

## The role of Cluster Services at [St Bartholomew's C of E Primary School](#)

### **What are Clusters?**

Clusters are groups of professionals who coordinate the range of services available to families in local areas. This usually comprises of representatives from schools, health professionals, social workers, third sector partners, youth offending team, youth service, housing...and others. Clusters offer expertise in family support, improving school attendance and supporting behavioural, emotional and developmental needs. As needs may vary from area to area, so the services offered also vary – no two clusters work in exactly the same way. Cluster working arrangements are designed to ensure that families are offered the right intervention at the right time, as early as possible in the life of a problem, to prevent issues escalating which may result in poor outcomes for the family. They offer support through a range of strategies including therapies, counselling or courses all aimed at helping young people achieve their best. Cluster referrals are usually made via school or NHS services.

For specific cluster related enquiries or concerns, please contact your child's school in the first instance.

### **What are the benefits of cluster working?**

The cluster model provides a way for practitioners to secure the help and support that families require for improved outcomes. For example, where a child needs additional counselling support which individual schools are unable to provide.

Cluster working enables local practitioners to build good working relationships in order to provide effective integrated services for the families in the area. Organising services around a cluster model raises practitioner awareness of the resources that are available in each area for responding to specific needs. This awareness allows clusters to organise their resources more effectively by being able to identify the agencies that are best placed to offer a service, thus reducing duplication. This should ensure that families receive the right support at the right time at the earliest opportunity.

The building of effective working relationships helps to facilitate information sharing where appropriate, and also provides forums in which issues of risk can be discussed and responded to. This is a key aspect of safeguarding, and something which it is important for us to get right.

### **How do staff in clusters know what families need?**

A good holistic assessment – which considers all of the aspects of a child's life – is the basis of all support provided to families. There are a number of assessment tools that practitioners can use to identify the needs of a child, a young person and family, for example, an Early Help Assessment. These tools provide a consistent way for practitioners to record and share assessment information across the city, so that the best support can be provided.

## **What will school do if they think my child or family would benefit from additional support?**

Staff are trained to meet the emotional and learning needs of all the children in school. If they feel that your child and family needs extra support they will contact you to talk this through. If you have concerns, please approach your child's school.

At **St Bartholomew's C of E Primary School**, the normal process is:

- make an appointment to speak to the head teacher
- discuss your concerns
- if something additional and different is needed, the head teacher may discuss it with the year or phase leader before deciding on what is the best course of action
- the head teacher and/or year leader/phase leader will meet with you again and discuss the plan for your child
- school will closely monitor the impact of the plan and adjust it to ensure the needs are being met
- school will keep you informed about the additional support your child is receiving
- with your consent, school may make a referral to the cluster via a Support and Guidance meeting, when in-school strategies have been ineffective.

Other services e.g. the GP may refer into the cluster.

## **What happens at a Support and Guidance meeting?**

The cluster has an important role in the Support and Guidance meeting. This is made up of a wide range of professionals including school who review individual cases and then determine the support needed.

The meetings are also forums for the appropriate sharing of information, ensuring that those working with families have all of the relevant facts from each service to enable them to make a safe judgement with regard to risk and next steps.

## **What can I expect the cluster to do to meet my child and /or family's additional needs?**

1. Discuss with you your child's and family needs.
2. Identify the need and put in place extra support.

This may be in the form of:

- specific and targeted work within school
- specialist programme of support around an emotional need
- counselling
- family support
- parenting groups
- brokering support from other professionals, e.g. housing, health, children's social care services, youth service or some other form of support.

### 3. Monitor the impact of support.

We will ensure that the support in place is monitored so that its effectiveness can be identified. We will adapt and develop the support where it is not working as intended and will seek the advice and support of other agencies where necessary.

#### **Can the cluster give me a diagnosis?**

It can be a very stressful, frustrating and difficult time when you feel your child has a more complex need or is suffering from a mental health difficulty. You know that something is wrong and want your child to get the support they need.

No-one in the cluster can make a diagnosis, but we can help to identify the symptoms and implement strategies which help to minimise their impact, where they are affecting a child's ability to access their education or their wellbeing. We will not wait for a formal diagnosis before offering support. Where a child has social or emotional difficulties that are severely affecting his or her education, school will discuss with you additional support that can be available through our Cluster Services. Following the completion of work by the cluster, if we feel there are unmet SEMH needs, a referral to CAMHS can be made (with your permission).

#### **Below are a range of useful websites/services related to Cluster work**

If your child is on a waiting list for cluster or CAMHS support, they may benefit from one-to-one online counselling. Your child will be able to access support from a trained counsellor. Find out more at <https://www.kooth.com/>

- Leeds MindMate MindMate help you explore emotional wellbeing and mental health issues and offers information for parents, carers, young people and professionals.
- Leeds NHS CAMHS information CAMHS information for parents, carers, young people and professionals