



Monkston Primary School

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Chair of Governors: Mr Adam Gledhill
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September 2023

Dear Parents / Carers,

Child Protection Update

I am writing to all families on the very important subject of child protection [also known as 'safeguarding'] procedures at Monkston Primary School. We do, of course, have a very detailed safeguarding policy available for parents to view on our website. However, this is such an important area of our work that I have decided, with the support of governors, to once again send home this summary of how we protect children at our school.

1. Definitions of Abuse

Working in an educational establishment, we have a very serious legal responsibility to protect children from what the law terms 'significant' harm or 'abuse'. The 4 categories of abuse are defined as follows:

- **Neglect:** failure to provide basic care to meet the child's physical needs, such as not providing adequate food, clothing or shelter; failure to protect the child from harm or ensure access to medical care and treatment
- **Physical abuse:** causing physical harm or injury to a child
- **Sexual abuse:** involving children in sexual activity, or forcing them to witness sexual activity, which includes involving children in looking at or the production of pornography
- **Emotional abuse:** failure to provide love and warmth that affects the child's emotional development; psychological ill treatment of a child through bullying, intimidation or threats

2. Responsibilities

At Monkston Primary School, I am what is termed the 'Designated Safeguarding Lead' [DSL] responsible for child protection throughout the school. Mrs Mills and Mrs Hamer have received the same training and fulfil the role in my absence. Part of my responsibility is to ensure that all staff are regularly and appropriately trained to follow child protection procedures. All staff were trained in September 2023.

3. Processes

If a member of staff suspects abuse or a child tells them that they are being abused, the member of staff is duty-bound to pass the matter to me and I will directly refer to social services or discuss the matter with them 'in principle' before deciding whether or not a referral is necessary. At the same time, I would usually inform the child's parents of the action we are taking, although sometimes social services or the police specifically request that I don't inform parents.

4. Principles

At Monkston we seek to create a climate which encourages good communication and open discussion between pupils and staff. We provide opportunities for children to request help if they need to do so. If we are involved in potential child protection conversations with children, we follow a strict protocol – e.g. never promising secrecy, never asking 'leading' questions which put words into a child's mouth and ensuring that we talk to children within view of another member of staff.

An important point I would like to make concerns clarifying the legal position with regard to parental punishment of children. Over the last 18 years, I have dealt with many allegations of child abuse. Tragically, I have encountered severe cases of abuse under each of the 4 categories outlined above. However, I have also addressed issues where parents who thought they were doing 'the right thing' in disciplining their child have, in fact, been guilty of abuse under UK law.

As a parent myself, I am fully aware that when you leave hospital with your new baby, you are generally left to 'get on with it' as far as raising your child is concerned and you have to make your own decisions about managing your child's behaviour. Nobody gives you a clear legal framework for those decisions or offers 'best practice' advice – you have to seek it out for yourself. Many of you have already adopted effective and reasonable practices for managing your child's behaviour and are aware of the legal context, but it has been increasingly apparent to me that this is not the case for every parent, which is why I'm including the following information:

UK law states that it is unlawful for a parent or carer to hit their child, *except* where this amounts to 'reasonable punishment'. This defence is laid down in section 58 of the Children Act 2004, but it is not defined in this legislation. Whether a 'smack' / 'light hit' amounts to reasonable punishment will depend on the circumstances of each case, taking into consideration factors like the age of the child and the nature of the smack. However, physical punishment will be considered 'unreasonable' if it leaves a mark on the child or if the child is hit with any implement such as a cane, belt or shoe. If a child alleges that an implement has been used to punish them or if there are any visible signs of bruising/cuts, I have no option but to refer the matter to social services for further investigation. Similarly, if a child alleges that they been shaken or struck on the head [e.g. slapped around the face], I will refer to social services. If such violence is alleged to have been *threatened* [e.g. "My mum said she'll hit me with a belt if I do that again."], I will always discuss the matter with social services and decide together with them whether or not a formal child protection referral is required. Over the last 18 years of working in child protection, I have met parents who have considered it acceptable to physically punish their child in other ways which don't involve actual 'hitting', such as washing their mouths out with soap or spreading curry powder on their tongues. Any such measure will be viewed as physical abuse.

A key principle to make clear is that we initially take a child's disclosure at face value – we never suggest that they are lying. In some cases of alleged abuse, social services or the police decide not to proceed because they have reasons to doubt the child's account – this is not a decision that I have the authority to make. Schools are not allowed to determine 'guilt' or 'innocence'; they must simply follow procedures and refer allegations/disclosures to social services. Failure to do so would result in serious disciplinary action and possibly legal proceedings being taken against the member of staff who failed to refer.

In addition to the information shared above, I would like to make an offer of support. Class teachers – as well as Mrs Mills and I – are always available to offer suggestions concerning effective strategies for behaviour management at home. We appreciate that family life can be stressful and we are happy to offer advice, if asked, or point you in the right direction for more specific help. We are, of course, very careful not to offer advice without being invited to do so! Thank you for your kind attention and understanding.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs Hannah Williams

