

Serious Case Review

6 Step Briefing on Education findings / learning

Chadrack, Hackney Local Safeguarding Children Board

The Background

Chadrack was born in January 2012. Chadrack's mother had epilepsy and appeared vulnerable with little support. Social Services identified a Congolese worker from a local charitable organisation who provided ongoing support to mother and in May 2013, mother and Chadrack moved into permanent Council accommodation.

From a young age Chadrack was known to suffer from a number of health issues. Chadrack was essentially non-verbal and had great difficulty in communicating, social interaction and play. In June 2015 at an approximate age of 2.5 years, Chadrack was formally diagnosed with autism.

Chadrack attended a nursery and in September 2016 moved into Reception Class at Primary School. Shortly after he was introduced and then arrangements made to transfer to another school that specialised in teaching children with complex needs.

Incident

Chadrack's mother died unexpectedly at home in early October 2016. Chadrack had learning difficulties. He was 4.5 years of age and did not know how to call for help or feed himself properly. He died two weeks later of dehydration and starvation.

Chadrack was last seen in school on 30th September when he did not eat anything and it was thought he may have a slight cold. On Monday 3rd October, when Chadrack did not arrive at school, the school initiated its procedure for pupil absence. Mother was the only point of contact detailed on the school's emergency contact sheet and several calls and subsequent visits to the family flat were unsuccessful.

On Monday 17th October, a cousin contacted the police concerned that they had had no contact with mother, which was unusual and that they had never gone missing before. The police attended and forced entry. Sadly both Chadrack and his mother were found deceased.

The Review

The review focussed on two key lines of enquiry.

- One considered the professional knowledge of the family's history, specifically mother's epilepsy, missed health appointments, non-compliance with medication and Safeguarding Children's Services previous involvement.
- The second line of enquiry focussed on Chadrack's absence from school.

Learning for schools

- The school were not aware of mother's epilepsy. Whilst the school may only have known if mother had shared this information herself, it is significant as it could have prompted the school to think much earlier about Chadrack's absence in terms of his wellbeing.
- The school were not aware that Children's Services had previously been involved as this had taken place before Chadrack attended school. Whilst unlikely to change the school's response, it could have promoted professional curiosity and facilitated discussions between agencies that could have influenced the response to children in need of help or protection.
- The school demonstrated good practice by invoking their absence procedure on 3rd October and then engaging other agencies on 12th October as Chadrack was not of statutory school age at the time.
- Numerous attempts to contact mother by telephone and by visiting the family home reflect a proactive response by the school, however, it is not unreasonable to conclude that throughout the period Chadrack was missing, no professional fully considered his absence in terms of him being in potential danger. Had they done so it is likely they would have contacted the police prior to 17th October.
- Two key factors are likely to have influenced professionals response at the time; Non-statutory guidance on school attendance focuses primarily on getting children back into education and, in the opinion of the review, lacks sufficient emphasis on protection. In addition, the significant majority of attendance issues do not involve safeguarding risks and are resolved without any harm to children.
- The emergency contact sheet for Chadrack only included his mother's details. The review felt emergency contact details should include details for three adults.
- It is not their role nor physically possible for police to attend all general welfare check requests. Therefore it is essential that professionals take an early view on whether a child's absence suggests the need for "immediate assistance due to a health condition, injury or some other life threatening situation".

Recommendations for schools

1. The Independent Chair to write to the Department for Education (DfE) recommending that a stronger focus on safeguarding is reflected in both the statutory and non-statutory guidance that relates to school attendance.
2. Review and strengthen the local guidance available to schools on managing attendance. This guidance should emphasise the need to consider 'safeguarding first' and the necessary pathways to follow.
3. Given the relevance to children who are not of statutory school age, review and strengthen the guidance available to pre-school settings on responding to attendance issues.
4. Amend the respective threshold tools to ensure that children missing education through unexplained absences are appropriately risk assessed in terms of their safety and that advice on information sharing is explicit.
5. Reinforce in guidance the minimum expected information that should be obtained by schools to help them manage episodes of absence effectively. Guidance should state that this information is clearly recorded on a child's school file and be easy to access by relevant staff.
6. Points of contact should be established within Local Authority Housing Services (and referenced in relevant guidance) to help professionals gain access to flats and/or other premises that have security controlled entrances. As part of this process, Local Authority Housing Services should facilitate contact with other housing providers as appropriate.
7. Seek reassurance that practice by all safeguarding professionals reflects the importance of visiting children at home and that there is confidence staff know how to respond if access is frustrated.

Links to relevant learning from this Review

Please click [here](#) to review Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board's Children Missing from Education Policy.

Please click [here](#) to review Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board's Children missing from Care, home and Education Policy.

Please click [here](#) to review Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board's Raising concerns about Vulnerable Adults or Children Policy.