

Supervision for Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools: focus on child sexual abuse

Information Sheet for schools

A number of local authorities across England are taking part in an exciting research project exploring how Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) in schools may be better supported in their roles, including in relation to their practices around identifying and responding to child sexual abuse. Funded by [What Works for Children's Social Care](#) (WWCSC), the project aims to test an innovative approach to collaboration between Children's Social Care services and schools. WWCSC aims to improve the lives of children and families through generating the best available evidence for practitioners, policy makers and practice leaders to improve children's social care.

This project involves a programme providing supervision to DSLs in primary and secondary schools. This entails monthly supervision sessions for DSLs, delivered by a Supervising Social Worker. The programme is inspired from an intervention originally developed by Bolton Council, in recognition of the fact that the safeguarding role can be stressful for DSLs, and for which formal supervision has typically not been available. The programme aims to improve knowledge and understanding of Children's Social Care processes and issues, resulting in reductions in inappropriate contacts to Children's Social Care, and reducing DSL stress and anxiety. In this adapted version of the original programme, there is also a specific focus on supporting DSLs in better identifying possible indicators of child sexual abuse and responding to this.

It is envisaged that all primary and secondary schools within the participating local authorities, will take part in the project. The programme is being independently evaluated by a team from the [National Institute of Economic and Social Research](#) (NIESR).

What does the project involve?

This project will involve a randomised controlled trial (RCT). This means that within each participating local authority, schools will be randomly selected to receive the programme or not, with approximately half of participating schools receiving the supervision. Random selection is the best means of establishing whether the programme has an effect. When groups are allocated randomly, it means we can attribute any difference in outcomes to the intervention itself, as the two groups can then be assumed to be similar in all other respects. The randomisation is conducted by the independent evaluators.

All schools involved in the research, whether allocated to receive the programme or not, will be making an important contribution to the evidence base. The findings of the trial will help to inform whether such a programme should be rolled out on a wider scale in the future.

What does this mean for my school?

In all schools:

DSLs will be asked to complete a short online survey asking about their role and experiences, once in the Autumn term and again towards the end of the school year.

In schools selected to receive the programme:

Monthly supervision sessions will be provided for the participating DSLs (within each school). Sessions will take place throughout the school year 2021/22, with each session lasting a maximum of 2 hours, at a time convenient for the DSLs' schedule. Sessions will be held within schools or remotely in line with Covid-19 guidance.

In some schools selected to receive the programme, researchers from the evaluation team will conduct interviews with the DSL receiving the supervision, along with other key school staff. Interviews will be undertaken either by phone or online.

How will data sharing work?

All personal data collected as part of the study will be treated with the strictest confidence and processed only in accordance with the requirements of the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Participating schools will be required to provide contact details for the participating DSLs and any other school staff involved in the project. This will facilitate the surveys and interviews that will form part of the evaluation, as well as enabling the supervision sessions to be arranged. Further information about how data is used in this project can be found in the project privacy notice here: <https://www.niesr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Data-Privacy-Notice-2121-DSL-FINAL.pdf>

Data relating to children's social care activity and outcomes, for each school, will be provided directly by the participating local authorities to the evaluation team. This information will not contain any personal data and will not identify individuals; the data provided will be aggregated so that it relates either to the school as a whole, or to groups of pupils within the school (such as whole year groups).

What happens when?

Key dates are as follows:

October 2021	First survey of DSLs (all schools)
October 2021 – July 2022	Supervision sessions take place
May – July 2022	Case studies and interviews with selected schools
June - July 2022	Follow-up survey of DSLs (all schools)
January 2023	Results of research published

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have any queries about the evaluation, you can contact Lucy Stokes at l.stokes@niesr.ac.uk

For further information about the programme, you can contact programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk

Alternatively, please contact your Local Authority project lead.