

Essex County Council

Child Protection Files

Guidance for Essex schools and education settings

September 2025

ECC Education Safeguarding Team

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Introduction

Child Protection (CP) files should contain all safeguarding information about a pupil. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is responsible for Child Protection files, and it is their responsibility to ensure they keep written records of concerns and referrals which are up to date, accurate, detailed and secure, as set out in Annex B of Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK

Child Protection file storage systems

All safeguarding information about a child should be held in one place within one system. The system can be either paper or electronic files. The CP files should be kept separately to the main pupil file.

If a setting moves from a paper to an electronic system, there should be consideration about whether to transfer existing papers to the electronic file. Where it is not feasible to do this, settings should ensure the date the paper system ceased is clearly shown on both the paper CP file and the new system. Settings should also make clear there is a previous paper CP file, and that this information is included in any CP file review.

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Secure storage of Child Protection files

For both paper and electronic CP files, the DSL should ensure that the files are stored securely. For paper files this may be within a locked cabinet and for electronic files, this would include secure access arrangements.

Confidentiality and Child Protection file access requests

CP files are confidential and there should be systems in place to ensure only those who are authorised to access them are able to do so. There may be specific circumstances where it is appropriate for the DSL to share the CP file, or some of the contents of the file, with another person or agency. Settings should take into consideration Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK and The Information Sharing Duty (2026)

If a setting receives a request for access to a child's CP file or information within it, for example from a parent/carer, this should be discussed with the ECC Information Governance Team. Settings should not share any information that may cause risk or harm to the child.

Child Protection file format – best practice guidance

A CP file should be started for any child for whom a safeguarding concern has been raised. If there are concerns about a family, each sibling should have their own CP file. All information relating to a safeguarding concern should be on the CP file and should not be held in other locations (for example on attendance records, spreadsheets, or emails). The CP file does not need to contain information that is irrelevant, for example first aid or behaviour incidents, unless such incidents are part of the bigger picture of the safeguarding concerns for the child.

CP files should be organised clearly and in chronological order so that safeguarding concerns can be tracked from the initial concern being raised through to the outcome of the concern.

Each CP file should include:

- a chronology (which is regularly updated and current)
- details of key family members and involved agency
- a clear record of each concern
- details of how the concern was followed up and resolved, recorded as the response to the concern.
- a record of any reviews undertaken of the CP file

Further information on these sections can be found below and templates to support recording are available within the Appendices of this document on the Guidance Documents, Model Policies and Templates page of the ESI or Guidance documents, model policies and templates - Early years and childcare

Recording safeguarding concerns accurately

Each concern recorded on a CP file should be contemporaneous (notes taken as soon as practicable after an event) in case needed for evidence later and must be detailed and accurate. A report of a concern should include:

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Information about the report being made

- the date and time of the report
- the name, role and contact details of the person to whom the concern was reported
- the name, role and contact details of the person making the report and their signature (if it is a paper copy)

Information about the incident

- the date and time of the incident/disclosure
- the names of all parties involved in the incident, including any witnesses to an event. Use initials or anonymise the other children / young people involved, unless there is a specific need to name them in full.
- the details of what was said or done and by whom, ensuring the report is factual. Any interpretation or inference drawn from what was observed, said, or alleged should be clearly recorded as such.
- use of a body map where required (with the advice of the DSL)

To support with accurate recording, a 'Child Protection file – report of a concern' template and a 'Child Protection file – body map' are available within the Appendices of this document on the Guidance Documents, Model Policies and Templates page of the ESI or Guidance documents, model policies and templates - Early years and childcare

The Designated Safeguarding Lead should ensure that all staff at the setting are trained in how to both respond to and record incidents/disclosures of abuse from children. The NSPCC's Let children know you're listening is a useful resource. As the Designated Safeguarding Lead is responsible for the CP files, they should review each record of a concern and address any issues with the recording of a concern directly with the staff member and use these to inform staff training where necessary.

Recording the setting response to a safeguarding concern

Once a safeguarding concern has been reported and recorded on the CP file, the actions taken by the setting in response to this, including the rationale for any actions taken and the outcome for each concern, must also be recorded on the CP file next to the concern.

The record should include:

- details of any **advice** sought, and from whom
- details of any **actions** taken
- details of **referrals** made as a result
- copies of relevant **correspondence**, emails, discussions, meetings, and phone calls with other agencies/the child/the child's family
- **rationale** for actions taken or rationale for not acting
- records of **professional challenges** to other agencies where the setting has concerns about their response
- **Minutes** of any relevant meetings such as Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting or Child Protection (CP) Conferences
- the **outcome** of the concern

'Child Protection file – Contact record' and 'Child Protection file – report of a concern' templates are available within the Appendices of this document on the Guidance Documents, Model Policies and Templates page of the ESI or Guidance documents, model policies and templates - Early years and childcare

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Reviewing Child Protection files

All Child Protection files should be reviewed at regular intervals. Regular reviews provide an opportunity for the DSL to have oversight of the response to safeguarding concerns, follow up any actions or referrals as necessary and ensure that the Child Protection file is up to date and is kept in-line with the guidance in this document. A record of the review should be added to the chronology.

When reviewing the files it is suggested that this is triangulated with attendance, behaviour and pastoral colleagues, as well as any relevant teaching staff.
We recommend that all files are reviewed on at least a half-termly basis. For current concerns, the review may be more regular.

A 'Child Protection file – review record' template is available within the Appendices of this document on the Guidance Documents, Model Policies and Templates page of the ESI or Guidance documents, model policies and templates - Early years and childcare

Transferring Child Protection files

The CP file should always follow the child. Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK 2026 Annex B, sets out that transfer of the child protection file falls under the role of the Designated Lead. There is a joint responsibility when a pupil starts at a new education setting to ensure the new setting has all existing child protection records. When a setting admits a new pupil, they must always check with the previous setting whether there are any child protection records to transfer. However, it is also the responsibility of the original setting to ensure the timely transfer of any CP file to the new one.

Annex B of the updated Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK 2026 provides more examples of when the Designated Safeguarding Lead should consider sharing information with the new setting in advance of a child leaving particularly where the information would support an assessment of risk to others in the school as well as the individual pupil or where sharing of relevant information would allow the new setting to continue supporting children who have a social worker, been victims of abuse or are currently receiving support through the 'Channel' programme.

Where information indicates a risk to others and/or the individual pupil, for example where a pupil has previously carried, threatened with, or used a knife or weapon, it is incumbent on the receiving school to assess risk, and accordingly, put in place a safety and support plan for when the child arrives. It would be good practice for a conversation to take place between the designated safeguarding leads at both settings, where there are issues or concerns.

It may be helpful for a setting prior to transferring information to prioritise the CP files. This will enable the receiving Designated Safeguarding Lead to easily identify particular children – for example, children with a Social Worker. It may also be helpful to invite the new setting to meetings that are taking place (with consent where appropriate), for example to Child Protection or Child in Need meetings, or to early help meetings.

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In Essex, we advise that the below best practice is followed:

Preparing to send a CP file to another setting.

- ✓ check the CP file is up-to-date, complete, and tidy. For example, ensure there are no duplicate records (such as emails repeated within email trails) and ensure the file is in chronological order
- ✓ ensure that the CP file does not contain information that is irrelevant, for example first aid or behaviour incidents, unless such incidents are relevant to the safeguarding concerns for the child
- ✓ ensure the names of any other children are redacted/shortened to initials for confidentiality
- ✓ a copy of **paper** files should be kept at the setting until the new setting has confirmed receipt of the original CP file. This ensures that a copy of the file still exists if the original file is lost in transit
- ✓ ensure the original CP file is ready to transfer separately to the pupil file
- ✓ the DSL from the previous setting should contact the DSL at the new setting to agree a means of transfer of the records
- ✓ the DSL should consider if it would be appropriate to share any information with the new school or college in advance of a child leaving, such as information that would allow the new setting to have support in place for when the child arrives. It may be appropriate to consider including the new setting in meetings that are taking place or to consider a TAF meeting with the new setting included to aid transition planning.

Transferring a CP file

- ✓ confirm that the child has started at the new setting before sending the CP file. CP files should not be sent in advance of a placement starting, or in July in advance of new academic year, as not all children begin at their intended setting.
- ✓ once it is confirmed that the child has started at the new setting, transfer the CP file as soon as possible and within the first 5 days of the start of a new term or within 5 days for an in-year transfer.
- ✓ the original setting should ensure the CP file is sent directly only to the DSL at the receiving setting. It should not be sent to or left with any other member of staff.
- ✓ the CP file must be sent securely, whether it is being sent by post or electronically.
- ✓ where a paper CP file is sent **by post**, it should be by secure recorded delivery to a named individual. The receiving setting should receive a telephone call in advance to notify them that the child protection file is being sent. The envelope should be marked as 'Strictly Confidential' and for the attention of the named Designated Safeguarding Lead in the new setting. A record of transfer form should be included with the file (available within the Appendices of this document on the Guidance Documents, Model Policies and Templates page of the ESI) for the receiving setting to sign and return

Confirming receipt of a CP file

- ✓ the new setting should send confirmation/receipt to the original setting once a CP file is received (this may be electronic or paper, depending on the system used). *If paper copies are being transferred there is a 'File Transfer Record and Receipt' template within the Appendices of this document on the Guidance Documents, Model Policies and Templates page of the ESI or Guidance documents, model policies and templates - Early years and childcare*

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- ✓ the original setting should retain their copy of the CP file until they receive a confirmation of receipt from the new setting. At this point, any **paperwork** held at the previous setting should be destroyed securely. Electronic files should be archived as appropriate.

Transfer from school to college (from Year 11 to Year 12)

The CP file should follow the young person, so the same CP file transfer procedures apply for Year 11 to Year 12 (and subsequently to Year 13 where applicable). However, it is recognised that settings will not always be aware of the Year 12 destination by the end of Year 11. In these cases, they should identify any particularly vulnerable pupils (for example, those subject to a CIN / CP Plan, or those with mental health concerns) and make every effort to establish their new post-16 placement so they can contact them to plan for transition. In the interests of safeguarding young people, it is essential that important information is shared with a new setting as soon as possible. Equally, colleges should consider what information they request from parents / carers and from the previous educational setting to inform their planning to support vulnerable pupils.

Transferring files to Alternative Education Providers

Where a pupil remains on the roll of a school but attends an Alternative Education Provider, the school retains overall safeguarding responsibility for the pupil. Pertinent safeguarding information should be shared with the Alternative Education Provider to support day-to-day safeguarding practice. The provider should manage and respond to immediate safeguarding concerns and share all concerns, actions, and relevant information with the school's safeguarding team without delay.

Clear safeguarding arrangements, including information-sharing processes and responsibilities, should be agreed before the placement commences.

Where a pupil moves from being on a school roll to a not on roll education arrangement (for example, an Education Otherwise Than At School package), the Local Authority assumes responsibility for coordinating safeguarding arrangements. In these circumstances, the CP file will be requested by Essex County Council (ECC) to ensure safeguarding information is held appropriately and can be shared with relevant professionals as required. For safeguarding enquires for no on roll students please contact NORsafeguarding@essex.gov.uk

Children who leave a setting to be home educated

If a child is taken off role to be home educated, the CP file should be kept by the last setting that the child attends, in line with the setting retention policy (further details on retention can be found in the section below). If the child re-enters the education system, the CP file should be transferred to the new setting at that point. If a home educated child starts at a new setting, efforts should be made by that setting to discover the last setting the child attended and enquire whether there is a CP file.

Retention of Child Protection files

CP files should be stored until the child's 25th birthday by the last education setting the child attends. If the file relates to child sexual abuse, retain until the child's 75th birthday. When a file is destroyed, settings must ensure this is done securely and confidentially. Settings can contact the ECC Information Governance Team for further advice and guidance on the retention of CP files.

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