

Safeguarding Leadership: The Role of the DSL and the Safeguarding Governor

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PaJeS Governor Workshop

14 May 2026

If you walked into a school with a strong safeguarding culture, what would you expect to see, hear or feel?

You would expect to see:

- Staff who are visible, present and alert around the school.
- Students who know who they can go to if they are worried about themselves or someone else.
- Safeguarding information displayed clearly, including who the DSL/DDSLs are and how to report a concern.
- Staff noticing the small things: changes in behaviour, attendance, friendships, uniform, mood or presentation.
- A calm but vigilant environment, where safeguarding is part of everyday school life, not something separate.
- Records that are clear, timely and followed up, with no concerns left to drift.
- Students being supported individually, not just through assemblies or PSHCE, but through check-ins, conversations and personalised support.
- Leaders and governors asking thoughtful questions about safeguarding, culture, risk and impact.

You would expect to hear:

- Staff using a shared language around safeguarding: “report it”, “be professionally curious”, “don’t assume someone else knows”.
- Students saying they feel known, noticed and able to speak to trusted adults.
- Parents feeling that the school takes concerns seriously and follows things through.
- Staff feeling confident about what to report, how to report it and what happens next.
- Open discussion about current risks affecting the school community, including online safety, mental health, antisemitism, parties, sleepovers, peer relationships and community pressures.
- Governors hearing consistent messages from staff, parents and students, both inside school and in the wider community.
- A willingness to raise concerns early, even when something feels low-level or uncertain.
- Leaders being honest about challenges, not defensive or closed.

You would expect to feel:

- A culture of vigilance, care and professional curiosity.
- That safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, not just the DSL team's role.
- That students are known as individuals and not lost in the size of the school.
- That staff feel supported, not blamed, when raising concerns.
- That there is openness and transparency, rather than a closed culture.
- That the school understands its specific community context and responds to it.
- That governors are connected enough to understand the school community, but maintain appropriate boundaries and confidentiality.
- That safeguarding is lived through daily practice, relationships and follow-up, not just written in policies.

Community lens for governors:

Because governors may hear things outside of school, a strong safeguarding culture also means:

- Governors understand that informal information from the community may still be relevant and should be passed on through the right school channels.
- Governors avoid becoming directly involved in individual cases, but know how to share concerns appropriately.
- Governors recognise that in a close community, relationships and confidentiality need careful handling.
- Governors are alert to themes they may hear from parents or the wider community, while avoiding gossip or assumptions.
- Governors can help leaders understand community context, pressures and emerging concerns.

Key safeguarding risks to consider

- Online safety risks - harmful content, image sharing, sextortion, misogyny, pornography, grooming, group chats, social media pressures and online bullying.
- Mental health and emotional wellbeing - self-harm, anxiety, low mood, emotionally based school avoidance, grief and students struggling silently.
- Peer-on-peer harm - bullying, sexual harassment, inappropriate language, relationship issues, consent, coercion and pressure between students.
- Community context - antisemitism, community tensions, safety outside school, parties, sleepovers, bar/bat mitzvah events and risks where students mix socially beyond school.

- Attendance and missing education - poor attendance, persistent absence, lateness, reduced timetables, alternative provision and students becoming less visible.
- Students with additional vulnerability - SEND, children with social workers, students in alternative provision, students with mental health needs, family stress, domestic issues or other pressures at home.
- Low-level concerns not being reported - staff, parents, students or governors assuming something is too small, not relevant, or that someone else already knows.
- Case drift - concerns being recorded but actions not followed up, especially in a large school with a high volume of safeguarding information.
- Professional blind spots - becoming too familiar with a child, family or situation and not remaining professionally curious.
- Closed culture risk - defensiveness, lack of challenge, poor information-sharing, or leaders only seeking reassurance rather than real assurance.

As a safeguarding governor, what would you want to know to assure yourself that safeguarding concerns are being addressed?

Governors do not need to know every detail of every case. But they do need enough information to know that concerns are being identified, acted on, followed up and quality assured.

What governors should seek assurance on:

- Are staff reporting concerns, including low-level concerns?
- Are CPOMS records clear, factual, timely and actioned?
- Are cases either open because action is ongoing, or closed because all actions are complete?
- How does the DSL know there is no drift in cases?
- How are themes identified from CPOMS, attendance, behaviour, wellbeing and student voice?
- How do themes feed into PSHCE, assemblies, parent education and external speakers?
- How are the most vulnerable students reviewed and monitored?
- How does the school know students in alternative provision or on reduced timetables are safe and receiving appropriate education?
- How are online safety, filtering and monitoring concerns reviewed?
- How does the DSL team quality assure safeguarding practice across a large school?
- How are DDSLs, safeguarding officers and other staff trained and supported?
- How does the school respond to risks that emerge in the wider community?
- How does the safeguarding governor test what they are being told, rather than simply accepting reassurance?

Questions to ask your DSL that give strong assurance without crossing into operational case management?

These questions are not to catch the DSL out, but to test whether safeguarding is understood, evidenced and actively led. The best questions are often the ones that feel slightly uncomfortable, but in a constructive way, because they require the DSL to show that they know their most vulnerable students, understand the risks in their school, can evidence impact, and can explain what they are still improving.

Governors should seek assurance, not just reassurance. This means not only asking, *“Is this happening?”* but also asking, *“How do you know, where is the evidence, and what difference has it made?”*

1. Who are your most vulnerable students at the moment, and how do you know?
Can you explain who you are most worried about, why, and how their risk profile is changing?
2. If we selected 10 students from your highest-risk list, would their CPOMS records show clear actions, follow-up and oversight?
Can we review a redacted sample to check that there is no drift and no loose ends?
3. Who are your students with severe absence (below 50%), and what is being done for them?
4. How many students are on reduced timetables, and can you evidence that these are properly reviewed?
Do the files show parental agreement, safeguarding considerations, clear review dates and reintegration planning?
5. How many students are in alternative provision, and how do you know they are safe and receiving a suitable education?
Can you show the AP documentation and verify it against the AP DfE guidance?
6. How many referrals have been made to children’s services this year, and what were the outcomes?
What do you do if you are not satisfied with the outcome of a referral?
7. What case do you feel you have handled badly this year and what lessons have been learnt?
8. Can you give an example of when you escalated a concern or challenged an external agency decision? What difference did it make?
9. How do you quality assure safeguarding records?
10. How does the attendance of SEN and disadvantaged pupils compare to that of the cohort and national figures?
11. How does safeguarding analysis inform PSHCE, assemblies, parent education and staff training?

For example, how are themes such as online safety, mental health, peer-on-peer harm, harmful sexual behaviour, bullying, antisemitism or community risks being addressed?

12. How do you know there is a culture of safeguarding and vigilance across the school?
How do you know staff report concerns, including low-level concerns, and are there any groups who report less often?
13. How is safeguarding kept visible for students throughout the year?
How do students learn about consent, healthy relationships, online safety, harassment, bullying, mental health and personal safety?
14. How do you know filtering and monitoring are effective?
Who reviews alerts, how quickly are they acted on, and how do online safety concerns feed into education for students and parents?
15. If Ofsted came tomorrow, what evidence would you use to show that safeguarding is effective?

Safeguarding Focus Groups – Questions

Question
1. Safety Do you feel safe at X? Are there any places, times of day, or parts of your journey to or from school where you feel less safe? (probe about corridors and break/lunch)
2. School Culture How would you describe the culture at X? Do students generally treat each other with kindness and respect? Do you feel staff are respectful and supportive?
3. Bullying Are you aware of bullying at school? Do students feel confident reporting it, and do you feel the school takes action?
4. Inappropriate or Discriminatory Behaviour Have you seen or heard inappropriate or discriminatory language or behaviour (for example racist, sexist, homophobic or sexual comments)? Do you feel this is dealt with appropriately?
5. Bullying & Online Behaviour Are you aware of bullying at school, including online or on social media? Do students feel confident reporting bullying, and when it is reported, do you feel the school takes it seriously and takes action? Do issues online affect relationships or behaviour in school?
6. Reporting Concerns If you were worried about yourself or a friend, would you know who to go to for help? Would you feel confident speaking to them?
7. Follow-up and Trust If a concern is reported, do you feel it is taken seriously and followed up?
8. Mental Health Support Do students know where to go if they are struggling with their mental health? Do you think students who need support are able to get it?
9. Tutor Check-ins This year the school introduced regular tutor check-ins. Do these help students feel noticed and supported? What works well and what could be better?

10. Helping Hand

Are you aware of the Helping Hand and who you can go to for support?
Has this made it clearer how to get help?

11. Belonging & Inclusion

Do you feel a sense of belonging at X?
Do you feel able to be yourself at school?

12. Inclusion of Minority Groups

Do you think the school does enough to support students who may feel in a minority in some way?
What helps students feel included, and what could improve?

13. Final Reflection

What is one thing the school could do to improve students' wellbeing or experience at X?

To be completed at the end of the session - key points to take away:

Checklists for Alternative Provision usage:

Checklist for Alternative Provision Usage
Information Action
Name of Student
Year Group
SEN status and details
PP/FSM
Borough child resides in
Children services involvement: CP/CIN/LAC/EH
If no to the above, has a referral to children's services been considered
Other professionals involved with child/family
Reason not attending X full time
Brent SASO involvement
Home visit if appropriate
Initial GP letter confirming medical needs and implications on school attendance if EBSA
Reason for chosen AP (has the AP been used before, impact for young people - positive, negative, their ethos, values, safeguarding, behaviour support, curriculum, geography)
Pupil and parent agreement for AP referral
Application to AP made
Name of AP
EWT for Brent and LA student resides in to be made aware of AP (if EHCP must be both)
Safeguarding checks for AP - to be done by the school and kept on file per AP

AP agreement of sharing of information - safeguarding concerns, frequency of attendance certificates and academic reports, behaviour concerns
Correct coding on school registers
Initial meeting to set and agree objectives - child, parents, the school (safeguarding and academic), AP and other professionals that are involved. To include pupil views. Have a clarity of timeframe and intended outcomes for the placement. Half termly review date to be agreed.
Provisional end date of AP
Fortnightly welfare check of student with pastoral member of staff - to include opportunity to keep in touch with peers
<i>Assessment of an appropriate educational offer:</i>
Educational provision offered by AP
If not full time, does additional education provision need to be provided by the school - to make up 32 hours
If not receiving 32 hours of a broad education, is there medical evidence to support this?
School, student and parental agreement of educational provision (supported by medical evidence)
QofE checks on AP - quality of provision and focussed on Eng/Ma
Review meeting (safeguarding and QofE) - should be every half term - review safety, success/effectiveness of placement, educational provision, pupil views, transition back to school? To include student, parent, school and any other professionals working with the child
Student, parent, school to sign to agree provision after each review meeting
Updated medical letter each term

Check-list for reduced timetable usage:

Checklist for Reduced Timetable Usage
Name of Student
Year Group
SEN status
PP/FSM
Borough child resides in
Children services involvement: CP/CIN/LAC/EH
If no to the above, has a referral to children's services been considered
Any other professionals involved with the family?
Reason not attending X full time
Brent SASO involvement
Home visit appropriate?
Initial GP letter confirming medical needs and implications on school attendance
Meeting to discuss an appropriate reduced timetable - record of the meeting to include objectives of the reduced timetable, educational provision, pupil view, clear time frame/end date, parents safeguarding responsibilities during school hours - including pick up from school if before school end time, fortnightly review date to be arranged. To be agreed and signed by student, parent, school. Any other professionals working with the family to attend the meeting where possible.
Safeguarding risk assessment completed?
EWT for Brent and LA student resides in to be made aware of reduced timetable (if EHCP must be both)
C2 code used on school registers when pupil not in school at agreed times.

If LAC, CIN, CP – Virtual head and SW should be consulted
Weekly welfare check with SO
<i>Assessment of an appropriate educational offer:</i>
Educational provision offered by JFS - Provide the pupil with sufficiently differentiated work to make up the 32 hours – marked, assessed and constructive feedback
If SEND or EHCP –check statemented need and educational offer supports that meets need
If not receiving 32 hours of a broad education, is there medical evidence to support this?
Review meeting (safeguarding and academic) - should be every two weeks - check against attendance progress
Updated medical letter each half term - clearly stating current needs and impact on full time attendance as a result
If no progress is being made after a half term, is a referral for an AP being considered?