *money*, rather than any sexual motivation underpinning the actions of the offender. The offender (known, posing as known, or unknown children/adults) will demand the victim child self-generate nudes or semi-nudes (see below) and send them to them. Whether or not the victim child actually sends these images/videos, the perpetrator will blackmail the victim by

threatening to share these or other images online, and occasionally offline, with the wider community i.e. family, friends, staff, and/or media unless the child victim sends money to them. This is sometimes known as 'sextortion' and there has been a rapid increase in these situations being reported nationally; many cases of course will not have been reported by children for a number of reasons.

Some young people have had deteriorating mental health due to this extortion. For this reason, the school will hold an 'open door' and supportive approach in regard to pupils sending nudes/semi nudes, rather than seeking to criminalising them. This approach will enable pupils to feel able to share that they have shared nudes/semi-nudes, or been asked to do this, with the aim that they can receive the support they so vitally may need in a timely manner. This is not the same as condoning or accepting the sharing of images/videos as the norm. The school is mindful that much of this behaviour is illegal and will follow their statutory duties where appropriate, including reporting matters on a case-by-case basis to the Police and Social Care as needed.

### Resources

Find more information and advice from the Internet Watch Foundation [here](#).

## **H Sharing of nudes/semi-nude imagery/videos**

Please see [Part 3-Process](#) for more information in relation to managing situations involving sexual violence and/or sexual harassment.

This policy only covers the sharing of sexual imagery by pupils.

Possessing, creating, sharing and distributing sexual photos and videos of under-18s is illegal, and therefore causes the greatest complexity for schools (amongst other agencies) when responding.

It also presents a range of risks which need careful management.

**Staff must not ever view or forward illegal images of a pupil (or any other child). Should they receive such from any source, then they must notify the DSL immediately.**

What types of incidents are covered by this policy?

Yes:

- A pupil creates and shares sexual imagery of themselves with another pupil/child (also under the age of 18).
- A pupil shares sexual imagery created by another pupil/child with another pupil/child (also under the age of 18) or an adult.
- A pupil is in possession of sexual imagery created by another pupil/child.

No:

- The sharing of sexual imagery of children by adults constitutes child sexual abuse and schools must always inform the Police if they hear this has occurred or find this content on a pupil's/adult's device (or confirmed searches). Images/searches of this kind must not be deleted from a pupil or adult's phone.
- Pupils sharing pornography or exchanging sexual texts which do not contain imagery<sup>8</sup>.
- Sexual imagery downloaded from the internet by a pupil<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> All such incidents should be responded to with reference to the school's Online Safety Policy, and in line with the school's Safeguarding Policy

<sup>9</sup> As above

- Sexual imagery downloaded from the internet by a pupil and shared with another pupil/child (also under the age of 18) or an adult.

### Disclosure

All staff should understand, that even if there are no reports in their school it does not mean it is not happening; it may be the case that it is just not being reported by pupils. All members of staff (including non-teaching staff) should be aware of how to recognise and refer any disclosure of incidents involving the sharing of nudes/semi nudes, imagery/videos. This will be covered within staff training.

Disclosure about can happen in a variety of ways. The pupil affected may inform a class teacher, the DSL in school, or any member of the school staff. They may report through an existing reporting structure, or a friend or parent/carer may inform someone in school or a colleague or inform the Police directly. Any direct disclosure by a pupil should be taken very seriously. A pupil who discloses they are the subject of sexual imagery is likely to be embarrassed and worried about the consequences. It is likely that disclosure in school is a last resort, and they may have already tried to resolve the issue themselves.

### Resources

LGFL 'Undressed' provides schools advice about how to teach young children about being tricked into getting undressed online in a fun way without scaring them or explaining the motives of sex offenders.

For more guidance from UKCIS around sharing nudes/semi-nudes read [here](#).

## I **AI Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)**

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to generate Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) is increasing, and the technology is fast improving. As with all online safety challenges, this challenge is inherently international.

The term 'AI CSAM' to refer to criminal images or videos of the sexual abuse of children that are generated or edited by AI technology, and 'real CSAM' to clearly distinguish CSAM that is not generated or edited by AI technology.

The term 'deepfake' is used variously in the AI field, in the media, and among the wider population. Sometimes it is taken to refer to all AI-generated or AI-edited content.

This policy uses the term 'deepfake' to refer to partially synthetic content: edited content that is based on a real image or video but has been altered using AI technology. Incredibly realistic deepfake, or partially synthetic, videos of child rape and torture are made by offenders using AI tools that add the face or likeness of a real person or victim.

This is particularly important in the context of 'deepfake videos' edited (or 'faked') real videos which should be clearly distinguished from fully synthetic videos created by text-to-video or text-to-image-to-video

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) stated in their most recent [report](#) the following 5 key findings:

1. **Increase in AI-generated Child Sexual Abuse Material:** The latest findings show over 3,500 new AI-generated criminal child sexual abuse images have been uploaded on to the same dark web forum as previously analysed in October 2023.
2. **More Severe Images:** Of the AI-generated images confirmed to be child sexual abuse on the forum, more images depicted the most severe *Category A* abuse, indicating that perpetrators are more able to generate complex 'hardcore' scenarios.

3. **Emergence of AI Child Sexual Abuse Videos:** AI-generated child sexual abuse videos, primarily deepfakes, have started circulating, highlighting rapid technological advancements in AI models/generators. Increasingly, deepfake videos shared in dark web forums take adult pornographic videos and add a child's face using AI tools.
4. **Clear Web Increase:** There is a noticeable increase in AI-generated child sexual abuse imagery on the clear web, including on commercial sites.
5. **AI Child Sexual Abuse Featuring Known Victims and Famous Children:** Perpetrators increasingly use fine-tuned AI models to generate new imagery of known victims of child sexual abuse or famous children.

## J Honour Based Abuse (HBA)

HBA includes all incidents or crimes which have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the community and/or the family, and commonly involve practices such as FGM, forced marriage and/or breast flattening. Abuse often involves a wider network of family or community pressure and therefore it is important to be aware of this dynamic and consider risk factors when deciding on action. If staff have a concern that a pupil or adult may be at risk of Honour Based Abuse, they must alert their DSL immediately.

## K Forced Marriage (FM)

FM is one entered into without the full and free consent of one or both parties and where violence, threats or any form of coercion is used to cause a person to enter into a marriage.

Forcing a person into marriage is a crime in England and Wales. Changes to the Marriage Act (1929) and the Civil Partnership Act (2004) came into effect in February 2023 which raised the legal marriage age to 18 years old. These changes mean that 16 to 17-year-olds are no longer able to marry or enter a civil partnership under any circumstances, even with parental or judicial consent. This Minimum Age Act expands the criminal offence of forced marriage in England and Wales to make it an offence in all circumstances to do anything intended to cause a child to marry before they turn 18 without the need to prove that the young person:

- is coerced into the marriage or civil partnership (e.g. threatened)
- is deceived into leaving the UK and coerced into marriage
- lacks the mental capacity to give consent

### Resources

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) has created:

[Multi-agency practice guidelines: handling cases of forced marriage](#)

The right to choose: government guidance on forced marriage -[GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

School staff can contact the Forced Marriage Unit if they need advice or information:

Contact: 020 7008 0151 or email [fmu@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:fmu@fcdo.gov.uk).

# **L Female Genital Mutilation, Virginity Testing and Hymenoplasty, and Breast Flattening**

## **Female Genital Mutilation**

Female Genital Mutilation is illegal.

It is abuse that encompasses all procedures involved in the partial or total removal of female external genitalia.

All staff should speak to the DSL (or deputy DSL) with regards to any concerns about FGM. UK only -there is a specific legal duty on teachers under the FGM Act (2003) to report FGM. If a teacher, in the course of their work in the profession, discovers that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out on a pupil under the age of 18, it is mandatory that the teacher must report this to the Police using the telephone number 101. They must be supported by a member of the safeguarding team should they do this.

## **Virginity testing and Hymenoplasty**

Virginity testing and hymenoplasty are forms of violence against women and girls and are part of the cycle of so called 'honour-based' abuse.

### **Virginity testing**

The law defines 'virginity testing' as "the examination of female genitalia, with or without consent, for the purpose (or purported purpose) of determining virginity."

It is also referred to as hymen, '2-finger' or vaginal examination, is an inspection of the female genitalia, intended to determine whether a woman or girl has had vaginal sexual intercourse. For the purposes of the Health and Care Act (2022), virginity testing is any examination (with or without contact) of the female genitalia intended to establish if vaginal intercourse has taken place. This is irrespective of whether consent has been given. The position of the World Health Organization and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) is that virginity tests have no scientific merit or clinical indication as there is no known examination that can prove whether a woman has had vaginal intercourse.

The hymen is a thin membrane that partially covers the entrance to the vagina. During puberty, oestrogen causes the hymen to change in appearance and become very elastic. Normal variations of the post-pubertal hymen range from thin and stretchy to thick and somewhat rigid. A non-intact, or stretched, hymen is not a reliable indication of past sexual activity, nor is it guaranteed that the hymen will break or bleed after the first vaginal intercourse.

### **Hymenoplasty**

The law defines 'hymenoplasty' as the reconstruction of the hymen (with or without consent).

There are a number of different techniques to achieve but it generally involves stitching hymenal remnants together at the vaginal opening, or surgically reconstructing a hymen using vaginal tissue. The aim of the procedure is to ensure that a woman bleeds the next time she has intercourse to give the impression that she has no history of vaginal intercourse. There is no guarantee that this will fully reform the hymen or cause bleeding when penetration is attempted.

Both virginity testing and hymenoplasty can be precursors to child or forced marriage and other forms of family and/or community coercive behaviours, including physical and emotional control. Women who 'fail' a virginity test, are found to have undergone a hymen reconstruction, or do not bleed on their wedding night

are likely to experience further so called 'honour-based' abuse including emotional and physical abuse, family or community disownment and even honour killings.

**Emotional impact:** The practices are degrading and intrusive. They can lead to extreme psychological trauma in the victim, and can provoke conditions including anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. The practices have been linked to suicide.

**Physical impact:** They can be physically harmful. For example, virginity testing can result in damage to the hymen, tears and damage to the vaginal wall, bleeding, and infection. The risk of infection is also high in hymenoplasty, which has the added risks of acute bleeding during the procedure, scarring and narrowing of the opening of the vagina and sexual difficulties. Virginity testing and hymenoplasty are considered to have a similar level of seriousness to assault occasioning actual bodily harm. This is in recognition of the physical harm they can cause to the individual who is subjected to them. This level of seriousness also reflects the controlling attitudes that underpin the practices.

**Prevalence:** there is evidence that women and girls from the age of 13 are most at risk of undergoing a virginity test and/or hymenoplasty, but girls as young as 8 can be affected. As with other forms of so-called 'honour-based' abuse, these practices often take place behind closed doors, and because of this, the numbers of women and girls that are subjected to these practices are not known.

**Who:** any woman or girl, of any age, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, disability or socioeconomic status could be subjected to a virginity test or hymenoplasty.

**Why:** Women and girls are coerced, forced and shamed into undergoing these procedures, often pressurised by family members or their intended husbands' family in the name of supposedly upholding honour and to fulfil the requirement that a woman remains 'pure' before marriage. Some practitioners issue a certificate to prove 'virginity' after a virginity test or hymenoplasty, while some will simply tell the family or community members whether a woman or girl has 'passed' a virginity test.

**Legislation:** it is illegal to carry out, offer or aid and abet virginity testing or hymenoplasty in any part of the UK, as part of the Health and Care Act (2022). It is also illegal for UK nationals and residents to do these things outside the UK. These offences carry extra territorial jurisdiction and carry a maximum sentence of 5 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

**Signs and Indicators:** there are several indicators that a girl is at risk of or has been subjected to a virginity test and/or hymenoplasty:

- the girl requests either procedure or asks for help
- family members ask for the procedures or disclose that the girl has already undergone the practices
- there could be pain and discomfort after the procedures, which, for example, could result in the girl having difficulty in walking or sitting for a long period of time which was not a problem previously
- concern from family members that a girl has a boyfriend, or plans for the girl to be married
- a close female relative has been threatened with either procedure or has already been subjected to one
- the girl has already experienced or is at risk of other forms of so called 'honour-based' abuse
- the girl is already known to Children's Social Care in relation to other safeguarding issues

- the woman or girl may disclose other concerns that could be an indication of abuse. For example, they may state that they do not feel safe at home, that family members will not let them out the house and/or that family members are controlling
- the girl may have suffered trauma from being coerced and having to undergo the procedures. This could result in an increase in emotional and psychological needs, for example withdrawal, anxiety or depression, or significant change in behaviour. The trauma could also have long-term implications for the girl and may not manifest for many years after the event
- the girl may appear fearful of their family or a particular family member
- unexplained absence from school, potentially to go abroad
- changes in behaviour – becoming withdrawn, anxious, or depressed; a deterioration in schoolwork, attendance, or attainment

This is not an exhaustive list of indicators. If any of these indicators are identified, staff must inform the DSL and following safeguarding procedures.

### Resources

Virginity testing and hymenoplasty: multi-agency guidance - GOV.UK

### **Breast Flattening**

Breast flattening, also known as breast ironing, is the pounding and massaging of a pubescent's breasts. Hard or heated objects are used, to try to make the breasts stop developing or disappear. The practice is typically carried out by the girl's mother, who will say she is trying to protect the girl from sexual harassment and rape to prevent early pregnancy that would tarnish the family name, or to allow the girl to pursue education, rather than be forced into early marriage.

## **M Faith or belief- related child abuse**

As a school, we respect, and do not challenge parents/carers' rights to have faiths or beliefs, but where these may/have led to abuse and/or a risk of harm to a pupil, we will seek advice from the authorities as required.

### What is faith/belief related abuse?

Abuse linked to faith or belief is where concerns for a child's welfare have been identified, and could be caused by a belief in witchcraft, spirit or demonic possession, ritual or satanic abuse features; or when practices linked to faith or belief are harmful to a child. Research suggests that in 2023, the abuse of 2,140 was linked to faith/beliefs.

It is important to note that child abuse linked to faith or belief is not confined to one faith, nationality, and/ or ethnic community. Examples of this form of abuse have been recorded worldwide across various religions including Christians, Muslims, and Hindus. The number of known cases suggests that only a small minority of people who believe in witchcraft or spirit possession go on to abuse children and adults. Abuse may happen anywhere, but it most commonly occurs within the child's home. Under-reporting of abuse is, however, likely.

Harm to a child can take place due to the following known reasons:

- abuse as a result of a child being accused of being a 'witch'
- abuse as a result of a child being accused of being possessed by 'evil spirits'

- ritualistic abuse which is prolonged sexual, physical and psychological abuse
- satanic abuse which is carried out in the name of 'satan' and may have links to cults
- any other harmful practice linked to a belief or faith

In terms of the categories, explored above in section A:

**Physical abuse:** can involve ritualistic beating, burning, cutting, stabbing, semi-strangling, tying up the child, or rubbing chilli peppers or other substances on the child's genitals or eyes.

**Emotional abuse:** can occur in the form of isolation. A child may not be allowed near or to share a room with family members and threatened with abandonment. The child may also be convinced that they are possessed.

**Neglect:** the child's family and community may have failed to ensure appropriate medical care, supervision, education, good hygiene, nourishment, clothing or warmth.

**Sexual abuse:** children who have been singled out in this way can be particularly vulnerable to sexual abusers within the family, community or faith organisation. These people exploit the belief as a form of control or threat.

### Common factors and causes

A range of factors can contribute to the abuse of a child for reasons of faith or belief. Some of the most common ones are below:

**Belief in evil spirits** that can 'possess' children is often accompanied by a belief that a possessed child can 'infect' others with the condition. This could be through contact with shared food, or simply being in the presence of the child.

**Scapegoating** occurs when a child is singled out as the cause of misfortune within the home, such as financial difficulties, divorce, infidelity, illness or death.

**Behaviour** that is attributed to spiritual forces. Examples include a child being perceived as disobedient, rebellious, overly independent, wetting the bed, having nightmares or falling ill.

**Physical, learning, and/or emotional differences** that single a child out. Documented cases included children with learning disabilities, mental health issues, epilepsy, autism, stammers, deafness and LGBTQ+.

**Gifts and uncommon characteristics** and/or when a child has a particular skill or talent can sometimes be rationalised as the result of possession or witchcraft. This can also be the case if the child is from a multiple or difficult pregnancy.

**Complex family structures** such as when a child living with extended family, non-biological parents, or foster parents can place them more at risk.

### Signs and indicators

- physical injuries, such as bruises or burns (including historical injuries/scaring)

- a pupil reporting that they are or have been accused of being 'evil', and/or that they are having the 'devil beaten out of them'
- the pupil or family may use words such as 'kindoki', 'djin', 'juju' or 'voodoo' - all of which refer to spiritual beliefs
- a pupil becoming noticeably confused, withdrawn, disorientated or isolated and appearing alone amongst other pupils
- a pupil's personal care deteriorating (e.g. rapid loss of weight, being hungry, being unkempt with dirty clothes)
- it may be evident that the pupil's parent or carer does not have a close bond with the pupil
- a pupil's attendance at school becomes irregular or there is a deterioration in their performance
- a pupil is taken out of a school altogether without another school place having been arranged
- a pupil wearing unusual jewellery/items or in possession of strange ornaments/scripts.

## Resources

National Schools Safeguarding Guidance (developed by Metropolitan Police Service)  
The Guidance for Schools and Colleges: Safeguarding Children from Sexual Violence, CSE and Harmful Practices has a chapter on CALFB.

Schools Charter on Ending Harmful Practices

This Schools Charter encourages the delivery of high quality, safeguarding focused inputs on harmful practices.

UK Government: National Action Plan to Tackle Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief

Centre for FMD: 21-02-2024---Child-Abuse-linked-to-Faith-or-Belief-Leaflet.pdf

Child abuse linked to faith or belief | Metropolitan Police

## **N Behavioural signs in children**

Staff must be aware and recognise that all behaviour is communication.

If a child is being abused, neglected and/or exploited, their behaviour may change in a number of ways.

For example, (but not limited to) they may:

- behave aggressively to self/others or be disruptive, act out, demand attention and require more discipline than other children
- become angry or disinterested socially, and/or show little creativity/motivation
- seem frightened of certain adults or child
- present as sad, withdrawn, and/ or depressed
- have trouble sleeping/sleep for longer periods than the norm for them
- become sexually active at a young age
- exhibit inappropriate/advanced sexual knowledge for their age
- exhibit sexualised behaviour in their play or interactions with other children
- refuse to undress/change for gym/PE, and/or refuse to participate in physical activities
- develop dysfunctional eating

- self-harm and/or express suicidal ideation
- have changes in their attendance, refuse to attend school, go missing whilst in school, or run away from home/go missing in the community
- lack confidence or have low self-esteem; in some situations, will have raised confidence and esteem initially
- use drugs and/or alcohol as a coping strategy for anxiety/ new use of drugs/alcohol
- have unexplained gifts, money, and/or other items
- spend increasing time online, and become socially isolated
- have a new group of friends (potentially older)
- be seen to leave school with unknown peers/adults

## O Behavioural signs in parents/carers (or other adults)

Please see [Part C-Process](#) for information relating to Low-Level Concerns, Self-Reports, and Allegations

Signs may include:

- placing unrealistic expectations on the child i.e. demanding a level of academic or physical performance of which the child is not capable
- offering conflicting or unconvincing explanations of any injuries to the child/behaviours of the child
- delaying seeking medical treatment for the child's mental/physical health (including not taking the child to a specialist medical practitioner immediately when a child discloses suicidal ideation in school)
- failing to meet the basic needs of the child in regard to clothing, housing, food etc
- having alcohol/drug dependency/*unmanaged* mental illness and refusing support
- appearing indifferent to, is emotionally unavailable, or overtly rejecting, the child
- denying the existence of or blaming the child for the child's behaviours at home or at school
- seeing and describing the child as entirely worthless, burdensome, or in another negative light
- refusing offers of support to meet the child's need(s)
- refusing to consent to referrals to external agencies to meet their child's needs/does not engage as expected.

## P Grooming

Grooming is *the process* by which an individual prepares a child, significant adults, including staff, and the environment for abuse and/or exploitation of this child.

The perpetrator's motivation can be sexual, or increasingly financially related (see above section G).

Children and young people can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know, or someone pretending to be someone they know, including peers.

Groomers may be of any gender identity or sexual orientation. They could be of any age, including another young person.

They may be located in the country where the child lives, or if online exploitation, could be resident anywhere in the world.

### Modus operandi of grooming

**Target vulnerable victim:** Perpetrators target victims who are vulnerable, isolated, insecure and/or have greater emotional needs. This may happen over a number of months/years, or may happen very quickly.

**Gain victim's trust:** Offenders may allow a child to do something (e.g. eat ice cream, stay up late, view pornography) which is not normally permitted by the child's parents or the school in order to foster secrecy and intimacy.

**Gain the trust of others:** Institutional offenders are often popular with children and parents, and often staff, successfully grooming not only the victim but also other members of the victim's family and the school community at large.

**Filling a need/becoming more important to the child:** This can involve giving gifts, rewards, additional help or advice, favouritism, special attention and/or opportunities for special trips or outings.

**Isolating the child:** The perpetrator may encourage dependency and subtly undermine the victim's other relationships with friends or family members. This may involve the offender making themselves the only/main point of contact in school for the child.

**Sexualising the relationship:** This can involve playful touches, tickling and hugs. It may involve adult jokes and innuendo or talking as if adults, for example about marital problems or conflicts.

**Maintaining control and secrecy:** Offenders may use their professional position to make a child believe that they have no choice but to submit to the offender.

**Making threats:** Offenders may threaten the child/their family/their friends/their pet with harm if they tell/do not continue with the abuse.

**Blackmailing:** Offenders may blackmail their victim, for example, by saying that they will share any intimate photos of the child with friends and family.

**Creating opportunity:** Offenders will gradually seek to create the time and opportunity to allow for the grooming process to occur, and the eventual abuse of the child (ren). This behaviour may involve the offender creating situations where they have access more easily, in unstructured scenarios and/or encouraging the children), and occasionally the parent/care unwittingly to do so.

### **Signs of grooming manifested by sex offenders (paedophiles)**

It is important to remember that not all sex offenders will exhibit the signs listed below and if an individual exhibits some or all of these signs, it does not mean that they are a sex offender:

- Being overly affectionate with a child
- Affording special attention or preferential treatment to a child (ren)
- Gravitating towards a specific sex of pupil or year group
- Creating and/or spending excessive time alone with a child outside of the classroom/school
- Frequently spending time with a child in private or isolated areas in the school
- Transporting a child to or from the school
- Making friends with a child's parents and visiting their home socially
- Offering to provide a particular child additional educational support
- Acting as a particular child's confidante
- Giving small gifts, money, toys, cards, letters to a child
- Using texts, telephone calls, e-mails, messaging apps, and/or social networking sites to inappropriately communicate with a child
- Exhibiting flirtatious behaviour or making suggestive remarks or comments of a sexual nature around a child
- Making inappropriate and/or suggestive remarks about children to other staff

## Signs and indicators that a child may be being groomed

Many children and young people do not understand that they are being/have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse and/or exploitation. The signs that a child is being groomed are not always obvious. Groomers will also go to great lengths not to be identified.

Children may:

- be very secretive, including what they are doing online
- spend lots, much more, or much less time online, texting, gaming or using social media
- are withdrawn, upset or outraged after using the internet or texting
- are secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or e-mail addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet.
- have more than one phone
- be in a relationship with an older child offline/online (or perceive themselves to be with an older child)
- go to unusual places to meet friends; not disclose who they are meeting, or give false accounts of who they are meeting
- have new things such as clothes or mobile phones that they can't or won't explain
- have increasing or new access to drugs and alcohol
- go missing from home or school; or are increasingly likely to be absent from school without adequate explanation
- display behavioural changes; these can be both negative and positive
- have sexual health issues
- express suicidal ideation and/or self-harm (including dysfunctional eating and/or excessive exercise)
- express indicators that they are anxious and/or depressed
- have low self-esteem (or occasionally high self-esteem in earlier stages of grooming)
- steal items or money/sell theirs or others' items for money

In older children, signs of grooming can easily be mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour, but you may notice unexplained changes in behaviour or personality, or inappropriate sexual behaviour for their age. See the [NSPCC website](#) for further information about grooming.

## Q Radicalisation

For more information, please see the Preventing Extremism and Radicalisation Policy.

All schools are subject to a duty under section 26 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015), in the exercise of their functions, to have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”. This duty is known as the Prevent duty.

Children can be vulnerable to the influences of extremism which could lead to radicalisation. There is no single way of identifying whether a child is likely to be susceptible to an extremist ideology and/or radicalisation. Background factors combined with specific influences such as family and friends may contribute to a child's vulnerability. Similarly, radicalisation can occur through many different methods (such as social media or the internet) and settings (such as within the home).

Increasingly the preferred pathway for those wishing to radicalise others is by online methods. As with other safeguarding risks, staff should be alert to changes in children's behaviour, which could indicate that they may be in need of help or protection.

Staff should use their judgement in identifying children who might be susceptible and at risk of radicalisation and act proportionately which may include the DSL/Preventing Radicalisation lead making a referral to the Channel Panel in their local authority. Channel panels, established under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, arrange for support for individuals who have been assessed as vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism.

## Signs and Indicators

There are no known definitive indicators that a child/young person is susceptible or vulnerable to radicalisation, but there are a number of signs that *together* increase their risk of being groomed in this way.

These include, but are not limited to:

- Under/over achievement changes
- Being in possession/sharing extremist literature
- Poverty
- Social exclusion/isolation and need for belonging
- Traumatic events – current and/or historical in earlier childhood
- Global or national events (may or may not involve any personal link/association with a particular country)
- Religious conversion/changes in practice and/or belief structure
- Change in behaviour (verbal, physical, emotional, social)
- Exploitation of some form
- Extremist influences
- Conflict with family over lifestyle
- Confused identity/sense of self
- Victim or witness to race or hate crimes
- Rejection by peers, family, social groups
- Having confirmed or emerging indicators of SEND

## R Adverse Childhood Experiences

An Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) is a stressful event in childhood (note: a child is up to 18 years) that can have a lasting impact on mental health, behaviour, and education throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. An ACE can mean that a child has already been a victim of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation, or growing up in a household in which alcohol or substance misuse, mental ill health, domestic violence and/or criminal behaviour are present. ACEs can affect brain development, increase the risk of chronic health conditions, mental illness, and substance abuse in adulthood. Recognising and preventing ACEs is therefore crucial for promoting child well-being and reducing the long-term impact of these experiences.

### Resources

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) - Early Education

A practical handbook on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Delivering prevention, building resilience and developing trauma-informed systems: A resource for professionals and organisations - World Health Organization Collaborating Centre On Investment for Health and Well-being

Understanding trauma and adversity | Resources | YoungMinds

The Little Book of Adverse Childhood Experiences | National Education Union

Trauma and child brain development training | NSPCC Learning

## S Mental Health

Please see [Part 3- Process](#) for more information in relation to managing situations involving mental health.

**Mental Health** is defined as a 'state of wellbeing in which every individual recognises his or her potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community' (World Health Organisation).

Positive mental health is important to build strong, resilient and proactive children. We know that some children will encounter some level of challenge in life, but for many children, they will face adversity, with some experiencing trauma or abuse (see above). For many young people, adolescence is particularly a time of stress, whilst for others transitioning through the school years can also be problematic. For those pupils who may begin to struggle with their mental health, a school intervention may provide a turning point in their lives, may mitigate the issues that are negatively impacting on their mental health, and ultimately may prevent mental ill health in adulthood.

It is important to note that there have been many changes in the kinds of pressures and difficulties that children now encounter to what has gone before. What seems apparent, however, is that there has never been a time when children have needed our support more in terms of their mental health.

### Contributing factors

There are various contributing factors to the rise in mental health issues, the most common being:

- lack of family support and unrealistic parental expectations
- peer relationship problems and bullying
- feeling unhappy about appearance
- pressures around drugs and alcohol
- excessive screen time
- excessive dieting/exercise
- quarrelling with parents, the breakdown of the family unit and parental conflict

### Vulnerabilities

Certain groups of children may be more vulnerable to having poor mental health, and we also know that there are certain risk factors that could increase their likelihood of having poor mental health. Therefore, it seems logical that these types of children and young people may be most likely to display emerging indicators, and subsequently they could be more easily identifiable.

Research suggests that children's vulnerabilities can be categorised into eight broad categories:

1. Children receiving statutory support including those in care
2. Children known to have experienced abuse, neglect and/ or exploitation
3. Children with a disability or ill-health or developmental difficulties
4. Children in households characterised by poverty or domestic abuse
5. Children who are vulnerable by virtue due to their nationality
6. Children who are vulnerable by virtue of their identity e.g. LGBTQ+ and/or gender questioning
7. Children at risk in relation to activity or institutions outside of the home e.g. gangs or radicalisation
8. Children caring for others, e.g. their parents due to illness

## Our approach

The school will have a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. This means that we:

- have a culture and environment that promotes positive mental health and wellbeing
- raise awareness of emotional wellbeing and mental health issues, and reduce stigma
- ensure that all school staff know every pupil in the round, including their mental health
- upskill staff so they can respond to pupil's mental health needs should they arise
- identify the mental health needs within the school
- implement both targeted and school-wide interventions to help pupils build resilience
- make sure that pupils and their parents/carers are aware of, and able to access, a range of mental health interventions
- are committed to pupil and parent/carer participation in decision making
- deliver high quality teaching to pupils around mental health and wellbeing

## The link between Mental Health and Safeguarding

There is a logical link between safeguarding and mental health. It is the responsibility of **all staff** to recognize when a pupil shows signs of distress or presents with mental health concerns which need the intervention of the DSL within their safeguarding capacity.

Whilst only appropriately and medically trained professionals should attempt to make a diagnosis, all staff are well placed to observe pupils day-to-day and identify those whose behaviour suggests that they may be experiencing deteriorating mental health and/or emerging need. Our staff understand that the 'contextual safeguarding model' and knowing about the 'bigger picture' of pupil's lives including their family circumstances, will help them identify any social, emotional, and mental health needs.

## Self-harm

More information around process can be found in Part 3

### What is self-harm ?

Self-harm 'describes any way in which a young person might harm themselves or put themselves at risk, in order to cope with difficult thoughts, feelings or experiences (No Harm Done 2017). The clinical definition of self-harm also includes attempted suicide, though some argue that self-harm only includes actions which are not intended to be fatal. Some people who self-harm may be suicidal, but it is widely accepted that self-harm is often used as a way of managing difficult emotion without it being a suicide attempt. However self-harming can result in accidental death, so every episode must be taken seriously to avoid escalation or fatality.

### Why do children self-harm?

- To *manage* extreme emotional upset
- To *reduce* tension
- To *provide* a feeling of physical pain to distract from the emotional pain
- To *express* emotions such as hurt, anger or frustration
- As a form of escape
- As an effort to regain control over feelings or problems
- As an attempt to punish themselves or others
- To elicit care from others
- To identify with a peer group

### How do children self-harm?

- Self-cutting, scratching, scraping or picking skin
- Swallowing inedible objects, hazardous materials or substances

- Taking an overdose of non-prescription or prescription drugs
- Hitting or banging head or other parts of body
- Intentionally taking too little or too much medication
- Burning or scalding
- Hair pulling
- Hanging
- Suffocation or self-strangulation
- Scouring or scrubbing excessively
- Self-poisoning
- Use of illegal drugs and excessive amounts of alcohol.

Staff or parents/carers may also notice in their child:

- Changes in eating/sleeping habits
- Increased isolation from friends, becoming socially withdrawn
- Changes in activity and mood
- Lowering of academic achievement
- Talking or joking about self-harm and suicide
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Changes in clothing e.g. always wearing long sleeves
- Unwillingness to participate in certain events e.g. swimming

## Resources

The Department of Education has published advice and guidance on Preventing and Tackling Bullying, Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools, and 'Every interaction matters'. The latter is a pre-recorded webinar which provides staff with a simple framework for promoting wellbeing, resilience, and mental health.

In addition, Public Health England has produced a range of resources to support secondary school teachers to promote positive health, wellbeing and resilience among young people including its guidance, Promoting Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing. Its resources include social media, forming positive relationships, smoking and alcohol. See [Rise Above](#) for links to all materials and lesson plans.

Child mental health: recognising and responding to issues | NSPCC Learning

Papyrus is a national charity dedicated to the prevention of suicide offering training, resources, information and advice for all. [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org) Hopeline: 0800 068 4141

[Alumina](#) offers free online support for 10–17-year-olds

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) Telephone: 116 123 (anytime) Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

[www.younMDinds.org.uk](http://www.younMDinds.org.uk) Phone: 0808 802 5544 (weekdays 9.30am-4pm)

## **T Children who may have specific vulnerabilities**

### **Essential points**

Some children are potentially at greater risk of harm and early help and support is required.

Whilst all children should be protected, it is important that staff recognise that some groups of pupils are potentially at greater risk of harm (including online harm), especially those with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation).

This policy will now consider 9 specific groups of children who may have increased vulnerability.

1. Children with additional learning needs and/or disabilities
2. Children who are LGBTQ+ (or perceived by others to be)
3. Children who are gender questioning (or perceived by others to be)
4. Children who have a family member in prison
5. Children who have involvement within the court system
6. Children who are absent from education and Children Missing Education
7. Children who have a Social Worker
8. Children who cannot be looked after by their parents
9. Children who live in a home environment where there is domestic abuse (see above section B)

## **1 Children with additional learning needs and/or disabilities**

Children with additional learning needs and/or disabilities are statistically more vulnerable to child abuse, including child-on-child abuse. Additional barriers can exist when recognising abuse and neglect in this group of children. These include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's disability without further exploration
- that children with additional learning needs and/or disabilities can be disproportionately impacted by things like bullying without outwardly showing any signs
- communication barriers and difficulties in overcoming these challenges.

### Resources

SEND Code of Practice 0 to 25 years, and

Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Support Services (SENDIASS).

Mencap - Represents people with learning disabilities, with specific advice and information for people who work with children and young people

NSPCC - Safeguarding children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and NSPCC - Safeguarding d/deaf and disabled children and young people

## **2 Children who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual/other in sexual orientation**

Whether a child is, or perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual (or other) any risks can be compounded where children lack trusted adults with whom they can be open. Our school is an inclusive environment where all pupils belong, and all pupils are encouraged to seek support when, and if, they require this. It is therefore vital that our staff endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced by these potentially vulnerable groups of pupils and maintain a culture where children can speak out or share their concerns with members of staff.

A child or young person being lesbian, gay, or bisexual (or other) is not in itself an inherent risk factor for harm, however, they can sometimes be targeted by other children. In some cases, a child who is perceived by other children to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual (whether they are or not) can be just as vulnerable as children who are.

### 3 Children who are Gender-Questioning

Please note that this section will be reviewed and adapted according to any changes in law/government advice (pending).

Our school will use and refer to the current UK Guidance for Schools and Colleges in relation to Gender Questioning Children, when deciding how to proceed (final draft pending publish). The school will also follow the recommendations made in the Cass Report which advised that when parents/carers are making decisions about support for their gender questioning children, they should initially be encouraged to seek clinical help and advice, as early as possible by a clinical professional with relevant experience. Therefore, should a parent /carer approach the school around this matter, they will be initially supported by signposting them to their local General Practitioner (GP).

If a pupil approaches staff to talk about their gender, they will be supported to talk to their parents/carers about how they are feeling, and the school will, where needed, do so on the pupil's behalf/with the pupil (unless to do so would heighten any risk of harm to the pupil, including a significant deterioration of their mental health, and/or a more mature student declines consent). The school, will, as the review report advises, take a cautious approach and consider the broad range of the pupil's individual needs, in partnership with the pupil's parents/carers (other than in the exceptionally rare circumstances where involving parents/carers would constitute a significant risk of harm to the pupil).

#### Teaching pupils around gender

The school will be mindful that beyond the facts and the law about biological sex and gender reassignment there is significant debate, and they should be careful not to endorse any particular view or teach it as fact. For example, they should not teach as fact that all people have a gender identity. The schools will avoid language and activities which repeat or enforce gender stereotypes and will be mindful to avoid any suggestion that social transition is a simple solution to feelings of distress or discomfort.

When using external resources, the school will avoid materials that use cartoons or diagrams that oversimplify this topic, that could be interpreted as being aimed at younger pupils, or that perpetuate stereotypes or encourage pupils to question their gender. The school should consult parents/carers on the content of external resources on this topic in advance and make all materials available to them on request as set out in the section on openness with parents/carers.

### 4 Children with family members in prison

Schools should be aware and provide additional support if they have any pupils on their roll whose parent or close family member is moving through criminal proceedings, and/or in prison. Approximately 101, 634 children in England and Wales have a parent currently in prison (Children separated from parents - Children of prisoners.)

Many children with a parent in prison go on to lead positive and fulfilling lives. However, a range of research shows that this group of vulnerable children are more likely to have poorer outcomes, including, but not limited to poverty, stigma, isolation, homelessness and mental health problems. Crucially they are more likely to become involved in crime. [The Prisoner Families Helpline](#) provide information designed to support professionals working with offenders, parents/carers and their children, to help mitigate negative consequences for those pupils.

### 5 Children involved in the court system

#### Criminal courts

Children are sometimes required to give evidence in criminal courts, either for crimes committed against them or for crimes they have witnessed. There are two age-appropriate guides to support children 5-11-year olds

and 12-17 year olds. The guides explain each step of the process, support and special measures that are available.

### Family Courts

Making child arrangements via the family courts following separation can be stressful and entrench conflict in families. This can be extremely stressful for children caught up in proceedings, and in the most complex situations, cause significant emotional abuse to the child when exposed to parental conflict that is frequent, intense and unresolved (see above). In these situations, after speaking to both parents about the situation and the impact on their child, a referral to local authority children's Social Care may be made if the situation does not improve in a timely manner.

The Ministry of Justice (UK) has launched an online child arrangements information tool with clear and concise information for on the dispute resolution service. This may be useful for staff, parents, and pupils.

### Court Orders

Where pupils are involved in the above family courts, the school has a duty to support any court order granted and cannot become involved in individual discussions with parents around court decisions around collections/residence. It is the parents' responsibility to adhere to the directions in any court order; therefore, it will be themselves who potentially breach it. Those with Parental Responsibility must seek permission from the courts to disclose any variation to orders with the school.

## **6 Children Absent from Education and Children Missing Education**

Please see our Child Absent in Education, Children Missing Education, and Attendance Policy for more information.

It is mandatory for all children of statutory age to attend school every day that the school is open. However, our attendance policy also applies to all pupils in the Early Years (EYFS 2025).

All staff should be aware that pupils who are absent from education for unexplainable, and/or prolonged periods and/or on repeat occasions, particularly repeatedly, can act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding possibilities. This may include abuse and neglect, which may include sexual abuse or exploitation and can also be a sign of child criminal exploitation including involvement in County Lines. It may indicate mental health difficulties, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation and/or risk of forced marriage.

It is important that the school's response to unexplainable, prolonged and/or persistently absent pupils supports identifying such abuse, and in the case of absent pupils, helps prevent the risk of them becoming a child missing education in the future. This includes when problems first emerge. Early intervention is necessary to identify the existence of any underlying safeguarding risk and to help prevent the risks of a pupil being absent from school or going missing in future

Where pupils are already known to external agencies, where being absent from education may increase known safeguarding risks within the family or in the community, or where there is prolonged absence and/or unexplained absence for any pupil, the school will request that the parents/carers facilitate regular visibility of the pupil remotely, over MS Teams. Where the parents/carers do not comply with this request, the school will follow the DfE statutory guidance on school attendance Working Together to Improve School Attendance which sets out how schools must work with local authority children's services where school absence indicates safeguarding concerns.

Children Missing Education are **not** those who are registered at a school, even if they are persistently or severely absent from that school,

CME are children who

- are in the process of applying for a school place

- have been offered a school place for a future date but have not yet started
- are receiving elective home education (EHE) that has been assessed as unsuitable
- have been recorded as CME for an extended period, for example where their whereabouts is unclear or unknown

Staff should be aware of their school's unauthorised absence and their local authority's 'children missing/absent from education' procedures. Information regarding schools' duties regarding pupils absent/missing education, including information schools must provide to the local authority when removing a pupil from the school roll at standard and non-standard transition points, can be found in the department's statutory guidance: Children Missing Education.

### Elective Home Education

Many home-educated children have an overwhelmingly positive learning experience. Most parents/carers decide to home educate with their child's best education at the heart of their decision. However, this is not the case for all, and home education can mean some children are less visible to the services that are there to keep them safe and supported in line with their needs.

Where a parent/carer has expressed their intention to remove a pupil from school with a view to educating at home, the school will coordinate a meeting with parents/carers where, and as soon as possible. Ideally, this would be before a final decision has been made, to ensure the parents/carers have considered what is in the best interests of the pupil, and the school has had ample opportunity to listen to the underlying reasons for the absence/wish to remove the pupil from the school; supportive interventions will be offered. This is particularly important where a pupil has SEND, is vulnerable, and/or has a Social Worker.

Should there be existing safeguarding concerns about any pupil whose parents state they are planning to educate them at home and/or the removal from the pupil to home educate may be a concern, a referral to Social Care may be considered.

Schools must notify the local authority CME department of a child's removal from the school roll at a non-standard transition point, and they should also share information on a child's circumstances, especially if already known to children's Social Care or if they have an EHC plan. The local authority has a duty to intervene where a home educated child is not being suitably educated, or is not safe, and in such cases the local authority must act to remedy the situation.

## **7 Children who have a Social Worker**

Children may need a Social Worker (local authority children's services) due to safeguarding or welfare needs (see below). Children may need this help due to abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation and/or complex family circumstances. A child's experiences of adversity and trauma can leave them vulnerable to further harm, as well as educationally disadvantaged in facing barriers to attendance, learning, behaviour, and positive mental health.

## **8 Children who cannot be looked after by their parents**

This policy will explore the following scenarios:

- A. Kinship care, including children who are being privately fostered
- B. Children who are looked after (or previously looked after)
- C. Children who are staying with host families
- D. Children who on a sponsored visa

## **A Kinship care, including children who are being privately fostered**

Kinship care is when a child lives full-time or most of the time with a relative, friend or connected person and that person provides most or all of the child's care. It does not include parents, foster carers with no prior connection to the child, or anyone caring in a professional capacity.

Kinship care arrangements can be formal (through legal orders or kinship fostering) or informal (family or friends caring without a formal agreement in place).

The following are all types of kinship care arrangements however this list is not exhaustive:

a) informal kinship arrangements (no approved foster care) including

i. A private family arrangement in which a close family member who does not hold parental responsibility raises the child and

- the local authority has had no major role in making the arrangement for the child
- where a Family Court has not made an order in respect of the care of the child.

ii. Where a child under the age of 16 is being provided with accommodation for less than 28 days by an individual in their own home who is not a close relative

iii. Where a 16- or 17-year-old is being provided with accommodation by an individual who is not a close relative in their own home

b) A private fostering arrangement in which someone who is not a close relative of the child looks after the child for 28 days or more (as per section 66(1)(a) and (b) of the Children Act 1989

(see more information below about private fostering)

c) Where a 'lives with' child arrangements order' has been granted in respect of the child, in favour of someone who is a friend or family member but is not the child's parent.

d) Where a special guardianship order has been granted appointing a friend or family member as the child's special guardian.

e) Where a child is a 'looked after child' by virtue of either an interim or final order or being accommodated by the local authority (usually under section 20 of the Children Act 1989) and each of the following apply (this may be described as 'kinship foster care' or 'family and friends foster care'):

i. The child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent, and

ii. The friend or family member is a. approved as a local authority foster carer on a temporary basis or following full assessment.

f) Where an adoption order has been granted in respect of the child and, prior to the making of the order, the adopter was a friend or family member.

Private fostering is when a child or young person under 16 years old (or 18 if they have a disability) is looked after for 28 days or more by someone who is not a close relative, legal guardian, or person with parental responsibility. Close relatives *only* include parents, step-parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

It is not private fostering if the child is 'looked after' by the Local Authority (see above -also known as 'in foster care' and which includes placement in residential care, with an approved foster carer or a 'kinship' carer).

Private fostering occurs in *all* cultures, including British culture, and children may be privately fostered at any age.

Examples of private fostering situations include:

- children and young people living apart from their families for a variety of reasons e.g. a parent is ill, has had to temporarily move for work, or there has been conflict, separation or divorce;
- children whose parents work or study elsewhere in the UK or overseas;
- children sent to this country by their parents for education and health care;
- young people living with the family of a friend; and
- children on holiday exchanges

People become private foster carers for all sorts of reasons. Private foster carers can be a family friend, or someone who is willing to care for the child of a family they do not know, for example host families supplied by a Guardianship Organisation (see below). If a host family is going to be caring for a child for 28 days or longer, they are classed as private foster carers, and the Local Authority must be notified.

#### Why does your Local Authority Children's Services need to know?

By law, the Local Authority must be informed about all private fostering situations. The pupil's parents, private foster carers, and anyone else involved in the arrangement or who becomes aware of the arrangement, e.g. guardianship agencies, schools or health professionals are *legally required* to inform Children's Services. Children's Services have a legal duty<sup>10</sup> to make sure all private fostering arrangements are safe for the child.

Once informed of the arrangement, they will check the suitability of private foster carers, make regular visits to the child, and ensure advice, help and support is available when needed. Where a member of staff becomes aware that a pupil may be in a private fostering arrangement, they should raise this with the DSL. Where Children's Social Care are not already aware of the circumstances, the DSL should make a referral to them, after making enquiries with the family about the arrangement.

#### Timescales for informing the Local Authority

The child is not yet living with the private foster carers	Within 6 weeks beforehand
The child will move in with the private foster carers within 6 weeks	Immediately
The child is already living with the private foster carers.	Immediately

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<sup>10</sup> Section 67(1) of the Children Act 1989 amended by the children Act 2004) and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

## Resources:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-minimum-standards-for-private-fostering>

## **B Children who are Looked After (CLA/LAC) (and Previously Looked After Children)**

The most common reason for children becoming looked after is as a result of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation. A child who is being 'looked after' by their Local Authority is usually known as a 'Child in Care' or a 'Looked After Child' (or Child Looked After-CLA). They might be living with foster parents or at home with their parents under an Interim Care Order (Children Act 1989) granted to Social Care, or in residential children's homes, or other residential settings like schools or secure units.

A child who is *adopted* is **not** a Looked After Child. Occasionally, in rare circumstances, children are placed into Local Authority foster care under an Interim Care Order when an adoption breaks down and the adoptive parents relinquish the child. Once a Full Care Order is agreed, the child remains on long term foster care. The previously adoptive parents may or may not have continued contact with the child, depending on the situation and the emotional impact on the child.

In any situation involving care proceedings, an Interim Care Order (under section 31 of the Children Act 1989) will remain in place until those proceedings are concluded (within 26 weeks in most authorities). At the conclusion of care proceedings in any situation, the child will either stay in long term foster care (under a Full Care Order granted to the local authority under section 38, Children Act 1989) until they reach the age of 18 years, return to their parents (usually under a Supervision Order), reside with other family members/friends (usually under a Special Guardianship Order), or in some cases be adopted, when an Adoption Order is granted. In all of the latter situations, it is often usual for parents to have agreed supervised contact arrangements with their child, most commonly one, twice or three times per year, unless there is risk posed to the child. Some parents are granted non-direct written contact; this is often referred to a 'letterbox contact'.

A child may also have been placed in local authority arranged care **voluntarily** by their parents who are struggling to manage their children's behaviour 'beyond parental control', or meet their child's needs due to their own illnesses or disabilities (under section 20, Children Act 1989). In these cases, rehabilitation will always be the aim, but if this is not possible, the Local Authority will apply for an Interim Care Order and finally a Full Care Order. Usually, these parents will have continued contact with their child throughout proceedings, and often after they have concluded

As a result of their experiences both before and during care, Looked After Children are at greater risk than their peers; they are, for example, four times more likely than their peers to have a mental health difficulty. Providing a secure, caring environment in school and enabling such children to develop strong, trusting, and stable relationships with professionals is critical to their immediate and longer-term safety and wellbeing.

Similarly, a previously looked after child (whether in care temporarily or longer term into adoption) also potentially remains vulnerable and all staff should have the skills, knowledge and understanding to keep previously looked after children safe. When dealing with looked after children and previously looked after children, it is important that all agencies work together and prompt action is taken when necessary to safeguard these children, who are a particularly vulnerable group.

Cognita ensures that the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children receives training, including on the reasons why children become looked after, their legal status, the support that staff can provide to keep such

pupils safe and the ways in which they can maximise educational stability for Looked After Children (see above).

The Designated Teacher for Looked After Children (and 'previously' Looked After Children), in collaboration with the DSL is responsible for:

- a) ensuring that any 'looked after' pupils are adequately supported by staff in school
- b) has contact details of the pupil's social worker and the name and contact details of the Virtual School Head\* for children in care
- c) ensures that relevant staff members have sufficient information about the pupil's looked after legal status and care arrangements;
- d) works with the Virtual School Head to discuss how staff can best support and promote the educational progress and achievement of 'looked after' pupils and previously looked after pupils in the school and meet the needs in the looked after pupil's LAC Plan, and Personal Education Plan; and
- e) attends Looked After Children reviews and other meetings they are required to attend.

Statutory guidance: Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked after children contains further information on the role and responsibilities of the designated teacher.

\*Virtual School Heads have responsibilities towards children who have left care through adoption, special guardianship, or child arrangement orders or who were adopted from state care outside England or Wales. Their primary role for this group will be the provision of information and advice to relevant parties. In addition to their statutory duties, the role of Virtual School Heads was extended in June 2021, to include a non-statutory responsibility for the strategic oversight of the educational attendance, attainment, and progress of children with a social worker.

In September 2024, the role of Virtual School Heads was further extended to include a non-statutory responsibility to promote the educational achievement of all children in kinship care. Non-statutory guidance on Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements contains further information on the roles and responsibilities of Virtual School Heads.

### Adoption

A child who is *adopted* is **not** a looked after child. Adoption occurs when the biological parents relinquish their parental rights, and the adoptive parents become the child's legal guardian and caretaker. The state in which the child is being adopted will require a series of background checks, licensing, and 'check ins' of the adoptive parents' home to ensure the child is entering a safe, clean, and accommodating environment. A previously looked after child who eventually becomes adopted potentially remains vulnerable and all staff should have the skills, knowledge and understanding to keep previously looked after pupils safe.

### Guardianship

Guardianship is a legal term denoting someone who is appointed by a court order to be a legal guardian of a minor. Typically, if a biological parent is deemed by the courts to be unable to take care of the minor, all of the rights and privileges of a biological parent are transferred to the appointed guardian. Guardianship is different than adoption and is typically temporary. During a guardianship, however, parents can sometimes retain some rights including limited contact with the child. Guardians are overseen by courts, unlike adoptive parents.

## **C Children who are staying with host families**

### When might this happen?

Schools often make arrangements for pupils to take part in exchange visits, either to other parts of the UK or abroad. Exchanges can benefit learning across a range of subjects. Foreign visits can enrich the languages curriculum and provide exciting opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence and expertise in the use of other languages.

### What is the responsibility of the school?

Schools have a duty to safeguard and promote pupil's welfare as outlined in this policy. This extends to considering their safety and how best to minimise any risk of harm to those pupils during any exchange visit the school arranges, and when organising for the care and accommodation of a pupil with a host family (known as homestays) as part of the exchange.

### Suitability of adults in UK host families for homestay arranged by the school

When arranging a homestay, schools should consider the suitability of the adults in the respective families who will be responsible for the visiting child during the stay.

In circumstances where a school arranges for a visiting child to be provided with care and accommodation in the UK (including where they engage a company to make those arrangements) in the home of a family to which the child is not related (including where a person has parental responsibility for the visiting child), the responsible adults will be engaging in 'regulated activity' for the period of the stay. In such cases and where the school has the power to terminate such a homestay, the school would be the regulated activity provider.

A regulated activity provider commits a criminal offence if it knows, or has reason to believe that an individual is barred by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) from engaging in regulated activity but allows that individual to carry out any form of regulated activity.

### Private arrangements

Where the child's parent(s) or a student arranges their own homestay themselves, this would be a private arrangement, therefore the school would not be the regulated activity provider. Where it is a private arrangement, the school is not entitled to obtain a standard or enhanced DBS check.

### Background checking for adults in homestay arrangements

When a school arranges a homestay, it should consider what intelligence/information will best inform its assessment of the suitability of the adults in those families who will be responsible for the visiting child during the stay. It will be for the school to use their professional judgement to decide what it considers will be most relevant. However, to help inform that assessment, schools should obtain, as a minimum, a DBS enhanced certificate with barred list information.

This check will not only establish whether the adults are barred from engaging in regulated activity relating to children, but where criminal record information is disclosed, it will also allow the school to consider, alongside all other intelligence that it has obtained, whether the adult would be a suitable host for a child.

### Volunteer DBS check

DBS enhanced certificates with barred list information for volunteer roles can be obtained free of charge. In respect of an adult who provides UK homestay and receives no remuneration in respect of the stay or where schools reimburse families only for expenses incurred, to enable a DBS application to be considered as a volunteer role, the 'Position Applied For' field will need to make clear that the position is unpaid.

In addition to those engaging in regulated activity, schools are free to decide whether they consider it necessary to obtain a DBS enhanced certificate in respect of anyone aged 16 or over in the household where the child will be staying.

### Suitability of adults in host families abroad

It is not possible for schools to obtain criminal information from the DBS about adults who provide homestays abroad. Schools should liaise with partner 'host' schools abroad, to establish a shared understanding of, and agreement to, the arrangements in place for the visit. They should use their professional judgement to satisfy themselves that the arrangements are appropriate and sufficient to safeguard effectively every child who will take part in the exchange. Parents must be aware and provide written confirmation of any agreed arrangement. Schools are free to decide whether they consider it necessary to contact the relevant foreign embassy or the High Commission of the country in question to discuss what checks may be possible in respect of those providing homestay outside of the UK.

The school must produce a written risk assessment outlining the approach taken and indicating the reasons for specific decisions. This must include any safeguarding considerations, and individual risk assessments must be created for all vulnerable children (those with a safeguarding (including mental health), SEND, and/or medical need)

### During the visit

Pupils must be made aware and understand who to contact during a homestay should an emergency occur, or a situation arises which makes them feel uncomfortable.

### Additional action for extended homestays

Where a period of UK homestay lasts 28 days or more, for a child aged under 16 years of age (under 18 years of age if the child has disabilities), this may amount to Private Fostering under the Children Act (1989) (see above). In these cases, the school must notify the local authority of the arrangements. Private fostering legislation places a duty on local authorities to satisfy themselves that the welfare of a child who is being, or proposed to be, privately fostered in their area is being or will be satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted. By notifying the local authority, the school will be assisting the local authority in discharging its duty. See section on Private Fostering.

## **D Children being sponsored- International pupils (Tier 4 child visas)**

Cognita acts as a sponsor for international pupils who have Tier 4 visas. The United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) has a duty to ensure that all sponsors discharge their responsibility to act in accordance with the immigration rules. As a school we are responsible for ensuring that these pupils are appropriately cared for and that any safeguarding concerns are addressed.

Prior to the pupil arriving at the school, it will be important for the DSL to have knowledge of the pupil's circumstances, including who has parental responsibility, the pupil's care arrangements and contact details for the carer/Private Foster carer in the UK.

Responsibility for each sponsored pupil starts from the moment the Cognita International Recruitment Team assigns the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS), i.e. before the pupil leaves their home country and enrolls at the school. The DSL should be aware of the pupil's travel arrangements to the UK.

If the pupil fails to arrive as expected, the school should report this as a matter of urgency to the Cognita International Recruitment Team, who is responsible for checking the pupil has arrived safely on the day of travel and prior to their first day of school. Cognita are responsible from the moment the pupil arrives in the UK. The school needs to complete the enrolment checklist (Appendix F in the UKVI handbook) and upload it to the pupil's file onto the appropriate MS Team. If the pupil does not arrive when expected at the school, the school must notify the International Recruitment Team (IRT) immediately. If the pupil does not arrive within ten working days of the enrolment period, the IRT, in collaboration with the school, must report this to UKVI.

Once the pupil has arrived safely in the UK and the school, the UKVI School Champion, in collaboration with the DSL, will aim to ensure that their needs are met, including pastoral need, and they will liaise with the pupil's parents and/or carers for the ongoing needs of the pupil.

With regards to safeguarding this potentially vulnerable group of pupils, any absences or lack of engagement in study/social activities displayed by them, including failure to return to school after a holiday or break, must be escalated initially to the Regional Safeguarding Lead on the day it occurs. The RSL will escalate the concerns to the Cognita International Recruitment Team (IRT) as needed (but no later than 5 working days after the event); the latter is obliged to report the pupil to the UKVI if they have ten consecutive unauthorised absences.

It is the school's responsibility to **always** know where these pupils are residing and/or travelling during breaks. In order to have clear visibility of pupils who are being sponsored on a visa by the school, a formal meeting with the pupil's parent/guardians/carers will be arranged if a sponsored pupil's attendance falls lower than 92% and again if it falls below 82%. A record must and will be made of this meeting and agreed action points to improve the pupil's attendance. If a sponsored pupil's attendance ever falls below 80%, Cognita will be required to withdraw sponsorship of their visa, and they will need to leave the UK. It is a requirement of the UK Visas & Immigration (part of the Home Office), that schools demonstrate how they track the attendance of this group of potentially vulnerable pupils. Their attendance must be an agenda point on all safeguarding related meetings.

Changes in circumstances must also be reported immediately to the IRT. These can include:

- a. a change in where a pupil studies
- b. a change in the pupils' course
- c. a change in a pupil's registered address
- d. a change in whom the pupil lives with (e.g. from parent to private foster care); or
- e. any other circumstance that suggests that they are breaking the conditions of their permission to stay in the UK.

Schools should be proactive in determining whether there has been any change in a sponsored international pupils' circumstances. The school should liaise with the parent(s)/guardians of all sponsored international pupils every term to check whether:

- a. the pupil and their parent/guardian's address has changed; or
- b. the pupil's childcare arrangements have changed (e.g. moved from living with their parents to a private foster care arrangement)
- c. Whether or not the pupil/family have any travel plans, including dates and locations.

Templates are available in the UKVI handbook.

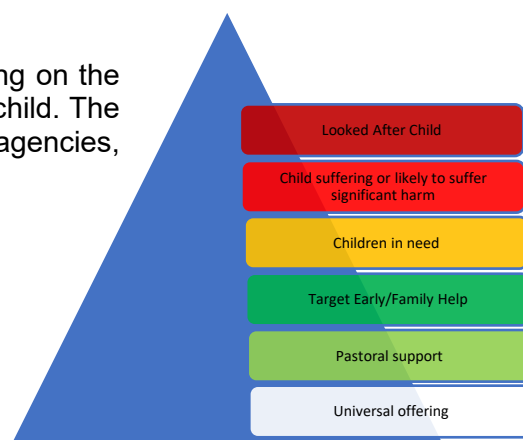
## 9 Children who live in an environment where there is domestic abuse and/or controlling and coercive behaviours

(see section B above)

## U Stages of Safeguarding

The school can use a range of arrangements, depending on the information available and the risk of harm posed to the child. The school will always work cooperatively with external agencies, including the local authority and the Police.

The diagram opposite outlines the hierarchy of these approaches.



For further information on the stages, and the role that the school will play, please read WTSC (Ch.3 2026).

### Introduction

All families can face challenges that make parenting difficult. Often families are able to overcome challenges themselves or with the help of relatives, friends, and services, such as schools, youth services, health visiting and mental health services as well as local authority support available. However, sometimes families will have more significant needs that require more intensive help and support. The following section will explain the tiered approach support that can be provided.

### Universal

Universal services is the term used for support for children of all ages that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. It is not an individual service, but a system of support delivered by local authorities and their partners working together and taking collective responsibility to provide the right provision in their area. This level of support is provided through "universal services" such as education, health, and other community-based services.

It is distinct from targeted early help delivered through Family Help teams, which are more formal arrangements coordinated by local authorities, where a plan is in place and a lead practitioner appointed (see below).

### Targeted Early/Family Help

Early help falls under the overall definition of safeguarding.

Early help is support for children of all ages that improves a family's resilience and outcomes and/or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse, and subsequently the risk of harm escalating. Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later when the needs of the child are affecting their health and/or development, or when harm has already occurred and/or there is the likelihood of harm. Whatever their circumstances, pupils and families should not be left waiting to access help and support when issues arise.

In line, and in parallel with supporting situations/unmet need internally via school led interventions, the school may decide that, whilst the pupil (s) involved do not require referral to statutory services under s47 (Children Act 1989) they may benefit from local authority targeted early/family help services due to their complex needs/vulnerabilities.

In the UK, the local authority targeted early help services are delivered through what is referred to in WTSC (2026) as 'Family Help', as defined in the Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide. Family Help aims to improve outcomes for children by understanding and responding to their needs, and to the circumstances of their family, as early as possible. It takes place at the heart of communities, bringing together local services under a combined, multi-disciplinary practice approach and service offer.

Family Help aims to address specific concerns within a family and can be used only with the family consent to receive such services and support. Examples of concerns include parenting support, mental health support, domestic abuse services, youth services, youth offending teams and housing and employment services. Targeted early help should be provided for children and families who have multiple and/or complex needs, or whose circumstances might make them more vulnerable. This could include where a child is living with wider family members under a kinship arrangement.

Many local authorities now combine Early/Family Help services with statutory support under Child in Need (s17 Children Act 1989, see below), the aim of which is to create a more seamless offer for families, with consistent practitioner relationships and a Family Help Plan led by a multi-disciplinary team.

A Family Help plan will be designed together with the pupil and family and updated as the pupil and family needs change.

Some local authorities hold formal multi-agency/organisation Early/Family Help panels to discuss referrals, whilst others have different processes. If parents/carers wish to have further information about this schools' early/family help local processes, please contact the DSL.

### Threshold Document

It is the responsibility of the local authority Safeguarding Partners to publish a Threshold Document in order to aid the school in knowing when a referral should be made to Family Help.

This document should include:

- the process for accessing universal services and community-based early help, which may include an assessment (see pages 58-61 in WTSC 2026 for more information)
- the criteria, including the level of need, for when a child should be referred to Family Help, which covers non-statutory and statutory support and services provided through:
  - targeted early help under sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004. This support is provided to children and families who are identified by practitioners to have multiple and/or complex needs, requiring a specialist and/or multi-disciplinary/agency response, where statutory support or intervention is not required
  - statutory support, including assessments, delivered under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (children in need, including how this applies for disabled children)
- the criteria, including the level of need, for when a child should be referred to local authority children's Social Care for assessment and for statutory services under:
  - section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm)
  - section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (care and supervision orders)

- section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (duty to accommodate a child)
- clear procedures and processes relating to:
  - the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children inside and outside the home, including online
  - looked after children
  - disabled children

If targeted early/Family Help is felt appropriate for the family, the DSL or DDSL will discuss this with the parents/carers of the pupil, explaining what this support is, and what happens next. The parents/carers must consent to this service as it is voluntary. If a family does not consent to Family Help, the school should seek to understand why this is the case, so that they can provide reassurance to the family about their concerns. They should ensure the family has understood the consensual nature of support, and range of services available to meet their needs. The school should consider how the needs of the pupil could otherwise be met, for example, through provision by universal services.

Once the referral has been made with the parent/carer's consent, the Family Help Team will liaise with the DSL and set up an inter-agency Family Help assessment (for more information see page 54; WTSC 2026), involving, not only the parents/carers, but their wider family network- making use of family decision making, such as family group conferences, with the aim of meeting the needs of the child (see page 166 of WTSC 2026 for more details).

Those undertaking this assessment should have consideration for specific needs, including, but not exclusive to, family members who:

- may have learning difficulties/disabilities
- are imprisoned
- have a first language is not English
- may be at risk from hidden harms such as coercive and controlling behaviour, child sexual abuse and 'honour' or faith - or belief-based abuse
- have themselves experienced being in the care system
- young parents
- birth parents who have had children removed from their care
- fathers or male carers
- are LGBTQIA

This should also include where pupils may not view themselves as victims of abuse, such as teenage relationship abuse and child sexual exploitation.

In some cases, the DSL will act as the 'Lead Professional' and be responsible for:

- co-ordinating support and services for the family
- ensuring the assessment and the Family Help plan responds to identified needs, and
- support the family to co-produce the plan

The Families First Partnership programme guide provides operational details on Lead Practitioner roles and responsibilities, and expectations for coordinating a multi-disciplinary team around the family.

Multi-agency and multi-disciplinary training will be important in supporting this collective understanding of the demographics and needs of the local community, the local practice framework, and the services available to support children of all ages.

Any pupil/family may benefit from early/family help, but all school staff need to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and be particularly alert to the potential need for support for any pupil who:

- is disabled and has specific additional needs;

- has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory education, health and care plan)
- has an emerging mental health need/diagnosis
- has been bereaved
- has an ongoing or chronic physical illness
- is a young carer
- is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups
- is involved in the court system; criminal or family court
- is persistently absent from school
- is not in receipt of a full-time education e.g. on a part-time timetable
- is frequently missing/goes missing from care or from home/school
- has received multiple suspensions, and is at risk of being excluded from school
- is misusing drugs or alcohol themselves
- is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking, and/ or exploitation (including group-based exploitation)
- is at risk of so called 'honour'-based abuse including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and/or Forced Marriage (FM)
- is at risk from faith/belief-based abuse
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the pupil/other, such as drug/alcohol misuse/addiction, unmanaged mental health problems, teenage relationship abuse, and/or domestic abuse, including coercive or controlling behaviour
- is experiencing parental conflict that is frequent, intense and unresolved
- has returned home to their family from 'looked after' care
- is newly adopted or being cared for permanently by a family member other than their biological parents
- has a parent/significant other going through the criminal court system/in custody/serving a custodial sentence in prison
- is showing early signs of abuse, exploitation, and/or neglect (including group-based)
- is at risk from threats, including online harm, grooming, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, radicalisation, with staff being aware that there may be an overlap that can occur between online harm and harm experienced in person
- is showing emerging signs of becoming gaming /addicted to gambling
- is in kinship care, including being a privately fostered child, with staff being aware that they may need to support both parents and kinship carers at the same time
- is LGBTQ+ or is perceived to identify as LGBTQ+
- is gender questioning

In addition, staff must be aware:

- of and able to identify where a pregnant person (parent) might need help or support to provide safe and suitable care for their unborn child well
- of new and emerging technologies (such as artificial intelligence) and the role that online platforms, including gaming and social media platforms, can play in grooming children and facilitating and/or causing harm
- that a pupil and their family may be experiencing multiple needs at the same time
- and recognise how trauma, racism, discrimination, and past experiences with services affect relationships and adapt practice, accordingly, respecting the importance of different cultural models of parenting and family life.

This is not an exhaustive list and there may be many other factors or situations that could mean that a pupil may require early help or intervention, or their family will benefit from support to prevent concerns escalating.

Many forms of early help to pupils and families can also be offered via signposting parents/carers of pupils to helpful local organisations prior to contacting the local authority Family Help team.

Early help interventions can also occur within school:

Early Help interventions in school will begin with universal support, including high-quality teaching and pastoral care, incorporating inclusive classroom strategies and general wellbeing support in line with the PSHE curriculum. Regular wellbeing check-ins (daily or weekly) with a trusted adult, alongside access to a safe space for emotional regulation, will support pupils with emerging needs.

Where additional needs are identified, targeted Early Help interventions will be implemented. These may include small group work, mentoring, and pastoral support. SEN Support plans may run concurrently with Early Help provision, with clear links to Individual Support Plans (ISPs) to ensure a coordinated approach.

Where appropriate, families will be signposted to additional services, including the Family Information Service, which provides access to support groups and advice to address emerging needs.

All interventions will be subject to ongoing monitoring and review. Progress will be tracked against identified targets, and provision will be adapted in response to the pupil's changing needs.

### Escalation of need/risk of harm

All pupils and families at the Early/Family Help stage must be kept under constant review and consideration given to a referral to Children's Social Care for assessment for statutory services if the pupil's situation does not appear to be improving or is getting worse, and/or the parents/carers are not engaged with the support recommended to meet their child's unmet need (see below for information about interventions under section 17 or section 47 of the Children Act 1989).

### Children who have a Social Worker

Children may need a Social Worker (local authority children's Social Care) due to safeguarding or welfare needs. Children may need this help due to abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation and/or complex family circumstances. A child's experiences of adversity and trauma can leave them vulnerable to further harm, as well as educationally disadvantaged in facing barriers to attendance, learning, behaviour, and positive mental health.

Local authorities should share with schools the fact a child has a Social Worker and inform schools whether the child is subject to a Child in Need (s17) or Child Protection (s47) Plan. However, it is more than likely that the school will have been involved in any assessment leading to the child being made subject to a statutory 'plan' (see below for types of plan). The DSL or the DDSL in the DSL's absence, must attend all 'plan reviews'.

Where pupils have an allocated Social Worker, this should inform school decisions about safeguarding (for example, responding to unauthorised absence or missing education where there are known safeguarding risks) and about promoting welfare (for example, considering the provision of pastoral and/or academic support, alongside action by statutory services). Any new information or safeguarding concern that the school has about any pupil on a statutory plan, must and will, be shared with the pupil's allocated Social Worker (or their Team Manager in their absence).

### Children in Need

A Child in Need is defined under the Children Act (1989) as a child who is;

- unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development; or
- whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or
- a child who is disabled.

Local authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. A child who is deemed to be a Child in Need will have been assessed by Children's Social Care under section 17 of the Children Act (1989). The child will have a Child in Need Plan which should be shared by the allocated Social Worker with the school. The school will attend and participate in Child in Need Review meetings, as arranged by the local authority.

## **Children suffering or likely to suffer significant harm**

Local authorities, with the help of other organisations as appropriate, including the school, have a duty to make enquires, and take decisive action, under section 47 of the Children Act (1989) if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child\* is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. Such enquiries enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard and promote the child's welfare and must be initiated where there are concerns about maltreatment, including all forms of abuse, neglect, domestic abuse (including controlling or coercive behaviour), teenage relationship abuse, trafficking, online abuse, female genital mutilation or other so-called honour-based abuse, and extra-familial threats like the influences of extremism which could lead to radicalisation, and sexual/criminal/financial exploitation.

\*Section 47 applies to all children, whether they are living with their birth parents, in a kinship arrangement or under a special guardianship order, or in foster or residential care.

Actual or likely significant harm should be assessed through an anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and culturally aware framework, applying knowledge of faith, beliefs and family cultures that can positively and negatively impact on children, whilst maintaining a core focus on the safety and wellbeing of the child involved.

Should an investigation occur, then the school's involvement and any action may be determined on the advice given by the investigating agency. Whatever the form of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation, those across agencies involved in the investigation, including schools, must adhere to the steps raised on page 250 of WTSC 2026. In summary they must:

- put the needs of children first, understanding their experiences and responding to their needs when determining what action to take
- speak to and observe the child at the earliest opportunity to understand what is happening in their daily life, recognising that the child may express this non verbally through their actions and behaviour. Ask questions sensitively, interpreting non-verbal cues and applying professional curiosity
  - understand that children can experience more than one type of harm simultaneously
- be responsive to the needs of children who have harmed as well as been harmed, including referring to other agencies where there is a risk of continued harm to others
- work with the family to build trusting and co-operative relationships with parents and carers, in line with the principles for working with parents and carers (as set out above in Part 1)
- use their skills and experience to recognise circumstances where parents or carers are reluctant or unable to engage and seek to understand and address the factors that might underly this. These could include issues such as: language, technology or working patterns; parental special educational needs or disabilities; mental ill health and/or substance misuse; being a victim of domestic abuse (including emotional abuse and coercive or controlling behaviour); prior experience of services, including previous removals of children; or abuse arising from 'honour', faith- or belief-based abuse which limits the parent or carer's capacity to engage.
- speak to and gather detailed information about the child and, where appropriate, their siblings, through engaging with the family network and those who know the child well, such others working in the school
- in the case of children whose parents/carers are considering home education, speak to the local authority elective home education team/home education service
- consider a wide range of evidence from many sources, including other agencies working with the family (for Social Care/Police)
- recognise and respond to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children with SEND

- understand the impact of poverty. Practitioners should be skilled at recognising the distinction between poverty and neglect and respond accordingly
- be inclusive, anti-discriminatory and responsive to the needs and experiences of children and families of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Practitioners should remain alert to any bias in practice that may adversely impact particular groups or communities and consider children foremost in terms of their vulnerability to harm. For instance, care should be taken to ensure children of particular ethnic backgrounds are not treated as older than they are
- recognise that looked after children can experience actual or likely significant harm. Where a child is looked after, child protection activities should align with care planning processes and decision making, working with relevant carers and practitioners

Where the child is already known to services, assessments should build on existing information, activity, assessments and plans, including those completed in Family Help under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, at or at targeted early help, and in community-based early help

#### Following the investigation under s47

If the pupil is made subject to a Child Protection plan, following the assessment under s47 and an Initial Child Protection Case Conference reaching conclusion that a child is at risk of significant harm, their Child Protection Plan will be shared by the allocated Social Worker with the school safeguarding team.

The DSL/DDSL will attend and participate in regular meetings (known as Core Groups), as arranged by the local authority.

Where the decision is taken not to proceed with a section 47 enquiry or child protection plan, or to discharge a child protection plan, the lead practitioner should consider the ongoing support that the child requires, which might include Family Help support including under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 or support from universal or early help services.

Where it is decided that no further action is necessary, the reasons for this should be recorded and shared with the child, family and practitioners involved with the family ( including the school),

### **Looked After Child**

Please see above in Part 2-section T- 8- B

If it is necessary to remove a child from their home, the local authority must, wherever possible and unless a child's safety is otherwise at immediate risk, apply to the courts for an Emergency Protection Order (EPO). Police powers to remove a child in an emergency should be used only in exceptional circumstances where there is insufficient time to seek an EPO or for reasons relating to the immediate safety of the child.

For further guidance on EPOs see Chapter 4 of the statutory guidance document for local authorities, Court orders and pre-proceedings (DfE, April 2014).

Practitioners working with looked after children should be aware of their increased vulnerability to certain forms of harm, including child sexual exploitation. Some children living in residential settings will have increased vulnerabilities, for example due to SEND, being placed out of area, a history of frequently going missing or because they have been deprived of their liberty.

See Working Together to Safeguarding Children (2026) for further information about local authority statutory Social Care processes in regard to looked after children.

## **V Contextual Safeguarding and Extra Familial Harm** including modern slavery

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools, and online can feature violence and abuse, neglect and/or exploitation.

Parents and carers can often have (or feel that they have) little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships. Staff should consider the importance of understanding intra familial harms and any necessary support for siblings following incidents of child-on-child abuse, including sexual harassment and/or violence.

The contextual safeguarding approach says that children's social care practitioners, child protection systems and wider safeguarding partnerships need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices.

Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse *beyond their front doors*. This also includes the risk of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation occurring in or outside of school.

### Extra-familial Harm

While there is no legal definition for the term extra-familial harm, it is widely used to describe different forms of harm that occur in contexts outside of their home. Children may be at risk of or experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and exploitation. Contexts can include peer groups, school, and community/public spaces, including known places in the community where there are concerns about risks to children (for example, parks, housing estates, shopping centres, takeaway restaurants, or transport hubs), as well as online, including social media or gaming platforms.

Children can be vulnerable to multiple forms of extra-familial harm from both adults and/or other children and harm may be perpetrated or facilitated by individuals or groups.

Examples of extra-familial harm may include (but are not limited to): criminal exploitation (such as county lines and financial exploitation), serious violence, modern slavery and human trafficking, online harm, sexual exploitation (including group-based child sexual exploitation), child-on-child (non-familial) sexual abuse and other forms of harmful behaviour displayed by children towards their peers, abuse, and/or coercive control, children may experience in their own intimate relationships (sometimes called teenage relationship abuse), and the influences of extremism which could lead to radicalisation.

### Modern Slavery

Modern slavery is a complex crime and may involve multiple forms of exploitation. It encompasses:

- human trafficking
- slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour

An individual could have been a victim of human trafficking and/or slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour. Victims may not be aware that they are being trafficked or exploited, and may have consented to elements of their exploitation, or accepted their situation.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK's system for identifying victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. If a staff member has concerns that a child may be a potential victim of modern slavery or human trafficking (including through child criminal exploitation such as county lines and/or child sexual exploitation) then they must use the school procedure in the first instance, ensuring that the pupil's medical and emotional needs are addressed as the priority.

A referral must be made by the Safeguarding team to the Police. Under their responsibilities as designated **First Responders**, they will make a referral to the NRM and to Social Care (schools should check with Social Care that they have received this referral; there should be no delay). A pupil's consent is not needed for a referral to the NRM to be made by the Police.

### Resources

Child exploitation disruption toolkit – Home Office (UK) statutory guidance

Multi-agency practice principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

## **W** Signposting to further information

Annex B of KCSIE contains further guidance on a range of specific safeguarding issues, some of which are above. This section must be read by all staff that work directly with pupils and those with governance oversight for the school.

- Child abduction and community safety incidents
- Children and the court system
- Children missing from education
- Children with family members in prison
- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- County lines
- Modern Slavery and the National Referral Mechanism
- Cybercrime
- Domestic abuse
- Homelessness
- Honour-based abuse
- FGM
- Forced Marriage
- Preventing radicalisation
- The Prevent duty
- Channel
- Child on child abuse
- Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools
- Upskirting

## **Part 3: Process**

## Contents

- A. Reporting and recording in relation to pupils
- B. Reporting and recording in relation to staff (not parents/carers) including:
  - 1. Expectations of staff conduct
  - 2. Low-Level concerns
  - 3. Self-Reports
  - 4. Allegations
- C. Whistleblowing
- D. Managing situations involving child on child abuse
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- F. Managing situations involving sexual violence and/or sexual harassment
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## A Reporting and recording in relation to pupils

### Contents

- 1. What to do if you have a concern about a pupil
- 2. What to do if a pupil makes a disclosure
- 3. Actions following a concern/disclosure
- 4. Making referrals
- 5. Multi-agency working arrangements
- 6. Confidentiality
- 7. Photos
- 8. Record-keeping
- 9. Passing on records

#### 1 What to do if you have concerns about a pupil

All staff should know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare or when pupils or staff raise concerns about a pupil to them.

Staff should understand the difficulties pupils may have in approaching them and the need to build trusted relationships.

All staff should be aware that pupils may not feel ready or know how to tell someone that they are being abused, neglected and/or exploited, and/or they may not be able to recognise their experiences as harmful.

Staff should be aware that the first approach/disclosure from a pupil may not be the only incident that has happened. It is appropriate therefore, to ask the pupil whether something like this has ever happened to them before.

If staff have a concern about a pupil, they should notify the DSL/DDSL on the same day.

For many situations, staff will be able to upload their concern directly onto the ECMS used in the school. The DSL/DDSL will discuss the concern with the staff member who has raised it and then make the necessary decisions that are required.

Parents/carers must always be informed of all concerns raised about their child on the same day, unless to do so in disclosure situations where the child may be at increased risk. At a suitable point, once risk has been assessed, the parents/carer *will* be informed, after advice and direction has been received from the authorities. Where parents are no longer together i.e. separated or divorced, information about the concern must be shared with both parents so that the school remain impartial (unless to do so may raise the risk for the pupil and/ or one of the parents e.g. in a case where there is serious acrimony or domestic abuse).

In more serious situations, where a pupil has made a disclosure that suggests they have been harmed (by themselves, another child, or by an adult (including staff)) or are likely to be harmed, staff must report this **verbally and immediately** to the DSL (or in their absence the DDSL). See below for further information around disclosures.

There must be no delay.

## 2 What to do if a pupil makes a disclosure

Staff must know how to respond should a pupil make a safeguarding disclosure to them.

The points below support all staff in a situation where a pupil tells them that they know about or have been a victim of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation. They also apply to when a pupil discloses that they have self-harmed/have suicidal ideation.

- Listen carefully and allow the pupil to speak freely and remain calm.
- Try not to interrupt the pupil or be afraid of silences.
- Recognise that there are many barriers to a pupil making a disclosure.
- Provide reassuring nods and words such as, "I am so sorry this has happened", "You are doing the right thing in talking to me".
- Avoid saying things like, "I wish you had told me about this earlier" or "I cannot believe what I am hearing".
- Do not question the pupil about what they are saying extensively, as partner agencies will lead any investigation.
- Seek a context around what the pupil has said.
- Limit questioning to the minimum necessary for clarification using *What, When, How and Where*. Avoid leading questions such as, "Has this happened to your siblings?"
- Do *not* use questions beginning with *Why* as this can apportion feelings of guilt within a pupil.
- If the pupil discloses abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation, it is appropriate to ask whether any other adults/children were present and observed/involved in what happened, and whether anything like this has happened before
- Staff should summarise for the pupil what they have said as the conversation continues when there are natural breaks, or at the end, to ensure that they have heard and understood the information accurately, mirroring back to the pupil their own words and descriptions, occasionally stopping to check.
- At an appropriate time in the conversation, tell the pupil that the matter will be passed onto to those that need to keep them safe in confidence, always using language that is appropriate to the age and stage of development of the pupil, allowing for their individual need.
- Take the pupil directly to the DSL/DDSL, or if not immediately available, ensure that the pupil is supervised until emotionally stable.
- If the pupil has disclosed abuse and also spoken about physical pain and/ or physical discomfort, medical intervention must happen immediately whilst the DSL/DDSL makes a referral. No photos must ever be taken of injuries (see below) and staff must be mindful of removing any forensic evidence.
- then tell the pupil that the school needs to keep them safe and what will happen next i.e. they will go with you to see the DSL/DDSL in their absence. If neither are available within an hour, then staff should contact the RSL.
- If the pupil has expressed any suicidal ideation when they disclosed their abuse, they must be 100% supervised by appropriate staff until support can be put in place, and referrals made. If to follow normal

processes i.e. informing the pupil's parents/carers of their ideation and asking them to collect their child, would heighten risk to the child/other, then the pupil must be supervised until such time that statutory agencies have made their initial decisions.

### **3 Actions following a concern/disclosure**

Following notification of a concern/disclosure, the DSL and the safeguarding team will consider the necessary course of action to support the pupil.

The case management process includes, but is not limited to:

- Information gathering
- Information sharing (within the Safeguarding team)
- Identifying and assessing the level of need and support to address the concern
- Identifying who in the school has the responsibility to take decisions on need and support
- Recording the rationale for all decisions taken
- Identifying who will inform the parents/carers of the concern, after risk assessing
- Identifying who will deliver the support to the pupil
- Recording, monitoring, and evaluating interventions for the pupil
- Creating Safeguarding Risk Assessments where needed
- Undertaking Case Reviews every 6 weeks
- Liaising with other agencies as required

### **4 Making referrals**

#### **If a pupil is thought to be at risk of harm**

If a pupil is at risk of harm, a referral should be made to Children's Social Care immediately. If it is assessed that a criminal offence has occurred, or they/a parent/carer may be in imminent danger the school should first contact the Police, followed by Social Care. Whilst any member of staff can and should know how to make a referral to the authorities, our policy is that any referral will be done by the DSL or DDSL. However, there must be no delay.

Depending on who obtained the initial disclosure i.e. if a member of teaching staff first receives a disclosure or has a concern, the DSL/DDSL may also need to speak to the pupil, either to corroborate the pupil's account or to gain further context, prior to making any referral, to aid the authorities in their decision making.

The school does not require parental consent for referrals to be made to statutory agencies. Consent to do this must not be obtained from the parents if to gain consent would put the pupil's safety at risk (for example in situations where physical/sexual abuse by a parent/family member has been clearly disclosed by a pupil) or to do so could jeopardise any investigation by partner agencies (WTSC 2026)

The school should ask the leading authority whether and when the referral (and concerns) can be shared with the pupil's parents/carers when making the referral where seeking consent is a safeguarding element of the situation.

The DSL/DDSL must inform their Headteacher/Head of School and the Regional Safeguarding Lead (RSL) of all referrals to authorities.

### If a pupil is not at risk of harm but has unmet needs

When a pupil is not considered at risk of harm but still has unmet needs that is impacting or likely to impact on their health and development, a referral should be made to Children's Social Care. The school does not require parental consent for referrals to be made to statutory agencies; however, it is best practice in these situations where risk is not present for any referral to be made transparently with the parent's/carer's knowledge. Note, some local authorities do not accept referrals at this level without parental consent.

## 5. Multi-agency working arrangements

For more information about multi-agency working arrangements, please see above: Part 1-S,

The DSL and Deputy DSLs liaise and work in partnership with all agencies in the best interests of pupils in the school.

Safeguarding Partners and Child Death Review partner arrangements (the local authority; a clinical commissioning group for an area within the local authority; and the chief officer of police for an area (any part of which falls) within the local authority area) publish a local 'threshold' document. The DSL and any deputies should liaise with the three Safeguarding Partners and work with other agencies in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026).

'NPCC - When to call the police' should help DSLs understand when they should consider calling the Police and what to expect when they do. Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) (1984) – Code C, the DSL is aware of the requirement for pupils to have an 'Appropriate Adult' when in contact with Police officers who suspect them of an offence (see below). PACE states that anyone who appears to be under 18, shall, in the absence of clear evidence that they are older, be treated as a child for the purposes of this Code and any other Code.

### Appropriate adult

PACE also states that if at any time an officer has any reason to suspect that a person of any age may be vulnerable, then that person is entitled to be accompanied by an 'Appropriate Adult' at any point. The DSL will communicate any vulnerabilities known by the school to any Police Officer who wishes to speak to a pupil about an offence they may suspect. This communication must be recorded using the school's recording systems. If, having been informed of the vulnerabilities, the DSL does not feel that the officer is acting in accordance with PACE, they should intervene in any interview, ask to speak with the officer's supervisor or contact 101 to escalate their concerns.

A person whom there are grounds to suspect of an offence must be cautioned before questioned about an offence or asked further questions if the answers they provide the grounds for suspicion, or when put to them the suspect's answers or silence, (i.e. failure or refusal to answer or answer satisfactorily) may be given in evidence to a court in a prosecution.

A Police Officer must not caution a juvenile or a vulnerable person unless the appropriate adult is present. If a child or a vulnerable person is cautioned in the absence of the appropriate adult, the caution must be repeated in the appropriate adult's presence.

The 'Appropriate Adult', in the case of a child must be:

the parent, guardian or, if the juvenile is in the care of a local authority or voluntary organisation, a person representing that authority or organisation, a Social Worker of a local authority failing these, some other responsible adult aged 18 or over who is not:

- a Police Officer
- employed by the Police

- under the direction or control of the chief officer of a Police force; or
- a person who provides services under contractual arrangements (but without being employed by the chief officer of a Police force), to assist that force in relation to the discharge of its chief officer's functions.

Further information can be found in the Statutory guidance - PACE Code C 2019.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pace-code-c-2019/pace-code-c-2019-accessible>

## 6 Confidentiality

Whilst it is always important to take into consideration pupil's wishes and feelings, staff must never guarantee confidentiality to them as this may not be in their best interests. They should let the pupil know that they will pass on information in confidence only to the people who must be told to ensure their safety (Safeguarding Team members).

## 7 Photos of abuse/injury

If a pupil discloses physical abuse, self-harms, and/ or attempts to take their life, staff **must never** take photos of their injuries. On exceedingly rare occasions, a member of the safeguarding team may be directed by the authorities (Police/Social Care only) to take a photo of a pupil's abuse injury and send it to them for their assessment of risk.

The staff member must use a school device (only) to take photos, and they must have a witness present when doing so.

They must never take intimate photos of any genital or chest area.

Images must be sent securely, and then deleted from school device as soon as the authorities confirm receipt of the images. A record must be made as soon as possible who has asked this task to be done noting their role and contact details.

## 8 Record-Keeping

All safeguarding-related documents/files including online must be kept in a secure location with restricted access/permissions.

In principle, records must include, but not be limited to:

- a clear and comprehensive summary of the concern and/or disclosure including context
- details of how the concern/disclosure was initially followed up by the safeguarding team i.e. note of the immediate action (s) taken, decisions reached (see above), and school interventions (including referrals to agencies)
- confirmation that all those with parental responsibility for the pupil have directly been informed of the concern/disclosure (unless to do so would heighten risk at that time to the pupil/others).

- the outcome in terms of whether the unmet need was met/harm addressed and /or reduced (this will usually occur later).

In cases where a pupil has disclosed harm or likelihood of harm, staff must:

- as stated above, prior to writing up their record, **immediately** discuss the concerns **verbally** with the DSL, so that immediate action can be taken. If the DSL is not available then this should not delay appropriate action being taken and staff should speak to the DDSL, Headteacher or failing that the RSL
- make a written record of any conversation with the pupil as soon as possible, using school systems
- use the specific words that the pupil used when they disclosed (e.g. if referring to parts of their body), indicating these words by using “speech marks/inverted commas”.

The Safeguarding team are responsible for making decisions on next steps and actions following any disclosure or reported concern. All discussions and decisions made, and the reasons/rationale for those decisions being made (AND for others **not** being made), must be recorded in writing by the DSL/DDSL throughout the pupil’s safeguarding record.

Further actions, meetings, and decisions may be required after the initial concern has been raised. For all disclosures, it is likely that there will more recording required, and a lengthy period of intervention.

## 9 Passing on safeguarding records when a pupil leaves the school

Information sharing is vital in identifying and tackling all forms of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation. KSCIE (2025) emphasises the need for fuller pastoral information to be passed on about pupils for whom there has been a safeguarding concern, as a lack of information about their circumstances can impact on the pupil’s safety, welfare, and educational outcomes.

Whilst data protection legislation places duties on organisations and individuals to process personal information fairly and lawfully and to keep the information they hold safe and secure, this is not a barrier to sharing information where the failure to do so would result in a child being placed at risk of harm. Fears about sharing information cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare and protect the safety of children.

When a pupil leaves the school, it is the responsibility of the DSL to ensure that a copy of their safeguarding records is transferred securely and confidentially to the new school. Records must be transferred within 5 days for an in-year transfer or within the first 5 days of the start of a new term (KCSIE 2025).

Before transferring data, the DSL will arrange a telephone call with the DSL or Headteacher in the receiving school to ensure that the former pupil has started their school as planned/informed. Following their conversation, the DSL will arrange for the secure transfer of documentation.

No sensitive data /information must be passed onto the pupil’s pending new school, including verbally, until they are formally on roll and in their new school. Confirmation of the receipt of the documentation must be retained with safeguarding records. A safeguarding record must be transferred separately from the main pupil file (see *internal document* Safeguarding Toolkit for further detail).

In some situations, the DSL should consider if it would be appropriate to share any information with the new school in advance of a pupil leaving, for example, information that would allow the new school to continue supporting victims of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation and have time to arrange for appropriate support in place for when the child arrives. This should be done with parent/carer’s knowledge, unless to do so would

heighten any risk to the child or younger person (if this is the case, then Social Care are likely to already be involved, and the school must seek (and record) their advice about what information should be shared).

## **B Reporting and recording concerns about an adult (not parents)**

### **Contents**

1. Expectations of staff conduct
2. Low-Level concerns
3. Self-Reports
4. Allegations

### **1 Expectations of adults**

All references in this section to “adults” should be interpreted as meaning any adult, staff members, agency/supply staff, self-employed, contractors, volunteers and visitors, unless otherwise stated.

The safety and wellbeing of pupils in our school is dependent on the vigilance of all our staff. Their prompt communication to the DSL, DDSL or Head of School of any concerns, no matter how small, regarding the conduct by an adult in the school which causes them to doubt that adult’s suitability to work with or have access to children is paramount.

As a result of their knowledge, position and/or the authority invested in their role, all adults working with pupils are in positions of trust in relation to the pupils in their care. A relationship between a member of staff and a pupil cannot be a relationship between equals. There is potential for exploitation and harm of vulnerable pupils. All members of staff have a responsibility to ensure that an unequal balance of power is not used for personal advantage or gratification. A position of trust could arise even if the member of staff does not teach the . Staff should note that it is an offence for a person aged 18 or over and in a position of trust to touch any child in a sexual way or have a sexual relationship with any child.

The notification and prompt handling of all concerns about adults, including those raised by individuals about themselves (see below for Self-Reports), is fundamental to safeguarding children. It helps to identify and prevent abuse and to protect adults against misunderstandings or misinterpretations. It also encourages openness, trust and transparency and it clarifies expected behaviours.

All adults must behave responsibly and professionally in all dealings with pupils and must always follow the procedures set out in our ‘Staff Code of Conduct.’ Those raising concerns or reporting allegations in good faith will always be supported. Adults in respect of whom concerns or allegations have been raised will not suffer any detriment unless the concern or allegation is found to be substantiated. Staff should always avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others.

It is essential that all staff know the differences between Self Reporting, Low-Level Concerns, Allegations and Whistleblowing, and know how to report any concerns. They should also be familiar with the Complaints Policy so that they can direct parents/carers to the Headteacher as required.

### **2. Low-Level Concerns**

#### **What is a Low-Level Concern?**

The term ‘low-level concern’ does not mean that it is insignificant. A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a ‘nagging doubt’ - that **another adult** working in or on behalf of the school may have acted in a way that:

- is inconsistent with the staff Code of Conduct/other Cognita policy (including inappropriate conduct outside of work), and
- does **not** meet the threshold to be an **Allegation** (see below) and/or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the Designated Officer.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being over friendly with pupils or having favourites
- engaging with a pupil on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door ( whether on /off site)
- using inappropriate, offensive, sexualised, or intimidating behaviour / language (including shouting, being verbally aggressive, and/or saying words that could impact on their wellbeing)

Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum, from the inadvertent or thoughtless, or behaviour that may look to be inappropriate, but might not be in specific circumstances, through to that which is intended to enable abuse.

### Why do we have a Low-Level Concern policy?

The overarching aim of the school's Low Level Concern Policy is to facilitate a culture in which the clear values and expected behaviours which are set out in our Code of Conduct are lived, constantly monitored and reinforced by all staff. In particular, the intention of this policy is to:

- maintain a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which staff are confident and clear about expected behaviours of themselves and their colleagues, the delineation of boundaries and reporting lines
- ensure that staff feel empowered to raise any low-level concern about a colleague's behaviour, where that behaviour might be construed as falling short of the standards set out in our Code of Conduct or other Cognita policy and
- provide for responsive, sensitive and proportionate handling of such concerns when they are raised – maintaining on the one hand confidence that concerns when raised will be handled promptly and effectively whilst, on the other hand, protecting staff from false allegations or misunderstandings.

### What do you have to do if you have a Low-Level Concern?

Where a Low-Level Concern (including self-reports) exists, it must be reported in writing **using the relevant form** to the DSL or to the Headteacher **only** as soon as reasonably possible, on the same day as the incident (where the concern relates to a particular incident).

### How is the Low-Level Concern is dealt with?

When the DSL/Headteacher receives the report, they must inform the other in a timely fashion (within the day). If the DSL and Headteacher are unavailable, the staff member with the concern should contact their RSL. There must be no delay.

Where a Low-Level Concern relates to a person employed by a supply agency or a contractor to work in the school, that concern should also be shared with the DSL and/or Headteacher. Their employer will be notified about the concern by the DSL/Headteacher, so that any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.

- a) the threshold is met for an allegation (see below);
- b) there is a pattern of low-level concerns which collectively amount to an allegation; or
- c) there is other information which, when taken into account, leads to an allegation.

The Headteacher/Principal is the ultimate decision maker in respect of all Low-Level Concerns; however, it is safe and best practice that they consult with the DSL and take a more collaborative decision-making approach.

The DSL and Headteacher will discuss all low-level concerns they receive on the same day as the concern was raised. The Headteacher, in collaboration with the DSL, will, in the first instance, satisfy themselves that it is a Low-Level Concern and should not be reclassified as an **Allegation** and dealt with under the appropriate 'allegations' procedure (outlined later in this document).

The circumstances in which a Low-Level Concern might be reclassified as an allegation are where:

- a) the threshold is met for an allegation
- b) there is a pattern of low-level concerns which *collectively* amount to an allegation or
- c) there is other information which, when considered, leads to an allegation.

**If there is any doubt about the Allegations threshold, the DSL/Headteacher will seek advice from the RSL immediately. There must be no delay.**

The Headteacher/Principal can also seek advice from the Designated Officer should the above colleagues be unavailable.

### Next steps

Having established that the concern **is** Low Level, the DSL or Headteacher, as appropriate, will first discuss it with the individual who has raised it to gather context and any further information. The person who has raised the Low-level concern about the adult will remain anonymous.

The person to which the Low-Level Concern relates **must** be informed of any concern raised about them once all risk has been identified and assessed.

Most low-level concerns by their very nature are likely to be minor and will be dealt with by means of management guidance, training, etc.

The DSL/Headteacher will seek advice from the RSL/HR team as needed around recommendations or actions for the staff member.

### Record keeping of Low-Level Concerns

Where a Low-Level Concern has been communicated a confidential record will be kept in a school central file which logs all low-level concerns A-Z according to staff member surname; this file must only be accessible by the DSL and the Headteacher. Any rationale for any decisions made and actions taken, must be recorded on the Low-Level Concern form by the Headteacher/DSL.

When staff leave the school, any record of Low-Level Concerns which are stored about them will be kept for a period of ten years and, following this, reviewed as to whether or not that information needs to be kept.

Consideration will be given to:

- (a) whether some or all the information contained within any record may have any likely value in terms of any potential historic employment or abuse claim so as to justify keeping it, in line with normal safeguarding records and practice; or
- (b) if, on balance, any record is not considered to have any value, still less actionable concern, and ought to be deleted accordingly.

Retention is necessary to see whether any patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified. Where a pattern of such behaviour is identified, the school should decide on a course of action, either through its disciplinary procedures or where a pattern of behaviour moves from a concern to meeting the harms threshold, in which case it should be referred to the local authority Designated Officer (DO).

No record will be made of the concern on the individual's personnel file unless either:

- a) the concern (or group of concerns) has been reclassified as an allegation; or
- b) the concern (or group of concerns) is sufficiently serious to result in formal action under the school's grievance, capability or disciplinary procedure
- c) the concern is determined to meet the threshold of an allegation when considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been raised about the same individual.

Specifically, if a referral is made to the DO/other external agencies where the behaviour in question:

(i) had not originally been considered serious enough to consider a referral to the DO but merited consulting with and seeking advice from them

(ii) is determined to meet the threshold of an allegation when considered with any other Low-Level concerns that have previously been raised about the same individual; or

records relating to the behaviour will be placed and retained on the staff member's personnel file, whilst **also** being retained on the school central low-level concerns file.

### References

Low Level concerns should not be included in references unless they relate to issues which would normally be included in a reference, for example, misconduct or poor performance. It follows that a Low-Level concern which relates exclusively to safeguarding (and not to misconduct or poor performance) should not be referred to in a reference. However, where a low-level concern (or group of concerns) has met the allegations threshold for referral to the Designated Officer and found to be substantiated, it should be referred to in a reference.

### **Summary:**

#### **Low- Level Concerns about an adult**

From time to time, an individual may notice behaviour, statements, or actions in others which leave them concerned.

These are behaviours or actions which fall short of a formal **allegation** of abuse.

These tend to be behaviours which indicate that our Code of Conduct may not have been met.

Any such concerns can be dealt with as a Low-Level Concern.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being over friendly with pupils and/or having favourites
- engaging with a pupil on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door (on/off site)
- using inappropriate, offensive, sexualised, or intimidating behaviour / language (including shouting, being verbally aggressive, and/or saying words that could impact on their wellbeing)

#### **What to do if you have a Low-Level Concern?**

Where a Low-Level Concern exists, it must be reported to the

DSL or Headteacher (only)

as soon as reasonably possible on the same day.

### 3. Self - Reports

#### What is a Self-Report ?

A Self-Report also falls under our Low-Level Concerns Policy. From time to time, an adult may find **themselves** in a situation which might appear compromising others, or which could be misconstrued.

Equally, they may, for whatever reason, have behaved in a manner which on reflection they consider falls below the standard set out in the Code of Conduct/other Cognita policy, falls below the expected professional standards, or breaches this policy.

Self-Reporting by adults in these circumstances is encouraged. This demonstrates both awareness of the expected behavioural standards and self-awareness as to the individual's own actions or how they could be perceived.

As such, the school sees Self-Reporting as an important means of maintaining a culture where everyone aspires to the highest standards of conduct and behaviour.

#### What do you have to do if you have a Self-Report?

A Self-Report must be reported in writing **using the relevant form** to the DSL or to the Headteacher (only) as soon as reasonably possible, on the same day as the incident (where the concern relates to a particular incident).

#### How is the Self-Report dealt with?

When the DSL/Headteacher receives the report, they must inform the other in a timely fashion (within the day). If the DSL and Headteacher are unavailable, the staff member with the concern should contact their RSL/HR department. There must be no delay.

#### Record keeping

Where a Self-Report has been raised by an individual about themselves, a confidential record will be kept in a school central file which logs all low-level concerns A-Z according to staff member surname; this file must only be accessible by the DSL and the Headteacher.

### 4 Allegations

The purpose of this section of the policy is to outline how allegations against adults will be handled. Allegations will always be dealt with in accordance with statutory guidance provided in KCSIE.

#### What is an allegation?

Allegations represent situations that might indicate an adult may/would pose a risk of harm to children if they continue to work in regular or close contact with children in their present position or in any capacity.

This policy applies to all adults in the school- regardless of whether the school is where the alleged incident or pattern of behaviour took place- if it is alleged that they have have met one of the following four statements, often referred to as '**harm tests**':

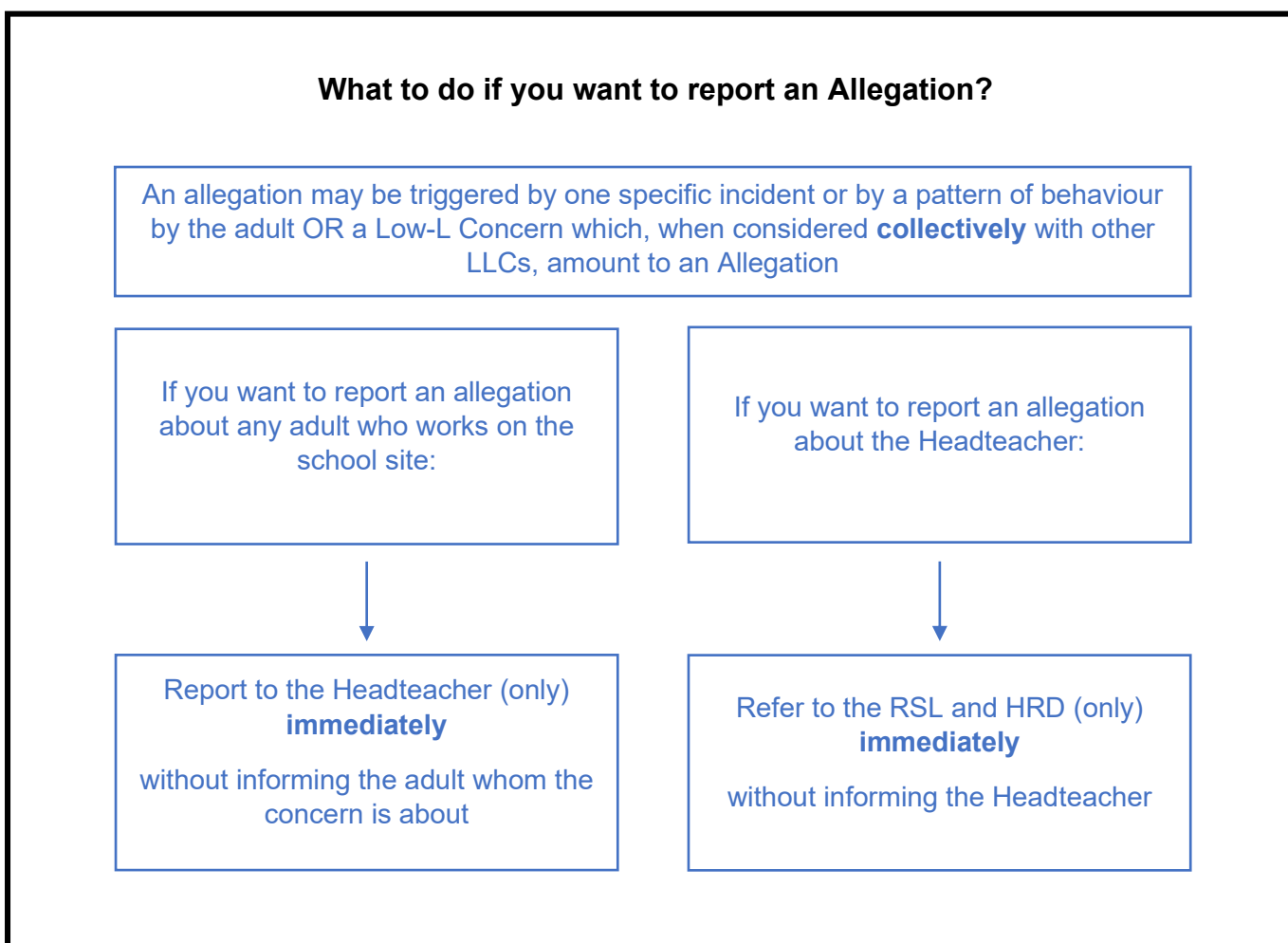
- behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she may pose a risk of harm to children
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children (potential transferable risk).

An allegation may be triggered by:

1. **one** specific incident
2. a pattern of behaviours and Low-Level concerns which, **when considered collectively**, amount to an allegation

Allegations against a teacher who is no longer teaching must be referred to the relevant Police authorities.

Non-recent (i.e. historical) allegations of abuse must also be referred to the same.



#### Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to members of staff, contractors, visitors, and volunteers who are currently working in any school, regardless of whether the school is where the alleged abuse took place.

#### Supply/Agency Staff/Hirers of school premises

This policy also refers to agency staff/supply staff/hirers of school premises (KCSIE 2025) (see below). In some circumstances, schools will have to consider an allegation against an individual not directly employed by them, where its disciplinary procedures do not fully apply, for example, supply teachers provided by an employment agency or business. Whilst schools are not the employer of supply teachers, they should ensure allegations are dealt with properly. In no circumstances should a school decide to cease to use a supply teacher due to safeguarding concerns, without finding out the facts and liaising with the local authority Designated Officer (LADO) to determine a suitable outcome.

Decisions will need to be made in discussion with the agency whether it is appropriate to suspend the supply teacher, or redeploy them to another part of the school, whilst they carry out their investigation. Agencies should be fully involved and co-operate in any enquiries from the LADO, Police and/or children's Social Care. The school will usually take the lead because agencies do not have direct access to pupils or other school staff, so they will not be able to collect the facts when an allegation is made, nor do they have all the relevant information required by the LADO as part of the referral process.

Supply teachers, whilst not employed by the school, are under the supervision, direction and control of the school when working in the school. They should be advised to contact their trade union representative if they have one, or a colleague for support. The allegations management meeting which is often arranged by the LADO should address issues such as information sharing, to ensure that any previous concerns or allegations known to the agency are taken into account by the school during the investigation. When using an agency, schools should inform the agency of its process for managing allegations. This should include inviting the agency's human resource manager or equivalent to meetings and keeping them up to date with information about its policies.

### Non-recent allegations

Where an *adult* makes a non-recent allegation via the school that they were abused as a child by a current member of staff, the individual should be advised to report the allegation to the Police. The Headteacher must contact the RSL, HR and the MD as a priority.

Where an *adult* makes a non-recent allegation via the school that they were abused as a child by a former member of staff, the individual should similarly be advised to report the allegation to the Police. The Headteacher must contact the RSL, HR and the MD as a priority.

Non recent allegations against current /former staff made by a *pupil* must be reported to the LADO in line with the local authority's procedures for dealing with non-recent allegations. The LADO will coordinate with local authority children Social Care and the Police. Abuse can be reported no matter how long ago it happened.

### Dealing with an allegation

The procedures for dealing with allegations need to be applied with common sense and judgement.

Many cases may well either not meet the criteria set out above or may do so without warranting consideration of either a Police investigation or enquiries by local authority Children's Social Care services.

However, some allegations will be so serious they require immediate intervention by Children's Social Care services and/or the Police. There must be no delay.

### Initial Enquiries

Headteachers, after first liaising with the Regional Safeguarding Lead, HR (ER Manager/Head of HR in the UK), MD/MD (known as 'the group'), may need to gather some initial information to help them determine whether there is any foundation to the allegation before contacting the local authority DO (note, the school must contact the DO within one working day if it is established that the concern amounts to an allegation).

Schools should ensure they understand the local authority's arrangements for managing allegations, including the contact details and what information the DO will require when an allegation is made. This information can be found in local policy and procedural guidance provided by the DO service. Before contacting the DO, and after liaising with the group, schools should conduct these basic enquiries to establish the facts, being careful not to jeopardise any future Police investigation.

When to inform the individual of the allegation should be considered carefully on a case-by-case basis, with guidance as required from the 'group', the DO, and if appropriate local authority children's social care and the Police. Unless agreed, the person to which the allegation has been made must not be informed or interviewed at this stage, so as not to jeopardise potential evidence gathering by external agencies.

### Outcomes after initial enquiries

If, after the initial gathering of information it is decided by the above group of colleagues that the concerns **do not** meet threshold for an allegation (and therefore no contact with the DO is required), but they are a concern around **conduct**, the Headteacher/Principal will be supported by HR in the steps thereafter, with the RSL supporting as needed.

If, after the initial information gathering stage, it is decided that the concerns **do** amount to a Safeguarding allegation that **does** meet threshold for contacting the DO (at least for advice about whether a referral is needed), the Headteacher/Principal will do so within one working day (or the DSL in their absence or delegation), and will be supported by the RSL, and HR colleagues in steps thereafter.

### Informing Parents/Carers

Parents or carers of the pupil or pupils involved will be told about the allegation as soon as possible if they do not already know of it. The case manager will seek advice from the group about when and how this communication will happen.

However, where a 'Strategy Discussion' is required (WTSC 2026, see below), or the Police or Children's Social Care services need to be involved, the case manager will not inform the parents/carers of the allegation until those agencies have been consulted and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the parents/carers.

Parents or carers will also be kept informed of the progress of the case and told the outcome where there is not a criminal prosecution, including the outcome of any disciplinary process (the school will seek support from HR about what can be shared). The deliberations of a disciplinary hearing, and the information taken into account in reaching a decision, cannot normally be disclosed, but the parents or carers of the pupil may be told the outcome in confidence, on the advice of HR only.

Parents or carers will also be made aware of the requirement to maintain confidentiality about any allegations made against teachers whilst investigations are ongoing, as set out in section 141F of the Education Act (2002). If parents or carers wish to apply to the court to have reporting restrictions removed, they will be told to seek legal advice.

In cases where a pupil may have suffered significant harm, or there may be a criminal prosecution, Children's Social Care services, or the Police as appropriate, will consider what support the pupil(s) involved may need.

### Initial Discussion with Designated Officer (DO)

The purpose of an initial discussion is for the DO and the case manager (school initially-Headteacher/DSL) to consider the nature, content and context of the allegation and agree to a course of action. The DO may ask the case manager to provide or obtain relevant additional information, such as previous history, whether the pupil or their family have made similar allegations previously and about the individual's current contact with pupils/other children. There may be situations when the case manager will want to involve the Police immediately, for example if the person is deemed to be an immediate risk to pupils/other children or there is evidence of a possible criminal offence. Where there is no such evidence, the case manager should discuss the allegations with the DO in order to help determine whether Police involvement is necessary.

The case manager should then consider with the DO what action should follow both in respect of the individual and those who made the initial allegation.

Situations can arise where the DO is contacted, but advises that, whilst the matter does/does not reach threshold for a referral to them, it should be managed internally as a conduct issue. In these situations, the Headteacher/Principal will be supported by HR, with the RSL supporting as needed.

The initial sharing of information and evaluation may lead to a decision that no further action is to be taken in regard to the individual facing the allegation or concern, in which case this decision and a justification for

it should be recorded by both the case manager and the DO and agreement reached on what information should be put in writing to the individual concerned and by whom.

Registered providers must inform Ofsted of any allegations of serious harm or abuse by any person living, working, or looking after pupils at the premises (whether the allegations relate to harm or abuse committed on the premises or elsewhere). Registered providers must also notify Ofsted of the action taken in respect of the allegations. These notifications must be made as soon as is reasonably practicable, but at the latest within 14 days of the allegations being made. A registered provider who, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with this requirement, commits an offence.

### Multi-agency Strategy Discussion

Where a referral to the DO **has** met threshold, and where there is cause to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, a 'Strategy Discussion' will be convened by the Designated Officer or the Police in accordance with the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026). If the allegation is about physical contact, the 'strategy discussion' or initial evaluation with the Police will take into account that teachers and other school staff are entitled to use reasonable force to control or restrain pupils in certain circumstances, including dealing with disruptive behaviour (see Use of Reasonable Force, Restrictive Intervention and/or Restraint Policy, incorporating Screening, Searching and Confiscation Policy).

Where a 'Strategy Discussion' is needed, or Police or Children's Social Care services need to be involved, the case manager (school) will **not** inform the accused person until those agencies have been consulted and have agreed what information can be disclosed to the accused. The case manager should only inform the accused person about the allegation after consulting the Designated Officer(s) and actions have been decided. It is extremely important that the case manager provides the accused with as much information as possible at that time.

Where it is clear that an investigation by the Police or Children's Social Care services is unnecessary, or the 'Strategy Discussion' or initial evaluation decides that is the case, the Designated Officer(s) will discuss the next steps with the case manager. In those circumstances, the options open to the school depend on the nature and circumstances of the allegation and the evidence and information available. This will range from taking no further action to an internal school-based investigation (see below),

### Internal school investigations

In some cases, whilst an investigation by the Police or Children's Social Care services is unnecessary, the school will be guided by the agencies so that further enquiries will be needed to enable a decision about how to proceed. If so, the Designated Officer(s) will discuss with the case manager how and by whom the school investigation will be undertaken. The DO's role is not to investigate the allegation, but to ensure that an appropriate investigation is carried out by the school. In straightforward cases, an internal school investigation will normally be undertaken by a senior member of school staff such as the DSL. Where necessary, due to lack of resource or conflict of interest, the investigation may be undertaken by a senior leader from another Cognita school. Should the nature of the allegation be very complex, the allegation will require the RSL to investigate/ appoint an independent investigator. Any independent investigator will be appointed by HR in conjunction with the MD and RSL. The outcome of the investigation must be fed back to the DO.

Where a safeguarding concern or allegation triggers another procedure, such as grievance or disciplinary, that procedure shall only be followed once the immediate safeguarding concern or allegation has been fully investigated.

## Suspension of an employee

Cognita will consider carefully whether the circumstances of a case warrant a person being suspended from contact with pupils at the school or whether alternative arrangements can be put in place until the allegation or concern is resolved. All options to avoid suspension will be considered prior to taking that step.

The possible risk of harm to pupils posed by an accused person should be evaluated and managed in respect of the pupil(s) involved in the allegations. In some rare cases, this will require the case manager to consider suspending the accused until the case is resolved. Suspension should not be an automatic response when an allegation is reported: all options to avoid suspension should be considered prior to taking that step.

If the case manager is concerned about the welfare of other children in the community or the staff member's family, those concerns should be reported to the DO Children's Social Care or the Police as required. However, suspension is highly unlikely to be justified on the basis of such concerns alone.

Suspension will be considered only in a case where there is cause to suspect a pupil at the school are at risk of harm or the case is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal. However, a person should not be suspended automatically: the case manager will consider carefully whether the circumstances warrant suspension from contact with pupil at the school or until the allegation is resolved.

In cases where the school is made aware that the Secretary of State has made an interim prohibition order in respect of an individual who works at the school, immediate action will be taken to ensure the individual does not carry out work in contravention of the order, i.e. pending the findings of the TRA investigation, the individual must not carry out teaching work.

The case manager will also consider whether the result that would be achieved by immediate suspension could be obtained by alternative arrangements. In many cases an investigation can be resolved quickly and without the need for suspension.

If the DO Police and Children's Social Care services have no objections to the member of staff continuing to work during the investigation, the case manager will aim to be as inventive as possible to avoid suspension.

Based on assessment of risk, the following alternatives will be considered by the case manager before suspending a member of staff:

- redeployment within the school so that the individual does not have direct contact with the pupil or pupil(s) concerned
- providing an assistant to be present when the individual has contact with pupils;
- redeploying to alternative work in the school so the individual does not have unsupervised access to pupils
- moving the pupil(s) to classes where they will not come into contact with the member of staff, making it clear that this is not a punishment and parents have been consulted or
- temporarily redeploying the member of staff to another role in a different location, for example to an alternative Cognita school

These alternatives allow time for an informed decision regarding the suspension and possibly reduce the initial impact of the allegation. This will, however, depend upon the nature of the allegation. The case manager will consider the potential permanent professional reputational damage to employees that can result from suspension where an allegation is later found to be unsubstantiated or maliciously intended.

A conversation with the case manager, Head of HR/ER Manager and RSL will occur to reach a rounded decision about whether suspension is the correct course of action. If immediate suspension is considered necessary, the case manager must record the rationale and justification for such a course of action. This must also include what alternatives to suspension have been considered and why they were rejected.

Where it has been deemed appropriate to suspend the person, written confirmation will be dispatched within one working day, giving as much detail as appropriate for the reasons for the suspension. Cognita will make

clear to the suspended employee where they can obtain support. The person will be informed at the point of their suspension who their named contact is within the organisation and will be given **their** contact details.

Children's Social Care services, the DO or the Police cannot require the case manager to suspend a member of staff or a volunteer, although the case manager will give appropriate weight to their advice. The power to suspend is vested in Cognita as proprietor of the school.

Where a 'Strategy Discussion' or initial evaluation concludes that there should be enquiries by Children's Social Care services and/or an investigation by the Police, the Designated Officer(s) should canvass Police and Children's Social Care services for views about whether the accused member of staff needs to be suspended from contact with pupil in order to inform the school consideration of suspension. Police involvement does not make it mandatory to suspend a member of staff; this decision will be taken on a case-by-case basis having undertaken a risk assessment.

### Support for employees

Cognita has a duty of care to their employees. Cognita will provide effective support for anyone facing an allegation, and/or other members of staff involved in the process as witnesses and will act to manage and minimise the stress inherent in the allegations process. It is essential that any allegation of abuse made against a teacher or other member of staff or volunteer is dealt with very quickly, in a fair and consistent way that provides effective protection for the pupil and, at the same time, supports the person who is the subject of the allegation and any witnesses. Support for the accused individual is vital to fulfilling this duty. Individuals will be informed of concerns or allegations as soon as possible and given an explanation of the likely course of action, unless there is an objection by the Children's Social Care services or the Police. The individual will be advised to contact their trade union representative, if they have one, or a colleague for support. They will also be given access to an employee support service, provided by Cognita.

The case manager will appoint a named representative to keep the person who is the subject of the allegation informed of the progress of the case and consider what other support is appropriate for the individual and/or witnesses. Particular care needs to be taken when employees are suspended to ensure that they are kept informed of both the progress of their case and current work-related issues. Social contact with colleagues and friends should not be prevented unless there is evidence to suggest that such contact is likely to be prejudicial to the gathering and presentation of evidence.

### Timescales

It is in everyone's interest to resolve cases as quickly as possible and ensure consistency with a fair and thorough investigation. All allegations will be investigated as a priority to avoid any delay. The time taken to investigate and resolve individual cases depends on a variety of factors, including the nature, seriousness, and complexity of the allegation.

For cases where it is clear immediately that the allegation is unsubstantiated or malicious, it is aimed that they will be resolved within one week. Any concerns about safeguarding will always be discussed with the Designated Officer.

### Confidentiality

When an allegation is made, the school will make every effort to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity while an allegation is being investigated or considered. The Education Act (2002) introduced reporting restrictions preventing the publication of any material that may lead to the identification of a teacher in a school who has been accused by, or on behalf of, a pupil from the same school (where that identification would identify the teacher as the subject of the allegation). The reporting restrictions apply until the point that the accused person is charged with an offence, or until the Secretary of State or the General Teaching Council for Wales publishes information about an investigation or decision in a disciplinary case arising from the allegation. The reporting restrictions are disapplied if the individual to whom the restrictions apply effectively waives their right to anonymity by going public themselves or by giving their written consent for another to do so, or if a judge lifts restrictions in response to a request to do so. The provisions commenced on 1 October 2012.

The legislation imposing restrictions makes clear that “publication” of material that may lead to the identification of the teacher who is the subject of the allegation is prohibited. “Publication” includes “any speech, writing, relevant programme or other communication in whatever form, which is addressed to the public at large or any section of the public.” This means that a parent/carer who, for example, published details of the allegation on a social networking site, would be in breach of the reporting restrictions (if what was published could lead to the identification of the teacher by members of the public).

In accordance with the Authorised Professional Practice published by the College of Policing in May 2017, the Police will not normally provide any information to the press or media that might identify an individual who is under investigation, unless and until the person is charged with a criminal offence. In exceptional cases where the Police would like to depart from that rule, for example an appeal to trace a suspect, they must apply to a magistrates’ court to request that reporting restrictions be lifted.

The case manager will take advice from the DO Police and Children’s Social Care services to agree the following:

- who needs to know and, importantly, exactly what information can be shared;
- how to manage speculation, leaks and gossip;
- what, if any, information can be reasonably given to the wider community to reduce speculation; and
- how to manage press interest if, and when, it should arise.

### Oversight and monitoring

The DO has overall responsibility for oversight of the procedures for dealing with allegations, for resolving any inter-agency issues, and for liaison with Safeguarding Partners on the subject. The DO will provide advice and guidance to the case manager, in addition to liaising with the police and other agencies and monitoring the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible, consistent with a thorough and fair process. Reviews should be conducted at fortnightly or monthly intervals, depending on the complexity of the case.

Police forces should also identify officers who will be responsible for:

- liaising with the DO
- taking part in the strategy discussion or initial evaluation
- subsequently reviewing the progress of those cases in which there is a police investigation; and
- sharing information on completion of the investigation or any prosecution.

If the ‘Strategy Discussion’ or initial assessment decides that a Police investigation is required, the Police should also set a target date for reviewing the progress of the investigation and consulting the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) about whether to:

- charge the individual
- continue to investigate
- close the investigation

Wherever possible, that review should take place no later than four weeks after the initial evaluation. Dates for subsequent reviews, ideally at fortnightly intervals, should be set at the meeting if the investigation continues.

### Information sharing

In a ‘Strategy Discussion’ or the initial evaluation of the case, the agencies involved will share all relevant information they have about the person who is the subject of the allegation, and about the alleged victim.

Where the Police are involved, wherever possible, the employer will ask the Police to obtain consent from the individuals involved to share their statements and evidence for use in the employer disciplinary process. This will be done as their investigation proceeds and will enable the Police to share relevant information without delay at the conclusion of their investigation or any court case.

Children's Social Care services should adopt a similar procedure when making enquiries to determine whether the pupil(s) named in the allegation are in need of protection or services, so that any information obtained in the course of those enquiries which is relevant to a disciplinary case can be passed to the employer without delay.

### Following a criminal investigation or a prosecution

The Police should inform the employer and DO immediately when a criminal investigation and any subsequent trial is complete, or if it is decided to close an investigation without charge, or not to continue to prosecute the case after the person has been charged. In those circumstances, the DO should discuss with the case manager whether any further action, including disciplinary action, is appropriate and, if so, how to proceed. The information provided by the Police and/or Children's Social Care services should inform that decision. The options will depend on the circumstances of the case, and the consideration will need to be given as to the result of the Police investigation or the trial, as well as the different standard of proof required in disciplinary and criminal proceedings.

### Outcome of an allegation

The following definitions will be used when determining the outcome of allegation investigations:

**Substantiated:** there is sufficient evidence to prove the allegation

**Malicious:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation and there has been a deliberate act to deceive

**False:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation

**Unsubstantiated:** there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence

**Unfounded:** to reflect cases where there is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made.

### On conclusion of a case

There is a legal requirement for employers [Cognita] to make a referral to the [DBS](#) where they think that an individual has engaged in conduct that harmed (or is likely to harm) a child; or if a person otherwise poses a risk of harm to a child. This referral is usually made on behalf of the school by HR.

### Substantiated allegations

If an allegation is substantiated and the person is dismissed or the employer ceases to use the person's services, or the person resigns or otherwise ceases to provide his or her services, Cognita will refer the case to the DBS for consideration of whether inclusion on the barred lists is required. In the case of a member of the teaching staff at a school, the matter will be referred to the TRA to consider prohibiting the individual from teaching in relation to their professional misconduct.

Where it is decided on the conclusion of a case that a person who has been suspended can return to work, the case manager will consider how best to facilitate that. Most people will benefit from some help and support to return to work after a stressful experience. Depending on the individual's circumstances, a phased return and/or the provision of a mentor to provide assistance and support in the short term may be appropriate. The

case manager will also consider how the person's contact with the pupil(s) who made the allegation can best be managed if they are still a pupil at the school. Likewise, those members of staff who have been witnesses during the processes must be supported.

### Unsubstantiated allegations

If an allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated or malicious, the RSL may advise the Headteacher/DSL to choose to refer the matter to Children's Social Care to determine whether the pupil concerned needs support services and/or may have been abused by someone else.

### Malicious

If an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the Headteacher/Principal and proprietor will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the pupil or staff member who made it; or whether the Police should be asked to consider if action might be appropriate against the person responsible, even if he or she were not a pupil.

### Learning lessons

At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated, the DO will review the circumstances of the case with the case manager to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to the school's procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future. This will include issues arising from the decision to suspend the member of staff, the duration of the suspension and whether suspension was justified. Lessons will also be learnt from the use of suspension when the individual is subsequently reinstated. The Designated Officer(s) and case manager will consider how future investigations of a similar nature could be carried out without suspending the individual.

### Resignations and 'settlement agreements'

If the accused person resigns, or ceases to provide their services, this will not prevent an allegation being followed up in accordance with the statutory guidance KCSIE. A referral to the DBS must be made if the criteria are met (see criteria in KCSIE). Cognita will also consider whether a referral to the TRA is appropriate (see criteria in KCSIE).

If the accused person resigns or their services cease to be used and the criteria are met, it will not be appropriate to reach a settlement/compromise agreement. Any settlement/compromise agreement that would prevent the proprietor from making a DBS referral even though the criteria for referral are met, is likely to result in a criminal offence being committed. This is because the proprietor would not be complying with its legal duty to make the referral.

It is important that every effort is made to reach a conclusion in all cases of allegations bearing on the safety or welfare of pupils, including any in which the person concerned refuses to cooperate with the process. Wherever possible, the accused will be given a full opportunity to answer the allegation and make representations about it. However, the process of recording the allegation and any supporting evidence and reaching a judgement about whether it can be substantiated on the basis of all the information available, will continue even if that cannot be done or the accused does not cooperate. It may be difficult to reach a conclusion in those circumstances, and it may not be possible to apply any disciplinary sanctions if a person's period of notice expires before the process is complete, but it is important to reach and record a conclusion wherever possible.

### Record keeping

Details of allegations that are found to have been malicious will be removed from personnel records. However, for all other allegations, it is important that a clear and comprehensive summary of the allegation, details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, and a note of any action taken and decisions reached, is kept on the confidential personnel file of the accused.

The purpose of the record is to enable accurate information to be given in response to any future request for a reference, where appropriate. It will provide clarification in cases where future DBS checks reveal information from the Police about an allegation that did not result in a criminal conviction and it will help to

prevent unnecessary re-investigation if, as sometimes happens, an allegation re-surfaces after a period of time. The record will be retained at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for a period of 10 years from the date of the allegation, if that is longer. The Information Commissioner Employment Practices Code provides some practical advice on record retention.

On occasion, records may be needed when Police investigate non-recent sexual allegations brought about by former pupils/staff.

The record must therefore be **retained in full**.

## References

Cases in which an allegation was proven to be **false, unsubstantiated or malicious** will not be included in employer references. A history of repeated concerns or allegations which have all been found to be false, unsubstantiated or malicious will also not be included in any reference. See KCSIE for further information on references.

## C Whistleblowing

Please refer to the staff Whistleblowing Policy for more information.

### Key Points

- Staff are encouraged to report to Cognita any suspected wrongdoing within our School or Cognita.
- Members of staff who raise genuine concerns under the Whistleblowing Policy will be supported, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment (including dismissal, disciplinary action, threats, or other unfavourable treatment) as a result of raising a genuine concern.
- Staff should ordinarily report wrongdoing internally within Cognita. In most cases it will not be necessary to alert anyone externally.
- Reports made maliciously or in bad faith may lead to disciplinary action.
- Concerns raised under the Whistleblowing Policy are distinct from concerns or allegations about an adult's suitability to work with or have access to children.

All adults have a responsibility to report any concerns about poor or unsafe practice, including in relation to the care and protection of a pupil or pupils. If a member of staff believes that best practice in this area is not being adhered to or that practice may put a pupil or pupils at risk, they should first attempt to resolve their concern at school level via their Headteacher.

If the situation is not resolved, or the staff member is uncertain about whether something is within the scope of the Whistleblowing Policy, they should seek advice from the Whistleblowing Officer via [whistleblowingofficer@cognita.com](mailto:whistleblowingofficer@cognita.com).

Staff are strongly encouraged to reach out at an early stage.

[Please see the 'key people and contacts' page in this document for the contact details of the above people within Cognita.]

Where an adult feels unable to raise a concern about poor safeguarding practice within Cognita through the above options or where they feel that their concern is not being addressed, they can raise their concern externally using either of the routes below:

Government guidance can be found [here](#).

The [NSPCC whistleblowing helpline](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/our-services/whistleblowing-helpline/) is available for adults who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally. Staff can call: 0800 028 0285 – lines are available from 8:00am to 8:00pm, Monday to Friday, or email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

## D Managing situations involving child-on-child abuse

In some situations, a pupil will make a direct disclosure of child-on-child abuse, or their peers may report something has occurred. Alternatively, a staff member may raise a concern having witnessed or been told about an incident by a pupil or a parent/carer.

### Staff

If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a pupil (s) may be at risk of abuse/exploitation from another pupil or young person, or a group of perpetrators, or that a pupil (s) may be abusing/exploiting others, the member of staff should report their concern **verbally** to the DSL **without delay** in accordance with this policy, recording their concern in writing after this.

### Parents/carers

Parents/carers must be informed of all situations and referrals, unless to do so would heighten risk to the pupil/others.

### Safeguarding Leads

The DSL will discuss the behaviour with the member of staff raising the concern and will in all situations, take any immediate steps to ensure the safety of the victim(s) or any other pupil (s) including the perpetrator (s). Where the DSL considers or suspects that the behaviour might constitute abuse and/or exploitation, Children's Social Care should be contacted immediately, and if a criminal act is thought to have occurred, also the Police. Any response should be decided in conjunction with Children's Social Care and other relevant agencies who will direct and advise once a referral has been received and accepted and should investigate the incident and the wider context and assess and mitigate the risk posed by the perpetrator(s) to the victim(s) and to other pupils .

### Take steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of any pupils affected

1. Whilst the school establishes the facts of the case and starts the process of liaising with Children's Social Care and the Police, the alleged perpetrator(s) should be removed from any classes they share with the victim. NB: Consideration will be given to suspending the perpetrator (s) at this point if for operational reasons, the pupil (s) cannot be separated/the risk is too high for either the victim, the perpetrator or other pupils
2. The school should also carefully consider how best to keep the victim and alleged perpetrator(s) a reasonable distance apart on school premises (including during any before or after school-based activities) and on transport to and from the school, where appropriate. These actions are in the best interests of all pupils involved and should not be perceived to be a judgement on the guilt of the alleged perpetrator(s).
3. The school should consider that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the pupils involved
4. Treat all pupils (whether perpetrator or victim) as being at risk - while the perpetrator may pose a significant risk of harm to other pupils, they may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves.

5. Take into account the complexity of child-on-child abuse and of pupil's experiences and consider the interplay between power, choice and consent. While pupils may appear to be making choices, if those choices are limited, they are not consenting
6. Take appropriate action in respect of the perpetrator (s) – any action should address the abuse, the causes of it, attitudes underlying it and the support that may be needed if the perpetrator is at risk.

Factors to consider include the risk the perpetrator(s) poses and will continue to pose to other pupils, their own unmet needs, the severity of the abuse and the causes of it.

### Safeguarding Risk Assessments

A written Safeguarding Risk Assessment must be completed after the above initial practical steps are completed. This must be shared and co-constructed with the pupils involved, their parents/carers and the safeguarding team. Any risk assessment must be regularly reviewed.

The risk and needs assessment (including for a report of sexual harassment and sexual violence) must consider for each pupil involved, whatever their role (victim/perpetrator):

- the victim, their individual needs, their protection and support
- whether there may have been other victims and/or perpetrators
- the alleged perpetrator(s) individual needs, their protection and support
- all the other pupils who have not been directly involved but whom may be at potential risk, (and, if appropriate, staff) at the school, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them from the alleged perpetrator(s), or from future harms, and
- the time and location of the incident, and any action required to make the location safer (see below)

### **Following the incident**

#### Perpetrator(s)

When any investigation has been completed, disciplinary action i.e. sanctions, in line with the Behaviour Policy may be appropriate, including

- (a) to ensure that the perpetrator takes responsibility for and realises the seriousness of their behaviour
- (b) to demonstrate to the perpetrator and others that abuse can never be tolerated; and
- (c) to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the victim and other pupils in the school.

Permanent exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and only where necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the victim(s) and other pupils in the school;

#### Victim

Provide on-going support to victim(s) to including, but not limited to:

- (a) ensuring their immediate safety
- (b) responding promptly and appropriately to the abuse
- (c) assessing and addressing any unmet needs
- (d) following the procedures set out in this Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy (including where the pupil is in need of early help or statutory intervention)
- (e) monitoring the pupil's wellbeing closely and ensuring that they receive on-going support from all relevant staff members within the school
- (f) engaging with the pupil's parents/carers and any external agencies to ensure that the pupil's needs are met in the long-term

#### School community

The school should consider the lessons that can be learnt from the abuse and put in place measures to reduce the risk of such abuse recurring. This may include, for example: gender and equalities work, work around school safety, security and supervision, awareness raising for staff, pupils and parents/carers about a particular form of abuse, training for staff on handling certain types of incidents or abuse.

## E Managing pupil situations involving the sharing of nudes/semi-nude imagery/videos

Where the report includes an online element, staff should be aware of searching, screening and confiscation advice (for schools) (and the Use of Reasonable Force etc Policy) and UKCIS Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people.

**Staff must NEVER view or forward illegal images of a child/pupil.** Should they receive such, then they should notify the DSL immediately. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to confiscate any devices to preserve any evidence and hand them to the Police for inspection and subsequent removal. This will be the decision of the Police.

When an incident involving comes to a member of staff's attention:

- The incident should be referred to the DSL as soon as possible
- The DSL will follow the best practice procedures and guidance set out in this [guidance](#)
- There should be interviews with the pupil (s) involved to gather further information (if appropriate, seek advice from the RSL/external agency)
- Parents/carers of each pupil should be informed at an early stage and involved in the process (including any interviews with their child) unless there is good reason to believe that involving parents/carers would put the pupil at greater risk of harm and jeopardise any Police/Social Care enquiries
- At any point in the process, if there is a concern that a pupil (s) has been significantly harmed or is at risk of significant harm, a referral must be made to Children's Social Care and/or the Police immediately. In these situations, the parents/carers must be informed, unless to do so may heighten any risk to the pupil/others.

## F Managing situations involving sexual violence and/or sexual harassment

All staff must be trained to manage a disclosure from a pupil around sexual violence and/or sexual harassment. They should seek advice and support from the DSL following any initial disclosure.

Any response to sexual harassment and/or sexual violence should fall within, and be consistent with, the school's wider approach to child-on-child abuse (see above) whether the concerns of child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment, including those that have happened outside of the school premises, and/or online.

It may be appropriate to make notes during the discussion with any victim involved (especially if a second member of staff is present). However, if making notes, staff should be conscious of the need to remain engaged with the pupil and not appear distracted by the note taking. Either way, it is essential a written record is made eventually (after immediate actions are taken) **only recording the facts** as the pupil presents them. Schools should be aware that notes of such reports could become part of a statutory assessment by Children's Social Care and/or part of a criminal investigation by the Police.

The basic safeguarding principles in terms of actions are:

- if a pupil discloses that they have been harmed, a referral must be made to Children's Social Care
- if a pupil says something that could indicate they may be at *imminent* risk of harm, Children's Social Care must be contacted immediately but also the Police

- rape, assault by penetration and sexual assaults, and upskirting are all crimes and must be reported to the Police immediately, followed by Children's Social Care
- if a pupil expresses that they are feeling unwell or have an injury due to what has occurred to them, they should receive medical assistance. However, all staff must be mindful not to remove any forensic evidence (for sexual violence i.e. criminal acts, seek advice from the authorities prior to intervention)
- parents/carers of the victim must and will normally be informed of their child's disclosure and subsequent referrals to external agencies (unless this would put the victim at greater risk).
- the school should not speak to the alleged perpetrator (or their parents/carers) in some situations unless the authorities have stated that this is allowed- to interview a perpetrator where criminal offences may have occurred may jeopardise their enquiries

There are four likely scenarios that schools will need to manage:

Note: local authority procedures will dictate exactly how reports should be managed.

### 1 Internally:

For example, for one-off incidents of sexual harassment (dependant on what has occurred, and whether there have been any previous incidents), the school may take the view that the pupils concerned are not in need of early help nor that referrals need to be made to statutory services and that it would be appropriate to handle the incident internally, perhaps through utilising their Behaviour Policy and by providing pastoral support. Whatever the response, it should be underpinned by the principle that there is a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment, and it is never acceptable and will not be tolerated. All concerns, discussions, decisions, and reasons for decisions, including why certain decisions have not been made must be recorded (written or electronic).

### 2 Those requiring Early Intervention:

In line with the above, the school may decide that the pupils involved do not require referral to statutory services but may benefit from early help. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life. Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help can be particularly useful to address non-violent Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSB) and may prevent escalation of sexual violence. All concerns, discussions, decisions, and reasons for decisions, including why certain decisions have not been made must be recorded (written or electronic).

### 3 Those where Social Care will need to be informed and involved:

Where a pupil has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger, but a criminal offence may not have been committed, schools must make a referral to Children's Social Care. At the point of referral schools will generally inform parents/carers, unless there are compelling reasons not to (if informing a parent/carer is going to put the pupil at additional risk). Any such decision should be made with the support of children's Social Care. If a referral is made, Social Care will then make enquiries to determine whether any of the pupils involved are in need of protection or other services. Schools should not wait for the outcome (or even the start) of a Social Care investigation before protecting the victim and other pupils in the school. All concerns, discussions, decisions, and reasons for decisions, including why certain decisions have not been made must be recorded (written or electronic).

### 4 Those where a criminal offence is likely to have occurred and the Police will be needed:

The DSL will lead the school's response to any incident where there is evidence that a criminal offence has occurred or is likely to occur. However, schools are not alone in dealing with sexual violence and sexual harassment. The Police will be important partner where it is thought that a crime might have been committed. Referrals to the Police will often be a natural progression of making a referral to Social Care and will generally run in parallel. All concerns, discussions, decisions, and reasons for decisions, including why certain decisions have not been made must be recorded (written or electronic).

It is important for the DSL to explain to any pupil involved that the law is in place to protect all children and young people rather than criminalise them, and this should be explained in a way that avoids alarming or distressing them. Ultimately, the DSL will need to balance the victim's wishes against their duty to protect the

victim and other pupils. The victim may ask the school not to tell anyone about the sexual violence or sexual harassment. If the DSL/DDSL decide to go ahead and make a referral to Children's Social Care and/or a report to the Police against the victim's wishes, this should be handled extremely carefully. There are no easy or definitive answers when a victim makes this request. The reasons should be explained to the victim and appropriate specialist support should be offered.

However, where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made, or upskirting, the starting point is that this must be passed on to the Police. Whilst the age of criminal responsibility is ten, if the alleged perpetrator(s) is under ten, the starting principle of reporting to the Police remains. **Please also** above regarding the need to have an 'Appropriate Adult present when Police are communicating with a vulnerable child as part of any criminal investigation under PACE (UK only). Please refer to KCSIE (2025) for information regarding bail conditions.

#### Informing parents/carers

Schools will generally inform parents/carers unless there are compelling reasons not to, for example, if informing a parent/carer is likely to put a pupil at additional risk. In circumstances where parents/ carers have not been informed, it will be especially important that the school is supporting the pupil in any decision they take. This should be with the support of children's Social Care and any appropriate specialist agencies. The school must record all their actions clearly and advice taken from external agencies

#### Confidentiality

Schools must do all they reasonably can to protect the anonymity of any pupils involved in any report of sexual violence or sexual harassment. Amongst other things, this will mean carefully considering, based on the nature of the report, which staff should know about the report and any support that will be put in place for the pupils involved.

#### Support and sanction for the perpetrator

Taking disciplinary action and still providing appropriate support are not mutually exclusive actions. They can, and should, occur at the same time. Our approach will be to implement preventative and/or forward-looking action to safeguard the victim.

It may also be that the perpetrator requires safeguarding, especially where there are concerns that a perpetrator themselves may have been a victim of abuse. It is important that the perpetrator(s) is/are also given the correct support to try to stop them from re-offending and to address any underlying trauma that may be causing this behaviour. Addressing inappropriate behaviour can be an important intervention that helps prevent problematic, abusive and/or violent behaviour in the future.

The school may sanction (in line with the Behaviour Policy), any pupil whose conduct falls below the standard which could be reasonably expected of them, and disciplinary action may be taken whilst other investigations by the Police and/or local authority children's Social Care are ongoing. The fact that another body is investigating or has investigated an incident does not in itself prevent a school from coming to its own conclusion, on the balance of probabilities, about what happened, and imposing a penalty accordingly. This is a matter for the school and will be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis.

That said, the school will consider if, by taking any action, it would prejudice an investigation and/or any subsequent prosecution. Careful liaison with the Police and/or local authority children's Social Care will help the school make a determination. It will also be important to consider whether there are circumstances that make it unreasonable or irrational for the school to reach its own view about what happened while an independent investigation is considering the same facts.

#### The basic safeguarding principle is:

- if a pupil is at risk of harm, is in immediate danger, or has been harmed, a referral must be made to child protection agencies, and
- rape, assault by penetration and sexual assaults, and upskirting are crimes and must be reported to the Police.

Parents/ carers must and will normally be informed of their child's disclosure and subsequent referrals to external agencies (unless this would put the victim at greater risk).

## G Managing situations involving mental health

### The staff member identifying the emerging need should

- **Ask** the pupil how they are feeling, what support they need and want
- **Consider** the risk of harm to the pupil from self or others and try to reduce any immediate risk that is present (including summoning the First Aider as required)
- **Listen** to the pupil and give them time to talk; give reassurance, and work with them on avenues of support
- **Tell** the DSL

### What to do if there are concerns about a pupil's mental health

If staff have a mental health concern about a pupil, they should follow the above steps, dealing with any imminent medical risk as a priority. Should there also be safeguarding concerns about the pupil, then appropriate decisions will be made to safeguard the child by the DSL. Likewise, if there are safeguarding concerns about any pupil, consideration about how this may be impacting on the pupils mental health will be taken into consideration.

Clear actions for intervention will be decided, working in partnership with the parents/ carers (and external agencies if involved with consent). These interventions will be reviewed at every subsequent meeting, or before as the need arises, as is often the case with pupils who are experiencing poor or deteriorating mental health.

Parents/carers must always be contacted when signs/indicators of deteriorating/emerging mental health are first displayed (unless to do so would heighten the risk of harm to their child, in which case children's Social Care will be contacted for advice).

### Staged interventions

School interventions to promote positive mental health are more successful when pupils and their parents/carers participate in any decision making. Any interventions put in place by school staff to support pupils with their mental health are therefore planned, co-ordinated, targeted appropriately, then sustained and evaluated.

With regards to the support offered to pupils, please see below:

#### Universal support

We will support the emotional wellbeing of all pupils in partnership with their parents/carers, who hold main responsibility for meeting their child's needs.

#### Pastoral Support

Some pupils, in addition to the above, may require enhanced levels of *pastoral* support for their wellbeing in the form of informal daily or weekly check-ins with nominated staff.

#### Targeted support

For some pupils, enhanced pastoral support may not be enough to meet their emerging mental health needs. They will be given additional targeted support with nominated staff.

### External Support

For some pupils, enhanced pastoral support and targeted support may not be enough to meet their need. In these situations, the parents of the child will be signposted to an agency/organization/professional/GP. The school will also make a referral to an external agency as required.

### Hospitalisation

Where a child is admitted to hospital/a mental health facility, the school must always make a referral to local authority children's Social Care.

### Language to use

The appropriate use of language when speaking to a pupil whose mental health is deteriorating, or when they express thoughts or plans to self-harm or attempt suicide is important.

[Why language matters: rethinking the language of suicide | NSPCC Learning](#)

### When pupils are self-harming

Should an incident occur where a pupil has harmed themselves, first aid will be administered by the school's nominated First Aider and their parents/carers contacted, unless to do so will place the pupil potentially at greater risk of harm (in these situations, Social Care and the RSL will be contacted for advice).

Should a more serious incident occur whereupon a pupil requires urgent medical assistance after harming themselves, an ambulance will be called immediately via 999, and the parents/carers contacted (unless to do so will place the pupil potentially at greater risk of harm).

### When pupils have suicidal ideation

Should a pupil voice that they are considering/ intending to harm themselves by taking their own life:

1. they will be 100% supervised by appropriately trained school staff immediately AND
2. their parents/carers will be called and asked to collect their child immediately from school. They will be advised to take their child to Accident and Emergency to have an urgent mental health assessment.

### When children attempt suicide

Should an incident occur in school (or before they arrived) whereupon a pupil states that they have attempted to take their life or is found in school to have attempted suicide, an ambulance must be called immediately via 999, and the parents/carers contacted unless to do so will place the pupil potentially at greater risk of harm. In the latter circumstance, an urgent referral must be made to children's Social Care.

### Safeguarding Risk Assessment

All pupils who have a diagnosed mental health illness, have self-harmed, and/or have suicidal ideation **must** have a Safeguarding Risk Assessment which is reviewed on a 4-week cycle (minimum).

The pupil's parents/carers must be informed of the above risk assessment and the control measures in place to keep their child as safe as possible whilst in school.

**All Safeguarding Risk Assessments involving suicidal ideation and/or suicide attempt and /or and significant self-harming **must** be shared with the RSL.**

### When pupils are too unwell to attend school

In some situations, akin to when a pupil is physically very unwell, the mental health needs of a pupil may be so serious that the school is unable to keep them safe on the school site despite a range of supportive interventions being attempted. Discussions about how interventions are managed are facilitated with the

parents/carers at every step of their child's journey. If the pupil is too unwell to attend school, their absence will be coded as illness.

Any decision made about the pupil being unable to attend school may be a temporary measure until the pupil's mental health is medically assessed by a treating clinician as stable enough for them to safely return to school (this may be an immediate full return or a part-time timetable by arrangement). This medical assessment must be put in writing for the school, and in combination with the individual context and facilities of the school will inform the final decision prior to the pupil reintegrating.

In a very small minority of situations, despite a range of supportive interventions attempted, a pupil's mental health needs and associated behaviours are such that the school can no longer keep them safe on the school site in the longer term. A decision may be made by the school that the school is no longer the most appropriate setting to meet the pupil's mental health needs. All avenues and options will be considered before this serious step is taken. The parents/carers will be supported in these rare situation to find alternative educational provision.

## H Visiting professionals and speakers

### Professionals

For visitors who are in school in a professional capacity, on arrival (and prior to any contact with children) schools should check their photo ID, any professional badges/lanyards, and be assured that the visitor has had the appropriate checks (or the visitor's employers have confirmed in writing that their staff have appropriate checks; and what these are). Schools should not ask to see the certificate in these circumstances.

### Speakers

Whilst external organizations and individuals (including parents) can provide a varied and useful range of information and resources that can help schools enrich children's education, careful consideration must be given to their suitability. Due Diligence must include an assessment of the education value, the age appropriateness of what is going to be delivered i.e. the content and approach, the ideology of the speaker, and whether relevant checks will be required. An online due diligence process should also be undertaken, and a discussion with the visiting speaker prior to any confirmation of booking. A record must be kept of the diligence and checks undertaken (using the internal Cognita forms).

## I Organisations or Individuals Letting School Premises

Schools have a duty to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to keep pupils safe when allowing outside organisations to use their facilities. If the activity is being run by the school, or overseen by the school, then this policy and the school's procedures apply. If not, and the school is renting out their space to an organisation or individual, then the school must seek assurance that the body concerned has appropriate safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures in place (including inspecting these as needed) **and** ensure that there are arrangements in place for the provider to liaise with the school on these matters where appropriate. This applies regardless of whether or not the pupils who attend any of these services or activities are children on the school roll. Guidance around keeping children safe in out of school settings can be found here. This document details the safeguarding arrangements that schools should expect these providers to have in place, and schools must check that any hirers have met this guidance.

Should the organisation wishing to use the school premises **not** have any safeguarding policies or procedures in place, then the organisation must not be allowed to let the facilities. The school should also ensure safeguarding requirements are included in any transfer of control agreement (i.e. lease or hire agreement),

as a condition of use and occupation of the premises; and that failure to comply with this would lead to termination of the agreement.

Schools may receive an allegation relating to an incident that happened when an individual or organisation was hiring their school premises for the purposes of running activities for pupils (for example community groups, sports associations, or service providers that run extra-curricular activities). As with any safeguarding allegation, schools should follow this policy and process (see above).

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