

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – SAFEGUARDING ADVICE FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN V1

What is the status of this local guidance for schools for safeguarding vulnerable children during Covid-19?

This guidance is issued to reflect the COVID 19 situation and the context of increased child absence and school closure during term time. This guidance is draft and will be under regular review to reflect local, regional and national advice.

KSCIE September 2019 states (**See KCSIE 2019 page 19 para 65**) *During term time, the designated safeguarding lead and/or a deputy should always be available (during school or college hours) for staff in the school or college to discuss any safeguarding concerns. It is a matter for individual schools and colleges and the designated safeguarding lead to arrange adequate and appropriate cover arrangements for any out of hours/out of term activities.*

AND KCSIE 2019 Annex B (Role of the DSL) page 95

Availability

During term time the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should always be available (during school or college hours) for staff in the school or college to discuss any safeguarding concerns. Whilst generally speaking the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) would be expected to be available in person, it is a matter for individual schools and colleges, working with the designated safeguarding lead, to define what “available” means and whether in exceptional circumstances availability via phone and or Skype or other such media is acceptable. It is a matter for individual schools and colleges and the designated safeguarding lead to arrange adequate and appropriate cover arrangements for any out of hours/out of term activities.

As you are aware from Monday 23rd March the majority of schools will be partially closed until further notice. The County Council will continue to support all DSLs and senior leaders in schools during this time.

What are schools statutory obligations for children and young people that are Children Looked After, on Child Protection Plans, are Children in Need or who have an Early Help Assessment if schools are closed?

There is an expectation that statutory partners continue to discharge their safeguarding responsibilities and participate in discussions/ checks and meetings as required (there has been no Governmental guidance to relax these duties). We however need to be mindful of potential sickness and contamination and different means of communication may be employed depending on how many people are impacted by illness. KCSIE 2019 provides brief guidance regarding how schools should maintain support and information sharing protocols for children subject to CP and safeguarding plans and concerns:

These are unprecedented circumstances and latest government guidance is that schools continue to support vulnerable children. We are awaiting national guidance on how this will operate. We will provide an update when that is available.

How do I prepare for school closure in relation to safeguarding children in education?

The Senior Leadership Team will need to complete a risk assessment for COVID-19 in relation to vulnerable children.

Vulnerable children:

Review the Vulnerable Children's list to identify:

- Children on a Section 47 Child Protection Plan,
- Children on a Section 17 Child in Need Plan,
- Children for whom an extended period of time at home will present an additional risk to the child,
- Children open to Targeted Family Support /Early Help
- Children who are acting as Young Carers
- Looked After Children
- Based on the level of need/concern, the school should consider how often a home visit would be needed if these children were not in a school setting, if unsure link with your Social Worker or Early Help staff in the Local Authority.

Additionally, there are a number of key aspects to consider now, for example: child protection of all children, access to food and any known financial burdens.

Schools should identify their vulnerable students on the basis of risk. We suggest red, amber and green. These 'grades' mean:

Red – most risk of harm or neglect and fewest protective factors (would include those with a child protection plan)

Amber – a moderate risk of harm, but with some protective factors (would include those identified as 'Child in Need'; and those with a social worker)

Green – some concerns escalating or unmet needs; or have been red or amber and need monitoring

What actions should I take if a vulnerable child does not come to school during this period?

If the vulnerable child is not in school (for example where a family are self-isolating or choosing not to send the child to school due to risk) DSLs will need to contact the family by phone.

How often will be depend on the risk assessment above.

1. This will vary from 1-3 days, but contact will be no longer than every 3 days. Record this risk assessment on the child's file.
2. Divide the children between the DSL team and ensure that each member of the team knows which child they are allocated to.

3. Where a school receives Operation Encompass/Domestic Violence notification emails the in-box should be checked on a daily basis and appropriate actions taken (the same process will continue as normal)
4. Record this decision on the child's file.
5. Liaise with specialist health teams for any child with a chronic long-term health needs to inform them of a school closure.
6. The DSL must ensure that remote access (working from home) to access the school IT system where possible and that a laptop/iPad is available for each member of the DSL team.
7. Establish where the children will be living in the event of a closure and discuss with parents the need to respond to calls.
8. Contact details of parents, social worker and any multi-agency professional working with the child are recorded on the child's file.
9. Discuss with neighbouring schools about DSL cover in the case of sickness.

How should the school record contact during this period?

All contact or support with vulnerable children and families should be recorded. During school closures, products like CPOMS and My Concern really do come into their own, as they can be securely accessed from anywhere. Remember though that if the screen is visible in non-secure areas, for example, at home, that there can be a data breach, if other members of your family can see it.

Record action taken:

-Spoken to parent

-Spoken to child

-Summary of Conversation

-Arising actions

What Home Visiting should a school carry out?

The most vulnerable children will potentially need a home visit, so that they can be seen in person, this could be the role of the DSL (All usual measures around staff safety to be taken into account.)

The frequency of any visit should be related to risk, but probably at least once a week. In cases of self-isolation, aiming to view through a window may be appropriate. For any children with a social worker, other professionals should be kept informed. This is especially important, since for many children, school is a protective factor and when it is missing, the risk may increase, and children's services may need to reassess the case.

Phone calls will also be important. Ideally these calls should be made using school phones, rather than personal devices. If personal phones are used please put in place measures to withhold numbers.

What are the arrangements for CP conferences and CIN meetings?

The SQAS service has confirmed that all CP meetings will take place virtually. For CIN meetings, social workers will expect information in writing from partners to inform CIN progress meetings.

Will home visits be carried out in CP cases and for vulnerable families open to children's social care?

Unannounced visits will not take place but phone calls will be made to families whose children are open to Social Care and the situation will be checked. If a visit is deemed necessary by the Social Worker, a visit will be undertaken. If you are aware of any new information of any child you are working with please notify the Social Worker. They will confirm a plan of action once they have risk assessed the information.

What procedures for schools should be in place for children that are missing from education in the closure period?

We will consider any necessary changes to current procedures for this eventuality and provide updated guidance for all schools in due course.