



Safeguarding in international schools: **4 vital issues**

Keeping children safe is a challenge in any school, but international schools have extra challenges to overcome. In this resource, our customer from Orbital Education, a leading expert in international safeguarding, offers his advice.





An interview with our customer, Michael Clack, Regional Head of Schools, Orbital Education.

Michael's schools use our online learning service for international schools.

The protection of the children comes above everything else in a school; it outweighs the importance of exams, it takes precedence over staffing costs, and it absolutely trumps the desire to maintain a school's reputation.

For school leaders, the thought of making a safeguarding mistake is utterly terrifying, owing to the risks involved. But is it as straightforward as just ensuring all your paperwork is in order?

Not really, says Michael Clack, a leading expert in safeguarding in international schools.

Clack has more than 25 years of educational experience, with nine of those spent in Dubai and Portugal. While in Dubai, Clack was the principal of Raffles International School, and prior to that he was headmaster of Oporto British School, Portugal.

Now back in the UK, Mr Clack is regional head of schools for the international schools group, Orbital Education, a team inspector for the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI),

and a lead improvement partner and peer accreditor for the Council of Overseas British International Schools (COBIS).

In addition to this, Clack makes up part of the international taskforce on child protection for the Council of International Schools (CIS).

Safer recruitment

Clack describes the challenge of safeguarding in international schools as an ever-changing and never-ending series of mini-challenges – you are never finished and will always be adapting to new dangers in the world.

"Before the quality of teaching and learning, you have to ensure that you have a safe and secure environment," he says.

"Of course we want to deliver high-quality teaching and learning, but I'll say this as a parent myself. First, I want children to be safe."

For international school leaders trying to ensure the safety of the children entrusted into their care, that task is made even trickier.

"International safeguarding is more challenging than in a UK setting. But just because it's more challenging, that does not mean you should shy away from investing as much due diligence as you would if you were in the UK," he says.

"It is more difficult and it presents more challenges because of the itinerant nature of many teachers that decide to work overseas."

So, how can school leaders get international recruitment right?

Clack advocates taking these steps:

1. Raise the bar to match the highest standard

As you might expect, guidelines and rules regarding safeguarding will vary according to the laws of the country in which your school is based. However, Clack suggests that rather than adapting what you're doing to suit the local laws, you take the bar and raise it to the highest standard.

"Your starting point is to ask: what are the standards in the UK? And where there's no contradiction or no challenge to local laws, we will always adhere to the British standard," he says. "Then we will try and go beyond that."

2. Paperwork ready before you're on the plane

One big problem in international teaching is keeping on top of police-check paperwork as teachers change jobs. Ideally, teachers need to obtain that paperwork before they leave the country because, once you've left, it isn't so easy to get hold of.

This might be especially hard if your new teacher is moving countries to take up a post at your school, and is trailing a spouse, or adding extra travelling opportunities in between contracts. They might be arriving long before their contract actually starts,

and this will make getting any missing paperwork even harder.

Clack says you must ensure all new incoming staff are on top of their documentation before they take up the post, especially because of the changes made to who can apply for a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate.

"British schools overseas could no longer get a DBS check, so there is now the International Child Protection Certificate (ICPC)."

Clack says that it doesn't stop there though.

"We will say we want to see police certificates from all the countries that the new teacher has worked in overseas for at least the last five years, and up to 10 if it is a leadership position," he says.

3. Regular spot checks

It's not enough, says Clack, to simply gather the paperwork before your new staff member begins their contract. What you need to do is regularly audit and spot check documentation ensuring the correct processes and procedures are in place and are adhered to.

"One approach is to pick names at random, and then pull their files and check you have everything there," says Clack.

These random spot checks are a good way to prepare for the formal audits you will have when inspected by British Schools Overseas or accreditation by international organisations, such as the Council of International Schools.

4. Use agencies with high standards

If you're a teacher looking to work in an international school, you might sign up for a specialist agency who will find you work and take a fee from the school they place you with. It's useful to have someone helping you navigate the system, and many teachers and school leaders appreciate the way they lighten the load of recruitment and job hunting.

However, not all agencies are asking for the same paperwork from the teachers on their books.

"The agencies will have certain requests for paperwork they want teachers to upload for their records: certificates, qualifications and so on," says Clack. "However, some will ask for less than others."

Clack advises checking carefully what paperwork and references the agencies you are using require of the teachers on their books before you use them.





This article was written by Grainne Hallahan and originally appeared on Tes.com as content sponsored by the recruitment team at Tes.

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