

SCHOOL GOVERNORS AND SAFEGUARDING

School governors have a key role to play in the safeguarding of children. Public enquiries and investigations into child deaths and abuse have consistently highlighted the need for everyone to work together on protecting children, and for those in influential positions in organisations working with children to have a clear understanding of safeguarding policies, procedures and duties.

Role of the governing body

The Education Act 2002 defines the statutory role of governing bodies in relation to safeguarding children and requires them to ensure that schools have suitable child protection policies and procedures in place. This includes procedures for safe recruitment and dealing with allegations of abuse against members of staff and volunteers.

Governing bodies are required to remedy, without delay, any deficiencies or weaknesses in regard to child protection arrangements that are brought to their attention, and policies and procedures must be reviewed annually.

Designated persons

In addition to the above, governing bodies have a statutory duty to ensure that a senior member of the school leadership team is designated to take lead responsibility for child protection issues. Larger schools may require more than one designated person.

The designated person is responsible for:

- referring cases of suspected abuse or allegations to the relevant investigating agencies
- providing advice and support to other staff
- liaising and working with other agencies, for example the local authority, the police and social services.

Governors should ensure the designated person is aware of:

- local safeguarding services
- how to gain access to them
- what sources of further advice are available
- who to contact in what circumstances, and how

The designated person does not have to be a teacher but must have sufficient status and authority to be able to carry out the duties of his or her post.

Designated individuals should undertake inter-agency training as provided by a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and attend refresher training every two years.

<https://www.hampshirescp.org.uk/>

Specific governor roles

Many governing bodies nominate an individual member to champion child protection issues and to link with the safeguarding lead and team. Such a role has been found to be an effective way for the governing body to achieve an overview of safeguarding arrangements and ensure they are robust.

The chair of the governing body, or the deputy, will normally be responsible for liaising with the local authority (LA) and any partner agencies, as appropriate, in the event of allegations of abuse being made against the Head.

Governors should support the safeguarding activities of the school at every opportunity and always act to promote the welfare of children.

Working Together to Safeguard Children

The Department for Education provides key guidance for safeguarding in *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A Guide to Inter-Agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children*. School governors need to be aware of this guidance, and the structures and processes that it requires to be put in place.

According to the guidance, the LA has lead responsibility for safeguarding and must work in partnership with other organisations to promote the welfare of children. In particular, the LA is responsible for establishing an LSCB in their area and for ensuring it is run effectively. Such boards are the key mechanism for agreeing how organisations in each local area will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

LAs and their partners are also responsible for ensuring that the training opportunities to meet the needs of the workforce are identified and met by LSCBs.

Training

Teachers and other members of school staff who work closely with children are in a position of trust and have a unique opportunity to recognise changes in behaviour and receive what are known as “disclosures” from children themselves. All staff must, therefore, have the necessary training to help them recognise signs of possible abuse and to know what to do if a child discloses information to them.

All members of the governing body should receive information about the child protection procedures in the school and should attend training wherever possible. Those governors with specialist child protection roles should attend further training. Governors should ensure that the Head and all other staff who work with children are trained to a level that enables them to carry out their responsibilities and maintain familiarity with school policy and procedure. This training should be updated every three years.

Temporary staff and volunteers must be made aware of the school’s arrangements for child protection and their individual responsibilities, ideally on the first visit to the school.

Relevant training should be approved by the LSCB and can usually be accessed through LA social services, school or governor training programmes. Within the school, those who are designated persons with up-to-date inter-agency training may also provide training for other staff and governors.

Safer recruitment

In the past there have been many cases of people getting jobs in schools or volunteering, and then using their position of trust and influence to abuse children. Putting into place effective recruitment processes, which include appropriate checks and safeguards, is the best way to minimise the risk of such people gaining these roles.

Since 2010, under the School Staffing (England) Regulations 2009, it has been a legal requirement on governing bodies that they ensure recruitment panels appointing school staff include at least one person who has been trained in safer recruitment.

Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education gives statutory guidance as to how this duty must be discharged and places requirements on all governing bodies to have suitable policies and procedures in place.

Allegations against staff

Governors should be clear about the procedures in place for dealing with abuse allegations against school staff and volunteers. The procedures must aim to strike a balance between the need to protect children from abuse, and the need to protect staff and volunteers from false or unfounded accusations.

If an allegation is made, the Head or chair of governors should immediately discuss the case with the LA designated officer for safeguarding. Chairs of governing bodies are expected to work with the Head (unless the allegation concerns the Head) and the local officer to confirm the facts about individual cases.

In August 2011, the Department for Education published statutory guidance on *Dealing with Allegations of Abuse against Teachers and Other Staff — Guidance for Local Authorities, Headteachers, School Staff, Governing Bodies and Proprietors of Independent Schools*.

Ofsted inspections

School safeguarding arrangements are included in Ofsted inspections, particularly under the framework judgment on behaviour and safety. It is also included in the judgment on the quality of leadership in, and management of, the school, and as part of this judgment inspectors will expect governing bodies to ensure they have robust safeguarding arrangements in place, including safe recruitment procedures. In this regard, Ofsted may request evidence that each recruitment panel includes at least one member trained in safer recruitment.