



**Rowanfield
Infant School**
Where our little gems come to shine

PARENTS IN PRISON POLICY

Approved by Full Governing Body – March 2015

Signature _____

Review date: March 2016

Review Committee:

Post Holder responsible:

Policy for the Education of Children with a Parent or Close Relative in Prison or at Risk of a Custodial Sentence

Context

A government review has identified that there is an estimated 160,000 children with a parent¹ in prison in any year. This figure is around two and a half times the number of Children who are Looked After and over six times the number of children subject to child protection measures.

Children with a parent in prison should be regarded as true victims of their parents' crimes, often achieving poor outcomes and a high probability of them growing up in poverty and disadvantage. Some of them have complex needs and are from socially excluded families. Research² identifies this group as having high level risks of vulnerability and safeguarding with the potential for future offending behaviour, exclusion from school, poor attendance and poor academic achievement.

Purpose

Rowanfield Infant School is committed to support the children and young people who have a parent or close relative in prison.

The aims of this policy are:

- to raise awareness of the needs of the pupils with a parent or close relative in prison
- to secure the educational achievement and attendance of those pupils and student during their time in our school
- to promote their social inclusion and equal opportunities within our school community

How will we achieve these aims?

1. All staff and parents will be informed of this policy and the school's commitment to support children with a parent/close relative in prison. This policy will be available on the school website and to parents on request
2. The document 'Risks to Children of Prisoners' information (Appendix 1) will be available on the school website
3. Guidance on 'Information Sharing and the Seven Golden Rules (Appendix 2) will be available on the school website

¹ For the purpose of this policy the term 'parent' will refer to parent, carer, partner, sibling, significant adult or family member

² The Bromley Briefings published by The Prison Reform Trust December 2011

4. A member of the school staff will be appointed as 'Designated Person for Children of Prisoners' and their role will include:
 - Keeping the Headteacher fully informed of pupils or students with a parent in prison
 - Liaise with other relevant school staff on a 'need to know' basis
 - Provide a point of contact in the school for external agencies in order to share information
 - Liaise with the family and seek their consent to provide additional support for the child as necessary
 - Liaise with other statutory and voluntary agencies as appropriate
 - Promote the use of the 'My Plan' and 'My Plan+' to identify the needs of the child
 - Consider calling a multi-agency meeting to address the needs of the child and to identify a key worker for that child following the completion of a 'My Plan' or 'My Plan+'
 - Consider the use of an individual education plan for the child concerned
 - Monitor the achievement, attendance and behavior of the child with a parent in prison
 - Act as an advocate for children with a parent in prison, particularly if the child is a Child who is Looked After (CLA) as CLA usually have poor levels of visiting a parent in prison.
 - Consider purchase of books and resources on the subject of prisons and prisoners for the school library
 - Keep appropriate and current records with reference to information sharing guidance
5. If a parent informs our school that the parent or other close relative of one of our pupils is in prison, we will provide information on the support available to them (Appendix 3)
6. **Wherever appropriate** our school will include a parent **with parental responsibility**, who is in prison, in the education of their child by making and maintaining contact with that parent. This will be done by forwarding copies of any school report or newsletter, supplying photographs of examples of work and encouraging the pupil to suggest other ways that contact may be maintained

Guidance for Teachers and staff on practical measures to support

All staff have a vital role to play in ensuring that a child affected by imprisonment is supported within our school. The secure, stable and consistent routines of school can provide reassurance for a child who is experiencing difficulties in their personal life and an awareness of the emotional health and well-being of our pupils will enable all pupils to feel valued and safe, including those with a parent in prison.

Staff will not necessarily be aware that a child has a relative in prison. In some cases a pupil may confide in a member of staff or drop hints and clues through school work or in conversation.

A member of staff does not need to let the child know that he or she knows that their parent is in prison as the pupil may be unwilling to discuss the issue with anyone in school. It may

be that the family of the child merely wish the child's performance and behavior be monitored for any change.

Confiding

If a pupil raises issues concerning the imprisonment of a parent during school time, the following responses may be helpful:

- Allow the pupil to express him or herself
- Listen carefully
- Acknowledge what is said
- Reassure the pupil
- Agree future action with the pupil

Adhere to the basic principles of responding to any disclosure

- See the child as an individual with their own specific needs
- Be non-judgmental – the child has not committed a crime
- Don't ask about the crime
- Acknowledge the child's preferences
- Follow safeguarding principles if appropriate

Who to inform – Need to know

If a child does disclose sensitive information about a parent in prison, it is important to acknowledge their situation and be clear with them about who needs to be told in order to support them. It may be useful to explain the role of the designated/named person in school, and to negotiate and agree with the child what steps need to be taken.

Recognising the signs – changes in behaviour and performance

Children of prisoners may exhibit changes in behaviour and performance that can be likened to a child's emotional response as in divorce or bereavement. Clearly, the experience of having a parent in prison is about 'loss.' The child's, and the family's resilience to this loss will determine how it impacts on the child in their behavior and performance at school. There are certain events that can make these changes in a child more apparent and these can include;

- The arrest of parent, carer or sibling
- Finding out about the imprisonment
- A visit to a parent in prison
- A home visit by a parent from prison
- The release of a parent from prison

The following are possible changes in pupils with a parent in prison

- Moodiness
- Chattering
- Bullying
- Difficulty with peers
- Appearing upset

- Appearing withdrawn
- Showing a lack of concentration
- Showing a lack of interest
- Antagonism towards authority
- Tiredness

However, for some children, the removal of a parent to prison may be beneficial to the child and behavior and performance in the classroom may improve.

Bullying

Many children of prisoners report being teased or bullied at school. Any form of bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy.

Attendance issues

Our school takes attendance very seriously and will always promote the importance of attendance. However, we will be considerate of the difficulties that a child with a parent in prison, or at risk of imprisonment may face e.g.

- The child is in court with, or visiting the prisoner some distance from home
- The child is providing support for the remaining parent or siblings, as a young carer
- The child is having difficulty coping with school or is being teased or bullied about having a parent in prison and is becoming disaffected

Attendance will be monitored and if it becomes a concern the school will refer to appropriate agencies for support.

Particular problems

Prison visits

Teachers say that performance and behavior of children of prisoners can become more erratic at the time of a prison visit.

If teachers or other staff, have good relationships with pupils who are happy to confide in them, there may be opportunities to allow pupils to take samples of work to show parents when visiting. However, reports or written work, drawings or artwork can be sent by post or email. Although prisoners do not have open access to email, it may be possible for the pupil to send email from school to a prison email address for the information of their parent. Photographic attachments or school work or events may also be sent in this way.

Financial implications

A family may experience significant loss in income with a parent in prison and face severe hardship. Teachers would be aware of the potential difficulties for children of prisoners finding the money for school trips and resources in school. A 'My Plan' or 'My Plan+' may have identified these issues and support already put into place.

Children of prisoners held overseas

This is a relatively rare occurrence for our community, but can be all the more distressing with a lack of access, distance and unanswered concerns about a prisoner's welfare.

Organizations and individuals that can provide support in these circumstances include

- Amnesty International

- Local councilors and member of Parliament
- Prisoners Abroad

Appendix 1

What are the risks to children of prisoners achieving the Every Child Matters outcomes?

Be Healthy

- Children of prisoners have about three times the risk of mental health problems compared to their peers.
- The sudden removal of a parent from the family creates feelings of separation and loss and may affect the emotional health of the child

Stay Safe

- Parental imprisonment can lead children to experience stigma, bullying and teasing
- Children's caregivers often experience considerable distress during parental imprisonment, and children are often subject to unstable care arrangements
- During the consultation with parents in prison bullying of their children was the greatest concern. Several parents also voiced their concerns that their own children had bullied other children
- Discrimination from members of the local community can have major implications for the children of parents in prison
- Children of parents in prison may be exposed to substance misuse by family members and their peers

Enjoy & Achieve

- Children of prisoners may experience higher levels of social disadvantage than their peers
- Some families choose not to inform schools that a pupil has a parent in prison. Yet, having a parent in prison can lead to poor attendance, lack of support and isolation for the young person
- Children of prisoners may have to take on more responsibility in the household or take on a caring role
- Children of prisoners may have higher levels of anxiety or worry that prevent them from participating fully in learning

Make a Positive Contribution

- Children of prisoners have three times the risk of anti-social/delinquent behaviour compared to their peers
- 65% of boys with a convicted parent, go on to offend

Achieve Economic Wellbeing

- Imprisonment has a negative financial impact on families, leaving families vulnerable to financial instability, poverty and debt and potential housing disruption
- 72% of prisoners were in receipt of benefits before coming into prison
- Costs of visiting the parent in prison may prevent the child from visiting their parent

Appendix 2

Information Sharing

DCSF and Communities and Local Government have produced information sharing guidance that can be accessed via the following link

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/IG00340/>

This guidance states that information sharing is the key to meeting the Government's goal of delivering better, more efficient public services that are coordinated around the needs of the individual. It is essential to enable early intervention and preventative work, for safeguarding and promoting welfare for wider public protection. Information sharing is a vital element in improving outcomes for all.

The Government understands that it is important that people remain confident that their personal information is kept safe and secure and that practitioners maintain the privacy rights of the individual, whilst sharing information to deliver better services. It is therefore important that practitioners can share information appropriately as part of their day-to-day practice and do so confidently. It is important to remember there can be significant consequences to not sharing information as there can be to sharing information. You must use your professional judgement to decide whether to share or not, and what information is appropriate to share.

Seven golden rules for information sharing

- 1. Remember that the Data Protection Act is not a barrier to sharing information** but provides a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately.
- 2. Be open and honest** with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.
- 3. Seek advice** if you are in any doubt, without disclosing the identity of the person where possible.
- 4. Share with consent where appropriate** and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement, that lack of consent can be overridden in the public interest. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case.
- 5. Consider safety and well-being:** Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the person and others who may be affected by their actions.
- 6. Necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure:** Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up-to-date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.

7. Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it – whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

Appendix 3

Education of a Child with a Parent or Close Relative in Prison – Information for Parents and Carers

The impact on a child

A family has to deal with many changes when a parent or relative goes to prison. Initially there may be a delay in finding out where they have gone or before any visits can be arranged. For a child there may be a sense of confusion and loss and this could affect their behaviour and ability to learn

One difficulty is deciding what to say to the children to explain where the parents is. Some families want to protect the children from distress and create a story such as the parent is working away but this could be difficult to continue if a prison visit is possible. There is also the possibility that the children will find out the truth from someone else

Action for Prisoners' Families recommends that the key question parents should ask themselves is, 'When and what shall I tell the children?' rather than, 'Shall I tell the children?' Although difficult, the advice from groups who work with families of prisoners is to be truthful but to be prepared for questions. Action for Children's Families have produced a useful guide 'Telling the Children – a guide for the partners and families of prisoners' that gives practical advice on how to tell children.

Research and experience tells us that children who are worried, upset or anxious can find it very difficult to concentrate and learn in the classroom. They may be embarrassed or angry about having a parent in prison and this may affect the way that they behave in school. Living arrangements and financial circumstances may also change leading to money difficulties in the payment for equipment or school trips and events. This may lead to new emotions and feelings for the child concerned and could have a negative impact on their education and attendance at school.

Who can help?

Rowanfield Infant School is committed to supporting children with a parent in prison so that they can continue and succeed with their education.

There are also a number of other national charities and organisations that can offer advice and support for children and families of someone in prison.

School can offer children of prisoners a stable environment where routines and staff generally remain the same at a time when their personal life could be one of change and uncertainty. All school staff are experienced in keeping confidential information about their pupils and will support children in order for them to achieve the best that they can at during their time at our school.

Therefore, it is advisable to inform the head teacher or other member of staff that you know, if a parent or relative of one of our pupils is in prison. It may be that you can arrange a meeting to discuss ways that your child can be supported. This support could range from staff monitoring your child to offering more individual support with open discussion and support about their parent or relative in prison.

Once you have informed a member of staff, we may suggest additional support that can be obtained through a 'My Plan' or 'My Plan+' which may identify additional support for you or your family.

As a school we have to monitor the attendance and punctuality of all pupils. Please inform the school of any absence in advance so that consideration may be given to classifying the absence as an 'authorised absence.' Working with the school on attendance may avoid the risk of incurring any fixed penalty fines for your child's absence from school.

In summary

- The education of a child with a parent or relative in prison can be disrupted
- Advice from experts is for families to tell the children the truth about their parent or relative being in prison
- Life for the children and family following the parent being sent to prison could change radically
- All staff and governors are committed to supporting children with a parent or relative in prison
- Informing a member of staff at our school that you have a relative in prison will help the child as we will be able to offer appropriate support and monitor your child's education and attendance
- We will treat this information in confidence
- Staff of our school will work with you to find the best ways to support your child
- A 'My Plan' or 'My Plan+' may be suggested as a way to get extra support tailored for your family's needs.

