Child Safeguarding Policy

LADO

Ultimately decisions about welfare are made by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) contactable on 01635 503190. If there are concerns about a child or member of staff that any member of staff feels are being inadequately addressed, please visit this page.

Introduction

Vacational Studies is a residential English Language Course that operates for a 27-day period in the summer at The Mary Hare Grammar School, Newbury RG14 3BQ for young people aged 10-18+.

Vacational Studies takes steps to ensure that all children in its care are properly protected. The designated Safeguarding Lead is Paddy Douglass. Other named Safeguarding Officers are Tom Goodwin and Ian Mucklejohn. All are trained in Specialist Safeguarding for Designated Safeguarding Lead training provided by English UK.

As an organisation that makes provision for children and young people we ensure that:

- the welfare of the child is paramount
- all children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse
- all suspicions and allegations of abuse and poor practice will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- all staff (paid/unpaid) have a responsibility to report concerns to the management.

The law changes for those over 18. All over-18s are in a 'Position of Trust' vis-à-vis under 18s and under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 anyone aged 18 or above who may be considered as caring for under 18s and who has access to under-18s is legally not able to have any sort of intimate interaction with those they are with under the age of 18. All relationships must be entirely open and in no way exclusive. No advantage may be taken of an under-18 because of age or status.

Staff/volunteers are not trained to deal with situations of abuse or to decide if abuse has occurred, BUT all staff are required to have had basic awareness level safeguarding training. The Safeguarding Lead requires staff to take a free online course written specifically for the ELT industry and includes a unit on Prevent. There is a certificate on completion as evidence of the training. Staff are asked to bring this certificate.

British Council Inspectors will want to see evidence of the training and will also check to see that the training has been effective, i.e. that staff understand what their safeguarding responsibilities are for that course, that they know the procedures for reporting and who to report to if they are worried about a child, and maybe also some basic safeguarding information.

As part of staff induction, training is given to provide the staff with the specific information that a generic online course does not.

All staff employed by The Mary Hare School (and not by Vacational Studies) have mandatory safeguarding training which is refreshed and updated on an annual basis. Any new staff have to cover this training as part of their induction.

Anyone using a school facility for hire is to report any safeguarding concerns back to the school, who then have to follow their reporting process as well.

Vacational Studies allows only those for whom they have a contractual responsibility as a student or who have received training as staff to stay overnight.

Policy statement/aims

Vacational Studies has a duty of care to safeguard children involved in their Course. All children we accommodate may, by reason of distance from home and unfamiliarity with the language, be particularly vulnerable and have a right to safeguarding. Vacational Studies will ensure the safety and protection of all children involved in their Course through adherence to the safeguarding guidelines adopted by them.

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 (The Children Act 1989) and in this context is anyone who will be, is or has attended a Vacational Studies Course.

Policy Aims

The aim of the Vacational Studies Safeguarding Policy is to promote good practice:

- providing children and young people of whatever race, gender, sexual orientation or religion with appropriate safety and protection whilst in the care of Vacational Studies
- ensuring that their health and medical welfare are looked after by Matron/Medic and any medical practice paid for this purpose
- providing an online First Aid Course at the start of the Course thus assisting staff to take prompt action to save lives by applying appropriate first aid
- providing information allowing all staff /volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific safeguarding issues

- providing safeguarding to reduce risk and provide care for children
- providing safeguarding to protect children from abuse of any kind
- taking steps to ensure that adults who work with our students but who are not directly employed by us have enhanced DBS clearance and have seen this policy document.

Promoting good practice

Child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can arouse strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgment about the appropriate action to take.

Abuse can occur within many situations including the home, school and the sporting environment. Some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with young people in order to harm them. A coach, instructor, teacher, official or volunteer will have regular contact with young people and be an important link in identifying cases where they need protection. All suspicious cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document.

Practical assumptions

- Children have the right to be safeguarded and protected as above.
- No one, including parents, can take away a child's right to be safeguarded.
- Adults working with children accept that this connection is one of absolute trust.
- The teacher:student relationship cannot involve grooming or be sexual.
- Children have the right to say 'no'.
- Children must know that bullying will be dealt with
- Children must know that they can go to an adult and will be listened to.

Good practice guidelines and recognising abuse

All staff should be encouraged to show exemplary behaviour to promote children's welfare and reduce the likelihood of allegations being made. The following are common-sense examples of how to create a positive culture and climate.

Good practice means:

- Always working in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication with no secrets).

- Treating all young people equally and with respect and dignity.
- Always putting the welfare of each young person first, before winning or achieving goals.
- Maintaining a safe, appropriate and professional distance.
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empowers children to share in the decision-making process.
- Ensuring that if any form of manual/physical support is required, it should be provided openly.
- Accompaniment is to be by a male and female members of staff.
- Being an excellent role model – this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol or using inappropriate language or topics of conversation in the company of young people.
- Giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Recognising the developmental needs and capacity of young people.
- Keeping a written record of any injury that occurs, along with the details of any treatment given. These are to be kept in one place by the DSL.
- Not spending time alone with a child away from others.

Practices never to be sanctioned

The following should never be sanctioned. You should never:

- engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun
- reduce a child to tears as a form of control
- fail to act upon and record any allegations made by a child
- do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves
- allow access to your social media outlets if they contain adult material
- allow students to take or distribute digitalised intimate images

Incidents that must be reported/recorded

- If any of the following occur you should report this immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and record the incident:
    - if you accidentally hurt a child
    - if he/she seems distressed in any manner
    - if he/she appears to have a crush on you or vice-versa
    - if a child misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done
    - if you have suspicions about the behaviour of any adult with access to

children.
- If he/she displays sudden changes in behaviour.

Recruitment of staff

Vacational Studies recognises that anyone may have the potential to abuse children in some way and that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working or being with children. Vacational Studies practices 'Safer Recruitment'. Safer Recruitment checks include the following:

- All applicant staff complete an application form. The application form will elicit information about an applicant's past and a self-disclosure about any criminal record.
- All applicant staff are asked to explain any gaps in their CV.
- Consent
- Consent is obtained from an applicant to seek information from the Disclosure and Barring Service.
- If an Enhanced DBS or similar suitability check result is delayed, that staff member will be allowed only supervised access to and responsibility for under 18s.
- Two confidential references, including one regarding previous work with children.
- Evidence of identity (passport or driving licence with photo).
- Right to work in the UK.
- Staff agree to Vacational Studies strictures regarding 'Professional Relationships' in the 'Notes for Staff 2026': 'In a boarding situation, staff should have good, friendly relationships with the students while avoiding any suggestion of exclusivity or over-familiarity. The relationship staff have with students is a privileged one, based on trust and subject to professional, ethical and contractual restraints. For reasons of age and authority, staff and students do not meet on equal terms. *No advantage must be taken of this situation for personal gratification and any clandestine or improper development of this professional relationship will be regarded as a breach of contract. To prevent allegations of any form of abuse, staff must not be alone with any student in a private room. Except* in the case of fire rescue or similar, *male staff must never be in girls' dormitories or vice-versa. Staff are in contact with potentially vulnerable young people and are potentially vulnerable themselves to situations in which misunderstanding or malice may put them at risk of accusation. These situations will be explained at the start of the Course by the Safeguarding Officer or his deputy. The 'Safeguarding Policy' describes how Vacational Studies safeguards young people and action to be taken if abuse is*

suspected.'

And:

- *'The law changes for those over 18. All over-18s are in a 'Position of Trust' vis-à-vis under 18s and under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 anyone aged 18 or above who may be considered as caring for under 18s and who has access to under-18s is legally not able to have any sort of intimate interaction with those they are with under the age of 18. All relationships must be entirely open and in no way exclusive. No advantage may be taken of an under-18 because of age or status.'*

- Staff sign that they understand and agree with this document.

- ' Students over the age of 18 will not share dormitories with anyone under the age of 18 or use the same changing facilities

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Interview and induction

All employees will be required to undergo an interview carried out according to acceptable protocol and recommendations.

Responding to allegations or suspicions

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in Vacational Studies, in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However, there is a responsibility to act on any concerns by reporting these to the DSL.

Vacational Studies will assure all staff/volunteers that it will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith reports his or her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.

Where there is a complaint against a member of staff there may be three types of investigation:

- a criminal investigation
- a child protection investigation
- a disciplinary or misconduct investigation.

The results of the police and child protection investigation may well influence and inform the disciplinary investigation, but all available information will be used to reach a decision.

Reporting concerns about suspected abuse

Any suspicion that a child has been abused should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Officers. There are Ian Mucklejohn, Tom Goodwin and Paddy Douglass, who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.

The Directors / DSL will refer the allegation to the social services department which may involve the police.

The parents of the child will be contacted following advice from the social services department.

Nevertheless, a child may disclose to any trusted adult.

It is more likely that bullying may be disclosed. In this case read 'bullying' below.

Further guidance

If you are concerned about a child and unable or unwilling to contact the designated persons in this organisation, please call the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000.

Confidentiality

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis only. This includes the following people:

- the Course Management
- the parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused
- the person making the allegation
- social services/police

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data safeguarding laws.

Enquiries and further action

Internal enquiries and possible suspension

Vacational Studies management will make an immediate decision about whether any individual should be suspended.

Consideration should be given to what kind of support may be appropriate for the alleged perpetrator.

Allegations of previous abuse

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (e.g. by an adult who was abused as a child or by a member of staff who is still currently working with children).

Where such an allegation is made, the organisation will follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to the social services or the police. This is because other children may be at risk from this person. Anyone who has a previous criminal conviction for offences related to abuse is automatically excluded from working with children. This is reinforced by the details of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.

Bullying (Vacational Studies' interpretation thereof)

Bullying can take many forms but usually includes the following:

Physical – hitting, kicking, pinching, punching, scratching, spitting or any other form of physical attack. Damage to or taking someone else's belongings may also constitute physical bullying.

Verbal – offensive name calling, insults, racist remarks, sexist or homophobic jokes, teasing, threats, using sexually suggestive or abusive language.

Sexual – abusive sexualised name calling, inappropriate and uninvited touching, inappropriate sexual innuendo and/or proposition,

Indirect – spreading nasty stories/rumours about someone, intimidation, exclusion from social groups.

Overseas children in a boarding situation are particularly vulnerable to being bullied for a variety of reason. These include

- the increased likelihood of social isolation
- having fewer outside contacts than UK-based children, and having limited access to someone to disclose bullying to

Homophobic bullying can be hard to identify because it may be secret. It may include being made to feel unwelcome, belittled, or harassed (through gossip, name-calling, jokes and other hate acts – both in the virtual (online) and 'real' world.)

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying which uses technology to deliberately harm or upset others. This type of bullying can happen in many ways, using mobile phones or the internet and could include:

- Sending hurtful messages or using videos and images to humiliate
- Leaving malicious voicemails
- A series of silent calls
- Creating a website about other people to humiliate them
- Writing hurtful comments on social networking sites e.g. Facebook, Twitter
- Exclude them from chat/messaging rooms
- 'Happy slapping'- sending video/images of people being bullied, so others can see.

Bullying must be reported to the Management.

SAFEGUARDING RISK ASSESSMENT is here.

Mobile phones

All Student's mobile phones are kept centrally throughout the course with the exception of school trips and classroom activities where a mobile phone may be required. The use of mobile phones is closely monitored, and staff retain the prerogative to request students to provide evidence of phone activity.

'PREVENT'

Here is a link to our 'Prevent' policy.

IGM & PDS – 28 April 2026