North West
Multi Agency Safeguarding
Learning & Support Hub

Education as a Strategic Safeguarding Partner: Models for Integration & Impact

Aligning Educational Leadership with Safeguarding Strategy. Pathways to Influence, Accountability, & Shared Outcomes.

Introduction

This document explores potential structures through which safeguarding partnerships can elevate the role of education to a more strategic level. As safeguarding becomes increasingly complex and multi-faceted, the inclusion of education as a core strategic partner is essential to ensuring a holistic, preventative, and responsive approach. Educational establishments are uniquely positioned to identify early signs of harm, influence protective environments, and contribute to long-term safeguarding outcomes.

By outlining a range of structural models—from formal representation on strategic boards to integrated governance frameworks—this document aims to support partnerships in designing inclusive, effective, and sustainable mechanisms for educational engagement at the highest level of decision-making.

Culture

A culture that truly embeds the voice and influence of education within safeguarding partnerships is built on mutual respect, shared accountability, and a commitment to inclusive collaboration.

Key components include a genuine recognition of education's frontline insight into children's lives, a culture of listening where educational perspectives are actively sought and valued, and a shared language that bridges professional boundaries. Trust, transparency, and a willingness to challenge constructively are also essential, enabling education leaders to contribute confidently to strategic discussions.

Embedding this culture is not only about fairness—it strengthens the partnership's ability to make informed, child-centred decisions. When

education is empowered to shape safeguarding strategy, the result is a more responsive, preventative, and holistic system that better protects children and young people.

Language

All leaders within the partnership must ensure that key documents—including MASA reports, annual reports, websites, and outward-facing communications—explicitly refer to education as an 'equal strategic safeguarding partner.' This terminology recognises the unique and vital role that education plays in safeguarding children.

Strategic Representation of Education

Successful partnerships that have achieved strong education engagement have embraced flexibility in representation. While education is not a statutory safeguarding partner—meaning there is no mandated role at the DSP or LSP level—this flexibility creates opportunities for multiple representatives, such as both a local authority (LA) officer and a dedicated education leader.

In some areas, the Deputy Director for Education, as an LA officer, may face limitations in fully representing the diverse voice of the education sector at the strategic table. This is especially relevant where the majority of local education providers are independent schools or part of multi-academy trusts. In such contexts, appointing a dedicated education leader alongside the LA officer helps ensure a broader, more representative perspective, strengthening the partnership's ability to make informed, inclusive safeguarding decisions.

Delegated Safeguarding Partner for Education

Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) and Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs**)** must determine how education can be meaningfully integrated into high-level decision-making structures. A common starting point is the inclusion of an education representative as a DSP on the safeguarding partnership's executive committee.

To maximise the effectiveness of education in this role, the executive group should give careful consideration to the onboarding and induction process, recognising that this may be a new and unfamiliar space for many education leaders. For instance, if statutory partners routinely provide updates during executive meetings, education should also be invited to share sector-specific insights. Additionally, aligning meeting schedules with school term times is essential to support consistent and meaningful participation.

Sub-Group vs. Direct Representation

Safeguarding partnerships typically adopt one of two models for education representation:

Education Committee

This model establishes a dedicated group of education professionals responsible for safeguarding at both strategic and operational levels. Its primary objective is to bring together the collective voice of the education sector, ensuring broad and balanced representation.

Membership should include both local authority (LA) officers and independent education leaders, with each member representing a specific sub-sector—such as early years, primary, secondary, special education, further education, independent schools, and alternative provision. Each representative is expected to gather insights from their respective networks—such as local headteacher forums or school improvement partnerships—and present a collective viewpoint rather than individual opinions.

Successful partnerships using this model ensure clear and direct lines of communication between frontline education safeguarding practitioners and strategic leaders. To support continuous feedback and engagement, safeguarding discussions should be embedded within existing education forums and structures.

Direct Representation

A group of education leaders represents the sector at the strategic decision-making level within the safeguarding partnership. When attending committee meetings that feed directly into executive meetings, typically one or two representatives participate. Representation is often shared between local authority (LA) officers and independent education professionals with safeguarding responsibilities. These individuals are responsible for maintaining ongoing communication with colleagues across education establishments to ensure they reflect a broad, collective voice rather than individual perspectives.

Partnerships that have successfully adopted this model often assign representatives to specific sub-sections of the education sector. This approach helps establish direct feedback loops between frontline education safeguarding practitioners and strategic leaders, strengthening the partnership's responsiveness and inclusivity.

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Selecting the Right Model

The decision to implement either model should be informed by:

- The local education landscape
- The existing education governance structure
- The views of both partnership executives and education leaders

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Partnerships that co-create their engagement model with education stakeholders tend to experience higher levels of participation, stronger mutual understanding, and greater recognition of education's unique role in safeguarding.

For support and advice on embedding the meaningful voice and influence of education within multi-agency safeguarding partner arrangements, please contact Nicola Griffiths (North West Strategic Voice & Influence of Education Lead) at nicola.griffiths@stockport.gov.uk.