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From Policy Presence to Policy Usability in Ghanaian School Cyber Safety Governance

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ABSTRACT

School cyber safety policies can name relevant rules and services while leaving learners and staff uncertain about how a response proceeds. This conceptual article argues that policy usability depends on continuity of responsibility across essential tasks, especially when work passes between roles. It defines usability as the extent to which intended users can locate, understand and carry through a legitimate response under actual institutional conditions. A purposive synthesis of policy enactment, accountability and child participation scholarship develops the argument; an unpublished Ghanaian doctoral summary provides contextual illustration. The framework distinguishes task acceptance from a complete handover, which also requires coordination and an appropriate explanation to the learner. Six audit domains and five documentary codes support task-level review without treating document completeness as evidence of effective practice. A worked example and process figure connect the framework to observable decisions. Three conditional propositions address handover ownership, institutional capacity and practical access, with separate evidence requirements for written specification, demonstrated usability, implementation and learner outcomes. The contribution is a response-pathway approach that makes discontinuities between otherwise clear provisions open to investigation. Its international relevance lies in comparing procedural functions while allowing authority, resources and organisational arrangements to vary. The framework remains unvalidated; prospective studies must test its explanatory value and assess fairness, privacy and harm independently of administrative speed.

Keywords: cyber safety governance; policy usability; school leadership; online harm; policy enactment; Ghana

INTRODUCTION

A student approaches a teacher after an embarrassing image circulates in a group used by classmates. The school prohibits bullying, regulates computer use and provides counselling. Yet the teacher cannot determine who should coordinate the response because the image was shared outside school hours. The student repeats the account to another office, but neither staff member explains what will happen next. This hypothetical example illustrates a problem that can persist even where relevant rules and services exist: the connections between them may leave responsibility unresolved.

The distinction matters for educational policy because digital interaction crosses the boundaries through which school responsibilities are commonly organised. A conversation can involve classmates, occur through privately owned devices and affect participation in school the following morning. Patel and Quan-Haase (2024) position digital media within an ecology connected to young people's other settings. For school governance, this makes the connections between responsibilities an important object of inquiry. The practical question is how a school can provide a coherent response while recognising the limits of its authority, expertise and resources.

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International research has already challenged the assumption that the existence of a policy establishes its adequacy. Siyam and Hussain (2021) examined cyber safety policies in 20 private schools in Dubai through categories covering definitions, prevention, incident response, policy connections and legislation. Chalmers et al. (2016) investigated how educational authorities across three Australian states understood school bullying and cyberbullying policies. These studies direct attention to policy content and development. The present article extends this concern to the continuity of responsibility across a response: whether someone can identify the next action, the person accountable for it and the means of checking what happened.

Ghana provides the contextual starting point. The Cyber Security Authority (2024) reported the launch of a National Child Online Protection Framework on 18 October 2024. An unpublished Ghanaian doctoral manuscript describes school conduct and support arrangements with less explicit provision for digital incidents (Afriyie, 2026). Read together, these sources raise a question about how national commitments become navigable school responses. The doctoral account motivates that question; it does not establish how widespread procedural gaps are.

The article asks: how can schools distinguish the presence of cyber safety provisions from the usability of the response those provisions describe? Policy usability is defined as the extent to which intended users can locate, understand and carry through a legitimate response, including handovers and opportunities for review, under the conditions in which they work or seek help. It is a relationship among users, procedures and institutional conditions, rather than an intrinsic quality of a document. A route may be clear to an experienced administrator yet inaccessible to a learner; it may be understood by everyone yet depend on an unavailable service. Navigability and legitimacy must therefore be examined separately, even though both are requirements of an adequate response.

The contribution is an account of continuity across institutional roles. It identifies the response pathway as a unit of analysis, develops six audit domains and documentary coding rules, and specifies propositions that could be challenged empirically. Its comparative value lies in examining the same procedural functions across different organisational arrangements. The inquiry concerns how school responses connect, rather than the effectiveness of counselling or certification of legal compliance.

Policy Enactment and Accountable Response

Why Policy Content Needs an Account of Use

Policy enactment scholarship explains why instructions do not move unchanged from official texts into practice. Braun et al. (2011) identify the situated, professional, material and external circumstances through which schools interpret policy. Staff experience, institutional histories and available resources affect what a provision can mean locally. Spillane et al. (2002) likewise emphasise how implementers make sense of policy through existing knowledge and social contexts. Together, these perspectives caution against treating a centrally specified procedure as self-executing.

Applied to cyber safety, this means that a teacher, a counsellor and an administrator may interpret the same incident differently. One may see a classroom relationship problem, another an urgent support concern and another a disciplinary matter. Each interpretation may identify something important. Difficulties arise when the interpretations generate incompatible actions or leave necessary tasks unowned. Policy usability directs attention to the points at which those interpretations must be reconciled sufficiently for action to continue.

Professional judgement remains necessary because no policy can anticipate every combination of platform, audience, relationship and harm. Excessively detailed instructions can become obsolete or obstruct a proportionate response. The relevant distinction is between discretion allocated to an identifiable role and uncertainty created by an unresolved gap. Allocated discretion permits an explanation of why a course was chosen; an unresolved gap can leave the student responsible for navigating unclear institutional boundaries.

A school may mention reporting, counselling, discipline and privacy in separate documents without explaining how they connect. Conversely, a short procedure may connect services reliably without using cyber safety

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terminology. The audit therefore examines the function and relationship of provisions rather than counting topics or rewarding document length.

Policy usability is not proposed as a wholly new theory of implementation. Its added value is the response pathway as a unit of analysis and the requirement to inspect its essential transitions from the user's position. Established constructs explain related but different aspects of that pathway. Accessibility concerns whether an intended user can reach and use an entry route, including language, disability, cost and device requirements. Procedural clarity concerns whether an instruction is intelligible. Both matter, but accessible contact and clear instructions for individual offices can coexist with an unowned transfer between them.

Implementation concerns putting policy into practice, including how actors interpret and adapt it. Policy usability isolates a task-specific property within that larger process: whether an intended user can proceed across essential responsibilities. Organisational accountability concerns answerability and review (Bovens, 2007); usability asks whether these responsibilities also form a navigable response for the person seeking assistance. A clear accountability structure can still leave that person uncertain about the next contact.

Implementation fidelity examines delivery against an intended intervention or programme (Carroll et al., 2007). A school could faithfully follow an incomplete referral rule and still lose continuity. Conversely, informal coordination could sustain a response despite low adherence to its written route. Proctor et al. (2011) distinguish implementation outcomes from service and client outcomes. Their distinctions prevent usability from becoming a proxy for benefit, but the present construct requires more granular observation of tasks and handovers than a broad judgement of feasibility or adoption.

The originality claim is integrative and operational. The framework brings access, clarity and responsibility together at the level of a response pathway, then examines where their connection fails. Its incremental value would be challenged if pathway measures explained no additional difficulty after these established constructs and institutional resources were considered. Legitimacy places an independent constraint on procedural success: easier navigation cannot compensate for excluding a learner's account or unnecessarily circulating personal information.

Responsibility Must Survive a Handover

Bovens (2007) distinguishes accountability as a relationship in which conduct can be explained and judged. This perspective supplies a useful question for school procedure: to whom must the person handling a concern explain what was done? Merely naming a committee does not establish that relationship. A policy also needs an intelligible allocation of tasks and a route through which omissions or disputed decisions can be raised.

Continuity of responsibility is the proposed organising principle. Task acceptance occurs when the receiving role agrees to undertake a defined action; acknowledgement that a message arrived is insufficient. A complete handover additionally requires the coordinating role to know the acceptance status and the learner to receive an appropriate explanation of the next contact and step. These are distinct checks, not interchangeable indicators. Until acceptance or a justified alternative is established, responsibility for following up the transfer remains identifiable within the school's authority and agreed referral arrangements. Coordination continues as needed to check agreed actions after the transfer.

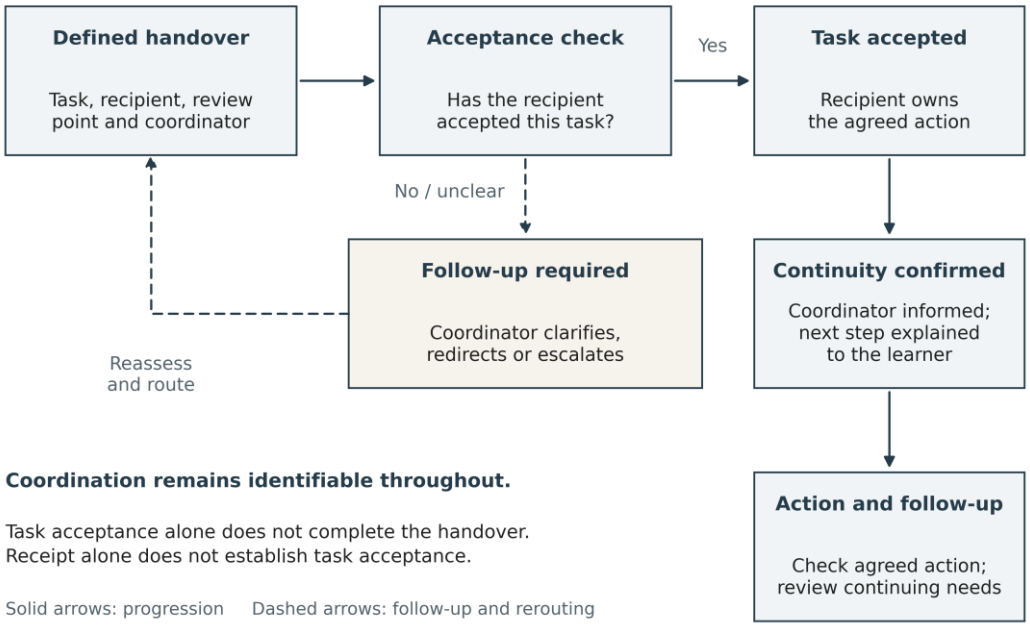
A useful distinction follows between responsibility for an action and responsibility for coordination. A counsellor may provide support, an administrator may manage a disciplinary process and an external service may advise on specialist concerns. The coordinating role checks that necessary connections have occurred. It does not acquire authority to make every decision or unrestricted access to every record. A small school might combine several functions in one staff position; a larger institution might distribute them. In either case, the functions should remain distinguishable and reviewable.

The proposed mechanism is reduced uncertainty about who must act when work crosses a role boundary. An identifiable owner, confirmation of acceptance and an escalation route make an omitted action easier to detect and address. An essential transition is one needed for the agreed response for which no feasible alternative has

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been identified. Its failure can interrupt that response even when individual provisions are clear. This is a conditional claim: redundant routes or effective informal coordination may preserve continuity. Figure 1 shows one handover within a pathway; support, fact-finding and other authorised actions may proceed in parallel.

Figure 1. Continuity of responsibility during a school response



Note. Authors' conceptual process, not an empirically validated model. The diagram shows one handover; authorised support and fact-finding may run in parallel. Urgent action should follow the applicable safeguarding route without waiting for routine handover steps.

Usability Must Include Participation and Fairness

A process that is convenient for staff may be difficult or unsafe for a learner. Lundy's (2007) account of children's participation distinguishes opportunities to express views from an audience that listens and gives those views due weight. Applied here, student consultation should influence how contact routes, explanations and feedback are designed. It cannot be reduced to asking learners to endorse a procedure already settled by adults.

Participation includes students whose accounts are questioned and those accused of harmful conduct. Assistance should not depend on an early determination of guilt, and an initial conversation should not promise an outcome the subsequent process cannot guarantee. Understandable explanations should distinguish what has been decided, what remains uncertain and how decisions may be questioned. These requirements protect the legitimacy of a response independently of whether it moves efficiently between offices.

Privacy places a further boundary on procedural expansion. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021, paras. 67–75) connects children's digital privacy with dignity, proportionality, restricted access and protection against indiscriminate surveillance. More information is not automatically better information. A school should be able to explain why particular material is needed and who is authorised to handle it. The framework therefore treats access to help and restraint in information collection as joint requirements of usable governance.

Accountability, privacy and participation can pull in different directions. More extensive recording may make decisions reviewable while exposing unnecessary personal information; a consistent route may improve predictability while a learner's circumstances justify an alternative. The framework addresses these tensions through identifiable decision authority, proportionate reasons and a route for review. It does not assume that

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maximum documentation or uniform treatment resolves them. A justified departure from the usual route should preserve responsibility for the next action.

Approach and Evidential Basis

Design of the Conceptual Analysis

The article uses theory synthesis as described by Jaakkola (2020), combining concepts selected for complementary explanatory functions. Policy enactment explains how school actors interpret procedures in context (Braun et al., 2011; Spillane et al., 2002). Accountability makes the allocation and review of actions or omissions explicit (Bovens, 2007). Child participation addresses whose interpretation and preferences influence the response (Lundy, 2007). The synthesis links these perspectives through the handover: an instruction must be understood, responsibility accepted, and the learner appropriately involved. This is a conceptual derivation rather than a comparative test of theories.

Sources were selected purposively to address interpretation, answerability, participation and school cyber safety governance. Implementation outcomes (Proctor et al., 2011) and fidelity (Carroll et al., 2007) provide comparison constructs that help delimit the contribution. The ecological account of digital interaction situates the cross-setting problem (Patel & Quan-Haase, 2024), while school policy studies and Ghanaian material provide substantive context. This selection supports a focused argument, not an exhaustive review or a claim that existing theories exclude coordination.

Framework construction proceeds through four analytical steps. First, distinguish procedural governance from claims about intervention effects. Second, identify the tasks a response requires: recognising a concern, reaching a contact, transferring responsibility, handling information, explaining decisions and checking follow-through. Third, examine each task through interpretation, accountability and participation, retaining a domain when it raises a distinct question about continuity or legitimacy. Fourth, use an invented handover example to expose differences among documentary specification, understanding and action, then formulate propositions that distinguish the proposed mechanism from capacity constraints and informal coordination. The six domains are organising categories derived through this reasoning, not factors extracted from data. No systematic search, independent theoretical coding or empirical validation is claimed.

What the doctoral source provides

The illustrative source is Afriyie's (2026) unpublished doctoral manuscript at Africa Research University. Section 4.2.3 and Table 3 report 24 documents across six categories: school rules or codes (6), ICT-use or digital conduct documents (4), anti-bullying or cyber safety documents (3), disciplinary procedures (5), counselling or learner-support records or procedures (3), and reporting protocols or records (3). These are counts of documents, not schools. The mix of records and procedures prevents treating them as equivalent policy units.

The contextual account draws on section 4.9.3 and Table 16 of the doctoral manuscript. Original school documents, a school-linked inventory, complete extracts and coding records were unavailable for independent inspection. An omission from a summary cannot establish absence from the underlying policy, a distinction consistent with the need to examine documentary context and limitations (Bowen, 2009). The summary is therefore used to formulate questions, not to recode the 24 documents or validate the framework. No identifiable case records or participant quotations are reproduced.

Ghanaian Context as Illustrative Motivation

General Rules and Digital Scope

The doctoral summary describes general rules about discipline, respect, bullying and abusive language, alongside less explicit definitions of online misconduct. It also describes ICT guidance centred on school computers and classroom technology, with less detail about personal phones and social media. These reported

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observations motivate a scope question: can users connect existing expectations to a digital concern affecting school participation? Offering assistance, applying conduct procedures and referring matters beyond school competence require distinct responsibilities.

Reporting and Support Connections

The summary identifies teachers, counselling units, discipline committees and administrators as contacts, while describing cyber-specific reporting steps as inconsistently stated. It also reports general learner support with less specific provision for online harm. This motivates examination of how a disclosure reaches the relevant service and how a learner learns that a referral has been accepted. Listing offices can provide choice without establishing that connection; informal support may nevertheless exist.

Discipline and Information Handling

The source describes general disciplinary arrangements and raises questions about their adequacy for privacy and digital evidence. Without the original clauses, this does not establish that protections were absent. It motivates a narrower audit question: what information is needed for each task, who may receive it, and how is unnecessary recirculation avoided? The question concerns the governance of information rather than instructions for extracting material from devices.

These examples motivate examination of the boundary between general commitments and specific responsibilities. They do not establish national deficiencies or observed handover failures. The comparative question is whether a school's actual arrangements connect recognition, access, task ownership and follow-through, irrespective of how many documents or offices it uses.

A framework for Reviewing Policy Usability

Examine a Response across Documents

The proposed unit of review is a response pathway for a defined concern and set of intended users. A pathway is the connected set of tasks and decisions through which the institution addresses that concern; it can span several documents and roles. An audit therefore examines a document as evidence within the pathway, rather than assuming that every conduct code must repeat provisions accessible through clear cross-references. This approach can reveal missing connections as well as unnecessary duplication.

Table 1 defines six audit domains. For each applicable task or transition, retain the source clause, document version, page or section, linked provisions and reason for the judgement. Domains organise the review; individual tasks are the coding units. A profile should make essential unresolved transitions visible rather than average them into a numerical quality score.

Table 1. Proposed domains for reviewing a school response

Domain	Question for the policy	Evidence to retain
Recognition and scope	Can a learner or staff member identify when to seek advice, including concerns arising outside school?	Relevant definition, examples and explanation of the school's support and referral role.
First contact	Can students approach an available person through routes suited to different communication and access needs?	Contact routes, availability, initial explanation and an alternative when the usual contact is unsuitable.
Responsibility and handover	Who coordinates the response, accepts each referral and acts when the designated person is absent?	Role allocation, confirmation of task acceptance, cover arrangements and a way to raise an unresolved handover.

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Information handling	What information does each role need, and who may receive, retain or share it?	Purpose, authorised access, separation of records and locally approved retention arrangements.
Decisions and review	How are support, fact-finding and disciplinary decisions distinguished and explained?	Decision responsibilities, opportunities to correct information and the appropriate route for review.
Follow-up and revision	Who checks agreed actions, addresses continuing needs and maintains the procedure?	Follow-up responsibility, reopening route, revision owner and version history.

Note. Proposed conceptual domains. The framework has not been applied to the 24 documents described in the doctoral source.

Across the domains, ask whether the user can identify the next legitimate action, whether its recipient can accept responsibility, and whether the action or omission can be reviewed. Personal knowledge held by one experienced employee is a separate implementation resource; it does not establish that written arrangements remain usable during absence or turnover.

Before coding, define the concern, intended users, available document set and essential tasks. Record a task as not applicable only with an explicit reason; this is an applicability decision, not a sixth evidence code. Personal knowledge, informal practice and resource availability should be documented separately from what written provisions establish.

Operational coding rules

Table 2 specifies five documentary codes. Apply them to an applicable task within the defined pathway, using current provisions and accessible cross-references. An explicit code establishes documentary specification only; it does not establish that intended users understand or follow the route.

Table 2. Documentary codes and decision rules

Code	**Decision rule**	**Boundary of the judgement**
Explicit and consistent	The applicable action and responsible role are specified; relevant triggers, recipients, acceptance and escalation are clear.	No unresolved contradiction. Detail may be supplied by accessible, unambiguous cross-references.
Partial	A relevant provision exists but an essential requirement for the task is unspecified.	Missing detail is not itself a contradiction.
Conflicting	Current provisions prescribe incompatible actions or responsibilities without an authoritative precedence rule.	Retain both clauses; flag additional missing material separately.
Not located	A completed search of the defined, available document set and relevant cross-references finds no provision.	Absence within the search does not establish absence of institutional practice.
Indeterminate	Missing, inaccessible or unverifiable material prevents a defensible judgement.	Do not convert an evidence limitation into not located.

Note. Apply codes at task level after deciding applicability. Record not applicable separately with a reason. Codes describe documentary evidence, not a numerical ranking of policy quality.

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Decide applicability first, then whether the evidence supports a judgement. An established contradiction between current provisions remains conflicting even when other material is missing; record the evidence limitation separately. Otherwise, missing material that prevents a defensible decision yields indeterminate. With adequate evidence, distinguish no located provision, an incomplete provision and an explicit, consistent provision. Retain the relevant clauses and a brief reason for every decision, including any essential transition left unresolved.

Define concerns and an accessible first contact

Definitions should help users recognise conduct without requiring them to make a final disciplinary judgement. A student seeking advice may not know whether an incident satisfies a formal definition of bullying, whether an account is authentic or whether repeated circulation originated with one person. Initial assistance should therefore be possible when a concern is uncertain. The later assessment can determine which procedures apply and whether specialist referral is necessary.

At least one initial contact route should work without a private smartphone, paid data or a detailed written account. Variation in Ghanaian children's digital access and supervision makes a uniform access assumption unsuitable (Kyei-Arthur et al., 2024). A digital reporting form may be useful, but should not become the sole route to assistance.

An explanation at first contact should describe the receiving person's role, immediate next steps and the circumstances under which information may be shared. Absolute confidentiality should not be promised when the procedure cannot honour it. The student's immediate preferences and concerns should inform the conversation, while responsibilities that cannot be delegated to the student remain with the institution. The aim is a realistic expectation of the process, including its limits.

Allocate Roles and Control Handovers

A procedure should identify the coordinating role, cover arrangements, task recipient, confirmation method and review point. Coordination can belong to an existing position. A notification establishes transmission, not acceptance, unless the receiving role accepts the defined action. The coordinator should be able to distinguish a message received, a task accepted, a learner informed and an action completed without requiring unrestricted access to confidential service notes.

Schools should also define how to raise a concern about a person who normally receives reports. Without an alternative contact, a formally accessible process may become unusable in precisely the circumstances in which independent attention is needed. This does not imply that every school requires several specialist staff. A feasible alternative might involve a designated senior role or an agreed external contact, provided its responsibilities and availability have been established locally.

An external referral need not end a school's educational support responsibilities, and continued support does not authorise the school to control an external investigation. Agreed arrangements should identify what each institution can do, what information may be exchanged and who explains the limits to the learner.

Limit Information Handling and Distinguish Decisions

Information should be matched to its task. A coordination record might contain contact date, responsible role, agreed next action and review point, while support notes remain restricted to the relevant service. The audit asks whether locally approved arrangements for access, sharing and retention are intelligible and consistent.

The framework also distinguishes offering support, establishing relevant facts and deciding consequences. These activities may proceed at different speeds and involve different responsibilities. Immediate assistance should not be treated as proof that an allegation has been established. Equally, unresolved attribution should not prevent a school from considering educational adjustments or support that can appropriately be offered. Written explanations should preserve these distinctions for affected learners, those accused and their families.

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Efficiency must be considered alongside fairness. Faster closure could mean improved coordination or premature exclusion of a learner's account. The audit should identify opportunities to correct information, obtain an explanation and seek review.

Make Follow-Up and Revision Observable

Administrative closure does not establish that a learner's difficulties have ended. Follow-up should identify who checks agreed actions and how continuing needs or an unsuccessful response can be raised again. Receipt of an action and its benefit to the learner are separate questions. Assistance should not depend on a declaration of satisfaction.

Policy revision needs similar allocation. Someone should be responsible for checking contact details, reconciling changes across documents and reviewing difficulties identified through use. Marcus-Quinn and McCoy (2025), examining acceptable-use policies in 51 large Irish post-primary schools, report problems of policy currency amid changing digital technologies. Their findings concern a different system, but they support treating maintenance as a governance activity. A revision date printed on a document is useful only if there is an actual process for identifying what needs revision.

Leaders can examine aggregated procedural difficulties, such as repeated uncertainty about referral destinations, without sharing sensitive case content in staff meetings. Procedural learning and restraint in information circulation should develop together.

Worked Example of a Disputed Handover

Consider an invented school whose conduct code directs learners to a class teacher, whose counselling procedure permits referral, and whose disciplinary procedure assigns investigations to an administrator. An altered image is circulating among classmates and affecting a learner's attendance. All current documents are available. None identifies who follows up an unanswered referral or confirms counselling task acceptance. The scenario is an analytical illustration, not a case from the doctoral source.

If the conduct code specifies an available first contact and an appropriate alternative, that task is explicit and consistent. The referral transition is partial because referral is permitted but acceptance and follow-up duties are unspecified. Missing detail is not itself a conflict. In an alternative version of the example, incompatible assignments in two current documents would be conflicting unless an authoritative precedence rule resolved them. An unavailable counselling procedure would make affected judgements indeterminate. Only a completed search of the defined, available document set with no referral provision would justify not located.

A substantive revision identifies the coordinator, substitute, defined task, receiving role, confirmation method and review point, including what happens if the recipient declines or does not respond. The coordination record tracks acceptance, communication to the learner and the next action without copying counselling notes into a disciplinary file. A separate scenario task then asks staff and learners to explain the revised route when the usual recipient is absent. Documentary improvement and demonstrated understanding remain separate observations. The example yields a discriminating test. If staff can accurately explain the revised process but the receiving service remains unavailable, specification and understanding have improved while response capacity has not. If the handover is accepted but the learner receives no explanation, organisational transfer has improved while an important aspect of user continuity remains deficient. If the process closes quickly after excluding the learner's account, efficiency has increased at the expense of procedural legitimacy. Each result points to a different correction, which a single policy-quality score would obscure.

Implications for Educational Leadership and Policy

Align National Commitments with Feasible Local Procedures

National commitments require a locally workable allocation of responsibilities. Schools can compare their procedures with authoritative guidance, identify matters requiring external agreement and distinguish actions

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within school control from services that depend on other institutions. Ghana's framework launch establishes the policy context for this discussion; the announcement alone cannot support a clause-level compliance assessment.

International Telecommunication Union (2020) guidance positions educators and caregivers as participants in helping children benefit from digital environments while addressing risks. For institutional policy, the implication is to connect prevention with understandable response arrangements. Jones and Mitchell's (2016) work on digital citizenship similarly gives attention to respectful participation and civic engagement. A school can explain responsible online conduct while also explaining how to obtain assistance when expectations are breached. Knowledge of a rule and knowledge of a response route are complementary educational aims.

Transfer between systems should preserve procedural functions while allowing organisational form to vary. A small school may combine coordination and support in existing positions, whereas a larger school may distribute them across a team. An external referral may depend on a district office in one setting and a separately governed service in another. The relevant comparison is whether ownership, acceptance, communication and review remain identifiable under those arrangements. Requiring identical committees or staffing structures would mistake organisational similarity for functional equivalence.

Develop Professional Understanding Without Overloading Staff

Training should rehearse decisions staff actually face: recognising a concern, explaining the next step, identifying the appropriate role and confirming acceptance of a defined task. Cilliers and Chinyamurindi's (2020) study of student teachers in South Africa highlights the preparation of educators for cyberbullying and school policy. Its findings do not describe Ghanaian teachers, but they support examining professional understanding alongside written provision.

Fictional scenarios can reveal divergent staff interpretations and lead to a corrected route or clarified boundary. Rehearsal should examine the process rather than judge an individual's competence, and should avoid identifiable student records.

Leaders also need to protect time for the work. Assigning responsibility without considering workload can create a nominally complete procedure that is difficult to enact. The audit should record unresolved resource dependencies, such as access to a qualified service or time for follow-up. A school should not describe a referral arrangement as operational merely because a telephone number appears in a directory. The receiving organisation's role and availability need to be established through the appropriate local process.

Involve Students without Transferring Institutional Responsibility

Students can help identify terminology that is unclear, routes that are difficult to access and explanations that create unrealistic expectations. Participation should include learners with different communication needs and levels of digital access. It should not require students to disclose personal experiences publicly or to investigate peers. The policy remains an institutional responsibility even when students contribute to its design.

Consultation can ask learners what they expect after a fictional disclosure. A difference between anticipated public confrontation and staff descriptions of a private conversation warrants investigation. Publishing another contact list may not address the source of distrust. Collection of such accounts for research requires appropriate permissions and safeguards.

International relevance rests on comparable questions rather than identical institutions. Sheng and Lipscombe's (2026) review and Australian document analysis connect mobile-phone policies with school leadership decisions, but device regulation and responses to harm serve different functions. The present framework asks whether learners can obtain assistance within the policy environment they encounter, including where access is restricted. Comparative research should examine variation in language, disability access, service capacity and institutional authority before interpreting a procedural difference as a cultural or national difference.

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Evaluation Priorities and Limitations

Distinguish Specification From Implementation and Outcomes

Table 3 separates the evidence required for four claims: what documents specify, what intended users can demonstrate, what institutions do and what happens to learners. This distinction adapts Proctor et al.'s (2011) separation of implementation, service and client outcomes to school governance. Evidence at one level cannot substitute for evidence at another. Table 4 specifies candidate indicators for observing continuity without treating acceptance, communication, action and benefit as equivalent.

Table 3. Evidence required for claims about policy usability

Claim	Suitable evidence	Inference to avoid
Written specification	A versioned document inventory; relevant clauses; identified responsibilities and cross-references.	Inferring that students understand a route or that staff follow it.
Demonstrated usability	Consented scenario-based tasks with intended users; explanations of choices and points of uncertainty.	Treating success in a fictional task as proof of effectiveness in a real incident.
Implementation	Appropriately authorised records of referral acceptance, response continuity and receipt of agreed assistance.	Treating an increase in reports, or quicker closure alone, as evidence of more or less harm.
Effects on harm and participation	Prospective outcome measures, a defensible comparison, and attention to changes in reporting and context.	Attributing change to revised wording without considering resources, concurrent interventions or alternative explanations.

Note. Proposed evidence categories. No stage has been evaluated for this framework.

Validation should begin with content review by learners with varied access needs, school practitioners and relevant governance specialists. They should assess whether each domain is relevant, understandable and sufficiently distinct, identify missing tasks, and explain disagreements. Cognitive interviews or think-aloud scenario tasks can examine how users interpret the questions. Pilot the resulting codebook across contrasting schools before fixing a version for a larger study. These are proposed stages; no expert validation or user testing has yet been completed.

For documentary consistency, two reviewers should independently code the same prespecified set of task-by-pathway units using the same document inventory and codebook version. Train with separate examples, retain judgements made before discussion, and record disagreements in a category-by-category cross-tabulation. Report exact agreement and, where appropriate, a chance-corrected nominal agreement statistic with uncertainty, alongside category frequencies. Sparse categories or a small pilot may make an overall coefficient misleading. Adjudicate through cited clauses, revise ambiguous rules and test the revised version on fresh material. Agreement establishes consistency of coding, not validity of the framework or quality of practice.

Scenario evaluation should cover routine contact, an absent officer, a disputed allegation and a concern involving the usual recipient. Prespecify acceptable alternative routes and accessible languages or formats; distinguish independent from prompted completion. Differences between staff and learner explanations require interpretation rather than automatic correction of the learner. Subsequently examine implementation and outcomes using the separate evidence levels in Table 3 and candidate indicators in Table 4.

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Table 4. Candidate indicators of response continuity

Indicator	Operational observation	Interpretive limit
Task understanding	Proportion completing each prespecified scenario task independently; report prompted completion separately.	A fictional task does not establish willingness to seek help or behaviour during an incident.
Task acceptance	Eligible referrals with recorded acceptance of the defined task, divided by referrals due for review.	Receipt is insufficient; acceptance does not establish a complete handover or assistance.
Complete handovers	Eligible handovers with task acceptance, coordinator confirmation and an appropriate explanation to the learner, divided by handovers due for review.	Record all three checks separately; completeness does not establish action or benefit.
Unresolved transitions	Eligible handovers still lacking acceptance or a justified alternative at review, divided by handovers due for review.	Show assigned follow-up, declined or redirected transfers, and missing records separately; escalation alone is not resolution.
Learner understanding	Ability to identify the next contact and explain the next step following an appropriate status explanation.	Understanding differs from agreement, satisfaction and fairness of the decision.
Receipt of agreed action	Eligible agreed actions completed by review, divided by actions due, with an appropriate record or confirmation.	Completion does not establish benefit; service availability and changed needs affect interpretation.
Balancing observations	Unnecessary information sharing, repeated retelling, inaccessible routes, workload and challenges to decisions.	Interpret alongside continuity; faster closure alone does not establish better governance.

Note. Candidate definitions, not validated measures. Prespecify observation periods, eligibility and review points. Report missing information separately; no universal response deadline is proposed.

Each indicator requires a defined observation period and denominator. For time-bounded measures, include only eligible transfers or actions due for review within that period; show items not yet due separately. Record task acceptance, coordination status, learner communication and action completion as distinct fields. A refusal or redirection is not a completed handover: document its reason and follow any new transfer to acceptance or a justified alternative. A decision that referral is unnecessary should be distinguished from a failed eligible transfer. Missing status is a data-quality limitation, not automatic evidence of success or failure. Case complexity and service availability must accompany comparisons so that easier workloads or permissive completion rules do not appear as better governance.

Cross-system adaptation should preserve the functions of task acceptance, continuing coordination, proportionate information handling and review while mapping them to local roles and resources. Translate and test wording with intended users, document changes to tasks and eligibility rules, and re-examine coding consistency. Compare task-level profiles only where definitions and opportunities to complete the tasks are sufficiently equivalent. The framework does not support a cross-national league table. Implementation research requires appropriate authorisation and collection of only the personal information needed for its questions.

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Test the mechanism and its alternatives

P1 concerns handover ownership. Where authority and resources permit action, revising responsibilities to identify task owners, acceptance checks and escalation arrangements should reduce unresolved essential handovers relative to a revision limited to general commitments. The proposed sequence is improved understanding of responsibility, confirmed acceptance and more reliable follow-through. Evidence that understanding improves but continuity does not, despite adequate capacity and comparable case demands, would count against the mechanism. Unchanged understanding after a textual revision would indicate that the procedural change had not been enacted as intended.

P2 concerns institutional capacity. Improved procedural understanding should translate less strongly into completed responses where designated roles lack time, authority or access to required services. The prediction concerns the relationship between understanding and action, rather than merely a lower average level of completion in less resourced schools. Capacity should therefore be measured explicitly, using indicators such as assigned time and actual service availability, rather than inferred from national income or school location.

P3 concerns practical access. Revising a contact route should improve independent task completion among learners facing communication or digital-access barriers only if the route reduces the relevant demands. Clearer wording on a smartphone-only form cannot remove lack of a private device or data. Evaluation should compare completion across prespecified access needs and examine whether the revised route reduces those differences, rather than relying only on an overall average.

These propositions require prospective comparisons that distinguish revised responsibilities from additional training or resources. Where feasible, schools could compare two acceptable approaches to procedural revision, with prespecified measures before and after introduction and analysis accounting for school-level clustering. No design should remove necessary assistance. Where revision, training and service expansion occur together, the estimated effect concerns the combined package unless the design supports component attribution. Repeated measures of understanding, acceptance and follow-through can assess the proposed sequence, but correlated changes alone do not establish mediation.

Effective informal coordination is a competing explanation. Trusted staff may sustain handovers despite sparse documents, challenging any claim that explicit text is necessary. Written arrangements might instead matter most during absence, turnover or unfamiliar incidents. Existing distrust may persist after clarification, and rigid protocols may delay help by making routine steps prerequisites for urgent action. These alternatives should inform scenario selection and evaluation. Precise estimates of little or no improvement under the stated conditions would challenge the propositions; imprecise estimates or weak implementation would remain inconclusive.

Reported incident counts are especially difficult to interpret. A rise after a procedural change could reflect improved access to reporting, a change in awareness, an actual increase in harm or several processes together. A decline could reflect prevention or renewed barriers to disclosure. Evaluation should therefore examine reporting alongside other indicators and users' accounts. Polanin et al. (2022) find that intervention programmes can reduce cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation, but their meta-analysis does not establish that a document audit alone has such an effect. Claims about reduced harm require an appropriate outcome study.

Limits of the Present Contribution

The framework is an unvalidated conceptual synthesis. The Ghanaian source provides contextual motivation rather than independently inspected school policies, and it cannot establish prevalence, compliance or implementation. The six domains may overlap, omit important tasks or require modification across systems. Content review and task-based testing must precede institutional comparisons.

The theoretical combination also has limits. An accountability lens can privilege recorded activity over relational work, and a usability lens can misidentify institutional incapacity or unequal power as an

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individual's failure to navigate. Participation can become superficial where learners influence wording but not consequential decisions. Evaluation should therefore examine trust, practical access and authority alongside procedural records, and revise or reject domains that fail to capture those experiences.

The framework's value consequently depends on a demanding test: whether examining connections across a response pathway explains difficulties that separate assessments of clarity, access, resources and accountability miss. Its purpose is to make that question investigable, not to establish a new quality label on the basis of document review alone.

CONCLUSION

Policy presence becomes useful to a learner when institutional responsibilities connect in a response that can be understood, carried through and questioned. This article locates the central governance problem at those connections. Policy enactment explains interpretation in context, accountability identifies who must answer for action, and participation keeps the learner's position within the analysis. The Ghanaian account gives the synthesis a concrete point of departure without determining its empirical validity.

The resulting framework distinguishes task acceptance, complete handover and completed action, and provides six domains, documentary codes and separate evidence requirements for evaluating each. Its international contribution is a set of comparable procedural functions rather than a universal organisational template. Clearer ownership is expected to improve continuity only where authority, capacity and access permit action. Testing that expectation, while assessing fairness, privacy and learner outcomes separately, is the next step from policy presence towards demonstrably usable governance.

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