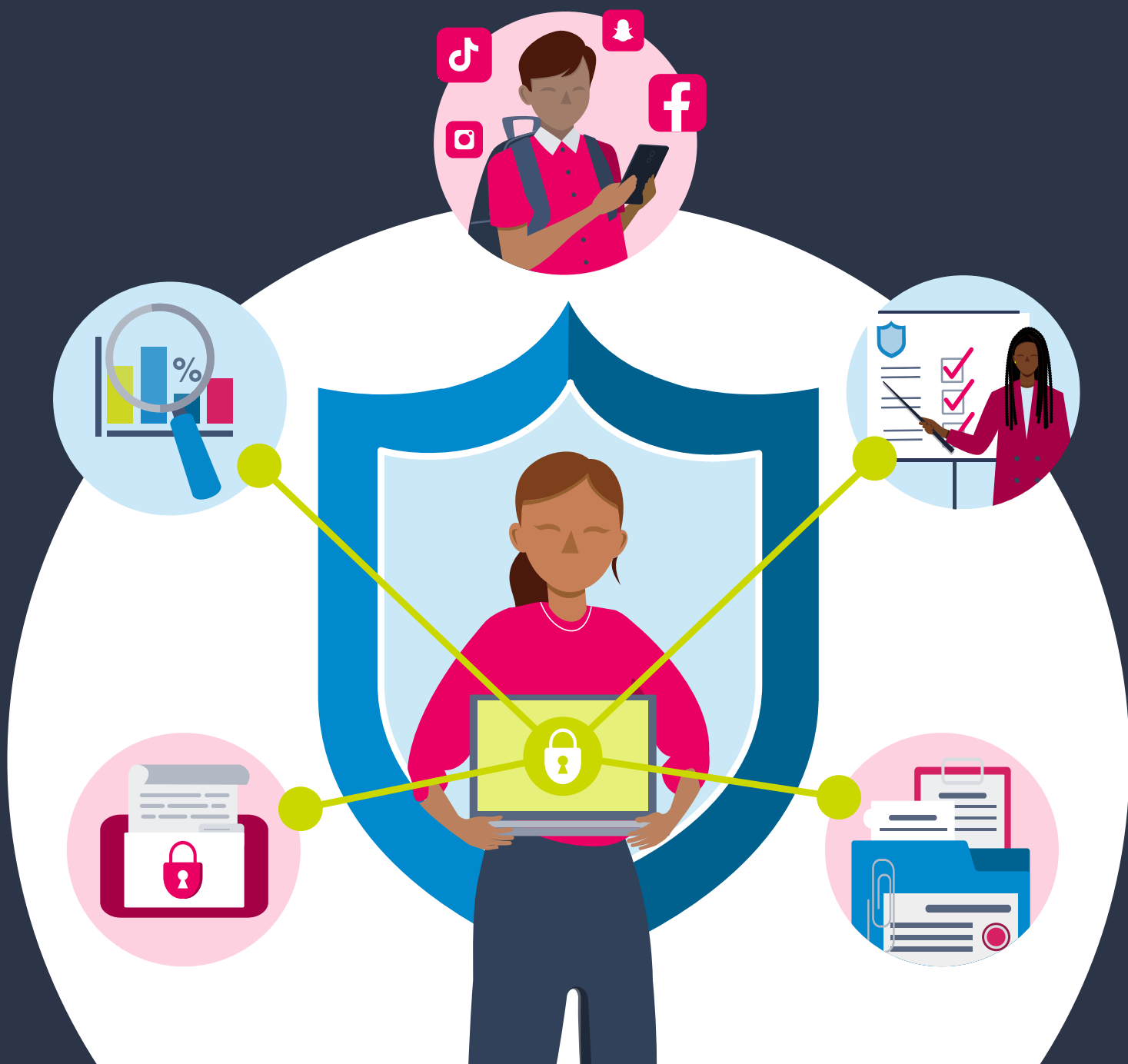




International Safeguarding Report 2025

Exploring safeguarding and child protection in international schools: Perspectives, challenges and evolving practices in safeguarding in international schools.



Contents

3

Why this report matters

4

**Introduction:
a new era of
safeguarding**

6

**The changing
landscape of
safeguarding in
2025**

8

**Digital safety and
online risks**

11

**Safeguarding
confidence
and training:
Addressing the
readiness gap**

14

**Barriers to
effective
safeguarding and
recommendations**

17

**Conclusion: A
global call to action
for safeguarding
in international
schools**

Why this report matters

As an international educator, you're the frontline guardian of student wellbeing. In classrooms across the globe, safeguarding and child protection isn't just a policy – it's a daily responsibility. From the digital playgrounds students inhabit to the diverse cultural and legal landscapes your school operates within, your role in protecting children has never been more vital.

This report gathers the voices of 1,441 international school staff across 117 countries*, offering real-world insights, data and challenges directly from those who manage safeguarding daily. It doesn't just highlight problems – it surfaces solutions, spotlights best practice and empowers you to strengthen your own safeguarding strategy.

So why read this report? Because your work matters. Because students are relying on you. And because by better understanding the patterns, barriers and opportunities emerging across the international education sector, you can take informed action to build a safer, more supportive school environment.

You are not alone. Whether you're a safeguarding or pastoral lead, a headteacher, a member of the senior leadership team or a teacher championing wellbeing, this report will help you:

- Benchmark your school's approach against global trends
- Learn what's working (and what's not) across peer institutions
- Make the case for improved training, systems and support

Ultimately, this is your story – a collective journey of safeguarding leadership, courage and care. We invite you to use this report to strengthen your voice, elevate your school's approach and continue being the hero every child needs.



* Out of 1,441 respondents, 650 were from domestic/state schools

Introduction: A new era of safeguarding

International schools are navigating a new safeguarding reality. Long admired for their commitment to student wellbeing, their exceptional pastoral care, global mindset and emphasis on teaching critical thinking, these institutions are now contending with digital dangers, increased mental health needs and shifting family dynamics.

Staff naturally take safeguarding exceptionally seriously. They know that achieving the highest safeguarding standards demands constant vigilance, proactive measures and robust communication, both within their school and with external agencies.

Respondents from this year's report came from all over the world but almost half (48%) are based in Asia – a fast-growing education market – with others from Europe (24%) and Africa (21%). Their insights spotlight both progress and pressing concerns. Some 46% of respondents were safeguarding leads, while 22% were senior leaders, providing a wealth of insight from those at the forefront of safeguarding practice.

Safeguarding practices in international schools are evolving swiftly to meet the increasingly complex realities facing students – and online harms remain among the most urgent challenges. In this year's survey:

- 36% of safeguarding incidents were reported to have originated online, yet
- 88% of educators said they struggle to monitor students' online activity beyond school boundaries



This gap between risk and visibility reflects wider global concerns. UNICEF's Tackling Online Violence Against Children report¹ highlights the **mounting threats of cyberbullying, online grooming and exposure to harmful content**. It calls for schools to implement multi-layered, proactive digital safety strategies. In parallel, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)² has identified a **380% increase in AI-generated child abuse imagery**, underscoring the urgency for safeguarding teams to stay abreast of rapidly evolving threats.

These findings are echoed in the Council of International Schools (CIS) safeguarding framework³, which advocates for **contextual safeguarding approaches** – models that respond to the diverse cultural, legal and social environments in which international schools operate.

At Tes, safeguarding is a central commitment. With over a century of experience supporting educators globally, we remain focused on helping schools respond to both emerging and entrenched safeguarding challenges. This report provides senior leaders with the evidence, insight and practical recommendations they need to adapt and strengthen their approach – ensuring every student learns in an environment that is safe, inclusive and resilient.



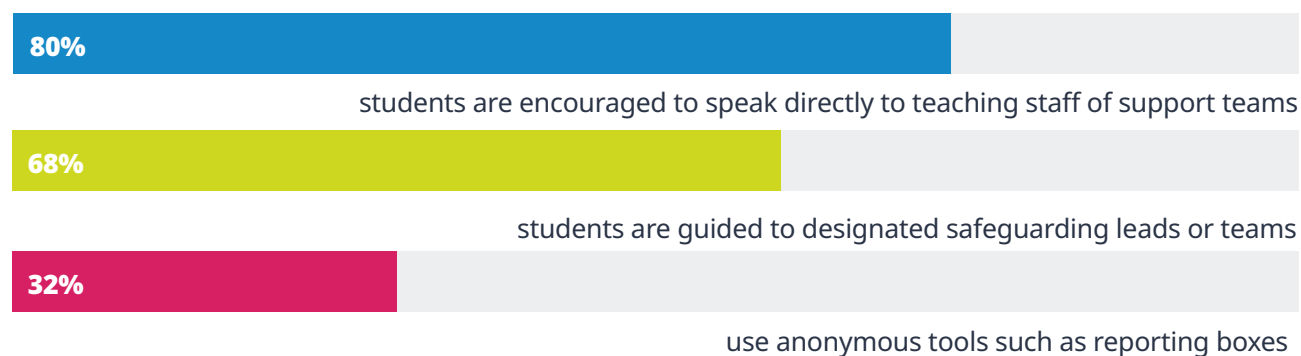
1 <https://www.unicef.org/documents/tackling-online-violence-against-children>
2 <https://www.iwf.org.uk>
3 <https://www.cois.org/about-cis/child-protection/resources>

The changing landscape of safeguarding in 2025

Safeguarding in international schools has evolved significantly in recent years, reflecting the shifting needs of students and the increasing complexity of the risks they face.

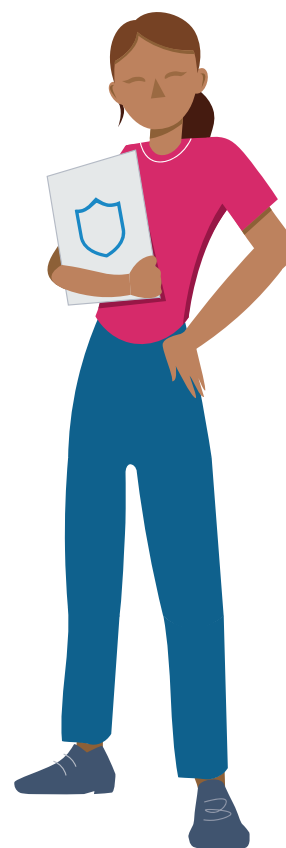
In 2025, safeguarding remains a critical priority for schools, yet the ways in which concerns are raised and addressed continue to highlight both strengths and opportunities for innovation.

Face-to-face communication remains the most common route for students to report concerns and anonymous tools remain relatively underutilised. According to our findings:

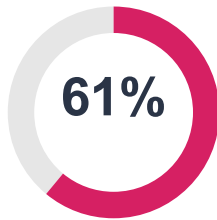


For students, the ability to easily and confidentially report concerns is essential. While traditional in-person communication builds trust and ensures the human element remains central, the low uptake of online reporting tools signals an opportunity to explore digital solutions. Schools could benefit from implementing secure and anonymous platforms, such as MyConcern, to better accommodate tech-savvy students who may hesitate to speak up face-to-face. Combining digital systems with trusted 'tell a teacher' methods ensures no concern goes unnoticed, particularly among older pupils who are more accustomed to digital interaction.

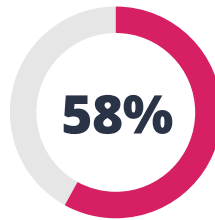
As safeguarding demands grow, schools must adapt their approaches to ensure they remain effective in addressing evolving risks. Technology has the potential to ease workloads, streamline response processes and improve visibility for safeguarding teams, while also fostering a stronger culture of trust among students.



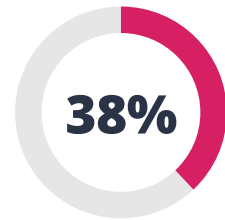
We also asked respondents to identify the most significant safeguarding changes over the past two years. Three key themes emerged:



Online safety remains the top concern, with **61%** of respondents reporting increased challenges linked to **cyberbullying, exploitation and exposure to harmful content**. European staff were more likely to cite these concerns (64%) than those in Asia (59%).



Student mental health was highlighted by **58%** of respondents as an area of **growing importance**, reflecting global conversations about student wellbeing and the psychological pressures young people face.



Family and home environments were flagged by **38%** of educators as presenting **increasing safeguarding concerns**, particularly in international contexts where cultural and socio-economic dynamics vary widely.

These findings echo those of Leila Holmyard's report on International Baccalaureate World Schools⁴, which explores online harm, affluent neglect and identity-based risks. Her analysis reinforces the need for culturally responsive safeguarding frameworks that reflect the realities of globally diverse student populations. Additionally, findings from ISC Research⁵ highlight that safeguarding concerns related to mental health and online safety have surged in recent years, with schools increasingly integrating wellbeing curricula to address these issues.

In this changing landscape, international schools must remain agile, combining evidence-based practice, local insight and innovation to safeguard every child effectively.



⁴ <https://ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/research/pdfs/jta-executive-summary-leila-holmyard.pdf>
⁵ <https://iscresearch.com/international-schools-impacted-by-staff-and-student-wellbeing-during-covid-19>

Digital safety and online risks

Online safety has become a central focus for international schools, reflecting the increasing scale and complexity of the risks students face in digital spaces.

As students engage with technology more frequently and at younger ages, the safeguarding landscape must continually evolve to keep pace.

Recent research from Internet Matters⁶ revealed that **67% of children have experienced online harms – equivalent to two in every three children**. This stark figure reflects a growing public and professional awareness of the dangers associated with digital life, including cyberbullying, online grooming, harmful content and inappropriate image sharing.

Our findings align with these concerns, showing that cyberbullying is one of the most common online safeguarding issues faced by educators. **60% of respondents identified cyberbullying as the primary challenge**, with regional variations: 68% in Europe, 56% in Asia and 60% in Africa. Other significant issues include **online predators, grooming and sexting** or **nude image sharing**. Among designated safeguarding leads (DSLs), sexting and nude image sharing ranked as the third most frequent concern, highlighting the nuanced challenges schools face in addressing online risks.

When asked about their greatest challenges in managing online safeguarding, educators identified several recurring themes:

88%

Monitoring online activity outside of school

This emerged as the top challenge, with the vast scope of online platforms and the prevalence of personal devices making comprehensive monitoring unfeasible. In one European study⁷ across 19 countries, **80% of children aged nine to 16 reported using a smartphone to go online daily, or almost daily**. Schools often attempt to bridge this gap by educating students and parents about safe online behaviour, but the scale of the digital landscape remains daunting.

⁶ <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/press-release/children-experiencing-harm-online-in-the-uk-remains-stubbornly-high>
⁷ <http://www.eukidsonline.net/>

52%

Anonymity and lack of traceability online

Perpetrators or students in distress can hide behind fake profiles or encrypted apps, making it difficult for schools and law enforcement to trace harmful behaviours. This highlights the importance of teaching students how to use reporting tools and fostering a culture of openness where concerns can be shared, even anonymously.

53%

Resistance from parents and students

Addressing issues like excessive screen time or risky apps requires proactive communication and parent education. Many schools are hosting online safety workshops, sending newsletters with e-safety tips and directing families to resources from organisations like Childnet and Internet Matters. Building partnerships with parents can gradually reduce resistance and foster a shared understanding of the risks and the need for supervision.

49%

Managing personal devices and social media

The widespread use of smartphones allows students to circumvent school filters and policies, making enforcement difficult without clearly defined rules. In response, some schools have adopted phone-free policies, leading to noticeable improvements in student focus and a reduction in online incidents during school hours. France has banned mobile phones in schools since 2018, and the UK government has also considered implementing a similar ban during the school day. The 2023 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report⁸ recommended that phones be used in classrooms only to support learning. More recent analysis by the UN agency⁹ found that more than 60 countries have now introduced measures to regulate phone use in schools.



“Keeping up with rapidly evolving online risks – the constant changing threats such as cyberbullying tactics, online grooming methods.”

Survey respondent



“At school students are fairly protected, but at home it’s difficult to know the extent of access students have to dangerous sites.”

Survey respondent

Academic research supports the need for robust anti-bullying policies that explicitly cover cyberbullying. A UK study by the Anti-bullying Alliance¹⁰ found that **40% of young people experienced bullying (online or offline)** in the past year. The relentless nature of online bullying can contribute to anxiety, depression and school avoidance. In response, many schools are implementing digital empathy education, enhanced reporting tools and clear, well-communicated policies to ensure concerns are addressed quickly and effectively.

The World Health Organization’s report, What Works to Prevent Violence Against Children Online¹¹, further advocates for comprehensive school-based programmes that promote healthy digital behaviours and teach children how to protect themselves from online harm.

The International Task Force on Child Protection¹² similarly emphasises the importance of safeguarding in international schools, particularly in addressing online risks. Their guidance highlights the blurring of boundaries between the online and offline world. A bullying incident may begin in the classroom and escalate online; a mental health issue triggered at home may emerge through a student’s digital behaviour.



10 <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/prevalence-and-impact-bullying/prevalence-bullying>
11 <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240062061>
12 <https://www.cois.org/about-cis/child-protection/international-taskforce-on-child-protection>

Safeguarding confidence and training: Addressing the readiness gap

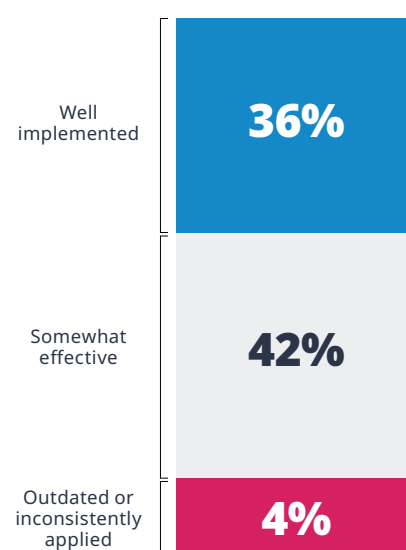
Staff confidence is a cornerstone of effective safeguarding in international schools. When educators feel well-prepared and supported, they are more likely to identify, escalate and respond to concerns appropriately. However, our findings reveal a significant gap in training provision – particularly in relation to online safeguarding incidents.

While most international schools provide some form of safeguarding training on online incidents, **43%** of respondents reported that the **training they received was insufficient**, and a further **18%** stated that they had **received no training at all**. This means that over half of staff surveyed felt underprepared to manage online safeguarding concerns – at a time when such issues are rapidly increasing in complexity.

Encouragingly, most respondents (83%) were positive about how their school's approach early intervention, demonstrating a proactive attitude toward safeguarding. However, 44% acknowledged that there is room for improvement in this area too.

When it comes to **safeguarding policy implementation**, responses were similarly mixed:

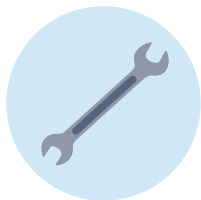
- **36%** of respondents said their policies were **well-implemented and regularly reviewed**
- **42%** felt that policies were **somewhat effective but needed refining**
- **Fewer than 4%** believed their school's policies were **outdated or inconsistently applied**



This suggests that while the framework for safeguarding exists in most international schools, effective implementation and continuous review remain essential to ensure policies keep pace with emerging risks.

Confidence in how safeguarding concerns are handled was generally high, with most respondents believing that issues were managed as well as possible within their existing structures. However, **9%** said there had been **multiple instances where safeguarding concerns were not handled effectively**. This figure rose slightly among schools in Europe (11%), while confidence was highest among schools in Africa, where 42% of respondents said all concerns had been addressed appropriately.

Among the most common barriers to effective safeguarding practice were:



Lack of adequate training
or practical tools

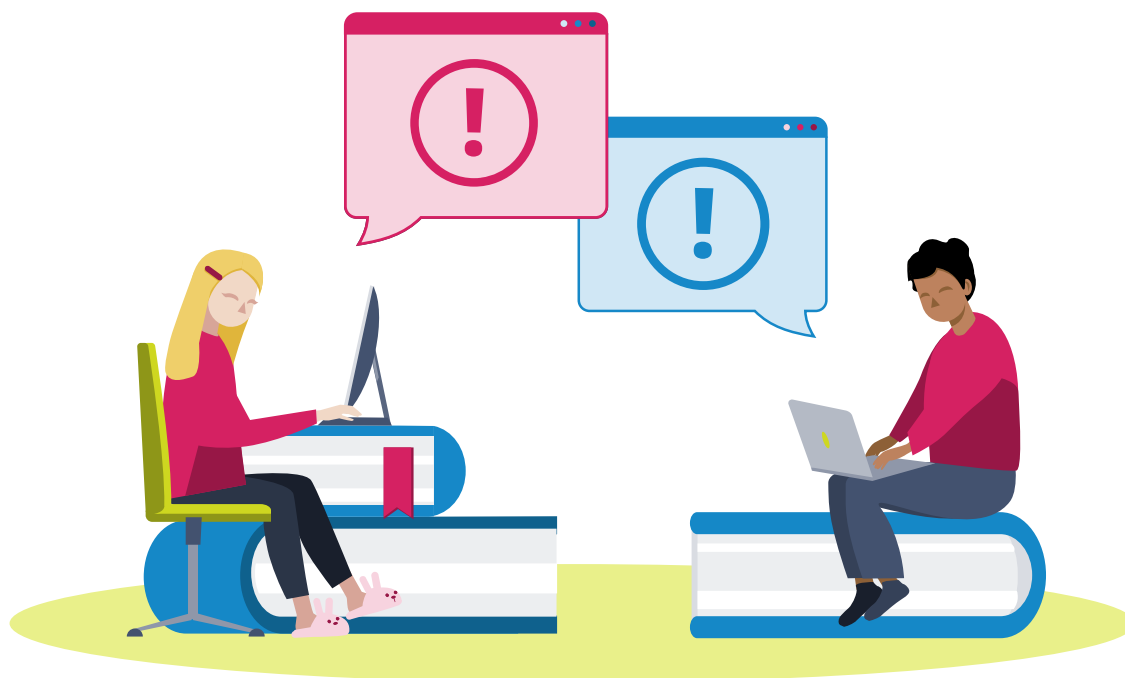


Breakdowns in
communication between
safeguarding leads, staff and
external agencies



Insufficient information-
sharing protocols

These findings were mirrored in perceptions of how safeguarding is covered in teacher preparation. **19% of respondents said safeguarding content during initial teacher training was inadequate**, especially in areas such as child protection law, handling disclosures and online safety. This supports long-standing calls from organisations like the **NSPCC** and **various teaching unions** for safeguarding to be more robustly embedded within teacher education programmes.





“Safeguarding is still a work in progress at our school. Proper training from external bodies has helped the DSL team highly. We would need more scenario-based training to sharpen the teacher’s readiness to deal with safeguarding concerns.”

Survey respondent

Our report surfaces safeguarding challenges in international schools and highlights the growing need for safeguarding training that integrates digital safety measures, given the rise of cyberbullying and online exploitation. Additionally, the Council of International Schools (CIS) safeguarding framework^{3.1} emphasises the importance of contextual safeguarding, ensuring that international schools adapt their policies to the diverse environments in which they operate.

These findings indicate two actionable priorities for schools:

- First, **safeguarding training should be regularly updated** to reflect emerging risks, including new online trends and legislative changes. Many experts recommend incorporating scenario-based exercises, real case studies and interactive elements into annual training to keep staff engaged and aligned with best practices
- Second, **schools must ensure multiple avenues for students to report concerns**, reinforcing findings from earlier report responses that online and anonymous reporting are still underused

International schools are increasingly turning to external training resources to bridge these gaps. Updated e-learning modules and workshops from specialists such as Tes Safeguarding Training provide engaging content for staff CPD.

Ultimately, safeguarding confidence is built through consistent, high-quality training, effective reporting mechanisms and strong communication between staff and safeguarding leads. By addressing these gaps, international schools can ensure that all staff, not just safeguarding leads and their teams, are well-equipped to protect students effectively.

3.1 <https://www.cois.org/about-cis/child-protection/resources>

Barriers to effective safeguarding and recommendations



“The problem of safeguarding is mainly due to not knowing its importance, financing, training, lack of awareness and school and home relationship. Learners are not made aware of the consequences of their actions in school.”

Survey respondent

Our report findings highlight a range of challenges that hinder effective safeguarding in international schools. These barriers, while not insurmountable, require targeted strategies and collaboration between stakeholders if they are to be overcome.

Parental engagement

Barrier:

46% of respondents identified a **lack of parental engagement** as the most significant obstacle to effective safeguarding. Engaging parents effectively is critical, as it can significantly enhance student outcomes and foster a cohesive school community. However, cultural differences, language barriers and differing attitudes toward safeguarding can complicate this relationship.

Recommendation:

Schools should prioritise building strong relationships with parents and carers. Regular workshops on topics such as online safety, mental health and digital wellbeing can equip parents and carers with the necessary knowledge to reinforce safeguarding messages at home. Initiatives, such as family liaison officers and parent safeguarding champions, have proven effective in bridging trust gaps, creating a consistent safeguarding culture across both school and home environments. Reports, such as the NSPCC's Helplines insight briefing¹³, emphasise the importance of building trust with parents through regular communication and accessible resources.

Student awareness

Barrier:

30% of respondents cited a lack of student awareness of safeguarding processes.

Recommendation:

Embedding safeguarding education into the curriculum is vital. Training student ambassadors or digital leaders, who can run peer-led workshops on issues like cyberbullying, privacy and responsible digital behaviour, ensures that students become active participants in their own protection. Programmes like Childnet's Digital Leaders¹⁴ initiative have been proven to improve online behaviour among students. Empowering students to understand and engage with safeguarding processes can create a culture of shared responsibility.

Access to external services

Barrier:

28% of respondents reported difficulty accessing external safeguarding and welfare services, especially in countries with varied legal frameworks and limited inter-agency coordination.

Recommendation:

To improve access to external services, international schools should establish clear partnerships with local safeguarding agencies, social care and health professionals, ensuring pre-defined referral pathways for urgent cases. Schools can also benefit from proactive participation in multi-agency frameworks or starting up their own safeguarding forum with their own local services, allowing them to engage directly with service providers and advocate for streamlined support tailored to their unique contexts.

Staff training

Barrier:

26% of respondents identified inadequate staff training as a key barrier to safeguarding effectiveness.

Recommendation:

Continuous professional development is a key element of effective safeguarding. Schools should tap into external resources, like Tes Safeguarding Training, to provide up-to-date, scenario-based training that reflects the rapidly evolving risks, such as identifying grooming signs in online gaming. Interactive training, including scenario drills and regular quizzes, help ensure that all staff, from teachers to support staff and governors, remain engaged in this issue and prepared to address emerging safeguarding challenges.

Cultural and legal challenges

Barrier:

Operating across diverse jurisdictions, international schools must navigate a **broad spectrum of legal frameworks and cultural expectations**, which can complicate the application of standard safeguarding policies.

Recommendation:

To effectively navigate cultural and legal challenges, international schools should collaborate with their local government organisations to ensure policies align with regional legal requirements while maintaining global best practices.

Technology and digital risks

Barrier:

The rise of cyberbullying, online grooming and exposure to harmful content presents a growing challenge. **88%** of respondents said that **monitoring students' online activity beyond the school day** is a significant obstacle.

Recommendation:

Technology can also be part of the solution. Adopting a secure safeguarding platform such as MyConcern allows staff to confidentially log, track and escalate concerns, improving efficiency, visibility and record-keeping. The UNICEF report on Violence Against Children Online¹⁵ underscores the need for comprehensive school-based strategies that extend into students' digital lives.

Together, these insights form a roadmap for strengthening safeguarding in international schools. By addressing each barrier with targeted, context-aware interventions – and embedding safeguarding into all aspects of school life – leaders can ensure students are better protected, better supported and more empowered.

Conclusion: A global call to action for safeguarding in international schools

Our Tes International Safeguarding Report 2025 offers a critical lens and essential insight into the safeguarding landscape in international schools, highlighting both progress and ongoing challenges. With responses from 1,441 school staff and governors across 117 countries, the findings reinforce the commitment of international schools to student safety while underscoring areas that require urgent attention.

Parental engagement remains a vital component of effective safeguarding, yet **46% of respondents identified parental resistance or lack of involvement as a key challenge**. Schools that proactively encourage collaboration through initiatives such as family liaison officers or parent safeguarding champions, as recommended by the NSPCC's Helplines insight briefing^{13.1}, tend to see stronger safeguarding outcomes and more cohesive school communities.

Student awareness remains a foundational element of effective safeguarding. Despite ongoing efforts, **30% of respondents noted gaps in students' understanding of safeguarding processes**. Embedding safeguarding education into the curriculum and encouraging student-led initiatives can strengthen students' ability to recognise and respond to risks.

Accessing external services remains another significant challenge, with 28% of respondents highlighting difficulties in securing timely support. **Staff training on online safeguarding incidents** continues to be another area requiring urgent improvement, with 43% of respondents stating that their training was insufficient and 18% reporting no training at all. Training resources, such as Tes Safeguarding Training, offer scenario-based, interactive approaches that can enhance staff confidence and preparedness.

The **increasing prevalence of cyberbullying and online safety risks** is reflected both in this report and external studies, such as the IBO report by Leila Holmyard^{4.1}, which highlights the importance of culturally responsive safeguarding strategies and whole-school approaches to digital safety.



13.1 <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/childline-nspcc-helpline-insight-briefings>
4.1 <https://ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/research/pdfs/jta-executive-summary-leila-holmyard.pdf>

Conclusion



Despite these barriers, **international schools remain dedicated to safeguarding every child's wellbeing.** By strengthening parental engagement, encouraging multi-agency collaboration, embedding digital safety education and investing in robust staff training, schools can effectively address the safeguarding challenges of 2025.

Safeguarding is a shared responsibility. This report demonstrates that through collaboration, innovation and continued dedication, international schools can create environments where **every student feels safe, supported and empowered to thrive.**

What happens next depends on all of us.

Whether in the classroom, the leadership team or the wider school community, every action contributes to a culture of safety. The findings in this report are a starting point – what matters now is how schools apply them to strengthen practice, build trust and keep every child at the centre of their safeguarding approach. Together, Tes and educators are committed to building a stronger, safer future for every child.



"We are on a safeguarding journey, and a lot is being put in place to ensure a secure safeguarding process where all 't's' are crossed and no 'i' is left undotted."

Survey respondent





Tes total safeguarding

True safeguarding comes from seeing the whole picture. We offer a fully connected, end-to-end approach to safeguarding, empowering schools, trusts and school groups to create a safer environment where students can thrive.

Helping to identify potential risks early, address concerns promptly and ensure the wellbeing of every child, our solutions are designed to support every stage of the safeguarding process.

Our solutions include:



Safeguarding training

Equip your staff, volunteers and trustees with the knowledge and skills to spot concerns early with unlimited access to a wide range of flexible, interactive online courses covering safeguarding, compliance, health and safety, and wellbeing. Track learning progress and evidence training with our robust reporting suite.



Case management

Streamline record-keeping and case management with our secure, centralised system for managing all types of safeguarding concerns. It helps you identify patterns, address issues proactively and make well-informed decisions.



Staff allegations

Handle staff allegations, low-level concerns and self-referrals on a dedicated platform, separately from student concerns. Early reporting improves visibility into risks, protects students from harm and safeguards staff from false accusations while reducing reputational risks.



Student voice

Give students, parents and the wider community an easy, anonymous way to report safeguarding concerns – anytime, anywhere. With customised forms shared via links or QR codes, reporting becomes quick and accessible, so nothing gets missed.



Safeguarding reporting

Identify trends and gain actionable insights with our powerful reporting tool specifically designed for trusts and school groups. Paired with our case management system, it supports data-driven decisions, detects risks and ensures a consistent approach to safeguarding.

**Learn more about how we can support
you with safeguarding**

tes.com/total-safeguarding

Empowering teachers to inspire the future



Learn more about how we can support
you with safeguarding

tes.com/total-safeguarding