

Safeguarding in schools and trusts

A guide for governing boards

Updated August 2022



The expert organisation for school
governors, trustees, clerks and
other governance professionals

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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

Introduction

One of the most important duties that governing boards fulfil is to ensure that their school or trust is creating safe environments for pupils. This guide is designed to support governors and trustees in all types of school structure to ensure they meet their safeguarding responsibilities.

Safeguarding in schools means:

- protecting pupils from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of pupils' mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that pupils grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all pupils to have the best outcomes

Advice for multi academy trusts and federations

Multi academy trust (MAT) boards and federation governing bodies will want to ensure that safeguarding culture and policies are consistent throughout all of their schools while taking into account the unique circumstances of each individual school. This can be achieved by:

- **Adopting an overarching safeguarding and child protection policy** that reflects all schools within the trust/federation and is developed through collaboration between leaders and safeguarding professionals. If appropriate, policy amendments may be necessary to reflect the safeguarding priorities of individual schools.
- **Appointing someone at executive leadership level to coordinate safeguarding activity** across the group of schools in a similar manner to the framework expected of designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) but on a larger scale. This role contributes to resources and knowledge being shared effectively and provides valuable support to school-level DSLs.

Keeping children safe in education

[Keeping children safe in education \(KCSiE\)](#) is statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) that schools must have regard to when carrying out their duties to promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

As a starting point, all governors and trustees should read at least part two of KCSiE and ensure that they are kept informed of any changes to the guidance and to their safeguarding responsibilities. Governing boards must also have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism; this is known as the [prevent duty](#).

The latest version of KCSiE is in force from September 2022. It contains updates and changes that governors and trustees should be aware of, including:

- safeguarding and child protection [training expectations for governing boards](#)
- the role of governing boards in [ensuring effective IT monitoring and filtering](#)
- an [expectation for online searches to be carried out](#) when recruiting school staff
- guidance on [sexual violence and sexual harassment](#) (previously standalone guidance)

1. Governing board safeguarding responsibilities

KCSiE sets out the responsibilities that governing boards have to keep pupils safe. In broad terms, this means ensuring that:

- the safeguarding policies and procedures in your school/trust are effective and comply with the law at all times
- all staff understand their roles and responsibilities and are able to discharge them
- the board has sufficient knowledge and capacity to fulfil its safeguarding responsibilities

Leading a safeguarding culture

Governing boards fulfil their safeguarding duties by providing strategic leadership that supports an overarching culture of safeguarding and checking that the culture has become embedded.

An effective safeguarding culture is characterised by:

- safeguarding and child protection underpinning all elements of school life so that school/trust systems, processes and policies operate with the best interests of the pupil at their heart
- an environment where pupils feel confident to approach a member of staff if they have a worry or problem, and pupils' wishes and feelings being taken into account when determining what action to take
- an environment where staff remain vigilant and act on safeguarding concerns

A robust approach to safeguarding should be tailored to the specific needs of the school/trust.

2. Meeting your safeguarding responsibilities

2.1 Governing board training

All governors and trustees must receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training (that includes online safety). This should form part of your [board's induction programme](#) and take place regularly thereafter; we recommend that boards engage in safeguarding training on an annual basis. The training should:

- equip the board with the knowledge to provide strategic challenge and assure themselves that safeguarding policies and procedures are effective
- be tailored to governance, and so distinct from that received by [designated safeguarding leads](#) and other school staff
- take into account your specific context and your board's delegated responsibilities
- respond to the needs of different board members (for example, a [lead safeguarding governor/trustee](#) may require more detailed coverage of the topic)

Governing board safeguarding training should cover:

- the duties that schools and trusts have to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
- the governing board's relationship with the DSL
- effective safeguarding monitoring (including how to review data related to safeguarding)

You should also make use of opportunities to learn about how safeguarding works in your own school(s), such as through your [monitoring visits](#) and discussions with the [lead safeguarding governor/trustee](#) and [designated safeguarding lead](#).

Accessing safeguarding training

NGA's [introduction to safeguarding](#) training session is designed to help governing boards understand the theory and practice of safeguarding and the board's role in keeping pupils safe.

Subscribers to NGA Learning Link can [complete an e-learning module](#) that sets out the governing board's role in safeguarding.

Safeguarding training for governors and trustees is also offered by local authorities and organisations such as the [NSPCC](#). Some schools and academy trusts arrange their own.

Governing boards should discuss additional training needs with school/trust leaders, considering the characteristics of their setting.

Safer recruitment training

Where the governing board forms a selection panel to recruit an executive leader, it is a statutory requirement in maintained schools for at least one member of the panel to have completed safer recruitment training. It is advisable for academies to mirror this requirement.

Your school or trust will arrange safer recruitment training for you if required.

2.2 Safeguarding policies and procedures

KCSiE refers to the safeguarding policies and procedures that governing boards should ensure are in place in order for appropriate action to be taken to safeguard and promote pupil's welfare. The procedures required are wide-ranging and so will not be covered in a single policy.

Central to this is an effective **child protection policy** which refers to locally agreed multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. It should be reviewed and updated annually (as a minimum) and be publicly available – normally on the school's website. The child protection policy should also include the policy and procedures to deal with [sexual violence and sexual harassment](#).

Additional policies with safeguarding considerations include:

- **Staff code of conduct** – this sets out expected behaviour including important elements of safeguarding such as staff/pupil relationships and use of technology.
- **Behaviour policy** – every school must have a [behaviour policy](#) which aligns with the procedures set out in the safeguarding policy, giving particular thought to the school's response to bullying. The behaviour policy should also encompass the school's procedures for [searching, screening and confiscation](#).
- **Safer recruitment and selection policy and procedure** – this should include details of the required recruitment checks and procedures that must be carried out to prevent people who pose a risk of harm from working with children.

School leaders will need to update policies and procedures for recruiting staff to reflect the new expectation for carrying out an online search on shortlisted candidates (see page 53 of KCSiE). Governing boards should be mindful of this expectation when recruiting an executive leader.

Further information on safeguarding policies and procedures can be found on page 26 of [KCSiE](#).

Approving safeguarding policies

When approving safeguarding policies, consider:

- What risks are pupils in your school facing (or likely to face)? – the nature and level of risk will vary according to the type of school, location, the age and demographic of pupils and other factors; policies should be developed accordingly.
- What do your policies communicate to parents and staff about the importance of safeguarding in your organisation?
- Do staff (with relevant expertise and first-hand experience) have opportunity to input into policy development?

2.3 Appointing a designated safeguarding lead

A designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is a senior member of the school's leadership team that must be designated to take lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection (together with one or more deputies). The DSL or a deputy should always be available during school hours to discuss any safeguarding concerns.

The DSL is expected to:

- liaise with external agencies (such as social services) and act as a point of contact
- work with other school staff (such as the special educational needs coordinator) on safeguarding matters
- keep the headteacher informed of safeguarding issues and ongoing enquiries
- provide support, advice and expertise for all staff

2.4 Appointing a lead safeguarding governor/trustee

Governing boards must appoint a governor or trustee to take leadership responsibility for safeguarding arrangements in their school/trust. Employees of the school/trust should not take up this role, nor should associate board members.

Where MATs have academy committees with sufficient delegated responsibility, we recommend that each academy committee also appoints a safeguarding lead to help maintain trust-wide oversight.

The appointed person (sometimes known as the safeguarding link governor/trustee) is often the serving chair or vice chair. In practice, the safeguarding link governor/trustee is required to:

- meet with the DSL termly to discuss (without details of specific pupils) any safeguarding incidents; conversation should focus on the suitability of policies and whether any amendments are necessary
- stay up to date on relevant guidance and policy, ensuring the board is made aware of any changes to their safeguarding responsibilities
- report to the governing board following meetings with the DSL and any [monitoring visits](#)

NGA's [role description for safeguarding governors and trustees](#) can be adapted to suit your context and ensure your appointed safeguarding governor/trustee understands their role.

The appointed governor/trustee should take the lead on safeguarding. However, the governing board retains collective responsibility for making sure that safeguarding procedures are properly followed in schools and that the overarching culture is right.

2.5 Appointing a designated teacher for looked-after pupils

Looked-after pupils are in the care of the local authority (living with a foster family, for example). Many looked-after and previously looked-after pupils have suffered disrupted learning and so a [designated teacher](#) must be appointed with responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after pupils. The designated teacher works closely with the DSL to ensure that any safeguarding concerns regarding looked-after and previously looked-after children are quickly and effectively responded to. Governing boards should ensure that the designated teacher has appropriate training and the relevant qualifications and experience.

Governing boards should, through the designated teacher, hold the school to account for how it supports its looked-after and previously looked-after pupils. In some schools, designated teachers do this by providing the governing board with a regular report.

2.6 Maintaining oversight of the single central record

Schools and academy trusts must maintain a single central record of pre-appointment checks which cover all staff and those who govern. These checks help to identify whether a person may be unsuitable to work with children. A list of safeguarding checks for governors and trustees is provided in [appendix 2](#).

In the case of MATs, the record is maintained at trust level but must be done in a way that allows for individual academy records to be provided when required.

It is not the duty of the governing board to administer the single central record or to conduct an audit of the document. However, governing boards do have a role in ensuring it is up to date. In practice, the board's oversight of the single central record is likely through routine reports from the DSL and evaluating external reviews (sometimes carried out by the local authority).

2.7 Ensuring staff receive appropriate CPD

Boards must ensure that those staff who work directly with children have read at least part one of KCSiE. Staff who do not work directly with children may read part one or the condensed version labelled as 'Annex A'. This is a matter for the school or trust to decide based on their assessment of which part of the guidance will be most effective for their staff. Senior leadership teams within schools are expected to read and follow KCSiE in its entirety.

Governing boards should ensure that a safeguarding [CPD programme](#) is in place that is relevant to the school/trust. The CPD should result in staff developing the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding of child protection and safeguarding (including online safety).

2.8 Ensuring pupils are taught about safeguarding

Building safeguarding into learning supports pupils by helping them to recognise, understand, and develop resilience to the risks around them. As such, governing boards should ensure that pupils are taught about safeguarding in their [curriculum](#), covering mental and physical health and wellbeing as well as online safety.

Online safety

It is essential that pupils are safeguarded from potentially harmful and inappropriate online material. Governing boards should ensure that their school has appropriate filters and monitoring systems in place and regularly review their effectiveness. The measures in place should be detailed within the school/trust IT (or other relevant) policies. The board should ensure that the leadership team and relevant staff have an awareness and understanding of the provisions in place and manage them effectively.

Governing boards and school/trust leaders should consider the age range of their pupils, the number of pupils, how often they access the IT system and the proportionality of costs verses safeguarding risks.

Protecting pupils from sexual violence and sexual harassment

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between pupils of any age and sex. The DfE's standalone guidance on sexual violence and sexual harassment is now contained within part five of KCSiE and sets out what schools should be aware of. In summary, this involves:

- understanding that sexual violence and sexual harassment may be happening, even if it is not being reported
- building an awareness of peer-on-peer sexual violence and understanding that it can happen both inside and outside of school
- making clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is never acceptable
- challenging seemingly harmless inappropriate physical behaviour
- ensuring that all victims are reassured that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe
- maintaining effective working relationships with external agencies (such as the police and local authority)

[Ofsted inspections](#) will continue to look at the school's approach to harmful sexual behaviour.

NGA's [PSHE guidance](#) explains that PSHE education (often encompassing statutory relationships and sex education) should teach pupils how to build healthy, respectful relationships.

3. Strategic oversight and monitoring

3.1 Identify strategic priorities linked to safeguarding

Keeping up to date with guidance and policy is important but it is strategy that sets direction, maintains focus and ensures continued improvement. Safeguarding should be central to conversations around school/trust strategy and development.

School/trust leadership teams may undertake a self-assessment or audit of their safeguarding procedures or ask a third party (such as the local authority) to do so. Governing boards should review and discuss the output of any such activity. The below questions may be helpful to refer to during strategic discussions:

- Do we understand safeguarding strengths and areas for development in our school/trust?
- What lessons have been learned from safeguarding incidents?
- How is this reflected in our strategy/development plan? – what are our key goals and how will we know when these have been achieved?
- How are school/trust leaders shaping and influencing practice to help achieve these goals?

3.1 Understanding how policy works in practice

Governing boards should develop a good understanding of how safeguarding policies work in practice. Consider applying the following principles to your safeguarding monitoring approach.

Observe

- What does data tell you about the school's safeguarding procedures and the overall context? For example, trends emerging from: the number of looked-after pupils, attendance rates, exclusions, behaviour incidents and responses.
- What is your experience of safeguarding behaviour and culture in practice? For example, is effective staff training evident – are staff approachable and accessible?

Listen

- Is your board engaging with stakeholders (parents and pupils in particular) to understand their experience of the school's safeguarding procedures and the support provided to vulnerable pupils and their families?
- How do staff perceive the school's safeguarding culture?
- What can staff tell you about how policies and procedures work in practice? – are the expected routines well understood and manageable?

Discuss

- Regular discussion with school/trust leaders helps to establish and maintain an open and transparent safeguarding culture.
- Make safeguarding a standing item on each agenda.
- Ensure due regard is always given to safeguarding, discussing the potential safeguarding implications of the board's decision-making.

3.2 Safeguarding monitoring questions

The below example questions are intended to support conversations between the governing board and school/trust leaders. Some of these topics may be covered during meetings between the DSL and the board's appointed [safeguarding governor/trustee](#).

- Do all staff know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare?
- Do staff have sufficient time to commit to safeguarding duties?
- Are there any staff vacancies? How are these being covered to minimise safeguarding risks?
- Does the school/trust work with other schools and agencies to stay informed about local risks?
- Is the DSL suitably skilled and supported to undertake their role?
- How are pupils learning to stay safe online?
- How does the school identify pupils and families that may need extra help and support?
- How is the effectiveness of staff safeguarding training monitored?

Appendix 1. Summary of safeguarding responsibilities

Equipping the board	Governing board responsibility
Governing board checks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ all governors and trustees need to have enhanced DBS certificates; section 128 checks are also required in some cases ■ additional checks may be required – see appendix 2
Governing board training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ all governors and trustees must receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training that includes online safety
Safer recruitment training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ maintained schools: at least one member of recruitment panel must have safer recruitment training (also advisable for academies)
Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) – statutory DfE guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ have regard to KCSiE when carrying out your safeguarding duties ■ read and follow KCSiE - ensure that safeguarding policies, procedures and training are effective and comply with the law
Prevent duty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ include this duty (preventing people from being drawn into terrorism) in wider safeguarding obligations ■ ensure DSL is familiar with prevent duty guidance
Safeguarding link governor/trustee appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ appoint a governor or trustee to take leadership responsibility for the school's safeguarding arrangements (the board retains collective responsibility)

Policies and procedures	Governing board responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child protection / safeguarding policy ■ Staff code of conduct ■ Behaviour policy ■ Recruitment policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ review and update as needed (update child protection policy at least annually) ■ publish child protection policy (on school website) ■ ensure policies are developed to reflect the needs/context of the individual school and community (utilising staff expertise) ■ ensure policies are reviewed and appropriate changes made after any safeguarding incident
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ IT policy (monitoring and filtering systems) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the IT policy should detail measures in place to ensure children are safeguarded from potentially harmful and inappropriate online material ■ governing boards should ensure that effective monitoring and filtering systems are in place

Safer recruitment	Governing board responsibility
Pre-appointment checks and supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ prevent people who pose a risk of harm working in school: ensure statutory checks are being carried out (DBS and section 128) ■ decide if additional checks are needed ■ ensure volunteers are appropriately supervised
Online searches for shortlisted candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ school leaders will need to update policies and procedures for recruiting staff to reflect the new expectation of carrying out an online search on shortlisted candidates ■ governing boards should be mindful of this when recruiting an executive leader
Monitoring the single central record (SCR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ensure the SCR is up to date (but no need to administrate) ■ have oversight of the SCR (this could be through routine reports received from the DSL and/or external reviews)

Building safeguarding capacity	Governing board responsibility
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ensure that a member of the school's senior leadership team is designated to take lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection (together with one or more deputies)
Staff training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ensure all staff receive appropriate and regular safeguarding and child protection training (including online safety) ■ ensure all staff understand the policies and procedures in place and know what to do if they are concerned about a pupil ■ all staff must read at least part one of KCSiE (or the condensed version labelled as Annex A in the case of staff not working directly with children). ■ senior leadership teams within schools are expected to read and follow KCSiE in its entirety
Teaching safeguarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ensure children are taught about safeguarding, including online safety, as part of a broad and balanced curriculum

Appendix 2. Governing board safeguarding checks

- All governors and trustees are required to hold an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate.
- Section 128 checks are also required for trustees, governors and local academy committee members that retain or have been delegated any management responsibilities.
- Additional identity and right to work checks are required for trustees.

Refer to pages 50-52 of [KCSiE](#) for further detail on what the checks entail and why they are required.

✓ = required ✗ = not required	Enhanced DBS	Enhanced DBS countersigned by DfE	Section 128 check	Identity and Right to Work Check
Maintained school governor	✓	✗	✓	✗
Maintained school associate member	Governing bodies should consider if it is appropriate for associate members to undergo this check	✗	Governing bodies should consider if it is appropriate for associate members to undergo these checks	✗
Chair of trustees	✓	✓	✓	✓
Trustee	✓	✗	✓	✓
Member	✓	✗	✓	✓
MAT local academy committee member (with delegated responsibilities)	✓	✗	✓	✗

The process of applying for a DBS certificate goes through the school, local authority or trust as appropriate. There is no specified requirement for individuals with a governance role or staff members in schools to renew their DBS checks, however, boards should ensure they have a consistent policy on renewing checks that avoids unnecessary repetition.

Thank you for reading this guide. If you have any feedback you'd like to share, please email kcfeedback@nga.org.uk.

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