

Safeguarding Principles within the Virtual School

Somerset Virtual School recognises its responsibilities for safeguarding children and protecting them from harm. This safeguarding policy is regularly reviewed by the VSH who is also the Designated Safeguarding Lead. She can be contacted via

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Safeguarding children is defined as:

The actions we take to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. These actions are everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children has a role to play. All Virtual School staff who work with children and young people are regularly trained (level 3) by Somerset Safeguarding Children's Board.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment
- Preventing impairment of children's 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

Safeguarding is not just about protecting children from deliberate harm. It also relates to broader aspects of care and education including:

- Pupils' health and safety and well-being, including their mental health
- Meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- The use of reasonable force
- Meeting the needs of children with medical conditions
- Providing first aids
- Educational visits
- Intimate care and emotional wellbeing
- Online safety and associated issues

Safeguarding can involve a range of potential issues such as:

- Neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse
- Bullying, including online bullying (by text message, on social networking sites, etc.) and prejudice based bullying
- Racist, disability and homophobic or transphobic abuse.
- Gender based violence/violence against women and girls
- Extremist behaviour and/or radicalisation
- Child sexual exploitation and trafficking

- The impact of new technologies, including 'sexting' and accessing pornography
- Teenage relationship abuse
- Substance misuse.
- Issues which may be specific to a local area or population, for example gang activity and youth violence
- Particular issues affecting children including domestic violence, female genital mutilation and honour based violence and forced marriage.

Our ethos is that the effective safeguarding of children can only be achieved by putting children at the centre of a system where we listen and hear what they say. Every individual within our school will play their part, including working with professionals from other agencies, to meet the needs of our vulnerable children and keep them safe. We will be vigilant in our work with children and young people and will respond with appropriate action in a timely manner for those children who may need help or be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

In our work we

- Treat all children with respect regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity
- Work to the guidance provided by Somerset Safeguarding Children's Board
- Ensure that any training or events are managed to the highest possible safety standards
- Review ways of working to incorporate best practice. Including this policy being regularly reviewed and updated to reflect current best practice and Government expectations
- Carefully recruit and select all employees, contractors and volunteers.
- Respond swiftly and appropriately to all complaints and concerns about poor practice or suspected or actual child abuse
- Follow procedures where an allegation is made against a member of staff and that such procedures are robust to deal with any allegation and that clear records of investigations and outcomes of allegations are held on staff files
- Risk-assess any off-site activity, led by the school
- Share information about concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parents and children appropriately

Sharing Concerns

Where staff members have concerns about a child they will decide what action to take in conjunction with the Designated Safeguarding Lead. When concerns arise whilst working in a school, a member of the Virtual School will follow the school's safeguarding policy and refer to the DSL on site but will also immediately raise the concern with the VS DSL. The designated safeguarding lead who is familiar with national and local guidance will share concerns, where appropriate, with the relevant agencies.

There are four types of child abuse as defined in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (2015). In the first instance if a member of staff has a concern about a child they should report to the DSL.

Physical Abuse

May involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning/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.

Emotional Abuse

Is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar 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 the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection

and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), 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, though it may occur alone.

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 or 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 (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males; women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

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.

It may include a failure to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter.
- Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger.
- Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.
- It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to a child's basic emotional needs.

In addition there are a number of behaviours or issues that the Virtual School is aware of and works to prevent:

Bullying

Bullying and forms of bullying including prejudice based and cyber bullying is also abusive which will include at least one, if not two, three or all four, of the defined categories of abuse. Please see the Virtual School Anti-Bullying Policy for more detail of our work and procedures in this area.

E-Safety

Mobile phones, laptops, iPads, and other on-line type products are integrated into all our lives. Many are used within our school. However, there are those that seek to use these for their own or others gratification. The Virtual School is vigilant and responsive to any signs of inappropriate use of technology by or against children and young people and will raise any concerns with the DSL.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of sexual abuse where children are sexually exploited for money, power or status. It can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults. In some cases, young people 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. A significant number of children who are victims of sexual exploitation go missing from home, care and education at some point.

All suspected or actual cases of CSE are a Safeguarding concern in which Child Protection procedures must be followed. If any staff are concerned about a pupil, they must refer to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the CSE lead within the School where the child or young person is on roll as well as sharing the information with the Virtual School DSL. Please see the appendix on CSE Child Sexual Exploitation, 'Practice Guidance for Children's Social Care staff', attached to this document.

Radicalisation/PREVENT

The Virtual School will ensure all staff adhere to their duties in the Prevent guidance 2015 to prevent radicalization (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty>).

The DSL will

- ensure staff understand the risk and build capabilities to deal with issues arising
- Communicate the importance of the duty
- Ensure all staff implement the duty

The Virtual school will respond to any concern about Radicalisation/Prevent as a Safeguarding concern and will report in the usual way using local safeguarding procedures. We will seek to work in partnership, undertaking risk assessments where appropriate and proportionate to risk, building our children's resilience to radicalisation.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The Virtual School recognises and understands that there is now a mandatory reporting duty for all teachers to report to the police where it is believed an act of FGM has been carried out on a girl under 18 in the UK. Failure to do so may result in legal/disciplinary action being taken.

All suspected or actual cases of FGM are a Safeguarding concern in which safeguarding procedures will be followed; this will include a referral to the police and to Children's Social Care via MARU. If any staff are concerned about a pupil, they will refer to the Safeguarding Designated Lead/s within the School unless there is a good reason not to do so.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities can face additional safeguarding challenges.

The Virtual school recognises that additional barriers can exist when identifying abuse and neglect in this group of children. These can include:

- Assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's disability without further exploration;
- The potential for children with SEN and disabilities being disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs; and
- Communication barriers and difficulties in overcoming these barriers.

The individual needs of every special educational needs or disabled child will be reviewed regularly and consideration given to any additional vulnerabilities they may have which could lead to safety and welfare concerns arising.

Should any concerns arise in relation to any child in relation to their safety and welfare the Virtual school will immediately liaise with the DSL

Children Missing Education

Attendance, absence and exclusions are closely monitored by the Virtual School. A child going missing from education is a potential indicator of abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. The Virtual School will take appropriate action, liaising with CSC and following local procedures, particularly where children go missing on repeated occasions and/or are missing for periods during the school day. Please see our Attendance Policy for more detail.

Part-time timetables

The Virtual School does not support Part-time timetables from CLA but acknowledges that sometimes a personalised approach whereby a child or young person is not receiving all their education on a school site may be appropriate in some cases. Should a reduced time table be raised as an option by a school, the intention and plan will be considered by the Virtual School. Please see our 'What to do if' document regarding part time timetables for more detail.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality needs to be discussed and fully understood by all those working with children, particularly in the context of child protection. No adult must ever guarantee confidentiality to any individual including parents, children and colleagues. Staff should make children aware that if they disclose information that may be harmful to themselves or others, then certain actions will need to be taken.

Wherever possible, consent should be obtained before sharing personal information with third parties. In some circumstances, obtaining consent may not be possible or in the best interest of the child or young person, e.g., where safety and welfare of that child or young person necessitates that the information should be shared. The law permits the disclosure of confidential information necessary to safeguard a child or children. Disclosure should be justifiable in each case, according to the particular facts of the case, and legal advice should be sought if in doubt.

If the information given relates directly to the safety and welfare of a child then the DSL must be informed immediately. They should then contact MARU.

Record Keeping:

Well-kept records are essential to good safeguarding and child protection practice. We are clear about the need to record any concerns held about children or young people, the status of such records and when these records should be passed over to other agencies.

In our work with children and their families, we recognise the importance of:

- Keeping clear detailed up to date written records of concerns about children and young people. This includes a chronology.
- Ensuring all records are kept secure
- Ensuring all records are clear, factual and jargon free.

Allegations against staff:

Allegations against staff are covered in all basic training and induction training that takes place within our school. The Virtual School will never let allegations by a child or young person go unrecorded or unreported, including any made against its own staff. If staff receive a disclosure, about an adult colleague, In all instances the DSL should be advised and the child or young person made aware that their concern is being taken seriously. The DSL can then follow County Council policy and refer to the LADO as necessary.

In all our work we closely follow the County Council guidance and additionally utilise support such as the Somerset document 'Child Sexual Exploitation - Practice Guidance for Children's Social Care staff, June 2017.

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