

Essential Questions and Expectations to ensure the safeguarding and protection of children in schools.

International Task Force on Child Protection

School Evaluation Committee (1st November 2015)

Rationale:

The School Evaluation Committee of the International Task Force on Child Protection was asked to collect, review and assess current external processes, standards and indicators used to regulate, evaluate and monitor school practices designed to ensure Child Protection and Well-being, and determine what measures should be in place in a school wanting a high quality child protection programme. The Committee conducted extensive research into effective child protection practices and reviewed existing requirements of school evaluation, accreditation and inspection agencies operating within national and international contexts.

In developing the Committee's recommendations to these agencies, recognition has been given to the requirement for schools to conform to legislation within the countries in which they operate and the extent to which each of the agencies are themselves subject to the legislation, regularity framework and expectations of their sponsoring organisations and countries.

The Committee spent some time debating the extent to which its recommendations should be prescriptive. However, one overriding principle was adopted which was to ensure that the resulting recommended expectations are not so generic that their impact is negligible and that they encompasses a comprehensive approach to child protection in all its dimensions.

The results of the June 2015 Training Needs Survey of schools conducted by the International Task Force on Child Protection, in cooperation with the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC), demonstrated the need for higher, more rigorously-applied standards to be adopted and implemented and the need to provide appropriate and effective training to enable schools to meet these standards.

Collaboration between the many school evaluation, accreditation and inspection agencies has been outstanding and it is envisaged that all agencies will ensure that the recommended ideals for effective safeguarding and child protection be adopted as appropriate, in whatever format best suits each individual agency.

One particular area of debate amongst committee members concerned the recommended expectation that all schools adopt a Values Statement that aligns with the responsibilities set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). More countries have ratified the Convention than any other human rights treaty in history, a notable exception being the USA, which has signalled its intention to ratify¹. The committee's view is that the UNCRC is central to the protection of children across the globe and all schools should be expected to be aligned with the responsibilities set out in the Convention.

The Committee's recommendations fall into two sections:

- A) A set of **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS** that should be comprehensively considered and which form the basis of whole school community dialogue on the school's policies and practices related to safeguarding and child protection.

- B) A set of comprehensive **EXPECTATIONS** which school evaluation, accreditation and inspection agencies are strongly advised to consider as essential requirements within their evaluation programmes as appropriate.

In developing the Key Questions and Expectations the committee has taken into account the work and findings of the ITFCP School Recruitment Committee and the ITFCP School Policies and Resources Committee.

Members of the Committee wish to thank the representatives of the many organisations that have contributed to their work. The dialogue and discussion have shaped, formed and refined the Committee's final recommendations. In particular the Committee is indebted to the work of the African Association of International Schools and specifically the advocacy of Dennis Larkin.

- ¹ *As in many other nations, the United States undertakes an extensive examination and scrutiny of treaties before proceeding to ratify. This examination, which includes an evaluation of the degree of compliance with existing law and practice in the country at state and federal levels, can take several years—or even longer if the treaty is portrayed as being controversial or if the process is politicized. Moreover, the US Government typically will consider only one human rights treaty at a time. Currently, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is cited as the nation's top priority among human rights treaties.*

Essential Questions:

Schools have a duty of care to protect children and prevent them from harm, and act with a sense of urgency if a child is at risk of harm. These discussion questions focus on child protection in the context of abuse and neglect from any person. These include those in authority, those entrusted with the care of a child, or any person with access to children in the school. These questions are applicable to the safety and protection of day, home-stay and boarding students. The school should build partnerships with external agencies to enhance child protection practices. All questions are asked with reference to the regulatory framework, unique cultural context and sensitivities of a country/state. The role of the school in child protection cases is also determined by this cultural context and specific regulatory framework.

1. Has the school created a definition of child protection with ensuing policies/procedures which are fully understood and followed by Board Members/ Governors/Owners, school leaders, staff, students, parents and volunteers?
2. Do the school's culture and values support and encourage good practice leading to enhanced child protection?
3. Does the school comply with all legal and statutory requirements / obligations in relation to child protection within the country in which it operates? Does it have effective working relationships with support agencies (where they exist)?
4. Does the school have robust policy/procedures, which are successfully implemented, to ensure that it only employs and engages people of sound moral character? If so, is the school compliant?
5. Does the school have robust and fully implemented policies/procedures to ensure that all helpers, volunteers and contract workers are people of sound moral character and suitable to work with children?

6. Does the school communicate publicly its child protection policy/procedures?
7. Are child protection policies and procedures reviewed with sufficient regularity and systematically?
8. Is there a designated Child Protection Officer (CPO) in the school with oversight of child protection procedures and related school policies?
9. Do the school's operational procedures support and encourage good practice leading to enhanced child protection, including:
 - a. Training and Support;
 - b. Identification/Disclosure; and
 - c. Reporting in line with policy.
10. Are the school's buildings and facilities, security and protection measures compatible with child protection and related policies?
11. Does child protection education and on-line/virtual safety form part of the written and taught curriculum?
12. Are students, staff and volunteers aware of what to do if they feel uncomfortable or have concerns about mistreatment or abuse?
13. What measures are taken by the school to ensure the safety and protection of students in homestay accommodation or on residential trips and student-exchange programmes, and to what extent are they successful?

Expectations

The following Expectations have been identified by the ITFCP School Evaluation Committee as being the minimum requirement of schools to provide safeguarding and child protection for its students. The Expectations are based on the following principles:

- All children have equal rights to be protected from harm and abuse.
- Everybody has a responsibility to support the protection of children.
- All schools have a duty of care to children enrolled in the school and those who are affected by the operations of the school.
- All actions on child protection are taken with the best interests of the child, which are paramount.

For convenience the Committee have grouped the Expectations in the following areas: Policy, People, Procedures and Accountability. Agencies will be free to use whatever categories most suit their own protocol.

The Committee recommends agencies adopt the following Expectations:

Policy

- A values statement about the rights of the child has been developed and formally adopted by the school that is aligned with the responsibilities set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- The school has developed and adopted an appropriate definition of child abuse including physical, emotional or sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, neglect and commercial exploitation and inappropriate behaviour of children towards other children.

- The school has a policy, approved by the School Board that describes how it is committed to preventing and responding appropriately if children are harmed, or if allegations of harm to children are made.
- The school has specific child protection policies, practices and faculty and staff training programmes to ensure the safety and welfare of all students within boarding facilities, homestay and residential arrangements and on excursions, trips and students exchanges.
- School safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures are subject to an annual, scheduled review and revision.
- The school has recruitment policies and execute rigorous recruitment procedures that ensure all employees and volunteers are of sound moral character and are suitable people to work with children and young adults.

People

- The school has clearly defined leadership responsibilities for child safety and duty of care.
- Formal procedures exist for determining the character of adults who interact with students. These procedures may include criminal record, background checks or other such means as may be suitable based upon the risk posed to the students.
- Formal procedures exist to obtain and verify references for prospective and existing faculty and staff.
- The school has developed and adopted a code of conduct and written guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of adults towards children and children towards other children. All faculty, staff, volunteers and contractors acknowledge that they have read the code of conduct and agree to abide by it.
- The school has a scheduled programme of regular, systematic professional training for volunteers, contractors, faculty and staff on student safeguarding, child abuse prevention, recognition, intervention and reporting.

Procedures

- The school shall have in place formal learning programmes throughout the school experience related to child protection which cover areas such as bullying personal safety, physical abuse, manipulation, grooming, online safety, healthy sexual behaviour, neglect and negligent behaviour, self-harm, staying safe away from home, commercial exploitation and disclosing abuse. These programmes to be delivered by members of faculty or external providers who are trained in these areas.
- The school has developed structured procedures for reporting suspected or disclosed maltreatment or abuse, including disclosure of abuse that may have taken place in the past history of the school, and adopts a formal policy identifying actions to be taken, including informing appropriate authorities.
- The school develops meaningful and effective relationships with external organisations and bodies that are able to provide appropriate support and advice on matters related to child protection.

- Child protection measures are integrated with all procedures and systems (strategic planning, budgeting, recruitment, programme management, performance management, procurement, partner agreements, risk management and management systems etc.)
- Due regard is given to building and facility design, layout, designation and use to ensure best practice in child safety and protection, within the context of the host country.

Accountability

- The school is cognizant of cultural expectations and complies with the legal and ethical expectations and requirements regarding child abuse within the country in which it operates.
- All reports of suspected or disclosed abuse and any actions taken by the school are securely archived, regardless of the conclusions reached.