

# **GUIDELINES FOR SAFEGUARDING RECORD KEEPING IN SCHOOLS**

**November 2016**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Schools Safeguarding Officer has produced these guidelines for DSLs in schools with to assist them in establishing and maintaining record keeping systems that support effective safeguarding practice. The importance of good, clear child welfare and child protection record keeping has been repeatedly highlighted in many Serious Case Reviews, including the 2013 high profile enquiry into the death of Daniel Pelka. The document "Keeping Children Safe in Education" highlights the area of record keeping as a key task of the school's DSL.
- 1.2 Promoting the welfare of and safeguarding children is a whole school task. Ensuring all staff know when and how to record concerns about a child, however small or apparently insignificant is an essential part of the DSL role. Good record keeping is an important part of a school's accountability to children and their families and will assist DSLs in meeting their key responsibility to respond appropriately to concerns for children. Records should be factually accurate, relevant, up to date and auditable. They should support monitoring, risk-assessment and planning for children and enable informed and timely referrals to be made when necessary. A well maintained chronology is a fundamental part of good record keeping.

## **2 Establishing a standard school recording process**

- 2.1 The use of a standard "concern" form for all staff irrespective of their role in school is strongly recommended. It is suggested that this is photocopied onto coloured paper to promote familiarisation and shared ownership of the school's "concern form." The form must be easily accessible to all staff and depending on the size and type of school should be available in a range of settings for example, the staff room, school office, and Head Teacher's /DSL's /Pastoral care staff offices.
- 2.2 You may find it helpful to use a whole staff meeting to introduce the form to staff. Ideally this should be in the context of a safeguarding training / raising awareness session. Where this is not possible, meetings of each staff group e.g. teaching, classroom assistant, mid day supervision, domestic should be used. These meetings will provide an opportunity to remind staff of their safeguarding responsibilities and the expectations on them to report and record concerns. Meetings can be a useful forum for clarifying what you as the school's DSL would view as a "concern". This should include evidence of underlying risk factors and Early Help requirements.

- 2.3 It is acknowledged that many schools employ a range of staff who hold specific pastoral care responsibilities and may have their own systems for recording their ongoing work with children and their families. It is especially important that DSLs are aware of these systems and establish processes for sharing information. In some cases it may be appropriate for pastoral care staff to provide copies of their records for inclusion in children's safeguarding files. In all cases where specific incidents or events arise, pastoral care staff must be aware of the need to complete the school's concern form.
- 2.4 Staff should be guided in recording to be mindful of the possibility that this may be shared with others at some stage and in exceptional cases, the possibility that they may become evidence in court proceedings. It is therefore essential that Head Teachers and DSLs ensure that such processes are in place and that staff are supervised appropriately in carrying out these arrangements.
- 2.5 It is also vital that Head Teachers / DSLs notify staff of how they will respond to reported / recorded concerns. Staff need to feel empowered to seek clarification on why concerns have not been reported to the statutory agencies and if concerns remain then a consultation should be sought with the School Safeguarding Officer.

### **3. Recording Guidance for staff**

3.1 Safeguarding children is a whole school task. All staff have an important role to play in helping to identify welfare concerns and possible indicators of abuse or neglect at an early stage. For some children a "one off" serious incident or concern may occur and you will have no doubt that this must be immediately recorded and reported. Most often however it is the accumulation of a number of small incidents, events or observations that provide the evidence of harm being caused to a child. It is vital therefore that any concern you have for a child however small is recorded and passed to the DSL. ALL concerns must be recorded on the concern form.

#### **3.2 What is a "concern"?**

- Evidence of any indicators of abuse either, Emotional, Physical, Sexual or Neglect.
- Underlying Risk Factors
- High Risk Indicators
- Allegations
- Disclosures
- Concerning information from third parties about pupils
- ANYTHING that makes you feel worried about a pupil, their family or their lifestyle

### 3.3 What do I record?

Ensure;

- the form is written in ink, dated, signed and your details are legible
- the incident / event / observation of concern is described clearly and concisely
- it is written using straightforward language and fact and opinion are differentiated.
- if recording a disclosure, the child's own words are recorded and any questions you may have asked are included
- physical marks and injuries are recorded on a body map where appropriate

### 3.4 How to record actions taken in response to staff concerns

When a concern form is passed to you it is important that you check this is sufficiently detailed and has been dated and signed by the staff member who has reported the concern. If a body map has been completed or there are any other documents referred to in the record ensure these are attached and where appropriate are also dated and signed.

3.5 It is important that you make a record of the action you take in response to every concern form passed to you. The level of detail of this record will clearly depend on the nature and seriousness of the concern but may include

- Requests to staff for monitoring specific aspects of the child's presentation, behaviour, attendance etc
- Discussions and telephone calls (with colleagues, parents and children / young people and other agencies or services)
- Professional consultations/advice
- Referrals

## 4 When and how to start safeguarding records

4.1 Once a welfare concern has been passed to you and you have made a record of the action you have taken in response to this, these documents require storage in a separate safeguarding filing system. **This is regardless of whether formal child protection procedures have been initiated.** For some children this single record will be the only concern you hold for them over their time in school. For others, further information will be brought to you often from a variety of sources over time.

- 4.2 An effective method for storing single or infrequent records of concerns is to file these in alphabetically divided ring binder files. It may be helpful for larger / busier schools to use separate files for each Year group. This system is particularly recommended for Primary schools since this will assist you at the end of the Academic Year with meeting your responsibility to transfer records when children leave the school.
- 4.3 A stand-alone individual file for a child must be started when
- Concerns for the child and consequently records of these and actions in school are increasing
  - The child has been referred to Specialist Children's Services
  - You have been made aware of the involvement of Specialist Children's Services with the child / family and are contributing to multi agency assessments
  - The child is at Level 2 or above on the Continuum of Need
- 4.4 Where concerns relate to more than one child from the same family at the school a separate file for each child should be created. Common records e.g child protection conference minutes should be duplicated for each file where appropriate.
- 4.5 When an individual file is started it is helpful to use the front pupil information sheet to enable key information to be easily accessed.

## **5 What records should be included in a child's safeguarding file?**

- All school welfare concern forms
  - Any notes initially recorded in the form of notebooks or diaries
  - Records of discussions, telephone calls and meetings (with colleagues, other agencies or services, parents and children / young people)
  - Professional consultations
  - Letters sent and received
  - Referral forms
  - Minutes of meetings (copies for each child as appropriate)
  - Formal plans linked to the child (e.g. Child Protection Plan)
- 5.1 In cases where information is held in this variety of formats it may be helpful to use a ring binder file and organise this on a 'modular' basis for ease of reference – see file contents sheet.

## **6 Chronologies**

- 6.1 The importance of understanding concerns for a child in the context of history, time-lines and other known information cannot be underestimated. Chronologies are central to this process and it is strongly recommended that these are completed on an ongoing basis as the case progresses. In addition to aiding assessment, a chronology will serve as an important record of school actions and when attached to an Inter Agency Referral form can provide evidence for the reason for the referral.

- 6.2 A chronology should list specific and significant incidents, events and actions taken in relation to the child and where appropriate their family, with a brief explanation or cross-reference to the relevant record within the file.
- 6.3 A chronology is most helpfully stored at the front of a child's safeguarding file alongside the front sheet where it can be quickly accessed and viewed. It should be kept up to date

## **7 Storage of records**

- 7.1 Safeguarding records must be kept separate from all other records relating to that pupil in school. Safeguarding records should be stored in a locked cabinet within the DSL's office with access only to those with direct safeguarding responsibility for pupils. It is essential to ensure that the school's Leadership Team know the arrangements for access to records in the absence of the DSL from school.

## **8 Sharing information**

- 8.1 All information held by the school should be shared with Specialist Children's Services, police and health professionals as appropriate, where there is a concern that a child is at risk of significant harm. Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 authorizes all agencies to share information in these circumstances. Early Help is an essential part of safeguarding and DSLs should refer to thresholds guidance for advice on how and when to share lower level information.
- 8.2 On occasions where safeguarding concerns exist for a child in the context of a family situation and siblings attend other schools, it may be appropriate for the DSL to consult on a confidential basis with the DSL from another school to share and jointly consider concerns. If in any doubt about the appropriateness of this process, advice can be sought from your Schools Safeguarding Officer.

## **9 Data Protection**

- 9.1 Records relating to safeguarding are exempt information under the Education (School Records) Regulation 1989. They can be kept on computer and are exempt from the disclosure provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984.
- 9.2 Neither the parent nor the pupil has an automatic right of access to safeguarding records. It is however best practice to share information written by school staff unless there is a valid reason to withhold it. If an application is made to see the whole record, advice should be sought from your Schools Safeguarding Officer, and the child's social worker if they have one. All third party information should be removed, or consent sought for its disclosure from source.

- 9.3 Cases of alleged abuse that result in court proceedings may require the school to disclose their records, either through the police or Children's Social Care. Records (suitably anonymized) may also be requested for use in disciplinary proceedings.
- 9.4 In all court cases, a requesting solicitor or other third party should be advised that a Witness Summons or Subpoena should be obtained. In these situations the advice of your Schools Safeguarding Officer and legal department should be sought.

## **10 Transfer of Safeguarding Records**

- 10.1 When children transfer from your school and safeguarding records have been kept, these sent to the receiving school as soon as the pupil is on roll at the new school. The transfer of safeguarding records should be arranged separately from the main pupil file in line with DfE guidance. It is recommended that these are passed directly to the DSL in the receiving school.
- 10.2 Ideally safeguarding records should be hand delivered to the new school. Where this is not possible they should be sent recorded delivery. A receipt should be obtained and retained by the originating school. Where records are sent by recorded delivery this receipt should be pursued until received.
- 10.3 Current guidance from the Records Management Society is that when a pupil with a child protection record reaches statutory school leaving age, **the last school attended** should keep the child protection file until the pupil's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. It should then be shredded (and a record kept of this having been done, date, and why)
- 10.4 **It is not advised that schools keep copies of safeguarding records unless there is any ONGOING legal action.** It could be argued that a child protection plan could be described as ongoing legal action. Therefore if a pupil is CURRENTLY on a CP plan, copies of records should be kept until they are no longer on a CP plan. Efforts should be made to maintain contact with receiving school to establish when this happens.
- 10.5 If a child who is subject of a child protection or child in need plan leaves your school and you are unaware of the name of the child's new education placement you should contact the child's social worker to discuss how records should be transferred.
- 10.6 Where safeguarding records exist and the child leaves and details of the receiving establishment are not known, schools should follow Children Missing Education guidance and procedures and/or seek advice from Schools Safeguarding Officer.