

## Africa Educational Trust - Child Protection Policy

### **1. The Africa Educational Trust – role and responsibilities**

The Africa Educational Trust works in the UK and Africa, providing services to children in schools and community settings, directly and through local partners. AET staff, trustees, interns, volunteers, contractors, partners and visitors to AET projects and premises – who are referred to below as AET personnel - have contact with children in these settings, and this policy aims to ensure that in all circumstances and in all the widely varying contexts in which AET works, the interests and safety of the child are paramount. Where the AET is operating in contexts and/or with partners which have existing child protection policies in place, and where these introduce more or a higher level of safeguards than are set out in this policy, then the higher level of safeguarding applies: in all cases AET staff must observe national legislation on child protection. Any partners that do not meet our level of safeguarding must sign up to our policy. Anyone under the age of 18<sup>1</sup> will be given the protection accorded to a child for the purposes of this policy. Those over the age of 18 may still be accorded special protection under the AET Protection of Vulnerable Adults policy.

This policy is grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which sets out as a principle that children should be protected from “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse”. The Africa Educational Trust believes that every child, should be able to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment in which their dignity is respected. All forms of abuse and exploitation are unacceptable, and it is an institutional and individual responsibility to protect children. This applies to every child, whatever their age, gender, religious beliefs, racial origin or ethnic identity, culture, class, disability or sexual orientation. The aim of this policy is to ensure that through the work of Africa Educational Trust, children are protected from abuse and exploitation, both direct and indirect.

Africa Educational Trust works in some of the world’s most challenging environments with children who have been exposed to violence and trauma. Recognising the differences in views and approaches between the different contexts in which we work, this policy affirms the following guiding principles underpin the protection of children:

1. *The guiding principle is that the interests of the child are paramount. Africa Educational Trust personnel should consider the risks to which the children with which they are in contact have already been exposed, and how the best interests of these children can be protected.*
2. *The guiding principle is that children should be enabled and empowered to understand that they are entitled to have their personal safety and dignity respected and protected: they are entitled to be safe from abuse. They should also be informed what to do if they feel they are at risk of or have been abused in any way, and a member of the AET personnel who is accessible to them should be charged with responsibility for being the first point of contact for children.*
3. *The guiding principle is that harm to children is preventable and every adult has an important role to play in preventing violence, abuse, harassment and bullying. Africa*

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of a child may vary country to country and should reflect the age of consent for that country. There may also be disparity in legislation regarding pregnancy and termination. It is important that country staff make themselves aware of the local legislation in these matters.

*Educational Trust personnel should observe the protocols below, considering how they apply in the context to protect the best interests of the children. AET personnel should also consider how they will manage contact with children in challenging contexts and/or far removed from their own communities or family members.*

4. *The guiding principle is that the privacy and dignity of the child is to be respected, and not made vulnerable to abuse via the media. AET personnel should consider their own role in taking photographs and circulating information about children and how to balance the need to portray challenging contexts with the need to avoid negative stereotyping*
5. *The guiding principle is that every adult has a positive role to play in providing a safe environment for children, and in taking action if children are perceived to be at risk. AET personnel should assess what they see and hear, and should respond to any complaints or disclosures by children. Any allegations of abuse must be treated seriously and dealt with quickly.*
6. *The guiding principle is that the safety of children should be built into the way AET works. This means we must look at our organisation, its systems and procedures, within the different contexts in which we operate and ensure that they enshrine the possible practices for the protection for children.*

These principles inform the policy below which must be adhered to by all Africa Educational Trust personnel both at work and outside of work.

At the bottom of this policy there are references to a number of documents providing further information about child protection, and Africa Educational Trust personnel are encouraged to read these.

## **2. Children at risk**

*The guiding principle is that the interests of the child are paramount. Africa Educational Trust personnel should consider the risks to which the children with which they are in contact have already been exposed, and how the best interests of these children can best be protected.*

### **a. How are children at risk?**

Children can be at risk from adults, or other children, who may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting; by those known to them, in positions of trust and responsibility or, more rarely, by a stranger.

**Physical Abuse:** Is when a person deliberately hurts or threatens to hurt or abuse a child, which can include any activity that causes physical harm to a child. It may involve hitting, shaking, poisoning, drowning, tying up and burning among other forms of physical violence. This is not an exhaustive list.

**Emotional Abuse:** Is when a person damages a child's emotional well-being by attacking a child's self-esteem verbally or non-verbally by rejecting, degrading, isolating, terrorising, corrupting, ignoring or exploiting the child. It may involve age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children, or other actions that are not respectful of the child. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill treatment of a child, though it may also occur alone.

**Sexual Abuse:** Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in activities to satisfy sexual power, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve a wide range of physical contact and non-contact activities, including looking at, or being

involved in the production of pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

**Neglect:** Is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, taking into account the local context, where the neglect is likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

**Abuse by groups:** Children can also be at risk through the actions of related or non-related people, either working through a ring, or operating within a community, organisation or institution.

#### **b. Who perpetrates harm against children?**

Any adults, male or female, can be capable of harming children, and can include:

- Those in positions of responsibility or trust over the child.
- A person who is known to and has access to the child, including carers.
- Someone in authority such as a teacher, youth leader, children's worker or spiritual leader
- A person who sets out to join organisations to obtain access to children, and who is a paedophile, who may deliberately target faith-based and international development organisations
- Other children may also take part in action that harms other children.

#### **c. What are the signs of violence or abuse?**

Signs of child abuse and harm are diverse, and may be very difficult to detect or interpret, even for those trained and skilled in this area of work. Children may disclose that they have been harmed or abused, or some of signs below may be evident:

**Physical signs** such as injuries which have not got a proper explanation and which have not been treated, injuries that appear to have been caused by a weapon or instrument, self-harm, or children being kept out of sight or away from collective activities for no proper reason.

**Emotional signs** which can include all kinds of inappropriate behaviour, including attention-seeking, extreme tiredness, fear of adults and bed-wetting by an older child.

**Signs of neglect** can include hygiene, clothing, skin or personal care which is much below the local standard, low weight, a child left alone.

**Sexual signs** can be hard to detect, but can include a child who is sexually provocative with adults or who has inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home.

Abuse, harassment and bullying involve the misuse of power and can result in a justice issue if criminal behaviour has occurred. In all cases the victim is blameless

As the majority of AET's work takes place outside the UK, we acknowledge that there are different interpretations of what constitutes "abuse" and how these cases are dealt with. As part of this agreement, we therefore commit to promoting child protection policies and standards with all organisations and stakeholders, believing that strengthening grassroots knowledge of child protection issues will reduce the risk of such occurrence. AET acknowledges that many of the children directly or indirectly impacted on through its work are extremely vulnerable to abuse and

exploitation, especially girls, those affected by HIV/AIDS, orphans, children with disabilities, street children, those living in extreme poverty and those living in conflict affected regions.

### **3. Empowering children**

*The guiding principle is that children should be enabled and empowered to understand that they are entitled to have their personal safety and dignity respected and protected: they are entitled to be safe from abuse. They should also be informed what to do if they feel they are at risk of or have been abused in any way, and a member of the AET personnel who is accessible to them should be charged with responsibility for being the first point of contact for children.*

All managers of AET services and personnel must:

- Encourage the participation of children in decision-making within their schools, communities and the wider world.
- Ensure that information is provided to children in an accessible form informing them of their rights, including their right to be safe from abuse, and what to do if they are afraid.
- Ensure that a person who is accessible to children is given lead responsibility for being the first point of contact for them, and that this information is provided to children in a suitable form. Consideration must be given to cultural sensitivities to make sure that the person given this responsibility is culturally appropriate. This includes taking account of gender issues.
- Ensure that AET activities include empowerment for children in their right to respect for their personal dignity and freedom from abuse.

### **4. The responsibility of adults to protect children – Code of conduct**

*The guiding principle is that harm to children is preventable and every adult has an important role to play in preventing violence, abuse, harassment and bullying. Africa Educational Trust personnel should observe the protocols below, considering how they apply in the context to protect the best interests of the children. AET personnel should also consider how they will manage contact with children in challenging contexts and/or far removed from their own communities or family members.*

These protocols form a code of conduct designed to protect children from harm. AET personnel must:

- Treat all children equally, fairly and with respect,
- Manage individuals or groups of children without resorting to corporal punishment.
- Be aware that vulnerable children may have been affected by prior abuse, and they may use a relationship to obtain special attention. So it is important that adults should avoid being placed in compromising or vulnerable positions.
- Try to always be visible to other adults when with a child.
- At all times be seen to be respectful of children, reflecting positively on the children and their role in the community.
- Be aware that contact with children in challenging or difficult situations can be very distressing, and AET personnel should ensure that they have other adults to whom they can turn for support, help and advice.
- Be aware of potential cultural issues that may constitute child abuse e.g. FGM, forced marriage, drug abuse and radicalisation. If the issue is beyond the scope of AET's work, AET personnel should be aware of and link to alternative agencies that might provide support.

AET personnel must not:

- Touch children/minors in an inappropriate or culturally insensitive way, and if uncertain, should ask for permission before touching a child. Any touching should be visible to other people, and should not be in private.
- Fondle or kiss children or engage in any sexual activity, whether or not this involves contact.
- Use sexualised or abusive language with children.
- Stay alone with one or more children or minors in the same accommodation overnight and should, as far as possible and practical observe the two adult rule with two or more adults, including community members, being involved in visits or activities that engage with children.
- Engage in a relationship with a child that might be deemed to be exploitative
- Put a child in danger
- Physically hit or threaten to injure a child, eg as part of class discipline
- Spend excessive time alone with one child away from others.
- Share activities or spaces with children that are outside of a standard professional capacity
- Perform tasks of a personal nature that the child is capable of doing for themselves
- Verbally or emotionally abuse a child by acting in a way that shames or degrades them
- Endorse the participation of a child/young person in abusive activities eg bullying
- Make suggestive or discriminatory remarks

Organisational measures:

- Every AET project and office must adopt this child protection policy. Every AET project and programme must be designed to minimise the risk of harm to children they come into contact with or impact upon directly or indirectly
- Every AET office should have available relevant contact details for child protection services, social services, police and emergency medical help, or other support and/or law enforcement agencies that might be available.
- Every AET project and office must nominate one staff member to be responsible for safeguarding issues, both for the purposes of child protection and the protection of vulnerable adults, and the contact details of this person should be readily available to all personnel and beneficiaries.
- Recruitment and training protocols must be designed to ensure that personnel who may come into contact with children as part of their work, or who may be responsible for organising activities that involve contact with children receive appropriate information and training.
- AET will develop a standard form for report of allegations of child abuse.
- AET will seek out training opportunities for all staff involved in children's work to ensure that they develop and maintain the necessary skills and understanding to safeguard children, are able to recognise the signs and symptoms of possible abuse and neglect and know the procedures for reporting and recording their concerns.
- All AET personnel will be given a copy of this child protection policy, and will be required to sign a declaration that they have received and understood it.
- The Executive Director will report instances of safeguarding to donors and the Charity Commission.

## 5. Children and the media

*The guiding principle is that the privacy and dignity of the child is to be respected, and not made vulnerable to abuse via the media. AET personnel should consider their own role in taking photographs and circulating information about children and how to balance the need to portray challenging contexts with the need to avoid negative stereotyping.*

AET understands the sensitive issue around the publishing of information and images of children, especially on social media. Whilst acknowledging the need to use personal stories and images of children, and the pleasure and positive benefits that this usually brings, AET is committed to the rights and protection of children and encourages its partners to respect children's dignity and identity through. Photographic images of children need to be treated with particular care because of the potential for misuse. The AET has a picture policy to promote use of positive images of all people, and it sets out the following protocols:

- Consent - wherever possible, try to get permission from the people being photographed - preferably in writing or using a standard consent form being developed by AET. If this is not possible because of practical difficulties, think carefully about whether it is right to take photographs and either use them or submit them for use on a website or publication.
- It is important that photos do not reinforce negative stereotypes and unequal power relationships involving children. Does everyone look confident, comfortable and on equal terms with each other?
- Respecting a child's need for anonymity for their protection and well-being and using a different name for published material. Details attached to images and included in stories must not allow that child to be traced to his/her home or community.
- Avoid taking pictures that might be misused or misinterpreted. Pictures of naked children may be acceptable in some cultures, but can be used in other contexts by people who abuse children and should not be taken, circulated or published.

### E-Safety:

New technologies have become integral to the lives of children and young people in today's society, both within schools and in their lives outside school. Where projects involve computer access and training, AET personnel should help beneficiaries to become responsible users and can stay safe while using the internet. Children and young people should have an entitlement to safe Internet access at all times.

The Internet and other information and communication technologies can open up new educational opportunities for everyone. However, the use of these new technologies can put children at risk within and outside the school. Some of the dangers may include: access to illegal, harmful or inappropriate images or other content; unauthorised access to personal information or images; grooming by those with whom they make contact on the Internet; cyber-bullying and an inability to evaluate the quality, accuracy and relevance of information on the Internet.

To promote E-safety AET should ensure that:

- Any project involving ICT training adopts an E-safety policy

- Schools involved in ICT projects are supported to develop and implement E-Safety policies
- Any ICT project should build children's resilience to the risks to which they may be exposed, so that they have the confidence and skills to face and deal with these risks.

## **6. Actions to protect vulnerable children – dealing with allegations of abuse**

*The guiding principle is that every adult has a positive role to play in providing a safe environment for children, and in taking action if children are perceived to be at risk. AET personnel should assess what they see and hear, and should respond to any complaints or disclosures by children. Any allegations of abuse must be treated seriously and dealt with quickly.*

Children often do not talk about their experiences of violence or abuse, for a whole variety of reasons. If a child discloses that they have suffered harm as a result of unacceptable behaviour by adults, or if AET personnel witness abuse, violence or other behaviour that is judged to put a child or children at risk, there is an obligation to act: doing nothing is not an option.

How allegations or disclosures are handled can have a significant impact on the child, so the person dealing with the disclosure or allegations needs to ask themselves three basic questions:

- What or how much do I need to know? Remember that asking a child to repeat allegations of abuse can of itself be a form of abuse. It is better not to question a child, but report what the child has said to the local Protection Officer.
- What do I need to do?
- When do I need to do it?

Steps to take if a child reveals they are being abused:

- Take the child to a quiet place
- Tell the child that you can't keep it a secret if what the child is about to say informs you that they are being hurt or they are hurting someone else.
- Don't write anything down in front of the child.
- Tell the child that you will have to write down what they said.
- Only write down what the child said and no additions. Write the date, name of child, your name, this child told me on my own (or if any other person was present)
- Tell the child what action you will take following this conversation

If the abuse is reported by a third party, similar steps and support should be provided to those witnessing or reporting child abuse.

### **Procedure for dealing with allegations of abuse**

If an AET personnel receives allegations of abuse or has grounds to suspect that abuse may have taken place, the following steps must be followed:

- Treat all disclosures or allegations seriously and calmly, and ensure that those who make them are aware of the steps that will be taken.
- Respect the confidence and privacy of those concerned: allegations or disclosures should only be discussed with others on a need to know basis.

- If the child is at immediate risk, then arrangements must be made for her/him to be moved to a place of safety.
- Report the information to the local manager and local protection officer. This must be done in private. Record in writing what has happened, including as much factual detail as possible, send a copy to the local safeguarding representative, and keep a copy.
- The local manager will then report to the staff member designated for safeguarding, who will work with the manager to ensure the appropriate action is taken under the AET's disciplinary code.
- The AET executive director and safeguarding trustee are responsible for reporting the matter to the next AET board and ensuring that the organisations amends its procedures and practices as necessary.
- Allegations of criminal activity must be reported to the police or other relevant law enforcement agencies.

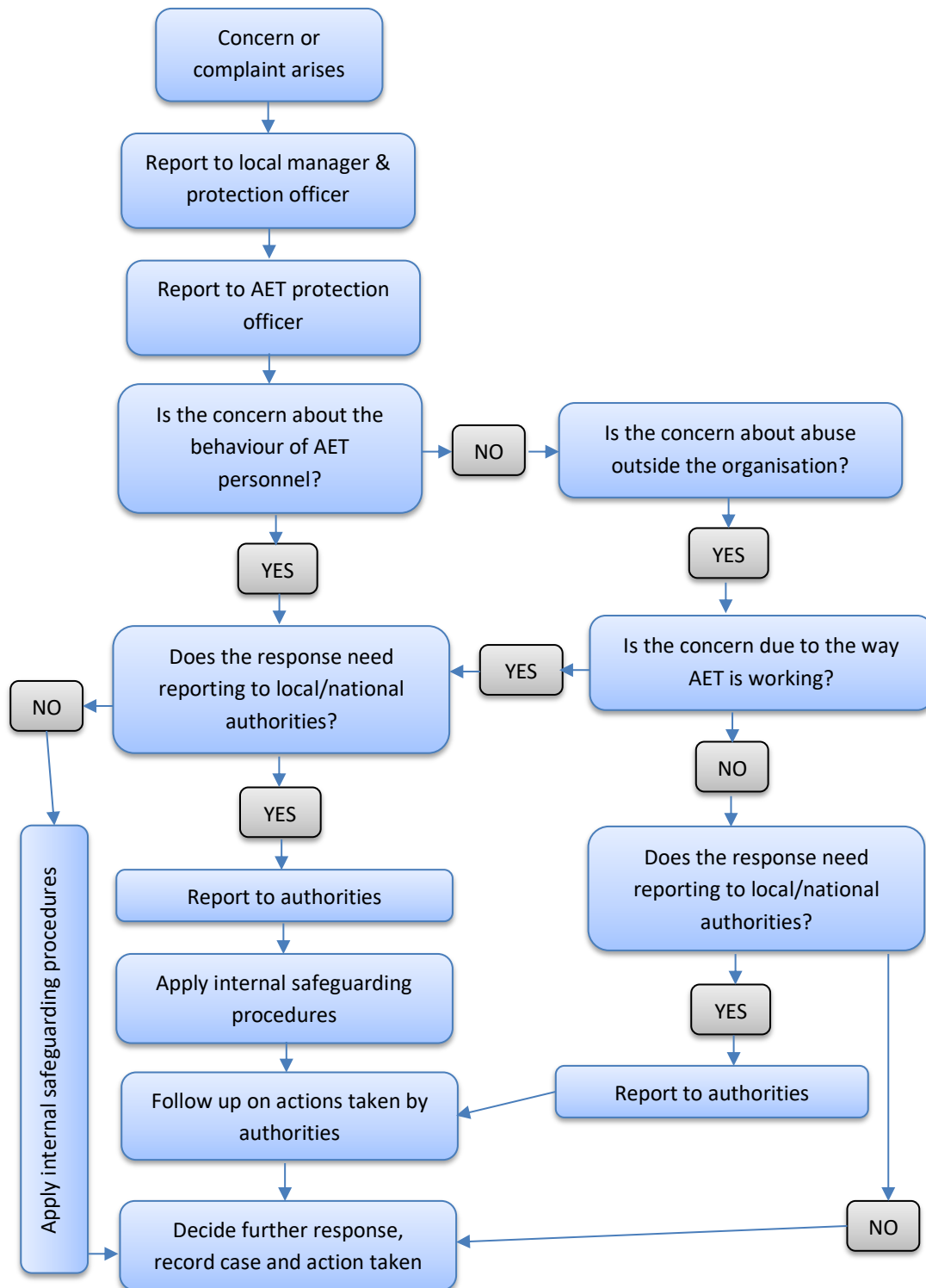
### **Abuse in schools, homes and communities not due to our work**

Abuse arising within a community or school may not be due to our programmes or operations. However, AET personnel still have a responsibility to report on suspected or actual child abuse taking place.

- As AET delivers projects in partnership with schools and communities, AET and partner staff should be ready to advise partner, school and community leaders on the right action to take and on referral pathways available to them.

The diagram below represents the reporting procedure that should be followed (adapted from the Keeping Children Safe, Child Safe Guarding Standards).





### Disciplinary action

The ramifications of misconduct are serious. If allegations of child abuse are made against a member of staff by a named individual from a verifiable source, the accused individual will be suspended (on full pay if relevant) pending the outcome of inquiries. The area manager, in consultation with the executive director and designated child protection officer, will determine

the disciplinary action and other steps to take. Allegations of child abuse, if substantiated, will be treated as gross misconduct under AET disciplinary procedures and may constitute grounds for instant dismissal. Allegations of child abuse by others, such as volunteers or partners, may, if substantiated, lead to a termination of their relationship with AET. All allegations of criminal activity will be reported to the relevant law enforcement agencies. It is also not appropriate to break confidentiality to the media or people outside of the organisation. Disciplinary action will be taken if staff report to outside agencies without authority.

### **Recording and monitoring of abuse**

All complaints of abuse must be recorded and action must be monitored.

### **7. Building protection of children in our organisation and procedures**

*The guiding principle is that the safety of children should be built into the way AET works. This means we must look at our organisation, its systems and procedures, within the different contexts in which we operate and ensure that they enshrine the possible practices for the protection for children.*

### **Responsibility of AET staff**

AET staff are responsible for implementing this policy in their area of operation. This means they must:

- Ensure that all partners are briefed as to their accountability under the policy. This should form part of any MoU or partnership agreement. Allegations of abuse by staff of partnering agencies can be sensitive and cause conflict in host communities. Should this arise AET staff should seek advice from a senior manager before taking any action.
- Promote local development of child protection policies and practices.
- Increase their own understanding of what constitutes child abuse
- Understand how to respond to concerns or disclosures of abuse
- Minimise any potential risks to children through
  - Following a systematic recruitment and selection process for staff, consultants and volunteers
  - Following guidelines for recording and publishing images of children
  - Working with communities and authorities to improve local capacity to prevent and deal with situations of child abuse
  - Following the code of conduct

All country and regional managers and senior management are responsible for:

- Ensuring that all new employees read and sign a copy of the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct, prior to or at the time of issuing an employment contract, to show that they are aware of and agree to act in accordance with the Policies. Signed copies must be placed in their personnel file.
- Ensuring that all staff are aware of how they can raise concerns about unacceptable behaviour towards children by other personnel or beneficiaries.
- Ensuring that child protection policy training is provided to new employees during their induction, and all staff receive child safeguarding training.

- Ensuring that all partners, are informed of and have signed up to the Child Protection Policy or have their own child protection policies in place with a higher level of safeguarding. How allegations of child abuse by staff of partner agencies should be responded to, should be considered on a case by case basis depending on the host community sensitivities.
- Ensuring that each country office has local procedures in place, consistent with national law, to respond to incidents of child abuse.
- Ensuring that all visitors, who will be in contact with children, read and sign a copy of the Child Protection Policy to show that they agree to comply with the policy in all contacts and communications with children.
- Ensuring that those who have reported child safeguarding concerns or are accused of child abuse are given appropriate care, support and protection in dealing with all aspects of the case including any safety concerns and potential reprisals which may arise from the incident or from the reporting of such concerns.

The AET Protection Officer is responsible for making sure that child safeguarding measures are integrated throughout the organisation and acts as a focal point.

### **Recruitment policies and safeguarding**

All persons under recruitment will be expected to:

- Undergo a face-to-face interview. For permanent members of staff this will include a panel of one or more interviewers.
- Provide two character references that are not family members and to whom the candidate has been known for over two years.
- Read and adhere to the child protection statement and related policies.
- For UK staff undergo a CRB check if the candidate will come into direct contact with children over a sustained period of time.
- If available, African staff undergo checks that are appropriate to their country e.g. Certificate of Good Conduct

### **8. Next steps in this policy**

- a. The policy will be provided to all Africa Educational Trust staff, interns and trustees, and they will be required to sign that they have received and read the policy. Copies of the signed form should be returned to the London office for filing.
- b. Training will be provided to staff and trustees. This should cover:
  - i. Developing local procedures for implementing the policy
  - ii. How to integrate child protection in projects and programmes
- c. Managers of AET activities and centres will be responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented locally and that the associated actions are taken, including to inform and empower children.
- d. An internal audit will be carried out once a year of compliance. The policy will be reviewed every two years.
- e. A child-friendly version of this policy will be produced to give to the children with whom we work.

Child protection policy and procedure agreement.

This is to confirm that I have read and understood this policy and agree to uphold it.

Signed .....

Name .....

Role .....

Date .....

## 9. Further reading

The UN World Report on Violence Against Children 2006

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

Child Protection, by the Inter-parliamentary Union, published by Unicef 2004

Adapting a systems approach to child protection, published by Unicef 2010

This policy draws extensively from:

Ten steps to creating safe environments for children and youth, published by the Canadian Red Cross

Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations

Safeguarding Policy, published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations

Protection Guidelines for Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults, Papua New Guinea Church Partnership

Update Date	Author
1.6.18	J.Polzerova