



Dear Parent/Carer,

## Safeguarding Update

As we approach the third term of the school year, we are writing to give you an update on safeguarding developments within our school and within our local area, so far this year.

### A Crisis on Our Doorstep - New Report from Barnardo's

In October 2022, Barnardo's published their first report on the cost-of-living crisis. Their latest reveals that the winter has forced parents to choose between heating or purchasing food. The report includes findings from a YouGov poll of a thousand parents in Great Britain, plus a survey of 316 children and young people who have received support from Barnardo's.

#### The poll from Barnardo's in February 2023 found:

23 per cent of parents struggled to buy food (up 3 per cent from October 2022).

1 in 3 parents believed their child's mental health had become worse (up from 1 in 4 in October 2022).

49 per cent of parents worried about being able to keep their homes warm for their children.

If you would like any support in this area please contact our Family Liaison Officer Eileen, her family information blog can be found in the Parents and Carers section of our website and contains a wealth of support for families. To contact her directly use [e.robinson@percyhedley.org.uk](mailto:e.robinson@percyhedley.org.uk)

## Attendance

Attendance is important, and we are grateful for your support and cooperation. There is a clear link between attendance and attainment, so it's important pupil attendance is strong. As I write this, the national average for special schools is 86.4% whereas our school attendance is 85.9%. We are ambitious for our pupils, and we are determined to improve this. We have been working hard with North Tyneside to ensure that our policy supports pupils and families to have a clear understanding of the importance of attendance at school, where this is possible. Our attendance leads have been collaborating with our school attendance officer to support families who may be struggling with any element of attendance, which has prompted us to reflect on what else we can do to help our pupils and their families.



Our new absence request forms are working well. Parameters around absence requests are in our new attendance policy, which you can find on our website. We will continue to update you on our progress around this important topic.

### Contextual Safeguarding

Our location, and the location of our pupils means that we have a large area to cover for our contextual safeguarding. As our pupils come from many of the twelve local authorities in the North East we need to keep up to date with the local safeguarding for those areas. Our staff receive regular contextual safeguarding training sessions across the year, which ensures staff know what the current risks are to our pupils and what signs could indicate a concern.

### County Lines

A current contextual issue which we must remain vigilant of is County Lines. Our location and demographic mean that pupils within several of our local authorities could be at risk from organised criminal gangs from elsewhere who deal drugs and engage in criminal activities. Pupils and staff have had contextual safeguarding training and education. We have a good relationship with Northumbria Police and consult with them as needed. A guide to spotting County Lines activity can be found within the Safeguarding section of our Website, in the Parents and Carers tab.

### Site Security

We regularly review our site security to ensure that pupils are safe at our school. This academic year we have made some improvements to our reception area, creating more room for visitors, and giving us an extra level of security at the entrance to our school. We have added extra measures to the fire exits that lead into our staff car park, to prevent any pupils from exiting the school site without us knowing about this.

### Vaping

Recently, the BBC and The Guardian have highlighted the rise of teen vaping. Whilst we have not seen the effect of this in school many Headteachers are reporting that children as young as ten have acquired illegal and unregulated vaping products, despite UK laws to prevent those under eighteen from buying such products. In a survey with UK wide teaching staff concerns about the symptoms of addiction displayed by pupils in the classroom and during break times, and the potential impact it may have on their learning were raised.



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Medical professionals and campaigners are worried about the lack of research regarding the effects of vaping on the long-term health of children and young people and are calling for tighter rules regarding the packaging and advertising of vapes. If you are concerned about the rise of vaping in young people, there will be a factsheet available on our Safeguarding website page.

### Mobile Phones

We have recently reviewed the guidance on mobile phone use within school to support the safeguarding of pupils and staff within our school building. We appreciate that many of our young people have long journeys to and from school, and phones are often used as calming strategies at these times. However, we have had an increasing number of phones being used within the school day and therefore pupils have been reminded about the rules within school. Pupils who need to keep their phones on them for medical reasons have individualised contracts agreed with parents around the use of mobile phones. We are in the final stages of finalising our mobile phone guidance and will send this to you once it is complete.

### Internet Safety

This week has been Personal Development week within school. Pupils have been learning about internet safety, relevant to the age and stage of the pupils. We have a wealth of information on our E-Safety section of the blog, which can be found in our Parents and Carers area of the website. Our E-Safety lead Maria adds the most up-to-date information on games, apps etc and is happy to support with training needs where they arise. If you need any support in this area, please contact Maria at [m.mawdesley@percyhedley.org.uk](mailto:m.mawdesley@percyhedley.org.uk)

We hope you found the information in this update useful as we continue to work together to ensure all the pupils within our care are safe and secure. Should you, or your child ever have any safeguarding queries please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Yours sincerely

**The Designated Safeguarding Lead Team at PHS**