

12th September 2019

Dear Parent/Guardian

Re: Years 7-13 - Parent information on safeguarding

At The Holt, we recognise our moral and statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of all our students. This aim of this letter is to give you some information about how we meet our safeguarding and child protection responsibilities.

I am the designated safeguarding lead, and in my absence Mrs Kay Maynard is also a trained designated safeguarding officer. My key responsibilities are to coordinate child protection within school, to support students and staff and to ensure that all staff and volunteers receive training. I also work with other agencies including children's social care, the police and health staff to safeguard and promote the welfare of all our students. I make referrals to children's social care when there are concerns about a student's safety and I liaise with the family. I also liaise with governors to ensure the school meets its child protection responsibilities. The designated governor for child protection is Mrs Fiona Cross. I do not pass on any case specific details to the governors.

We try to minimise the risk of harm to all of our students by

- having an up to date safeguarding policy
- checking the suitability of all our staff to work with children
- encouraging students to tell us if something is wrong
- adhering to health and safety regulations
- training all our staff and volunteers to recognise and respond to child welfare concerns
- appointing a designated person who has additional training in child protection
- working in partnership with parents and carers
- sharing information with appropriate agencies if we have concerns
- managing and supporting our staff team

Child abuse and what to look for

No parent wants to think about the possibility of their child becoming a victim of abuse, and most children are never abused. Even so, it is important for parents to be aware of the possibility and to know that help is available if the unthinkable does happen.

Although there is always a lot of media focus on 'stranger danger', the abduction of children is rare and the threat from strangers is very small. You should still ensure that your child knows the rules about keeping safe when they are out alone. A useful guide can be found on the NSPCC website:
<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1103/out-alone-keeping-child-safe.pdf>

Most children know their abusers. They may be family members or friends of family, someone who works with the child or someone who lives in the community. Awareness of abusive relationships between peers (i.e. if your daughter/son is in an abusive relationship with her boyfriend/girlfriend) has been raised in the media recently and is a serious issue amongst teenagers.

There are four types of abuse: physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and neglect. There are many signs, or indicators that a child might be suffering abuse. There may be injuries, but it is more likely that you will notice some change in your child's behaviour. If you notice anything that concerns you, talk to your daughter/son to see if you can find out what is happening. Remember that, if he or she is being harmed, they may be too frightened to tell you. If your daughter or son becomes distressed or you are not happy with the explanations, you could talk to an adult you trust or call a helpline or children's social care services, or call school.

Some signs to look for are:

- bruises or other injuries
- a change in behaviour – from quiet to loud, or from happy-go-lucky to withdrawn
- pain or discomfort
- fear of a particular person, or a reluctance to be alone with them
- secrecy around a relationship with a particular person
- secretive behaviour in the internet and/or sexting
- reluctance to discuss where they go, or who they are with
- sexual talk or knowledge beyond their years
- being watchful, or always on edge
- losing interest in their appearance, hobbies or family life
- alcohol or drug taking
- having money and refusing to say where it has come from
- wetting the bed
- becoming clingy

If your child is being bullied

We define bullying as behaviour that is deliberate, repeated and is designed to be hurtful. Bullies tend to pick on children who they think are unable to defend themselves. Bullying is not only about hitting or fighting. It also includes name calling, threats, taking belongings, intimidating and making unkind or abusive remarks. Young people may try to hide the fact they are being bullied because they are afraid or ashamed but you might notice some signs, for example your child might:

- change their behaviour
- 'lose' their pocket money, or ask for extra money
- try to avoid going to school
- complain regularly of headaches or stomach aches
- have unexplained cuts and bruises
- play truant.

We have anti-bullying procedures that help us to identify and deal with any case of bullying in school, but bullying does not only take place in school, it can also happen in the home or in the community. Bullying can be serious and cause a lot of distress. If your son or daughter tells you that they are being bullied in school, ask for their permission for you to tell us. They may not have told us themselves because they are afraid that the bully will find out and the bullying will get worse. Try to help them to understand that the bullying will not stop while it is kept secret. As soon as we know it is happening we will follow our anti-bullying procedures to try to stop it. It is also distressing to suspect that your son or daughter might be bullying other children. Our anti-bullying procedures include trying to support children who bully to change their behaviour, so please talk to us if you think your child needs some help.

What we will do if we have a concern about your child

If we are concerned that your child may be at risk of abuse or neglect, we must follow the procedures in our safeguarding policy. You can look at the policy on the school website. The procedures have been written to protect all students. They comply with our statutory responsibilities and are designed to support students, families and staff. The procedures are based on the principle that the welfare of the child is the most important consideration.

In almost all circumstances, we will talk to you about our concerns and we will also tell you if we feel we must refer our concerns to children's social care. We will ask your consent to make a referral, but in some circumstances we may need to make the referral against your wishes. We will only do this if we genuinely believe that this is the best way to protect your child, and the fact that you did not consent to the referral will be recorded. If we think that talking to you first might in some way increase the risk to your child, we will report our concerns to children's social care and take advice from them. We will normally tell you that a referral is being made and we will record the reasons why we decided to follow this course of action.

Child protection is a very sensitive issue and it raises many questions as well as a range of strong emotions. We will do everything we can to support our students and you can be assured that any action we take will be in the best interests of your child.

If you are concerned about the safety or welfare of your daughter, son or a child you know, you should always act without delay. Many people worry that their suspicions might be wrong, or that they will be interfering unnecessarily. If you wish, you can telephone Wokingham social care (0118 9088002) for advice without identifying the child. If the conversation confirms that you are right to be concerned you can then give the child's details. You will be asked for your name and address too, but the agencies will take anonymous calls, so if you really do not want to say who you are, you do not have to. Remember, it is always better to be safe and not to assume that someone else has acted.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding our safeguarding procedures or have any concerns following on from this letter.

Yours sincerely



Vicki Martin
Assistant Headteacher