



GILLINGSTOOL PRIMARY SCHOOL

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HOME VISITS GUIDANCE

Signed ... 

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Date: January 2024

Signed 

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Aim

This policy is designed to protect the safety of all school staff carrying out home visits. Where home visits take place, a risk assessment should be completed in advance. This will identify any concerns about potential risks and appropriate measures to be taken. If specific information is known about families, this should be added to the risk assessment.

EYFS home visits will always take place with staff in pairs. Ideally, all practitioners including family support workers should take a colleague out on an initial home visit, however, where the levels of resources available makes this impractical, you must ensure that adequate risk assessments are made and that home visits only take place when the policy and protocols are fully met.

Policy and procedures must be consistently applied by all staff.

Rationale for carrying out home visits

There is a unanimous feeling in our school that the home visits which staff undertake have huge benefits. The insights that staff have gained into each child's home and background greatly helps them to assess their level of need in school and prepare for the child's entry into the setting.

Another major benefit is that the home visits are the start or the continued building of the relationship with parents which is vital if we are to be successful in providing for the needs of the child. It also shows parents that the school respects them and wants to share their knowledge, which puts the relationship on a more equal footing.

Meeting each child in his or her home environment has proved invaluable in:

- gathering information that will enable the children to settle into the Reception class;
- establishing positive links with families, especially those of vulnerable pupils.

For parents and children, a visit gives them the opportunity to meet the teacher and staff in a safe environment, where they feel confident and at ease.

For teachers and support staff, a visit provides the opportunity to:

- establish early, positive contact;
- see children in their own familiar settings;
- meet other family members, people and pets who are important to the children;
- understand the problems that children might encounter at school, and
- also to appreciate the wealth of learning that goes on in the home.

This all helps to get a fuller picture of the children. Professionals can gain much from observing a child where they feel settled and in control.

Strategies/Guidelines for Staff carrying out home visits

The class teacher and Headteacher and/or Deputy Head or Family Link Worker, should make each visit together. As well as the obvious safety implications, this allows one to talk to the child's parents and the other to focus on the child. This can be the beginning of the relationship between the teacher and the child, especially as staff have been invited into the child's home. It also means that the parent has focused time with the Teacher or Teaching Assistant. Fifteen to twenty minutes is the standard period of time devoted to each home visit.

Visits take place during the term before children are due to start attending Reception. Parents are always telephoned in advance to confirm the appointment. If a visit is considered high risk then a home visit should not take place. A more safe and secure area at the school should be used for the appointment.

Equipment needed

Visiting staff members will take an information pack with them when visiting a pupil and their parents in their home. This would usually contain a Welcome to Reception Booklet containing photographs of staff and the kinds of activities the children will be doing inside and outside of the school, as well as the standard forms that would need to be filled in by the parents. One staff member will play/read stories to the child and the other adult will engage with the parent/carer.

Staff should also take a mobile phone for safety reasons, a camera to take a photograph of the child (written consent from parents is needed before a photograph is taken) and a School Teddy for the child to play with.

Before the visit

- Make appointments in advance and offer alternative dates/times
- Ensure that parents know when you will arrive, how long you will stay, what will happen, what kinds of questions you will be asking and what information you will bring
- Ask them to think about the information they need from you in advance of the meeting
- Accept the right of a family not to want a home visit
- Confirm Parents/Carers actual name and title and keep on record.
- Do not presume that there are two parents with the same surname as the child
- Do not assume that all Parents/Carers are literate
- Make sure you consider diversity of social, cultural, racial, religious and sexual orientation
- Familiarise yourself with the route/location, parking restrictions etc before you leave.
- Leave details of your visiting schedule and expected return time with another member of staff in the office, ensuring you sign out

During the visit

- Show respect for Parents/Carers as equal partners.
- Remember you are a guest who has been invited into the family's home.
- You may ask people for information but they are under no legal obligation to give it to you. They can also ask you to leave at any time.
- Be a good listener.

- Be aware of pets and other adults who may be in the home. If necessary, ask the family to put any uncaged animals in a separate room.
- Sit near a door or exit and if you feel uneasy or worried at any time, make an excuse and leave.
- Staff should avoid commenting on a child's home or provision so that parents do not feel that any judgement is being made on their home or lifestyle.
- Staff should demonstrate an awareness and respect for differing cultures.
- They should comply with appropriate customs such as removing shoes, wearing modest clothing etc.
- Staff should remain aware of time constraints on both themselves and parents.
- Maintain professional boundaries in your relationship with the family e.g. do not drink alcohol or smoke with them and don't accept presents.
- Consider confidentiality at all times. Do not chat about other families that the family is in contact with. Do not discuss anything in front of other family members without checking beforehand or privately that it is ok to do so.
- Consider safeguarding policies and procedures at all times.

You need to be prepared to deal with the unexpected:

- Young children 'home alone'
- Poor home conditions that pose an immediate risk to child's safety or wellbeing
- Marks or bruises on a child that give you cause for concern
- Information about sexual abuse or domestic abuse

Before you leave, check that family members are satisfied with the outcome of the visit and if appropriate are clear about:

- Any plans made
- What will happen next
- Who will do what

Unless you have child protection concerns, if there is information to be shared with other agencies, check with the family:

- What is to be shared
- Who with
- By whom

If you have child protection concerns, and providing it is safe to do so, tell the family:

- What you are concerned about

- Who you will share the information with
- What is likely to happen next

If you are concerned about the child's safety or wellbeing and it is not appropriate to discuss this with the family because:

- You don't feel safe
- You are concerned about child sexual abuse
- You are concerned about domestic abuse and the perpetrator was present
- You feel that raising concerns could compromise the child's safety and wellbeing

YOU MUST SEEK ADVICE URGENTLY, AFTER LEAVING THE FAMILY HOME

You must discuss the situation with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) from or Access and Response 01454 866000

Things to think about after a home visit

- Checking back in at your setting
- Recording
- Following up any safeguarding or child protection concerns
- Actions agreed and next steps
- Sharing information with appropriate agencies
- Return to school when you have completed the visits and sign back in, also letting the office staff know you have returned.

Specific Protocols for All Home Visits

Risk Assessment

- Check records to see what is known and information available.
- Talk to other professionals who may already have had contact or involvement with the family.
- Obtain information about the location of the home visit. For example, does the area have a reputation for being unsafe, isolated or poorly lit?
- Discuss strategies to adopt when working with a potentially challenging Parent/Carer/Family with your line manager.
- Where potential risks are identified, arrange an alternative meeting environment.

ALWAYS COMPLETE A RISK ASSESSMENT BEFORE A VISIT TAKES PLACE

Appendix 1: Health and Safety:

- Inform a nominated member of staff when you are leaving for a home visit.
- Leave the details of the home visit schedule with a member of the office staff. Include a list of visit addresses and times including family name, child's name, address, telephone number, and time due back at school.
- Carry with you and show the parent some form of identification.
- Demonstrate normal courtesy – wait to be invited into the home.
- If a child answers the door, ask if an adult is present in the house before entering. Do not enter if an adult is not present.
- If the Parent/Carer appears at all uncomfortable about the visit continuing, staff should offer to leave, offer to continue the contact with a telephone call and give the Parent/Carer the telephone number of the school.
- During home visits, it is prudent to park your car in the direction of your exit. This may save vital seconds in the event of needing a swift exit from an emergency situation.
- Where possible, all home visits should be carried out during normal working hours (9.00am – 3.00pm) with due regard to the daylight hours. Particularly in the winter months take all possible steps to ensure that your last home visit ends before sunset.
- Wear clothes and shoes that do not hinder movement or your ability to run in case of emergency.
- If you feel anxious upon arriving at a home visit location and feel your personal safety could be jeopardised, do not take the risk of proceeding any further. Telephone the home and tell them you will be unable to attend. Then return to school and relay your concerns to your line manager.
- When conducting a home visit your safety is of paramount importance. Your professional judgement should be used in deciding whether to continue with a visit. Use common sense, trust your instincts and if a situation feels dangerous or threatening – leave, saying for example that you need to get something from your car.
- Should you need to stop a visit over a threat to your personal safety you must immediately move to a place of refuge and if necessary call the police. Your concerns should be conveyed to your line manager straight away.
- Confrontation should always be avoided. At the first sign of potential threat you should make a swift exit from the home. While there are hundreds of home visits made safely every day you should never assume that violence wouldn't happen to you. Good preparation is the key factor in ensuring your safety and that of all employees working out in the community.
- Staff should keep clear and detailed chronologies of contact for every family/home visit and meeting that they attend on a case note/home visit record sheet (Appendix B). These should be kept in a secure location. However trivial these details seem at the time, this will raise awareness and may well prevent problems from being encountered in the future.
- Report back to the school office and sign in immediately after the visit is finished informing staff that you are safe. The member of office staff on duty must advise the DSL or DDSL if staff carrying out a home visit have not returned/made contact by the appointed time and locally agreed actions must be followed.