

Keeping Children Safe in Education – Self-Assessment Transcript

Welcome to this webinar on the Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Keeping Children Safe in Education Self-Assessment.

These are the themes from the self-assessments, which all schools returned before the deadline date of 30 September 2023. It will also provide some of the findings from the verification visits made to schools in January and early February 2024.

So first, let's think about why our schools asked to complete the audit. Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 and the Education Independent School Standard 2010, made under Section 157, requires governing bodies to carry out an annual review of their safeguarding practice and to provide information to the local authority and local safeguarding children partnership about how their duties are set out in the guidance and have been discharged.

In addition, in the Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance that was released in December 2023, education providers including multi-academy trusts have a responsibility to play their full part in local safeguarding arrangements, including: “responding to safeguarding audits of quality and compliance requested by the local authority and local safeguarding partners”. Education providers should also report their audits to the governing bodies and proprietors.

In Hampshire, we have 597 schools, colleges and academies, both maintained and independent. All these schools and colleges returned the safeguarding audit in good time. When looking through the evaluation schedule, schools all populated it and were clear about the role of governors. This was a main focus when carrying out the quality assurance visits in January and February 2024.

When visiting schools, areas of strength and areas of development were identified. This included governor's triangulating evidence, using documents and talking to pupils and staff about their perception of safeguarding. One head teacher identified that their governors were really good at probing without interference, and they noted that being a governor was a supportive role, but also a role that provided accountability.

In some of the schools visited, there were two safeguarding governors. This established real resilience in the system, so if one governor was off or unable to carry out their role, then a second governor could step in with the knowledge required to be a functioning safeguarding governor.

In one school visited, the children were part of the governing body. The full governing body was scheduled once a year within school time, with child governors invited along senior leaders. Governors said this was an invaluable experience for the governors and the children. They said the children had a real insight into what would improve the school around safeguarding and where there were real strengths.

Safeguarding is always a standing item on full governor body meetings. This could appear through the head teacher report or a discussion around reports or anonymised case studies. Governors were also an important part of the external verification process. Many governors come in and check the single central record as well as generating reports on the evidence they find. Health and safety governors would come and walk around the schools on a regular basis to check the security and the safety of the school. Some schools spoke about using children within this process.

Governors are also coming in and carrying out monitoring visits on a regular basis. The focus is not necessarily safeguarding, but in most cases, this provided them with the opportunity to ask a safeguarding question, helping to identify whether children felt safe and whether they had trusted adults they could talk to if they did feel unsafe. This perpetuates the belief that safeguarding was something that was of utmost importance and a thread that ran through the school.

Thinking about the place of safeguarding in the school, where the culture of safeguarding was really strong. From the time I walked through the school gates, to the time I walked out, safeguarding was a thread that ran through the school with staff knowing the children and families well. This meant that any support was targeted, meaningful, and had a good impact on the wellbeing of the children. In all cases, schools are thinking about how to improve safeguarding. There are many ongoing developments in the schools visited, including tackling bullying and the development of the prejudicial language and behaviour toolkits plus the challenging of inappropriate language.

Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2023 identified that filtering and monitoring was

something that schools and governing bodies needed to have an additional focus on. In all cases, there was a greater focus on filtering and monitoring this year. This could have been implemented by buying new technology to improve monitoring features as well as developing the understanding of staff about what is to be filtered within the school system.

All the schools visited spoke about the importance of the voice of the child and how it informed their thinking around safeguarding and their improvements across the school. In one of the schools we visited, there were a number of children who used a range of communication methods. It was really interesting to talk to the safeguarding lead and head teacher about how to capture the voice of a non-verbal child. They focused on the use of tools including symbols, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication Systems), MAKATON sign language as well as using head and foot switches. They had multiple tools and methods they used to capture the voice of the children within their school and the safeguarding lead said, “actually our non-verbal children have the loudest voices and the most to say.”

In many schools, staff spoke about using children to develop their policies, especially the behaviour policy where children took ownership, not only of their own behaviour, but also of people around them as well.

In all the schools visited, we spoke to some children across year groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds in different areas of need. Where there was the most effective safeguarding practice, children really understood the role of the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) and who they could speak to if they had any concerns. Children also spoke about the many trusted adults they could talk to if something was worrying them, and this was really evident in all the schools visited. Some schools use different coloured lanyards dependent on school safeguarding status within the school. Children were very aware that someone with a DBS check had a different coloured lanyard from someone without a DBS. Children also spoke about how good schools were about building their awareness around online safety, and also about the value of parental controls, especially at home and how the parents support and protect them from harm on the internet. It was really apparent that the school provided parents with advice on how to keep their children safe online. In all the schools, children identified examples of where inappropriate language was used and how it was tackled.

Increasingly, especially, as demonstrated by the Ofcom statistics, more and more children of school age are going online, so the need for online safety in schools is essential. In all the

schools visited, online safety was an increased priority. Senior leaders spoke about different schemes they use, like cyber ambassadors, which has recently been relaunched for the train-the-trainer model. Some schools spoke about using digital leaders to talk to their peer groups around how to stay safe online, as well as tools they use within PSHE and computing to support the development of online safety within the curriculum, and how to develop awareness and encourage conversations around how to stay safe online. This included use of Education for a Connected World as well as Project Evolve, two tools which were being used extensively.

One of the topics schools were asked to consider when completing the Keeping Children Safe Self-Assessment were their action planning priorities. In every case, every school provided some priorities within safeguarding, which is positive. 581 schools identified training as a priority. 232 mentioned the continued development of DSLs. Governors were cited 371 times. The curriculum was mentioned 117 times, policies 82 times. Engagement of parents was noted 66 times, the use of reporting tools 43 times. Action planning was something all schools considered within the Keeping Children Safe Self-Assessment and it was evident through school visits, the real priority was embedding the culture and expectations of safeguarding.