

# Effective Risk Assessment Processes during the Covid-10 pandemic - Learning from Nottinghamshire & Lincolnshire

## #7 of the Responding to Covid-19 Series

***Based on a session delivered by Chris Jones, SEND Strategic Lead for Nottinghamshire County Council and John O'Connor, Interim Head of SEND at Lincolnshire County Council***

### Learning from Nottinghamshire

#### **Involve young people and families in risk assessments**

In Nottinghamshire, the County Council asked all education settings, including Early Years and Further Education settings, to provide summaries of completed risk assessments for all vulnerable children and young people – including children and young people with SEND and those with a named Social Worker.

The focus of the risk assessments was on attendance and any risk of not attending. Guidance for schools highlighted the need to involve the child or young person and the family in assessments, and for risk assessments to be dynamic.

All risk assessments were RAG rated and collated by a central team in the County Council (using the MOSAIC digital case system). If a young person was rated red, the Council sought further details and passed this information on to the most appropriate support worker, for example a named social worker.

Where issues relating to health provision or increased health needs could not be resolved directly with providers, an escalation process via the Designated Clinical Officer was made available. In total, nearly 6,000 risk assessment summaries have been returned to date.

#### **Person-centred conversations**

Once the temporary changes to the SEND Legislation were introduced, structured conversations with parents carers and young people began, and these conversations have now been completed for all children and young people from early years setting up to Year 11.

The conversations were person-centred and focused on the child's wellbeing, with open questions around how they were feeling and what lockdown has been like for them. Discussions also focussed on provision as defined in an EHC plan and any changes to that (from Section 42); again responses were RAG rated. This supported easy identification of problems and enabled the Council



to follow up quickly with settings and/or health providers, with an escalation process through the DCO to commissioners available if necessary.

During these conversations families were able to raise issues, including:

- Support required to returning to an education setting, especially around anxiety (both for their child and parents)
- Impact of challenging behaviours on the family – some children and young people have settled as time has gone by, whilst others have escalated their behaviours
- The lack of communication from schools– predominantly mainstream schools (the LA was then able to follow these up)
- Lack of differentiation in work set by setting (again, these concerns were followed up by LA and support offered)
- Existing issues prior to Covid -19 that were still impacting the family

## Impact

Nottingham County Council found that families really welcomed the engagement which took place around the risk assessments, particularly the time spent discussing their concerns and the way conversations took a person-centred approach, rather than being process driven.

This work was also felt to have improved partnership working, as concerns and issues were shared and actions taken across-teams, with daily collaboration needed. It also led to an increased and improved use of technology across teams.

This work has had a long-term impact on how services will be delivered in the future: the focus will now be on the child or young person rather than the process.

## Learning from Lincolnshire

### Working directly with families

In Lincolnshire County Council a slightly different approach was taken, with the SEND team going directly to families rather than going through education settings in order to produce their RAG rated risk assessments. SEND caseworkers across Lincolnshire were quickly taken offline so they could phone parents of children with an EHC Plan to find out what the arrangements were and how they were feeling. They thought that schools may feel too busy trying to understand and adapt to the new arrangements and that little guidance on risk assessment had been provided to schools.

The SEND focused on how families felt the Covid-19 pandemic was affecting them, asking similarly open questions around how they felt, if they had any particular worries, and how they felt their child's needs were being met. The aim was to assess the overall risk of needs not being met whilst a child or young person at



home and to ascertain whether it would be better for the child to be back in their educational setting. The calls also set up direct contact between the named SEN Case Worker and the family. As in Nottinghamshire, the MOSAIC case management system was used provide a read across all data held.



In the two week period between 23 March and 3 April, 5,500 calls were made directly to families.

All risk assessments were RAG rated and these were held internally and not shared with settings. Less than ten young people were identified as needing direct further action in the form of a follow-up with their education setting, and in these cases all ten children subsequently went back into school.

This work was very positively received by families, who were pleased to know that the Local Authority “cared that much” and wanted to know if they were safe and content.

### **Ensure process is dynamic and responsive**

This was very much a dynamic, rather than a static, process. At the start 15% of ‘vulnerable’ children in Lincolnshire were in school and schools risk assessed all children at home. They ensured that if a child’s situation had changed then the risk assessment grew to involve a caseworker and/or a social worker. This allowed the Local Authority to develop a snapshot with the means of continuously updating the risk status of any child or young person. The onus was put on the education setting to report any child or young person who had not returned to, rather than directly put pressure on the child or parents for them to return.

### **Next steps**

The process was reviewed when it was announced which selected year groups would be returning to school, and is being updated to meet two core principles:

1. The update will be proportionate to risk – the children and young people who are known about and where there are concerns exist have been flagged
2. The Local Authority will not ask for any information it cannot act on

The DfE daily survey reports that 42% of Lincolnshire’s ‘vulnerable’ children are now in school. However the Local Authority has identified that they are now not aware of who these children are.

In response, they have set up a new process with schools. This will involve a proportionate risk survey in schools that seeks minimal information for maximum effect and provides a broad brush picture. The process is auto-set to keep it streamlined and reduce the impact on capacity e.g. if the answer to whether a child is in school is ‘yes’, then there are no further questions. Please see the table below for an example:

Please answer the below questions when highlighted in yellow.					
National Curriculum Year Group	Is the child in school?	Pupil has left school and is no longer on your school roll?	Has the school offered the child a place but parents have chosen not to send them to school?	Is the school maintaining its risk assessment on the child?	Is the child currently not attending due to illness?
R	Yes				
1	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
2	Yes				
3	Yes				
4	Yes				
5	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
6	Yes				

This new process is already working well in Primary Schools who have had phased returns and therefore relatively stable numbers attending, and has been established in Special Schools, Alternative Provision, PRUs and secondary settings.

## Key learning:

- For some children and young people, the change in approaches and remote learning has been of benefit and some Alternative Providers and FE are reporting an increase in both attendance and engagement which has been picked up through the risk assessment process
- Blended learning approaches need to be built into future delivery options
- Remote working has enabled Annual Reviews to be completed effectively with good family involvement, and has offered the opportunity to catch up on back logs
- Mediation around 'Best Endeavours' has worked well remotely and families have been very supportive of meeting on 'common ground'
- Both County Councils were involved in supporting education settings and families to identify, negotiate and to put in place anticipatory actions to enable certain young people to return to school where there had been some reluctance to re-admit, including where this was because of behaviours that challenge e.g. spitting
- Above all, both areas used the risk assessment process as an opportunity to hear from families and the core message that 'your child matters' has worked well to support families through the crisis.

