Best Practice in Schools and Children’s Homes

Practice Areas Affected:
The Ofsted report – and this Policy Briefing - primarily addresses Safeguarding Schools but should be read in conjunction with an earlier Ofsted report (‘Outstanding Children’s Homes), which contained some similar messages. Therefore, this Policy Briefing is of interest to colleagues in education and social care.

Status of this report(s):
Both reports are just that – reports providing messages to colleagues in education and social care. To view the Ofsted reports, go to our website (www.trixonline.co.uk) and follow links to Policy Briefing No 38 from the Home Screen.

Introduction
This Policy Briefing combines messages from the latest Ofsted Report (Safeguarding in schools: best practice) published in September 2011, which evaluates the features of best practice in safeguarding where safeguarding has been judged outstanding. It identifies the findings from over 6,000 inspections conducted in 2009/2010 and highlights best practice in those schools achieving the grading of ‘outstanding’ in relation to their safeguarding procedures.

It also contains information published in the March 2011 report (Outstanding Children’s Homes) which analysed 12 Children’s Homes who achieved and sustained Outstanding Status over a period of three years.

Best Practice
Improvements in safeguarding children have been high on the priority for nearly all schools in recent years. In her commentary on the findings set out in Ofsted’s 2009/2010 Annual Report, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector wrote:

‘Safeguarding...is an issue addressed not only with increasing sureness by those responsible for keeping children and learners safe, but one felt keenly by those most vulnerable to harm and neglect.’

Despite this statement, recent figures from the Ofsted report Safeguarding in school: best practice, have shown that almost a quarter of all schools inspected in 2009/2010 had safeguarding arrangements that were satisfactory or worse; thus indicating the “need for considerable improvements”

In addition to this, 26 schools were judged to be inadequate for issues related solely to safeguarding. Common weaknesses in these schools included:
The failure to maintain a single central record of recruitment and vetting checks covering all adults who had regular contact with children.

- Insufficient child protection training.
- Key risk assessments not completed.
- A failure by the governing body to monitor and review the policies to protect children.

Ofsted were also keen to set the record straight and banish a number of myths that have emerged due to various interpretations of the word ‘reasonable’.

Some of those myths are:

- Ofsted does not require schools to build walls around playgrounds.
- It does not expect schools to seek CRB checks on casual visitors to schools, including parents.
- It does not judge a school to be inadequate due to minor administrative errors.
- It does not fail a school because and inspector’s ID was not checked.

**Key features of outstanding practice**

19% of schools were judged to be outstanding in relation to their safeguarding procedures. The key features listed below were found to a greater or lesser extent in all of those schools:

- High quality leadership and management that makes safeguarding a priority across all aspects of a school’s work. NB the earlier (Children’s Homes) Ofsted Report states that a key characteristic which sets apart Outstanding Children’s Homes is ‘leaders who are hands-on, who unite their staff behind a shared purpose, and who are transparent and open in their expectations and pursuit of excellence and clarity of vision, which is absolutely focused on the experience of children and young people and uncompromising in its ambition’.
- Stringent vetting procedures in place for staff and other adults.
- Rigorous safeguarding policies and procedures in place, written in plain English, compliant with statutory requirements and updated regularly; in particular, clear and coherent child protection policies.
- Child protection arrangements, which are accessible to everyone, so that pupils and families, as well as adults in the school, know who they can talk to if they are worried.
- Excellent communication systems with up-to-date information that can be accessed and shared by those who need it.
- A high priority given to training in safeguarding, generally going beyond basic requirements, extending expertise widely and building internal capacity.
- Robust arrangements for site security, understood and applied by staff and pupils.
- A curriculum that is flexible, relevant and engages pupils’ interest; that is used to promote safeguarding, not least through teaching pupils how to stay safe, how to protect themselves from harm and how to take responsibility for their own and others’ safety. The earlier (Children’s Homes) report states ‘a commitment to continual improvement, always being willing to learn and ask “what could we do better?”’. 
Courteous and responsible behaviour by the pupils, enabling everyone to feel secure and well-protected.

Well thought out and workable day-to-day arrangements to protect and promote pupils’ health and safety. The earlier (Children's Homes) report states 'meticulous planning that engages young people and responds in detail to their individual needs so that their experience of care is highly personalised, combined with a commitment to never 'give up' on a child or young person and to do everything possible to maintain the placement'.

Rigorous monitoring of absence, with timely and appropriate follow-up, to ensure that pupils attend regularly.

Risk assessment taken seriously and used to good effect in promoting safety.

Additional messages that came from the earlier (Children's Homes) report on key characteristics, which sets apart Outstanding Services – and which colleagues in education should take account of too- are:

- The passion and energy of staff who are deeply committed to their work, and the recruitment, training and management systems which identify these staff and support them to grow and develop.
- Time spent with the children and young people individually and in groups so that they are able to develop meaningful secure relationships with the adults in the home, and with each other.
- Absolute consistency in the management of behaviour so that young people understand and respect the boundaries that are set and respond positively to encouragement, rewards and meaningful sanctions.
- An unwavering commitment to support children and young people to succeed, and a belief in their ability to do so, translated into active support for their education both in the homes and in their partnerships with schools and other professionals.
- Working with each child or young person to build their emotional resilience and self-confidence, to prepare them for independence and enable them to withstand difficulties and set-backs in the future.

Getting Help

The report also showed that safeguarding is not something that schools have to do alone.

The use of outside agencies was commented on and those that achieved the accolade of outstanding use other professional bodies in the field to help with their policies and procedures (this is reflected in the earlier Children’s Homes Report: that care had been taken in developing the procedures so that they became a fundamental and evolving element of the service and tied closely to its overall ethos.

- Senior managers encourage their staff to draw support on the expertise of other agencies and professionals to support and protect pupils and their families.
- The schools visited liaised closely with their local authority to ensure their procedures were compliant with national requirements.
• The use of external specialist support can help schools to keep their safeguarding practice sharp and in line with statutory requirements and local and national guidance.

The earlier, Children’s Homes, Report also stated that outcomes for children are ‘more likely to be improved where managers engage staff, partners and wider stakeholders in the creation and updating of procedures, properly launching and familiarising their staff once manuals are published, and translating procedures into language that is accessible and meaningful to staff’.