



Department of Health & Social Care

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Minister of State for Patient Safety,
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Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
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Victoria Atkins MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
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To: All statutory safeguarding partners
cc: All safeguarding partners business managers.

29 July 2021

Dear Colleagues,

We are writing following the publication of the [Ofsted review into sexual abuse in schools and colleges, and Minister Ford's oral statement](#) on 10 June 2021, regarding the next steps we should take together to tackle this issue.

We are grateful for the work Ofsted did at pace and for their engagement with almost 900 young people to ensure their voices were heard, which is so important in the work that we all do. We know that Ofsted spoke to a number of safeguarding partners and that there was representation from police, health, and local government on its Reference Group. The review has shown us a clear picture that the response to tackling sexual abuse and sexual harassment (including peer-on-peer) requires everyone to collaborate and cooperate. This isn't just about schools and colleges, but how we can use this moment to further the conversation on this issue, and local safeguarding partners have a critically important role to play.

The statutory guidance '*Working Together to Safeguard Children*' is clear that schools and colleges must cooperate with the local safeguarding arrangements when named as a relevant agency. However, we know that engaging with all schools and colleges in a local area can pose significant practical challenges – our largest counties have upwards of 500 schools and finding a single lead in a local area to speak on behalf of all education settings is a primary reason why we do not have education as a fourth safeguarding partner. We want to support you to get this right. We are funding 16 local areas to test different ways of how to secure meaningful engagement with schools and colleges, and we hope to have some best practice from that programme to share with you early next year.

The Ofsted review made a number of recommendations which, alongside broader government and sector action, we hope will make a material change to the culture the inspectorate found in schools and colleges, and the support provided to children both displaying, and affected by, concerning behaviours. Ofsted recommends that schools and colleges and safeguarding partners work more closely together so that the range

of support is clear, available, and utilised. We hope that our plans for extending support and supervision for school designated safeguarding leads to up to 500 more schools in up to 10 further local authorities will enhance relationships between schools and colleges, and local areas, by highlighting what works well and allowing us to share that practice to all safeguarding partners. We have also asked schools to set aside time from INSET days to assess how they are responding to the issues highlighted by the inspectorate.

We would particularly like to draw your attention to Ofsted's specific recommendation for safeguarding partners: *'to review work to improve engagement with schools of all types in their local area, tailoring their approach to what their analysis (produced in partnership with schools/colleges and wider safeguarding partners) indicates are the risks to children and young people in their local area'*. We are therefore reiterating Minister Ford's oral statement request that all safeguarding partners review how they work with all their schools and colleges locally (including academies and independent schools) by October half-term and set out what your offer of support to schools and colleges is.

As you will be aware, the implementation of local safeguarding arrangements is supported by national facilitators for local government, police, and health who can work with you to develop and strengthen your partnerships. We have asked the facilitators to explore the issues raised in the Ofsted report, consider how best to generate either regional or national conversations to support your own reviews, and to gather wider feedback that may be taken into consideration. Officials from the Department for Education will contact you with further details of this work, and we would welcome your engagement and collaboration to ensure we're doing all we can to protect children and young people from abuse.

Earlier this month we published our new cross-Government [Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy](#) to help ensure that women and girls are safe everywhere - at home, online and on the streets. We are committing to radically changing how we end violence against women and girls with a whole system approach focusing on prioritising prevention, supporting survivors, pursuing perpetrators and a stronger system.

The new strategy has been informed by the Call for Evidence that the Home Office ran earlier this year to hear directly from the public, which received an unprecedented more than 180,000 responses. The strategy will be followed this Autumn by a complementary Domestic Abuse Strategy, a refreshed National Statement of Expectations to support local areas in commissioning services, and a refreshed Male Victims Position Paper in recognition of the additional challenges which may be faced by men and boys who are victims of these crimes. We would ask that your partnerships engage with this work as it continues.

We know that for many young people, the risks of harms rise during the six weeks of summer school holidays. So of course, if they must be out of early years, schools, or colleges for much longer than that, through self-isolation for example, they are exposed to those same risks for a longer period of time. Whilst initiatives like our Holiday Activities and Food programme will provide enriching activities for many children this summer, we would ask that that all safeguarding partners are vigilant to

the risks that long periods out of education might mean and work together effectively to protect children over the holiday period.

As ever, we are grateful for your hard work and dedication to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in your local areas, and your commitment to improving the wider safeguarding system for all our children.

Yours sincerely,

Vicky Ford MP

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