Guidance for Safeguarding Vulnerable children during forced full or partial school closure

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Review Period:	3 years

Introduction

The duty to safeguard all pupils is of course the responsibility of all of us across the Multi Academy Trust and we have systems in place to do so. This includes working alongside other agencies including Safeguarding Partnerships in each local authority.

The pandemic has challenged us to ensure we have in place procedures which do their very best to safeguard our most vulnerable children, both during and outside school hours. Attendance patterns of some vulnerable children during the pandemic was mixed, so schools had to ensure systems were in place to check on the well-being (and education) of vulnerable children who did not attend school. Resulting from the work done during that period, this guidance document is in place to mainly to support academies where long-term school closures may occur for one reason or another. However, these practices can also be employed during any school closure or non-attendance by vulnerable children.

Whilst many of our safeguard 'actions' take place during school hours and term time, there is a moral duty of care to at least be aware and possibly take some action on any issues that may occur at other times when school is not in session, whether this be in evenings, weekends and of course holiday periods. These 'actions' may usually be in the form of communication with children and families, local authority and other external agencies as well as possibly the police, but may require more face-to face 'actions, such as attending emergency meetings or even visiting a child's home.

This guidance sits alongside our 'Remote Learning Policy' and can be implemented at any times of forced full or partial closures.

The planning for prolonged closures is more straightforward in regard to academic education, to an extent in regards to pupils carrying on with subject specific tasks, whether that be; by sending work home with children prior to closure, signposting online resources, making available via an academies online systems etc., and/or even recorded lessons which pupils can view and work through at home (Remote Learning Policy).

It would be assumed where a child has not been identified as 'vulnerable' that they are being adequately cared for by parents/carers or other systems in place. However, where a school has identified a pupil as being 'vulnerable', clearly there needs to be some extended support when not in

school. This does not apply to normal non-term time periods, e.g. summer holidays when it is assumed other adults take responsibility for vulnerable pupils.

Vulnerable children

At a time of prolonged full or partial closure, practical issues come into play in regard to 'how many' children a safeguarding team can 'monitor'. It will be up to each school how they put together their list of vulnerable children but it is suggested the following **should** be included:

Child Protection / Child in Need / Looked After Children / Young Carers / Early Help Assessments plus any other significant recent referrals made, e.g. Channel, CAMHS, private fostering etc.

In addition, it is up to a school to determine its capacity to include other children, e.g. FSM / persistent absentees / EHCP / Fixed excluded / Permanent excluded (within 15 days). However, it may well be that the first list includes some of these children and the degree of vulnerability must be assessed by DSL team in determining if checking on a child during a prolonged closure is needed.

Actions to consider

The table below sets out some actions recommended to Safeguarding teams to undertake prior to and during prolonged school closure. This is guidance from a combination of other documents including Working Together to Safeguard Children and Keeping Children Safe in Education and some school systems.

Action	Notes	Lead	Done
Identify your vulnerable groups of children.	Beside each child, identify regularity and type of check to be done, e.g. daily, weekly, by telephone, in person, etc., and who will carry out the check. Allocate staff to each child (use DSL, pastoral team, form tutors, SLT etc. and as many as needed).		
Home visits*	On the very rare occasion you deem that a child **must be seen**, have a system of referral to social care and/or police ready for allocated staff. The HT/Principal MUST be informed of any visit. Only go in pairs unless unavoidable. Risk assess as appropriate, e.g. if family/child		

	is isolating because of coronavirus; context of family; time of visit; location of visit. Should you feel there is a risk to yourselves, or others, attend with the police.		
DSL Meetings	Make arrangements to touch base regularly, e.g. each week, with all staff on any issue. If staff not in school, use emails, FaceTime/TEAMs/Zoom etc. Decision on a case by case nature may need to be made. (see next box).		
Record-keeping	When staff check-in, use of My Concern / CPOMs (other) to record check been made and whether 'all is well' or concerns exist. DSL should then monitor system. If anything urgent, consider if police should be contacted.		
Communication method for staff team.	Set up clear addresses/numbers for email, online, phone calls (always use school mobiles if off site to contact families). If staff do have to use a personal mobile, this must be known to the DSL and HT and they must ensure they withhold their number. There should not be contacting children via social media.		
Inform Social Care for those in CP & CIN.	Inform all social workers that are involved with a child what your plan is on checking-in. If they are making regular checks maybe they can inform you.		
CIN/CP Meetings	Depends on reason for school closure. If advice is not to travel then do not attend and ask for alternative methods of communicating, e.g. online, or send in a report to relevant social worker.		
Phone number/email for families to contact	Communicate a relevant email address, phone number or other method where a family can contact DSL (or maybe allocated staff member) if there is an issue they need help with.		
GDPR	Just be aware when dealing with sensitive data outside school but remember that safeguarding the child is the priority. If in doubt about any aspect check with SET Operations team.		

FSM	Please liaise with Pete Potts via email Peter.Potts@shaw-education.org.uk		
Communicate to all relevant adults and children above actions	Dependent on action and child, communicate to school staff and parents as appropriate and maintain current information on school website.		

Check-ins

When contacting a family, useful to have a script ready such as…

"Hi, it's Mr X from X Academy. Just calling for my weekly check in with *pupil X*. Everything ok and anything I can do to help?" (Try to speak briefly with child if possible.)

Useful numbers:

Use this section to put in contact details relevant to your local authority support such as:

(not an exhaustive list, add as appropriate)

LA first response number:

Local Education Safeguarding Partnership:

DSL email address and school mobile: stmartins-safeguarding@shaw-education.org.uk

Police non-emergency number:

SET Safeguarding contact: Brian Duffy brian.duffy@shaw-education.org.uk

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