

Briefing on Serious Case Reviews

Child G (Published by **East Sussex** in December 2013)

Background

During 2012 a girl, Child G, became involved in a sexual relationship with a teacher at her school, Mr K. Anticipating that this relationship would come to light, they left the country together. After just over a week they were detained by police. Child G returned to her family and Mr K was brought back to this country in custody. Child G was fourteen years old when the relationship began and fifteen when they left the country. Mr K was subsequently found guilty of abduction and admitted a number of charges of sexual activity with a child under 16-years. He received a custodial sentence of 5-and-a-half-years.

Some of the failings identified in this SCR are both significant and systemic.

The SCR identified serious concerns relating to school's actions, including: failure to identify the abuse and exploitation of Child G, fixed thinking, failure to hear concerns raised by students, failure to involve Child G's mother, insufficient recognition of Mr K's inappropriate use of Twitter to communicate with Child G and serious concerns with the ways in which information was recorded, stored, retrieved and provided for the review.

The SCR identified procedural failings in police handling of allegations relating to inappropriate images of Mr K on Child G's phone.

The SCR makes various interagency and single agency recommendations covering: East Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Board, children's services, school and police services.

Key Learning Points:

These can be summarised as being about listening to young people, talking to children who may be victims of abuse, involving their parents purposefully, recording and sharing information reliably and planning interventions more carefully across the agencies.

Listening to young people

- The SCR recommended the school be reminded of the importance of ensuring that the wishes, feelings and experiences of the child is at the centre of all assessments and ensure that children's wishes, feelings and experiences are routinely recorded as part of all safeguarding concerns.
- In this case emerging concerns were not raised appropriately with Child G herself. She continued to be identified as the problem despite evidence to the contrary. When there was a formal child protection investigation by experienced police and CSC officers, Child G was not seen alone. There was no evidence of any attempt by school staff to talk to Child G in a way that was supportive. She was never offered a private discussion with any member of staff after she was seen by the school nurse. She may not have disclosed abuse but she was not given an opportunity to do so until the abusive relationship was firmly established.



- The Board should develop initiatives which promote the ability of young people in schools to raise safeguarding concerns, and the capacity of schools and other agencies to hear and respond to such concerns. In this case safeguarding concerns were raised or came to light seven times, including the final report to police. On five of those occasions concerns were raised initially by young people. The young people who were raising concerns had not been heard and there were a number of opportunities for interventions which might have prevented the events leading to this review.

Enhancing core skills working with parents

- There is conflicting evidence about attempts made to contact Ms C (Child G's mother) but it is clear that Ms C was only spoken to by a member of teaching staff two or three times in the seven months that her daughter was being abused – and on one of those occasions the person who spoke to her was the abuser.
- The SCR review identified that the school made almost no use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) arrangements. The CAF would have offered structured processes for starting to work with Child G and her mother. This approach could have enabled all those involved to identify the real areas of concern and escalate their interventions accordingly.

Commitment to interagency child protection procedures

- The LADO needs to ensure that recording of work is always completed and stored appropriately and agreed in consultation with senior managers. In this case the LADO had made no record regarding being consulted with about Mr K's inappropriate use of Twitter.
- In light of *Working Together 2013*, CSC must identify the most appropriate health professional to be invited prior to convening a Strategy Discussion. In this case there were Strategy Discussions with no representatives from health. It would have been appropriate to invite the School Nurse because of her earlier direct contact with Child G, which may have been significant. The Strategy Discussion subsequently failed to draw together and evaluate all the evidence that was held by the agencies.
- When making referrals all relevant information should be shared relating to the young person being referred.

Professional curiosity

- A learning point is the lack of appropriate curiosity across the agencies. In this case the police and CSC allowed themselves to be falsely reassured by the apparent absence of incriminating evidence when investigating an allegation about an inappropriate image of Mr K or Child G's phone.
- Strategy meetings held re Mr K's conduct did not consider the safety or welfare of any young people other than Child G. It would have been appropriate for the meeting to think more broadly about the situation, the effect on other pupils and on the school community as a whole.
- The fact that another pupil was known to have called Mr K a pervert indicates that school staff were aware that there were wider rumours about Mr K's sexual conduct, not just about inappropriate behaviour by Child G.



Using child protection procedures

- Full compliance with the Child Protection procedures around children and young people being seen on their own as part of a Child Protection Investigation, should consistently be adhered to. An interview conducted by police and a social worker was not carried out in compliance with standard safeguarding requirements. Child G and her mother were not interviewed separately. That is a routine expectation in child protection enquiries of this nature and there was no good reason not to do so here.
- Police should be represented at Strategy Discussions, when there are concerns about abuse by a professional, by a CPT Detective Sergeant. This did not happen in this case. Similarly In light of *Working Together 2013*, CSC must identify the most appropriate health professional to be invited prior to convening a Strategy Discussion.
- Safeguarding Policies should be up to date and reflective of current practice. In this case the school are recommended to ensure the safeguarding policy makes explicit any future procedural changes with a clear time line of their implementation. This document should be reviewed every two years.

Ensuring best practice

- During investigations and ongoing assessments, where communication through mobile phones and computers are an issue, staff should be challenged on their knowledge of the use of social media and advice and assistance should be sought.

Training and support

- There should be arrangements for the support and supervision of staff with specialist child protection responsibilities.
- Ensure child protection training for the Senior Management Team, Designated Child Protection Teachers and all pastoral care staff on the application of child protection thresholds is in place.

E-safety

- The Board should promote the development of robust “e-safety” arrangements in schools. In this case Mr K used social media, specifically Twitter to communicate with Child G. Whilst this was not ‘grooming’ in the more commonly recognised form, it was part of the way he promoted the abusive relationship.
- During investigations and ongoing assessments, where communication through mobile phones and computers are an issue, staff should be challenged on their knowledge of the use of social media and advice and assistance should be sought
- There should be updated e-safety and Social Media Guidance in all schools (including primary, secondary, special schools and academies) so that all parties (students, parents and teachers) are aware of the potential pitfalls and dangers when using social media.
- Arrange Child Exploitation and Online Protection training to all Designated Child Protection Teachers and wider IT staff about e-safety issues and possible safeguarding concerns related to the use of social media and potential for grooming.

