Overcoming Barriers to Child Protection in International Schools

ICMEC Education Portal Executive Summary of LSCB Report

"...the degree to which (the teacher abuser) managed to groom both victims and colleagues and the environment for his activities is a significant feature of this case." (2.14, 6.13)

This Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) report details the barriers that prevented school leadership from identifying abuse by a prolific offender on the teaching staff. See complete report at ICMEC education portal.

Barrier to Child Protection (CP)	Policy or Action Recommended to Overcome Barrier	Report Reference
Belief incident is isolated event	Child Protection Designate on staff (CPD), record keeping and information sharing, staff trained to identify inappropriate behavior with child and prepared to raise concerns	2.11, 2.17, 6.9, 6.10
Uncertainty and ignorance among staff, excuses and apologies of abuser accepted	Code of Conduct and policies and procedures well known, trained designated CP staff contact with time to perform role, recruitment protocols followed, staff training in modus operandi of abusers and symptoms of abuse, abuse prevention curriculum (social-emotional learning/SRE/PSHE) for students	2.3, 2.13-14, 2.17, 6.10, 6.24-25
Fear of professional backlash; being wrong (waiting for additional evidence); alienating colleagues, students, or parents	Professional development, Code of Conduct, robust and explicit CP policies embedded in school culture, students and teachers have voice/are taken seriously, courageous management prepared to act when staff raise concerns (willing to go against parents or staff who wish to drop matter or ignore evidence), administrators have daily informal interactions with teachers and students (communication open)	2.13, 2.17, 2.26, 6.13, 6.18, 8.32
School hierarchy and bystander effect (action must be acceptable since others know)	Abusers exploit tacit acceptance to normalize informal environment conducive to abuse. Training, and responsibility of all to report (support staff reluctant to report teacher, or teacher reluctant to report head of school), school Code of Conduct clear to all	2.11, 6.10
Hostile or adversarial relationships between staff, popularity rewarded with power	Recruitment protocols followed, behaviors and boundaries are clearly stated (Code of Conduct and policy), staff doesn't undermine each other (abusers exploit these environments to normalize secrecy and discredit others)	2.12, 2.18, 6.7, 6.16-19
Excessively informal environment and lack of clarity on staff behavior	Policies and procedures are explicit and adhered to; anonymous and non-confrontational complaints by staff and students allowed and documented with secure record keeping. Note: balance is key, excessive compliance focus can be detrimental to support of victims	2.10, 2.16, 2.18, 8.35, 8.36
Physical layout and dysfunctional architecture	Strive for open lines of sight, windows in doors, observable and interruptible meeting spaces (open doors), questioning of staff in unexpected places like locker rooms	2.10 – 2.11

Reliance on one measure of child protection	Recruitment rigor, staff training, policies and procedures, and safety curriculum ALL needed to prevent inappropriate behavior and abuse	2.13, 9.13
School governance weak. Weak or unclear reporting structures between staff, admin and board members	Termly CP reporting to Board is meaningful and received with rigor, formalized information exchange between levels, established protocols are followed	2.22, 6.28-29, 9.19
Over reliance on inspections, external audits, or compliance focused box ticking	Active and nuanced understanding of CP issues and protocols. Regular professional development, engaged and trained teaching and support staff, HR/admin follow up on recruitment requirements, focused safeguarding inspection rather than one covering range of standards	2.1, 2.18, 2.22-24, 10.1–7
Transience and cultural differences of students and staff	Record keeping protocols; recruitment rigor; references provided by supervisors only; leadership handover notes formalized; safeguarding curriculum in place; and explicit rules of behavior clear to staff/parents	2.23, 6.28, 9.17-18
Limited time for rigor in interview (late hires, job fairs), and informality in procedures	Prioritization of protective hiring practices, specific questions on child protection scenario in interview, follow up skype calls, interview tick lists, training for HR/interviewers, school child protection ethos and policies clearly stated during interviews	2.8-9, 6.5
Lack of follow up on new hire paperwork and complaints	HR training, clearly stated CP policies in interview, avoiding box ticking focus, delegation of key roles	2.28
Difficulty of obtaining background checks	Inform applicants of requirement before leaving current country of employment, refer to accreditation agency developed resources	2.15
Experienced abusers are manipulative and know how to avoid detection by "hiding in plain sight"	Recruitment addresses accusations of inappropriate behavior; protocols designate individual child protection designate/s (CPD); and reporting, record keeping and training supported (training includes modus operandi of abusers); willingness to go against parent/victim wish to dismiss matter	2.10, 2.13, 2.25, 6.3, 6.7, 6.12-13, 6.15, 6.18
Not protecting most vulnerable and those typically targeted	Staff training, information exchange and record keeping supports high risk students (those with learning needs, language deficiency, weak familial support, and new students)	2.12, 6.15, 6.21
Trust: parents trust school, teachers trust administration, students trust teachers	Code of Conduct known to all; reporting requirements explicit; parents included in Code of Conduct and policy dispersal; students and parents taught prevention curriculum (digital and personal safety)	6.10, 6.12, 6.25
Concerns of staff, students or parents not taken seriously	Policies explicit and clear, open lines of communication especially about cultural differences, record of inappropriate behavior retained, staff and community training	6.11, 6.27-28
Insufficiently proactive when handling potentially serious case allegation	Allegations reviewed with rigor, attention to victim and staff support (crisis management) possibly at off-campus location, liaise with parents/staff to review CP practice, commission internal report with results available to adult community	2.20-22, 3.2, 3.5, 3.7-8, 3.13, 6.18