**Early Police Alert to Schools (EPAS) -** **Building on PPN success**

*Background*

Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children’s Board completed a Knife Crime Audit which showed that school were not routinely made aware of incidents where a child had been involved in a violent incident until well after the event. A PPN process was introduced which allowed officers to alert the local authority children’s services of incidents, which included a blank space for the officer to record which school a child attended, this field was commonly left blank, and that officers were not routinely considering the school a child attended as a relevant factor. Frequently young people were arrested and there was either a “No Further Action” decision or they were “Released Under Investigation”, and they would be attending school the next day with no one knowing the situation they had gone through. Around the same time as PPNs were being considered, a serious case review of a young person from Nottinghamshire who was murdered showed that police and school both held information about the child, which if put together would have shown a pattern of escalating risk. This was motivation for improved information sharing between Police and Education Providers.

*What is EPAS?*

The Early Police Alert to Schools (EPAS) was based on the existing safeguarding process [Operation Encompass](https://www.operationencompass.org/) whereby Schools are notified after Police have been called out to an incident of domestic violence in a household where children were present.

Through EPAS, the Designated Safeguarding Leads in Schools (including colleagues and alternative providers where possible) receive daily alerts from police if a young person attending their school has been named as connected to a knife related or serious violence incident in the previous 24 hours. This was whether they were a victim, alleged perpetrator, or a witness. A copy of the EPAS form can be found here:



*Why EPAS?*

* Schools are often the first professionals to have contact with a young person after their involvement in an incident. Whether victim or offender the young people will be in need support and safeguarding.
* Schools often know the young person better than any other professional – knowing about an incident could be the missing piece of a puzzle which means they can make appropriate onwards referral for support from Social Care, Early Help or Youth Justice.
* Sometimes repercussions and reprisals that spill over into schools that need to be managed
* Schools should be given the opportunity to share information and intelligence relevant to police investigations

*Key Lesson’s from Nottinghamshire’s implementation of EPAS*

* Significant communication with schools is needed in advance of starting to send them police notifications. They need as much information as possible about the purpose of the project, and what steps they can take when they have been notified of an incident involving one of their pupils. Step by Step guidance for school was produced, which may be helpful when considering implementation in your local area:



* EPAS needs to sit within a wider system of early intervention and prevention – there needs to be a good offer of family support and youth diversion (from the local authority, VRU’s, School’s and the third sector) so that young people identified as at risk of exploitation and violence can have their needs assessed and met.
* EPAS should complement but not replace the existing relationships and information sharing between police, schools and the local authority.
* EPAS needs to be owned by Police (the information being shared is owned by them), with Children’s Services supporting communications with schools, the development of step-by-step guidance, identifying training needs for school staff and developing a pathway for those young people needing additional support.

*Next Steps for Nottinghamshire*

EPAS originally launched in Nottinghamshire in 2020 with an event for designated safeguarding leads. Since then there has been significant staff turnover, improvements to the process, a 6 month gap where EPAS was paused due to staffing shortages and a change in which Police team delivers the service. Having just relaunched the process with improvements to the template and a more robust step by step guidance for schools, we are now entering a reflective phase. A record will be kept of all EPAS’s completed, allowing us to scrutinise the impact of the process by contacting a sample of schools each month to gather case studies of good practice, to ask about impact, to check any issues and gather feedback on improvements to the system.

In September Police and Children’s Services will collaborate on an event for DSLs which will bring everyone up to date – including sharing the findings from case studies, good practice examples and Frequently Asked Questions. Materials from this session will be made available on the Harm outside the Home website for use across the region.