

**The role of school in protecting
pupils from harm that is linked to
culture, faith or beliefs – June 2019**



**Oxenhope Church of England Primary
School**

If you are concerned about the safety of a child, act!

Our Named Persons for Child Protection are (Head of School), Alice Jones and Gillian Dyson (Pastoral Manager), Caroline Auty (Class Teacher) and Hannah Inman (Explorers Club Leader)

Useful phone numbers:

School – 01535 642271

Social Services Initial Contact Point 01274 437500

This policy is designed to be read alongside the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Staff in school are in a good position to recognise any potential signs that a child may be subject to abuse and to act quickly to help protect the child.

Protecting some pupils from abuse may require a better understanding of their families' faith, culture or belief to appreciate risk factors, recognise signs of abuse, and improve confidence in challenging practice which may be putting a child at risk of harm.

Some parent/s or carers may have a perspective on child rearing practices underpinned by culture or faith which are not in line with UK law and cultural norms, and they may put their child at risk of harm.

Not all practices related to culture, faith and beliefs are harmful, but there are some known practices involving children which are unsafe and in some cases against the law in the UK.

These include:

- branding a child as a witch
- breast ironing
- child trafficking
- cupping therapy
- female genital mutilation
- forced marriage,
- honour based violence,
- harsh forms of physical chastisements,
- scaring initiations,
- certain healing practices and ritual practices.

Practices such as these can cause emotional, psychological and physical harm and in the worst cases death.

Culture, faith, belief or tradition is no excuse for harming a child and is condemned by people of all communities. Child abuse is never acceptable wherever it occurs and whatever form it takes.

School ethos, policy and training

Oxenhope C of E Primary has robust child protection policies and procedures in place that are read and understood by all members of staff.

The school also creates an ethos and culture that encourages children to speak to a member of staff if they are worried about anything. Displaying posters that advertise helplines for children such as ChildLine are also a good way of encouraging children to seek help if they have a problem.

Teachers are also encouraged to develop or enhance their cultural competency. This can be achieved by understanding the underlying principles of good child protection practice and applying them with knowledge and understanding of a student's specific circumstances relating to their family's culture and faith. All school staff attend child protection training to help them identify signs of abuse and act quickly.

What are the schools' responsibilities?

The Children Act 1989 makes it clear that the child's welfare is paramount. The rights of the child must always be upheld before consideration of the rights (and traditional cultural and faith related practices) of adult family members and/or the child's community.

Since the Children Act 2004, there is a responsibility on professionals, voluntary organisations and faith communities to proactively safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Therefore, building trust and understanding between the school, parents and communities is important. Oxenhope also adheres to guidance on child protection set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2018) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)

Preventative education

Oxenhope invites faith and community leaders to lessons or assemblies to raise children's understanding about faith, culture and safeguarding. Specific cultures are not be targeted in lessons, rather the general issue of children's rights which is covered in PSHE lessons and the importance of emotional and physical wellbeing which is also covered in PHSE lessons.

Response and action to take on suspicions or disclosures

It must be stressed that being sensitive to the family's culture, faith and beliefs is important, but teachers need to be prepared to challenge views and actions which expose children to harm. Teachers should feel able to question the parent or carer's practice or interpretation of their faith or belief system if it impacts on the wellbeing of their students.

If a student reports that they fear for themselves because of the behaviour of a family member, ensure that they are listened to, follow the school's procedure for referrals and do not contact the pupil's parents/ carers if it is felt that this would put the pupil at risk of at further harm.

Teachers should be familiar with the school's child protection procedures for referral and reporting, and follow these procedures where the student is found to be at risk or information becomes available that abuse has taken place.

Working with parents

Families may be in need greater awareness and education about UK children's legislation, the role and responsibilities of local statutory services and their powers and duties towards children and their families. Schools can put them in touch with voluntary organisations that can offer family support, information and training to adults and children.

Schools can further support parents by:

- challenging childcare practice which may be harmful and provide parents with information or referral to access further support
- being specific about what the law says about the welfare of the child which is backed up by school child protection guidance.
- providing a space for parents to engage with each other and to access information from professional services
- displaying information from community support organisations
- providing a space to deliver English language courses if the school has many parents from the same community who have language difficulty.

~Written by Alice Jones

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