

Question on Notice

No. 830

Asked on 11 August 2020

MR P WEIR asked the Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence (HON D FARMER)—

QUESTION

Will the Minister outline the procedure followed by staff members in the Department of Child Safety when they are contacted by teachers employed by the Queensland Department of Education alerting them to children who consistently turn up at school without breakfast, a packed lunch or money to purchase food from the school canteen?

ANSWER

Teachers are mandatory notifiers who are obligated to notify the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (DCSYW) when they believe a child has experienced significant harm, or may be at risk of significant harm and does not have a parent who is willing and able to protect them from that harm.

Teachers have a range of options available to them to inform a decision to notify DCSYW, including use of the Child Protection Guide. The Child Protection Guide might recommend the concerns being reported to DCSYW, but also might recommend that other supports would be more beneficial to a child or family.

When a Child Safety Officer (CSO) receives information from the community, they first gather information about the child, the parent, the harm, the child and family's environment and the family's specific circumstances. The CSO also checks for previous child protection history, to examine any patterns of harm or cumulative harm and, in some circumstances, seeks additional information from another agency.

The CSO and their Senior Team Leader use all of the information gathered to assess whether there is a reasonable suspicion a child is in need of protection. If there is, they record a notification which triggers an investigation. If there is not, the matter is recorded as a Child Concern Report.

A decision to record a notification is not contingent on the identification of a pattern of harm. In some cases, a notification is recorded in response to a singular incident. Children who consistently turn up at school without breakfast, a packed lunch or money to purchase food from the school canteen – that is, missing more than one meal in a day – will be recorded as a notification.

If a decision is made to record a Child Concern Report, the CSO normally contacts the teacher who made the report and provides advice around appropriate supports for the child. This advice might encourage the teacher to talk with the parent to let them know the teacher is concerned about their child being hungry at school and that they need to ensure lunch is provided.

The advice might also be for the teacher to ask the parent if they would like to be referred to a service such as Family and Child Connect or, if required, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Service. These programs help families to address a range of family and parenting challenges, including budgeting.

Generally, where families are struggling to meet their day-to-day financial commitments, but are otherwise coping well with parenting, it is more appropriate to support a child's safety with services outside of the statutory system.

Food insecurity is a growing issue, and many schools have established breakfast clubs to respond to this need.