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Dear Year 5 and 6 Parents/Carers,

'COUNTY LINES' EXPLOITATION

It is likely you have heard the term 'County Lines' used in the news recently. This is a national issue where criminal gangs are targeting children to move drugs and money in and out of cities and large towns, including Southend-on-Sea.

As part of County Lines, criminals can target children as young as 8 to 12 years old and into adulthood. They target children across all economic, ethnic and social groups. Gang members may use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons to do this. We are clear that this is child exploitation.

WARNING SIGNS

We want to support parents and carers to keep children safe; listed below are some warning signs of 'County Lines' exploitation for you to look out for. Often, these are behavioural changes such as:

- Persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out-of-area
- Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- Excessive receipt of texts / phone calls and/or having multiple handsets
- Relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups
- Leaving home / care without explanation
- Suspicion of physical assault / unexplained injuries

Please find attached further guidance for parents on the steps that should be taken if you suspect your child is at risk of criminal exploitation.

We hope that in giving parents as much information as we can about the issue, and its warning signs, as well as a supportive ear for anyone who has any concerns whatsoever, that we can protect the children in our locality.

Regards,

Janet Mullally

Designated Safeguarding Lead



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