

Delyth Lynch

Beyond Compliance

The DSL's guide to
creating a school-wide
culture of safeguarding

Praise for *Beyond Compliance*

Delyth Lynch is the DSL's DSL. She is superlatively qualified and stunningly effective at her job, which may very well be the most important in any school. She is also an accomplished and very engaging writer; her text has rhythm, passion and drive, and is diffused throughout with the empathy and insight that make her so brilliant at what she does.

What truly sets this book apart, and why I recommend it so highly, is that it is a safeguarding book like no other. It goes far beyond guidance or compliance, delving into the enduring culture of safeguarding in schools through the lens of a working DSL. Delyth explores what really makes schools safe: strong leadership, open communication, staff well-being and the hidden risks and biases that can undermine a culture of safety. She unpacks real-world vulnerabilities, the psychology of bias and the cost of caring, all in a way that challenges readers to reflect and act.

Must-read is a cliché about a book: this one is a must-read and must read again. There is simply so much she has packed in between the covers. It's a book to return to, packed with wisdom that will make children securer, DSLs happier, schools safer and the world better.

Sir Anthony Seldon, educator, author and historian

Anyone who cares about keeping young people safe should read *Beyond Compliance*. It's easy to say that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, but turning noble aims into effective action isn't easy. With typical professionalism founded on years of experience, Delyth Lynch explores and explains the inner workings of safeguarding, navigating readers through the tricky currents of theory and practice. For safeguarding professionals, school leaders, teachers, governors, students, parents or those simply looking to learn more about safeguarding, *Beyond Compliance* is the book to have on your desk, not just on a shelf. *Beyond Compliance* contributes to making children safer and Delyth Lynch must be congratulated and thanked for writing it.

Robin Fletcher, CEO, Boarding Schools' Association, founder of SACPA (Safeguarding and Child Protection Association)

This book captures the reality of the complex safeguarding spiderweb we have present within the education system, with great details about navigating within a space where reputation, stigma, professional challenge, lack of parental understanding, and staff retention are versus safeguarding children and getting appropriate support.

The designated safeguarding lead role is complex, as they are a senior member of staff with lead responsibility in an additional role that is very important. Split decisions must be made regarding the safety of a child, balancing the need to override a parent's, teacher's or school's decision against the risk of a complaint and fallout.

Non-recent child abuse is a recurring theme throughout most of the book, and it prompts a deeper understanding of how such harm can occur. The coverage dissects the environment, presenting a mixed message between the need to obey the charismatic individual in a position of trust and what grooming looks like.

I highly recommend this book to anyone seeking to understand the truth about safeguarding in the modern era.

**Ann Marie Christian, International Independent
Safeguarding Consultant**

Beyond Compliance is a book every head teacher should buy for their designated safeguarding lead and read themselves. It takes us behind obvious safeguarding thinking, driving us beyond professional curiosity into unexplored areas. Numerous diagrams, frameworks and planning tools genuinely add something new to safeguarding knowledge.

Lynch places leadership at the heart of whole-school culture, influence and professional integrity. The book shows how safeguarding culture is everyone's responsibility, and how it can unintentionally go wrong, even how 'white lies' influence culture.

Well-researched, readable, with excellent further reading, this book is jargon-free and offers real language which will make sense to the people doing the job. Lynch offers important insights from doing the work and thinking hard about it.

She takes significant reports and research from the past decade, illuminates them and raises important questions. The author covers practicalities too: tiredness, effects on decision-making, groupthink, overconfidence and being constantly busy. She reframes difficult

conversations as 'necessary meetings', exploring how to make them emotionally safer.

Lynch discusses DSL well-being honestly, exploring ways to say no, keeping boundaries and finding time for self-care.

This safeguarding book feels real – about people, culture and the daily reality of leading safeguarding work. I'll be recommending it to others.

**Andrew Hall, specialist safeguarding consultant and speaker,
former special school head teacher**

This is a book from which every school – whether in the UK or overseas – can learn. Though Delyth professes not to be a writer, she writes with an easy, engaging and accessible style. She utilises the research of others effectively, thinks outside the box and applies her own experience to make it even more relevant. This is a book which, as its title says, will provoke and encourage schools to go that extra mile in keeping pupils safe. I recommend it to every school safeguarding lead and governor.

David Smellie, Head of Safeguarding Unit, Farrer & Co

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Introduction

I have been a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) for 15 years. In 2010, I am not sure I really understood the role fully. I had a large purple and white file on a bookshelf that had some semblance of the word safeguarding in a sentence on the spine, which my predecessor told me I should read. I did not. Like most DSLs I learned on the job, thriving off the diverse challenges and opportunities to advocate for young people in order to try and create a safe environment in which everyone could flourish. However, it was not until I was sitting watching the news with my Dad (who was in the final throes of terminal cancer) one evening and the topic of conversation turned to Jimmy Savile that my heart was really set ablaze. Remarking that I found it staggering that such a household name could be a notorious predator and sex offender, and expressing my disbelief over his victims not feeling they were able to come forward, Dad quietly replied, 'I understand. It happened to me.' He went on to describe the regular abuse of boys in his prep school dormitory. I asked him why he didn't tell anyone; he simply replied, 'Because that's just what happened; I thought it was normal.'

Safeguarding has come a long way since then and the DSL role description has changed immeasurably, but there are few safeguarding books for those of us working as DSLs in organisations. I suspect this is because the frequency with which legislation changes means that as soon as a book is written, it goes out of date. I also imagine that the best DSLs are too busy *doing* safeguarding to even contemplate writing a book. However, over the last decade, it has become obvious that there are some tenets of safeguarding which do not change – the culture within an organisation and the unstinting belief and passion required by the DSL leading it. So, this is a book about culture, and *sustainable* culture: how can safeguarding within schools be enduring and how can we – the DSLs – work in a way in which we thrive, building up experience and knowledge to ensure that the environment in which we are the ultimate safeguarding guide is a safe and supportive one? I want you to believe in yourself and to really enjoy creating the right culture and ethos for all who learn and work within it. It might be argued that not many would actively seek out the role. Let's change that; there are risks and stressors but we can overcome fear and excel – and love – this very unique and special of roles.

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The chapters are structured in a way so there is theory behind the practical suggestions. When we are looking to engage with those we work with regarding a concept, ensuring that they understand the rationale behind an idea or strategy, it's useful to have the research to hand. There will not be a focus on statutory guidance, policy writing or how to prepare for an inspection. Those are the 'taken for granted's'. This book aims to be more courageous, shining a light on the intangibles as well as what we can do to ensure that we are fully equipped to tread bravely across our own unique safeguarding landscape.

A prevailing safeguarding culture is about everyone pulling together and understanding the reasons why and the consequences if they don't. Schools are different to other organisations though – the staff lists change, and the students change – it is a highly transient population and so, for safeguarding to be truly enduring, there needs to be a coherent and cyclical strategy of assessment, review and action. We also need to make safeguarding interesting, relevant and fun for staff, or it becomes a topic which will always prompt an eye roll or an excuse not to attend a course or some training.

Pupils are the most important people in any school – they are the reasons why schools exist. I am not about to get into a contentious debate about who the most significant adults are within a school, but the role of the DSL is right up there. We have been afforded a tremendous responsibility and it is our privilege to make a difference to the lives of children and potentially alter a culture within a school which may also re-route the life of an adult. This should not be seen as a daunting task; it is a privilege.

I am not a writer. I am a working parent, going from child in need meetings to hurling dirty PE kit into the washing machine within the space of five minutes. I also acknowledge that my perspective – as a white, middle-class woman – is just one amongst many, and I approach this work with a deep respect for the diverse journeys and experiences of all readers. My hope is to foster an inclusive space, mindful of both our differences and our shared humanity. But if my experience can offer suggestions, thoughts and practical advice which will enable DSLs to work creatively and sustainably in order to keep the young people in their schools and colleges safe, that is all I wish.



Online resources are available at:
www.crownhouse.co.uk/beyondcompliance

Chapter 1

Safeguarding Culture

.....
Growing a culture requires a good storyteller. Changing a culture requires a persuasive editor.¹

Ryan Lilly

.....

What is ‘a culture of safeguarding’?

I am often asked the question: ‘How do you know if the culture in your school is a safe one?’ If I knew the answer, I wouldn’t be writing this book; I would be earning millions of pounds doing TED Talks around the world. But ... it’s a feeling, isn’t it? A gut emotion and the atmosphere which is not only ascertained by surveys and conversations with the young people, but simply by watching – observing the interactions between pupils and their peers and between pupils and staff. It’s about being a fly on the wall in the staffroom and witnessing conversations between colleagues and how interactions are supportively and compassionately managed. At its best, it is a place where all – both staff and students – have the potential to thrive and feel safe. It is not just about having all of the policies in place and being focused on inspection outcomes rather than the outcomes for children.

When a culture of safeguarding prevails, it almost oozes through the pores of every wall and every individual in the school – it is tangible and simply underpins, naturally, every decision and conversation. It is when everyone lives out the organisation’s values and fosters an environment whereby, if those values are not aligned, others feel comfortable having a gentle and supportive conversation. It is about vulnerability and being non-judgemental. The moment that we think our school environment is a safe one, it is not. We have slipped from being a consciously competent DSL to unconsciously incompetent – and dangerous. At this point,

.....
¹ R. Lilly, *Startup Balanced! The Balances Startups Strike to Succeed* (Lilly Launcher Publishing, 2012).

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despite the warning lights, no one is noticing because behaviours have become normalised and there exists an apathy which, for a variety of reasons, no one is willing to challenge.

However, what has been described above is like trying to grasp a slippery eel. The perfect utopia which, given that the environment of safeguarding is dependent on hundreds of different human beings, all with different perspectives and life journeys and all with their own story to tell, is a fantasy. A utopia is a place in which – somehow – all concerns and problems have disappeared and where staff and students can live a life which is perfect. You could argue that if we – as DSLs – ever achieved this in our place of work, we would be doing ourselves out of a job. Safeguarding is a dynamic process rather than a perfectible state.

A strong culture of safety is not the remit of one individual, however. Safeguarding needs to be entrenched in every area of school life and by every individual. The DSL is the leader: someone who articulates a vision through a well-thought-through and bespoke organisational strategy, and who is empowering others to do the same in their roles. The team effect creates a safeguarding result that far surpasses what we might produce on our own and – more importantly – if we leave, the culture endures.

Creating this takes time, energy and passion. There have been several serious case reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews which have highlighted where the culture within an organisation was such that, although there were some concerns about an individual, these concerns were not stated, believed or listened to. The review of William Vahey, which analysed his behaviour of sexual abuse over a four-year period at Southbank School, found that aspects of his conduct and performance could have alerted senior staff to the possibility that he was abusing pupils but, for a variety of reasons, this was not given any consideration at the time.² The authors of the report stated that some of the reasons ‘are likely to be applicable to other schools within both the independent and maintained sectors’, but crucially that some related very specifically to the school itself.

We are all well versed in the concepts of ‘it could happen here’, ‘be vigilant’ and ‘don’t think what if I am wrong, think what if I am right?’ But how

2 J. Wonnacott and E. Carmi, *Serious Case Review: Southbank International School* (Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster Local Safeguarding Children Board, 2016). Available at: <https://www.icmec.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Southbank-UK-Serious-Case-Review-and-Report.pdf>, p. 3.

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can we prevent ourselves from normalising and accepting behaviours by other adults – and children – so that our organisations are not subject to a child safeguarding practice review in which someone causing harm was simply 'hiding in plain sight'? One of the prevailing thoughts about organisational culture is that it is 'the way things are done around here'.³ What those working in your school are unlikely to tell you (or inspectors) is that it is actually about the *unspoken* rules of how things get noticed, get done, or get ignored. The safeguarding culture within our school is its personality as seen through the eyes of our employees, our pupils and their parents.

Why are schools vulnerable?

School is considered to be a normal part of children's development and therefore, between the ages of 5 and 16, they spend a significant amount of time there, building relationships and trust with staff.

Parents and carers also trust those adults that work in schools, they have no reason to doubt their suitability or any reason to question their motivation to work in those roles. Parents and carers understand that the day's activities are tightly scheduled, with one activity leading at a prearranged time into the next, and the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of staff. Schools *are* institutions – either partial or total. All DSLs – and indeed all who work in schools – must remember that the amount of time a young person spends in a particular organisational setting has been proven as a risk factor for abuse. Studies have demonstrated that when young people spend a significant amount of time together in these settings, their vulnerability to victimisation increases significantly.⁴ So, the school itself makes the setting vulnerable. However, we need to try to identify where each school might be *more* vulnerable. What is your own school's unique safeguarding DNA?

3 T. E. Deal and A. A. Kennedy, *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

4 A. Carr, B. Dooley, M. Fitzpatrick, E. Flanagan, R. Flanagan-Howard, K. Tierney and M. White, Adult adjustment of survivors of institutional child abuse in Ireland, *Child Abuse & Neglect* 34 (2010): 477–489.

Getting inside what culture actually is ...

Values are the bedrock; culture is the shifting landscape

A school's culture reflects how everyone within it works and interacts together, as well as the behaviours the school holistically values and tolerates. The core values of the school, which may be explicitly stated or sitting within an overarching mission statement, guide decision making and a sense of what is important and what is right. They are the bedrock underneath the surface of everyday school life; they are the rules of the game. And if we think of the values as the bedrock, the culture is the shifting landscape on top. Culture is the embodiment of the values, and I would add *current* embodiment. The transient nature of a school means that the individuals within it change frequently, as do other factors: there will be temporary changes borne out by the rhythms of the terms, and more permanent changes such as environmental events (for example, COVID-19, which meant changes in legislation, or the Everyone's Invited movement). Values and culture are interwoven together in a complex tapestry which plays a vitally important role in safeguarding within any school, but it is not often spoken about explicitly.


Potential employees are looking to see whether their personal values align with the school and where they might thrive – or, indeed, where they would not fit in. If the values are part of an already robust recruitment process, then we will enlist team members who share core beliefs, who will want to be active participants in our shared safeguarding culture. Personal values will – and do – change over time but our organisation's values will be strong and consistent. When appointments are given to individuals who are aligned to those principles, the result will be a team with a shared set of ethics.


Values also help our staff and pupils make the right decisions. If someone is considering the right course of action – for example, whether to step in and actively notice when an inappropriate behaviour or comment has been made, or spend time looking behind the initial presentation of an individual's actions even though they might be busy themselves (being guided by values and asking themselves if their thoughts and eventual decision echoes the organisation's values) – they can be assured that they

Safeguarding Culture

are making the right decision. Hence safeguarding training which is delivered through a values lens can be more powerful and meaningfully relevant.

Furthermore, when a low-level concern about an adult needs to be addressed with them (the concept was introduced by Keeping Children Safe in Education [KCSIE] in 2021⁵), values can be incredibly helpful. I work with the following five organisational values: kindness, integrity, respect, responsibility and courage. Addressing, for example, the issue of a colleague who berated another staff member publicly through the medium of a values-based conversation enables us to speak about kindness and respect: we can facilitate a discussion about what these words mean to them, to the person who they reprimanded so visibly and what others who witnessed the altercation may have felt.

It is notoriously difficult to measure values, particularly if they are lofty ideals which are difficult to translate into practical day-to-day behaviours. However, some practical strategies are included in the online resources that accompany this book. 

Strengthening values, so that they are helping to secure an enduring positive culture around safeguarding, adds further hooks to our safeguarding Velcro. This can be done all the way through a member of staff's journey in our school: through interviewing (and considering the inclusion of values, behaviours and attitudes in interviewing), induction and training, feedback, appraisal and exit interviews. There are various examples of how to do this in the online resources. 

Sponges not rocks

A culture which encourages open communication, and in which people are genuinely heard, facilitates an environment of mutual respect and kindness. All need to be confident about making a statement and feeling empowered to share their observations. As an observer, I see those schools with great cultures having coped brilliantly with this highly timely and important introduction of low-level concerns, but those without the right culture have struggled. Our staff need to be like sponges, not rocks. They need – just like a sponge – to be sensitive and reactive to

5 Department for Education, *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021: Proposed Statutory Guidelines for Schools and Colleges* (2021). Available at: https://consult.education.gov.uk/safeguarding-in-schools-team/keeping-children-safe-in-education-schools-and-col/supporting_documents/Proposed%20keeping%20children%20safe%20in%20education%20guidance%202021%20%20for%20consultation.pdf.

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the environment around them; to take time to notice and absorb information and then act on it. Sea sponges are master filters and are one of the most important factors in changing water quality and preventing harmful ecosystem changes. When those around you are willing to spot the 'rocks', those that are not contributing to the environment that you wish to engender, the rocks become sediment and get washed away. The rocks no longer obstruct the safeguarding vision that you wish to create. In 2018 a visitor to Lusty Glaze beach in Cornwall was ridiculed when she complained about hurting her leg on a rock on the beach. 'Something needs to be done about this rock as it is covered in beautiful waves and nobody can see it', she wrote on the beach's Facebook page.⁶ The visitor was ridiculed, but these are the people you need – those who can spot the rocks which are covered in beautiful waves and that others fail to notice.

Recruitment

'Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility' is a phrase etched on every DSL's mind – with a laser pen. In the context of safeguarding, recruitment is everyone's responsibility too. Safer recruitment covers everything from writing the job description to shortlisting, checks and references, interviewing, induction and probation periods. Much has been written about safer recruitment in education, and our recruitment processes will undoubtedly reflect the culture of our schools. It says a lot about our organisation. It demonstrates how individuals collaborate with each other, levels of professionalism and attention to detail, and the extent to which we make an effort to get this right diffuses an explicit essence about our culture, what the school values and what it is willing to invest in. The irony of course is that if we get it wrong, the consequences can be catastrophic and the fall-out diverts resources from the core business of educating young people. Get it right and no one really notices. But it's not just about recruitment; our safeguarding culture should trickle into induction and seep into our appraisal processes like small streams running across our safeguarding landscape. Those who consistently undermine the staff code of conduct may also lack the ability to self-reflect or recognise when their behaviour needs correction. Recruitment, induction, appraisal and exit interviews should all be informed by

6 W. Coldwell, 'There's a rock on this beach!' and other awful tourist complaints, *The Guardian* (23 September 2018). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/shortcuts/2018/sep/23/theres-a-rock-on-this-beach-and-other-awful-tourist-complaints>.

safeguarding culture; equally, when done well, these processes also serve to reinforce and strengthen that culture. It is a symbiotic commensalism.

Typology of offenders

It is important to understand why a poor culture of safeguarding could actually assist an adult in making poor decisions. Considering the typology of three certain types of individuals who have been broadly identified to commit child sexual abuse allows us – and those we work with – to gain a greater appreciation of this.⁷

Serial offenders

These are described as chronic and habitual offenders who manipulate situations to gain access to victims. They make rational choices about the relative costs and benefits of offending in the context of particular situations. They could also be described as ‘preferential offenders’ – those who have a conscious desire to sexually abuse children. They do not see, and are not easily deterred by, obstacles.

Opportunistic offenders

These are more likely to abuse in settings and circumstances where there is low likelihood of detection. The personal and social constraints on the behaviour of opportunistic offenders are often stronger, but they do weaken from time to time. They may be able to justify their actions in an acceptable way, especially where situational factors serve to muddle personal accountability. For this type of offender, organisational controls will be influential in preventing offending and they abuse because possible victims are available and potentially vulnerable. They will abuse where an environment inadvertently facilitates, or fails to prevent, abusive activity.

7 R. Wortley and S. Smallbone (eds), *Situational Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse* (Cullompton: Willan, 2006).

In *Beyond Compliance*, Delyth Lynch draws on over 15 years' experience as a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) to offer a guide to creating a safeguarding culture that is coherent, sustainable and embedded into every aspect of school life.

Combining clear theory with case studies and practical suggestions, Delyth shares strategies and helpful advice that will make safeguarding sustainable and adaptable, involving a cyclical approach of assessment, action and review. She demonstrates that sustainable safeguarding can become a shared vision in schools – one that, when truly understood and embraced by all, will underpin every decision made and inform every conversation that takes place amongst staff.

Written with warmth and a tremendous passion for keeping young people safe, this is an inspiring and enabling handbook for DSLs at all levels, offering them the confidence and knowledge they need to thrive in this vital role.

Essential for all current and aspiring DSLs, school leaders, governors and safeguarding training consultants, this book will also be useful for those with a responsibility for safeguarding in organisations outside education.

A safeguarding book like no other.

Sir Anthony Seldon, educator, author and historian

Anyone who cares about keeping young people safe should read *Beyond Compliance*.

**Robin Fletcher, CEO, Boarding Schools' Association,
founder of SACPA (Safeguarding and Child Protection Association)**

I highly recommend this book to anyone seeking to understand the truth about safeguarding in the modern era.

Ann Marie Christian, International Independent Safeguarding Consultant

This safeguarding book feels real – about people, culture and the daily reality of leading safeguarding work. I'll be recommending it.

**Andrew Hall, specialist safeguarding consultant and speaker,
former special school head teacher**

This is a book from which every school – whether in the UK or overseas – can learn.

David Smellie, Head of Safeguarding Unit, Farrer & Co

Delyth Lynch has over 25 years' experience of teaching and senior leadership in education and is widely recognised as one of the UK's leading experts in safeguarding, particularly in the independent sector. She speaks regularly about the issue of culture within schools and the work that she has pioneered at Wellington College around values, behaviours and attitudes. She has been awarded the Safeguarding and Child Protection Association (SACPA)'s Safeguarding Initiative Award for two consecutive years. Delyth is also on the executive board of SACPA and an NSPCC-accredited trainer, having trained in supervision and in the delivery of safer recruitment training.

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