

White Meadows Primary Safeguarding and Child Protection policy

Annex 6 – COVID-19 school closure arrangements for safeguarding



Updated 8th March 2021

Key contacts

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Introduction

Since 4th January 2021, school attendance has been restricted to only pupils classed as vulnerable and those who have a parent as a critical worker, with the remaining pupils accessing education remotely from home. From 8th March 2021, the Government has advised that all pupils should now begin to attend school. When pupils return, safeguarding will continue to operate in line with statutory expectations outlined in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2020) This annex outlines the specific actions that our school will take, in addition to the main safeguarding and child protection policy, to safeguard pupils.

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, for our pupils who were required to access education remotely, new safeguarding concerns may have arisen that have previously been unknown due to the lack of face to face contact between pupils and staff during the time away from school. The current circumstances may also affect a child's mental health, and this may be displayed in a number of different ways. The DSL and Deputy DSLs are 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. They will also support and train staff, as required, 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 as they return to school and thereafter on a regular basis. Where necessary, bespoke additional input from school staff or from specialist staff/support services will be arranged, and the DSL and Deputy DSLs will continue to co-ordinate with children's social care, local safeguarding partners and other agencies and services to safeguard pupils as required.

Attendance

If any pupil does not return to school as expected on 8th March, appropriate enquiries will be made to ascertain the pupil's whereabouts, in line with the attendance policy. This may involve referral to the Local Authority, Social Care and/or to the Police to check the pupil's welfare. Parents are requested to inform the school as soon as possible if their child is not attending school and the reasons for their absence.

We are aware that a small number of pupils will still not be able to attend school due to being classed as clinically extremely vulnerable and having received a shielding letter, or because they are required to self-isolate due to symptoms of COVID-19. Absence in these circumstances will be authorised. We will continue to provide remote education to pupils who are unable to attend school for reasons of shielding or self-isolation, which will include pastoral support. If a pupil with a Social Worker is unable to return to school, the Social Worker will be informed.

We recognise that a number of parents and pupils may be anxious about returning to school. We will share all available information with families to reassure them of the actions we are taking to minimise infection risk, and to encourage the pupil's return to school. We will work closely with other professionals, including Social Care and West Sussex County Council to promote daily attendance at school, in line with our attendance policy. If a pupil with a Social Worker does not return to school or does not attend regularly, the Social Worker will be informed.

Safeguarding pupils who are not in school due to self-isolation

We will continue to follow DfE guidance in ensuring our pupils are maintained in consistent groups, or 'bubbles', in order to reduce the risk of infection transmission, and to more quickly and easily identify those who need to self-isolate in the case of a positive COVID-19 test. If a positive COVID-19 test does occur for a pupil or staff member, we are aware that, upon advice from the DfE and Public Health England, this bubble will need to self-isolate at home for 10 days and will not be able to attend school during this time. One or more of our pupils may also be required to self-isolate at any time due to contact with an infected person outside of school. Our safeguarding responsibilities for these pupils whilst isolating at home remains our highest priority.

A minimum of one person from the safeguarding team, as listed above, will be designated to be responsible for safeguarding of pupils who are unable to attend school due to self-isolation. They will typically be available in person at school or, in exceptional circumstances, remotely. Staff working in the school will be aware of the name and location of the designated safeguarding person on duty, and their contact details (phone and email) will be shared, as required.

The DSL and Deputy DSLs will continue to liaise closely with the Local Authority, Social Work teams, Early Help and Family Support teams, and the Virtual School, as applicable, to support any vulnerable pupil who is self-isolating. 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. If a pupil with a Social Worker is self-isolating, the Social Worker will be informed.

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

- Review the vulnerable pupil list and identify those for whom self-isolation and a lack of face-to-face 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
- Make regular (no less than weekly) phone contact with each identified pupil to check safety and wellbeing; where possible, speaking to the pupil and not just the parent
- Record a summary of conversation on CPOMS or on electronic version of school concern form which is then circulated to DSL team via email
- Monitor CPOMS and emails daily, and respond as required in line with the main safeguarding and child protection policy and Local Authority thresholds

Where contact with a vulnerable pupil who is self-isolating is difficult to achieve or maintain, every effort will be made to contact parents through all available means of school communication, i.e. phone, text, email. At the discretion of the Headteacher, a home visit may also be considered. In all cases, 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 self-isolation may affect the mental health of these 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 and responded to in line with the main safeguarding and child protection policy.

Upon completion of the mandatory period of self-isolation, if 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. This may involve referral to the Local Authority, Social Care and/or to the Police to check the pupil's welfare. Parents are requested to inform the school as soon as possible if their child will not be coming back to school on the day that they are expected to return, and the reasons for absence.

Reporting a concern

If staff have a safeguarding concern about a pupil who is self-isolating, they should follow the usual process as per the main safeguarding and child protection policy. A concern form must be completed and passed to a DSL in a timely manner. The DSL will then investigate the concern and record on CPOMS. 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 day in question 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, including those for Early Help.

As above, the DSL and Deputy DSLs are alert to the risk of new safeguarding concerns arising during a period of self-isolation; they will support and train staff as required 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 as they return to school and thereafter on a regular basis.

Online safety

Our school will support the learning of pupils who are self-isolating via Google Meet. Any staff member who is communicating with parents and/or pupils on this platform has been issued with guidance regarding safe, acceptable and professional behaviour when interacting with pupils online, in line with our school's code of conduct. Staff must only use approved devices and platforms to communicate with pupils, and a record of all interactions (excluding scheduled lessons) must be kept, with a record of the date, time, length and purpose/nature of the interaction.

Advice for parents regarding keeping their child safe online while at home has been shared via email, 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.

It is important that all staff continue to look out for signs a pupil may be at risk when online. 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.

Safeguarding support

The REAch2 safeguarding team will provide remote support as required 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. 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 in line with any updates issued by DfE to ensure it remains compliant with Government expectations.