

Covid19 Safeguarding Policy addendum: Supporting children not in school (vulnerable children, as defined, and those assessed as vulnerable by school)

Since 23rd March, schools have been operating under the COVID-19 guidance for schools and other educational settings¹ and have implemented procedures that enable them to keep their pupils and staff safe at all times. This document is a prompt for schools to use as a guide to ensuring that pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable, are supported.

Vulnerable children

Working Together to Safeguard Children² statutory guidance requires schools and the LA to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Whilst the majority of people are being urged to stay at home and adhere to guidance about social distancing, the DfE guidance **Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for schools and other educational settings** sets a clear expectation that schools stay open and make provision for vulnerable children where education is a protective factor. This includes:

- children who have a social worker i.e. children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after by the local authority. A child may also be deemed to be vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need or otherwise meet the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989.
- children and young people with an EHCP who cannot be safely supported at home.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

Children assessed as vulnerable by school

In addition to the children and young people identified as vulnerable in the recent government guidance³, the school will identify children on the edge of social care or who normally receive pastoral-type support in school through regular assessment, to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

Vulnerable children not in school

Whilst a number of vulnerable children will attend school regularly, there may be some who do not. It is the role of the school to make day to day decisions based on the vulnerability of a child and it remains the Local Authority Children's Services responsibility to assess and respond to the safeguarding concerns raised by the school, whether or not they are within the identified vulnerable categories. Therefore, given the current circumstances, it is more important than ever for school and Children's Services to work collectively to ensure the safety of our children and to facilitate joint working so appropriate support and interventions are provided.

Communication

In order to respond efficiently and timely to the needs of vulnerable children, communication is vital.

Communication with parents/carers – the school will ensure that up to date contact details for parents and other identified responsible adults are kept. Those responsible for safeguarding and home contact should establish best times to call with the parents and a process for follow up if no response is forthcoming. For any child who has another key worker involved e.g. social worker, the school will endeavour to

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

coordinate contact with the home and establish who is calling, when and the purpose of the call, to reduce undue duplication of contact to parents/carers.

Parents/carers communication with schools – the school will provide parents/carers with contact details for staff who they can talk to about any concerns and update this regularly to reflect staffing variations. If school have a manned office, this may simply be a school number, however if this is not the case, schools will consider how parents can inform them of changing circumstances or how to ask for advice. If schools are running fixed hours opening, this will be communicated to parents and school will consider how key messages can be received outside these hours. For families who do not have access to technology, the school will ensure this information reaches them, particularly if they are vulnerable. The same applies to families who do not speak English or are illiterate. If the school needs to communicate with a family in another language, staff will be able to contact EMTET@lincolnshire.gov.uk who may be able to help with access to a bilingual speaker and can also support communication with Traveller families.

Schools communication with social worker/Early Help and SEND worker – Efficient contact with a child's social worker or SEND worker is key to supporting pupils and families. Where a child does not have a social worker and the child is potentially vulnerable i.e. currently in TAC or the school are considering an EHA, the school can continue to contact the Early Help consultant who will support them to risk assess the current vulnerability of the child.

If the school is unable to contact the child's allocated social worker/case worker, the following generic email addresses should be used:

To notify SEND of a change in circumstances for a child with an EHCP, contact:

LWL_SendLocality@lincolnshire.gov.uk (Lincoln/West Lindsey)

NKSK_SendLocality@lincolnshire.gov.uk (North Kesteven/South Kesteven)

EAL_SendLocality@lincolnshire.gov.uk (East Lindsey)

BSH_SendLocality@lincolnshire.gov.uk ((Boston South Holland)

To communicate with social work (FAST) team when child's allocated social worker is not available and for cases open to Early Help, contact:

**East Lindsey North FAST and
Cases open to Early Help in the Louth/Mablethorpe area**
BS_Keilyhouse@lincolnshire.gov.uk
01522 554444

**East Lindsey South FAST and
Cases open to Early Help in the Horncastle/Skegness area**
01522 554621
BS_Horncastle@Lincolnshire.gov.uk

**Boston FAST and
Cases open to Early Help in the Boston area**
Child_BS_Boston@lincolnshire.gov.uk

**South Holland FAST and
Cases open to Early Help in the Spalding area**
Child_BS_Spalding@lincolnshire.gov.uk

**West Lindsey FAST team and
Cases open to Early Help in the Gainsborough**
Child_BS_Gainsborough@lincolnshire.gov.uk

**Lincoln FAST team and
Cases open to Early Help in Lincoln area**
BS_FastLincoln@lincolnshire.gov.uk

South Kesteven FAST
01522 554362
GAO_BS_Grantham@lincolnshire.gov.uk

North Kesteven FAST
01522 553947
BS_FASTNorthKesteven@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Cases open to Early Help in both North and South Kesteven
01522 689991

Making Decisions about Vulnerable Children Attending School

Schools will conduct a risk assessment regarding the vulnerability of every child. The risk assessment process should be clear and robust. The school will determine the frequency of this assessment based on current and of any newly identified needs of a child. Children's Services have produced a proforma to help schools with this - **Lincolnshire Tool for the Assessment of Risk to Children and Young People not Attending School due to Covid-19 Pandemic**. This is attached and will be used by schools where appropriate.

The majority of the children who are not attending school will be classified as 'not currently vulnerable'. For these children the school will consider routine checks on health and wellbeing as part of their overall communication plan around the learning at home.

If a parent/carer of a vulnerable child (as defined above), does not want them to attend school, the social worker/ SEND caseworker and school staff should joint risk assess in consultation with the parents/carers. Where the child does not have a social worker or SEND caseworker, the risk assessment should be carried out by the Designated Safeguarding Lead together with the current Safeguarding Leader responsible for coordinating the safeguarding arrangements in the school.

The risk assessment should explore the reasons for the parent/carer not wanting the child to come to school and talk through these with them, including any anxieties they may have about the risk of contracting the virus. These anxieties may be real or perceived and whilst the school cannot provide assurance against the risk of contracting the virus, they are able to reassure them of the processes that the school take to minimise the risk.

Each child will need to be considered individually according to the school environment, the child's needs and family circumstances. As the school has previous

knowledge of their children, they are in the best position to risk assess and this is based on the information that is available to them. They will be professionally curious but also be mindful of agency fears and therefore judgements need to be based on evidence.

The following issues should be taken into account:

- i) The potential health risks to the child from COVID-19, bearing in mind any underlying health conditions and available health advice
- ii) The ability of the child's parent or carer to ensure their health and care needs can be met safely at home
- iii) The level of vulnerability and any associated risks and whether these are likely to increase if the child was not attending school
- iv) The potential impact on the child's wellbeing as a result of any changes to the child's routine or the way in which their provision is delivered
- v) The likelihood of any increased risk to the child if some or all elements of their plan (including EHCP where appropriate) cannot be delivered; including consideration of associated risks if some or all elements of the plan cannot be delivered in the usual way or in the usual setting
- vi) The ability of the school to continue to provide the specific support the child requires, especially if key trusted staff are not available or the school delivers provision from another site
- vii) How easily the child can access another setting which has capacity to meet need

The risk assessment process must be dynamic in order to address any changes to the national advice and guidance as well as any changes associated with school capacity or home circumstances, for each child.

The risk assessment must take the form of, at least, a recorded conversation with agreed actions, ensuring that all appropriate agencies and workers are informed. For children on child protection plans, this will feed into the Covid19 risk assessment completed by the social worker.

The frequency and pace of review will be determined by the nature and level of identified risk for the child within the context of the changing national landscape. However, a risk assessment should be completed **at least every two weeks**.

Risk Assessments

Following risk assessments it is expected that children will fall into the following categories, and could move between these over time:

- 1) Attending school in best interests
- 2) Child is safer at home
- 3) Parental choice for child to not attend
 - I. Shielding/self isolating due to underlying health condition
 - II. Family member shielding for 12 weeks
 - III. COVID19 related illness and self isolation for 7 days
 - IV. Other illness
 - V. Family member unwell and family self isolating for 14 days
 - VI. Other appropriate reason
 - VII. No appropriate reason established

Depending on the outcome of the risk assessment for each individual child, there may be increased safeguarding concerns for children whose parents choose not to send them to school although this is considered to be in their best interests. **Over time, social isolation is likely to increase pressure on some families.** Where pre-existing concerns exist about domestic abuse, for example, some children may be at increased risk of likely significant harm as a result. For these children, schools will continue to play a critical safeguarding role.

Outcome of Risk assessments

The school leader responsible for coordinating the safeguarding in the school will have oversight of all the vulnerable pupils during this time. They will be responsible for ensuring appropriate care and welfare, through effective communication, takes place between the parents and the school that reflects the level of vulnerability of the child. This may be delegated but there should be good liaison between the delegated

role, the school leader and the DSL if they are not the same and especially if these roles change due to fluctuations in staffing.

Following the initial and continual risk assessment, the vulnerable children will be grouped depending on the level of support they require, for example,

1. Those who need daily monitoring
2. Those who need monitoring 3 times per week
3. Those who need weekly monitoring

The frequency of school contact may depend on the coordinated arrangements with the social worker, SEND case worker or other key professional however, **all vulnerable children must be contacted on a weekly basis as an absolute minimum.**

Your school may wish to allocate a specific member of staff to take the lead on each group or subgroups, delegated staff should be familiar with the children and be suitably trained. The delegated staff should also have access to appropriate safeguarding folders, online or otherwise and be recorded as having this access. If it is not possible for them to have access, key information must be shared and a record must be kept safely which can then be transferred to the appropriate files.

Recording of contact and actions

The school will ensure that key people in school e.g. SLT, DSL and pastoral leaders, have an up to date current list of identified vulnerable pupils including those who are medically shielding. This is likely to include vulnerable learners identified by school leaders, in addition to those who have a social worker and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

The school will implement a system or use current systems for recording and monitoring the contact with vulnerable children and their parents. A spreadsheet, for example, would include

1. the names of the children
2. the current attendance situation – (refer to points above in Risk Assessments)

3. the agreed level of contact (including arrangements made with social worker/SEND caseworker)
4. the preferable time of contact if agreed
5. who was spoken to, including child
6. the dates of contact and name of person who contacted
7. if contact has changed current risk assessment

This information should be kept safely but within easy access to staff that may need it. All safeguarding concerns and notes should be recorded as per normal safeguarding practice.

Communication plan with parents of vulnerable children

The school will ensure that there are systems in place for a named member of staff/group of staff (school and/or Children's Social Care) to make contact with named vulnerable pupils through phone calls, video- conferencing or through email. All methods should be approved by the senior leader as safe method of communication.. If deemed necessary by Children's Social Care, some pupils will receive home visits.

Any member of staff phoning a family should use a school phone or disable caller ID if using a personal device. The school should take great care to safeguard contact details according to GDPR.

As per government guidance, home visiting should be kept to an absolute minimum and all other means of assessing the child's safety should be attempted beforehand. If current evidence confirms that a home visit is required, then this should only take place once the school have checked the situation of the family re. COVID19 and confirmed that there are no symptoms present. The school first should check to confirm if a social worker intends to conduct a visit; if the decision remains that the school visit then it should take place with a second adult i.e. another member of staff or key professional. . The school must follow the social distancing guidelines; check-in visits can be conducted from the doorstep.

Referrals to Children’s Social Care must continue to be made in the usual way. The need to refer a child to social care is unlikely to decrease and may possibly increase during the period of lockdown, therefore schools must continue to refer or request a consultation to ensure children remain safe.

Communication with vulnerable children

For pupils who are risk assessed as being the most vulnerable, contact should take place with them directly (phone or video call), in line with the agreed actions from the assessment. There needs to be **coordination and communication** between the school leader and social care e.g. the child’s social worker or early help staff to agree what is being asked and by whom. It may be necessary to continue some form of contact with a young person in year 11 who would ordinarily be on study leave depending on their level of vulnerability.