

Learning Briefing CSPR 25

Background:

This briefing is in connection to an international student, who was studying A-levels in England in 2023. Although initially described as shy and socially anxious, they gradually integrated, forming friendships and gaining confidence. Although the young person was articulate and was able to seek help when needed, it was documented that they often felt isolated and pressured to succeed. They experienced poor mental health, leading to anxiety and depression.

The young person died by suicide at the age 16 whilst attending a private summer residential programme at a university campus out of their primary education area. Their story reveals that being away from home and family can add to vulnerabilities such as mental illness and special educational needs. UK legislation emphasises family care for children, so that trusted adults can mitigate this vulnerability, as recognised in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023). The education of international students is notable in schools and universities, with over 600,000 students coming to the UK annually. Therefore, the Review highlights significant gaps in regulation in safeguarding care for international students. Key themes, recommendations for safeguarding systems, and practice considerations for those working with international students in the UK is summarised below.

Themes 1: Reflection on Practice

Practice consideration A: That practitioners are reminded to be curious as to the everyday experience of students who are impacted by symptoms of as result of treatment and/or consider if the child's experience could be improved upon.

Practice consideration B: Practitioners should come together regularly to make sense of the lived experience of any students with additional needs.

Practice consideration C: That self-harming behaviour is never normalised or accepted by adults, but should be considered as a behaviour which suggests that a student is “dealing with very difficult feelings, painful memories or overwhelming situations and experiences.”

Theme 2: The response to an international student's, mental health

Practice consideration D: Due to potential culture differences regarding definitions of mental health and how diagnoses, symptoms, and possible labels are understood, there should be simple description of what information is requested and why it should be used.

System Recommendation 1 – For all boarding schools: where a student has a mental health diagnoses/treatment plan, the school should invite any mental health lead in the school and or clinical staff to attend alongside the school senior leadership team some or part of any admissions meetings with parents. The intended outcome is that the school can plan for any additional support the student might need, prior to the student arrival at school.

System Recommendation 2 – For all Integrated Care Boards (ICB): all children boarding with an independent school should be registered with a general practice local to the school premises. They should be assured that GP's are clear regarding their role with international students. Any agreement between the GP and any independent day or boarding school in the locality should be supported by the local ICS/ICB in terms of quality and monitoring so that physical and mental health needs of this specific cohort are met.

System Recommendation 3 – For all Boarding Schools: Boarding Schools make prospective parents aware that students will be registered with the local GP. NB this may require a revision of the National Minimum Standard for Boarding Schools.

System Recommendation 4 - For all Boarding Schools: All students who arrive with known symptoms and a diagnosis of depression, mental health condition, or medical need, should be assessed and treated under the supervision of a UK-based clinician, with a regularly monitored treatment plan. The student's health and wellbeing should be regularly reviewed by the multi-agency network of practitioners. Where consent is not given by the child a multi-agency meeting should be convened. The ISI and/or Ofsted should make their inspection of any school.

System Recommendation 5 – For all independent day and boarding schools employing school nurses. To ensure school nursing staff receive clinical and/or safeguarding supervision from a trained and accredited supervisor. This should be included in the ISI and/or Ofsted inspection frameworks.

Theme 3: Information Sharing and Seeking

System Recommendation 6 - For all boarding schools: That all adults involved in the care of an international student with additional needs are included in regular multi-disciplinary communications and meetings to reflect on the child's progress.

System Recommendation 7 - For all independent day and boarding schools: It is recommended that all independent schools be reminded of the DfE non-statutory information-sharing advice (May 2024) and its relevance to safeguarding practice.

Practice consideration E: It is important that the due diligence by boarding schools of the implementation of NMS 22 [regarding education guardianships] includes the assessment of both the quality and the consistency of homestays.

Practice consideration F: Practitioners should reflect on when to share information, using the new guidance, to promote a student's welfare and protect them from safeguarding risks, especially when the risk outweighs the individual's unwillingness to engage.

Theme 4: Working across agencies to respond to risk

System Recommendation 8 - For all boarding schools: Multidisciplinary meetings should be held when a student with mental health needs joins the school including a range of staff from within the school, as well as external agencies and parents. A multidisciplinary risk assessment and safety plan should be drawn up with the student and parents and implemented. Such a meeting will be dependent on the complexity and severity of the student's mental health needs.

Practice consideration G: Parents of international students can be helped, challenged, and supported to understand the options for their child's education and well-being. Schools should take the lead so that teachers and staff can implement their duty of care for the child.

System consideration - For all boarding schools that sponsor international students: Schools should consider using all available means to safeguard children and make decisions that prioritise the child's welfare with the right plan made for each student.

Theme 5: Safeguarding and the role of education guardians and homestay hosts in the lives of international students

System Recommendation 9 for the Department for Education and the Secretary of State for Education: To make the regulation of education guardianship statutory through national minimum standards for the sector.

System Recommendation 10 - For AEGIS all education agents and schools that advise parents to appoint education guardians: To establish as best practice that a student should meet their appointed education guardian as the trusted adult appointed to care for them at a (virtual) meeting before coming to the UK.

Practice consideration H: In the absence of statutory regulation, for AEGIS to continue to ensure best practice in ensuring that education guardians safeguard children.

System Recommendation 11 - For the Department for Education: The DfE establishes a clear and unambiguous legal position and revises statutory guidance regarding education guardianship and homestays so that education guardians and/or those providing a homestay are considered as in a position of trust.

Theme 6: The safety of out-of-education residential programmes

System Consideration for LSCPs: How to embed all this learning as relevant to all out-of-education residential programmes across the UK.

System Recommendation 12 for the Department for Education: Statutory regulations, supported by national minimum standards, are implemented across the out of education sector. To include as a minimum: Safeguarding policy; Application process, including multi-agency handover and transfer of information relating to additional needs; Admissions and registration; Risk assessment and management; Medication management, including storage and safe administration; Information management; Staff training and supervision; Supervision of students; Missing student responses; Provision of contact information for residents; All this information needs to be provided in languages and styles suitable for all students.

Addendum - Theme 1: CDOP Child Death Partners

System Considerations: The Child Death Review processes in both areas involved assimilating the learning from this review into their learning processes and annual reporting. Both LSCPs should lay out how this will be implemented. The LCSP to inform the coroner who conducted the inquest of this feedback from parents and participating agencies.