



**Dudley Safeguarding
People Partnership**

Child Y

**Child Safeguarding Practice Review
Practitioner Briefing
Jan 2022**



WHO SHOULD READ THE CSPR?

Any practitioner and manager whose work brings them into contact with children, young people and their families. The messages are just as important for those working in adult services (where service users are parents or carers). The term 'children' includes children and young people up to 18 years of age. For further information on CSPRs visit the Dudley safeguarding website



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Child Y was nearly seven years old when they first started school and was significantly developmentally delayed due to neglect.

The child lived with their parents who had managed to avoid professionals for several years.

Indications of Child Y's significant developmental delay and neglect were not identified due to them being missing from education and because they had no contact with any professional for a few years.

At no stage prior to Child Y starting school in October 2020 was neglect identified.



WHAT HAPPENED

It was in June 2019, a year after they should have started school, that it was established that Child Y was living in Dudley, was not attending school and had no school place in the borough or in any other area, due to a housing issue.

Action was then taken by the Children Missing in Education (CME) team to enable Child Y to access an education, but it took another 16 months for Child Y to start school. By then Child Y was nearly seven years old.

A school was identified and asked to offer Child Y a place, using the Fair Access process, in January 2020. It was ten months before Child Y started there. The CME team policy at the time was to close a case when a child is placed on the roll at a school. In the case of Child Y, the decision was made to close the case in June 2020 when the mother told the officer she was in contact with the school and planning for Child Y to start.

Once Child Y was seen at school, developmental delay was swiftly identified. The areas of delay included speech and language, mobility, wearing nappies and being unable to drink from a cup or use cutlery. There were also concerns about hygiene.

In order for young children to be the focus of any contacts with a family, they need to be seen, spoken to and observed with their parents. They were largely kept on the doorstep (or had to be on the doorstep due to Covid-19) and they had to negotiate with parents who did not want to engage.

There was very limited communication with Child Y's father, and the focus was on the child's mother to get Child Y into school. Services are often 'mother focused' rather than seeing both parents as equally responsible for the child and the need to be equally involved in any plans made.

There had been challenge about the child not having been seen from a School Improvement Director from the Academy Trust who was working at the school during February 2020 to increase leadership capacity.

Good practice was evident within the system when challenge was required due to concerns about Child Y and differences of opinion regarding whether they required a safeguarding response. There was individual agency challenge to the MASH from the school, from Family Solutions and from the school nurse regarding the MASH decision that family support was the appropriate response for Child Y after they started school.

There was no strategy discussion / meeting in this case until 4th November, nearly a month after Child Y started school and the serious concerns were identified. Around a week after the visit from the police and CSC, the social worker had a discussion with the Child Protection Chair service regarding whether the child should be subject to an initial child protection conference (ICPC)

The decision to have an ICPC was made the same day as the medical, and while the conference was then held within 15 days of the strategy discussion, it was seven weeks after the first visit by the police and CSC. No agency challenged the delay in either the medical or the decision to hold an ICPC.

OVERVIEW OF LEARNING

Learning point 1: When a young child is 'missing from education', while it is a priority to ensure that the child starts or returns to school, the possibility of parental neglect should also be considered.

Learning point 2: Systems need to support optimum information sharing between health professionals to ensure that a child's needs are met if there is any indication that there may be issues with the child's development or if appointments are missed.

Learning point 3: When any professional has concerns that a child is not in education, there needs to be timely information sharing and early consideration of the child's lived experience, which includes the child being seen.

Learning Point 4: The response to COVID 19 has allowed parents who are hard to engage with to avoid professional contact. Professional rigor and persistence are required so that the needs of children continue to be met despite the challenges of working during a pandemic.

Learning point 5: When there are concerns about a child, all agencies need to be clear about the child's place in the system and to challenge if there is a disagreement or delay.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The DSPP should request that the West Midlands procedures in relation to children missing education are reviewed to ensure that reference is also made to younger children missing education and the links with neglect.
2. That the DSPP seeks assurance and an update from the LEA regarding the effectiveness of their service when a child missing education meets the criteria for a school attendance order, and requests that the Education Investigation Service undertakes a review to ensure that all children who require a SAO are receiving timely consideration and that any other children missed during 2019/20 have been considered.
3. The DSPP should ask the relevant partner agencies to ensure that Working Together compliant strategy meetings are being held to plan investigations and visits and there is consideration of a child protection medical in neglect cases. Assurance should then be provided in relation to this.
4. The DSPP to request that the LEA Admissions Team provide assurance about what processes are in place to ensure that all children living in Dudley who are due to start school are known about and receive timely support if an application has not been received. All partner agencies may be required to provide information to the Admissions Team if a fool proof system is to be in place.

MORE INFORMATION

For further information and to access the full report visit our website:

<http://safeguarding.dudley.gov.uk>