

Practice Guidance

Schools' Recording of Child Protection Concerns

Background

Ofsted studied a series of serious case reviews and identified school record keeping as an important factor in keeping children safe. Their review said

" Specific concerns about school records were noted in 15 of the 50 evaluations in relation to the adequacy and accuracy of records, and in four cases it was noted that school records had been lost."

And on recording incidents, issues and concerns over time

" There were some good examples of schools keeping a record over time, but the significance of the information had not been recognised. In other cases school records were poor even when a child was subject to a formal monitoring process, such as those with a statement of special educational needs."

As a result the section 5 guidance on safeguarding inspection by ofsted includes the requirement that..... "inspectors should take into account the extent to which the school records information relevant to safeguarding concerns clearly and accurately and shares it appropriately, both internally and with other agencies" This should be done by "evaluating the quality of recording, by reviewing at least one case file of a pupil where there have been child protection concerns."

And at Appendix 7 in the guidance ofsted provided questions to ask in evaluating schools recording (see appendix to this guidance below)

In two recent serious case reviews held in Ealing the recommendations in both reviews echoes the ofsted analysis and said

"Ealing Children's Services to provide Ealing schools with current guidance in relation to pupil record keeping " and

"DCSF should consider consolidating and issuing national guidance clarifying the period for retention of Education records with particular reference to the importance of keeping records relating to Looked after Children or those subject to Child Protection Plans"

The DCSF/ DfE have had the issue drawn to their attention. The practice guidance below is provided for schools. (a copy is on EGFL) It will be used in the Ealing safeguarding board approved training provided for designated teachers and whole school staff groups and by the inspectors currently undertaking the review of safeguarding in Ealing schools.

Practice Guidance

This guidance applies to child protection files but can also guide the management of children in need, CAF and SAFE files.

Structure and Content of Files

- Each child for whom there has been any c p concern from a minor suspicion years ago to an ongoing case where a child is subject to a cp plan should have a cp file that is separate from their school education file.
- The child protection file has a separate legal status from pupil education files.
- The file should contain all papers from a note of a teacher's concern to conference minutes
- Inside the front cover should be a chronology and index showing all documents, incidents, consultation with social care or child protection advisors, referrals, meeting attended, decisions taken, notes of any review of the pupils progress undertaken at school, which staff are told about a pupil's case and why and any role they are to take in the response to the concern.
- The chronology has a crucial role in allowing current and future staff to get an overview of the case so that any new development can be assessed in the correct context.
- The file should reflect that it is a tool for monitoring and implementing a pro-active management of the child protection case in the school.
- Quality of recording. See attached ofsted appendix

Transfer of Files

There is a duty for schools to transfer a copy of any child protection file to any new school that the pupil joins. This applies even if the case is closed. The file should be transferred from designated teacher to designated teacher.

Management of Files

- Files should be kept in a locked cabinet to which the designated teacher controls access.
- Files should be cross-referenced to the school education file so that current and future staff can know there is a child protection file.

- Schools should maintain a list of vulnerable pupils and child protection concerns should be a category of vulnerability.

Long Term Storage of Files

There is no clear guidance on how long schools should store child protection files. However, files may be needed for a variety of purposes. They may need to be linked to concerns about younger siblings. They may be needed for future court hearings either in the family proceedings court or civil action for compensation. They may be needed for future serious case reviews. For all these reasons it is best to store the file permanently, pending any further national guidance on storage times. Files can be scanned and saved electronically. The LA can advise on agencies and costs involved in this process.

Appendix 1. OFSTED GUIDANCE ON RECORDING

Briefing for section 5 inspectors on safeguarding children

Annex 7. Evaluating the quality of records relating to safeguarding issues

Possible questions to consider – this is not a definitive list.

- Are records up to date and complete?
- Do records demonstrate both effective identification and management of the risk of harm?
- Do records demonstrate sound decision-making, appropriate responses to concerns and evidence of relevant referrals made in a timely manner?
- Do they indicate that appropriate action is taken in response to concerns and allegations in a timely manner?
- Do they show evidence of tenacity in following up concerns with relevant agencies?
- Do they provide evidence of effective partnership working and sharing of information?
- Is there evidence of attendance at or contribution to inter-agency meetings and conferences?
- Is there clarity about the school's policy relating to the sharing of information internally, safe keeping of records, and transfer when a pupil leaves the school?