Child protection during the COVID-19 measures

Annex to Matrix Child Safeguarding Policy
Updated 5th January 2021

Context

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

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

This annex to our Child Safeguarding Policy sets out details of our safeguarding arrangements for:

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1 Dissemination of the annex to the policy

This annex will be reviewed by our designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or a deputy DSL on a weekly basis as circumstances continue to evolve or following updated Department for Education advice or guidance. It is available on the school website and is made available to staff by email. Parents will also be made aware that this annex is on the website.

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

2 Safeguarding priority

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

- the best interests of children continue to come first
- if anyone in our school has a safeguarding concern, they will act immediately
- a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or deputy DSL will always be available
- no unsuitable people will be allowed to gain access to children
- children should continue to be protected when they are online.

3 Current school position

On the 4th January 2021 a national lockdown was announced.

Colleges, primary (reception onwards) and secondary schools will remain open for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. All other children learn remotely until February half term. This remote learning will be of high quality in line with government expectations.

In schools and colleges where year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults (staff and visitors) and pupils when moving around indoors, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

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

4 Safeguarding partners' advice

We continue to work closely with our safeguarding partners and we will ensure this annex is consistent with their advice. This will include expectations for supporting children with education, health and care (EHC) plans, the local authority designated officer and children's social care, health services, and any other relevant multi-agency partners.

5 Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities for safeguarding in our school remain in line with our Child Safeguarding Policy. Our DSL and at least one deputy DSL will be available on site during the school day. Where this is not possible, we will:

- have a trained DSL or deputy DSL available by phone
- Have regular debrief meetings with the DSL and other senior leaders

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

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) for child protection is Mr C Walton (Assistant Head Teacher)

Contact details: email: c.walton@decschool.co.uk tel: 0121 464 4040

The deputy designated leads are Mr M Dunn (Head Teacher) and Ms A Morris (School Social Worker)

Contact details: email: m.dunn@decschool.co.uk tel: 07548239955

Contact details: email: a.morris@decschool.co.uk tel: 07548239954

Local Authority Children's Services: Birmingham Children's Trust tel: 0121 303 1888

6 Vulnerable children

Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with education or health care (EHC) plans. Those who have a social worker include children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after by the local authority. A child may also be deemed to be vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need or otherwise meet the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

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

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

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

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

We will continue to work with children's social workers and the local authority Head of the Virtual School for looked-after and previously looked-after children.

7 Increased vulnerability or risk

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

8 Attendance

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

The DSL or a deputy will attempt to contact the parents through various methods, such as telephone or by contacting a relative in the first instance. If contact cannot be made or if the DSL or a deputy DSL deems it necessary, we will ask an appropriate agency to do a home visit. If the school needs to conduct a home visit, then a risk assessment will be carried out beforehand to ensure staff are not put at risk.

Where a vulnerable child does not take up their place, we will notify their social worker and attempt to contact the family through the various methods outlined above.

During a national lockdown, shielding advice is in place and all children deemed to be clinically extremely vulnerable are advised not to attend school.

Children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, but who are not clinically extremely vulnerable themselves, should still attend school if they are required to do so (i.e. vulnerable or children of critical workers).

9 Reporting concerns about children or staff

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

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

10 Staff training and induction

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

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

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

11 Safer recruitment and movement of staff

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

When recruiting new staff, we will continue to follow our Safer Recruitment procedures as outlined in the Matrix Child Safeguarding Policy. In addition, any offers of employment made during school closure will include a probationary period clause and an inspection of all documents will be made on the first day of employment.

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

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

12 Peer on peer abuse

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

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

13 Online safety

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

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

Parents will also be reminded of the guidance with regards to online safety. These can be found on the schools website.

14 New children at the school

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

For vulnerable children we will ensure we understand the reasons for the vulnerability and any arrangements in place to support them. As a minimum we will seek access to that child's EHC plan, child in need plan, child protection plan or, for looked-after children, their personal education plan and know who the child's social worker (and, for looked-after children, who the responsible Head of Virtual School is). Ideally this will happen before a child arrives but where that is not possible it will happen as soon as reasonably practicable.

Any exchanges of information will ideally happen at DSL (or deputy) level, and likewise between special educational needs co-ordinators/named individual with oversight of SEN provision for children with EHC plans. However, it is acknowledged this may not always be possible. Where this is the case our school senior leaders will take responsibility. The DSL will undertake a risk assessment based on the information received, considering how risks will be managed and which staff needs to know the information.

15 Supporting children not in school

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

16 Phased return to school

Primary and secondary schools remain open for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. All other children learn remotely until February half term. There is currently no government guidance on a phased return to face-to face education.

New Concerns

Staff may identify new safeguarding concerns about individual children as they see them in person following partial school closure. It is also noted that negative experiences and distressing life events, (such as the current circumstances) may have affected their mental health, as such children requiring additional support may also become a concern.

Staff must report any new concerns immediately to the DSL using the agreed school procedure.

There will always be a DSL or Deputy DSL on site during school opening hours and they can be contacted on: 0121 4644040 and located within school.

DSL

Dame Elizabeth Cadbury School (led by the DSL or deputy DSL) will do all they reasonably can to ask parents and carers to advise them of any changes regarding welfare, health, and wellbeing that they should be aware of before a child returns.

The DSL will ensure that the relevant safeguarding and welfare information held on all children remains accurate.

The DSL will ensure that any updated advice received from the local safeguarding partners is communicated to staff and incorporated into the daily working of the school. As of the 5th January 2021, there is no change to current practice.

Vulnerable children

The expectation is that vulnerable children continue to attend school. Dame Elizabeth Cadbury School will continue to work with and support children's social workers, the local authority virtual school Head for looked-after and previously looked-after children and any other relevant safeguarding and welfare partners.

The DSL will ensure that any updated advice received from the local authorities regarding children with education, health and care (EHC) plans, are incorporated into the local arrangements. Risk assessments with be amended for all pupils returning to school. As of the 5th January 2021, there is no change to current practice.

Reporting concerns about staff or children who may pose a safeguarding risk to others

Procedures for reporting concerns about a staff member who may pose a safeguarding risk to children remain the same and are outlined in the Matrix Child Safeguarding policy. Concerns must still be reported immediately.

Peer on peer abuse will be *reported by the procedure set out in our Child Safeguarding Policy Annex section 12.*

Remote Education and online interactions

It is important that all staff who interact with children, including online, continue to look out for signs a child may be at risk. Any such concerns should be dealt with as per the sections 13 and 15 above in this annexe and where appropriate referrals should continue to be made to the DSL who will refer to children's social care or the police if appropriate.

As always, staff should not communicate with parents or pupils outside school channels (e.g., they should not talk to parents using their personal Facebook accounts, or contact pupils using their personal email addresses or phone numbers) and must follow guidelines set out by the school with regards to the staff code of conduct.