

## **ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL**

### **Child Protection policy amendment in times of school closure due to COVID.**

Schools have been instructed to close, although are required to offer a place to vulnerable children and children of workers critical to the COVID-19 response.

Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Those who have a social worker include children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after by the Local Authority. A child may also be deemed to be vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need or otherwise meet the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989. There is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend provision, so long as they do not have underlying health conditions that put them at severe risk.

In circumstances where a parent does not want their child to attend, and their child is considered vulnerable, we will explore (with the social worker) the reasons for this and to agree an appropriate plan for that child.

We want to support all our children during this time and will consider making a place available to other children with vulnerabilities, although this will be in discussion with other professionals involved and based on a risk assessment process.

### **Safeguarding procedures during the closure period**

We are working very differently during this period of closure. However, the principles within our existing Child Protection Policy still apply, as does the duty on all staff to safeguard children.

We have assessed the needs of all our pupils and put in place plans to support them and their families during this period of closure. These plans include an education offer (details of which have been shared separately with parents for their child) and arrangements to support pupils with their safety and wellbeing. These plans may include actions and interventions from other agencies, as we continue to work with partners to provide an appropriate level of support.

### **Safeguarding arrangements:**

- Welfare checks (weekly phone calls where appropriate)
- Risk Assessments
- Plans for vulnerable children, existing plans will be reviewed in conjunction with other relevant agencies and updated to ensure they reflect the current situation and meet need.

Vulnerable children will be risk assessed with other professionals to decide whether children will be safer at home or in school and decisions will be made on individual cases.

The school will work with the Virtual School Headteacher (Keeley Pullen/Beccy Prince) to support our children in care. Children with an EHC plan will be assessed in consultation with the local authority/parents, to decide whether they need to continue to be offered a place in order to meet their needs, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home.

If it is felt they should remain at home, a plan will be agreed and this could include carers, therapists or clinicians visiting the home to provide any essential services. It is recognised that many children with EHC plans can safely remain at home.

During the closure period we will work with the local authority and parents / carers to produce a personalised plan that includes:

- Short term interim targets that have been agreed with the child and parent / carers
- Any agreed support to be provided by the team supporting the child (school, LA Education or SEND staff, Social Worker, Health professional)
- Regular reviews with the child and parent / carers

As always, all staff members have a duty to identify and respond to suspected / actual abuse or disclosures of abuse. Any member of staff who receives a disclosure or allegation of abuse, or suspects that abuse may have occurred must report it immediately to the designated safeguarding lead (or, in their absence, the deputy designated safeguarding lead).

All action is taken in accordance with the following guidance;

- Essex Safeguarding Children Board guidelines - the SET (Southend, Essex and Thurrock) Child Protection Procedures (ESCB, 2019)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Working Together to Safeguard Children
- PREVENT Duty - Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (HMG, 2015)

Where there is risk of immediate harm, concerns will be referred by telephone to the Children and Families Hub and / or the Police.

Less urgent concerns or requests for support will be sent to the Children and Families Hub at MASH. The school may also seek advice from Social Care or another appropriate agency about a concern, if we are unsure how to respond to it.

Wherever possible, we will share any safeguarding concerns, or an intention to refer a child to Children's Social Care, with parents or carers. However, we will not do so where it is felt that to do so could place the child at greater risk of harm or impede a criminal investigation.

On occasions, it may be necessary to consult with the Children and Families Hub and / or the Police for advice on when to share information with parents / carers.

### **Mental health and wellbeing**

The mental health and wellbeing of all our pupils is always a priority and it is recognised that, without the protective factor of attending school, some of our children may be more vulnerable. This is a worrying and challenging time for everyone and we understand that families will be placed under additional pressures and may be coping with issues such as increased anxiety, financial difficulties, caring for children at home all the time and bereavement.

It is vital that we work in partnership with parents to support the well-being of our pupils.

Parents should share any concerns about the well-being of their child with school, so appropriate support and interventions can be identified and implemented.

### **Online safety (for children away from school)**

We recognise that the majority of children will not be physically attending school and that it is likely they will be spending longer periods of time online, which may increase their vulnerability.

We have provided parents with information (including appropriate websites to use) on how to keep their children safe online.

Particularly useful websites are:

- CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection)
- Childnet
- Internet Matters
- Net Aware
- NSPCC
- Parent Info
- Safer Internet

Staff are aware that children are vulnerable to being bullied or groomed for abuse or radicalisation online. Staff will be vigilant to any signs that that this may be occurring and report any concerns in the usual way. It is important that parents make the school aware of any concerns they may have about the online activity of their child, or any particular vulnerability they may have in this respect.