**** **Conducting Visits to children during school hours**

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**Our commitment to Children and Young People when we visit them regularly**

Children and young people have a right to be heard and taken seriously and have the right to have their views and feelings listened to. Communication with children and young people is at the heart of child and family social care practice. Visits provide an opportunity for social workers to check on their young person's development, health and wellbeing and to ensure their needs are being met. As practitioners, the work we carry out to help families should be informed by the views of the child as well as the family, and a child’s wishes, and feelings must be sought. Working Together (2018) states that where possible, children should be seen alone. After making a visit, the social care practitioner or social worker should identify whether they have seen the child alone and record the issues addressed during the visit with particular reference to their wishes and feelings.

Visiting children at school is a common occurrence, to see children alone, on the basis that children may feel able to ‘open up’ about their achievements and strengths or their concerns and worries away from their parents or carers in a ‘safe’ place. However, school visits can often cause children deep anxiety for various reasons. We understand that talking to or meeting a social care practitioner or a social worker is not easy and can bring extra challenges and pressures for a child and their family, especially if they are subject to a Child Protection Plan or are care experienced. Our commitment to **children and young people** includes things we will do to help make sure that children’s experiences around being visited in school and being involved with their meetings is helpful and one they are fully involved in.

**What would help?**

* Children and young people are to be given preparation in terms of understanding the purpose of their meeting or the visit and what to expect. They should be asked how they want to structure their meetings. Who do they want there? Where should it be? What's the best time to hold it? Also, if they'd like to chair their own meeting.
* Encourage the child/young person to attend the meeting/visit or part of the meeting/visit either independently or with an advocate (an advocate can support them and help them share their thoughts and feelings at the meeting).
* Good practice is that meetings are child and young person led and where decisions are required, the child or young person is involved and has a good understanding about what is being discussed.
* If the child or young person does not want to attend the meeting, an advocate can meet with the child/young person before the meeting and write down or digitally record what they want said at the meeting in their own words and share this within the meeting.
* The adult/advocate will feedback to the child/young person from the meeting. The practitioner can also provide feedback to the child.
* Technology, such as MS Teams//video call can be used to allow children and young people to participate in their meetings from a distance.
* The meeting can also be recorded so that children and young people can hear/see exactly what was said. For example, we have the ability to support the development of innovative digital tools that reflect how children communicate and participate so official narratives reflect their story, not just the facts the recording system holds about them.
* The child/young person should be asked about their choice of location and venue for the meeting or the visit. Some children/young people might choose school as their preferred option, so we need to make it clear the choice has been given. This needs to be recorded on Liberi/Early Help Management System.
* Visits and meetings may need to happen in school. For example, s.47 visits may need to take place in school (in discussion with school staff) if this is considered the best way forward from the strategy discussion. It may be the case that school are required to be there as part of important meetings such as Personal Education Plans (PEP’s) or Education Health Care Plans (EHCP’s). Consideration needs to be given as to whether these important meetings, can be rationalised and held at convenient times to all parties involved to reduce stigma and to minimise the number of meetings children and young people attend. Children and young people tell us that they are missing important and preferred lessons due to meeting with social workers and social care practitioners They also tell us they may miss valuable social time with friends at lunchtime and this is not ideal. They tell us that this stigmatises them and makes them stand out from their peers.
* Timings of meetings and visits for support is therefore crucial as well as how the people who provide the support look (for example, not wearing official lanyards and badges) is important. When meetings and visits take place, they must be at times and in locations that work for the child and young person and must not adversely impact on their life and education.
* Punctuality and keeping appointments are also positive ways of keeping on good terms with the child or young person.
* Care experienced children and adults have said language needs to change to normalise their lives and shift away from professional speak. Words such as unit’, ‘placement’, ‘contact’, ‘respite’ and ‘LAC’ (looked after child) are used within meetings, visits and case recordings. This is not the same language experienced by their non care experienced peers. Children and young people told Ofsted that this language compounds a sense of being different, can exacerbate low self-esteem and is stigmatising.
* We want practitioners to stop using these words and use words such as ‘care experienced’, ‘home’ ‘spending time with their family’. Children and young people must have experiences of ‘visiting’, ‘staying over’ or ‘holidays’ with people outside of their immediate carers. These must never be called respite and must never be used in a way that makes a child feel excluded from family and home.

