

“You have
someone to trust”

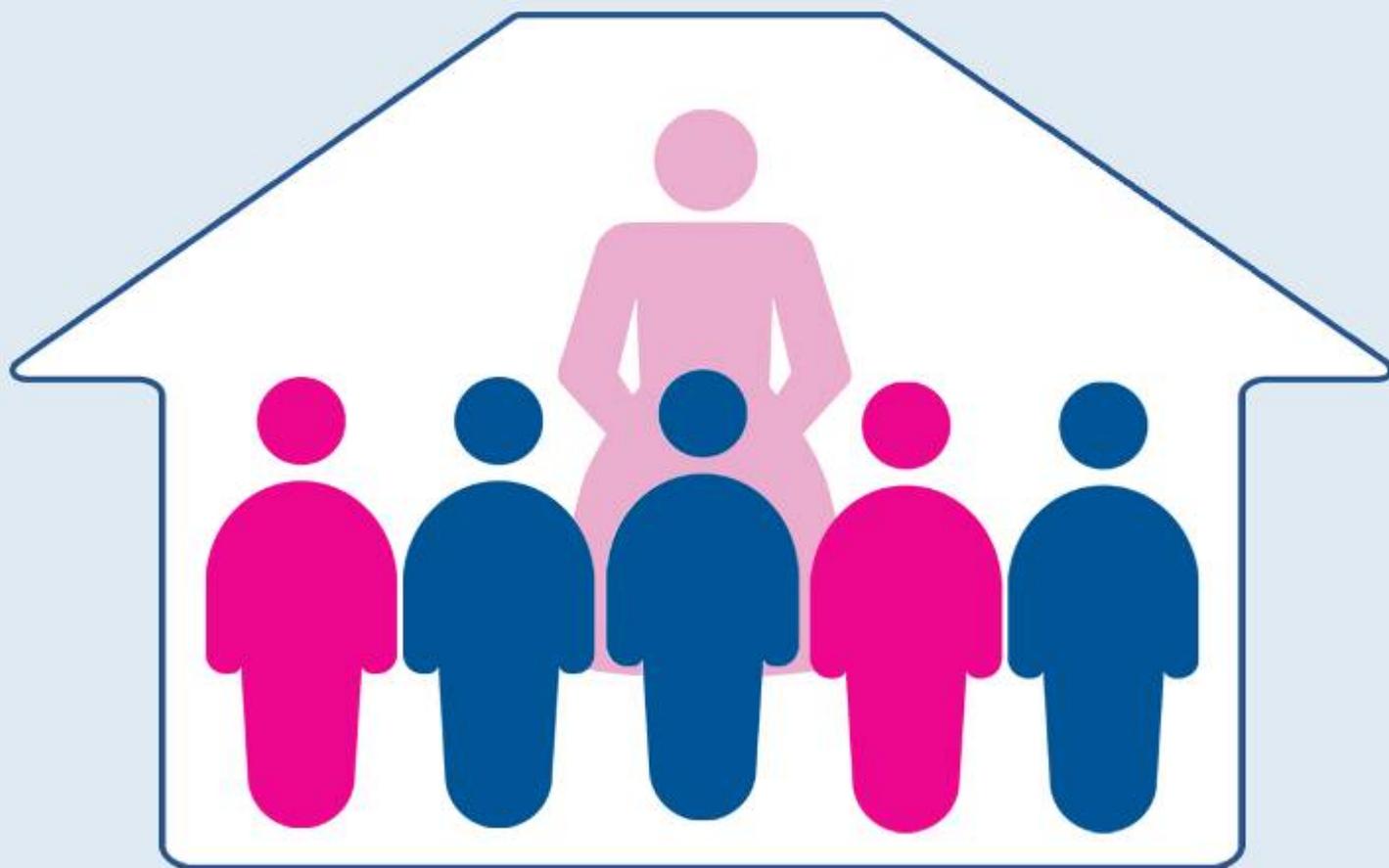
Outstanding safeguarding
practice in primary schools



Championing Children and Young People in England

September 2012

Practical Tips for Schools



www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Office of the Children's Commissioner is a national organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Dr Maggie Atkinson. The post of Children's Commissioner for England was established by the Children Act 2004. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) underpins and frames all of our work.

The Children's Commissioner has a duty to promote the views and interests of all children in England, in particular those whose voices are least likely to be heard, to the people who make decisions about their lives. She also has a duty to speak on behalf of all children in the UK on non-devolved issues which include immigration, for the whole of the UK, and youth justice, for England and Wales. One of the Children's Commissioner's key functions is encouraging organisations that provide services for children always to operate from the child's perspective.

Under the Children Act 2004 the Children's Commissioner is required both to publish what she finds from talking and listening to children and young people, and to draw national policymakers' and agencies' attention to the particular circumstances of a child or small group of children which should inform both policy and practice.

As the Office of the Children's Commissioner, it is our statutory duty to highlight where we believe vulnerable children are not being treated appropriately and in line with duties established under international and domestic legislation.

OUR VISION

Children and young people will be actively involved in shaping all decisions that affect their lives, are supported to achieve their full potential through the provision of appropriate services, and will live in homes and communities where their rights are respected and they are loved, safe and enjoy life.

OUR MISSION

We will use our powers and independence to ensure that the views of children and young people are routinely asked for, listened to and that outcomes for children improve over time. We will do this in partnership with others, by bringing children and young people into the heart of the decision-making process to increase understanding of their best interests.

Foreword by Maggie Atkinson

Children's Commissioner

These Practical Tips for Schools are based on work which examined outstanding safeguarding practice in primary schools. This was done for the Office of the Children's Commissioner by the NSPCC, working with Youthworks. The full report: 'You Have Someone to Trust' is available on the Children's Commissioner's website.

The report describes very good practice, found in a small but in many ways representative sample of England's primary schools. The ingredients of best practice they found there were confirmed by a wide range of professionals, and by reports from Ofsted. One of our main objectives was to identify models and illustrations of good practice which we could share widely, which could provide both the basis for these practical guidelines, and be a source of reassurance, information and professional challenge to teachers, school leaders and other children's services professionals. We wanted to look, from a primary school's perspective, at both in-school practice, and external liaison with others who help keep children safe, and who intervene when they are at risk of not being safe either in school, or in their lives outside. Above all, we wanted to hear what children said made them feel safe and, as the title quote indicates, children did feel they could trust staff in these schools with their worries.

The report and these Practical Tips, taken together, highlight the sampled schools' overall approaches to safeguarding. The view we present of these schools' overall work provides a sound context within which child protection concerns were found to be more likely to be recognised, and then robustly but sensitively addressed. We present key best practice points alongside illustrations of schools' structures, ethos and processes. Our short case studies illustrate how schools are listening to and involving children, ensuring they can both benefit from and contribute to making their school a safe place. The sampled schools are also good practice models of schools' direct engagement in support for children and their families.

I welcome the opportunity to offer these practical ideas and illustrations to schools, and other professionals involved in the lives of the children learning in them. Using our good practice points and examples, other schools can now examine their own practice, knowing others like them have good ideas to share. They can then address parts of their work which they may need to strengthen.

I would like to thank the authors, the schools, and the children who made it possible to produce these Practical Tips. It is always good to celebrate and share illustrations of excellent practice. Of course we could have found and showcased far more examples if we had had the time and resources. We know there is a lot of good practice in the system, and that schools want to learn from the best. We trust colleagues in all primary schools will benefit from reading about their colleagues' work, and will go on to implement the practices we present.



Dr Maggie Atkinson

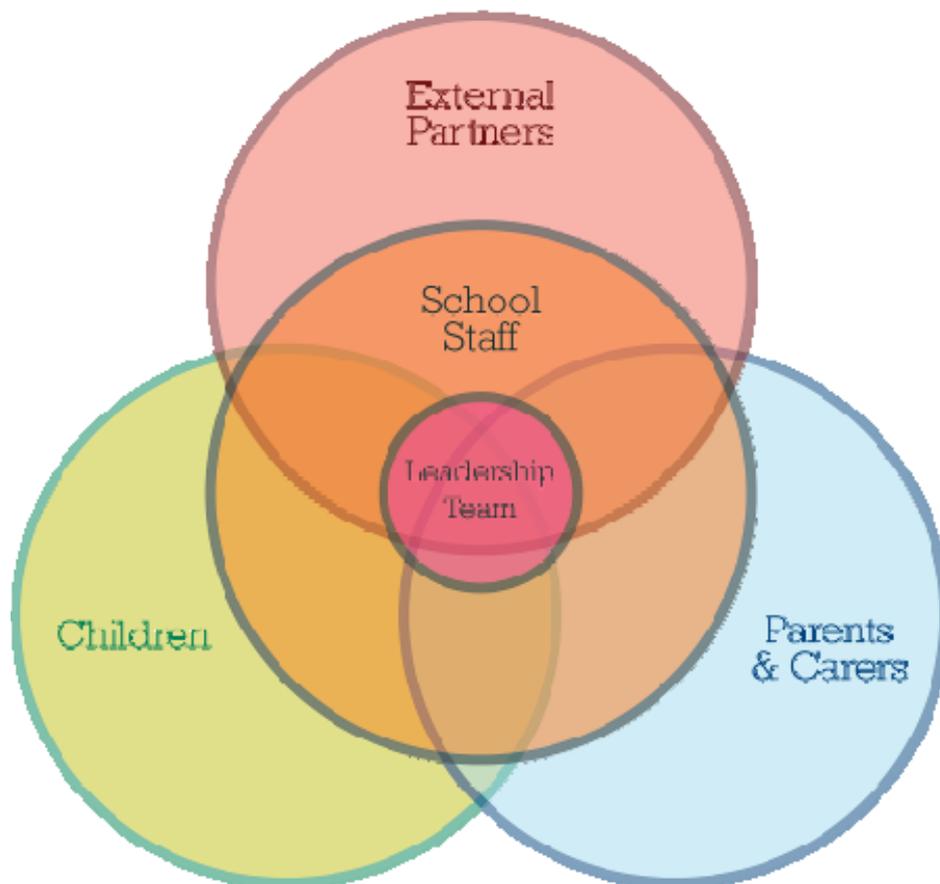
Children's Commissioner for England

Practical tips for schools: What's the purpose?

The Office of the Children's Commissioner asked the NSPCC to look into good practice concerning how primary schools in England identify and respond to safeguarding and child protection concerns. The resulting report is published together with these good practice tips.

The schools in the study were proactive in their work. Their identification and response to concerns about abuse and neglect were rooted in a whole school response to the safeguarding and support of their children. They understood that such support was essential to creating the best learning environment and provided many examples of their own work in support of families and children.

Central to their practice was collaboration with the local network of agencies involved in child protection and good relationships within the school community.



Relationships within a school are interdependent and can be challenging. The quality of these relationships is crucial to the safeguarding of children.

How will good practice in safeguarding help in the everyday running of schools?

Schools are judged on how well their children learn and behave. When children are emotionally insecure, for whatever reason, their ability to learn, interact with others and behave is often impaired. This can impact on others in and beyond their class. Recognising difficulties and tackling them early increases the child's capacity to learn, their ability to maintain good behaviour and to sustain positive and healthy relationships with peers and adults. The positive consequences – lower exclusion rates, fewer referrals to alternative provision and less conflict – are clear.

The Education Act 2002 makes schools responsible for 'safeguarding and promoting the welfare' of their pupils. Specific references to safeguarding and well being are included in the "Behaviour and Safety" Section of the Ofsted inspection framework where inspectors will consider:

- Pupils' behaviour towards, and respect for, other young people and adults, including, for example, freedom from bullying and harassment that may include cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to special educational need, sexual orientation, sex, race, religion and belief, gender reassignment or disability.
- Pupils' ability to assess and manage risk appropriately and keep themselves safe.

Inspectors also look at how well the school's leadership:

- Provides a broad and balanced curriculum that: meets the needs of all pupils; enables all pupils to achieve their full educational potential and make progress in their learning; and promotes their good behaviour and safety and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Ensures all pupils are safe.
- Manages safeguarding arrangements to ensure that there is safe recruitment and all pupils are safe, including for example, the effective identification of children in need or at risk of significant harm, including:
 - Maintaining the single central record and appropriate arrangements for child protection.
 - The rigor with which absence is followed up.
 - How well safe practices and a culture of safety are promoted through the curriculum.

In addition to the four key judgements (achievement of pupils, quality of teaching and learning, behaviour and safety, leadership and management), inspectors also consider safeguarding and wellbeing in their assessment of overall effectiveness.

The NSPCC team visited primary schools across England, serving communities with differing demographics, in order to make these case studies and practical tips widely applicable to other settings. In addition, evidence was gathered from other schools by online surveys. From the resulting analysis, some core themes emerged in respect of outstanding safeguarding practice. What follows is a set of 12 questions to help you think about the safeguarding practice in your school. It is hoped that these tips, or points for good practice, gathered from examples of the outstanding practice found in primary schools in 2011-12, together with the sample development plan at the end will assist this process.

Tip 1: Are your leadership team members involved in all aspects of safeguarding?

In all the study primary schools, the head teacher and the whole leadership team were pivotal to how well safeguarding was incorporated into the school. There was a clear shared understanding that a child who is not safe is not in a position to learn. This was shown through the personal involvement of leadership team members in individual cases – including advocating for pupils with external agencies; giving priority to safeguarding; ensuring all staff received training; and through the allocation of resources. They had developed specific school posts that related to safeguarding, and provided the time and the training for the post holder to meet their responsibilities.

These leadership teams had created a safeguarding culture through which all staff were actively and confidently identifying and sharing concerns.

Key Points for good practice

- **Senior leaders in the school are visible and accessible.**
- **Safeguarding is an overt priority**
Designated staff time for safeguarding raises its profile throughout the school and helps in the development of strong relationships with outside agencies and families.
- **Clear roles, responsibilities and systems are in place**
The Head and Senior Leadership Team promote a fundamental awareness of roles and responsibilities, creating and reiterating a cohesive structure and a shared vision which filters through to pupils, parents, carers and volunteers.
- **There is no threshold for sharing concerns and clarity about information sharing**
Any concern can be raised by any member of staff.
- **Cases are reviewed and learning shared**

Good Practice Example

“Having a whole school vigilant approach to safeguarding, with all staff taking equal responsibility for the recording and reporting of concerns.”

(Staff Survey, outstanding schools survey data)

The Senior Leadership Team led relevant staff in discussing current cases and reviewing the outcomes for the child. The emerging learning can then be shared with the whole staff, as appropriate.

Case Study

In a school in the Midlands the designated person and the senior leadership team use records of concerns as case studies in ‘team around the school’ meetings to target further support. They then feed back to staff to keep them informed of ongoing cases and the action taken. The board of governors had asked the head teacher to plot the cases that do not meet the threshold of social care but were causing concern. They wanted to look for patterns to ensure that resources were in the right place to support the children and their families. Many respondents in the study were using different methods to do this so that they could identify vulnerable groups and monitor the impact of interventions on the welfare of the child, as well as their academic achievement.

Tip 2: Is safeguarding a shared responsibility in your school?

Schools that share the responsibility for safeguarding effectively have good communication systems among the whole staff, operating formally and informally. Understanding of roles and responsibilities is gained and reinforced through training. Volunteers are informed of their role in sharing concerns, and how to do this, before they work with children.

Key Points for good practice

- All staff know how and where to record any concerns – regular training reinforces the recording systems and allows staff to voice concerns.
- All staff know who to approach if they have concerns.
- There is easy access to the designated person(s) and the senior leadership team. The head teacher operates an open door policy for concerns.
- Regular updates are given to all staff on any changes in policy, practice and concerns relating to individual pupils (as appropriate).
- There is a shared understanding that individuals might not know all the information about a child but trust that they are told what they need to know.
- The leadership team is sensitive to the importance of managing confidentiality, recognising too that staff may be members of the local community.
- Regardless of their role, all staff communicate with each other to support the children.
- Resources, including staff time are provided to reinforce individual safeguarding roles – clear policies outline the different roles within the staff team and detail the procedures to be followed.

Quote

“Our school will help you to keep safe by having school rules and when there is a problem the office will help you solve it.”

(Child's comment from focus group)

Quote

“All staff are aware of the ‘cause for concern’ sheets and how to complete them. Volunteers are informed of what to do if a disclosure is made.”

(Member of staff, inner-city community school, North of England)

Quote

“All staff are responsible for recording any changes in children's behaviour, appearance, ability to focus in class etc. A whole school recording system is in place. All concerns passed on to the Head teacher. A file is compiled so that the evidence can be monitored, discussed with safeguarding team and parental involvement instigated, if and when appropriate.”

(Staff Survey, outstanding schools survey data)

Case Study

The school has a safeguarding team which has developed a range of roles with colleagues in response to concerns and in recognition that children share their problems with a range of people.

Office staff: The head teacher recognised that many children informally raised their issues with office staff at lunchtime and often returned to the office in the afternoon when office staff had left. Appreciating the importance of this opportunity for children to talk, he negotiated a change of hours with his office staff so they would be available when needed. He reinforced issues of confidentiality, due to the frequent presence of children in the office, and the process for passing on any concerns from staff.

Development of a new role: The school developed a role of Parent Liaison/ Learning Mentor. She supported parents with a variety of issues but also broke down potential barriers in reporting concerns so that they were raised much earlier. This member of staff was part of the core safeguarding team and was better able to target early intervention work because of her wider perspective on the issues.

Family Support: The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) worked in partnership with a local Family Support service to provide a support group for parents. The group offered a forum for parents to discuss their concerns and issues and reinforced ways of developing their relationships with their children, bringing children into part of the meeting. Parents viewed the school and SENCO as supportive of their needs and felt comfortable to raise concerns at an early stage.

Central London School

Tip 3: Are staff seen as approachable by children, parents and carers and external partners?

Approachable to Children

The children in the study spoke of their trust in the staff and of being able to talk to them about any concerns or problems. They valued friendly, trusting, helpful, understanding staff who were good listeners. Whilst appreciating that these adults could not always be available, children knew the best times for them to talk to staff.

Quote

“They’ll listen to you and can understand and you can talk to adults you trust.”

(Child’s comment from focus group)

Approachable to Parents

By ensuring that staff, particularly members of the senior leadership team, were visible, accessible and felt to be approachable by parents and carers on a regular basis, any barriers could be broken down.

One parent explained:

“The open communication with both children and parents allows children and parents the confidence to approach any staff about a problem.”

Quote

“We have an open door policy, therefore parents are more likely to come and tell us if they are struggling or having problems.”

(Head Teacher, inner city school in the North of England.)

Approachable to External Partners

The positive relationships school staff had with external partners were apparent in all the schools visited.

Senior leadership team advocacy for pupils and their families enabled agencies to be introduced to them by people with whom they are already familiar. This could facilitate the engagement of parents and children.

Key Points for good practice

- The school gains feedback from children and parents, who therefore know there is a responsive, safe environment, where children feel confident in talking to adults and trust the school to take their concerns seriously, and parents’ concerns are heard.
- Senior members of staff are visible and accessible.
- The school identifies staff the pupils feel comfortable talking to and provides access to them – for example via lunch clubs or allowing children to come into school at break time. These staff may or may not be teachers.
- Staff are child centred, and tenacious in accessing support for the families in their school.
- External partners’ feedback is gained and confirms the school has good links with them in order to promote safeguarding.

Case Study

The head teacher or deputy head teacher is in the playground welcoming children in the morning and also at the end of the day to ensure the children are collected. This is the same school where children reported that 'teachers are understanding and can help you'. When a parent was asked how well their child is supported at the school, they answered: "Excellent. My child is confident to talk with any member of staff. They are all supportive and all problems are taken seriously"

'Support started at the family group as Mum was struggling with parenting. She'd had significant drug use in the past and her partner was not supportive with her three boys. The middle child was a challenge in class and was not reaching his academic potential. Mum was referred with the child to the Marlborough Education Centre and Mum took him there 4 mornings a week, attending school the rest of the time. This provided an intensive service. They attended for 16 weeks, which was reviewed regularly and school staff visited both Mum and the child there. He made slow but good progress, went down to two mornings a week and then graduated from there. There were many positive changes in this case including behaviour but mainly the relationship between mum and her children.'

Central London School

Tip 4: Do staff feel well supported in their safeguarding role?

The study found that staff are much more likely to voice concerns if they are confident they will be taken seriously and receive support. In addition, if they remained involved in a case, they received ongoing support and feedback.

Key Points for good practice

- Clear systems for reporting and recording concerns and feedback leads to staff feeling listened to and being more likely in the future to raise concerns.
- Communication on safeguarding is embedded in practice, for example through daily briefings and as a standing item in staff meetings enabling staff to raise their concerns.
- Policies are reinforced and reviewed regularly with all staff. Resources such as quick reference reminders of their duties and induction information are available.
- Regular training is provided, in addition to the statutory updates that are required. The training provided responds to needs and issues identified by staff.
- Staff are given professional and emotional support in their safeguarding duties. All staff have timely access to Leadership Team members to discuss their concerns and receive feedback on how these will be addressed.

Quote

“The school is run brilliantly and the support is great. I feel part of the school community even though I am just in for an hour.”

(Midday Supervisor, village school in Midlands.)

Case Study

One school noticed that a significant number of children had lost a parent within a short timescale. The head teacher recognized that this could be very difficult for the supporting staff. She ensured that specialist support was readily available for staff so their own feelings would not get in the way of them supporting the pupil. They were also able to explore the best way of supporting their pupils with their bereavement. Staff were able to raise any concerns, in the knowledge that their concerns would be taken seriously and so that the situation for the children did not worsen before the school intervened. The impact on the children at this school was clear. When the pupils were asked if they felt comfortable speaking to a member of staff the responses were very positive: “Teachers are understanding”, “They are good to talk to” and “I really trust Mrs X and Mrs Y”.

City School, North of England

Tip 5: Are all concerns recorded and monitored in a consistent way and do they inform the targetting of early intervention?

Staff used a variety of ways to record information, including 'niggle notes', 'causes for concern' forms, individual record books and use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The consistent factor was that the monitoring role was held by a member of the senior leadership team.

Key Points for good practice

- A 'zero threshold' is in place for the level of concerns that get recorded and discussed: no concern is too small to be considered.
- All staff have access to the recording system used in the school. This promotes communication across the school staff team, extending to midday supervisors, learning mentors, office staff and caretakers as well as teachers.
- Records are monitored and collated regularly by a member of the senior leadership team with the appropriate feedback given to staff. This illustrates the effectiveness of the procedure and reinforces staff vigilance.
- Monitoring is used to evaluate the child's case and also the school processes as a whole.
- Records are used to identify need and target resources, including training needs.
- Early allocation of school resources, such as learning mentor time or support groups, is considered so that this may prevent the escalation of problems and the need for multi-agency interventions at a later stage.
- Monitoring provides evidence of the involvement of other agencies.

Case Study

The school uses provision mapping and they include a vulnerable child column so that school can see which children have vulnerabilities or additional needs and school can then track data so that they can monitor impact of intervention on achievement, needs and levels. These can then be used to review the policies and make adaptations that relate to the school and pupils in it. This information is also used to ensure resources are in the right place.

Member of staff, London Primary School

Tip 6: What safeguarding and child protection training does your school provide?

Good safeguarding training involves the whole school community. Outstanding schools provide additional training beyond formal requirements and tailored to the needs of their staff, as well as for any pupils involved in peer support.

Potential resources for training include: printed materials as a reference guide; formal training repeated at regular intervals; cascaded training on relevant issues during staff meetings; and informal discussions with Senior Leadership Team regarding learning from disclosures or individual concerns.

Key Points for good practice

- All staff have safeguarding awareness training to reinforce their shared responsibility. This includes all staff, governors, and those volunteers who are regularly engaged in the school. It can extend, where appropriate, to after school club.
- Child protection training is provided which enables staff to understand the nature of abuse and neglect, recognise when children are at risk or are suffering abuse, know their responsibilities to protect children, have a sound grasp of school policies and procedures and how school processes fit with local safeguarding and child protection procedures.
- Training reflects specific lead responsibilities for safeguarding within the school and is responsive to the changing needs of children. This may be in response to changing local circumstances (for example, increased numbers of refugees in the area, a Traveller population, a rise in unemployment) or adaptation in response to specific cases that have occurred in the school.
- Pupils providing peer support are provided with appropriate training and ongoing support for their role.
- Parents are offered sessions in basic safeguarding awareness and assisted to understand the school's responsibilities and its policy and systems.

Quote

"Training is the most important [aspect of safeguarding]. Accountability is relevant and everyone knows their responsibility."

(Staff Survey, Outstanding schools survey data)

Quote

"All support, admin, caretaking, meal time supervisors are included [in training] as well as teaching staff."

(Staff Survey, Outstanding schools survey data)

Examples of printed materials mentioned by staff:

- Induction booklet covering some safeguarding issues
- Staff Handbook outlining relevant procedures and who the designated teachers are
- Staff Code of Conduct detailing specific areas of safeguarding
- Safeguarding and 'safer recruitment' guides for governors
- Child Protection policy and procedures given to all staff, volunteers & governors

Case Study

There had been an increase in the number of children who had experienced domestic abuse. The staff recognised the need for further training on this issue and the impact of the children in their classes. This was raised in a staff meeting and the school provided training and arranged a visit to the local refuge.

London School

Tip 7: Are there a range of listening and support strategies to meet the individual needs of pupils?

Schools need to have systems which will pick up children's worries and enable recognition of problems which may reflect abuse or neglect. Children have spoken of the need for vigilance so that they do not always have to speak out about what is happening to them. The schools in the study had a range of 'listening systems', many designed to enable children to find the support they needed. They included both adult led and a range of pupil led systems- the latter variously called 'playground pals', 'problem pals' or 'peer mentors' (See section 8 below). Most of the children consulted said they would choose to talk to these peer supporters. Adult led listening and support systems are identified in the chart below and more illustrations are given in the full report. **Relevant training for staff and pupils in these approaches and in identifying and responding to child protection concerns is essential.**

Quote

*What does it mean to feel safe?
"Having friends and Playground Pals to help and support you."
(Child's comment from focus group)*

Quote

*"We know we can talk to an adult and when we do we feel very safe."
(Child's comment from focus group)*

Listening and support in the classroom

- **Times to talk** – simply agreeing with the class when a teacher or teaching assistant or other member of staff is available to talk can prevent frustration at not being able to find them. It also promotes an understanding that staff want to listen.
- **Worry Boxes** – children can write their worries on a slip and post them – anonymously if they wish. Teachers regularly monitor the box and then speak to the children individually or use the issues raised as a stimulus for circle time sessions.
- **Circle time** – a regular meeting with safe ground rules for the class. It can be used for many purposes: as an opportunity to discuss wider issues; to express and discuss feelings; to model and develop social skills; and to enhance class relationships.
- **Circle of friends** – the children can access this support with the help of a member of staff. This is a group approach where peers can support a child in their classroom or in the playground.
- **Dedicated space/ quiet areas** – if children experience difficulties there is a space to which they can go. Teachers can then follow up proactively to see if the child wants to talk about the issue. This can be in the classroom and/or in the playground.

Listening and support across the whole school

- **School Council** – a group of elected children who represent their class. They seek the views of their class on specific issues, usually during circle time, and then feed them back to senior staff during regular school council meetings. It is important this is a two way process and representatives have the opportunity to feedback to their classes.
- **Nurture Groups** - A nurture group is a small group of 6 to 10 children / young people based in the school and staffed by trained adults. Nurture groups offer a short term, focused, intervention strategy, which addresses barriers to learning arising from social / emotional and or behavioural difficulties, in an inclusive, supportive manner. This is done by developing social skills in group activities. To be effective, a range of techniques are used by skilled staff to help children to re-join their classes.

- **Lunchtime and Breakfast Club** - these were seen as informal settings where children were given the opportunity to talk if they wanted to. In one school there was a lunchtime nurture group where children could drop in if they needed the support.
- **Individual Counselling** – this can be provided by voluntary organizations, sometimes with support from the local authority. Children can self refer, parents can refer or staff can refer a child if they have concerns.
- **Family Support** - in one school the Marlborough Family Group Early Intervention worker liaised with the SENCO to run a family group. In another school a Family Liaison worker runs homework and gardening club as an informal way of supporting vulnerable pupils. The children use it as a safe place to be and build a trusting relationship with the worker. Support was also accessed from local authority multi agency teams for families in difficulty (one school referred to the Dinosaur school for Family Support work).
- **Learning Mentors** – additional staff can support children with emotional and behavioural issues.

Key Points for good practice

- The school has a range of support systems and approaches that are informed by the needs and concerns of their children. These include arrangements for increased direct support to more vulnerable children.
- The systems are planned to pick up and respond to problems at an early stage and also to ensure that where children are at risk of or experiencing abuse or neglect there will be a timely and appropriate response.
- The different systems are planned to complement each other as part of an overall strategy and individual support is planned in the context of a whole school approach.
- Peer support arrangements empower children to help each other are properly resourced and well supported.
- Schools know from their children that they believe and trust that the staff are there to help and support them.
- Pupil participation is embedded in the way the school runs. Children know that they will be supported to express their views and their wishes and to have them heard and taken seriously. School Councils that make a difference are key to this but are only one such mechanism.

Tip 8: Do children have a voice in your school systems and are they able to give their feedback?

The study notes the children's views about what was helpful. *Circle time* was the most popular listening system and offered the opportunity for pupils to lead the content. Questionnaires enabled schools to focus their safeguarding work on pupils concerns and consultation identified ways of dealing with bullying concerns.

Key Points for good practice

- **Children have opportunities and choices to talk to someone and be taken seriously** – such as circle time when pupils can lead the content through use of worry boxes.
- **Children have opportunities to express their views and to give feedback on what worked.**
The use of questionnaires can range from assessing anti-bullying work; audits of relevant policies, such as those on behaviour, so children can gain ownership of these.
- **Children can be involved directly in systems for listening and support to other pupils.**
- **Peer Support** – this operated in all the schools visited, and was tailored to the needs of the school. The groups offered listening support to their peers under different names: Problem Pals, Rainbow Rangers, Friendship Squad, Peer Mentors. These groups were given training for their role and supported by an identified member of staff.
- **Buddies** - Schools operated a system where new pupils were given a 'buddy' to help them settle in. This system was also offered to pupils who were identified as vulnerable.
- **"Circle of Friends"** – These groups were used to support pupils with issues. "Circle of friends" is an approach to enhancing the inclusion, in a mainstream setting, of any young person who is experiencing difficulties in school because of a disability, personal crisis or because of their challenging behaviour towards others.
- **School forums and other formal approaches to consultation.**

Quote

"A teacher will speak to you in private if you are worried and will take it seriously."

(Child comment, from focus groups)

Quote

"The worry box is for people to use if they are worried - if you are frightened you can use the worry box."

(Child comment, from focus groups)

School councils can contribute to school developments, such as redesigning the playground or ordering play equipment, can contribute to support groups for children and can provide a line of communication between each class and the Senior Leadership Team. Some children in the study schools had been involved in work with their Local Children's Safeguarding Board, contributing to resources for schools. Education professionals have highlighted the value of broader pupil participation in surveys and consultations, such as the '*I stay safe consultation*'.

Case Study

One London school had a system of “Problem Pals”. During discussions it was clear that there were definite stages in the development of their role:

- **Recruitment:** to become a Problem Pal children had to complete an application form and have an interview to explain why they wanted to do it. One of the group had wanted to join because they had problems in the previous year and received help so they wanted to ‘*give something back*’.
- **Training:** once they had completed the interview process, they received two days training. The group demonstrated a clear pride in their role and a mature understanding of its limitations. The training had made clear when they should pass their concerns to staff as well as developing other skills.
- **Daily routine:** they worked on a rota basis and observed the playground. Children could make an appointment to have a chat about any worries in the Rainbow Room, where a Problem Pal listened and helped them to find a solution.
- **Monitoring:** they also had a monitoring system, so if a child had been to see them more than six times they would automatically pass their details to a teacher.
- **Ongoing support:** this was provided by a member of staff and is vital for the safety and wellbeing of the children involved.

Above are the critical ingredients in all peer support initiatives. The children felt it was empowering to be trusted to help their peers and that they valued the opportunity to listen. The school recognised that issues were raised with Problem Pal that would otherwise have been unknown and could have escalated.

Tip 9: Are children given skills and knowledge on keeping safe?

The schools in the study addressed safeguarding themes in a planned way, commonly using resources such as Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) as a basis. They also used visual aids around the school to reinforce 'staying safe' messages and what children could do if they were worried about anything. The posters and messages were at a height that enabled the children to see them. There were also ChildLine posters around the school in discreet places for those that might want to use that service.

Quote

"The aim of teaching children keeping safe messages is: 'Generating knowledge among children – what to do if...'"

(Staff Survey, outstanding schools survey data)

A range of targeted activities could include:

- Curriculum activities
- Circle Time
- Local partner agency visits
- Theatre visits or drama activities
- Anti-bullying week activities
- Police Community Safety Officer (PCSO) visits
- Newsletters
- Kidsafe materials or other input on the nature of abuse and neglect
- Sessions on domestic violence
- NSPCC talks or resources
- Internet safety activities
- Displays and notices in school

Key Points for good practice

- 'Keeping safe' messages are embedded in the whole school approach, through assemblies and classroom activities.
- The curriculum is designed and resources used in creative ways to introduce and consolidate keeping safe messages and skills.
- Visual aids reinforce the messages given and provide signposts to support.

Case Study

One school held an annual closed assembly with just the head teacher and a senior member of staff where they discussed in a sensitive way the different forms of child abuse and reinforced messages concerning who the children could talk to and how the school helped to keep them safe. They used the assembly as a confidential forum (within safe limits) to encourage the children to take opportunities to talk. Every year issues were raised by the children following the assembly and the head teacher felt it was an important part of teaching their children about safeguarding.

Tip 10: How do you engage with parents and carers?

Parents need to be aware of the school's responsibilities for safeguarding, and how schools plan to exercise these responsibilities. Schools in the study recognised that fostering supportive relationships with parents achieved better outcomes for their children and were proactive in engaging them. Staff were thereby able to raise concerns and encourage parents' engagement with help from within the school or other intervention. Some schools also recognised particular times of stress for families and sought to address these before issues arose. For example, one school had offered parents a support group during their child's transition from Year 6 to Year 7.

Quote

"We have a good relationship with parents and children. We know our families, we are aware of events that may cause stress to families such as relationship break ups, military deployment, redundancy etc. We monitor all children and any changes are noted and followed up if we have concerns. We have an open door policy therefore parents are more likely to come and tell us if they are struggling or having problems."

(Head teacher, inner city school, North of England)

Key points for good practice

- Staff are available and approachable: demonstrated by such steps as staff and leadership team being visible at the beginning and end of the day.
- Parents know who to talk to about their concerns.
- Involvement of parents and carers in different aspects of school life is welcomed: this can range from volunteering in classroom to developing policies. Child and parent friendly versions of policies are available online.
- Good communication: a combination of formal and informal approaches which can include letters, access to a web site, policies, prospectus and meetings, conversations in the playground and phone calls.
- Identifying vulnerable parents and proactively offering support: staff observe parent-child interactions in the playground. Concerns could then be raised through the usual processes and staff would engage sensitively with parents.
- Providing information about and access to external support agencies.
- Parents and carers give regular feedback on safeguarding issues and school processes so schools know whether their parents and carers feel engaged.

Case Studies

'There was a little boy who was very quiet, shy and tearful. Mum was shy and had limited English. She had moved area after fleeing domestic violence and did not appear to be coping. The child was quite challenging at home. We had a meeting at school to discuss issues and it came out that she was thinking of returning to her partner so that the child was happy. I went with Mum, for support, to some coffee mornings and asked other mums what groups were good and again went with her. Mum has now made friends and has got support and the child is fine.'

Pastoral Support, Central London School

'I received a disclosure from a girl who was very tearful as she thought her mother had told her she didn't love her anymore and locked her out of the house and she ate her dinner sitting on the floor. I filled in the cause for concern form, passed it to the SENCO, who felt it was appropriate to speak to the parent to get full story and it turned out the mother was having problems with the child's older sibling and the child had got confused and thought it was her she was angry with. Support was offered to the mother and older sibling and the parent explained and comforted the child.'

Member of staff, village school, Midlands

Tip 11: Is priority given to developing relationships with your external partners?

The schools in the study saw the importance of developing a partnership with external support agencies and felt they were well placed both to ask for advice and press for support for their pupils and families. Professionals that came into the school or worked with children and families felt that they had clear access to the senior leadership team and that they were unified in their approach and that by being so the outcomes for children and families were much better.

Key Points for good practice

- A key member of staff, for example the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), is given time and responsibility to establish relationships with external partners.
- Space is allocated in school for multi agency-meetings and for agencies to meet with pupils and their parents.
- Schools are actively engaged in the community and are a recognised hub for support.
- Staff are given opportunities to develop skills and resources in supporting and protecting children.

Case Study

The Marlborough Family Group Early Intervention worker comes into school and works in partnership with the SENCO. They have between 2-10 families that attend their meetings and they have set up home/school targets, in agreement with the families, that are marked. They talk to the adults for the first half an hour, to air any issues, then bring in the children. They then do a task with the adults and the children and the children have an opportunity to talk. They also offer 1:1 parent support if the parent doesn't want to come to the group. This is not time restricted and is available to families for as long as they feel they need it.

Central London School

Tip 12: Are your policies 'living' documents which develop from reflection on practice?

The whole school community needs to understand and be engaged with policies and procedures for protecting and promoting the welfare of children. Above all, staff need to understand these, identify concerns and know how to act on them. Schools in the study were keen to make sure their policies captured best practice, were responsive and regularly reviewed and that parents and pupils were well informed about them.

Quote

"It was the way that school reacted to incidents and altered their policies in line with the lessons learnt from the incident."

(Parent, village school, Midlands)

One of the impressive features of these schools was the time taken to reflect on their safeguarding and early intervention practice and to make their setting safer for children.

The good communication systems in place enabled staff to feed in any concerns, address good practice and share their learning. This adaptability and responsive way of working ensures that the school is learning all the time and making sure that its practice is as good as it can be. This can only be achieved if the time and commitment is taken to examine practice and evaluate how successful they have been.

Key Points for good practice

- Policies reflect real life concerns and are adjusted to the needs of the school community. They are regularly reviewed in accordance with both statutory requirements and school needs.
- Policies are communicated consistently across the staff group: study schools used staff meetings, INSET or the learning platform. Some schools ensured that staff read through the relevant policies at the beginning of each year and signed to say they had done so.
- Policies are related to the specific roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers.
- Policies are accessible to all.

Case Study

The head teacher of a school in the North of England ensured that the responsibility for safeguarding and child protection was written into each person's induction pack, to the relevant level, and was discussed with them within the first few days of joining the school. This was then followed up with further informal discussions about specific concerns to reinforce the agreed procedures.

Sample Development Plan

Question	Notes
1. Are your leadership team involved in all aspects of safeguarding?	
2. Is safeguarding a shared responsibility in your school?	
3. Are all staff seen as approachable and accessible by children, parents and carers and external partners?	
4. Do staff feel well supported in their safeguarding role?	
5. Are all concerns recorded and monitored in a consistent way and do they inform the targeting of early intervention?	
6. What safeguarding and child protection training does your school provide?	

7. Are there a range of listening and support strategies to meet pupils' individual needs?

8. Do children have a voice in your school systems and are they able to give their feedback?

9. Are children given skills and knowledge on keeping safe?

10. How do you engage with parents and carers?

11. Is priority given to developing relationships with your external partners?

12. Are your policies 'living' documents which develop from reflection on practice?



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