



SAFEGUARDING UPDATE - WHAT DO PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

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What parents need to know: Who checks that safeguarding services are working together?

When a child needs help or protection, several organisations may be involved including schools, children's social care, health services and the police.

But who checks that these organisations are working effectively together?

New research from the Department for Education looks at independent scrutiny within local safeguarding partnerships and how it can help improve the way organisations work together to protect children.

What is a safeguarding partnership?

Every local area has arrangements bringing together key organisations responsible for safeguarding children.

The aim is to ensure that agencies share information, work together effectively, learn from safeguarding concerns and continually improve the support children receive.

What is independent scrutiny?

Independent scrutiny provides an outside, objective view of how well safeguarding organisations are working together.

An independent scrutineer may look at:

- how effectively organisations work together
- whether lessons are being learned when things go wrong
- the quality of safeguarding practice
- whether improvements are actually making a difference
- what children and young people say about their experiences

Their role is not simply to identify problems. It is also to provide constructive challenge and help safeguarding partnerships improve.

Why does children's voice matter?

An important message from the research is that safeguarding services should not judge their effectiveness only through policies, procedures and statistics.

They also need to understand what safeguarding actually feels like for children and young people.

Some safeguarding partnerships are developing ways for children and young people to contribute directly to scrutiny and improvement.

This helps professionals ask:

"Are the services we have put in place actually making children safer and improving their experiences?"

What does this mean for parents?

There are no new responsibilities for parents as a result of this research. However, parents and carers are important partners in safeguarding. If your child receives support from several organisations, you should expect professionals to communicate effectively, listen to your child's experiences and keep their safety and wellbeing at the centre of decision-making. If you are worried that services are not working effectively together, raise your concerns with the professionals involved and ask how information is being shared and coordinated.

Key message for parents

Keeping children safe is rarely the responsibility of one organisation alone. Effective safeguarding relies on schools, health services, children's social care, police and other organisations working together and being willing to learn and improve when things could be better.

Most importantly, children's experiences should be heard.

Good safeguarding doesn't just ask, ***"Do we have the right procedures?"*** It asks, ***"Are they making a difference for children?"***

Read:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-independent-scrutiny-in-safeguarding-partnerships>

What parents need to know: Disability, additional needs and safeguarding

New Department for Education research looks at the experiences of children in need, children looked after and care leavers with a recorded disability in England.

The findings highlight why children with disabilities and additional needs may sometimes require extra understanding, support and safeguarding awareness.

What does the research tell us?

At 31st March 2025, 58,100 children in need had a recorded disability, representing 14% of all children in need.

Among these children, 46% had autism recorded, 33% had a learning disability and 88% had an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. Importantly, 31% had abuse or neglect recorded as their primary need.

Look beyond the diagnosis

One of the important messages for everyone caring for children is that a disability or additional need does not explain every change in a child's behaviour or wellbeing. A child who becomes unusually withdrawn, distressed, anxious or reluctant to attend school may be communicating that something is wrong.

Rather than assuming:

"That's just part of their autism or additional need,"

it can be helpful to ask:

"Is this usual for my child?"

"What has changed?"

"Could something else be worrying them?"

Communication may look different

Not every child will be able to tell an adult directly when something is wrong. Changes in behaviour, sleep, eating, toileting, communication, attendance or emotional wellbeing can sometimes be a child's way of communicating distress.

Parents know their children well. If something feels different, share what you are noticing with the school or professionals supporting your child.

Attendance can be part of the picture

The research found that **39.9%** of children in need with a recorded disability were persistently absent from school, compared with **18.5%** of the overall pupil population.

There can be many reasons for absence, particularly for children with health or additional needs. Schools and families working together can help identify what is making attendance difficult and what support may be needed.

Working together matters

Parents, schools, health professionals and children's services may each hold different pieces of information about a child.

Sharing concerns and changes can help everyone develop a better understanding of the child's needs and provide the right support.

If you are worried about your child, don't wait for a concern to become more serious before asking for help.

Key message for parents

You know your child. Trust what you notice. A diagnosis can help us understand a child's needs, but it should never prevent us from asking: ***"Is this normal for my child or could they be trying to tell me something?"*** Notice the change. Listen to your child. Share concerns. Ask for support.

Free resources for parents and carers

For the article: Who checks that safeguarding services are working together?

Department for Education - Working together to safeguard children: Guide for children, young people and families

A free illustrated guide explaining how organisations such as schools, social workers, health services and the police should work together to help, support and protect children. It helps families understand what multi-agency safeguarding means, what they can expect from professionals and why listening to children and families is important. The DfE also provides a short animated video that can be used alongside the guide.

Find out more:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

Department for Education - Improving practice with children, young people and families

Free information about how local safeguarding organisations can improve the way they work together with children and families. It reinforces the importance of good communication, effective multi-agency working and ensuring that children and families are involved in decisions about the help and support they receive.

Find out more:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-practice-with-children-young-people-and-families>

For the article: Disability, additional needs and safeguarding

Contact - Support for families with disabled children

Free information, advice and support for parents and carers of children with disabilities or additional needs. Families can access advice about education, health, benefits, finances, family life and local support, as well as workshops, online events and parent communities. Contact also provides a free helpline for families with children aged from birth to 25, and a child does not need to have a formal diagnosis for parents to seek advice.

Find out more:

<https://contact.org.uk/help-for-families/information-advice-services/>

Contact - Free helpline for parents and carers

Parents and carers who would prefer to speak to someone can access Contact's free advice helpline. Parent advisers can provide information and support about a child's disability or additional needs and help families understand what services and support may be available. Parents can make contact by telephone, email, web form or social media.

Find out more:

<https://contact.org.uk/help-for-families/information-advice-services/our-helpline/>

NSPCC - Safeguarding d/Deaf and disabled children and young people

A free safeguarding resource explaining why children with disabilities may experience additional vulnerabilities and why some children can face barriers when trying to tell an adult that something is wrong. It also explains how signs of abuse can sometimes be mistaken for behaviours associated with a child's disability and why adults should remain professionally curious about changes in a child's behaviour or presentation. The resource also provides helpful information about communication, listening to children, recognising possible abuse and ensuring children have accessible ways to express their worries and concerns.

Find out more:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/deaf-and-disabled-children>

NSPCC - Safeguarding children with SEND

Free information for anyone supporting a child with SEND, explaining how additional communication needs, difficulties recognising unsafe behaviour and other vulnerabilities can make it harder for some children to speak out when something is wrong. It reinforces the importance of adults looking beyond a child's diagnosis and listening carefully to their individual experience.

Find out more:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/schools/safeguarding-children-with-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-send>