Stort Valley Schools Trust

Policy & Procedures for Safeguarding

April 2025
(Appendix 3 updated Nov 2025)

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Section 1

Details of the place of worship / organisation

Name of Organisation: Stort Valley Schools Trust

Charity Number: 1001619

Address: Stort Valley Schools Trust, c/o Sawbridgeworth Evangelical Congregational Church, London Road, Sawbridgeworth, CM21 9EH

General Email address: enquiries@svst.org.uk

Senior Leader: Katie Haynes

Senior Leader Contact Email: kt.stortvalley@gmail.com

Chair of Trustees: John Walford

Chair of Trustees Contact Email: John.walford@ntlworld.com

Safeguarding Lead Trustee: Margaret Sherwin

Safeguarding Trustee Email: safeguarding@svst.org.uk

Membership of organisation: Thirtyone:eight

Helpline number: Thirtyone:eight - 0303 003 1111

Regulators: Charities Commission

Insurance Company: Ansvar Insurance

The following is a brief description of our work:

The Stort Valley Schools Trust (SVST) is a movement made up of trustees, volunteers and paid school workers. We believe that all human beings are of equal worth in the sight of God and aim to follow Biblical principles in all that we do.
Therefore:

- We commit ourselves to the nurture, protection, and general welfare of all; especially children and adults at risk of harm. In so doing we will work, in partnership and as appropriate, with parents, carers, statutory agencies and other organisations.
- It is the responsibility of each one of us to protect children and adults at risk of harm from all forms of abuse and to report any disclosures of abuse in addition to suspicions or concerns.

- In order to achieve this, we are committed to supporting, resourcing and training those who work with children and adults at risk of harm. We will provide appropriate supervision, recognise mutual accountability and commit to an annual review of our safeguarding policy, procedures and practices.
- SVST has adopted the above principles; all trustees, volunteers and school workers are presented with a copy and expected to follow the procedures and guidelines as set out in this document.

Section 2: Introduction

Good governance helps an organisation prevent abuse and means it can respond quickly and with integrity when concerns arise. Central to this is a strong working relationship between our schools' workers and our trustees and between our schools' workers and our volunteers. The Board of Trustees is appointed to have independent authority and legal responsibility for a charity and has a critical role in decision making and compliance as well as setting the values, standards and behaviours of the organisation.

The standards and behaviours may be referred to as the culture of the organisation or "the way we do things around here". Culture can be shaped in both negative and positive ways.
"The culture of a charity goes beyond mere compliance with legal and regulatory demands. Charity governance is most effective when it provides assurances not just that legal requirements are met, but that the behaviour of people working for the charity, and those who come into contact with it, is proper and ethical. Culture, alongside good governance, can be pivotal to whether a charity achieves its stated object" (ICSA The Governance Institute, 2017)

Positions of Trust

All adults working with children, young people and vulnerable adults are in a position of trust. All those in positions of trust need to understand the power this can give them over those they care for and the responsibility they have because of this relationship.
It is vital that all workers ensure they do not, even unknowingly, use their position of power and authority inappropriately. They should always maintain professional boundaries and avoid behaviour which could be misinterpreted.
As of April 2022 it is illegal (England and Wales) (Northern Ireland) for those in Positions of Trust in a faith setting to engage in sexual activity with a 16 or 17 year old under their care or supervision.

The following Safeguarding Policy and Statement aims, to not only meet the requirements of ensuring a safe environment for those accessing activities in our organisation but to also build an open culture where:

- those who lead do so by example
- that all are committed to the safeguarding of the children and young people we work with
- those that work or volunteer are safely recruited and trained for their roles.
- there are accountability structures
- there are clear codes of conduct

- the values of the organisation are embedded in its day-to-day actions and behaviours of its people
- there is open communication

Our commitment

As Trustees, workers and volunteers, we recognise the need to provide a safe and caring environment for children, young people and adults. We acknowledge that children, young people and adults can be the victims of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and neglect. We accept the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Human Rights, which states that everyone is entitled to "all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status". We also concur with the Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that children should be able to develop their full potential, free from hunger and want, neglect and abuse. They have a right to be protected from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s), or any other person who has care of the child." We have therefore adopted the procedures set out in this safeguarding policy in accordance with statutory guidance. We are committed to building constructive links with statutory and voluntary agencies involved in safeguarding.

The policy and any attached practice guidelines are based on the ten safeguarding standards published by Thirtyone:eight (thiryoneeight.org/ten-standards)

Section 3

Prevention

Understanding abuse and neglect

Defining child abuse or abuse against an adult is a difficult and complex issue. A person may abuse by inflicting harm or failing to prevent harm. Children and adults in need of protection may be abused within a family, an institution or a community setting. Very often the abuser is known or in a trusted relationship with the child or adult.

To safeguard those in our places of worship and organisations we adhere to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and have as our starting point as a definition of abuse, Article 19:

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those

who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

Also, for adults the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights with particular reference to Article 5:

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Detailed definitions, and signs and indicators of abuse, as well as how to respond to a disclosure of abuse, are included here in our policy in APPENDIX 2.

In addition, all schools' workers, volunteers and trustees are required to read Part 1 of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) on a yearly basis, when the updated version is available (September of each year).

Safer recruitment

The Leadership will ensure all workers will be appointed, trained, supported and supervised in accordance with government guidance on safe recruitment. This includes ensuring that:

· There is a written job description / person specification for the post

· Those applying have completed an application form

· Those short listed have been interviewed

· Safeguarding has been discussed at interview

· Written references have been obtained, and followed up where appropriate

· A self-declaration form and disclosure and barring check (DBS) has been completed where necessary (we will comply with Code of Practice requirements concerning the fair treatment of applicants and the handling of information)

· Qualifications where relevant have been verified

· A suitable training programme is provided for the successful applicant

· The applicant has completed a probationary period

· The applicant has been given a copy of the organisation's safeguarding policy and knows how to report concerns.

Safeguarding training

The Leadership is committed to on-going safeguarding training and development opportunities for all workers, developing a culture of awareness of safeguarding issues to help protect everyone. All our workers will receive induction training and undertake recognised safeguarding training on a regular basis. For workers, this safeguarding training will take place in the school settings within which they are working for that academic year.

The Leadership will also ensure that children and adults with care and support needs are provided with information on where to get help and advice in relation to abuse, discrimination, bullying or any other matter where they have a concern.

Practice Guidelines and Management of Workers – Codes of Conduct

As an organisation working with children, young people and adults with care and support needs we wish to operate and promote good working practice. This will enable workers to run activities safely, develop good relationships and minimise the risk of false or unfounded accusation.

As a Leadership we are committed to supporting all workers and ensuring they receive support and supervision. All workers have been issued with a code of conduct (appendix 1) towards children, young people and adults with care and support needs, and will be given clear expectations about what is expected of them both within their job role and outside of their role. They will receive further training as necessary.

At Stort Valley Schools Trust, we adhere to specific good practice guidelines for all activities we are involved in. As a small charity operating solely within school settings, we work closely with schools to ensure that all necessary procedures are followed to ensure the safety and well-being of the children and young people we engage with.

In line with our commitment to safeguarding, we rely on the school's internal systems, processes, and procedures for risk assessments, consent forms, and other required documentation. However, for the sake of clarity and as a helpful reference, we have included template forms in appendix 2 that may be used to support our work with schools. Please note that these templates are basic forms and should be adapted in accordance with the specific requirements and protocols of the individual school.

<u>Section 4:</u>

Responding to allegations of abuse

Under no circumstances should a volunteer or worker carry out their own investigation into an allegation or suspicion of abuse. Follow procedures as below:

- Documenting a concern

The worker or volunteer should make a report of the concern in the following way:

The person in receipt of allegations or suspicions of abuse should report concerns as soon as possible to the DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead) or deputy DSL at the school concerned. A list of names and contact details of DSLs at our partner schools is listed in Appendix A. These staff are nominated by the school leadership to act on their behalf in dealing with the allegation or suspicion of neglect or abuse, including referring the matter on to the statutory authorities.

- In the absence of the DSL or if the suspicions in any way involve the DSL, then the report should be made to the school Deputy Safeguarding Lead (see Appendix A).

If the suspicions implicate both the Safeguarding Lead and the Deputy, then the report should be made in the first instance to:

Thirtyone:eight, PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ Tel: 0303 003 1111

Alternatively contact social services or the police. The Stort Valley Schools Trust Safeguarding Lead should also be made aware that a disclosure has been made and action has been taken. Details of the disclosure should not be shared.

- The Safeguarding Lead should contact the appropriate agency or they may first ring the thirtyone:eight helpline for advice. They should then contact social services in the area the child or adult lives.

Name of local authority: Essex County Council Children's Social Services

Tel: 03330 139 797
Out of hours Tel: 0845 606 1212

Website address: childrens.safeguarding@essex.gov.uk

· Disclosures made to mentors/workers in school need to follow the school procedures as above.

· Any allegation made against a Stort Valley Schools Trust worker or volunteer needs to be reported to the Stort Valley Schools Trust Safeguarding Trustee – See Section 4a.

Section 4a

Allegations against Stort Valley Schools Trust workers or volunteers:

- The SVST Safeguarding Lead may need to inform others depending on the circumstances and/or nature of the concern. This may include:

- Chair of Trustees who may need to liaise with the insurance company or the charity commission to report a serious incident.
- Designated officer or LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) if the allegation concerns a worker or volunteer working with someone under 18.

- Suspicions must not be discussed with anyone other than those nominated above. A written record of the concerns should be made in accordance with these procedures and kept in a secure place.
- Whilst allegations or suspicions of abuse will normally be reported to the Safeguarding Lead, the absence of the Safeguarding Lead or Deputy should not delay referral to Social Services, the Police or taking advice from Thirtyone:eight.
- The Trustees will support the Safeguarding Lead/Deputy in their role and accept that any information they may have in their possession will be shared in a strictly limited way on a need-to-know basis.
- It is, of course, the right of any individual as a citizen to make a direct referral to the safeguarding agencies or seek advice from Thirtyone:eight, although the Trustees hope that members of organisation will use this procedure. If, however, the individual with the concern feels that the Safeguarding Lead/Deputy has not responded appropriately, or where they have a disagreement with the Safeguarding Lead(s) as to the appropriateness of a referral they are free to contact an outside agency direct. We hope by making this statement that the Trustees demonstrate their commitment to effective safeguarding and the protection of all those who are vulnerable.

The role of the safeguarding lead/ deputy is to collate and clarify the precise details of the allegation or suspicion and pass this information on to statutory agencies who have a legal duty to investigate.

Allegations of abuse against a person who works with children/young people

If an accusation is made against a SVST worker (whether a volunteer or paid member of staff) whilst following the procedure outlined above, the Safeguarding Lead, in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) procedures will:

- Liaise with Children's Social Services in regards to the suspension of the worker
- Make a referral to a designated officer formerly called a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) whose function is to handle all allegations against adults who work with children and young people whether in a paid or voluntary capacity.
- Make a referral to Disclosure and Barring Service for consideration of the person being placed on the barred list for working with children or adults with additional care and support needs. This decision should be informed by the LADO if they are involved.

- **Section 5**

Pastoral Care

Supporting those affected by abuse

The Leadership is committed to offering pastoral care, working with statutory agencies as appropriate, and support to all those who have been affected by abuse who have contact with or are part of our organisation.

Working with offenders and those who may pose a risk

When someone attending the organisation is known to have abused children, is under investigation, or is known to be a risk to adults with care and support needs; the Leadership will supervise the individual concerned and offer pastoral care, but in its safeguarding commitment to the protection of children and adults with care and support needs, set boundaries for that person, which they will be expected to keep. These boundaries will be based on a risk assessment and through consultation with appropriate parties.

Adoption of the policy

This policy was agreed by the leadership and will be reviewed annually on:

Signed by: J Walford Position: Chair of Trustees

Signed by: M Sherwin Position: Trustee (Safeguarding)

Date: 3.4.25.

Appendix 1

Stort Valley Schools Trust Safeguarding Code of Conduct

We hope that you will find this guidance helpful. We want all our volunteers to feel supported and equipped to deal with any serious issues which may arise during mentoring sessions. If you are ever unsure or would like help or support we are always here for you.

What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding refers to:
The safety and care of children or vulnerable people.
Making, keeping and passing on to the appropriate person a written record of incidents, disclosures and concerns.
Laws which keep children and vulnerable people safe. This may include court injunctions or supervised visits etc.
All people working in schools need to be familiar with "Keeping Children Safe in Education, Part 1. A copy can be found at:

Keeping children safe in education 2025 part one Information for school college staf f.pdf

What do schools have to do?
Every school has to follow safeguarding procedures as a matter of law.
Any concerns or incidents have to be recorded and kept as school records. This will be using online platforms such as CPOMS or Smoothwall or in the case of schools using a paper system – pink safeguarding forms.
Every school has a designated safeguarding officer to whom all incidents are passed. Schools have to inform agencies such as social services or police when necessary. They must also discuss safeguarding incidents with parents/guardians.

What do we do as mentors?
We should explain when we first get to know our mentees that whilst our conversations are confidential, if they tell us anything that makes us feel concerned for their safety, we will be passing that onto the pastoral team. We can do that for them, they can do it alone (which we must check up on) or we can go with them to speak to someone.

We should keep our own notes in our folders which are kept in school. These should never be removed from school premises. These serve to refresh our memories of conversations and circumstances. They are not safeguarding records.
Every school will have its own safeguarding policy and you need to have read this. A copy will be given to you by your SVST Mentor.

Any safeguarding concerns or disclosures made to us must be passed onto the school for them to record and retain. If a child makes a disclosure to you, or you are worried for their safety and well- being, you should first speak to the head of pastoral care at the school. They should listen and record the concerns on a safeguarding form. You may be asked to sign this. If you are not satisfied with the response, you should then speak to the school safeguarding officer. We can support you if you are concerned that an issue has not been dealt with appropriately. We can also support you if you need to talk confidentially or would like moral support. It can be upsetting and emotionally draining if you are involved in a safeguarding issue. Please ask for help if you need it.

What constitutes a safeguarding issue?

The question to ask yourself is: *Is the child's safety or well-being at risk?* If you feel it is, pass on your concern.

Here are some examples which you must report:

- Any mention or suspicion of physical, sexual or emotional abuse.
- Any marks or bruises on a child which they cannot explain or which concern you.
- Any concern that the child is being neglected physically or emotionally.
- Any sexual activity involving a person under the age of 16 – even if consensual. This includes the making, taking and passing on of explicit images or language on a phone, computer or camera.
- Any illegal drug-taking.
- Any concern that the child is at risk from FGM. Unlike other disclosures, if a concern or disclosure relates to FGM the individual has a responsibility to report this directly to the police.
- Any consumption of alcohol which is illegal, excessive or has rendered the child at risk.
- Any concern that a child is being groomed, manipulated or bribed into sexual exploitation.
- Any concern that a child is being groomed into a gang or drug culture.
- Any concern that a child has been involved in any crime, or has been carrying a weapon.
- Any concern that a child is vulnerable to or experiencing radicalisation
- Any concern that a child is self-harming, for example cutting themselves.
- Any concern that a child is struggling with eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia.
- Any concern that a child has made attempts to take their life, for example, taking pills, cutting wrists, or any other method of suicide. This includes any repetitive thoughts or planning of suicide.

It is worth remembering that whilst you may feel an incident is small or not very serious, the keeping of records builds up a picture of a child's circumstances and whether they are at risk. A growing folder of many small concerns may mean there is a more serious problem which needs to be looked into. If you have any doubt please speak out.

What should I do if a child makes a disclosure to me?

A disclosure is when a child tells you, intentionally or less consciously that they are being abused (physically, emotionally, sexually or being neglected).

Listen carefully. You can ask questions but don't probe too much. Don't ask leading questions. For example, you could say; 'Thank you for telling me this. I am going to give you space to talk.'

If you feel it's appropriate you might say. 'You're very brave to share this with me. Thank you for trusting me. Did this happen recently? Where were you?' But don't begin to 'investigate' or delve for details.

2. Do not promise to keep the information confidential.

It is the **law** that if you are told that a child is being abused you tell the relevant authorities. In the case as mentors, it is the DSL in the school in which you are based.

3. 'This is a safe space to talk. But if you tell me that someone is hurting you, we will need to tell (pastoral lead) so they can look after you.'

When the conversation is over you can either go with the child to the appropriate safeguarding representative in the school, or they may want you to speak for them. It is crucial that you do this **straight away**. It may help you to take a moment to write down (without using names) **exactly** what was said to you and pass this on. Do not keep this note, give it to the school safeguarding representative.

Make sure you are sensitive with how you begin this conversation with the staff member. Who is in the room? Are there other pupils in earshot? Is the safeguarding representative ready to hear you?

'Could (child's name) and I speak with you confidentially, please? There is something important he/she has told me.'

4. Support the child during this conversation. Let the safeguarding representative take the lead, it is ultimately their role and responsibility and they will follow the school procedure.

5. Affirm the child and say you will be there to see them again soon.

6. Do not discuss what the child has told you outside of the person who is your designated mentor support and the DSL in school. Do not share names, even in confidence.

7. Ask for support for yourself. It is upsetting and distressing to hear a child has been abused. It may bring up issues for you which you need to talk about. Ask for help if you need it.

8. The school will complete a safeguarding form. They may update you on what happens next, but they are not obliged to give you any details. If you feel that the disclosure has not been taken seriously or has not been handled well you should speak to the school safeguarding

officer, usually the deputy head or head teacher. Tell your SVST point of contact and we will support you.

I confirm that I have read:

- SVST Safeguarding Policy
- SVST Code of Conduct
- Keeping Children Safe in Education, Part one
- The School's Safeguarding Policy

School worker point of contact: Signature:

Volunteer: Signature:

Date:

Appendix 2

Safeguarding in Schools – further information & example consent forms

Further information:

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families and carers has a role to play in safeguarding children. School staff are particularly important as they are in a position to identify concerns early and provide help for children to prevent concerns from escalating. All school and college staff a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn.

Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2018)

Safeguarding in Essex

https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/safeguarding/pages/safeguarding.aspx

Please visit the page above for a really helpful resource. This is information that schools are given. If you would like help on a specific area of safeguarding e.g. domestic violence, you can follow the link and find support/advice for that issue.

Safeguarding information for **visitors to schools**- click on the link (under 'notice board') and you can read/print the advice.

Essex Safeguarding Children Board http://www.escb.co.uk/

Another useful guide and overview:

http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/training/zz_content_include/e-assessment/documents.Safeguarding_children_Level_1_factsheet.pdf

Example consent forms:

1. Risk Assessment Form for Activities in Schools:

Risk assessments are essential for identifying potential hazards and ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to protect children and young people during activities. We encourage schools to work with us to complete the risk assessment process for each specific activity or event.

Template: Simple Risk Assessment Form for Working in Schools with Young People

Activity/Task:	Date:	Location:
Hazard	**Risk**	**Control Measures**

Example: Sports activity	Possible injury	Ensure adequate supervision, first aid kit on hand, proper equipment check, etc.
Example: Arts & crafts	Allergic reactions	Check for allergies in advance, use non-toxic materials

2. Parental Consent Form:

In accordance with safeguarding protocols, written consent from a parent or guardian is required for any activity that involves children and young people. This form ensures that parents are fully aware of the planned activities and any associated risks.

Template: Parental Consent Form

Parental Consent Form for [Activity/Program Name]

Dear Parent/Guardian,

[Your Charity Name] is conducting a [brief description of the activity] at [School Name]. The activity will take place on [Date] at [Location]. We are writing to ask for your consent for your child to participate.

Details of the activity:
- Date: [Insert Date]
- Time: [Insert Time]
- Location: [Insert Location]
- Brief Description of Activity: [Insert description]

Please complete the consent form below and return it to the school by [Insert Deadline].

Parental Consent:

I, the undersigned, give permission for my child, [Child's Full Name], to participate in the [Activity/Program Name] at [School Name] on [Date].

I understand the nature of the activity and confirm that I have been informed of the details, including any associated risks. I agree to the supervision arrangements and any first aid procedures that may be necessary.

Emergency contact number(s) during the activity: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Emergency Medical Information (Optional):
- Medical conditions/allergies: _____
- Any other information the school or charity should be aware of: _____

We thank you for your cooperation and support in ensuring the safety and well-being of all involved.

Sincerely,
[Your Charity Name]

These templates are offered as simple examples to guide the process, but it is essential to review them with the school and adapt them to the specific nature of each activity and the school's policies. By working within the school's existing procedures, we can ensure that both the charity and the school comply with appropriate safeguarding practices.

Appendix 3:

Contact details for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) in the schools in which we work:

Birchwood High School
DSL: Chris Ruggins
Phone: 01279 655936
DSL Mobile: 07395356910
rugginsc@birchwoodhigh.org.uk

Deputy DSL: (Non Teaching) - Georgia Willsmore
Phone: 01279 655936
DDSL Mobile: 07543800798
gwillsmore@birchwoodhigh.org.uk

Saffron Walden County High School
DSL: Paul Singh, deputy head
PSingh@swchs.net

Deputy DSL: Mrs Sharon McCormick
SMcCormick@swchs.net

St Thomas More Primary School
DSL: Annie Stockdale
Head@stmsw.co.uk

Deputy DSL: Noreen Hall, Deputy head
N.hall@stmsw.co.uk

St Mary's Primary School
DSL: Chris Jarmain
Head@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk

Deputy DSL: Louise Robinson
Inclusion@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk

Radwinter Primary School
DSL: Emily Bartram (Headteacher)
head@radwinter.essex.sch.uk
01799 599248

Deputy DSL: Pippa Hibbs
Co-Chair of Governors and Designated Governor for Safeguarding - Mrs Helen O'Brien