



‘Our Bravery Brought Justice’
Extended Child Practice Review
Ysgol Frias – Gwynedd
November 2025



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SAFEGUARDING
MATTERS**

Overview

Neil Foden, former headteacher of Ysgol Friars and strategic head of Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle, was convicted in July 2024 of 19 counts of sexual abuse against four girls between 2019 and 2023. He was sentenced to 17 years in prison.

The North Wales Safeguarding Board's Child Practice Review, titled "Our Bravery Brought Justice", identified over 50 missed opportunities to intervene. Concerns were raised as early as 2018 but not acted upon. Foden was able to exploit his position of power, where he operated with impunity and cultivated a culture of fear and silence.

How it was found out

In September 2023, a pupil from Ysgol Friars in Bangor showed staff messages and images on her phone. Some were sexual, and some showed her in the Headteacher's car. She said she had been in a 'relationship' with Foden the Headteacher for months. The messaging number matched his phone. That same day, Foden was arrested. Afterwards, more pupils came forward to the police about being abused.

Foden created an atmosphere of fear and mistrust in school. He:

- bullied pupils, parents, and staff
- played people off against each other
- dominated the school Governors
- used insecure short-term contracts to keep staff under control
- intimidated parents, who feared their child could be excluded if they spoke out
- dismissed children as dishonest, encouraging staff not to believe their concerns or complaints

Key Learning Themes

Culture of Intimidation and Deference

Foden was described as 'arrogant' and 'controlling,' with staff fearful of challenging him. This culture enabled abuse to continue unchecked.

Failure to Act on Concerns

52 safeguarding concerns were raised across agencies - including inappropriate behaviour, boundary violations, and staff unease - but were not escalated or investigated.

Inadequate Response Post-Arrest

After Foden's arrest, pupils at Ysgol Friars were reportedly threatened with exclusion for discussing the case. This response undermined transparency and pupil voice.

Lack of Multi-Agency Coordination

Agencies failed to share intelligence or follow up on safeguarding alerts. The review highlights systemic breakdowns in communication and accountability.

Recommendations for Schools

Strengthen Safeguarding Culture

- Ensure all staff feel safe to raise concerns, including about senior leaders.
- Promote a culture of curiosity, challenge, and professional accountability.

Review Whistleblowing and Escalation Pathways

- Ensure staff understand how to report concerns and feel protected when doing so.
- Governors should test the robustness annually.

Empower Pupil Voice

- Create safe, visible routes for pupils to disclose concerns.
- Avoid punitive responses that silence or shame disclosures.

Audit Safeguarding Oversight of Senior Leaders

- Ensure safeguarding scrutiny applies equally to all staff, regardless of role.
- Governors should receive training on identifying grooming behaviours and abuse of power.

Enhance Multi-Agency Working

- Strengthen relationships with external safeguarding partners.
- Ensure concerns are logged, shared, and followed up with rigour.

At HH:SM I continue to talk about the need for an organisational and leadership culture that drives an open-door policy, where staff can feel confident discussing any subject. This needs to be supported by clear effective policies and practices that staff use consistently and have confidence in. Not only that, there needs to be regular opportunities for staff to come together to communicate their thoughts and worries about any aspect of safeguarding and where their voices effect real change in school in both policy and practice.

With that in mind, when was the last time your senior leaders or governors completed safer recruitment training,

Join us for Safer Recruitment Refresher training online on 13/11/2025 or the full day at the Ramside Hall on 04/12/2025.

To book your place email info@hhsafeguardingmatters.com

In Spring Term 2026 I will be taking a deeper dive into this review in the Designated Safeguarding Lead update session.