Virtual School Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

2024-2025

Katy Enser – Virtual School Head
Version 1

Milton Keynes Virtual School Contacts

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References

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 - [Keeping children safe in education 2024 (publishing.service.gov.uk)](#)

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 - [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance (publishing.service.gov.uk)](#)

Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024 - [Working together to improve school attendance (applies from 19 August 2024) (publishing.service.gov.uk)](#)

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2021 - [Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (publishing.service.gov.uk)](#)

Milton Keynes Inter-agency Safeguarding Children Procedures - [Welcome to the Milton Keynes Safeguarding Children... (trixonline.co.uk)](#)

The Children Act 1989, The Children Act 2004, Education Act 2002 (section 175)

Definitions

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children – Safeguarding children is defined in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023' as:

- Providing help and support to meet the needs of children as soon as problems emerge
- Protecting children from maltreatment, whether that is within or outside the home, including online
- Preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care

- Promoting the upbringing of children with their birth parents, or otherwise their family network through a kinship care arrangement, whenever possible and where this is in the best interests of the children
- Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes in line with the outcomes set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework.

Safeguarding can involve a range of potential issues such as:

- Neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse
- Bullying, including online bullying (by text message, on social networking sites, etc.) and prejudice-based bullying
- Racist, disability and homophobic or transphobic abuse.
- Gender based violence/violence against women and girls
- Extremist behaviour and/or radicalisation
- Child sexual exploitation and trafficking
- The impact of new technologies, including 'sexting' and accessing pornography
- Teenage relationship abuse
- Substance misuse
- Issues which may be specific to a local area or population, for example gang activity and youth violence
- Particular issues affecting children including domestic violence, female genital mutilation and honour-based violence and forced marriage

Child Protection – Part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.

Staff – Refers to all those working for or on behalf of the school, temporary or permanent, in either a paid or voluntary capacity, including contractors.

Child – Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.

Parents – Refers to birth parents and other adults who are in a parenting role, for example, step-parents, foster carers and adoptive parents.

Safeguarding Principles

This policy outlines the framework for all staff in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are part of the Virtual School (VS). The VS recognises that the safety and welfare of children is the most important thing we do and we have a responsibility to protect children in all of our schools' activities. The VS will take all reasonable steps to ensure that all children, irrespective of sex, age, disability, race, religion or belief, sexual identity or social status, are protected from abuse.

We are committed to:

- Ensure our schools create a safe and welcoming environment where children can learn.
- Support and encourage other groups and organisations to implement similar policies.
- Recognise that safeguarding children is the responsibility of everyone, not just those who work with children.
- Review ways of working to incorporate best practice, including this policy being regularly reviewed and updated to reflect current best practice and Government expectations.
- Treat all children with respect regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity.
- Following the Safer Recruitment processes to carefully recruit and select appropriate employees, contractors and volunteers.
- Respond swiftly and appropriately to all complaints and concerns about poor practice or suspected or actual child abuse.
- Share information about concerns with agencies who need to know, involving parents, carers and children appropriately and follow these concerns up until resolved.
- Ensuring that all VS colleagues maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here' at all times. When concerned about the welfare of a child, staff members should always act in the interests of the child and have a responsibility to take action.

Milton Keynes Council has a dedicated mechanism for recording and responding to complaints. Further information can be found here: [Comments, compliments and complaints | Milton Keynes City Council (milton-keynes.gov.uk)](https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk)

Expectations

All Virtual School staff will:

- Read and understand Part 1 of statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024);
- In addition, all staff will be aware of the systems in place which support safeguarding including reading this policy;
- Be subject to Safer Recruitment processes and checks in line with Milton Keynes Council procedures (e.g. DBS checks, references, safer recruitment trained interview panel members);
- Share relevant information to keep the child safe with the team around the child;
- Be alert to the signs and indicators of possible abuse;
- Record concerns and communicate with the Virtual School DSL as outlined below ensuring a record of the concern has been logged.

Sharing Concerns

Where Virtual School staff have concerns about a child, they must report these concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) of the Virtual School. When concerns arise whilst working in a school/setting/provider, a member of the Virtual School will follow the school/setting/provider's safeguarding policy and report their concern to the DSL on site in a timely manner. In this instance, the Virtual School staff must also immediately raise the concern with the Virtual School DSL. If a concern is raised from an alternative source, this information must be shared with the child's social worker. If there is any reason that sharing this concern via the routes outlined may cause additional risk or concerns, refer immediately to the Virtual School DSL. In all instances, the Virtual School DSL will ensure that the social worker is made aware.

In all cases, a record of the safeguarding concern must be completed on a Safeguarding Concern Form (see Appendix A), this will include all actions to be taken and dates for any follow-up actions. This form must be sent to the Virtual School DSL for review and/or further action and secure storage.

Where there are concerns raised about adults who are working with children, these will be discussed with the LADO. The LADO must be contacted within one working day in respect of all cases in which it is alleged that a person who works or volunteers with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children ; or

- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

Milton Keynes LADO – 01908 254307 – lado@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Where the course of action is not clear, or not agreed, advice will be sought from:

Jenny Thomas – Safeguarding Manager (jenny.thomas@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

Identification of those at Increased Risk, or that have Additional Safeguarding Needs

Certain groups of pupils are more likely to be identified as requiring extra support to meet their safeguarding needs. Many LAC have multiple vulnerabilities e.g children who have additional needs, have mental health concerns and/or substance misuse, etc. It is therefore important that those at greater risk are identified, regularly monitored and appropriate measures are put in place to support their needs.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can face additional safeguarding challenges. The Virtual School recognises that additional barriers can exist when identifying abuse and neglect in this group of children. These can include:

- Assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's disability without further exploration;
- The potential for children with SEN and disabilities being disproportionally impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs; and communication barriers and difficulties in overcoming these barriers

Children Missing Education (and Part-time Timetables)

Attendance, absence and exclusions are closely monitored by the VS. A child being absent from school and children missing from education are potential indicators of abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. The VS will take appropriate action, liaising with social care and the educational placement as well as following local procedures, particularly where children go missing on repeated occasions and/or are missing for periods during the day. Individual education providers are responsible for publishing their own Attendance Policies and reference should be made to these where there are concerns.

The Department for Education 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2024)' outlines that all pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. In very exceptional circumstances, where it is a child's best interests, there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs. For example, where a medical condition prevents a pupil from attending full-time education and a part-time timetable is considered as part of a re-integration package. A part-time timetable must not be treated as a long-term solution. Any pastoral support programme or other agreement must have a time limit by which point the pupil is expected to attend full-time or be provided with alternative provision.

Further information can be found here: [Working together to improve school attendance (applies from 19 August 2024) (publishing.service.gov.uk)](#)

Confidentiality

It is imperative that confidentiality is discussed and fully understood by all those working with children, especially in matters of safeguarding and child protection. Adults must never promise confidentiality to any individual, including parents, children and colleagues. VS staff should make children aware that if they disclose information that may be harmful to themselves or others, then this may result in further action being taken to safeguard them.

Wherever possible, consent should be obtained before sharing personal information with third parties. In some circumstances, obtaining consent may not be possible or in the best interest of the child e.g., where not sharing would compromise the safety and welfare of the child. The law permits the disclosure of confidential information necessary to safeguard a child or children. Disclosure should be justifiable in each case, according to the particular facts of the case, and legal advice should be sought if in doubt.

Record Keeping

All documents will be recorded and stored in accordance with Milton Keynes' GDPR policies and procedures. Further information can be found here: [Milton Keynes Council corporate privacy notice | Milton Keynes Council (milton-keynes.gov.uk)](#)

Allegations Against Staff

The VS will never let allegations by a child or young person go unrecorded or unreported, including any made against its own staff. If staff receive a disclosure, about an adult colleague, in all instances the VSH should be advised, and the child made aware that their

concern is being taken seriously. If an allegation is made against the VSH, the Director of Children's Services and the LADO should be notified immediately.

Low-level concerns as outlined in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 must also be acted on where noted by Virtual School staff. A low-level concern is any concern that an adult has acted in a way that:

- is inconsistent with their setting's staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work, and
- doesn't meet the threshold of harm or is not considered serious enough for the school or college to refer to the local authority

Low-level concerns are part of a spectrum of behaviour. This includes:

- inadvertent or thoughtless behaviour
- behaviour that might be considered inappropriate depending on the circumstances
- behaviour which is intended to enable abuse

Examples of such behaviour could include:

- being over friendly with children;
- having favourites;
- adults taking photographs of children on their mobile phones, contrary to school policy;
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door;
- humiliating children.

Where low-level concerns are noted, Virtual School staff will refer to the educational setting or commissioned service's safeguarding policy and procedures as well as informing the Virtual School DSL. Where unsure, the DSL should have a conversation with the LADO to reassure of actions.

Working with Other Agencies/Visits

The majority of the work of the VS involves working with a range of professionals and agencies. When any safeguarding concerns arise during visits to educational settings, the DSL of the setting/provider must be notified, and the setting's safeguarding and child protection procedures should be applied. In addition to this, the staff member must report this to the VS DSL.

Staff Support and Training

The nature of safeguarding and child protection work can be stressful and traumatic. Milton Keynes Virtual School will support staff by providing opportunities through 1:1 meetings with their line manager to talk through any issues and seek further support as appropriate.

All staff members will receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training, which is regularly updated. In addition, all staff should receive safeguarding and child protection updates as required, but at least annually, to provide them with relevant skills and knowledge to safeguard children effectively.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will undergo training to provide them with the knowledge and skills required to carry out the role. The training will be updated every two years.

Additional Information

Milton Keynes Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

The MASH has a core team of representatives from Children's Social Care, police, health and adult safeguarding co-located at Civic, 1 Saxon Gate East, Milton Keynes. It also has links with education, probation, housing, youth offending team and CAMHS (Child and adolescent mental health).

The MASH team receives information from professionals and members of the public raising concerns or requesting advice or support. It makes decisions on actions to be taken by:

- Using a RAG rating (Red\Amber\Green) to determine urgency of response required
- Sharing information securely between agencies to enable informed decision making
- Managers decide the most appropriate interventions for the child's identified needs

The MASH can be contacted by:

- Calling 01908 253169 or 253170.
- Emailing children@milton-keynes.gov.uk
- Completing the Multi Agency Referral Form (MARF)

Appendix A

Safeguarding concern template	
Child's name	Date of birth and Year Group:
Date:	Time:
Name: Print	Signature
Position:	
Note the reason(s) for recording the incident – *please identify the concern regarding this incident that has caused you to raise it with the VS DSL.*	
Details of concern/incident - record the who/what/where/when factually (use reverse or continuation sheet if necessary):	
Any other relevant information (witnesses, immediate action taken)	
Action taken - record and date any further updates/actions: Reporting staff signature: Date	
DSL – Response/Outcome DSL signature Date …………….	

Appendix B

Abuse and neglect is defined as the maltreatment of a child or young person whereby someone may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to prevent harm. They may be abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children.

All school and college staff, including the Virtual School staff, should be aware that abuse, neglect and safeguarding issues are rarely standalone events that can be covered by one definition or label. In most cases multiple issues will overlap with one another.

The following are the definition of abuse and neglect as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) however, the ultimate responsibility to assess and define the type of abuse a child or young person may be subject to is that of the Police and Children's Services – our responsibility is to understand what each category of abuse is and how this can impact on the welfare and development of our children and where we have concerns that a child or young person may be at risk of abuse and neglect (one or more categories can apply) to take appropriate action as early as possible.

Physical abuse: a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.	**Neglect:** the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to: provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment); protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger; ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.
Sexual abuse: involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.	**Emotional abuse:** the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, although it may occur alone.