

COVID-19 arrangements for Safeguarding and Child Protection

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Policy owner: Paul Smith
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Any questions regarding this policy addendum can be addressed to Paul Smith –
paul.smith@sandwell.ac.uk

Context

The government continues to manage the risk of serious illness from the spread of the Covid19 virus. The Prime Minister announced on 27 November 2021 the temporary introduction of new measures as a result of the Omicron variant and on 8 December 2021 that Plan B, set out in the autumn and winter plan for 2021/22 was being enacted. As a result, these measures are reflected in the guidance for FE providers that was published on Sunday 2 January 2022.

COVID-19 continues to be a virus that we learn to live with and the imperative to reduce the disruption to children and young people's education remains.

The Sandwell College Child Protection and Safeguarding policy remains in place and this addendum provides an update on individual safeguarding arrangements in regards to supporting vulnerable students, safeguarding young people, mental health and wellbeing and off-site behaviour.

Supporting vulnerable students

Vulnerable students are those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including students who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an EHC plan
- have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services) - this includes:
 - students on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services
 - adopted children
 - those at risk of becoming NEET
 - those living in temporary accommodation
 - those who are young carers
 - those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
 - care leavers
- others at the provider and local authority's discretion, including students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health

In particular, young people with a social worker or EHC plans are expected to attend provision (subject to public health advice), because of their safeguarding and welfare needs.

Staff Action: - If vulnerable students do not attend, you should work together with the local authority and social worker (where applicable) to follow up with the parent or carer to explore the reason for absence and discuss their concerns

Safeguarding young people

Staff should be particularly vigilant about new and additional safeguarding concerns.

Staff Action: - If you have any concerns about a student. It is important that they act immediately on any safeguarding concerns. Please remember:

A member of Safeguarding staff needs to be contacted **without delay** for serious and urgent concerns.

Dial 0 (Switchboard) and ask to be connected to a Safeguarding Officer

ALWAYS attempt to speak to a member of Safeguarding staff in person about a concern.

Do **NOT** use email to report concerns, speak to Safeguarding staff directly and submit an incident report using CPOMS to provide written information and for follow up actions (sandwell.cpoms.net)

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Many students and staff members will be feeling uncertain and anxious at this time. It is important to support positive mental health and wellbeing, which is necessary for young people to engage in learning.

Vulnerable young people are particularly likely to need additional support with their mental health and wellbeing.

The college will continue to work with local authorities and voluntary sector mental health organisations to ensure that support is in place.

The college will continue to refer young people to their local NHS children and young people's mental health services where needed. Self-referral options are commonly available and many services offer single points of access. Young people or their parents or carers can also contact their GP or refer to NHS 111 online.

NHS trusts have also established 24-hour urgent mental health helplines in most parts of England for people of all ages. If you have urgent concerns about a young person, find your local helpline to discuss your concerns with a mental health professional. (www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/)

Off-site Behaviour

The college will continue to reinforce public health messaging to students particularly at the point where they are entering and leaving college and heading onto public transport and into the community each day.

Staff should be aware of the potential for harm outside the college and home environments and where young people spend their time. Staff should be aware of contextual safeguarding and the higher risk to child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation due to Covid19.