

Case Study 1 Safe Network and NRCSE

Improving safeguarding practice in supplementary schools

Safe Network has worked with the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE), a national charity providing quality assurance in community-based provision, to improve safeguarding practice in supplementary schools. Through joint safeguarding training linked to NRCSE's own quality standards, and through NRCSE's support for local Safe Network Champions, supplementary schools are benefiting from tailored support appropriate to their needs.

Background

The National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE) provides advice and guidance to improve the quality of supplementary school provision. Supplementary schools offer out-of-school-hours educational opportunities for children and young people, many of whom come from minority ethnic and migrant communities. They are largely non-regulated, and often lack support and guidance, in part because many are run by volunteers who are themselves members of recently arrived migrant communities and are therefore not always well networked or connected to sources of support in their local area.

After developing and piloting a quality standards framework, the Quality Framework for Supplementary Schools, NRCSE found that the areas that schools most struggled with were not teaching and learning so much as governance and management. They found that many did not have basic policies and procedures in place and even lacked awareness that policies and procedures were needed. NRCSE therefore created a stand-alone bronze level standard focused on minimum standards in relation to policies and procedures – including a safeguarding standard. The organisation's goal is that all supplementary schools should be supported to achieve at least a Bronze Quality Framework Award within their first year of operation.

NRCSE developed a working relationship with Safe Network chiefly because of an awareness that many schools would struggle to meet the safeguarding standard at the Bronze level. They identified a lack of awareness; a lack of policies; and many schools struggling to find practical solutions to safeguarding challenges such as managing behaviour and discipline (particularly in schools with young or under-qualified teachers and/or very large class sizes); and/or a number not addressing safeguarding simply because they found the subject too daunting. As the NRCSE's Director, Pascale Vassie, observes:

'Some were aware that safeguarding was an issue, and aware that not addressing it was a problem, but they simply had no idea where to start and how to deal with it.'

The work

The work initially developed following discussions between Pascale and the Children England Regional Development Manager (RDM) for London. The work focused on two main activities – the first was a phase of joint work on developing tailored safeguarding training and resources for supplementary schools around the country based on adapted versions of Safe Network materials. This was followed by enrolment of NRCSE mentors as Safe Network champions to offer tailored safeguarding support to supplementary schools at the local level across London. A third element of joint work between Safe Network and NRCSE involved seeking to raise awareness at a national level of issues affecting supplementary schools. This was started but did not progress as originally anticipated.

Joint training

NRCSE understood from the outset that its members would struggle with a purely online system and resources, and that safeguarding training would need to be face-to-face and tailored to their needs so as not to make assumptions about schools' understanding of UK systems and processes, about how things work and to provide real opportunities for Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) officers and supplementary school representatives to meet and gain awareness of each other's work.

Pascale and the London RDM worked closely together to devise a one-day safeguarding course, based on the Safe Network *Are They Safe* pack, but with additional materials developed by NRCSE and specific to supplementary schools. Then in collaboration with Safe Network, NRCSE offered a programme of training to supplementary schools. The free one-day courses were primarily delivered in London though some were delivered in other English regions. The trainers were NRCSE staff, though sometimes co-training with the Safe Network RDM, and where possible with a representative of the relevant LSCB. In total twenty-three one-day courses were delivered, reaching 327 supplementary school staff/volunteers.

Another important principle underpinning the training was that NRCSE was offering 'overview sessions' only, that the training on offer should be seen as additional to rather than instead of any of the LSCB training offers in local areas. Wherever possible NRCSE made links to the LSCBs and invited representatives to attend so as to reinforce the message that the training was intended not to duplicate but to complement other local support, and also in hopes that LSCB involvement might improve awareness and communication between LSCBs and schools.

Engaging with the Safe Network Champions Programme

Following the launch of Safe Network's safeguarding standards, NRCSE and Safe Network entered a new phase of partnership working - jointly planning and co-delivering a training session for 24 representatives of the Pan-London Supplementary Education Network on the Standards. Of these participants, seven NRCSE Mentors signed up to be Safe Network Champions – between them offering support to supplementary schools across eight London boroughs.

All the mentors received training, and then began their work with local partners to deliver safeguarding training and one-to-one support based on the materials jointly developed in the first phase of the work. In Barnet, for instance, the local NRCSE Mentor is supporting supplementary schools to achieve the Bronze Quality Framework award and to improve their safeguarding practice. The Barnet Champion, Ertanch Hidayettin, combines his Champion's role with his job as Co-ordinator of the Barnet Supplementary Schools Forum. The forum comprises 30 of the borough's supplementary schools and since enrolling as a Champion Ertanch has worked closely with colleagues, forum members and his local LSCB and its various subgroups to offer training and support on safeguarding issues. He has delivered a range of training sessions both within and across schools, and has worked with forum members to ensure that each puts in place a nominated safeguarding lead. He now meets with those leads to take forward plans for working across organisations and delivering better training and support on safeguarding. Ertanch reports on how the Safe Network resources have helped him in his work.

'I found the Champions training I attended really interesting and very useful We've been using a lot of their materials in our own training and our one-to-one support, and in the training I've organised on safeguarding I very much use their materials. We've also used the materials to talk to groups about the safeguarding changes and to help us prepare our own guidance about how changes will affect people at supplementary schools.' [Barnet Champion]

Influencing at a national level

NRCSE has felt for some time that there are important messages that need to come from central government about safeguarding and support for supplementary schools – how to make it clear, for instance, what the legal requirements are in relation to Disclosure and Barring. Discussions were held with the minister responsible at the time for this issue, and there was some planning of a consultative event with Safe Network staff at NSPCC, but a subsequent cabinet reshuffle meant that the work did not progress beyond early conversations.

Outcomes

The collaborative working between Safe Network and NRCSE has contributed to a number of significant changes. These include:

Increased safeguarding awareness and knowledge

The initial phase one training and support helped raise awareness of safeguarding for the majority of those who attended. The NRC collected post-course evaluation forms from 228 participants on 20 courses and all rated the training useful (with 81% rating it very useful); all saying they had learnt something from the day and that they had learnt useful skills.

'It was very engaging and interactive. It was actually one of the best courses that I have attended. It certainly met its objective as far as I am

concerned. I am certainly more knowledgeable about issues surrounding safeguarding.' [Course participant]

At the local level, the work of the NRCSE Champions has also contributed to raised awareness.

'I think definitely the framework has made them a lot more aware about what is required ... when I have trained them on safeguarding issues ... sometimes it is raising very simple things like when a teacher comes to a class, doing a quick check to make sure the physical environment is safe. These are small things but very important and changes that these schools then go away and make.' [Barnet Champion]

New and/or improved safeguarding policies and procedures

NRCSE reports that to date 324 schools have achieved the Bronze award for minimum standards in supplementary schools, including meeting minimum safeguarding standards. This represents about 40% of their membership and the NRCSE's Policy and Delivery Manager feels little doubt that some of the changes in practice which may have helped groups achieve the award can be linked back to the improved level of safeguarding advice and support that has been made available through their joint work with Safe Network.

'After this session I will be able to implement the suggestions. There were many aspects that I found useful, but the section about what safeguarding is actually raised about how many issues are prominent. As a result of this session I will make sure the school has written rules, codes of conduct, etc.' [training participant]

The future

Despite the success of this project, and the ongoing work of the NRCSE Mentors in London, there is more to be done to reach all supplementary schools around the country. NRCSE identifies the main barrier to supporting more schools to improve their practice and implement (at least) minimum standards, is a lack of capacity and resources – not just within their own organisation but also the reduced resources available to local authorities and other infrastructure bodies (eg Councils for Voluntary Service) in local areas with whom NRCSE has previously worked. As Pascale summed up:

'Supplementary schools absolutely want to do what's right and they're volunteering to help their children because they want to help them. But people are not helping them to do it and they need that help.'

NRCSE is keen to continue to work with Safe Network, in particular to develop work on safeguarding and behaviour management and introduce specific material on working with children with special educational needs. Pascale would also like to work with Safe Network to develop more work outside of London.

Learning

Despite concerns about capacity and resources for the future, both NRCSE and Safe Network rate their partnership as successful, and between them have identified a number of success factors:

1. The capacity and commitment of the Safe Network London RDM made a big difference to this project. NRCSE had previously engaged with the NSPCC as a single agency, but found it easier to progress work quickly once Safe Network added the capacity of staff members on the ground with a specific remit to develop delivery partnerships.
2. Face-to-face support is key to engage groups like supplementary schools who operate outside of many mainstream support mechanisms. Online training and web-based resources are not sufficient to engage groups who might be unfamiliar with UK systems, and for whom English is often not a first language. In such cases even resources as accessible as Safe Network's need tailoring.

'I have had to change the materials to work with volunteers from immigrant communities. They are good, clear but these volunteers are coming from a different level, a totally different starting point ... unfamiliar with the language but also with the systems, with how things work ... it needs additional input from me to make it work' [NRCSE Champion]

3. Training has worked best where LSCB staff were involved and engaged. Some LSCBs were not able to send someone along to the joint training offered, or did not see a need for training other than their own even where this was not always accessible or appropriate for supplementary schools. NRCSE believes where there has been LSCB engagement in the work, there are other important benefits, including improved communication and understanding that works both ways.