

Education and Training Inspectorate

Child or Adult Protection and Safeguarding: Support for Self-Evaluation

September 2025

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Introduction

Since 2021, there has been extensive consultation and collaboration between the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), schools and organisations in the design of a new model of inspection. The ETI self-evaluation guidance on child or adult protection and safeguarding has been reviewed to align better with the new [Empowering Improvement Framework](#) which published in May 2024.

This document outlines key changes on how we inspect and report on child or adult protection and safeguarding. It is accompanied by self-evaluation proformas and useful materials, **which are for use by different audiences**, but are designed to support the review and quality assurance of the extent to which schools/organisations comply with their child or child and adult protection and safeguarding responsibilities. Within child protection legislation, a child refers to any young person up to the age of eighteen years.

The range of phase-specific self-evaluation proformas available include:

- a child or child and adult protection proforma, for use by the Designated Teacher/Officer/Person for Child or Child and Adult Protection, Designated Governor and/or the Child or Child and Adult Protection Team;
- a safeguarding/preventative curriculum proforma, for use by a pastoral care team or head of year/head of department/coordinator; and
- a safeguarding proforma, for use by the Board of Governors/Management Committee.

The completion of the documentation is not a requirement for any inspection activity; existing documentation will suffice. Schools/organisations may find helpful the documentation for self-evaluation purposes. The Department of Education (DE) recommends that you review/quality assure your compliance and effectiveness of child protection at least annually on a rolling basis.

The Board of Governors/Management Committees must ensure that the school or organisation has a child or child and adult protection policy which is reviewed annually, and that parents and pupils receive a copy of the child protection policy and complaints procedure every two years (page 15). (Department of Education's [Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools](#))

The Safeguarding Continuum

All organisations have a safeguarding responsibility to the children and young people in their care. The Department of Health's (DoH) policy document '[Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland](#)' provides the overarching policy framework for safeguarding children and young people in statutory, private, independent, community, voluntary and faith sectors. It also outlines how organisations must work both individually and in partnership to ensure children and young people are safeguarded as effectively as possible.

The Department of Education (DE) guidance document [Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools](#) provides statutory guidance aligned to the DoH's policy and current legislation to support organisations to fulfil their responsibilities as part of their child protection and safeguarding role.

In all matters relating to safeguarding and child protection procedures or policies, the best interests of the child must be the paramount consideration. **(Department of Education's Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools, P.1)**

Child or Adult Protection is part of safeguarding and refers to the processes which settings have in place to **prevent and respond to harm, and for protecting individual learners that have already suffered harm or who are likely to suffer from significant harm**. The child, and where appropriate adult protection, policy is **one of a suite of safeguarding policies**, must be a living document and must provide a **secure framework** from which all staff can work.

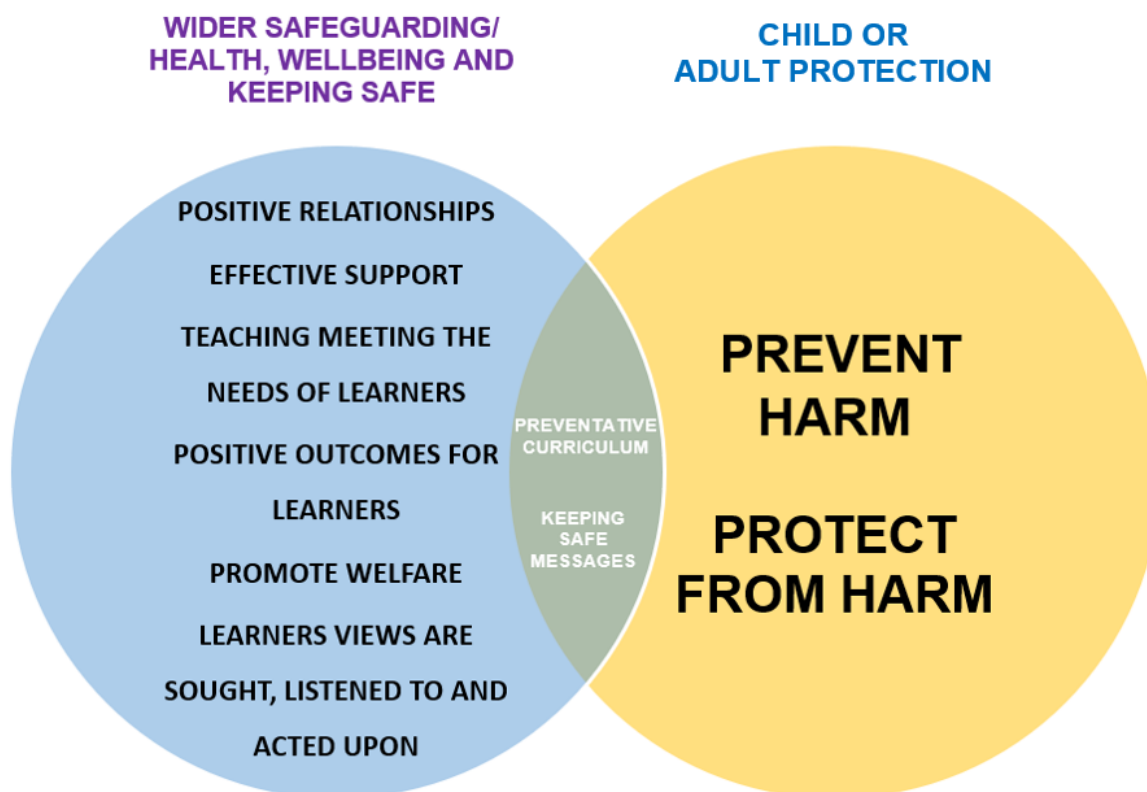
Safeguarding refers to the broad range of activities organisations must take to **promote the care, safety, health and wellbeing of children and prevent harm**. This includes, for example, the **preventative curriculum** and keeping safe messages which aim to help our learners gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century. The overarching aim of the NI Curriculum is to 'empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives'. It includes support to families and early intervention to meet the needs of children and continues through to child protection, which refers specifically to the activity that is undertaken to protect individual children or young people who are suffering, or likely to suffer harm.

"Every school should work to create and maintain an ethos which contributes to the care, safety and wellbeing of children or young people and must maintain a child protection policy that reflects both its legal duties and its safeguarding and child protection responsibilities." **(Department of Education's Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools, P.14)**

While child, and where appropriate adult protection, and safeguarding are intrinsically linked, **Figure 1** illustrates that they have a different purpose and definition.

Schools and organisations should note, the review of Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools in 2023 and the reference to adult safeguarding (page 8). **The EA's Child Protection Support Service (CPSS) offices will have contact details for Adult Safeguarding Teams**. "In the case of a pupil with special educational needs the term 'child' should be interpreted as including any person who has not attained the age of 19 and is a registered pupil at the school. While a school has responsibility for all registered pupils, referral pathways and processes may differ for a young person over the age of 18 (Education (NI) Order 1996)." (Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools, P.4).

Figure 1: The safeguarding continuum



The Role of Boards of Governors

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 places a **statutory duty** on Boards of Governors of grant-aided schools to:

- safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils;
- have a written child protection policy; and
- specifically address the prevention of bullying in school behaviour management policies.

The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016, places a statutory duty on Boards of Governors to record all incidents of alleged and confirmed bullying type behaviour involving registered pupils. To fulfil their responsibilities Boards of Governors are obligated to acknowledge and work within the relevant guidance and procedural documents that have been produced by the Department of Education and the Department of Health. All Governors should receive an element of safeguarding training as part of their induction with the Chair and Designated Governor for Child Protection undertaking full training provided by the Education Authority's (EA) Child Protection Support Service (CPSS). All Governors should undertake refresher Child Protection training every term of office (four years). This training may be delivered by the Principal or Designated Teacher for Child Protection, with resources available from the EA CPSS. ([Department of Education's Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools, P.9](#))

In addition, Governors of Schools which are involved in initiatives such as Extended Schools, Full-Service Schools, and Boarding Departments, must ensure that the implications for safeguarding their pupils in the extended school environment are fully addressed, and that these are outlined within the school's child protection policy.

A self-evaluation proforma for safeguarding, including child, and where appropriate adult protection, for boards of governors is available on the ETI website. Management committees of pre-school settings may choose to use this as part of their self-evaluation, noting that the same statutory duties do not apply.

The proformas provided are not intended as an exhaustive list of the issues to be considered.

Self-evaluation: Child or Child and Adult Protection

When reviewing the arrangements for child protection, schools should consider the effectiveness of the arrangements to adhere to the statutory duties set out in Figure 2.

Figures 3, 4 and 5 set out the responsibilities for voluntary and private settings, further education and work-based learning and youth organisations respectively.

Figure 2: Statements of legal/statutory responsibility on child protection for all schools and EOTAS centres

Under **Articles 17 and 18** of the **Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003**, **the board of governors of a grant aided school has a statutory duty** to:

- safeguard and promote the welfare of registered pupils at the school at all times when the pupils are on the school premises or in the lawful control or charge of a member of school staff; and
- decide on the measures to be taken by all persons associated with the school to protect pupils from abuse, whether at school or elsewhere, and review these measures from time to time.

The 2003 Order places a further obligation on the board of governors to prepare a written statement of such measures and to secure that copies of the statement are available for inspection at the school.

The Schedule for Regulation 4 of **The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (NI) 2010** requires schools to monitor and review annually (*Regulation 7*) the progress made in the school's approach to:

- (c) promoting the health and well-being, attendance, good behaviour and discipline of pupils; and
- (e) managing the attendance and promoting the health and well-being of staff.

Figure 3: Statements of requirements for voluntary and private settings

Statements about current requirements in respect of child protection/safeguarding arrangements as clarified in the DHSSPS Minimum Standards for Child-minding and Day Care for Children under 12 July 2012 which is based on Part XI of the Children Order (NI) 1995 and as explained in the HSCB Implementation Guidance for the Minimum Standards October 2018 from the Health and Social Care Trusts. Standard 1 relates directly to safeguarding and child protection. Standard 3 refers to children's health and well-being.

Various DE Circulars also contain statements of best practice which are pertinent for non-statutory settings.

Advice for Playgroups is available in [Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland \(Health, Social Services and Public Health - March 2016\)](#)

While not statutory the relevant DE policy is [Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools: A Guide for Schools](#) (See p.93-103 'Safeguarding and Child Protection in Pre-school and Early Years Settings: A Summary Guide').

Figure 4: Statements of requirements for FE & WBL all of the box below

DfE funded FE and WBL providers must take due regard of the following policies, circulars and guidance documents:

['Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland'](#)

[Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership key documents \(health-ni.gov.uk\).](#)

FE & WBL: evidence of the impact and monitoring of the disclosure and barring arrangements for an FE college is referred to in Circular FE 11/13 (under review) and the TfS/ANI 2017 operational requirements which are:

FE circular: [Disclosure and Barring Arrangements: Vetting Requirements for \(i\) the recruitment of staff to Further Education colleges \(ii\) existing staff and \(iii\) students](#)

AppsNI: [Apprenticeship guidelines and operational requirements](#)

In the absence of wider sector specific guidance, DE Circulars which are issued mainly for schools contain guidance which is regarded as a source of good practice for other organisations and supplement the guidance issued on safe recruitment practices issued by the Department for the Economy (Circular FE 11/13). If used, please refer to these and apply only as appropriate to the context of your FE college or WBL organisation.

Figure 5: Statements of statutory duties and requirements for youth organisations

De funded youth services must have regard to the Children (NI) Order 1995

*DE Circular 2017/04 Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools (While this guidance has been drafted for schools, it is also useful for other settings including youth and organisations will therefore wish to consider how to adapt the processes outlined in this circular to their settings).

[Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools](#) (revised September 2024)

[Child Protection Policy and Adults at Risk of Harm Policy Guidance \(EA\)](#)

The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016 (the Act) came into operation on 1 September 2021. DE completed a review of the use of restraint and seclusion in educational settings; and the current arrangements for the suspension and expulsion of pupils. Links to relevant DE Circulars can be found at: [Department of Education](#).

While the legal duty rests with the governors, in the best practice, both the designated teacher (DT) and designated governor (DG) should be involved in carrying out the self-evaluation as part of a safeguarding team, which includes the principal and chair of governors.

The following statements are provided as a guide to evaluating the effectiveness of child protection procedures:

- The school/organisation provides evidence of the regular review of child, and where appropriate adult protection policy, procedures and training.
- The discussions with Senior Staff/ Designated Staff/Designated Governor or Chair provide evidence of the policies in action and the confidence and consistency of key staff in implementing them.
- The discussions with the learners indicate their sense of safety and their confidence and understanding of the procedures in reporting any concerns and their awareness of how to seek help and support.
- The lesson/session observations provide evidence of how well the needs of the learners are met.
- Parental, learner and staff questionnaire responses indicate they are aware of how to raise a child or where appropriate adult protection concern.

Schools should note that “Child Protection Training is delivered by the Education Authority’s (EA) Child Protection Support Service (CPSS). It can be supplemented by external training should schools decide to do so, however **it would not replace the CPSS training.**” ([Department of Education’s Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools, p.11](#))

Self-evaluation: Safeguarding

Schools/organisations may find it helpful to consider its arrangements for safeguarding children and young people through the lens of the ETI's contributory area, **Health, Wellbeing and Keeping Safe** (HWKS); see ETI's [Empowering Improvement Framework](#) for more information on this contributory area.

Using this contributory area, schools and organisations can review the extent to which:

- a culture of keeping safe is evident across the school/organisation;
- the emotional health and wellbeing of all is promoted; and
- healthy lifestyles are encouraged and practiced.

A self-evaluation proforma for safeguarding which is aligned to the contributory area of Health, Wellbeing and Keeping Safe can be used by both curriculum and pastoral staff, including the safeguarding team, across **all phases**.

Links to relevant DE circulars to support the review of safeguarding and child protection are also available. While DE Circulars are issued mainly for schools please note that they contain guidance which is regarded as good practice for other organisations and supplement the guidance issued on, for example, safe recruitment practices issued by the Department for the Economy or the guidance issued on the minimum standards by the Health and Social Care Trusts (voluntary and private pre-school settings). If used, please refer to these and apply only as appropriate to the context of your FE college, work-based learning provision, or voluntary or private organisation.

Inspection and reporting of the arrangements for child/adult protection

In all inspection activity the ETI seek to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the child, and where appropriate adult, protection arrangements. The inspection process is responsive to the context of the school/organisation and further lines of inquiry relating to safeguarding and child, and where appropriate adult, protection may be pursued by the inspection team, as a result of: questionnaire responses, discussions with children and parents and/or discussions with staff. The inspection team will request sight of policies and other documentation to evaluate the effectiveness of the arrangements for child protection and safeguarding.

There are **three levels** for reporting the evaluation of the arrangements for child or child and adult protection.

Level	Reported text	Next steps
1	At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school/organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection (and adult protection where appropriate) align to the current statutory guidance.	
2	At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school/organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection (and adult protection where appropriate) align to the current statutory guidance. The ETI will monitor the progress of the school/organisation in addressing the following area(s) for action:	ETI monitoring
3	At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school/organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection (and adult protection where appropriate) do not align sufficiently to the current statutory guidance. The actions to take this work forward include:	A child/adult protection progress visit which will usually take place within six working weeks. EA's CPSS support.

Examples of a level 2 evaluation

For a level 2 evaluation to be made, an area(s) for action may include:

- update its child protection policy on.....;
- ensure that training requirements are up to date (for example, for post-holder, only one);
- ensure that the *governors/management group members* are provided with the necessary evidence to assure themselves that child protection is reviewed regularly and reflects requirements, including the hard back book being available signed by the Chair and leader (ETI only need to see that page); and
- insecure organisation/school premises (external doors, mobiles, fences) and/or vehicle access to areas where there are children can be reported in a Health and Safety appendix, unless there is a significant risk to the learners' safety which the organisation has not recognised.

As a *general rule*, Level 2 is selected if:

- (i) the caveats pose no, or almost no, significant risk to the young people; and
- (ii) there are a few caveats, namely that one or two areas for action are identified. Any more than two, ETI needs to consider whether or not they comprise a risk to the children/young people, and therefore level 3 may need to be considered.

What moves an evaluation from level 2 to level 3?

There is a **significant risk posed** to the children and young people, the culture of disclosure and the ability of the child to disclose.


- The children/young people report that they do not always/feel safe in the school/organisation and that they are not fully/not all aware what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare.
- The training for staff and governors is out of date.
- The child/adult protection policy is out of date.
- There is no system for recording child/adult protection concerns.
- There is no hard back book signed annually.
- There is a lack of concern for the care, welfare and safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk.

This is guidance only and cannot cover all cases: professional judgement is always needed in light of context and circumstances.

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