

Safeguarding and school inspection: advice for governing boards in maintained schools and academy trusts

One of the most important duties that governing boards fulfil is to ensure that their school provides a safe environment for pupils.

This advice from the National Governance Association (NGA) and the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) aims to help governing boards demonstrate, through the inspection process, that an effective safeguarding culture exists throughout their school/trust.

Although safeguarding is not graded as a specific area, Ofsted inspectors will always make a written judgement under 'leadership and management' about whether the arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. Where safeguarding is found to be ineffective, it is likely to lead to an inadequate judgement for leadership and management.

Multi academy trust (MAT) boards and federation governing bodies will want to ensure that safeguarding culture and policies are consistent throughout all of their schools while taking into account the circumstances of each individual school. For example, through adopting an overarching safeguarding and child protection policy and appointing someone at executive leadership level to coordinate safeguarding activity across the group of schools.

Governing board safeguarding responsibilities

In broad terms, boards are responsible for ensuring that:

- safeguarding policies and procedures are effective and comply with the law at all times
- all staff understand their roles and responsibilities and are able to discharge them
- the board has sufficient knowledge and capacity to fulfil its safeguarding responsibilities

School and trust leaders are primarily responsible for implementing safeguarding policies and procedures and ensuring that day-to-day practices promote the safety and wellbeing of pupils.

The responsibilities are detailed within [Keeping children safe in education](#) (KCSiE), statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) that schools must have regard to. All governors and trustees must read and understand KCSiE – part two sets out the responsibilities of governing boards. Governors and trustees should ensure that they are kept informed of any changes to the guidance and to their safeguarding responsibilities. Governing boards must also have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism; known as [the prevent duty](#).

The evidence that Ofsted look for

Inspectors will gather evidence from a range of sources to evaluate the culture of safeguarding. This includes looking at policies and meeting with members of the governing board to establish whether the board understands its role and carries it out effectively. As many board members as possible should attend the meeting with inspectors. It is particularly important that the [safeguarding link governor/trustee](#) attends to give their insight, although it is the board that retains collective responsibility.

During the discussion with inspectors, the board should be able to demonstrate that they know what the strengths and areas for development are for their school/trust in relation to safeguarding. Where there are areas for development, the board should know what is being done to address them. The following table outlines topics that may be covered with inspectors.

Boards should ensure that:	Inspectors may ask about:
all governors/trustees receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training (that includes online safety)	The specific nature of this training and the impact it has had on the board's role. For maintained school governing boards, it is a requirement for at least one member of a recruitment panel to also complete safer recruitment training (also advisable for academies).
relevant safeguarding policies are in place	Key aspects of the child protection policy, staff code of conduct, behaviour policy, safer recruitment and selection policy. They may also ask how policies are monitored and reviewed.
the safeguarding link governor/trustee fulfils their role effectively	How the role is carried out and how the link governor/trustee interacts with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), such as through termly meetings and routine reports to the board.
safeguarding forms part of the board's routine monitoring schedule	Dedicated safeguarding visits undertaken by the safeguarding governor/trustee. Other themed visits should also take into account safeguarding practices in line with adopted policies (such as the behaviour policy).
effective communication strategies are in place to help safeguard pupils	For example, the governing board monitors and has evidence that all staff are aware of who they need to contact if they have safeguarding concerns.
the board systematically monitors number and types safeguarding incidents	The actions taken to minimise future incidents. This should be high-level data which does not identify individuals but enables the board to see how policies work in practice.
the board's oversight ensures that the single central record (SCR) is up to date	Oversight which likely draws upon routine reports from the DSL and evaluation of external reviews (sometimes carried out by the local authority). Boards are not required to routinely audit the SCR.
the board is confident that pupils in their school/trust know how to keep themselves safe	Opportunities for pupils to develop knowledge of how to stay safe and protect themselves online. Inspectors may also ask about the school's approach to dealing with sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and peer-on-peer abuse. Those governing should be able to identify ways in which the school promotes appropriate standards of behaviour such as through the delivery of relationships, health and sex education.

Further reading

- [Governing board guide to safeguarding](#)
- [Safeguarding link governor/trustee role description](#)
- [Governing board guide to Ofsted inspection](#)