



North

Yorkshire County Council

Children and Young People's Service

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During 2012 a girl became involved with JF and began a sexual relationship. He was a teacher at the school she attended. Anticipating that the relationship would come to light they left the country together. After a week they were detained in France. The girl was 14 when the relationship started and 15 when they left the country.

Key events

In 2010 the girl was one of a number of girls to whom a supply teacher made inappropriate remarks and made drawings with an explicitly sexual reference. The school followed appropriate procedures.

In February 2012 JF and girl went on a school trip to America. Two pupils approached senior staff to say the girl had a crush on JF.

What would you expect school to do?

- The school spoke to JF about maintaining professional boundaries.
- No record of the school speaking to the girl, although they say they did.
- School says they referred the girl to the School Nurse but no record of the referral or that the girl was seen.
- School contacted mother and spoke about the girl having crush on JF.
- School reported to mother that JF had taken the girl's hand to reassure her when she was distressed about a medical issue
- Mother took girl to GP, GP reported she was emotionally very stressed but no further action was recommended.

In March 2012 a teacher heard students saying that JF got close to the girl on the trip and held her hand.

What would you expect school to do?

- Incident discussed at SMT, no record of discussion taken at the time.
- Also discussed:

School said girl was being taken out of a lesson to a Maths class with JF

What would you expect school to do?

- School was not able to state if the girl was formally offered Maths booster classes by JF, how many had been held, how long the sessions lasted and whether there was parental agreement.
- School met with JF to discuss need to maintain professional boundaries.

Two incidents in late March 2012 of girl seen on cctv going to JFs room.

What would you expect school to do?

- School spoke to JF who said she needed revision (girl had already taken the exam). He said they were not hand holding on the plane but he had tapped her on the shoulder. They went over professional boundaries again.
- JF was told to send the girl away if she tried to approach him and he was not to be alone with her.
- Girl was moved to different Maths group – not clear if this was in March or June.

In May 2012 students in the same year as the girl reported seeing handwritten notes between JF and the girl, referring to “marriage falling apart” “miss you”.

What would you expect school to do?

- Accessed girls twitter account and found nothing of concern – the girl was the focus of the concern.
- JF was advised to adjust his account so pupils could not see it.
- No formal investigation.
- Girl spoken to with girl who had raised the concern – girl was advised to find a boyfriend her own age.

School reports that it had tried to contact mother 7 times and left messages.

What would you expect school to do?

- Mother recalls only 1 message from the school. There was no contact with her in writing until July – 6 weeks after the Twitter concerns..
- June 2012 the Deputy Head met JF to see if any support was needed by him.

July 2012 two ex-pupils spoke to a member of staff about an improper relationship between JF and the girl. They said he had picked her up after work experience.

What would you expect school to do?

- The school spoke to JF and he said the girl was telling lies about him. No record of discussion.
- JF was asked to contact the ex-students to discuss why they had made the allegations.
- JF told teacher that he would contact girl's mother, he did. He reported to her that the girl was pursuing him and cried. The mother rebuked the girl.

September 2012 school informed by police of allegation of an improper photo of JF being circulated by pupils and linked to allegation of improper relationship with girl.

What would you expect school to do?

- Strategy discussion took place the next day. School attended. School reported that another pupil had called JF a pervert.
- The child and her mother were interviewed, the child denied the allegations. Her phone was seized, no evidence was found in initial inspection. JF was not interviewed. The following day the girl said she was staying overnight with a friend but did not attend school the next day. School contacted the mother in the late morning and she was reported missing to the police. There had been a sexual relationship from soon after her 15th birthday
- JF was found guilty of child abduction and a number of charges of sexual activity with a child under the age of 16. He is serving a custodial sentence of 5 ½ years.

NSPCC Early Warnings: Safeguarding in Education, NSPCC (2013)

Pupil receiving special attention, preferential treatment or special help.

Excessive time alone with pupil.

Frequently spending time with pupil in private or isolated areas.

Using texts, telephone calls or social media networking sites to communicate inappropriately.

Other pupils are suspicious.

Lesson Learned (Taken from the Serious Case Review):

This review is unusual in that it arises solely from the abuse of Child G by her teacher. Child G was not abused or neglected within her family – quite the opposite. There are no key issues arising from the minimal involvement of health services. There are matters for police and CSC, and it is right that those matters are addressed, but the lessons to be learned arise, in the main, from the way in which staff at School D repeatedly failed to see the evidence of Mr K's misconduct or to hear the concerns raised by students.

It is striking that it was, overwhelmingly, young people who raised concerns about this situation. Those concerns were repeatedly dismissed. Serious Case Reviews have often commented on agencies' failures to hear the "voice of the child" but this has generally been a reference to the abused child. Here the very nature of the abuse, grooming and exploitation, made it unlikely that the victim would raise concerns. Yet agencies, and particularly the school, were too ready to dismiss the reports received from other children. That should lead those agencies to re-consider how they respond, individually and together, to concerns raised by young people.

This review has tried to identify and understand the factors which contributed to the agencies' inadequate response to the mounting cause for concern. There was, in the school, a sort of "default position" of intuitively supporting a colleague with a corresponding reluctance to believe that the colleague might be an abuser. The most senior staff had some knowledge of the situation: the fact that they did not recognise the safeguarding implications



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will have sent a signal to other staff, as will the similar position taken by staff with particular child protection responsibilities.

That judgment on “who to believe” needs to be located in a broader set of professional and societal assumptions about the way young people behave, the way in which teachers conduct themselves, the vulnerability of colleagues / teachers to false allegations and unfounded concerns, a fear that child protection agencies will over-react to concerns, and a sympathy for an apparently promising teacher who was known to be experiencing personal difficulties outside work.

Most significantly there was no evidence of any attempt by school staff to talk to Child G in a way that was supportive. She was never offered a private discussion with any member of staff after she was seen by the school nurse. She may not have disclosed abuse but she was not given an opportunity to do so until the abusive relationship was firmly established. The failure by the school to involve Child G's mother in responding to these events is equally a cause for concern. Even if her daughter were not being abused but was behaving in a way that was damaging to herself and to a blameless member of staff, Ms C needed to know that. She is absolutely right to identify that she was denied the opportunity to assist her daughter.

It is not suggested that Ms C was deliberately left out of the loop. Nonetheless the failure to involve her was something more than carelessness. It was linked to the reluctance to acknowledge the increasing evidence of an improper relationship, and the tendency to reformulate that evidence into something more routine, such as an unprofessional (but not seriously harmful) use of Twitter. While there was a significant and mounting weight of evidence of abuse there was a lack of adherence to any formal process within the school for identifying, analysing and responding to the emerging concerns.

The review has identified some weaknesses in “routine” child protection work in this case, once matters reached that stage. Initial enquiries by police should have been carried out by the Child Protection Team. The Strategy Discussion was not sufficiently thorough and did not plan against potential and predictable contingencies. The subsequent interviews did not comply with procedural requirements in that Child G and her mother were not seen separately. A decision to reconvene the meeting was inappropriately overturned. CSC may have terminated their involvement too speedily. Police may have compromised evidence by examining Child G's phone without recourse to specialist staff. It is right that these matters are identified as learning points even if they may not have affected the course of subsequent events.

The scope of the agencies' response to the events, once concerns became explicit, was limited. They have all said that the evidence of abuse by Mr K, as considered in the Strategy Discussion, was persuasive. Yet this did not lead to any discussion of the consequences of this for the school more generally. They could not have foreseen the extreme nature of subsequent events but they could have anticipated that the abuse of a child by a teacher would become known and that the consequences of that would need to be carefully managed with the collaboration of all the agencies.

The review has identified weaknesses in the agencies' arrangements for recording information – a specific issue for the LADO and a much broader range of concerns for the school. There was no contemporaneous recording of any of the emerging concerns for Child G. This is despite the fact that schools have been provided with comprehensive and accessible guidance by the local authority. That guidance, in its introductory comments, notes that there has been a problem, identified in previous Serious Case Reviews, concerning record keeping by schools. This review indicates that at School D lessons had not been adequately learned. The reasons for this are inextricably linked with the continuing failure to recognise that this was an abusive relationship, but the weaknesses identified fall well below the threshold of reasonable practice in relation to record-keeping.

There is a further concern, which must be recognised, about the reliability of information the school has supplied to this review, and the fact that some matters cannot be reconciled. It was, at best, an unnecessary impediment to the process of the review that the school did not make it clear that no records had been kept, nor that records had been made retrospectively but were supplied in a way which led the Panel to believe that they were contemporaneous. This section of the report started with an acknowledgment that this was, in some ways, an unusual Serious Case Review. Yet the "headline" issues emerging from the review are not unusual – they are about listening to young people, talking to children who may be victims of abuse, involving their parents purposefully, recording and sharing information reliably and planning interventions more carefully across the agencies.

Recommendations for the School

The school should update its existing Safeguarding Policy (dated May 2012) detailing all safeguarding procedural changes implemented since May 2012.

The Safeguarding Policy should also make explicit any future procedural changes with a clear time line of their implementation. This document should be ratified no later than December 2013 and reviewed every two years.

Undertake an independent and bi-annual file audit of their child protection cases in line with the school and LSCB's expectations and standards and the findings of these file audits shared with the LSCB.

Be reminded of the importance of their responsibility of maintaining accurate written records that reflect communication and decisions in the assessment process. This should include emphasis on written records of any contact with statutory agencies such as the Police and Children's Social Services.

Be reminded of the importance of ensuring that the wishes, feelings and experiences of the child is at the centre of all assessments and ensure that children's wishes, feelings and experiences are routinely recorded as part of all safeguarding concern.

Arrange Child Exploitation and Online Protection training to all Designated Child Protection Teachers and wider IT staff about e-safety issues and possible safeguarding concerns related to the use of social media and potential for grooming.



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Arrange child protection training for the Senior Management Team, Designated Child Protection Teachers and all pastoral care staff on the application of child protection thresholds.

When making a referral to outside agencies share all relevant information relating to the young person being referred.

Useful information

1. NSPCC on- line learning – Keeping Children Safe Online

<http://kcsso.nspcc.org.uk/>

2. On line training and materials available from CEOP
Keeping children safe online and protecting them from sexual abuse and exploitation

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/Teachers/>