

Safeguarding Briefing

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Monday 26th January 2026

Mobile Phone Guidance (from April 2026)

The government has updated its guidance on mobile phones in schools, strongly encouraging schools to operate as mobile phone-free environments during the school day. The aim is to support learning, reduce distraction and help schools manage risks linked to bullying, online harm and wellbeing.

Ofsted has said it will reflect this guidance in inspections from April 2026. Inspectors will discuss with leaders how mobile phones are managed, how expectations are communicated, and how consistently the school's approach is understood and followed by staff and pupils. The focus will be on the impact on behaviour, learning and pupil wellbeing rather than on a single model being adopted.

Where schools take a different approach to the guidance or allow exceptions, inspectors will want to understand the reasons for this and how any risks are managed. Clear policies, consistency and attention to safeguarding will remain key.

Schools should also ensure that responses to breaches of the mobile phone policy are clear, proportionate and consistently applied, in line with the behaviour policy and safeguarding procedures.

Some actions to consider

Review the current behaviour policy to check how clearly mobile phone expectations are set out and whether they reflect the updated guidance.

Agree a consistent approach to managing mobile phones during the school day, including how exceptions (such as medical or safeguarding needs) are handled.

Brief staff and governors on the updated guidance and Ofsted's inspection focus, so expectations and responsibilities are well understood.

Communicate early with parents and carers, explaining the direction of travel and how further information will be shared.

Check safeguarding and inclusion arrangements, ensuring reasonable adjustments, medical needs and routes for pupils to raise concerns are clearly in place

You can find the DfE guidance here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-phones-in-schools>

Ofsted expectations can be found here:

<https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2026/01/23/what-the-governments-updated-guidance-on-mobile-phones-means-for-school-inspections/>

Parent webinars on county lines and criminal exploitation (Iverson Trust)

The Iverson Trust (formerly Pace) is a national charity working to keep children safe from exploitation by supporting parents, disrupting exploiters, and working in partnership with police and family services. Their work is grounded in a trauma-informed, family-centred approach.

During March 2026, the Iverson Trust is delivering a series of live webinars for parents and carers focused on county lines and criminal exploitation. The sessions help parents understand how exploitation happens, how children are groomed, what warning signs to look out for, and where to access advice and support. Each webinar includes local context, time for questions, and input from a parent with lived experience.

More information and booking details are available at:

<https://iversontrust.org.uk/webinars/>

Follow up to last week's question

Last week's question was *'A Year 8 pupil reports that another student has been repeatedly targeting them over several weeks. This has included being shoved and tripped in corridors, having their bag emptied and*

belongings damaged, being called degrading names linked to their ethnicity, and being filmed on a mobile phone and mocked in a group chat. There has been no sexual language or sexual behaviour involved.'

One of the discussion points was 'How might our response change if this is recognised as child-on-child abuse rather than only bullying?'

Here is one way to answer that question:

If this concern is recognised as child-on-child abuse rather than only bullying, the response becomes safeguarding-led rather than purely behaviour-focused. This means the DSL becomes involved and safeguarding decision-making is considered.

Importantly, it prompts a safeguarding response for both children. One child may be experiencing harm, while the other may have unmet needs or risks linked to their behaviour. Both require assessment, support and appropriate intervention, not just sanctions.

This approach also helps staff recognise the cumulative nature of repeated physical, discriminatory and online abuse, which can amount to significant harm when viewed as a pattern rather than isolated incidents.

Finally, recording the concern as child-on-child abuse supports clearer documentation, risk assessment and escalation if the harm continues, helping schools respond earlier and more effectively.

Supporting young people who bully: a guide for school and children's workforce staff (National Children's Bureau)

<https://safeguardingcompanion.co.uk/bullying>

Question of the Week

An adult in the school approaches the DSL and says:

"I'm not sure if this counts as a concern, but I wanted to mention something that's made me uncomfortable. A colleague has recently been spending a lot of one-to-one time with a particular pupil and tends to seek them out at breaktimes. I've noticed them joking and being quite physically familiar, for example putting an arm around the pupil's shoulders. It hasn't crossed into anything overtly inappropriate, but it has made me feel uncomfortable and I wasn't sure whether this was something I should report."

Suggested answer (for discussion feedback)

This should be treated as a low-level concern about an adult's behaviour.

There is no allegation of harm and nothing described meets the harm threshold. However, the behaviour described has caused unease and may be inconsistent with the expectations set out in the staff handbook and code of conduct, particularly around professional boundaries and one-to-one contact with pupils.

KSCIE (2025) paragraph 430/431 refers to low-level concerns:

The term 'low-level' concern does not mean that it is insignificant. A low-level concern is any concern, no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt', that an adult working in or on behalf of the school or college may have acted in a way that:

- is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work, and
- does not meet the harm threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being over friendly with children
- having favourites
- taking photographs of children on their mobile phone, contrary to school policy
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door, or
- humiliating children.

What is the harm threshold?

KCSIE (2025) part four describes the harm threshold in paragraph 359:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child and/or
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child, and/or
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she may pose a risk of harm to children, and/or

- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children. *[This could mean behaviour out-of-school.]*

UPDATED GUIDANCE

Generative AI: product safety standards

The DfE has updated its expectations for the AI products used in schools. Although aimed at developers, the changes matter for safeguarding. Most notably, mental health is now treated as a core safety requirement, alongside clearer expectations around monitoring, escalation and human oversight. AI is no longer seen as a neutral tool, but something that must actively prevent harm and know when to hand over to humans.

- **Mental health safeguards are built in**, including detection of distress, crisis-related usage patterns and clear escalation routes to human support and safeguarding leads.
- **Robust monitoring and alerting systems are in place**, with activity logging, safeguarding flags and reports that schools can understand and act on.
- **Products do not encourage emotional dependence or manipulation**, avoiding anthropomorphised language, persuasive techniques or designs that prolong use.
- **AI supports learning without undermining development**, using progressive disclosure, limiting cognitive offloading and monitoring over-reliance.
- **Strong governance, privacy and security controls are embedded**, including DPIAs, data protection compliance, filtering, and clear accountability mechanisms.

Find the guidance here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/generative-ai-product-safety-standards/generative-ai-product-safety-standards>

Safeguarding Companion - Latest Episode

[The Safeguarding Companion is now available on Spotify](#)

Do restrictions reduce digital safeguarding risk? (16 minutes)

In the latest edition, Andrew looks at how recent government guidance has renewed focus on restriction in digital safeguarding. He considers why restrictions often shift risk rather than removing it, and what that means for professional judgement and safeguarding practice.

[Explore all Safeguarding Companion episodes](#)

The Body Safety Workbook

In this new resource, social worker Elisha Ward has developed the Body Safety Workbook to support schools with age-appropriate, guided conversations about body boundaries, consent and speaking up. Drawing on her experience supporting schools, Elisha identified a gap between awareness-raising and practical direct work, particularly where early or emerging ('amber') concerns are identified. The workbook has been piloted in schools, complements RSHE provision and include clear staff guidance.

For more information, go to: www.bodysafetyworkbook.co.uk

Useful Resources from SWGfL

Integrating AI in Schools: Policy Template

SWGfL's school AI policy template helps schools balance opportunity and risk by promoting responsible, ethical, and effective use across teaching, learning, and administration.

Find the template here:

<https://swgfl.org.uk/magazine/integrating-ai-in-schools-new-policy-template-available>

Test whether your school internet blocks harmful online content

[TestFiltering.com](https://testfiltering.com) allows schools to check that their internet filtering is working effectively *without* exposing staff or pupils to harmful content, supporting compliance with UK statutory safeguarding guidance.

Find the tool here: <https://testfiltering.com/>

Forthcoming Courses

Advanced Safeguarding for Designated Safeguarding Leads

"I just wanted to say that I thought today's training was absolutely fantastic. By a mile it was the most engaging training I have done."

Next live online Advanced Safeguarding Course:

Wednesday 11th February 2026 [Book Online](#)

The on-demand version is available year-round and is updated regularly [Book Online](#)

Take a look at our other courses here:

<https://www.safeguardingschools.co.uk/availablecourses>

Many of our online courses are available in [Safeguarding.Pro](#) with full-year access included.

Until next time, keep safe,

Andrew Hall

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A promotional banner for the 'Safeguarding Companion' audio series. On the left, a smartphone displays the app's interface. The background is dark blue. The title 'Safeguarding Companion' is written in large, bold, white letters. Below it, in smaller white text, is 'Learn more about the Safeguarding Companion audio series'. At the bottom center, a white underlined link reads 'Click to find out more'. On the right side of the banner is a portrait of a man with glasses, wearing a suit and a light blue shirt.

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