

The contribution of schools to Early Help and Child Protection Services

Responsible Officer Sarah Wilkins

e-mail: sarah.wilkins@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 210485

1. Summary

- 1.1** This report outlines local authorities and schools duties to promoting the welfare of children and safeguarding them. Schools play a key role in recognising and identifying children who are vulnerable. The report **demonstrates** how schools go about identifying and assessing needs in relation to children's welfare and child protection and the importance of the partnership with other agencies. Developments for early help and child protection for schools and the Local Authority in identifying needs and coordinating effective responses are outlined. Recommendations for further close working at a strategic and local level are highlighted to continue to improve effectiveness by pooling resources, joined up commissioning and shared use of data for planning.
- 1.2** Overall schools in Shropshire continue to achieve good outcomes for children. However there continues to be an issue for Shropshire in relation to the outcomes for disadvantaged children. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) recognises that one of the ways to address this issue is through early intervention. The Troubled Families 'problem criteria' provides information that can be used to identify and predict 'disadvantage' using data that relates to family issues; for example workless households. In order to improve outcomes for children it may be considered essential that schools are using the information available to predict disadvantage and applying resources proportionately and working in partnership with other key agencies, including other schools to improve the impact and effectiveness of early help.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the details given in this paper and provide comments and feedback in respect of the Council's and schools approach to working together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

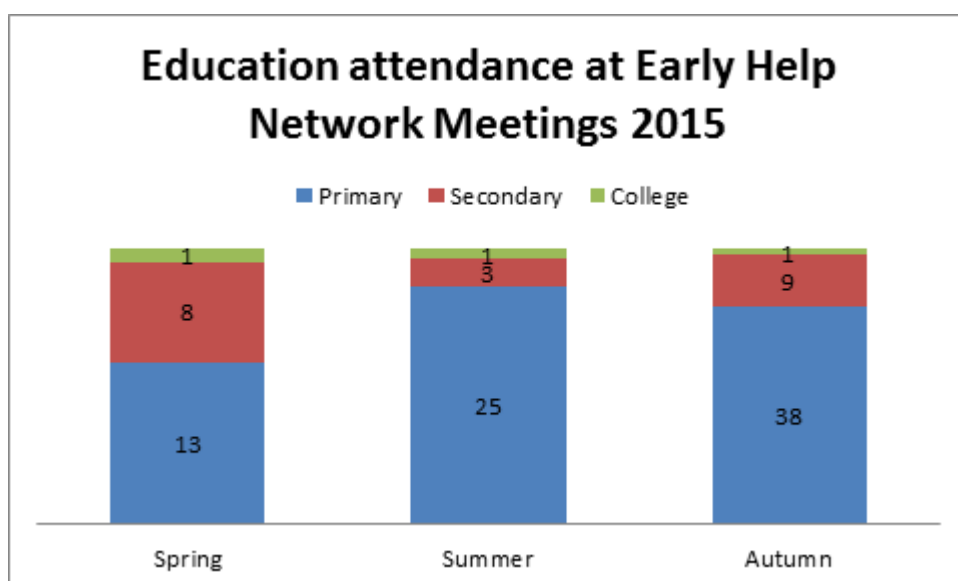
REPORT

3. Background

- 3.1** Early Help - means 'providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life'.
- 3.2** Effective early help relies upon local agencies working together to identify children and families who would benefit from early help; undertake an assessment of the need for early help; and provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child. (Working Together 2015)
- 3.3** Local authorities, under section 10 of the Children Act (2004), have a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of children. This duty supports organisations to work together to take a coordinated approach to safeguarding children.
- 3.4** All schools have key duties under the Children Act (2004) to have arrangements in place that reflect the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils and must also have regard to statutory guidance; Keeping Children Safe in Education (2015). This provides further guidance on how schools should fulfil these duties.
- 3.5** Under this guidance procedure is set out for what school staff should do if they have concerns about a child; including the identification of the need for early help and the role they may take in inter-agency assessment to prevent needs escalating.
- 3.6** The Ofsted Common Assessment Framework for Schools (2015) outlines the regard that inspectors have and assess for how well children and learners are helped and protected so that they are kept safe.
- 3.7** Included in this assessment will be how well individuals benefit from the education provision, including those pupils who may require early help or child protection services.
- 3.8** Inspectors make a judgement on the personal development, behaviour and welfare of children and learners by evaluating the extent to which the provision is successfully promoting and supporting them.
- 3.9** With this backdrop in mind it may be suggested there is a clear and coherent framework and expectation for schools in identifying and providing early help and working together with other agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

4. Identifying children who would benefit from help

- 4.1** The Ofsted thematic inspection of early help (2015) found a wide range of professionals in universal services are identifying additional needs for children and families. The children concerned had a variety of needs that led to professionals from different disciplines working together to support them and their families. Appendix 1 shows the types of needs that professionals may identify.
- 4.2** Local agencies should have in place effective ways of identifying emerging problems, risks and unmet needs for children and families. This requires professionals to have an understanding of their role and identifying and understanding needs of vulnerable children and families.
- 4.3** Professionals in universal services such as schools need to receive training in identifying the signs and symptoms of abuse and how to identify and respond early to the needs of all vulnerable children.
- 4.4** Shropshire Safeguarding Children's Board provides a multi-agency training schedule that all schools in Shropshire can access. However the majority of safeguarding training for schools is delivered 'in house' with over 2000 attendances at a range of safeguarding training by school staff during 2014-15. Training is also provided and accessed in a variety of ways including online modules for certain subjects.
- 4.5** The Ofsted thematic inspection of early help (2015) recommends that local authorities and partner agencies delivering early help should provide effective early help training.
- 4.6** In Shropshire schools attend Early Help Network meetings designed to support professionals and raise practice standards in the delivery of Early Help. 99 attendances by school staff have been recorded at these session this year. Schools also receive regular updates regarding process, services and new development via the Early Help newsletter.



- 4.7** Other training programmes available to schools to support in identifying and responding to early help needs include the Think Good Feel Good Programme (TAMHS), Understanding Your Child parenting programme and training needs identified as the Strengthening Families programme is developing. This includes; information sharing, bereavement awareness and mental health first aid.

5. Assessment of the needs

- 5.1** Children and families may need support from a wide range of local agencies. Where a child and family would benefit from coordinated support from more than one agency (e.g. education, health, housing, police) there should be an inter-agency assessment.
- 5.2** The early help assessment should be undertaken by a lead professional who should act as the point of contact for the child and family and coordinate the provision of services. Decisions about who should be the lead professional should be taken on a case by case basis and should be informed by the child and their family.
- 5.3** In total, from April to September 2015, 231 Early Help Assessments were completed. Of these, schools completed 161 (70% of the total) as follows:
- 89 (38.5%) were completed by Primary Schools
 - 71 (30.7%) were completed by Secondary Schools
 - 1 (0.4%) was completed by a Special School

As at February 2015, schools were Lead Professional for 494 children (54% of total cases). Out of these:

- 323 (35.1%) were Primary Schools
 - 161 (17.5%) were Secondary Schools
 - 10 (1.1%) were Independent Schools
- 5.4** The information reflects different time periods but can be used to show that schools are using systems to assess early help needs and primary schools are in the majority of cases take the lead professional role, however the lead professional role in secondary schools is significantly lower. The reasons for this will be subject to a number of influences including the complexity of the issues, levels of engagement with parents and resourcing of early help provision in school.
- 5.5** In Shropshire there are a range of assessment tools for early help that are used with children and families to understand unmet needs and identify what outcomes need to be achieved and how this will be done. Early help assessments are completed by schools and submitted along with referral information to COMPASS (Shropshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) when additional services are required. Schools will also use a range of other assessment tools depending on the presenting need.
- 5.6** The Effectiveness of Early Help Report (2015) found that schools feedback described the value of COMPASS as a single point of contact and resource for

helping them develop skills and confidence in providing early help where safe to do so.

- 5.7** Under the reforms for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) the statutory assessment process for children and young people with more complex needs has changed to become the Education, Health and Care assessment which may lead to an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Any early help needs and provision should be considered as part of this assessment and any subsequent plan and provision resulting from an EHCP.
- 5.8** When early help needs are assessed to require additional early help services schools can make an early help referral. In 2014-15 693 referrals for early help services were made by schools, this represented 51% of all early help referrals made in this year. Of these referrals, 60% were made by primary schools and 37% by secondary schools and 1% by other schools.
- 5.9** Where a school may identify that a child needs are more complex or the child is likely to suffer or are suffering significant harm and therefore reached the threshold for statutory involvement by children's social care services they make a referral to children's social care for a social worker to make the decision about the type of response required.
- 5.10** From April to October 2015 education settings provided the highest number of referrals from 'named' partner agencies. Along with this being the highest volume the greatest proportion (88%) have progressed to a social work assessment following the decision of the type of response required.
- 5.11** This result is expected and reflects that schools are most likely to have completed an early help intervention and or be able to identify increasing risk of need.

6. Provision of early help

- 6.1** The LGA Peer Review (2015) commented on good evidence of early help provision activity; the early help partnerships based in communities across the county were considered to be an example of good multi agency cooperation at the early help stage and both Children's Centres and schools were considered to be clearly committed to safeguarding with early help being particularly well supported by them.
- 6.2** Having identified the help needed, schools may provide this in a range of ways dependent on the complexity of the issues. Appendix 2 shows examples of how schools play a role in the provision of early help either by working as a single agency or in partnership to address unmet needs. This range of support and intervention available represents provision; training and consultation. This is sometimes referred to as the early help offer. Appendix 3 shows the early help provision that is either directly delivered or commissioned by Shropshire Council.

- 6.3** How a school determines the level of early help resource that it provides itself will vary from school to school. Every school in Shropshire achieved 'extended school' status by 2010, this required analysis of need to assess how they provided, referred to or signposted to multi-agency support for a range of what is now referred to as early help needs. School provision for early help will be influenced by a range of factors including; size of the school, school improvement priorities, whole school approach to emotional health and well-being and levels and impact of disadvantage.
- 6.4** A variety of models and levels of provision exists in schools with some schools employing staff as family support workers and others using learning mentors to engage the wider family and address issues. Some schools work creatively in clusters sharing resources and or working in partnership with other services to deliver early help, for example co-delivery of Understanding Your Child. There are some good practice examples of schools starting to commission additional health support to meet needs, learning from these and developing collaboration is key to all agencies managing with less resource.
- 6.5** What is not consistent in Shropshire is a shared understanding and commitment between statutory agencies and schools that uses data to identify need and target resource together to those schools where the most disadvantaged children attend. The Strengthening Families and Early Help needs assessment is bringing this information together and will be shared with schools in the Spring Term (2016).
- 6.6** Research into effective early intervention and Ofsted findings recommend that early help provision is informed and delivered through a robust multi-agency needs, demand and provision analysis with a coherent use of evidence based programmes. In Shropshire there is a multi-agency commitment and delivery of Understanding Your Child Parenting Programme this uses the Solihull approach to parenting. This programme received a national quality mark earlier this year. To date this year 46 primary schools and 7 secondary schools are trained to facilitate this programme.
- 6.7** In addition the Think Good Feel Good Programme (TaMHS) provides multi-agency training relating to the promotion and early intervention of emotional and mental health. In 2014-15 231 delegates attended training for TaMHS interventions and raising confidence and awareness, 69 delegates were from 18 secondary schools and 97 delegates were from 40 primary schools. Overall 50% of the attendance at these training sessions were from schools.

7. Developments for the early help provision in Shropshire

- 7.1** Shropshire Council has recently undertaken a needs assessment of early help looking at demand and provision. The assessment has used the Troubled Families 'problem' criteria as predictors of the need for early help. This needs assessment along with the requirements and aims of the Shropshire Troubled Families programme (Strengthening Families) has informed the future of the Early Help Strategy and the commissioning of early help going forward.

- 7.2** Schools are key partners in the shared development and ownership of this Strategy along with featuring in the needs assessment, a key delivery partner in evidence based programmes and part of the funding and commissioning of early help. Between January and March 2016 we will be communicating and consulting with schools and other stakeholders as part of the commissioning programme.
- 7.3** The Strengthening Families programme is currently developing a pilot project with schools to look at increasing the availability of the key worker role linked into localities to achieve Strengthening Families outcomes. A key measure of success will be the analysis of cost benefit of achieved outcomes thus providing evidence for future investment for disadvantaged children and securing the 'rewards' from the payment by result programme to reinvest in localities.
- 7.4** Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) and their Local Authority partners across the country have recently been required to submit transformation plans setting out how new investment from government will be spent to transform CAMHS. Shropshire CCG and Local Authority submitted a joint plan with Telford and Wrekin colleagues.
- 7.5** One of the programmes in this plan of transformation will be the development for workers in universal services, this programme will improve:
- Skills and knowledge of professionals within universal services
 - Mental health support available within schools
 - Availability of early help and targeted support to reduce incidence of self harm
 - Availability of early help and targeted support to reduce incidence of anxiety and other mental health issues within schools
- 7.6** Schools are involved in the development of early help and engaged and consulted through the Shropshire Children's Trust, Area Forums and Strengthening Families development planning. We need to ensure that we continue to make progress in developing the partnership with schools in order that we have a joined up strategic approach that uses data to evaluate and target our joint resources to get the right support to children and families at the right time.

8. Schools contribution to Child Protection Services

- 8.1** Under section 175 of the Education Act 2002 schools are required to adhere to the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education (2015).
- 8.2** Local Authorities have overarching duties under the Children Act 1989 in respect of safeguarding children. To comply with these duties local authorities may have to work with any school to investigate what action they need to take to safeguard a child.
- 8.3** Where a local authority has concerns about the safeguarding arrangements or procedures of a school, if the school is a maintained school the local authority has powers of intervention. Where the school is an academy or independent school then the local authority should report the concerns as appropriate to the Regional

Schools Commissioner or Independent School Division of the Department of Education.

- 8.4** This states that school staff have a particularly important role in safeguarding children as they are in a position to identify concerns early and provide help for children to stop these issues escalating. Schools and their staff form part of the wider safeguarding system as described in the statutory guidance Working Together (2015).
- 8.5** The Teachers Standards (2012) state that teachers' including head teachers should safeguard children's well-being and maintain public trust as part of their professional standards.
- 8.6** Under this statutory guidance each school are required to have a designated safeguarding lead who will provide support to staff members to carry out their safeguarding duties and who will liaise closely with other services such as children's social care. There is a further requirement for a lead governor for safeguarding to be in place.
- 8.7** Compliance of safeguarding duties is monitored through an auditing system carried out by the Local Authority. At the end of 2104/15 compliance information showed:
- 100% of schools had a designated lead for safeguarding
 - 100% of school staff had received up to date training in safeguarding awareness including recognition of signs and behaviours related to abuse, managing disclosures, referral pathway, early help, Child Sexual Exploitation and cultural issues including Female Genital Mutilation and radicalisation).
 - 100% of schools were also compliant with safer recruitment processes.
 - 79% of schools were considered to deliver appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) and monitor pupils confidence to seek help, support and advice (including CSE). 11 schools recognised they required further support and have been referred to the Public Health lead for RSE for this support.
 - 96% of schools had the correct Systems are in place for children/young people, staff and volunteers to raise concerns of poor safeguarding practice or allegations.
 - 100% of schools have a clear policy on bullying that is updated annually and available publically. Bullying review sessions are held and have a clear response to incidents of bullying
 - 100% of Ofsted report monitoring reports children feel safe in school.
- 8.8** An additional practice audit is also carried out termly with schools to review a minimum of 3 files held on vulnerable children. No significant concerns have been raised through this audit, however further work is being done through the SSCB Quality Assurance sub group to develop the analysis and learning identified through this process.
- 8.9** When a school makes a safeguarding referral to COMPASS and a decision is made that action may be required because there are concerns about the child's

immediate safety, schools will be requested to be part of the strategy discussion with along with statutory partners.

- 8.10** Developments in protecting young people at the earliest opportunity are being strengthened by the introduction of a CSE specialist at COMPASS along with work to reduce the number of children missing from education register. This requires schools to closely monitor and accurately record absences and for schools to improve the reporting of pupils on reduced timetables to the Local Authority and ensure these disadvantaged young people do not become more vulnerable.
- 8.11** Continued work is happening in this year to improve the 'step down' of cases from children's social care plans to early help with schools taking on the lead professional role. An underpinning feature of success and sustained outcomes for children and families is professional partnerships. These are being addressed through current Working Together sessions led by Children's Social Care that will extend invites to schools in the Spring Term 2015/16.
- 8.12** Schools are represented on the Shropshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) and on a number of the SSCB strategic groups. These representatives are members of a Schools' Safeguarding Group, which meets 4 times a year to ensure the implementation of SSCB priorities and to feedback from schools to the SSCB and its strategic groups. A representative from COMPASS attends this group to liaise in relation to children's social care and safeguarding services.
- 8.13** Impact of Actions and outcomes for children in Shropshire schools achieved by the group over the last year include increased access and clarity of the safeguarding section on the Shropshire Learning Gateway (VLE) which is available to all schools and education professionals including Independent schools. The section provides an effective communication platform for Safeguarding group members and all Independent schools.
- 8.14** Self-Harm concerns reported by schools has resulted in the publication of a Self-harm pathway guidance to all schools and designated safeguarding leads in schools have taken on the role of CSE Champions and have received training to fulfil the role effectively. The majority of secondary schools and 33% of primary schools are engaged in the new CSE programme. It is reported that the schools that have delivered the programme with specialist teams have had a positive impact.
- 8.15** Concerns regarding the capacity and procedures to access of CAMHS have been identified and addressed to increase capacity and ensure the service is consistently accessible.
- 8.16** The Learning and Improvement Sub Group of SSCB has carried out a Learning and Improvement Case Review and a Serious Case Review in the last year. In both reviews the schools involved with the children affected took part in the case review.

9. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 9.1** The risks and opportunities for the schools' role regarding the contribution to early help and child protection services may be attributed at an operational level to the duty of schools in identifying children and families who need help at the earliest stage, assessing this need and accessing provision to prevent problems escalating. At the same time being able to identify risks to children and escalate to specialist services in a timely manner.
- 9.2** This report reflects on how this works well in Shropshire with continuous improvement approaches in place to promote the welfare and safeguard children; systems for monitoring compliance, effectiveness, quality assurance and learning and improvement.
- 9.3** From a strategic perspective the early help commissioning project and financial strategy is considering risks and opportunities of the commissioning of early help going forward and how transformation of services can continue to promote welfare, strengthen families and safeguard children.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1** Currently early help provision delivered and commissioned by Shropshire Council is funded through Children's services budgets, Dedicated Schools Grant, Public Health and CCG contributions.
- 10.2** Pupil Premium is allocated to schools to provide additional support for looked after children and those from low income families. Schools use the Pupil Premium as they see fit however, they are accountable for how they use the funding to support pupils from low-income families and the other target groups. A direct relationship can be identified between those children who may benefit from Pupil Premium and those in need of early help. Some schools will be using this funding for the provision of early help
- 10.3** Shropshire Council Financial Strategy 2015/16 – 2020/21 outlines the impact on service delivery of a sustainable business model. Ensuring the welfare, protection and safeguarding of all children and young people is a key priority of this Strategy. This includes services that provide targeted early help, preventing risk and needs from escalating into the need for social work assessment and child protection.
- 10.4** The Financial Strategy states "we will realign the Early Help provision across all service areas and, with our partner agencies, move forward in our commissioning of local early help. Whilst some commissioned services will be reduced we will identify efficiencies in the way services are delivered as a priority approach to achieving savings in this area".
- 10.5** The early help commissioning programme along with other key commissioning and transformation programmes provides a driver and an opportunity for the Local Authority and partners to work more closely with schools both strategically and on a locality basis to further pool or align funding used to resource early help including sharing business cases for investment and a shared understanding of the cost benefits of early intervention. It may be suggested these discussions need to be initiated and develop through Schools Forum and Schools Central Policy Group.

11. Conclusion

11.1 Schools and the Local Authority have a duty to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. In doing so early identification of unmet needs is important in preventing problems from getting worse. In Shropshire schools are engaged and using the systems, partnerships and provision to do this. The timely and effective provision of early help is seen as key priority for Shropshire Council in preventing needs escalating into the need for specialist high cost services. The development of the early help system is progressing through commissioning and joining up of strategies and realising the value of a range of initiatives. It is important that schools are engaged, involved and contributing in these developments through key strategic forums that share an understanding of need and can pool and target resource and also at a locality level to maximise the effectiveness of provision and strengthen families in the community.

11.2 Schools in Shropshire are seen to have a high level of compliance in undertaking the duties to safeguard pupils. Take up of mandatory training is excellent and take up of practice development is relatively high and systems are used to escalate concerns appropriately. The development of COMPASS has seen further opportunities to ensure responses are timely and schools have appropriate access to consultation to develop confidence and skills in managing needs safely. Professional relationships and confidence have further opportunities to develop in 2016 through the Strengthening Families approach.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

[Working together to safeguard children - Publications - GOV.UK](#)

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2015)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

Ofsted Common Assessment Framework (2015)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015>

Early help: whose responsibility? (2015)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-help-whose-responsibility>

Shropshire Early Help Strategy (2014) – subject to refresh

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/early-help/strategies-and-reports/>

Shropshire Council Financial Strategy 2015/16 – 2020/21

[Decision - Financial Strategy 2015/16 to 2020/21 — Shropshire Council](#)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Ann Hartley: Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Local Member

All

Appendices

Appendix 1. Early Help Needs

Appendix 2. Early Help provision – how do schools play a role

Appendix 3. Targeted Early Help provision

Additional Information

COMPASS leaflet

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/early-help/compass/>

Strengthening Families – ‘problem’ categories

<http://shropshire.gov.uk/strengthening-families/identifying-families/>