

The New School at West Heath

Independent Visitor to Our School Policy

Introduction & Context

The safety and well being of our students is of paramount concern. The last decade has witnessed numerous public scandals concerning the ill and mistreatment of young people living in Children's Homes and Residential Special Schools. The common feature amongst these cases has been a chronic abuse of power and authority that members of staff have exhibited over the children and young people with whom they have worked. This has included significant physical abuse, sexual abuse and institutional neglect.

There have been wide ranging changes implemented in the field of residential care as a direct result of the recommendations made arising from these investigations and public enquiries. The most significant of these is a raised profile of the phenomena of Child Abuse and Child Protection.

All schools need to ensure that a senior member of staff assumes the role of Child Protection Co-ordinator (in our school this role is called Child Protection Officer). The intention is to ensure that someone has a responsibility for monitoring and responding to all Child Protection issues. These can range from staff training to referring young people to local Social Services offices. Additionally, the Government have issued guidelines for ensuring safe staff selection, recruitment and retention practices. More locally, we have established a framework of Staff Contacts and Key Workers for all of our students. One further action we have taken in creating and ensuring a safe environment for our students is the introduction of "Independent Visitors" to our school.

Role and Responsibilities

An important feature of Independent Visitors is that children and young people see them as being separate from the staff group i.e. in our case, independent of our school and staff team. The role involves befriending our students and establishing a relationship of mutual trust with them. It is essential that our students should be able to share any worries or concerns they have with our Independent Visitor that they feel unable to share with members of staff. (One of the features of those abusive institutions mentioned earlier was that children and young people could not tell staff that their colleagues were sexually abusing them.)

Strategies

Independent Visitors in our school : -

- Are introduced to our student body at an assembly
- Are introduced to our boarding students in their residential bases, sharing a meal with them
- Visit our students both day and evening, every half term.

- Complete a written record of each visit on the form provided.
- Spend time engaging with individual students, groups of students and staff
- Meet with the Vice-Principal (Care) following each visit and make a verbal report of the visit.
- Provide our Senior Management Team with a report of the activities of the Independent Visitor annually.
- Contribute directly and indirectly to our school's policy formulation processes through feeding back information gleaned from school visits.
- Engage in any training or development activity agreed as being relevant by both the Vice-Principal (Care) and the Independent Visitor concerned.
- Are appointed by the Principal on the recommendation of the Vice Principal Care who draws up a short-list of appropriate candidates having consulted widely. Appropriate references and checks are made as with any other appointment.
- Receive a specially tailored induction programme delivered by the Vice Principal Care.

Monitoring and Review

The role of Independent Visitor will be a voluntary one and as such, reasonable expenses will be paid to ensure they are able to carry out their role. These expenses will be agreed between the Vice-Principal (Care), the Independent Visitor concerned and our school Bursar. Expenses will be paid on a termly basis upon receipt of an invoice counter signed and approved by the Vice-Principal (Care).

The work of the Independent Visitor will be appraised individually annually by the Vice Principal (Care)

Independent Visitor	
This Policy should be read in conjunction with: Our School Prospectus and our Statement of Purpose and Function	
Appendices: Form for Independent Visitor to complete	
Monitoring of Policy Implementation is the responsibility of: The Senior Leadership Team	
Lead responsibility:	Vice Principal - Residential
Relevant Legislation:	To be detailed in the next release
Annual Policy Review Required:	Yes / No
Approved by: S.S. Committee	Date approved: 29/09/04
Ratified by: Trustees	Date ratified: 11/2004
Reviewed – no changes	Date:
Reviewed – with revisions	Date:
Revision No.	1.0

INDEPENDENT VISITOR REPORT

Name of Visitor: _____

Date: _____

Area(s) of School Visited:

Report of visit particularly issues of concern:

Discussed with Vice Principal (Care) on:

Signature of Visitor:

Signature of Vice Principal (Care) or his representative:

Date: