Sec**Ed**
Guide to...

A watertight
monitoring system

Key content

- How effective is your school's monitoring system?

- Meeting your statutory obligations

- The roles and responsibilities of all school staff

- Interpreting the information generated by students' digital activity

- Responding to monitoring system alerts

- Case Study: The Alpha Academies Trust

In association with **e Safe**

GUIDE TO...
A watertight monitoring system

IF THERE is one key message that is central to *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, the government's statutory guidance for schools and colleges on safeguarding, then it is that everybody has responsibility for ensuring pupil safety.

"Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play," the guidance states.

"All staff should be aware of systems within their school or college which support safeguarding and these should be explained to them as part of staff induction." The words "everyone" and "all" are written in bold type.

The document is clear that all staff must be familiar with their school's child protection and behaviour policies, along with its safeguarding policy for children who go missing from education and the role of the designated safeguarding lead. It does not, however, offer a definitive model for how schools should set up their safeguarding procedures, meaning that different schools have evolved different approaches.

Most schools will be aware of the importance of strong safeguarding processes, but the guidance gives a number of worrying examples of poor practice. These include staff members failing to act on and refer the early signs of abuse and neglect, poor record-keeping, failing to listen to the views of pupils, failing to re-assess concerns when situations do not improve, not sharing information or sharing information too slowly, and a lack of challenge to those who appear not to be taking action.

The consequences of poor safeguarding and monitoring practices can be tragic. In one recent high-profile case, a 15-year-old boy who hanged himself was found to have been researching suicide methods on school computers during lessons in the weeks before his death.

Clearly, for headteachers and senior leaders, it is imperative that they get this right – but finding out what works best can be a potential minefield,

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especially when the repercussions of getting it wrong can be so serious.

"The key thing really for schools is that safeguarding must be everybody's business," says Anna Cole, Parliamentary and inclusion specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders. "You must have robust policies and processes in place with very clear routes so that everybody in the school understands what their role is if they are worried about a child and think there may be a safeguarding issue."

One aspect of this is ensuring that all staff members receive appropriate and regularly updated safeguarding and child protection training – something that is stipulated in the government guidance.

All staff should also receive safeguarding and child protection updates to help ensure they have the relevant skills and knowledge.

At the Alpha Academies Trust in Staffordshire, a group of five schools that includes two secondaries, a regular email briefing is sent out including updates on incidents that have happened locally and examples of safeguarding stories in the press.

"Where staff aren't on email, they are required to (obtain a printed copy and) put it up in the office," explained Paula Rippingham-Smith, acting

principal and safeguarding lead for the Trust. "The staff are then quizzed on the content of the briefing to ensure that everybody is reading it."

As a result, she says, teachers are now regularly sending her examples of safeguarding information that they feel should be shared, and feel they have more ownership of and involvement in the safeguarding process.

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance is clear that all staff should feel this sense of responsibility: "Staff should not assume a colleague or another professional will take action and share information that might be critical in keeping children safe," it states. "They should be mindful that early information-sharing is vital for effective identification, assessment and allocation of appropriate service provision."

Monitoring the digital activity of pupils is also a key part of most schools' safeguarding strategy. This includes all activity on school-owned devices rather than just online activity, thus encompassing the use of applications like Word, for example.

"There is a rich seam of intelligence in the digital environment," explained Mark Donkersley, chief executive of digital monitoring company eSafe.

"If you miss something, or you don't have good intelligence-gathering mechanisms, the net result is that the welfare and wellbeing of an individual or group of individuals is going to be put at risk."

Paul Wright, who is the edtech and digital safeguarding lead at Aureus School in Didcot, says that digital safety is "about educating young children about their use of technology and dealing with the issues which do come up in a timely and sensitive way".

For many schools, responsibility for monitoring activity on the computer network lies with a senior IT technician. However, monitoring of the digital environment should never be left solely in the hands of one or two individuals, and should certainly not be the sole responsibility of the IT team, according to Mr Donkersley.

He warns that giving this role to just one person in the school would "limit the visibility that you could otherwise achieve".

At Aureus School, Mr Wright leads a whole-school approach in this regard: "Although I may take a lead on this as part of whole-school safeguarding, it is all staff's responsibility to view digital issues as equally important as 'real world' ones – staff training highlights this each term and regular cyber-safety updates for staff reinforce this."

Tony Walker, ICT technician at Craigroyston Community High School in Edinburgh, adds that "open and honest discussion, as is appropriate to the age and stage of the child" should also form a key part of a school's digital safeguarding approach.

"Education should be centred around a framework whereby all stakeholders are involved and working together to secure the best methods for both safeguarding children and educating them to keep themselves safe too."

And effective monitoring is not just having the systems in place to flag up potential problems, but being able to effectively interpret these alerts.

The Alpha Academies Trust works with eSafe on monitoring practices across its schools. Ms Rippingham-Smith continued: "We have everything flagged so that we don't miss anything in the digital environment."

She said that while a number of the incidents that come through are more minor issues, even these kind of incidents can still lead to staff having important conversations with the students concerned.

"Every single thing we get is followed up and logged, which enables us to track all the safeguarding conversations and monitor what the issues are moving forwards."

Using that information, the Trust is able to

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pinpoint what type of concerns are prevalent in each school and take appropriate action in response.

"If we are detecting a lot of mental health issues for example, we might up our counselling service. We can then see the following year if that has had an impact; if what we have put in place has started to better deal with the concerns."

This flexible, responsive approach to safeguarding concerns has been very effective, she says. "We review and change (our safeguarding approach) at least annually dependent on these signs."

Mr Donkersley added: "Information we gathered from a group of our customers at secondary and college level found that if they didn't employ eSafe to monitor the digital environment, they would have missed 50 per cent of the available intelligence. Having thorough monitoring gives a big insight into welfare and wellbeing issues."

One particularly effective approach at the Alpha Academies Trust has been tweaking a school's PSHE curriculum at short notice if a particular issue has become pervasive – either online or in the real world.

Ms Rippingham-Smith explained: "If for example gangs have become more prevalent in a particular area, the following half-term's PSHE might focus on that issue even more, or it might be that we get a guest speaker to come and work with students, as individuals or in groups."

Mr Donkersley believes that such interventions are critical to school safeguarding success, and that picking up red flags early is vital.

"If your early warning mechanism – whether that is relationships with parents, outside agencies, the eyes and ears of your staff or monitoring of the digital environment – is in place and working effectively, you have a better chance of identifying warning signs early, when intervention has a greater chance of delivering a positive outcome.

"If you have got the early warning abilities, and they are up-to-scratch, providing the appropriate support and guidance to a young person early on can mean the difference between addressing early stage anxiety and depression today versus someone seriously considering suicide in two or three years' time."

Further information

- *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, Department for Education, March 2015 (last updated September 2018): http://bit.ly/2bI2Zsm
- *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, Department for Education, March 2015 (last updated August 2018): http://bit.ly/2hZOeVM
- You can download *SecEd* and eSafe's previous Guide To, which helps schools to self-evaluate monitoring and safeguarding practice at www.sec-ed.co.uk/supplements/guide-to-monitoring-for-safeguarding-risks/ (March 2018).

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Case Study: Alpha Academies Trust, Staffordshire

EVERY DAY across the UK, pupils are leaving markers in the school digital environment that, if correctly identified and interpreted, could indicate that they are having difficulties or are in potential danger. The consequences of missing these early warning signs – which are often very subtle – can be tragic.

Many schools opt to monitor their digital environments internally. Some, like the Alpha Academies Trust, a group of five schools in Staffordshire, buy in an external monitoring service such as eSafe, which does that job for them.

"All our schools use eSafe – and we wouldn't be without it," said Paula Rippingham-Smith, acting principal and safeguarding lead for the Trust, which is set to expand to nine schools this year. Like in any school, we have a considerable number of concerns that come through, and alongside eSafe, which monitors the digital environment, we use a piece of software to manage and control the intervention process and historical log.

"In one school, which is in a very challenging area, we get around 2,500 safeguarding concerns a year. All of those concerns are actioned so, as you can imagine, the amount of work involved in doing that is quite considerable."

Each school in the Trust has a safeguarding team that comprises a designated safeguarding lead, a deputy safeguarding lead, and between three and 10 child protection officers, depending on the size of the school.

"Most of our secondary schools have between six and eight within a team," Ms Rippingham-Smith explained. "The designated safeguarding lead is usually an assistant principal while for the deputy safeguarding lead it is usually their primary role. The child protection officers often have other jobs within the school."

Each school receives daily and weekly reports from eSafe, outlining what has been happening during that time. This enables Ms Rippingham-Smith to identify trends or recurring issues and put into place strategies to address them.

For more urgent safeguarding concerns, the process moves more quickly: "If eSafe has seen something very serious has happened in our digital environment, we get a phone call immediately along with what we call a 'red alert' on our email system. The call goes straight to one of our safeguarding leads or officers, and they can then go to see the child immediately."

eSafe even detects when pupils have typed something concerning and then deleted it.

"It is not just like a search engine, or something that searches saved documents," Ms Rippingham-Smith continued. "If something happens that is deemed serious, even if it has been deleted, we can pick that child up and process the incident as we would any other safeguarding concern."

In one case identified by eSafe a student had typed something that indicated depression and suicidal tendencies: "It was picked up, and we tried to find out what had prompted it. Initially the student said it was just a joke, but there were concerns from the safeguarding lead, along with the eSafe report, and we opted to involve a counsellor."

Eventually issues relating to anxiety and depression were identified, including the underlying reasons. The student in question received the help that they needed and has now addressed a number of issues that, if left alone, might have developed into something far more serious.

"All of our children know that we monitor the system, so they know that whatever they write, delete, send or save is monitored," Ms Rippingham-Smith added.

"This means that sometimes we get notifications from eSafe which are the result of an intentional cry for help. Sometimes they forget that the monitoring happens and they say something worrying, but sometimes they do it purposely to get someone to talk to them."

This is no bad thing, she added. "Some children don't necessarily have the confidence to instigate a conversation, and they feel it is easier to write something and have someone come to them. They are not always accidental – some of them are intentional, but we action all the concerns that are raised."

Interpreting behaviour in the digital environment

ONE OF the biggest challenges for schools that are monitoring digital activity in order to improve their safeguarding practice is reliably interpreting the information that they receive.

While automated detection systems can pick up examples of worrying phrases that have been typed into an email or text and alert a staff member, in many cases a far higher level of scrutiny will need to be applied in order to ensure that red flags are not being missed. This, however, is no easy task — and finding someone to take responsibility for reviewing and acting on these warning signs poses a number of problems for schools, not least because of the breadth of issues that can arise.

"You are looking for someone who can speak multiple languages," explained Mark Donkersley, chief executive officer of eSafe. "They also need to be an expert in child abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, radicalisation and terrorism, bullying, sexualisation, mental health, self-harm, and more.

"That is a massive thing to ask of a single individual — in fact, it would be difficult to get three or four people who can give you the in-depth specialist knowledge of all that."

eSafe employs "behaviour analysts", who are responsible for interpreting and assessing the warning signs that are flagged up in schools. They work from a digitally and physically secure "monitoring lab" in Salford, and are recruited for their expertise in a wide range of safeguarding areas. All are employed directly by eSafe.

When a concern is identified, it is their job to look at it, scrutinise it, and decide the appropriate course of action. They are trained to recognise the early warning signs and know those that are genuine.

"Our analysts are all educated to at least degree level in relevant subjects like sociology or criminology," explained Mr Donkersley. "We also like them to have shown some bias towards the human element of their subject — for example, we have people whose theses were on child abuse, bullying or the mentoring of young people. It is a mix of academia and a genuine interest in the welfare and wellbeing of children."

While some behaviour analysts are educated to PhD level and bring with them a wealth of academic knowledge, they all come with a wealth of relevant experience and work in an environment that "reinforces their desire to help other people", as Mr Donkersley puts it. "If you look at those who have a mental health specialisation, for example, they may have worked historically in the medical sector, or guiding and mentoring young people with mental health problems."

Not only are the analysts trained in interpreting warning signs effectively, they are also well versed in dealing with what can be very distressing and upsetting situations. Digital monitoring systems can, for example, detect images of self-harm, incidents of extreme bullying, and illegal photographs that have been circulated on school devices.

Mr Donkersley added: "Schools obviously are at the coal face and encounter distressing situations, and you hear lots of stories of teachers taking it upon themselves to provide help. That can be upsetting and distressing and can lead to secondary trauma. The schools we work with of course still get involved in intervention plans and responses to safeguarding incidents, but it is our analysts who are trained and prepared to handle the sometimes distressing and upsetting markers or evidence of problems. The behaviour analysts aren't dealing with the incidents, but they are finding them and informing the school."

The reality is, when you monitor the digital environment of a school or college, the volume and nature of the material you are seeing is significant, not just in its range, but also in its severity.

Mr Donkersley added. "Not only do our behaviour analysts bring objectivity and specialism to the situation, the people we recruit have demonstrated that they have an aptitude for the job, and can cope with some of the distressing situations that we come into contact with."