CONSIDERATIONS FOR WRITING A RESEARCH AND ETHICS POLICY

IMPORTANT: The ideas suggested within this document are not comprehensive. However, they provide a starter for schools considering writing a research and ethics policy.

Schools will want to develop a policy to support ethical research which reflects individual ethos and approach. However, there are important aspects which need to be covered in a research and ethics policy. This is a list of suggestions about what you can consider when compiling one:

What foundations will the school build their Research and Ethics policy around?
Aspects to consider:
- Making a position statement about the place of research within the school and the school's research culture.
- Consulting externally respected research guidelines in developing the school policy (e.g. Research guidelines from the British Educational Research Association, http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/; and the Council for Disabled Children, http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/434791/guidelines_for_research_with_cyp.pdf), Economic and Social Research Council Framework, http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/research-ethics.aspx).
- Linking the Research and Ethics Policy to other relevant school policies (e.g. Safeguarding Children Policy, Data Protection Policy, Inclusion Policy, Communication Policy, Equal Opportunities Policy, ICT/Internet Use Policy, etc.)
- Developing a companion Research Charter for the school – a short, easily accessible, position statement in a format which can be shared with families, school, visitors, etc.; developing an accessible student version.

Ensuring research is ethical
- How will research and ethics be addressed by the school?
  Points to consider:
    o Characteristics of what your school sees as ethical research (e.g. in terms of best interests, improving outcomes, relevance, respect for others, etc.)
    o What are the key processes the research within your school must have gone through (e.g. approval, gaining permission from families/participants, supervision/mentoring of the researcher)
    o Forming a school Research and Ethics group to meet regularly (perhaps monthly) to discuss research and ethics (e.g. consider including representative from local university / a governor or trustee / local authority member / involving other schools). Many local authorities now have their own research and ethics committees – you may be able to link with them.
    o Identifying an individual/team with responsibility for research guidance and supervision within the school and implementing the research policy.

- What structures and protocols will be in place to ensure that the research is planned and carried out in a way that the outcomes are useful and valid?
  Points to consider:
    o Developing a standard form which asks for key information about any proposed research to be considered by the school's Research and Ethics group
    o A flow diagram to show the stages that research carried out in your school should go through.
    o Developing an ethical code that researchers are asked to sign.

- What structures and protocols will the school develop around contact with students, families/guardians and staff about research?
    o Standard letter template when asking parents/guardians about their son or daughter's involvement in research, which includes prompts for inclusion of key information and guidance on what to do if parents/guardians have literacy difficulties.
    o Accessible forms of information about the research and their rights in relation to it, which can be shared with families and students at a level they understand.
    o Standard forms for parents to sign in relation to (a) participation and (b) photography and video.
    o A commitment to sharing information about the research regularly in an accessible and meaningful way with the young people, families/guardians, colleagues, etc.
- How will outside involvement be managed in terms of appropriate interactions, CRB checks, access to sensitive information, etc.
- How will your school will address, manage and respond to any unfavourable outcomes of or findings from research in a constructive way within the school's best interests, while not denying or suppressing them, compromising research ethics or penalising staff involved.

Supporting staff as researchers
Points to consider:
- Who within school is able/qualified to take the lead on co-ordinating research within school, providing support, guidance and supervision to staff on submitting their project to the school's research and ethics group, and the different stages of research to make sure the research is valid and valuable? Is this an individual or a team? Is this a role which could be supported by a link with a local university?
- What written guidance will be available to staff on aspects of research (e.g. finding out what others have done previously in the area of research focus, choosing the correct methodology, collecting and analysing data, drawing conclusions and sharing the outcomes of research so that it makes an impact) and school expectations?
- What training will be offered to support staff doing research (e.g. internal, external)?
- What opportunities or requirements for mentoring or supporting the researcher will there be (e.g. internal, external to the school)?

- What opportunities will educator researchers in your school have to meet together to share research issues and difficulties?
- Will there be collaborative opportunities with other schools?
- What provision will there be for researchers to help them to agree realistic timescales for research, adjust priorities, allow additional time to enable the research to be do-able, additional access to resources (e.g. computer, internet email)?

Making research inclusive

- How will your practice take account of individual needs?
  Points to consider:
    - Parents/carers who may have difficulty in understanding the research paperwork. One possibility is to involve someone (preferably impartial – e.g. a social worker) to explain the research to the parent face to face and supporting the consent process).
    - Involvement of students with SLD/PMLD/CLDD as researchers
    - Involvement of others not usually involved in research (e.g. catering staff, lunchtime supervisors, etc.)
- How will research in your school encourage, involve or invite relevant perspectives from:
    - The participants themselves (e.g. students)
    - Families (e.g. parents/carers/guardians, siblings, significant others)
    - Education colleagues
    - Colleagues from other disciplines / areas of work
    - Specialists in the area of research (e.g. through literature, conferences, CPD, local university contacts, parents/guardians)
    - Funders?

Sharing outcomes
It is important that research is shared for the good of students and schools, so the research process has meaning.

- How will the research be shared as it is progressing? (e.g. with a peer research group; through staff meetings, telephone conversations with parents, etc.)
- How will you ensure that research is shared in a permanent way (e.g. short information sheets about research in progress, asking researchers to present a short written report)?
- How will the research be shared most usefully and to greatest effect?
- Who will the research be shared with?
  Points to consider – as a matter of course, how will research be shared with:
    - School governors / trustees
    - Colleagues in your school – from education and other disciplines
    - Families (e.g. parents/carers/guardians, siblings, significant others)
    - Those outside your own school

- How will information about research projects and outcomes be made available on an ongoing basis (e.g. on the school intranet, website, staff noticeboard)?

Maximising the impact
- How will you ensure that the impact of the research being carried out is maximised?
  Points to consider:
  - Using the school Research and Ethics group to discuss the outcomes of research in your school and deciding at which level it is going to be shared (e.g. this could be an information sheet about the project; extending the project to another student or class; embedding the approach in the school's development plan).

Thinking about contingencies
- If a member of school staff who is involved in research leaves mid-way through the project, at what level will you ensure the intellectual property for the paperwork related to the research remains with the school?
  Points to consider –the school may want to come to an agreement with the member of staff about:
  - What happens to the research project if the member of staff leaves
    Completion of the research / handing it over in an orderly way
    Ownership of the research
    Data protection
    Sharing the research
    How the school will want to be credited in any articles / papers / presentations
    Limits on permission for staff to use the research they have carried out in support of qualifications, publications, etc.
  - Liaising with a colleague about handover of the research so it is not lost
  - Signing an agreement before starting research covering the points above.
- Who will have responsibility for implementing different sections of the Research and Ethics Policy? How often will it be reviewed to see if it needs updating (e.g. every two years)?
- How to address any negative impacts of research (e.g. on service delivery to children; workloads for the researcher / other staff)
- What action will you expect staff to take in the event of any negative findings or outcomes from research?

Externally funded research
- Who will have the responsibility for managing aspects of externally funded research (e.g. financing, reporting, etc.)