

The MDS Schools Safeguarding Agreement

Responding to
The IICSA Report 2022



MUSIC
& DANCE
SCHOOLS
ACCESS TO EXCELLENCE

November 2022

Introduction

The eight Department for Education Music and Dance Scheme (MDS) Schools are:

Chetham's School of Music
The Purcell School for Young Musicians
Wells Cathedral School
Yehudi Menuhin School
Elmhurst Ballet School
The Hammond School
The Royal Ballet School
Tring Park School for the Performing Arts

St Mary's Music School is an associate school funded by the Scottish Government.

These schools offer students brilliant experiences with dance and music intrinsic to the school curriculum. The MDS award enables them to nurture exceptional talent, providing the finest training regardless of a student's financial circumstances or background. Exceptionally talented young musicians and dancers are provided with sector leading training preparing them for a career in the performing arts. These purposeful communities provide strong academics, outstanding pastoral support and inspiring environments.

The MDS Safeguarding Network was established in 2018 as a way of bringing together expertise from across the group to share best practice and strive to ensure excellence in provision. We focus on the unique characteristics of our learning environments which has included collaboration on privileged relationships, mental health and low-level reporting amongst others. The group meets twice a year in the Autumn and Spring terms. MDS Headteachers also discuss safeguarding matters at each of their termly meetings.

The March 2022 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Residential and Music Schools (IICSA) left us, as a group of schools, distressed

and appalled at the experiences of children who had been in our trust in the past. Whilst acknowledging that the abuse described is non-recent and that safeguarding provision has changed dramatically, we recognise that all of our organisations can learn from this report as the following extracts illustrate:

“Boarding schools could be said to provide ‘the ideal environment for grooming’. Certain characteristics unique to the boarding environment heighten the risks of sexual abuse of pupils by staff.”

“There is often a higher incidence of individual tuition at boarding schools, in music or sports coaching or for additional academic tuition. This can lead to unique and close relationships developing between pupils and staff.”

The 222-page report concluded with a total of six recommendations pertinent to our schools; we are committed to meeting all of them. In response to this report the Network met and agreed on the principles outlined in this document. This is our Safeguarding Agreement to ensure that our organisations are safe places for students and staff alike. It is a current response to the non-recent abuse and a renewed commitment that effective safeguarding will be consistent across the group. We will challenge any behaviour which falls below the highest of standards and do all we can to prevent any recurrence of the horrific non-recent abuse outlined in the report.

As a group we have adopted these principles and reflected them in the systems and procedures within our schools. The group supports all recommendations in the final report published in October 2022.

This is a live document and will be reviewed annually by the MDS Heads and DSLs.

MDS Safeguarding Network: Five Guiding Principles

Having read the report in its entirety and looking carefully at the implications for our sector, we decided that a more holistic response was necessary to address the issues identified. We must establish a culture of safeguarding with ambitions beyond the six identified recommendations. The schematic below identifies the five guiding principles which form the bedrock of secure safeguarding.



Five Guiding Principles: Ethos

Report findings:

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“Culture cannot be imposed or created by edict.”

“In a dysfunctional organisation the introduction of neutral notification is unlikely to improve matters, and indeed could potentially add further dysfunctionality by causing, or adding to, an atmosphere of blame and mistrust.”

“As the leader of the school the Headteacher has to be a role model to staff and students and must embody the values of the school.”

“Openness and transparency are key to a protective environment.”

“Where safeguarding is part of the stated aims and objectives of the school, this helps to create a positive culture in which the welfare of children is prioritised throughout the school.”

The issue of an effective ethos and culture with safeguarding at the heart of decision-making runs throughout the report. Although there is not a specific recommendation regarding ethos, each recommendation needs such a culture to work.

Strategic goal:

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Open, honest and transparent, our unique organisations work, learn and lead together to ensure the highest standards in safeguarding.

The Network values the mutual support and challenge provided by its meetings. In creating our group ethos, we have identified attributes to be transferred into individual schools within the group.

To achieve our strategic goal:

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- 1** Ultimate responsibility for safeguarding rests with the headteacher.
 - 2** All DSLs will work with the senior team to ensure that safeguarding is a part of any decision-making processes or strategic planning.
 - 3** Safeguarding training of all stakeholders goes beyond statutory requirements and instead reflects best practice recognising the unique challenges of our settings.
 - 4** The DSL teams will have time to work together and participate in Network activities.
 - 5** We will respond in a timely, multifaceted way to emerging issues.
 - 6** Within our schools, students receive regular messages regarding all aspects of safeguarding and feel safe and confident to report using a variety of available routes.

Five Guiding Principles: Leadership & Governance

Report findings:

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The report looks critically either at the current system or previous case studies. It concludes:

“Leadership matters.”

“Many of the schools examined responded inadequately to allegations against their staff. Some school leaders were unaware or ill-informed about the national guidance that was in place at the time and so did not implement it. In some schools, staff were aware of allegations or concerns about colleagues but did not report these concerns. There was widespread reluctance to believe that colleagues could be sexually abusing children and, in some cases, there was a culture which discouraged reporting.”

“There were examples of poor leadership in schools, where headteachers did not understand their safeguarding roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to taking the lead role in referring allegations against staff. Headteachers who were autocratic or unapproachable discouraged staff, parents or pupils from reporting concerns, and deterred or deflected challenge from governors.”

“Governors should have relevant knowledge and skills to enable them to identify safeguarding risks and how to manage them. Governors must understand their responsibility to put the child first, before the institution.”

“The relationship between leadership and governors was a cornerstone because ‘it sets the tone for effective leadership, mutual respect and recognition of shared values while recognising their different roles and lines of accountability.’”

Strategic goal:

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To provide strong leadership of safeguarding across our schools and deliver effective governance frameworks.

Governance should be a protective factor in the way it scrutinises safeguarding arrangements and holds leaders to account.

This means having informed leaders, boards and committees who receive baseline and refresher training, as well as regular safeguarding reports to update them on progress and demonstrate the impact of our safeguarding interventions. We need to be able to answer the ‘How do we know?’ question.

We will seek and listen to the voice of the young people in our care, their parents and our staff, ensuring that both current and past voices and experiences are heard and influencing how we build an ever safer culture.



Five Guiding Principles: Leadership & Governance

To achieve our strategic goal:

- 1** The Safeguarding Governor will have a level of expertise in education and safeguarding which goes beyond that of the normal layperson.
- 2** The DSL will be on the Leadership Team and given a voice within that team.
- 3** We will continue to deliver safeguarding training and ongoing professional development.
- 4** School leaders and Governors will engage with and support the Designated Safeguarding Leads.
- 5** DSLs, working with the Leadership Team, will continue improving the ways in which we measure the impact of the safeguarding measures that have been implemented.
- 6** Headteachers will undertake regular and specific safeguarding training.
- 7** Governors will undertake regular safeguarding training and the Governor with responsibility for safeguarding will undertake additional specific training.
- 8** Appropriate staff will undertake training on investigating allegations.
- 9** The DSL will be given sufficient, protected time, resources and authority to undertake their role.
- 10** The Headteacher will not also be the DSL, this is to add in an additional level of protection.
- 11** The DSL will receive regular supervision.
- 12** The DSL and Safeguarding Governor will meet regularly, in our schools this will mean at least three times a year.
- 13** Review the makeup and skill set of the safeguarding team and aim to ensure that teams have artistic representation.

Five Guiding Principles: Standards

Report findings:

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“The extent to which the school promotes and safeguards the welfare of all boarders rather than its compliance with structures and systems.”

“Despite the additional risks to children at boarding schools... there are no additional safeguarding requirements or advice for boarding school set out in the statutory guidance KCSIE.”

“Schools are required to have appropriate policies and processes in place to manage and record any low-level concerns and take appropriate action to safeguard children, as part of their whole-school approach to safeguarding. Governors and proprietors should set out the low-level concerns policy within the staff code of conduct, together with an explanation of its purpose, which is: to create and embed a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which the school’s or college’s values and expected behaviour which are set out in the staff code of conduct are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff.”

“KCSIE 2021 now requires schools to have a Staff Code of Conduct, so that the boundaries of acceptable behaviour with children are made clear. A low-level concerns/neutral notification policy relies on the existence of a Staff Code of Conduct to set out acceptable behaviour.”

“Guidance from 2007, Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education, set out that schools should have appropriate whistleblowing procedures in place.”

“The Inspectorate considered that the obligation arose from paragraph 7 of the Independent School Standards which required the school to have regard to KCSIE, which in turn required a school to report an allegation of abuse where the threshold was met to either the LADO or the police unless it had a good reason not to report. The Inspectorate stated that ‘it is difficult to think of an example of a reason which inspectors would accept as a ‘good reason’ not to report an allegation of abuse’.”



Five Guiding Principles: Standards

Strategic goal:

To clearly communicate our expected standards, policies and procedures and to support our Designated Safeguarding Leads to drive and monitor safeguarding practice and culture

Governance should be a protective factor in the way it scrutinises safeguarding arrangements and holds leaders to account.

This means having informed leaders, boards and committees who receive baseline and refresher training, as well as regular safeguarding reports to update them on progress and demonstrate the impact of our safeguarding interventions. We need to be able to answer the 'How do we know?' question.

To achieve our strategic goal:

- 1 Policies, procedures and guidance promote wellbeing and secure the safety of all students
- 2 There is an expectation that the DSL will undertake additional, advanced training specific to meet the needs of the school and the role; this is in addition to the statutory training and updates
- 3 Staff training goes beyond statutory requirements and staff are familiar with policies as living documents
- 4 The school's low level/neutral notification reporting processes should be clear and staff prompted on a regular basis to encourage reporting
- 5 It is the Headteacher's duty to respond to any concern regarding a member of staff and to report on to regulatory authorities, for example, DBS and TRA
- 6 All documents should be readily available to stakeholders
- 7 There is a clear code of conduct which is concise, free of ambiguity and linked to the ethos of the school and this document
- 8 Monitoring systems must be fit for purpose, allowing the DSL not just to record information but also to identify trends in reporting and potentially recognise future staff training needs

Five Guiding Principles: Prevention

Report findings:

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“The ISI considered that the relationship between leadership and governors was a “cornerstone” because “it sets the tone for effective leadership, mutual respect and recognition of shared values, while recognising their different roles and lines of accountability”.”

“The Inquiry heard that at many of the schools examined, governors did not monitor the effective implementation of safeguarding arrangements through the scrutiny of safeguarding incidents which arose at the school.”

“There are no national standards or minimum content for the safeguarding component of the initial teacher training curriculum, which leads to considerable differences of approach.”

“Other than requiring staff to have read the relevant parts of KCSIE, the Statutory Guidance does not set out a minimum level of training or specify any requirements as to the content of safeguarding training that teachers and other school staff should undertake.”

“At some of the schools examined, however, safeguarding training was not so extensive or effective.”

“Despite this level of responsibility and the requirement for specific knowledge and skills, there is no DSL qualification. This contrasts with the requirement for all state-funded schools to have a Special Educational Needs Coordinator with a specific postgraduate qualification for the role.”

Strategic goal:

—
To create ever safer schools through robust recruitment processes, safer working practices and culture. Utilising our skills, knowledge and experience

To achieve our strategic goal:

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- 1** The Single Central Register and all safer recruitment procedures should be regularly checked and challenged by appropriate members of SLT and Governors.
 - 2** Safeguarding is a standing item on all appropriate agendas including: Governors, Senior Leadership and Student Support meetings.
 - 3** Initial training at induction must be robust and understanding tested. Ongoing training should be varied, relevant, frequent and involve the whole staff.
 - 4** Logs of all training given must be maintained and monitored.
 - 5** The MDS Heads and DSL Network will continue to meet to share best practice, offer support, guidance and, where appropriate, lobby for change and development on a local and national basis.

Five Guiding Principles: Protection

Report findings:

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“Concerns about being seen as ‘difficult’ may dissuade children from making complaints about their teachers, who can have significant influence over their future education and career.”

“In several of the schools examined, headteachers said that they were confused about when an allegation met the threshold for referral and they were unaware that they could contact the LADO for informal advice.”

“We would rather over report than under report.”

“There was an attempt to stifle the reporting of concerns internally and to characterise them to external bodies as malicious attempts to undermine the headteacher, who was making changes to the school which were unpopular with some staff.”

“Triangle [an abuse survivors support charity] set out that much of the available guidance is largely prohibitive, telling staff what they should not do (investigate, ask leading questions, extend the child’s account) but not helping them to help the child without contaminating the evidence.”

Strategic goal:

—
Ensuring that reporting concerns is a key priority and is made as easy as possible for all. Continue to build strong relationships with statutory agencies, provide guidance on without blame concerns and ensure robust case management

We can only deal with issues if we are made aware of them. As such, reporting systems and our response to them need to be efficient and effective. We also need to acknowledge that our funding model may make some students and parents reluctant to report for fear of losing their financial support. It is imperative that we all engage in educating our families that they can alert us to concerns without any fear of reprisal.

The only way to achieve this strategic goal is to ensure that our children and young people are placed at the heart of all we do. We will consistently go above and beyond to ensure that children are given an authentic voice, allowing the intrinsically unique identities and life experiences of all children to be heard. Safeguarding concerns are acted upon quickly and appropriately whilst records are well maintained.



Five Guiding Principles: Protection

To achieve our strategic goal:

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- 1** School will identify and advertise a range of reporting routes, including anonymous ones.
- 2** There is a Whistleblowing Policy in place which also includes avenues to access advice.
- 3** Schools should log serious incidents, including:
 - a. Low-level concern about staff
 - b. Bullying
 - c. Sexual HarassmentThis list is not exhaustive and should reflect individual schools and emerging situations.
- 4** Internal case reviews of serious incidents should be held and include oversight from the Safeguarding Governor. Lessons learned should be logged and action points identified.
- 5** DSLs should develop good working relationships with external agencies, examples include:
 - a. LADO
 - b. Children's Services
 - c. CAMHS
 - d. Police
- 6.** DSLs and Headteachers will exhibit tenacity and professional curiosity allowing professional conversations with external agencies should further advice be needed.

Conclusion

The IICSA report has afforded us the opportunity to pause and reflect, to acknowledge the past and look to our systems and approaches to make sure such events cannot ever be repeated.


We have taken the six recommendations identified in the report and integrated them into the strategic goals we identified as a Network.

We must be transparent. Our students and their parents need to know that within our schools there is a safeguarding culture supported by systems and procedures which mean students are safe.

They furthermore need to have confidence in a structure of governance which will guarantee any victim a rigorous investigation, a demonstrable understanding of what it takes to disclose and a recognition of the support and guidance they need to engage with the process.

Whilst each MDS school has its own unique challenges, characteristics and strengths, we believe that by adopting this Safeguarding Agreement and embedding it within each school we will achieve sector leading safeguarding provision across the group.

Safeguarding in each of our schools is reflective of individual contexts but guided by a single principle – excellence.



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