



# **The Oak-Tree Group of Schools**

## **Child Protection Policy Addendum during Covid-19**

### **Introduction**

This addendum applies for all staff, parents, volunteers and the wider school community during the period of school closure due to Covid-19 and reflects updated advice from our local safeguarding partners and local authority. Unless covered here, our normal child protection policies continue to apply. It forms part of our safeguarding arrangements and should be read in conjunction with the following:

- the current Child Protection Policy
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2020)
- the school Behaviour policy
- the school Staff Code of Conduct
- the safeguarding response to children missing from education
- the role of the designated safeguarding lead (Annex B of KCSIE)

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children (*everyone under the age of 18*) is defined in Keeping Children Safe in Education as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment
- Preventing impairment of children's mental and physical 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

During these challenging times, the safeguarding of all children at our schools – whether they are currently at home or in attendance – continues to be our priority. Although we are operating in a different way to normal, we are still following these important safeguarding principles:

- The best interests of children must come first.
- If anyone has a safeguarding concern about any child, they should continue to act on it immediately.
- A Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or deputy DSL will always be available.
- No unsuitable people should be allowed to gain access to children.
- Children should continue to be protected when they are online.

### **Current School Position**

On Monday 4 January 2021, schools were instructed to close for all children other than:

- Vulnerable children
- Children of critical workers
- Children in Lower and Upper Kindergarten

Vulnerable children include 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. Those who have a social worker include children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after by the local authority.

We want to support all our children during this time and will consider making a place available to other children with vulnerabilities, although this will be in discussion with other professionals involved and based on a risk assessment process.

## **Safeguarding Procedures during the Closure Period**

Clearly we are working very differently during this period of closure. However, the principles within our existing Child Protection Policy still apply, as does the duty on all staff to safeguard children.

We have assessed the needs of all our pupils and put in place plans to support them and their families during this period of closure. These plans include an education offer (details of which have been shared separately with parents for their child) and arrangements to support pupils with their wellbeing through regular virtual class/form/tutor time. These plans may include interventions from other agencies, as we continue to work with partners to provide an appropriate level of support.

Teachers and teaching assistants will be interacting with children on a daily basis either through the school's virtual platforms or via face-to-face Zoom lessons. Staff should be mindful of the children's emotional and mental needs, and that all children's home lives will differ.

As always, all staff members have a duty to identify and respond to suspected / actual abuse or disclosures of abuse. Any member of staff who receives a disclosure or allegation of abuse, or suspects that abuse may have occurred **must** report it immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or, in their absence, the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead).

## **DSL (and Deputy) Arrangements**

The roles and responsibilities for safeguarding remain in line with those set out in our Child Protection Policy. The Head will always be on site as the Designated Safeguarding Lead, and there will normally be at least one other Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead on site as well.

Contact the following if you have a concern about a child at any time:

- Braeside School (020 8504 1133): Chloe Moon [cmoon@braesideschool.co.uk](mailto:cmoon@braesideschool.co.uk)
- Coopersale Hall School (01992 577133): Moreen Barnard [mbarnard@coopersalehallschool.co.uk](mailto:mbarnard@coopersalehallschool.co.uk)
- Normanhurst School (020 8529 4307): Jacqueline Job [jjob@normanhurstschool.co.uk](mailto:jjob@normanhurstschool.co.uk)
- Oaklands School (020 8508 3517): Sue Belej [sbelej@oaklandsschool.co.uk](mailto:sbelej@oaklandsschool.co.uk)

Matthew Hagger and Claire Osborn are also available at Head Office (020 8508 3109) via [mh@oaktreeschools.co.uk](mailto:mh@oaktreeschools.co.uk) or [cosborn@oaktreeschools.co.uk](mailto:cosborn@oaktreeschools.co.uk)

The Essex Local Authority Designated Officer (for children at Braeside, Coopersale Hall and Oaklands) can be contacted directly on:

- 03330 139797 or 01245 435167
- [escb@essex.gov.uk](mailto:escb@essex.gov.uk)

The Waltham Local Authority Designated Officer (for children at Normanhurst) can be contacted directly on:

- 020 8496 3646 or 020 8496 6310

## **Reporting Concerns**

All staff must continue to act on any concerns they have about a child immediately. It is still vitally important to do this.

All action is taken in accordance with the following guidance;

- Local Authority Safeguarding Children Board guidelines
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2020)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE, 2018)
- 'Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex' (ESCB, 2017)
- PREVENT Duty - Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (HMG, 2015)

Where there is risk of immediate harm, concerns will be referred by telephone to the Children and Families Hub and/or the Police. Less urgent concerns or requests for support will be sent to the Local Authority's Children and Families Hub. The school may also seek advice from Social Care or another appropriate agency about a concern, if we are unsure how to respond to it.

Wherever possible, we will share any safeguarding concerns, or an intention to refer a child to Children's Social Care, with parents/carers. However, we will not do so where it is felt that to do so could place the child at greater risk of harm or impede a criminal investigation. On occasions, it may be necessary to consult with the Children and Families Hub and/or Essex Police for advice on when to share information with parents/carers.

### **Records and Information Sharing**

Well-kept records are essential to good child protection practice. Our DSLs are clear about the need to record any concern held about a child or children within our school and when these records should be shared with other agencies.

Where there are concerns about the safety of a child, the sharing of information in a timely and effective manner between organisations can reduce the risk of harm. Whilst the Data Protection Act 2018 places duties on organisations and individuals to process personal information fairly and lawfully, it is not a barrier to sharing information where the failure to do so would result in a child or vulnerable adult being placed at risk of harm.

Similarly, human rights concerns, such as respecting the right to a private and family life would not prevent sharing information where there are real safeguarding concerns. Fears about sharing information cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Any member of staff receiving a disclosure of abuse or noticing signs or indicators of abuse, will record it as soon as possible, noting what was said or seen (if appropriate, using a body map to record), giving the date, time and location. All records will be dated and signed and will include the action taken. This is then presented to the DSL, who will decide on appropriate action and record this accordingly.

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

The mental health and wellbeing of all our pupils is always a priority and it is recognised that, without the protective factor of attending school, some of our children may be more vulnerable. Understandably, this is a worrying and challenging time for everyone, and we understand that families may be placed under considerable additional pressures, potentially coping with issues such as increased anxiety, financial difficulties, caring for children at home fulltime and illness or bereavement.

When setting expectations for pupils learning remotely and not attending school, teachers should bear in mind the potential impact of the current situation on both children's and adults' mental health. Where we are providing for children of critical workers and vulnerable children on site, we will ensure appropriate support is in place for them.

We will do all we can to support our pupils and it is vital that we work in partnership with parents/carers to do so. Parents/carers should share any concerns about the wellbeing of their child with school, so appropriate support and interventions can be identified and implemented. The school has a bank of resources, including appropriate helpline numbers, for families when required.

We have the option to offer places in school to children who do not meet the Department for Education's definition of 'vulnerable', but about whom we have safeguarding concerns. We will work with parents/carers to do this on an individual basis.

## **Staff Conduct**

All staff members are made aware of the boundaries of appropriate behaviour and conduct and the principles in our Staff Code of Conduct still apply during this emergency period. The usual processes for reporting concerns about a member of staff apply and we will continue to follow the principles set out in Part 4 of Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Staff should continue to act on any concerns they have immediately. We will continue to refer adults who have harmed or pose a risk of harm to a child or vulnerable adult to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), and we will continue to refer potential cases of teacher misconduct to the Teaching Regulation Agency. We will do this using the email address [Misconduct.Teacher@education.gov.uk](mailto:Misconduct.Teacher@education.gov.uk) for the duration of the COVID-19 period, in line with government guidance.

## **Monitoring Attendance**

As most children will not be attending school during this period of school closure, we will not be completing our usual attendance registers.

The exception to this is where any child we expect to attend school during the closure does not attend school in person (if applicable) or one of the online Zoom lessons. In this case:

- We will follow our attendance procedure and attempt to contact the family.
- If contact cannot be made, the DSL or a deputy will be informed.
- The DSL or a deputy will attempt to contact the parents.
- If contact cannot be made, or if the DSL or a deputy DSL deems it necessary, we will undertake a home visit or ask an appropriate agency to do so. A risk assessment will be carried out before any such visit is made to ensure staff and the family are not put at risk.

It is essential from a safeguarding perspective that we are aware, on any given day, which staff are on our school site and that the appropriate checks have been carried out on those individuals.

## **Safer recruitment/volunteers and movement of staff**

It remains essential that people who are unsuitable are not allowed to enter the children's workforce or gain access to children. When recruiting new staff, we will continue to follow our Safer Recruitment Policy and Part 3 of Keeping Children Safe in Education.

In response to Covid-19, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has made changes to its guidance on standard and enhanced DBS ID checking to minimise the need for face-to-face contact. In urgent cases, when validating proof of identity documents to apply for a DBS check, we will initially accept verification of scanned documents via online video link, rather than being in physical possession of the original documents. New staff must still present the original documents when they first attend work at our school.

## **Peer on peer abuse**

We recognise that children can abuse their peers and our staff are clear about the school's policy and procedures regarding peer on peer abuse. All peer on peer abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously. We also recognise that abuse can still occur during a school closure or partial closure and between those children who do attend the school site during these measures.

Our staff will remain vigilant to the signs of peer-on-peer abuse and will follow the process set out in our Child Protection Policy. Staff should continue to act on any concerns they have immediately. We will continue to follow the principles set out in Part 5 of Keeping Children Safe in Education when managing reports and supporting victims of peer-on-peer abuse.

## Online safety

We recognise that the majority of children will not be physically attending school and that it is likely they will be spending longer periods of time online, which may increase their vulnerability. The breadth of issues within online safety is considerable. It can be categorised into three main areas of risk:

- **Content** - exposure to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material. For example, pornography, fake news, racist or radical and extremist views;
- **Contact** - subjection to harmful online interaction with other users. For example, commercial advertising and adults posing as children or young adults;
- **Conduct** - personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm. For example, making, sending and receiving explicit images, or online bullying.

Staff are aware of the signs of cyberbullying and other online risks and will follow the process for online safety set out in our Child Protection Policy.

Staff who interact with children online will continue to look out for signs a child may be at risk. If a staff member is concerned about a child, that staff member will report the concern immediately to the DSL.

- In school
  - We will continue to have appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in place in school.
  - Members of the Group IT support team will be on hand to support the learning.
- Outside school
  - Where staff are interacting with children online, they will continue to follow our existing Staff Code of Conduct and Staff Use of ICT Policy.
  - When using Zoom for 'live' lessons, staff should always:
    - make sure they are the meeting host with control over the lesson.
    - be dressed appropriately to be facing children.
    - make sure that there is nothing compromising in the background, for example photographs or pictures not appropriate for young children.
    - talk professionally to the children as if in the school classroom.
  - When using emails to communicate with children, staff should always:
    - use official school email addresses for correspondence and never their own personal email addresses.
    - openly copy their line manager or Head into an email to a child's personal email account when replying to a child.

The full set of online protocols has been issued to all staff. We will also make sure children know how to report any concerns they have back to our school, and signpost them to other sources of support too.

It is important for parents to be vigilant about their child's online activity and to inform the school of any concerns they may have about their child in this respect. We have provided parents with information on how to keep their children safe online and resources to support them to do this.

Particularly useful websites are:

- [CEOP](#) (Child Exploitation and Online Protection)
- [Childnet](#)
- [Internet Matters](#)
- [Net Aware](#)
- [NSPCC](#)
- [Parent Info](#)
- [Safer Internet](#)

Staff are aware that children are vulnerable to being bullied or groomed for abuse or radicalisation online. Staff will be vigilant to any signs that this may be occurring and report any concerns in the usual way.