OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
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Working for you

FAO Designated Child Protection Person

The Cricket Road Centre
Cricket Road
Cowley
Oxford
OX4 3DW

Meera Spillett
Director for Children, Young People & Families

My ref: BA/teg Your ref: Date: 15 March 2011

This matter is being dealt with by Barry Armstrong Direct Line: 01865 810603
Email: barry.armstrong@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Dear Headteacher

Re: Statutory guidance on children who run away from home (or care)

The Local Authority and all our partner agencies have a duty to ensure that every child and young person in their area is safe. As part of this duty every Local Authority has had to develop protocols with a variety of agencies covering the children who go missing from home.

One of the key partners in relation to these requirements are our schools.

We know that children and young people rarely run away from home for no reason. We do know that some of the reasons that they run away relate directly to forced marriage, domestic violence or sexual exploitation. Unless we discuss the reasons for going missing with the young person we may well miss opportunities to intervene early with some children and therefore miss opportunities to protect and provide support.

It is for this reason that a new protocol has been introduced which may require input on behalf of school staff.

Information relating to all children and young people reported to have runaway from home is now being collated and shared by Thames Valley Police.

Initially representatives of Thames Valley Police will undertake an initial risk assessment but once the child has been located and returned home some further follow up is required.

In each case, the identified child or young person should be interviewed as soon as possible after their return to their home address. Ideally this interview will be undertaken by an adult

the child knows (but not a parent or carer). For this reason we are asking schools to undertake some of these interviews.

In cases where a child or young person is known to Social Care, a Social Worker will undertake this interview, as will staff from the children's homes for their residents. Occasionally Youth Offending Workers will interview juvenile offenders known to them. Many children and young people however who runaway are not known to any agency and it is here that schools and Attendance and Engagement Officers have a vital part to play.

The Local Authority will receive information from Thames Valley Police each week on a Monday identifying young runaways. Once received, we will seek to share this information with the child's school as soon as possible. In the majority of cases you will be contacted by an Attendance and Engagement Officer to agree who best should undertake the face to face interview with the pupil.

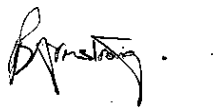
In the main, where the incidence of missing from home is a one off, the most appropriate person to undertake the interview will be a member of school staff but for repeat events it may be appropriate for the Attendance and Engagement Officer and the member of staff in school to undertake the interview jointly. Whoever it is that undertakes the interview, there are specific questions that need to be asked and answers recorded and returned to the Local Authority through the Attendance and Engagement Officer. A template form to support this process is enclosed with this letter.

The statutory guidance and a copy of the pro forma interview form will also be available through the Schools Safeguarding site.

I appreciate that this is yet another thing that schools are being asked to do but I hope you will appreciate how this process will contribute to protecting children. From what we know in terms of numbers, data suggests that requests for interview will not be frequent, but evidence would suggest that had these interviews been taking place in the past some children would have been prevented from being exploited.

Your support on this issue is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Barry Armstrong
Area Service Manager - Central
Inclusion Access & Engagement/
Local Authority Designated Officer,
Schools Safeguarding Team