

Written evidence submitted by Operation Encompass (COR0021)

Introduction

1. **Operation Encompass** is a police and education early information sharing partnership that enables schools to offer immediate support for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. When officers have attended a domestic abuse incident, police share the information with a school's trained Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) before the start of the next school day, so that appropriate support can be given at the earliest possible opportunity, and dependent upon the needs and wishes of the child.
2. **Children experiencing domestic abuse** are negatively impacted by this exposure; domestic abuse has been identified as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and can lead to emotional, physical and psychological harm. Rapid provision of support within the school environment through Operation Encompass means children are better safeguarded against the short, medium and long-term effects of domestic abuse – making a child's day better, and giving them a better tomorrow. During these difficult and uncertain times, the safeguarding and support of children through Operation Encompass remains a high priority for police forces and schools.
3. **Schools are closed.** However, some children (those who are considered vulnerable or who are the children of Key Workers) are attending school, but this may not be their usual school building as some schools are working together to create Hub schools.
4. The staff who are there working with them will not necessarily be staff that they know and certainly may not be a child's trusted adult.
5. Most children are at home and sadly many of these children are vulnerable.
6. **The incidents of Domestic Abuse** have risen since the 'lockdown' by 30% and many of these incidents will have child victims within the household, therefore we know that the number of children experiencing Domestic Abuse has risen and the number of incidents that they are experiencing have risen.
7. **Yet at this** very time of greater need our children have been left with less support, less security and with less availability to disclose and gain support for their lived experience to an adult who can help.
8. **Operation Encompass continues** its day-to-day activities supporting those children by alerting schools to the vulnerability of their children and the need to support them. However, teachers are providing support for vulnerable children **without** their usual network of support from their own colleagues, Senior Leadership Teams and Social Care. The impact of not being able to access this support in a timely manner is leaving the child victims of domestic abuse **without** the proper care they need and

the teaching staff feeling isolated and vulnerable. **Teachers are being left feeling vulnerable and unable to provide proper support to child victims of domestic abuse.**

Operation Encompass' proposals to help support victims of domestic abuse

There are three Priorities for Operation Encompass during Covid-19 Pandemic

9. Priority 1

Operation Encompass Teachers' Helpline

10. **To address teacher's** vulnerability and lack of support Operation Encompass has created the **Operation Encompass Teachers' Helpline.**
11. **Launched** on 1st April in the Devon and Cornwall area the dedicated Teachers' Helpline has been created to respond to the needs of teachers. During these uncertain and challenging times, it is more important than ever to ensure schools provide safety, security and stability for our vulnerable children and young people and that school staff themselves (many of whom may be working in an unfamiliar position) have the support they need to fulfil this vital role during periods of heightened stress and anxiety.
12. **We know that 38 UK** police forces are running Operation Encompass, the timely sharing of information from police to schools about children experiencing domestic abuse. The pressure of the recent pandemic has seen services stripped of staff such as teachers and Social Workers.
13. **The fact that this** is to support children and young people as victims in their own right and is building capacity in school at a time when staff will be especially vulnerable themselves, sets this apart from other services.
14. The OE Teachers' Helpline will provide **instant expert support and advice after the receiving** of an Operation Encompass call/notification.
15. (NB in 17 police forces in 190 school days 46,491 children had received support through Operation Encompass [source FOI BBC News])
16. **The OE Teachers' Helpline will address the following Identified needs;**
 - Teachers are working in very small groups (sometimes only 2 or 3 staff at any one time) without their normal support network around them
 - Teachers are working with children who may not be well known to them
 - If working at a Hub school they may be working with children who are not known to them at all

- They will be working with children without the full knowledge of their previous history of safeguarding needs
- They will be working with children with little or no knowledge about their behavioural needs
- The children are unlikely to have their trusted adult in school and therefore their reaction after a Domestic Abuse incident may be more pronounced and it may be more difficult for an unknown and untrusted adult to de-escalate a child's behaviour and make them feel safe and secure
- The routine and structure that normally supports these children is no longer in place for many of them
- Relationships for many children will be fractured
- The advice given from the helpline will inform the schools decision to offer a vulnerable child a school place in line with the **DfE Advice 2020** '*If a school is concerned about a child's vulnerability even though they are not formally under a social worker or a child in need, consideration can be given to offering them a place*'.

The Service: Operation Encompass Teachers' Helpline

17. There will be dedicated time available, Monday-Friday, 8-11am throughout term-time and school holidays to provide school staff with **consultation, guidance, information and support**. This will be by Psychologists and Therapists who all have extensive experience of providing consultation and support to staff working in schools and education settings.
18. This provides school staff with the opportunity to have **immediate, in the moment**, consultation that is confidential and easily accessible. This ensures a reflective space to seek guidance and discuss any worries, concerns or queries they may have following an Operation Encompass call, and in preparation for a child coming into school following a reported incident of Domestic Abuse. This aims to build ongoing capacity within school systems and to ensure staff members are confident and supported in how they respond and support children in what may often be unusual and unfamiliar circumstances.
19. Calls are confidential and the child/ren who are the subject of the request are not identified to the clinician offering advice and support
20. **Operation Encompass can ensure this helpline telephone phone support for all of the 43 police forces in England and Wales with immediate effect subject to funding**

What this service will not provide

21. It is essential that all consultation and guidance is provided at a generic and non-specific level and that no identifiable information about any child or family member is shared.
22. This service will in no way replace the existing safeguarding processes and procedures that schools follow and it will not provide specific safeguarding advice.

23. **Priority 2. Police Chief Constables** reminding all serving officers that they must consider the vulnerability of all children when they attend a Domestic Abuse incident (example Appendix A) and that they should remember 'Operation Encompass' and this vital method of sharing information with a child's school.
24. This means that the Local Authorities which sit within any given police force, must share their most accurate information with the police force so that the police have as clear a picture as possible as to where children may be attending school and where and how they can most easily access the Schools Dedicated Safeguarding Lead or teaching staff from the school that the child/ren attend on a normal basis.
25. **Police must be able** to pass on the important information about Domestic Abuse incidents where there are children so that school staff can appropriately assess risk and need for support.
26. **Priority 3. Where there has been** a police attended domestic abuse incident but the child /ren is **not attending school** due to Covid-19 restrictions and the attending officers are **concerned** about the child/ren's vulnerability (but not at the level where Social Services should be informed), they will record this concern which will in turn be passed on to the school utilising the standard method for that police force so that consideration can be given as to whether a school place should be offered as part of the vulnerable groups allocation. This decision should be taken by the Headteacher in consultation with the DSL.
27. ***'If a school is concerned about a child's vulnerability even though they are not formally under a social worker or a child in need, consideration can be given to offering them a place' (DfE Advice 2020)***