

The Palmer Academy Safeguarding and child protection policy

Annex 6 – COVID-19 school closure arrangements for safeguarding



Updated 4th January 2021

Key contacts

	Name	Email Address	Telephone number
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Introduction

From 30th December 2020, in areas identified by Government, parents have again been asked to keep their children at home, and schools are requested to offer provision only for those children who are vulnerable, and for those who are offspring of critical workers who cannot otherwise be safely cared for at home. For the purposes of this policy, ‘vulnerable children’ is defined by DfE as those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan

In addition, schools have discretion to offer a school place to children identified as otherwise vulnerable and who could therefore benefit from continued full-time attendance. This might include:

- children and young people on the edge of receiving support from children’s social care services
- adopted children
- those at risk of becoming NEET (‘not in employment, education or training’)
- those living in temporary accommodation
- those who are young carers
- those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
- others at the provider and local authority’s discretion

Whilst the way in which our school is run during school closure due to COVID-19 will be different to usual, the following principles remain central to the safeguarding of our pupils:

- the best interests of children must always continue to come first
- if anyone in school has a safeguarding concern about any child they should continue to act and act immediately
- a DSL or deputy should be available

- it is essential that unsuitable people are not allowed to enter the children's workforce and/or gain access to children
- children should continue to be protected when they are online

Safeguarding will continue to operate in line with statutory expectations outlined in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2020).

School provision

There is an expectation that vulnerable children will attend school, so long as they are not shielding or clinically extremely vulnerable. Parents of vulnerable pupils will be encouraged by our leaders to send their children to school. In circumstances where a parent of a vulnerable child still does not want to bring their child to school, the Headteacher and school leaders will continue to explore the reasons for this directly with parents. Where parents are concerned about the risk of the child contracting COVID-19, these will be discussed with them following the advice set out by Public Health England.

Designated Safeguarding Lead arrangements

A minimum of one person from the safeguarding team, as listed above, will be designated to be responsible for safeguarding of pupils from our school, including those who are currently learning from home. They will typically be available face to face or, in exceptional circumstances, remotely. In the latter example, where they are working remotely, a senior leader will take responsibility for co-ordinating safeguarding on site. Staff will be informed of the name and location of the designated safeguarding person on duty, and, where the designated safeguarding person is working remotely, the name and location of the senior leader taking responsibility for co-ordinating safeguarding on site. Where they are working remotely, the contact details (phone and email) of the designated safeguarding person on duty will be shared with staff.

In the event that DSL training expires for any of the above named staff members, the Trust safeguarding team will signpost an online DSL training course that can be used in lieu of face to face training during this period. The Deputy Director of Education (DDoE) and Trust safeguarding team will arrange for additional DSL capacity in the event that the DSL and Deputies named above are unable to provide adequate DSL cover.

The DSL and Deputy DSLs will continue to liaise closely with the Local Authority, Social Work teams and the Virtual School, as applicable, to support vulnerable pupils. Any professionals' meetings, i.e. core groups, child protection conferences, will be attended remotely where the facility from the Local Authority and school allows; in the event that this is not possible, a written report will be submitted. Where a vulnerable child who has a Social Worker does not attend school, the child's Social Worker will be informed.

Supporting pupils in school

We are committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all of our pupils. We will continue to be a safe space for all pupils to attend and flourish. Senior Leaders will ensure that appropriate staff are on site for the operation of our provision. Our staff to pupil ratio numbers are in line with Government and DfE requirements, as well as being appropriate to the number, age and understanding of the pupils who are attending. This includes staff designated to undertake First Aid, and those supporting pupils with EHC plans.

To promote good physical health, we will refer to the Government guidance for education and childcare settings on maximum safe group size, how to implement social distancing, and continue to follow the advice from Public Health England on handwashing and other measures to limit the risk of spread of COVID-19. The specific measures we are taking to promote good physical health, in line with DfE and Public Health England guidance, is detailed in our school risk assessment, completed as part of the REAch2 risk management process.

We recognise that the current circumstances may affect a child's mental health, and that this may be displayed in a number of different ways. We will be alert to any changes in a pupil's behaviour, presentation and mood, and will support them, in collaboration with their parents, to manage any worries or anxieties that they may

have. Where necessary, bespoke additional input from school staff or from specialist staff/support services will be arranged.

Where a pupil is expected to attend school and does not do so, appropriate enquiries will be made to ascertain the pupil's whereabouts, in line with the attendance policy. Parents are requested to inform the school as soon as possible if their child is not attending school.

Safeguarding pupils who are not in school

To support and safeguard pupils known to be vulnerable whilst they are not attending school, the following procedures have been put in place, as a minimum:

- Review all pupils on vulnerable pupil list and identify those for whom school closure and a lack of contact with school staff would pose most risk, allocating each child to a member of the DSL team
- Ensure pupil contact details are up to date and are remotely accessible by all DSLs
- Ensure all DSLs have remote access to email and CPOMS
- Issue letter/communication to parent and any allocated workers of each pupil at risk to explain DSL contact taking place during school closure
- Make phone contact with each pupil at risk regularly, weekly as a minimum, to check safety and wellbeing, and, where possible, speaking to the child not just the parent. N.B. the number of contacts will be determined by the DSL based on a risk assessment of the pupil's current circumstances
- Record a summary of conversation on CPOMS which is then circulated to DSL team
- Monitor CPOMS and emails daily, and respond as required in line with main safeguarding policy and Local Authority thresholds

These procedures will continue throughout the period of school closure, including times designated as school holidays. During school holidays, communication to parents and pupils and record keeping will be undertaken by the DSL who is 'on call' for the school on the given day as detailed above, to allow adequate opportunity for other members of the DSL team to have time off of work.

Where contact with vulnerable pupils not attending school has been difficult to achieve or maintain, every effort will be made to safely contact parents through all available means of school communication, i.e. phone, text, email. In exceptional cases and at the discretion of the Headteacher, a home visit may also be considered. This will follow a clear COVID-19 risk assessment, including instructions to staff to promote good hygiene and maintain social distancing. If there are concerns about the welfare of a pupil where contact has not been established, we will follow our Local Authority Social Care referral processes.

We recognise that school is a protective factor for our pupils, and that the current circumstances surrounding restriction of movement may affect the mental health of pupils, as well as their parents. All staff will be aware of this in setting expectations of pupils' work to be completed at home, and in any other communications with parents and pupils. Any concerns for either parents or pupils related to mental health will be recorded as per the guidance above and below.

These procedures will be reviewed by the DSL and Deputy DSLs regularly, and no less than fortnightly. Any substantial changes to processes will be updated in the monthly policy review (see below)

Reporting a concern

The DSL and Deputy DSLs are alert to the risk of new or escalating safeguarding concerns arising when pupils return to school. They will provide suitable safeguarding updates to staff prior to pupils returning to ensure that any potential safeguarding concerns are recognised and reported, and they will support staff to 'check in' with pupils when they are attending school.

If staff have a safeguarding concern about a child, they should follow the usual process as per the main safeguarding and child protection policy. This would involve completing a cause for concern log on CPOMS and notifying the Safeguarding team. In the event that staff working remotely do not have access to the necessary device or systems for recording their concern, they must contact the named person responsible for safeguarding on the same day via phone in order to make a verbal report. Staff are reminded of the need to report any concern immediately and without delay; where a concern is urgent and high risk, a verbal report must be made first, either in person or via phone, and followed up in writing as soon as possible thereafter. CPOMS will be monitored by the DSL team regularly, no less than daily, and actions will be completed and recorded in line with the main safeguarding policy and Local Authority thresholds.

We recognise that incidents of peer on peer abuse can still occur during this time. Due to the need for smaller group sizes and social distancing, pupils may also need to interact with others with whom they are not familiar, and use different parts of the school building with which they are not accustomed. All staff will be alert to the potential risks of peer on peer abuse, and our school risk assessment for peer on peer abuse has been updated accordingly. In such an event, guidance contained within Part 5 of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2020) and from the main safeguarding and child protection policy will be followed, and staff will report any incidents in line with the school's reporting procedures, as outlined above.

Where staff are concerned about an adult working with children in the school, the guidance contained within Part 4 of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2020) and Annex 5 of our main safeguarding and child protection policy still applies. Any concern of this nature must be reported directly to the Headteacher; if he/she is away from school, this should be done verbally via phone and followed up in writing at the Headteacher's direction. If the concern relates to the Headteacher, this should be reported to the school's Deputy Director of Education and to the Chair of Governors.

Online safety

We will continue to provide a safe environment for pupils, which includes any activities undertaken online. Our online filtering system restricts access to unsuitable material. When electronic devices are in use by pupils in the school building, this will take place under appropriate supervision from adults, in line with our Acceptable Use Agreements.

It is important that all staff who interact with children, including online, continue to look out for signs a child may be at risk. Any such concerns will be dealt with as per the main safeguarding and child protection policy, and where appropriate referrals will be made in line with Local Authority thresholds. Staff must only use approved methods or platforms to communicate with parents and pupils, and a record of all interactions must be kept, with a record of the date, time, length and purpose/nature of the interaction. Where this communication was on the phone, the record is expected to be created in line with the school's processes for recording parental phone calls; in the event of an email communication, a retained copy of the email within the sender's email account is sufficient. If any communication with parents or pupils relates to or indicates a safeguarding concern, the usual safeguarding reporting procedures, as outlined above, must be followed.

Our school will begin to offer home learning for pupils not currently at school via Microsoft Teams during the school closure. Any staff member who is communicating with parents and/or pupils on this platform will be issued with guidance regarding safe, acceptable and professional behaviour, in line with our school's code of conduct before they are asked to use this platform.

Advice for parents regarding keeping their child safe online while at home has been shared via letter, which will be updated as required to ensure it remains high profile for our parents. This will also include sources of support for pupils themselves, at an age and stage appropriate level.

Staff and volunteer recruitment

It remains essential that people who are unsuitable to work with children are not allowed to enter the children's workforce or gain access to children. Recruitment of staff and volunteers in our school is expected to remain at

a minimum during this period; however, where recruitment is required and necessary, we will continue to follow the requirements set out within Part 3 of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2020) and our recruitment policy. Under no circumstances will a member of staff or volunteer upon whom the appropriate checks have not been completed be left to work unsupervised with a child or children.

Safeguarding induction and training

All current staff have received safeguarding induction and safeguarding training in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education (2020) and our main safeguarding policy. Where new staff start work with us during the period of school closure, they will be provided with, as a minimum, the main safeguarding and child protection policy, a copy of this annex, and Part One and Annex A of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2020) In addition, they will be provided with an induction session arranged by the DSL. This will include zoom session with DSL, Flick online learning and CPOMS guidance.

Safeguarding support

The REAch2 safeguarding team will provide remote support to schools, DSLs and other school leaders to enable safeguarding to operate effectively. This may involve secure remote access to files and record keeping for the purposes of quality assurance, guidance and direction. DSL forums will take place with a member of the Trust safeguarding team as required to offer guidance. Support to DSLs in the event of concerns about the practice or decision making of external agencies with regards to the safeguarding of a pupil will be provided in line with Trust guidance on safeguarding escalation.

Review

This annex will be reviewed by REAch2's Head of Safeguarding, and then by the Headteacher and the Designated Safeguarding Lead, on the first of each month throughout the period of school closure, or more frequently if updates from the DfE require. This will include any information received from Berkshire Local Authority safeguarding children partnership, Social Care, Virtual School, and the Designated Officer.

Linked documents

- PARENTS safeguarding pupils while remote learning
- STAFF safeguarding pupils while remote learning
- guidance for use of personal devices