

Case 09 Issue 39 – Child sexual abuse		LEARNING THE LESSONS
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Safer Schools Officer's' handling of abuse allegations

Safeguarding concerns raised and not acted upon by Safer Schools Officers raising issues about:

- *Recording of Concerns*
- *Taking claims seriously*

This case is relevant to the following areas:

Public protection



Information management



Overview of incident

Mrs A, a member of staff at School A received a telephone call from the safeguarding lead at School B about some information she had received from pupils at her school. Pupils at School B had disclosed that their friend Miss B, who was 12-years-old, had been in a bedroom in a caravan with an older boy, Mr C who was aged 15/16 years old. The pupils at School B said that Miss B was sexually active and so was Mr C.

Mrs A sought advice from her manager, Mrs D about this call. Mrs D, along with PCSO E spoke to Miss B about these concerns. Mrs D described her recollection of Miss B during this conversation as being “evasive and giving very little information.” Mrs D said she asked PCSO E to attend the meeting due to the safeguarding concerns for Miss B. PCSO E was a Safer Schools Officer at the school, and his role was to assist the school in safeguarding, as well as assist with criminal activity.

Mrs D's assessment at the end of the meeting was that Miss B had not disclosed anything at that point which she felt was a crime. She said Miss B had told her that some were smoking and drinking in the caravan. Mrs D could not recall PCSO E contributing to the meeting and she felt that he may have had some further questions to put to Miss B given his understanding of the law.

Mrs D set herself an action to contact Miss B father to advise him of the conversation. There was no evidence to suggest PCSO E was to undertake any actions. The school is initially the lead agency in dealing with 'crime' or behavioural occurrences in line with school protocols.

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PCSO E said that following the meeting he formed the view that the allegations about Miss B were untrue as Miss B had denied them. He said for this reason he did not put an intelligence log on the force system. Evidence indicated that, following the meeting, PCSO E completed a search of force systems for the names of Miss B and Mr C, neither of which brought up any intelligence.

PCSO E accepted that the majority of his work was in relation to low level anti-social behaviour and criminality and as such his experience of child sexual exploitation (CSE) was minimal. The IOPC concluded that PCSO E would benefit from some training with regards to safeguarding, in particular around the signs of abuse and exploitation.

PC F, another Safer Schools Officer, also completed a search for Mr C and this returned a name, address and date of birth. Both PC F and PCSO E said this was an incident they would have discussed as part of their regular Friday meeting about ongoing issues at School A. There was no evidence that PC F took any further action in relation to this.

Around two months later Mrs A heard a rumour that a girl from a neighbouring school had sex with a boy at a party held at Miss B's house. Mrs A recognised Miss B's name and passed this information to PCSO E. Mrs A said did this due to the previous CPOMS (a system used in schools for recording safeguarding and pastoral issues)] logs about open houses and rumours of underage sexual incidents at Miss B's house. CPOMS showed the school had concerns for Miss B in relation to possibly being at risk of CSE. There was no evidence to suggest the concerns the school had between the previous incident and this incident were shared with PCSO E and PC F.

Mrs A said PCSO E attended the school wellbeing office for an unrelated matter. Whilst there she relayed the rumours to him. The CPOMS log suggested that the request was for PCSO E to contact the other schools to ascertain if the rumours were true. Mrs A told the IOPC that PCSO E had advised her that he would speak to Miss B's father to ascertain if the rumours were true. This was not recorded in the CPOMs entry.

PCSO E told the IOPC that Miss B's name was never mentioned by Mrs A. PCSO E recalled advising Mrs A that he would contact PC F to ask him which Safer Schools Officers covered the other schools. PCSO E did not make any record of the request by Mrs A other than the email chain demonstrating the enquiries made. PC F was also in the wellbeing office during this time and also said he could not recall Miss B's name being mentioned.

However, force systems showed that PCSO E did carry out a search for Miss B's name after attending the wellbeing office.

PC F provided the IOPC with an email from PCSO E asking who the Safer Schools Officers were at two different local schools. However, there was no mention within the email that the alleged incident took place at Miss B's house. Later, PC F forwarded the email to PCSO H and asked for her to speak with Ms G.

The IOPC observed that there was no process in place to share the outcome of agreed tasks between the Safer School Officers and School A. Mrs A was never made aware that PCSO E had contacted the other schools.

Around two weeks later Mrs I from the School A attendance team put a safeguarding concern from into the wellbeing team about Miss B and Ms J. Mrs I had become very concerned about Miss B and Ms J's attendance at school. She said that both girls were regularly late and often

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failed to attend lessons throughout the day. She said rumours had been spreading about them having sex with older boys and men.

Mrs I's concerns continued the following day as both Miss B and Ms J failed to turn up to school. Miss B's father told Mrs I that they had both stayed at Ms J's house. Mrs I decided to request the assistance of PCSO E and PC F.

Mrs I told the IOPC that she went to find PCSO E and PC F in their office. She said she could not recall speaking to them, however she sent an email shortly after, at around 10.30am, which said she had now passed the details to PC F to do home visits. Mrs I said this was an accurate reflection of her liaison with PC F and that she would have given PC F a physical copy of the girls' records. She said she would not have just left them in the office. PC F said he could not recall the conversation with Mrs I but did not dispute that it may have taken place. PC F was dealing with another incident at the time Mrs I came to speak with him about Miss B and Ms J. The incident log indicated that PC F had dealt with this incident by approximately 10.50am.

Miss B and Ms J subsequently arrived at school at around 11.15am and as such PC F was not required to conduct the home visit.

Mrs A requested Ms J to attend the wellbeing office and explained the concerns staff had about some girls being abused by older boys. Mrs A recorded in CPOMS: "Without hesitation [Ms J] said you're on about [Miss B] aren't you Miss?" Ms J went on to say that Miss B "does that stuff with those boys". Ms J went on to disclose the names of six girls who were potentially being abused by ten boys from another school. Mrs A wrote the names down on a piece of paper while Ms J was talking.

Following this, Mrs A called Miss B into the wellbeing office. Ms J also remained in the office. Miss B confirmed that the details Ms J had disclosed were true.

Mrs A called PC F and requested his assistance urgently. PC F attended the wellbeing office straight away. Mrs A told the IOPC she gave PC F information that Ms J had made disclosures about boys in another school and that she was concerned Miss B was having sex with the boys, which Miss B had confirmed herself. She said she explained to PC F that Miss B was scared as she felt the boys were "untouchable".

PC F told the IOPC that at no point did Mrs A tell him why he had been called into the meeting. His recollection was that Mrs A tried to get Miss B to talk to him but she did not say anything. However, it was cited in the CPOMS log how PC F and Mrs A spoke to Miss B about the risks of unprotected sex with multiple boys and that she was below the legal age of consent.

PC F's explanation for this was that he presumed he had been called in to speak to Miss B for a reason and as such, as a police officer, spoke to her as a potential victim or witness. He said he considered what the worst case scenario would be for a 12 year old girl and considered this to be sexual offences. It was for this reason he said he spoke to her about not being able to legally consent to sex.

There was no evidence that PC F recorded any of the information discussed during this meeting.

PC F commented that Miss B and Ms J were laughing throughout the meeting and that he felt this meant they were not taking the situation seriously. Mrs A said she felt this demonstrated Miss B's nerves coming across. She said Miss B was quite immature and didn't understand she

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was a victim of abuse, but that she was petrified about the boys. Mrs A said she didn't believe PC F saw Miss B as a victim in the same way. Mrs A also recorded in her statement that recalled PC F making a comment about Miss B and Ms J laughing "that insinuated that she got some enjoyment out of it and that she was a willing participant."

PC F was adamant that had Mrs A provided him the information then he would have dealt with the incident. He said he would have made some notes and that the follow up he would have needed to do was not a huge amount and could have been done in a couple of hours.

National Crime Recording Standards (NCRS) Annex B states that if there has been a serious incident, an officer should use the flow chart to make a decision as to whether an incident should be recorded as a crime or whether to follow school protocols. It was evident that PC F did not follow NCRS standards on this occasion.

A few days later Mrs A recorded in CPOMS that she had spoken with Miss B a couple of times in relation to the disclosures made previously. The evidence appeared to suggest that Miss B did not want to report the abuse to the police. Mrs A noted on the CPOMS record that she intended to contact PC F to arrange a meeting with Miss B's father due to these concerns.

Mrs A called PC F to remind him to meet with Miss B's father and made the necessary arrangements to facilitate this in the next couple of days at a time PC F said he was available.

The meeting took place in the wellbeing office with PC F and Mrs A in attendance. However, Miss B's father failed to turn up as did Miss B's Barnardos worker. PC F told the IOPC in interview that at some point he had been told that Miss B "can sort of turn on the tears and wrap her dad round her little finger." PC F's view was that Miss B may have told her father not to come to the meeting. PC F suggested to Mrs A that they call Miss B to the office to ask her this and also to check her mobile phone.

PC F spoke to Miss B about his concerns – that he thought she may have called her father and told him not to come to the meeting. She advised him that she did not have her phone. Later, Miss B's father called Mrs A to confirm he would not be attending due to work commitments.

PC F's recollection of this meeting was at odds with Mrs A's recollection. Mrs A recorded on CPOMS that "we spoke to [Miss B]... we explained to [Miss B] that she was a victim... we spoke about exploitation and grooming". Mrs A told the IOPC that Miss B gave specific names and locations where incidents had occurred. PC F did not record any information about this meeting. Mrs A advised Miss B that she would be making a referral to the CSE hub.

PC F disputed Mrs A's recollection of events. He said he recalled Miss B being upset but said this was because she was worried her father would ground her and stop her going to the cinema with friends. PC F recalled the meeting being short as Miss B did not disclose anything of concern. He said he did not make notes as there was nothing to write about. He suggested that Miss B made the disclosures to Mrs A after he had left the meeting.

Mrs D said she recalled PC F making a comment about Miss B "enjoying it or enjoying the attention" and said she believed Mrs A would have had conversations with PC F about Miss B being the victim of sexual offences prior to putting the referral into the CSE hub.

The following month, a referral was received from the school by a social worker in the CSE hub. This was immediately investigated by the CSE team and as a result 17 victims and 23 suspects were identified.

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Had PC F or PCSO E reported these incidents to a supervisor, recorded a crime or submitted intelligence it would have flagged that one of the suspects was a suspect in 3 rapes on under 16s in the previous six months and a suspect in a sexual offence relation to indecent images of a young female engaged in a sex act.

Type of investigation

IOPC independent investigation.

Outcomes for officers and staff

PCSO E

1. PCSO E was dealt with through Unsatisfactory Performance Procedures in respect of the allegations that he:
 - Failed to ensure safeguarding measures were put in place, share information, or respond to potential offences after learning a child age 12 was sexually active with a named male;
 - Failed to ensure safeguarding measures were put in place, share information, or respond to potential offences after learning a Year 7 pupil had sex with a named male.

PC F

2. PC F, the Safer Schools Officer who dealt with the incident, was found to have a case to answer for gross misconduct in respect of the allegations he failed to ensure safeguarding measures were put in place, sharing information or respond to potential offences after learning that a child age 12 was having sex and was being repeatedly sexually abuse by older males and that other girls were being abused in the same manner, by the same offenders. PC F received a final written warning as a result.

Questions to consider

Questions for policy makers/managers

1. What training does your force give to Safer Schools Officers to help them spot the signs of abuse and child sexual exploitation?
2. How does your force prepare Safer Schools Officers for working with young people?
3. Does the training your force gives to Safer Schools Officers equip officers to look beyond young people's behaviour, and avoid making judgements, where the young person's behaviour might be affected by their vulnerability, age, understanding or maturity?
4. Does your force set out clear expectations of how schools should share safeguarding concerns with Safer Schools Officers?

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5. Would your force have expected the safer schools officer to record the intelligence identified and bring this to the attention of a supervisor?
6. How would you expect safer schools officers to manage any actions arising from contact with school staff, students or parents?
7. How does your force work with schools to capture feedback from them on safer schools officers that they work with regularly, to help identify any concerns or development needs for officers?
8. How does your force make sure safer schools officers work within wider safeguarding processes to ensure clear decision making and ensure that action is taken within multi-agency plans?

Questions for police officers/staff

9. What else would you have done to safeguard the girl(s) after you became aware of the concerns raised?
10. As a Safer Schools Officer would you routinely update school staff when actions have been progressed?
11. When speaking to children where do you record their disclosures and why is it important to document and record information shared by children?