Briefing for schools: Ofsted requirements for safeguarding in schools in England

September 2019

About this briefing

This briefing provides schools with an overview of how Ofsted inspects safeguarding arrangements in schools in England.

It summarises information in Ofsted’s School inspection handbook and guidance on Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings, both of which were updated in September 2019.

It does not, however, provide a comprehensive guide to Ofsted inspections. For further information please refer to Ofsted’s published guidance, as referenced at the bottom of this briefing.

Schools in England are inspected on five key headings:

- overall effectiveness
- quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- personal development
- leadership and management.

(Ofsted, 2019a).

Ofsted’s School inspection handbook sets out what schools can expect from an inspection. It explains what inspectors must do and provides guidance for inspectors on making their judgements (Ofsted, 2019a).
As part of the inspection, schools are judged on the effectiveness of their safeguarding arrangements and will need to demonstrate that they are meeting their statutory responsibilities. Ofsted provides guidance about the key things inspectors need to consider when inspecting safeguarding in schools in Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings (Ofsted, 2019b).

**A school’s overall effectiveness will be judged inadequate if safeguarding is found to be ineffective.** If weaknesses are identified in safeguarding which are easily rectified and there are no serious failings that leave pupils either being harmed or at risk of harm a school will be judged as requiring improvement (Ofsted, 2019a).

**How does Ofsted define safeguarding?**

Ofsted inspectors refer to the Department for Education (DfE)’s definition of safeguarding, which can be summarised as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children’s 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

(DfE, 2018).

As well as safeguarding against neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse, school staff should have an understanding of wider safeguarding issues including:

- bullying
- racist, disability and homophobic or transphobic abuse
- gender-based violence
- trafficking and criminal exploitation, including county lines
- serious violent crime
- risks specific to the local area, such as gang activity and youth violence
- risks linked to technology and social media
- upskirting
- domestic abuse
- female genital mutilation (FGM)
- forced marriage
• fabricated and induced illness
• substance misuse
• homelessness
• so-called honour-based violence
• parental risk factors
(Ofsted, 2019b).

Inspectors will also consider other factors such as how the school:
• protects children’s mental health and emotional wellbeing
• ensures pupils’ safety on educational visits
• uses reasonable force
• meets the needs of children with special educational needs, disabilities or medical conditions
• provides first aid
• arranges to ensure children’s and learners’ security
• manages online safety
(Ofsted, 2019b).

**What do schools need to do before inspection?**

Ofsted will normally get in touch with a school the day before an inspection. The school will then have until 8am the next morning to pull together the information the inspectors need, including:
• the single central record, summarising the checks and vetting of all staff working with pupils
• a list of concerns that have been shared with the designated safeguarding lead, including information on which concerns were subsequently referred to the local authority and brief details of how concerns were resolved
• a list of pupils who have open cases with children’s services and for whom there is a multi-agency plan
• records and analysis of:
  o exclusions
  o pupils taken off roll
  o behaviour incidents
  o any use of internal isolation
  o sexual harassment or sexual violence
  o bullying, discriminatory and prejudiced behaviour
As well as information requested from the school, inspectors will review and consider a range of other sources, including:

- all relevant information held by Ofsted, including the most recent inspection report on the relevant local authority’s children’s services
- relevant publicly available information, such as the school’s website
- information published by local authorities, the DfE and the police

(Ofsted, 2019a).

**What evidence does Ofsted consider during the inspection?**

When assessing the impact, a school’s safeguarding arrangements are having on the safety and wellbeing of children inspectors will be looking out for signs of successful arrangements and consider a range of evidence including:

**Policy and procedures**

- whether statutory requirements are being met
- whether child protection and staff behaviour policies and procedures are in place, understood and regularly reviewed
- whether there have been any safeguarding incidents or allegations since the last inspection, how they were responded to and how the school worked with external agencies regarding concerns
- whether written records are made in an appropriate and timely way and are held securely
- whether child protection or safeguarding concerns are shared in a timely way with the relevant local authority, records of referrals are retained and any follow up action is taken promptly
- whether there is a clear approach to implementing the Prevent duty (DfE, 2015) and keeping children safe from radicalisation and extremism
- whether staff and volunteers are carefully selected and vetted, and appropriate checks and monitors are in place for visitors to the school

**Recognising and responding to risk**

- whether appropriate risk assessments and health and safety arrangements are in place to protect staff and children from harm
• whether staff are supported to have a good awareness of the signs of abuse and wider environmental factors that might be a threat to children’s safety, and are confident about what to do if they believe a child is at risk
• how the school identifies children who may need early help, be at risk of abuse or need support with their mental health
• how well the school understands the vulnerability of children who are missing education, the processes it has in place to support them and the decision-making process for pupils who are taken off roll

Staff understanding and awareness
• whether staff are provided with regular training and information related to safeguarding and child protection
• whether there is a designated senior member of staff in charge of safeguarding who has been trained to the appropriate level, and whether staff are aware of who their safeguarding lead is
• whether staff recognise that children can abuse their peers, and consider the support needs of all children involved
• whether staff have a good understanding of potential risks online and have strategies in place to keep children safe

Children’s safety, education and awareness
• whether children are protected and feel safe, can identify a trusted adult who they can tell any concerns to and experience positive support from staff
• how children are taught about healthy relationships and safeguarding risks and what support is available to them

Behaviour management
• how the school prevents and tackles discriminatory and derogatory language including homophobic and racist language and language related to disability
• whether staff are supported to make reasonable judgements on when it may be appropriate to use physical contact to protect a child or others from injury, and whether staff understand that poor behaviour may be a sign that a child is suffering harm or has experienced abuse

School environment
• whether the physical environment in the school is safe
• whether appropriate filters and monitoring systems are in place to protect learners from potentially harmful online material (Ofsted, 2019b).

Ofsted will also gather feedback from pupils, parents, staff and other stakeholders.

During the inspection, the inspectors will observe pupils to evaluate aspects of personal development, behaviour and welfare at times such as:

• start and end of the school day, lunch and break times
• assemblies and tutor times
• between lessons.

Inspectors will ask pupils about their experiences of behaviour in the school, including the prevention of bullying, how the school deals with any form of harassment and violence, discrimination and prejudiced behaviour (Ofsted, 2019a).

Pupils, staff and parents will also be asked to complete an online questionnaire during the inspection. Respondents are asked to comment on a series of statements about the school, covering a wide range of issues including child safety and wellbeing (Ofsted, 2019a, Ofsted, 2019c, Ofsted, 2018).

Inspectors may gather evidence from parents or other stakeholders in person. This may include informal meetings, which must take place without the presence of senior staff (Ofsted, 2019a).

**How do inspectors address safeguarding concerns?**

Concerns around safeguarding may be reported to the inspectors prior to a visit or may be picked up during the inspection. These could be in relation to:

• the school not following statutory safeguarding requirements or locally agreed procedures
• the school failing to act on or delaying passing on concerns which may put a child at risk of significant harm
• the suspension or redeployment of staff about whom there is safeguarding investigation taking place
the school failing to comply with Disclosure and Barring Service duty to refer a member of staff who may pose a risk to children (Ofsted, 2019b).

If concerns are known prior to the visit the lead inspector should record it as part of the inspection planning evidence.

The lead inspector should report any concerns that arise during the visit and highlight that it is under investigation.

References


Elearning
Our online and face to face courses can help develop your understanding of how to protect children from abuse

Child protection in schools:

Child protection for school governors
https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training/schools/child-protection-for-school-governors-online-course/

Schools and education safeguarding and child protection training courses:
https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training/schools/

Contact the NSPCC’s Knowledge and Information Service with any questions about child protection or related topics:

Tel: 0116 234 7246 | Email: learning@nspcc.org.uk | Twitter: @NSPCCLearning

Visit www.nspcc.org.uk/schools for more information and resources for schools

Sign up for our monthly safeguarding in education email newsletter
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