

Training Update

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'No attempt to map what was actually happening on the ground'

Training Teachers in Child Protection

Over the past 2 years the author has conducted a series of surveys within various sections of the education system to discover more about how schools, local education authorities (LEAs) and teacher training bodies have responded to an increasingly defined responsibility in relation to child protection. This paper sets out to explore some of the implications for training which have emerged from that work

Defining the Role of the School in Protecting Children

It is important to put these implications within the context of how the role of the school in this work has become more clearly defined in recent times. Although there have been a few studies which have examined teachers' attitudes (see, for example, Birchall, 1992), before this research was conducted there had been no attempt to map what was actually happening on the ground. While the responsibility of local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children falls most heavily on Social Services Departments, other agencies are involved in child protection work and, over the years, there has been a deliberate attempt to coordinate action and to encourage and develop inter-agency work and make it more effective. One of the key agencies is the school. This is recognized in the consultation document on the revised *Working Together* document (Department of Health *et al.*, 1999), as it was in the original version. Not only do teachers have a role in recognizing the signs of abuse or neglect and referring such concerns, they have to be able to provide information for child protection enquiries and be involved in the preparation of inter-agency child protection plans. Although individual accounts and literary fiction provide examples of cruel and abusive school experiences, most schools have tried to do their best to maintain and support the welfare of their students. However, until relatively recent

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times, there was little guidance on the part they should play in the child protection process.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a number of Committees of Inquiry drew attention to the important role which schools should play in protecting children. The report on the Lucy Gates inquiry (London Borough of Bexley and Greenwich and Bexley Health Authority, 1982) highlighted the need for schools to be able to recognize child abuse. The Richard Fraser inquiry (London Borough of Lambeth, Inner London Education Authority, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Area Health Authority, 1982) referred to the lack of a real understanding by school staff of the procedures which should be followed in the case of suspected injuries, and the Beckford Report (London Borough of Brent and Brent Health Authority, 1985) drew attention to the interaction between a child's private life and its response to school and went on to comment that the 'fear ... of crossing the vague boundaries which divide the social worker from school inhibits each side from a collaboration which is necessary to them both'. In retrospect, it is evident that the major impediment to teachers playing a greater role in child protection stemmed from the uncertainties which many teachers felt about what exactly this would entail.

Guidance and its Limitations

In an attempt to respond to these concerns, the Department of Education and Science issued guidance designed to clarify and support the school's role. The Beckford inquiry had emphasized the importance of the school in the management of the child protection system and recommended the appointment of a designated teacher in every school. This recommendation was subsequently adopted in Government guidelines. Circular 4/88 (Department of Education and Science, 1988) recommended that 'a senior member of a school's staff should have responsibility, under the procedures established by the Local Education Authority (LEA), for coordinating action within the school and for liaison with other agencies'. Seven years later, Circular 10/95 (Department for Education and Employment, 1995) set out the responsibility for child protection issues within education departments, schools and colleges and gave guidance on links with other agencies involved in the protection of children. Each LEA was directed to appoint a senior official to have overall responsibility for the coordination of policy, procedures and training and for making sure that procedures

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were set out in authority-wide documentation. The guidelines also reinforced the recommendation that all schools have a senior member of staff as the designated and named child protection liaison teacher/coordinator.

Such initiatives went part of the way to address what had been seen to be the failure of many schools to play an effective role in child protection. However, they would have done little to address teachers’ reluctance to get pulled into processes which many did not fully understand, or perhaps trust, if adequate training had not been offered.

The Extent of Training in LEAs

Many LEAs moved very quickly to provide training for designated teachers and sometimes other members of staff. In response to a request from the NSPCC, LEAs provided details of the proportion of schools in their areas represented on child protection training during the past 3 years. For most LEAs, the vast majority of their schools had been represented on an appropriate training programme. However, in one in eight LEAs, 50% or fewer of primary schools had had a member of staff at any appropriate training. And in one in five LEAs, half of their secondary schools had not been represented. Individual schools have responsibility for their budgets and for managing their staff and in the end they make the final decision. One result has been that in 10% of LEAs fewer than a quarter of their schools had been represented on child protection training in the past 3 years.

Grant-maintained schools came into existence in the late 1980s and ceased to exist in the autumn of 1999. Because LEAs did not retain any responsibility for these schools in relation to child protection, it is impossible to know the extent to which grant-maintained schools have been involved in child protection training. However, a significant proportion of grant-maintained primary, secondary and special schools have not taken part in LEA sessions, although it is possible that they had bought in independent trainers or used other providers. Even more uncertainty surrounds the extent to which appropriate training has occurred in independent schools, although Oxfordshire ACPC and the NSPCC’s pack for independent schools, ‘Developing the Protective Culture; Child Protection Training for Independent Schools’, is being widely used.

A great deal of training was supported by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST), where child protection

had been a specified area for such awards in 1995-6 and 1997-8. The vast majority of those authorities which had made successful bids said that the grant had enabled training to take place which would not otherwise have been possible or had allowed teachers to attend existing training. Although there are LEAs who are very proactive in encouraging and supporting teachers to attend appropriate training, most were pessimistic about their ability to sustain anything like the overall level of training that had been achieved. There are also LEAs who have attempted to involve teachers in ACPC subgroups and other support groups, but a number of them expressed disappointment at the many pressures which operated on schools and which significantly affected their participation. In the immediate future most LEAs envisaged continuing to train designated teachers; however, in some cases this would be only for those newly appointed to post and would not extend to any updating, higher-level training or additional multi-agency training. Although the training and updating of designated teachers is absolutely essential, schools have made it clear that it is equally important that *all* teachers receive *some* training and that this should also be part of a planned programme.

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Training in Schools

Schools which had previously responded to a NSPCC survey were asked to complete a questionnaire about their role in relation to child protection. For the most part it was head teachers and designated teachers who responded, and their replies indicate areas where additional training and support are needed. Although these respondents were reasonably confident that they would be able to recognize signs of abuse in children in their care, most (88%) were concerned that this would not be the case for all teachers. In fact, one third of all respondents were extremely concerned that abuse could go unnoticed because of many teachers' inexperience and lack of training.

In only two fifths of schools had teachers other than the designated teachers received any in-service child protection training. It was evident that schools wanted all those who came into contact with pupils, both teaching and non-teaching staff, to receive regular training on recognizing the signs of abuse in children, as well as on how to respond to suspicions and disclosures.

Almost two thirds of those schools replying to the survey reported some degree of uncertainty about when to contact

'Uncertainty about when to contact Social Services in relation to a child protection concern'

Social Services in relation to a child protection concern, and for half of these it was a major problem. And while improved channels of communication were needed, the real solution was identified as better understanding by teachers and social workers of each other's perspective, which could be achieved by more joint training activities.

Some schools acknowledged the help which they received from other agencies and, in particular, the support which has been available from school doctors and nurses over specific cases. These schools usually wanted to see closer working relationships established with the school health services and, where teachers had benefited from such support, they were anxious to harness this expertise by involving doctors and nurses in training sessions. However, there was a great deal of concern about both the widespread cutbacks in these services and the likely consequences.

While some schools wanted to see all child protection training based in schools and conducted by their own staff in order to reinforce the importance of the role of the school, the majority wanted to see other professionals involved in order to raise the awareness of all staff of the multi-professional dimension. At the same time, concerns were expressed about LEA trainers who themselves had had limited experience of teaching and schools but who were given the responsibility to train experienced teachers. A number of designated teachers believed that their expertise could be appropriately harnessed, especially within a multi-agency approach.

Initial Teacher Training

Many respondents referred to the need to improve the level of knowledge about child protection of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) during both their training period and their initial years in schools. Some of those involved in training and supporting NQTs would clearly welcome advice and guidance on how to approach this.

At the present time, the requirement to cover child protection on ITT courses is covered by Circular 4/98, *Teaching: High Status, High Standards* (DfEE, 1998), which states that, for all courses, those to be awarded Qualified Teacher Status should, when assessed, demonstrate that they have a working knowledge and understanding of teachers' legal liabilities and responsibilities relating to the role of the education service in protecting children from abuse (which is set out in DfEE Circular 10/95 and the Home Office,

Department of Health, DfEE and Welsh Office guidance *Working Together* (1991)).

A recent survey of initial teacher training courses (see Baginsky and Hodgkinson, 1999) showed that, in general, while most courses met the basic Government requirement, the coverage of child protection was minimal. Although the NSPCC is in the process of piloting material (Rodgers and Sinclair-Taylor, 1999) which goes a long way to address the demands of many course leaders for guidance on what should be covered and how, the fact remains that a great many other areas have to be covered on these courses and the input has to be seen as the first step in a process which continues throughout a teacher's career.

Some Ways Forward

Although there have been suggestions from a small section of the teaching profession that they will resist any further Government moves to deal with what may be defined as 'the ills of society' and calls for a lower level of pastoral responsibility in line with some European neighbours, this was not reflected in the responses received from teachers. However, it was clear that they are looking for additional support and training. It is not realistic to look at a single provider. Although newly qualified teachers should have received a basic understanding of what their child protection responsibilities are about, the survey showed that there was some inconsistency regarding what was covered on courses and the majority of courses were only able to spend between 1 and 3 hours on child protection. Material which the NSPCC is in the process of piloting sets out to:

'... build on statutory requirements with the explicit aim of preparing emergent teachers with the ability to deal appropriately with disclosures and suspicions about abuse (and raise) wider issues in relation to proactive child protection practices.' (NSPCC, forthcoming)

The stated objectives of the course are to enable those studying to become teachers to know what to do:

- If a child or young person makes a disclosure of abuse
- If they suspect a child or young person might be displaying signs and medicalization of abuse

Whatever the preparation student teachers have received, schools should assess their needs in relation to child

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protection on appointment, as they should for all their staff, and build this into an in-service programme. Many LEAs are supporting their schools in this and some have made a concerted effort to extend their own training to all staff in schools, and not just the designated teachers. At the present time it seems that too much is left to chance, available budgets and the need to take account of the enormous demands which are made on teachers’ time. It is vital that this *ad hoc* approach is ended. It may be time to look to some form of certification which would evidence that teachers have received training within a certain number of years. It may also require a more concerted and rigorous approach on the part of ACPCs to exploit the resources within their boundaries to ensure that these training needs are met.

It was clear from the surveys that while there were concerns about how each sector could best carry out their responsibilities within the child protection process, and particularly how to ensure that all teachers were adequately prepared to meet these, there was little sign of any reluctance to accept these responsibilities. However, it was clear that schools, LEAs and those that train teachers were looking for additional support. Many individuals and agencies, including the NSPCC, are engaged in providing this support and in examining how to develop additional sources. It fits well with the principles of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and a climate where the Government is encouraging all its departments to engage in ‘joined up thinking’. One of the major challenges along the road will be to enable all teachers to have the confidence to meet their responsibilities in relation to child protection, while acknowledging that it is but one of many aspects of a teacher’s life.

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