



ABINGDON

Child Protection (Safeguarding) Policy

The School's responsibility for Child Protection

All adults working at Abingdon should be aware of their responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of every pupil, both physical and emotional, inside and outside school. This involves ensuring that pupils are protected from significant physical or emotional harm and that there is a positive commitment to ensure the satisfactory development and growth of the individual. Everyone working at Abingdon should be aware of and, when necessary, follow the school's Child Protection Guidelines, which are in line with the Department of Education's (DfE) and Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board's (OSCB) practice and procedures – available online at <http://www.oscb.org.uk>. The School's Child Protection policy can be found on the Abingdon School Website.

Purposes and Aims

In line with Every Child Matters, Abingdon School wants the pupils in its care to:

- Be healthy
- Enjoy their lives
- Achieve economic well-being
- Make a positive contribution to society
- Stay safe

This policy aims to:

- provide clear direction to staff and others about expected codes of behaviour in dealing with Child Protection and Safeguarding issues.
- ensure that Child Protection concerns and referrals are handled sensitively, professionally and in ways that support the needs of the child.
- ensure that parents are aware of our policies and procedures.
- make clear our commitment to the development of good practice and sound procedures.

Child Protection in School

1. The school must provide a safe environment. The Bursary is responsible for this aspect of child protection through its Works, Maintenance and Health and Safety programmes. The HR Manager is responsible for the implementation of Safer Recruitment procedures for people wishing to work at the school.
2. The School must promote satisfactory development and growth is ensured by providing intellectual and physical challenge through the development of a sound curriculum policy, via the PSHE programme, that will promote the welfare and safeguarding of children. The School aims to create an environment within which children feel comfortable and know how to discuss such matters within a culture of strong pastoral support.
3. The school is also bound to take reasonable measures to safeguard the emotional welfare of its pupils from bullying or abuse within the school. Specifically, the school's anti-bullying policy should be consulted. Pupils are expected to abide by the Acceptable Use of the School Network Policy.

Child Protection Officer (CPO)

The designated member of staff for child protection matters is the Deputy Head (Pastoral), David Wickes. He has responsibility for dealing with child protection issues and liaising with other agencies where necessary. He will ensure that guidance outlined in *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education* (2007) is followed particularly with respect to the appointment of staff. Staff who will have unsupervised access to pupils will be subject to the statutory CRB checks and be checked for compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations on appointment. The CPO will gain assurance that appropriate child protection checks and procedures apply to any staff employed by another organisation who are working with the school's pupils. The CPO is required to undergo refresher training in inter-agency working to standards set by the OSCB every two years. The CPO can be contacted by telephone on 01235 849130 or by email, david.wickes@abingdon.org.uk.

The Assistant Child Protection Officers are the Head of Boarding (douglas.aitken@abingdon.org.uk) 01235 849036 and the Head (head@abingdon.org.uk) 01235 849023.

Governors and Annual Review of Policy

The nominated governor responsible for liaising with the Head over matters regarding child protection issues is Tanya Hawley. It is her role to:

- Ensure the School has a child protection policy and that procedures are in place, which are consistent with OSCB's procedures.
- Ensure that an annual item is placed on the governors' agenda to review the School's Child Protection policy and procedures, and the efficiency with which the related duties are undertaken. She is to report on changes to the Child Protection policy/procedures, training undertaken by the CPO, other staff and governors, the number of incidents/cases (without details or names) and the place of child protection issues in the school curriculum.
- Liaise (with due regard to issues of confidentiality) with the Head re: allegations of child abuse.
- Be responsible for the oversight of procedures relating to liaison with the Oxfordshire Children and Young People's Trust (formerly the Children's Services Department) and the Police in relation to any allegations of child abuse made against the Head, including possible involvement in multi-agency strategy discussions.
- Be familiar with the provisions of "Working Together to safeguard Children" and local protection procedures.
- Any deficiencies or weaknesses in child protection arrangements at Abingdon School will be remedied without delay.

Other Agencies

The Child and Families Assessment Team (formerly Social Services Child Protection Team) is responsible for answering queries and investigating any allegations concerning child abuse, telephone 01865 897983. OFSTED is responsible for monitoring welfare within the boarding community of the school, and inspects the school regularly. The Lead Inspector is Christopher Garrett, telephone 08456 404040 - OFSTED, Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA – enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Training

All adults working at Abingdon will be given a briefing on the child protection policy and procedures. This includes the briefing of new staff as part of their induction after arrival at the school and refresher training for all staff at three-yearly intervals. Part-time and voluntary staff who work with pupils will be made aware of arrangements. Boys appointed as prefects will also receive some basic training on appointment.

Definition of Abuse

Abuse can be defined as having occurred when a child has suffered *significant* harm or impairment of health and development by reason of physical violence, sexual interference, emotional pressure or neglect. Additionally, there are some miscellaneous categories of abuse, such as exposure to child pornography, racial or religious harassment or that occurring as a result of parental incapacity, for example due to mental illness or an addiction.

In line with Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010):

Physical Abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be cause when a parent or care fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

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. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (eg rape) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing etc. They may also include non-contact activities such as involving children looking at sexual images or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet.)

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs likely to result in the impairment of the child's health and development. Neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to provide food, clothing, shelter; failing to protect a child from physical or emotional harm; failing to provide adequate supervision or failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

Emotional Abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve: conveying to children that they are worthless or inadequate; not giving the child opportunities to express themselves; making fun of what they say; causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger; seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another; and serious bullying, including cyber-bullying. Some level of Emotional Abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, but may also occur on its own.

Procedure in the event of a report or suspicion of abuse

Any adult or prefect at Abingdon who is told of any incident or strong suspicion of physical or sexual child abuse occurring in the school, or to a pupil of the school at home or outside the school, or who suspects or knows this to be the case themselves must report the information immediately to the CPO. In the event of an allegation against the CPO, the information should be reported directly to the Head.

The CPO may, if necessary, interview the pupil to clarify the nature of an allegation or suspicion, before deciding on an appropriate course of action. If necessary, an immediate referral will be made to the local social services department rather than carrying out an investigation.

NB. School staff (including the CPO and the Head) should not investigate reports of physical or sexual abuse themselves. Alleged victims, perpetrators, those reporting abuse and others involved should not be interviewed by school staff beyond the point at which it is clear that there is an allegation of abuse. Guidance on the correct response to a pupil's disclosure of abuse is given in the Child Protection – General Guidance on the next page.

Allegations against members of staff, volunteers and the Head.

Allegations against a member of staff or volunteer must be reported immediately to the CPO. An allegation of abuse by a teacher or volunteer will be taken very seriously and treated in accordance with Oxfordshire's child protection procedures. The quick, consistent and fair resolution of the allegation will be made a clear priority for the benefit of all concerned. Unless the allegation is demonstrably false, the Schools Safeguarding Team will be contacted directly as soon as possible (LADO Barry Armstrong 01865 815956 or Safeguarding Co-ordinator Alison Beasley 01865 323457). Under no circumstances will the Head or Governors conduct their own investigation before an agreement is reached with the Schools Safeguarding Team. In case of serious harm, the police should be informed from the outset. Sensible precautions will be taken to prevent false allegations being made.

An allegation against the CPO must be notified to the Head immediately. An allegation against the Head should be notified to the CPO who will inform the governor responsible for child protection (Tanya Hawley) and the Chair of Governors without notifying the Head first.

Where child protection concerns involve a member of staff, these will be thoroughly investigated by the relevant agencies. Pending a full investigation, the member of staff may be suspended from duty although in no way is this an admission of impropriety. In cases where a member of the boarding community is suspended pending a full investigation, alternative accommodation will be necessary away from children. Staff may also face disciplinary action where, after investigation, serious concerns remain, even though external agencies may have decided that they are not able to proceed any further with the case.

The School will notify the Independent Safeguarding Authority, within one month of leaving the school, any person (whether employed, contracted, a volunteer or student) whose services are no longer used because he or she is considered unsuitable to work with children.

Whistleblowing Policy

Working closely with children is fundamental to teaching in schools. Where such interaction with children exists, so also does the opportunity to abuse them. It is regrettably the case that, in rare instances, teachers and other staff have been found to be responsible for child abuse. Given their daily contact with pupils in a variety of situations, staff are also vulnerable to allegations of abuse, whether deliberately or innocently false, malicious or misplaced. However, staff should avoid making their own judgements of whether an allegation is false or otherwise.

Whilst every effort is made to ensure that the School's practices and policies do not put children at risk, there may exist matters that have been overlooked, or new situations which have developed, that need challenging on child protection grounds.

No one should hesitate to take action to report concerns because of fear of possible repercussions. Any adult or prefect who makes in good faith a report to the CPO, the police, OFSTED or the Social Services of any concern or allegation about school practices or the behaviour of colleagues which are likely to put pupils at risk of abuse or other significant harm, can expect immunity from retribution or disciplinary action.

Child Protection specific to Boarding

In accordance with National Minimum Standards it is essential that the school has the following in place:

For all persons over 16 (not on the roll of the school) who after April 2002 began to live on the same premises as boarders but are not employed by the school, there is a Criminal Records Bureau check

completed at the standard level.

A written agreement between the school and any person over 16 not employed by the school but living in the same premises as boarders (for example, members of staff households). This specifies the terms of their accommodation, guidance on contact with boarders, their responsibilities to supervise their visitors, and notice that accommodation may cease to be provided if there is evidence that they are unsuitable to have regular contact with children. They must be required to notify an unrelated designated senior member of staff if they are charged with, or convicted of, any offence.

It is the responsibility of any member of staff living among the boarding community to adhere to this and to inform the Child Protection Officer if anyone falls into one of the above categories. If, at any stage, they intend to change their living arrangements, they must notify the Child Protection Officer immediately so the necessary procedures can be carried out. The CRB check and the written agreement will be held in The Bursary.

It is essential that all persons visiting boarding accommodation (e.g. visitors, outside delivery and maintenance personnel) are kept under sufficient staff supervision to prevent them gaining substantial unsupervised access to boarders or their accommodation. Those staff who are involved in boarding should play particularly close attention to this in order to ensure the safety of the boarders.

Arrangements for someone starting work with a pending CRB disclosure

On very rare occasions, such as unexpected long-term staff illness, it may be necessary for the school to bring in staff at very short notice. Where this is the case the school will follow the guidelines set down in *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education 2007*.

The CRB disclosure will be obtained as soon as practicable after the individual's appointment and the request for a CRB Disclosure will have been submitted in advance of the individual starting work. The Head does have discretion to allow an individual to begin work within the school pending receipt of the CRB Disclosure but should ensure that the individual is appropriately supervised and that all other checks, including List 99, have been completed.

Appropriate supervision for individuals who start work prior to the result of a CRB Disclosure being known needs to reflect what is known about the person concerned, their experience, the nature of their duties and the level of responsibility they will carry. For those with limited experience and where references have provided limited information the level of supervision required may be high. For those with more experience and where the references are detailed and provide strong evidence of good conduct in previous relevant work a lower level of supervision may be appropriate. For all staff without completed CRB Disclosures it should be made clear that they are subject to this additional supervision. The nature of the supervision should be specified and the roles of staff in undertaking the supervision spelt out. The arrangements should be reviewed regularly, at least every two weeks until the CRB Disclosure is received.

CHILD PROTECTION - General guidance

1. The Law and Child Protection

The legislation relating to child protection is contained in The Children Act 1989, The Care Standards Act 2000, The Education Act 2002 and The Children Act 2004. In addition, the Government's guidance, "Working Together to Safeguard Children", issued in March 2010 and "Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education " (DfES 2007) imposes statutory duties on all schools, including Abingdon School.

Recent child protection legislation is driven by horrific cases such as that of Victoria Climbié and Lauren Wright, both in 2000. The government's Green Paper "Every Child Matters" followed shortly afterwards and proposed that services involved with children should work more closely. It was subsequently determined that schools were to be the primary driving force in developing an integrated approach to children's services. Current legislation, is framed around the principle that the child's interests are paramount. In particular, the law now assumes the following:

- We *share* responsibility for 'safeguarding and promoting' each pupil's welfare with other adults and agencies. Failure to identify abuse, or potential abuse, and then refer it on may be deemed negligent. The term 'identify' may require us to pick up hints, not just respond to a straight disclosure of abuse - in most cases there may not be one.
- The child should be given credence in all circumstances. Even if we consider the 'harm' to be trivial, the child may not. The law takes the child's perspective and interests before all others.

2. General Guidance for staff.

We are required by the legislation to brief all staff on procedures relating to child protection and responding to allegations of child abuse. Staff are asked to operate according to these guidelines.

2.1 Staff should familiarise themselves with the School's Child Protection Policy.

2.2 Child abuse to be reported includes abuse of a pupil by a staff member or other adult, abuse at home which a pupil reports to staff, abuse by a stranger outside school, and abuse of one pupil by another pupil. In the case of abuse by a pupil, or group of pupils, the key issues identifying the problem as abuse (rather than an isolated instance of bullying or 'adolescent experimentation' which could be handled within the normal framework for discipline) are:

- the frequency, nature and severity of the incident(s);
- whether the victim was coerced by physical force, fear, or by a pupil or group of pupils significantly older than himself, or having power or authority over him;
- whether the incident involved a potentially criminal act; and
- whether if the same incident (or injury) had occurred to a member of staff or other adult, it would have been regarded as assault or otherwise actionable.

2.3 Any member of staff who is told of any incident or strong suspicion of physical or sexual child abuse occurring in the School, or to a pupil of the School at home or outside the School (or who knows of or suspects such abuse) must report the information immediately to the CPO. Further guidelines on responding to a disclosure are given below. If the allegation is about the CPO, the report should be made to the Head.

2.4 Staff are asked not to investigate in detail reports of physical or sexual abuse themselves. The School authorities are asked by the DfE not to interview alleged victims or perpetrators beyond the point at which it is clear that there is an allegation of abuse. Questioning should always be limited to the minimum necessary to seek clarification only, strictly avoiding “leading” the pupil or making suggestions that introduces your own ideas about what may have happened. (The reason for this requirement is that in the event of any legal action subsequently, the whole matter may be prejudiced by such questioning, which may confuse the law of evidence.) Further interviewing or investigation will be carried out by specially trained staff only, following procedures agreed between (amongst others) the local authority and Police in line with Government requirements.

2.5 Staff should never give absolute guarantees of confidentiality to anyone raising complaints about abuse but may point out that they will pass on information to only a *minimum* number of people who *have* to be told to ensure that proper action is taken to sort the problem out. See further guidance below.

2.6 If any of this happens a written record should be made as soon as possible - ideally at the time of the disclosure (see further guidance below) - and a copy given to the CPO.

2.7 Staff should be aware that the Head will, if necessary, suspend from duty, pending investigation, any staff member who is alleged to have abused a pupil or pupils. Current advice encourages schools to suspend, without pre-judgement of guilt, and as a precautionary measure, where there is a concern about possible abuse.

2.8 The School is also required to refer all allegations to the local Social Services Department. This referral must happen within 24 hours (in writing or with written confirmation of a telephone referral).

If in doubt, consult the CPO.

3. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the School

Among the special features of life at Abingdon is a fairly relaxed and informal atmosphere. Teachers are expected to fulfil many roles in and out of the classroom and are likely to find themselves working with large and small groups of pupils. Staff with responsibilities for tutoring in boarding houses have further opportunities for involvement. In addition, the teacher may often find themselves ‘in loco parentis’. Given the risk of false alarms and even deliberate hoaxes on the part of pupils, staff are advised to think carefully about the setting and nature of their varied relationships with their pupils so as not to lay themselves open to undue suspicion or accusation; this is particularly important for those involved in the boarding community.

It would be wrong to dictate hard and fast rules in the atmosphere of a school where the great importance of relaxed and informal pastoral interaction between teachers and pupils is basic to our educational philosophy. However, a few of the following points, given the atmosphere in the world outside, are probably worth bearing in mind:

3.1 It is probably prudent if engaging with pupils in your own home or another non-public setting, not to do so on a one to one basis but to meet with at least two pupils at any one time. This would normally apply for social gatherings as well. Clearly this would not normally apply in an obvious public place like the classroom or the housemaster’s office or study, but outside that formal context, care must be taken.

3.2 Inappropriate physical contact should be avoided. Contrary to popular belief, the Children Act says very little about what may or may not be done in this area, beyond the general requirement to look after children properly. There is such a thing as appropriate physical contact and 'non-abusive' actions include:

- applying restraint to prevent a pupil harming himself or another person;
- removing, with reasonable force, potentially dangerous items from a pupil's possession, or a pupil from a dangerous location;
- shepherding pupils, for example with a hand on back or shoulder;
- comforting, for example with a hand on shoulder, back or arm; and
- securing attention by tapping a pupil's shoulder.

It is always unacceptable to harm a boy.

3.3 If you find yourself having to accuse a pupil of an error of omission or commission beyond the trivial, you should make a brief written record of it and date it.

3.4 If you find yourself questioning a pupil about any serious matter, or one of any possible delicacy, it is probably advisable to do so with another adult witness present and, again, to make sure that a record is kept. A female teacher questioning a boy should have a male colleague present.

3.5 Staff are asked to bear in mind that a pupil's housemaster should be kept properly informed of any actions taken, conversations held, or questioning undertaken with a pupil which might have any later repercussions, bearing in mind that housemasters are legally in loco parentis.

3.6 The Acts require that boarding pupils have private areas and these clearly would include their study bedrooms. Although house tutors have full right of access to these school rooms, it is clearly prudent to respect courtesies such as knocking on the door before entering. Wherever possible, staff should not talk to pupils on a one to one basis in their rooms with the door closed.

3.7 Staff should ensure that if they are in charge of any school activity or facilities where safety regulations and precautions are required, these are clearly published and the attention of pupils is drawn to them from time to time. Any accidents or other untoward incidents should always be recorded, signed and dated.

3.8 It is the responsibility of each member of staff to be aware of the complaints procedure and the policy on sanctions. These, with other relevant documents are on the policies area of the school website.

3.9 It is important not to place pupils of the same or differing age groups in situations which might make bullying, intimidation or other pupil-to-pupil abuse more likely and, where such situations might arise, it is important that proper adult supervision be arranged. Senior pupils, assisting the supervision of junior ones, should also be aware of this precaution.

3.10 Under no circumstances should teaching staff advise on the taking of medicines, increase or decrease of medication and the like. These concerns are strictly within the province of the School's medical staff.

3.11 Teaching staff should bear in mind the requirements of both the law, insurance cover, the school's guidelines and good sense if conveying pupils in cars, minibuses etc.

3.12 In addition to the internal procedures required by the Head when staff plan trips outside the School, either in term or during the holidays, teaching staff should ensure that pupils are properly supervised and care taken for their safety and security during such trips. In cases where the trip involves obvious risks such as adventure training style activities, the ratio of supervising staff to pupils should be given careful consideration. Pupils should be given clear instructions as to timings, rendezvous and the conduct expected of them.

3.13 If a boarder leaves the School without permission the following procedure must be followed:

- i. Duty master to contact the boy's friends, roommates and prefects to determine his possible whereabouts. Prefects only may be asked to leave the School grounds to look for the absent boy.
- ii. Duty master to try to contact him on the absent boy's mobile using the list in the duty file.
- iii. If no contact still made after a maximum of 30 minutes the duty master should alert the Housemaster.
- iv. If there is no sign of the boy after 60 minutes the Housemaster will contact absent boy's parents and the Head to alert them to the situation.
- v. If there is no sign of the boy after 90 minutes of unauthorized absence the Housemaster will inform the police.
- vi. Once the absent boy has been recovered the cause of his absenteeism will be investigated at an appropriate occasion. The episode will be written up and submitted to the boy's file.

4. Examples of Abusive Actions

The key criteria in assessing whether or not to refer a situation to the CPO is whether the harm caused, or risk of harm, is *significant* and/or *persistent*. Any of the following between adult and pupil should be automatically referred:

4.1 Physical Abuse: Any form of physical assault (including attempts), such as:

- punching
- kicking
- pushing
- smacking
- slapping
- shaking
- throwing a missile at a pupil, such as a board rubber or white-board pen.

4.2 Sexual Abuse:

- Any form of sexual assault (including attempts)
- possession of indecent and pseudo indecent photographs of children, including digital images
- Showing indecent or pornographic material to children
- Inappropriate use of text messaging, email or other ICT towards any child or pupil for sexual purposes
- Inappropriate touching, language or behaviour towards any child or pupil for sexual purposes

4.3 Emotional Abuse and Neglect:

- Racial comments or behaviour, or failing to address these in others
- Homophobic comments or behaviour, or failing to address these in others
- Bullying pupils, or failing to address these in others
- Persistent sarcasm
- Humiliating pupils, for example by persistently placing a child in a corner or corridor
- Creating a climate of fear in the classroom
- Inappropriate punishment, for example putting a child in a cupboard
- Failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger
- Failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

5. Possible Signs of Abuse

Staff should be aware of the following signs that may indicate abuse:

Possible *physical* signs may include unexplained or repeated injuries, bruises in odd places, marks of slapping, biting, gripping etc, cuts in odd places, poor hygiene, marked weight fluctuations.

Possible *behavioural* signs may include a marked change in behaviour, eating disorders, excessively affectionate or sexual behaviour, emotional isolation, school refusal, an inability to sleep, theft, habits such as thumb-sucking, 'frozen watchfulness'.

Remember that these symptoms are 'possible' signs and do not automatically mean that abuse has or is taking place; there may be other explanations. In most cases it will be appropriate to discuss your observations with the pupil's housemaster to help you decide whether you should refer them to the CPO.

6. Responding to Allegations of Abuse

6.1 Listen to the child

Children who report to a teacher, prefect or other adult working at Abingdon that someone has abused them must be listened to and heard, whatever form the communication may take.

The following points give guidance on how to deal with a child who makes an allegation:

- Listen to the child, but do not conduct an interview or ask the child to repeat the account. Avoid asking questions and make sure that any questions asked are open-ended (i.e. not inviting yes or no as an answer).
- Do not interrupt when the child is recalling significant events.
- Make a careful note of all information, including details such as timing, setting, who was present and what was said, in the child's own words. The account should be obtained verbatim or as near as possible. Always record what was said as contemporaneously as possible. Notes written up afterwards will carry less weight than those made at the time.
- Take care not to make assumptions about what the child is saying or to make interpretations.
- On no account should you make suggestions to the child as to an alternative explanation for their worries.
- Staff should point out to the informant that action will be taken as a result of the allegation and you should ask the informant of any steps they would like taken to protect them now that they have made the allegation.
- The written record of the allegations should be signed and dated by the person who received them as soon as is practicable.
- All actions subsequently taken should be recorded.
- The disclosure should be reported to the CPO as soon as possible, and certainly within 24 hours.

Remember, no member of staff should promise confidentiality to a pupil who makes an allegation. In responding to a child who makes such disclosures, account should be taken of the age and understanding of the child and whether the child or others may be at risk of significant harm. While acknowledging the need to create an environment conducive to speaking freely, the member of staff should make it clear to any pupil asking for confidentiality that he or she will need to pass on what has been told, to ensure the protection of the child concerned. Within that context, the child should then be assured that the matter will be disclosed only to people who need to know, and the child will know who these people are.

6.2 Take Action

The member of staff who has listened to the allegations of abuse should report immediately to the CPO, who will make an urgent initial assessment. If the CPO is the person against whom the allegation is made, the member of staff should report to the Head. The support needs of a child who expresses concerns about significant harm should be considered and met, utilising resources within or beyond the school as necessary.

6.3 Initial Assessment and Further Action, if appropriate

Immediately an allegation is made, the CPO will:

- obtain written details of the allegation, signed and dated, from the person who received the allegation.
- record any information about times, dates, locations and names of potential witnesses.
- where appropriate, talk to the child concerned.
- make recommendations about further action to the Head, unless the allegation is against them.

There are four possible outcomes of the initial assessment:

- where the pupil has suffered, is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm, the incident will be referred immediately under local child protection procedures established by the OSCB.
- where the child has alleged that a criminal offence has been committed, then again this will be referred under local child protection procedures and the police may carry out a criminal investigation.
- the allegation may represent inappropriate behaviour or poor practice by a member of staff (which does not fall within the above categories) that needs to be considered under school disciplinary procedures
- the allegation is adjudged to be apparently without foundation.

Only if the allegation is trivial or demonstrably false, will further investigations not be warranted.

Where the initial assessment by the CPO (or, where the allegation is against the CPO, the Head) concludes that the allegation warrants investigation, there will be a referral within 24 hours to one or more of the agencies with statutory responsibilities to make enquiries.

If a referral needs to be made, parents will be consulted. In really extreme cases the law allows schools to by-pass parental consent.

7. Guarding against Allegations

The law is weighted in favour of the child, applying a burden on staff to safeguard children's welfare and providing for the child's protection rather than protecting the adult. Because of the requirement for schools and agencies to share information about allegations, there is little anonymity once an allegation has been made, even if it turns out to be false in the end. The burden of evidence is to disprove rather than prove the allegation.

Apart from following the advice given in section 3 above, which can really be summarised as, "Use your common sense and follow school policies", staff are advised to maintain union insurance and, if the situation arises, record everything scrupulously before referring it, keeping a copy for yourself.

Don't sit on information

Deputy Head (Pastoral) – May 2012