

the Common Assessment Framework and schools Fact sheet



The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a key part of delivering services that are integrated and focused around the needs of children and young people. It is one of the key integrated processes introduced as part of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme (ECM).

Understanding the CAF

The CAF is a holistic approach to conducting an assessment of a child or young person's additional needs which are not being met by the universal services they are receiving. The CAF facilitates the process by which different agencies working with the same child can 'join-up', and provides a co-ordinated and timely approach to support this.

The **CAF form** is a standardised tool used to conduct an assessment of a child's additional needs and helps practitioners to decide how those needs should be met. It is used by practitioners across children's services in England.

The CAF provides an assessment that is common across services. It helps to embed a shared language; supports better understanding amongst practitioners; and reduces the number and scale of different assessments faced by a child.

Keep reading to find out more about the benefits of CAF, who should be using it and how it can be embedded within schools.

CAF and schools

Ensuring that children and young people receive support quickly and that additional needs are identified early will need the input of lots of different children's services across the public, private and third sectors. Schools play an important role.

The Children's Plan (2007) sets out the expectation that all schools will provide access to the core offer of extended services by 2010, including swift and easy access (SEA) to targeted and specialist services such as speech and language therapy, sexual health advice and support, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Special Education Needs and disability services.

The CAF is a tool that will support SEA and will help school staff to establish links quickly with other practitioners who are working with a child or young person. It will help engage other relevant services earlier and more reliably. The CAF, particularly in the context of extended services will help schools tackle, along with other services, a broader range of social, behavioural and emotional problems acting as a barrier to learning and attainment.

The benefits of the CAF

School staff have reported a number of benefits from using the CAF including:

- the process has helped them to access services for the child or young person quicker
- many have welcomed the opportunity to work more closely with the child's parents or carers in a different way
- they have been able to develop valuable skills for their own career development.

What should schools do?

Schools should ensure current arrangements are effective in identifying children or young people in need of support. This would include emerging emotional distress and health needs. These arrangements should be set up in a sensitive way that ensures confidentiality for the child, young person and family.

These arrangements could include:

- ensuring that every member of staff is clear on their role in the early identification of emerging needs, and knows where they can get support e.g. from a local multi-agency team
- setting up drop-in provision
- participating in a locally convened multi-agency panel who take the decision as to when to undertake a CAF and who leads.

Schools must ensure that all staff are made aware of, understand and are carrying out their responsibilities in line with professional standards and current child-related legislation with regard to identifying pupil need, in particular child protection, special educational needs and disabilities. Staff need to be aware that there will be situations that require, for example, an immediate referral to social services rather than a CAF. Schools should therefore follow their child protection policy.

How should schools prepare to introduce CAF?

There are a number of steps a school can take to make introducing a CAF more straightforward including:

- raising general awareness with staff about why, when and how the CAF can be used effectively
- enabling staff to undergo local CAF training
- building the CAF into school procedures for children identified with possible support needs
- schools may decide to link CAF to other activities, for example by using the CAF pre-assessment checklist with universal assessments such as the Foundation Stage

Profile and other assessments for older children. This may provide a broader check of a child's progress

- using internal expertise such as SENCOs, school nurses, learning mentors, education welfare officers, pastoral managers, as well as support from other services if necessary, to aid identification of support needs.

Who within a school setting might carry out a CAF?

A CAF should be carried out by the person who the school considers to be the most appropriate. This person will need to have undergone local training in CAF procedures. Examples of those known to be undertaking CAFs include pastoral staff, SENCOs (or teaching assistants supporting the SENCO), learning mentors, heads of year, teachers and head teachers. Everyone working with children should know about the CAF and understand who is the most appropriate person within the school to undertake the CAF process.

Line management and supervision

It is important that managers of staff carrying out a CAF also undergo CAF training.

Will it affect our school governors?

School governors now have a statutory responsibility to promote the well-being of pupils. Schools are inspected against the five Every Child Matters outcomes as part of the new Ofsted inspection framework. School improvement partners will have an important role to support and challenge schools which involves: helping evaluate the school's performance; identifying priorities for improvement; and planning effective change. This role is to build the school's capacity to improve the attainment of pupils and to achieve other key outcomes for pupils that bear on achievement.

Work is underway to develop and implement a national system of IT support for CAF (eCAF) to provide authorised practitioners throughout England with access to a system which allows them to store and retrieve CAF information electronically, across agency and geographical borders where necessary.

For more information about the CAF and integrated working, visit the Children's Workforce Development Council website www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/caf or the Every Child Matters website www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/caf