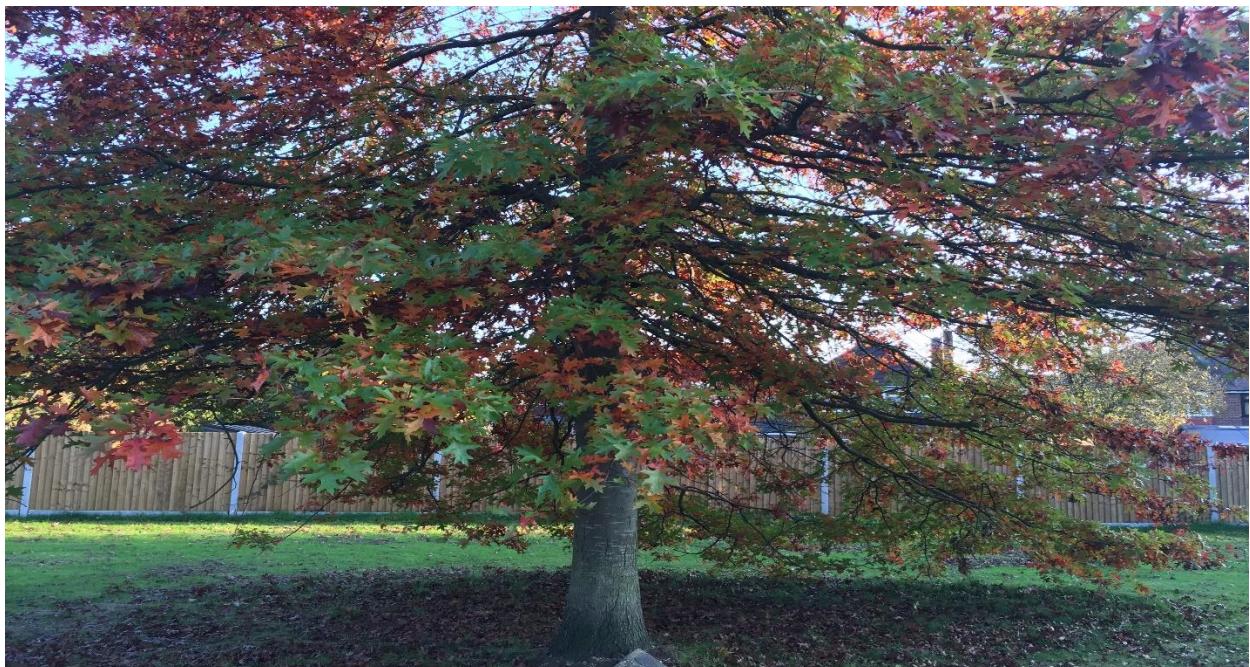


Bulletin 1 – January 2019



Safeguarding Children in Education

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Introduction

Happy new year and a warm welcome to the first Chalktalk Education newsletter of 2019 which is aimed at schools, settings and colleges to inform them of relevant news, guidance and publications and to share feedback and learning.

This month there is an interesting article on the impact on children and young people of regular screen use and some statistics demonstrating the negative effects on their health, welfare and attainment and some ways in which schools can help.

We also focus on the importance of Early Help and our duty to ensure vulnerable children and families receive the support they need as early as possible, to prevent problems increasing.

In our series examining learning from serious case reviews, we take a look at the case of William Vahey, a teacher who sexually abused children from Southbank School, an international school in London from 2009 until 2013. He then went to work in a school in Nicaragua. In Nicaragua a USB stick owned by Vahey was found to have multiple images of the abuse of school aged children from Southbank School. Vahey admitted the abuse but before further enquiries could take place, he committed suicide in 2014. These reviews highlight pertinent messages for practice improvement and multi-agency working; the detail can be emotionally draining and so can the emotional impact of the work of designated safeguarding leads in general; it is important that you have access to support your emotional well-being.

Good practice safeguards staff as well as children and it is vital for staff who deal with safeguarding and child protection issues to receive supervision and support – please do get some emotional support for yourselves – this is something that we can provide, please ask.

Help to share the information by circulating this newsletter to your colleagues and by making it available either electronically and/or on notice boards in your school/college/setting.

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NSPCC : Let's talk Pants

The NSPCC PANTS song and animation can be viewed on the NSPCC website: www.nspcc.org.uk/pants. You can also see it on You Tube <https://youtu.be/fn6AVSzK008>. The PANTS campaign was launched to provide support to parents to enable them to talk to their children about staying safe without even having to use the term sexual abuse. The campaign was based on a Council of Europe initiative called **The Underwear Rule** and developed this to form the PANTS acrostic with each letter representing a safety message:

Privates are private

Always remember your body belongs to you

No means no

Talk about secrets that upset you

Speak up, someone can help.

Mobile phones v health and attainment

Research carried out by Cambridge University has suggested that an extra hour a day of television, internet or computer game time in Year 10, is linked to poorer grades at GCSE

The researchers recorded the activities of more than 800 14-year-olds and analysed their GCSE results at 16. Those spending an extra hour a day on screens saw a fall in GCSE results equivalent to two grades overall.

Use of mobile phones or other devices at night can cause sleep deprivation and affects children's health and wellbeing.

Overnight use

HMC (Headmaster and Headmistresses Conference), in partnership with online safety organisation Digital Awareness UK (DAUK), has conducted a survey of 2,750 pupils aged 11-18, looking into teenage use of mobile devices overnight and the impact this is having on their health and wellbeing.

The survey found:

- Almost half (45%) of students admit they check their mobile device after going to bed. Of those:
 - A quarter (23%) check their mobile device more than 10 times a night
 - A quarter (25%) spend more than an hour on their mobile device after going to bed (just over 11% of the whole)
 - A third (32%) of these students' parents are not aware that they check their mobile device after going to bed
 - Almost all (94%) of these students are on social media after going to bed
 - 75% are listening to music after going to bed
 - Over half (57%) are watching films

- 70% of boys are playing games after going to bed
- 10% of students said they'd feel stressed about missing out if they didn't check their mobile device before going to sleep
- 38% of students said they'd be curious to know what's happening if they didn't check their mobile device before going to sleep

Other findings show that:

- 68% of students say that using their mobile devices at night affects their school work.
- A quarter of students (25%) also say they feel tired during the day because of how often they use their mobile device at night
- Almost half (42%) of students keep their phone next to their bed at night

These findings are particularly relevant at the beginning of the academic year, as safety group Internet Matters recently found that more children fall victim of cyber-bullying at the start of the school academic year than any other time, due to the fact many of them have increased access to mobile devices.

Mike Buchanan, Chair of HMC and Head of Ashford School said:

“As teachers we are seeing the effects of device use every day. Mirroring adults, pupils are constantly using their phones, quite often for productive purposes. However if they are not socializing with each other, or are tired for lessons and not concentrating, we need to address that.

“Teachers, parents and indeed most adults are trying to get to grips with the new realities heralded by the increased use of social media. HMC is committed to finding out more about how this affects pupils in all schools and use that knowledge to inform sensible and sympathetic policies.

“Schools will make their own minds up about the extent to which phones and other devices should be used in schools. However, we want to start a new conversation with parents about how to influence teenagers’ responsible use of phones and other devices both at home and at school.”

DAUK deliver innovative online safety solutions to schools throughout the country, tackling issues such as cyber-bullying, sexting and hacking. They say these findings chime with what they're seeing on the ground in schools:

“Students often tell us that they are exhausted due to the fact their mobile devices are flashing, buzzing and pinging throughout the night telling them what they’ve been tagged in, invited to or who’s messaged them.

Our research has found that almost half (42%) of students keep their mobile devices next to their bed at night, so it’s not surprising that technology can be such a barrier to proper sleep. This is why it’s invaluable for schools to be working with parents in educating students about the impact technology can have on physical and emotional wellbeing.”

Further research on device usage

- Childwise found that on average children spend six hours or more a day on screens **

- Cambridge University found that students who spend an extra hour a day on screens will see a fall in GCSE results equivalent to two grades overall***.

** <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/first-weeks-school-year-are-perfect-storm-cyberbullying>

**<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-32067158>

*** <http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/feature/digital-home/how-much-screen-time-is-healthy-for-children-benefits-3520917/>

What can schools do?

Schools play a pivotal role in educating both parents, children and young people about technology, screen time and the impact on health and well-being. The following advice, by Digital Awareness UK, can be used in lessons, parent evenings and acceptable use agreements, to support children, young people and parents in making the right decisions:

1. 90 minutes before bed

The run up to bedtime should really be an opportunity for you to relax, wind down and perhaps reflect on the day. While technology can be used to aid this process (by using meditation apps for example), it can also be very destructive. Social media in particular can expose the body to heightened anxiety or alertness, and this is not conducive to a good night's sleep. So we would always advise refraining from screen time 90 minutes before bedtime.

2. Notifications

It's not easy to sleep when your mobile device is buzzing, pinging, or flashing throughout the night, even if it does help you to instantly discover what you've been tagged in or who's just messaged you. To prevent restless nights, it may be helpful to turn off notifications, or activate 'do not disturb', 'aeroplane mode' or mute settings. Or just switch the device off all together if you can.

3. Blue light exposure

A number of studies have highlighted the impact blue light (the artificial lighting emitted through electronic devices such as smart-phones) can have on our sleep. This type of light can suppress the secretion of the hormone melatonin, which is what makes you feel sleepy. Blue light exposure can however be reduced through device settings. For example, most Apple devices now have the 'night shift mode', which changes the colour temperature of your device to reduce exposure.

4. Unprompted checking

Sometimes without even being prompted, we will reach over for our devices to see what we're missing out on, to communicate with each other, or just to be entertained. If you're aware of this habit, do your best to break it and remember that such habits will prolong sleep deprivation.

5. Location of device

Many of us are guilty of sleeping with our mobile devices near to our heads – even under our pillows! For obvious reasons this isn't a healthy place to have your device at night. Try to keep it in

a location that prevents you from seeing, hearing or even reaching for it. For some this means leaving it on the other side of the room. Others may choose to leave the device in a different room all together.

6. Monitoring usage

It's difficult to know if you are using your mobile device too often or for too long if you don't have awareness of exactly how much it's being used. There are a number of screen time tracker apps such as RealizD and Moment that can effectively showcase the amount of time you are spending on your device – from how many times you check it in a day to how many hours you've spent on Snapchat. Some of these apps even allow you to set usage restrictions.

7. Digital Detox

If you're aware that mobile device usage is starting to have an impact on your sleep, you might want to think about taking a break from it all together at night time, or at any other time during the day. This doesn't mean you need to quit cold turkey – you may decide on week days you will switch your tablet off before going to bed, or that you will turn your smart phone off from 8pm on weekends.

8. Switch up the habit

There are many things you can do as part of your night time routine instead of using mobile devices, especially in the 90 minutes running up to bedtime. This is the perfect time to get stuck into a good book, practice meditation or have a relaxing bubble bath. Switching your habit of using mobile devices for a habit like this could encourage a better night's sleep.

9. Think

We rarely think about the reasons why we are using mobile devices at night time, and often if we did, we would think twice. That's because our motivations reveal the reasons aren't always a necessity – often we pick up our smart-phones at 2am out of intrigue or boredom. If the reason isn't that important, perhaps you should consider your sleep and general health and well-being to be more important, and stop yourself from picking up the device as tempting as it may be.

10. Reward (positive reinforcement)

If you discover that mobile devices are having a negative impact on your sleep and you've decided to take control back by exercising any of the tips listed above, it's time to acknowledge that behaviour shift and give yourself a pat on the back! Make sure you treat yourself to something, whether it's a shopping spree, a bar of chocolate, or the latest mobile device (if you think you can handle it)!

Early help

In 2011 Professor Eileen Munro's review into child protection identified as essential the provision of early help services, as it was recognised that preventative services do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services. She called for statutory early intervention services as a vital component in safeguarding and preventing abuse early on.

Chapter 1 of the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children published in July 2018 details our legal duty to assess need and provide early help. Ofsted also put early help high on their inspecting agenda. In a recent¹ local authority inspection they state:

“Children and their families are well supported by the offer of a wide range of early intervention and assessment services. Thresholds to services are very clear, appropriately applied and embedded across all agencies”.

The Role of Schools

For schools it is crucial that they are fully involved. A key responsibility is to ensure that all children, including the most vulnerable, achieve expected levels of progress. They are often the first agency to spot problems when all is not well at home and are a trusted point of contact for many families. ‘Keeping Children Safe in Education’ states ‘*all school and college staff should be prepared to identify children who may benefit from early help*’ It goes on to say that in the first instance, staff should discuss early help requirements with their designated safeguarding lead and that staff may be required to support other agencies and professionals in an early help assessment.

Support and Prevention

Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later and is a crucial factor in safeguarding children. Early help means offering and providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life.

Early help can also prevent further problems arising, for example if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care.

Significantly improving outcomes for children

For early help to be effective, it is reliant on local agencies working together to :-

- identify children and families who would benefit from early help;
- undertake an assessment of the need for early help; and
- provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child

The Role of the Local Authority

Under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, local authorities have a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of children with a view to improving the well-being of all children in the authority’s care, including protection from harm and neglect.

¹ London Borough of Redbridge Autumn 2016

Identifying children who would benefit

The statutory guidance states that local agencies should have effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs for children.

For this to work, staff must understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other professionals to support early identification and assessment.

The Role of the Safeguarding Children Board

Local safeguarding children boards should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of training for all professionals. It is the training that is offered that will cover how to identify and respond early to the needs of all vulnerable children, including unborn children, babies, older children, young carers, disabled children and those in secure settings.

Disabled Children

All staff working with children should be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- is disabled and has specific additional needs
- has special educational needs;
- is a young carer;
- is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour;
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance abuse, adult mental health problems and domestic violence;
- has returned home to their family from care;

and/or

- is showing early signs of abuse and/or neglect

Working Together for an Effective Assessment

The guidance also states that local agencies should work together to put processes in place for the effective assessment of the needs of individual children who may benefit from early help services

Support may be necessary from a wide range of services. Where a child and family would benefit from coordinated support from more than one agency (e.g. education, health, housing, police) there should be an inter-agency assessment to identify what help the child and family require to prevent needs escalating to a point where intervention would be needed via a statutory assessment under the Children Act 1989.

Serious Case Reviews – Southbank International School

This month we look at a serious case review commissioned on behalf of the Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster Local Safeguarding Children Boards, following the sexual abuse of at least 54 pupils at an independent international day school in London.

William Vahey, a teacher, was an American citizen who joined Southbank School from an international school abroad.

He had a conviction for sexual abuse against young boys in California in 1969, with a 90 day custodial sentence and a 5 year probation. This conviction was not picked up when he qualified as a teacher in the United States or by any subsequent employer.

Recruitment processes were less formal than in other UK schools. A number of factors enabled him to be appointed as a teacher at the school :

- (1) his direct approach to the school for employment
- (2) his wife's power and influence (she was the head of school at his last school)
- (3) recruitment procedures that were not compliant with expected UK standards

- He was popular with many pupils and had an informal, unconventional teaching style
- He ran residential trips and a 'travel club' where he selected pupils and teachers to accompany him on overseas trips
- Teachers and pupils fell ill on the trips (now believed to be due to the administration of drugs by Vahey)
- There was no routine debrief or systematic recording system enabling a pattern of behaviour to be identified
- He was noted to have pupils in his room alone
- Behaviour was 'normalised' from an early stage
- Other concerning behaviours included setting inappropriate boundaries and watching boys shower – these were known to some staff but only reported after the abuse became public.
- Some staff raised concerns – none led to formal safeguarding enquiries
- Vahey managed to groom both victims, adults and manipulate the environment

The culture of the school was one of informality; roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding were unclear, safeguarding leads had insufficient knowledge to fulfil their role and there was no single point of contact for staff who had concerns

The range of behaviours exhibited by Vahey were said to be 'tolerated and not reported', the reasons given include:

- Lack of training for staff focussing on the modus operandi of sex offenders and the possibility that sexual abuse could happen in their environment
- Mixed feelings within the staff, pupil and parent groups about Vahey with some believing him to be a popular and charismatic teacher – the school board found him to be the second most popular teacher in the school
- A reluctance to go against the wishes of a small number of parents who did not want further action to be taken even when inappropriate behaviour towards their own children had been identified
- Not wishing to report a concern without 'firm evidence'
- Staff being unaware that others had similar concerns

Learning

- **Staff recruitment and overseas checks**

The role he was offered was not advertised, there was no job description or person specification

- He was not asked to complete an application form or given a candidate information pack or invited to interview which referred to Southbank's commitment to safeguarding
- No reference checks were carried out before the interview and references were not requested until he had been conditionally offered a role some months later and,
- The Principal interviewed Vahey alone
- It is interesting to note that Cognita (the proprietors of the school) relied on the online safer recruitment training rather than the accredited face to face training

One study into the most effective interviewing techniques conclude that four key areas common amongst those who abused children in professional settings, could be explored in the interview process:

1. Awareness and observation of professional boundaries
2. Appropriateness of relationships with children
3. Commitment to and evidence of taking action to protect

Roles and Responsibilities in relation to Safeguarding

Designated Safeguarding Leads are the cornerstone of effective safeguarding within schools. The review found that it was not clear amongst staff whom the safeguarding leads were and they were not clear about record keeping informing future decision making about a pupil or a member of staff. There was no single point of contact for staff and the safeguarding leads did not meet together to discuss cases, information was not shared and patterns of behaviour were therefore likely to be missed.

Training accessed by designated safeguarding leads run by the local safeguarding children board were found to be focused on familial abuse rather than managing concerns about staff.

Ofsted inspectors commented that although staff had attended training, staff were not aware of revised statutory guidance - suggesting that the training was not effective. Ofsted also noted that the safeguarding leads did not demonstrate that they had sufficient status and authority within the school to influence its safeguarding policy and practice; they were not involved sufficiently closely with either the senior leadership team or the proprietor in updating and reviewing the school's child protection policy.

The review found that some staff believed Vahey's travel club lay outside the ordinary school trip system whereas others understood them to be a school trip and subject to the same scrutiny.

There was ambiguity between the school and Cognita as to who ultimately authorised trips.

Record Keeping

- Pupil records lacked consistency and thoroughness.
- Files were found to be significantly below expected standards.
- Child protection files were 'not fit for purpose'.
- The review highlighted the importance of the school being aware of the limitations of their own systems, rather than relying on an inspection to highlight their concerns.

Recognising Behaviour that should have been a cause for Concern

- Lack of training for staff focused on the modus operandi of sex offenders and the possibility that sexual abuse could happen in their environment
- Mixed feelings with staff, pupil and parent groups about Vahey; some believed him to be a popular and charismatic teacher
- A reluctance to go against the wishes of parents who did not want further action to be taken, even when inappropriate behaviour had been identified, therefore not recognising safeguarding concerns for the wider school population
- Not wishing to make a complaint or express a concern without 'firm evidence'
- Staff being unaware that others had similar concerns
- A lack of inquisitiveness on the part of senior staff in relation to the concerns or complaints from individuals about Vahey's conduct.

Listening to concerns and managing staff behaviour

- In spite of staff raising concerns, Vahey was allowed to lead trips until he left in 2013.
- There is a need for clarity of communication both orally and in writing as this was identified as a crucial contributory factor to a failure to identify accumulating concerns
- The method of managing concerns was inappropriate and prevented children from reporting concerns as they knew they would be asked to attend a meeting with a member of staff and Vahey
- School staff must be 'mandated under the School's Code of Conduct' to notify the safeguarding leads of any inappropriate conduct. Safeguarding leads must have the capacity, knowledge, skills and supervision to manage this work, pupils and staff should all be aware. Reported concerns should be responded to and this should be consistent with statutory guidance.

Parental views, responses to safeguarding concerns and confusion with complaints process

- The views and wishes of parents should not override objective consideration of risk by professionals who should have knowledge of indicators of abuse and should have acted in the best interests of the child, whatever the parental views.
- The onus of any action should not be driven by parents concerns and complaints, but the wider perspective of safeguarding children.

Maintaining a school culture that promotes safe practice

During Vahey's time at Southbank school there was a liberal ethos and an informal culture. Cognita, the proprietor was noted not to have an effective oversight. The school board was insufficiently robust in interrogating safeguarding arrangements and did not assure themselves that systems and processes were fit for purpose.

Vahey was able to exploit the blurred boundaries between staff, parents and pupils. He was popular with pupils and parents, he had a powerful position within the staff group (influenced by his wife) and there was a lack of scrutiny of his behaviour by management. The situation was exacerbated by staff and pupils having little confidence in what would happen if concerns were raised.

Conclusion

The review highlighted the importance of two things for organisations in protecting children:

- (a) a culture of openness, including a willingness to recognise and accept that abuse could happen in any organisation and
- (b) a robust structure to support the effective reporting and handling of concerns about behaviour.

Safeguarding Training and Development

Please contact us on 07904197780 or e mail ChalktalkLtd@mail.com to discuss and book your seminar and continuing professional development.

We can offer bespoke courses on a range of safeguarding themes including:

- Whole school training on safeguarding and child protection
- Designated Safeguarding Leads
- Accredited Safer Recruitment training
- Safeguarding for governing bodies
- Supervision for designated safeguarding leads
- Safeguarding audits and reviews to support you to be inspection ready

Resources

www.nspcc.org.uk/pants

Key to Abbreviations

NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMC	Headmaster Headmistress Conference
DAUK	Digital Awareness UK
DfE	Department of Education
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead

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