

## Report summary

# Safeguarding in schools: best practice

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Improvements in safeguarding have been rapid and widespread in recent years, and nearly all schools now give an appropriately high priority to getting their safeguarding procedures right. In her commentary on the findings set out in Ofsted's 2009/10 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.'

There can be no issue of greater importance to parents and carers, or to schools, than the safety of their children; safeguarding remains high on Ofsted's agenda and will continue to do so. The purpose of this good practice report is to identify the features of exceptionally good safeguarding.

There is no reason why good practice in safeguarding should not be a feature of every school; the practice described here is replicable – with a sensible awareness of the local context – in every school. It complies with requirements and often moves beyond them; it is not seen as a burden but as a reasonable and essential part of the fabric of the school; it pays attention to the meticulous and systematic implementation of policies and routines; it involves every member of the school community in some way; and it has a sharp eye on the particular circumstances and needs of all pupils, especially the most vulnerable.

Inspection and regulation have helped to focus minds on the need to ensure that all appropriate steps have been taken to guarantee and promote children's safety. This report seeks to distil the best practice seen in the best schools – the 19% of schools which were judged to be outstanding in their safeguarding procedures in 2009/10. It addresses the question: 'What can schools with some way to go learn from the best?' Evidence from this group of schools has been augmented with more detailed evidence taken from a small sample of schools visited by HMI with a view to investigating further the features of successful practice in effective schools.

Given the high priority afforded to the safety of children and young people and the considerable media interest in Ofsted's role in protecting children, almost inevitably 'scare stories' emerge from time to time about the inspection of safeguarding.

The key word for both inspectors and providers in the area of safeguarding is 'reasonable', and it is around the interpretation of 'reasonable' that a mythology has emerged. The record can be set straight. Ofsted does not require schools to build walls around play areas; it does not expect schools to seek Criminal Records Bureau checks on casual visitors to schools, including parents; it does not judge a school to be inadequate because of minor administrative errors, or because an inspector's ID was not checked. Ofsted does not try to 'catch schools out'.

## Key features of outstanding practice

Most of the features of outstanding practice are found, to a greater or lesser extent, in all effective schools with outstanding safeguarding arrangements. It is a wide-ranging list and includes:

- high-quality leadership and management that makes safeguarding a priority across all aspects of a school's work
- 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 that 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
- 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
- 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.

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