

Child on Child Abuse Policy



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Responsible person: Heidi Lindle

Introduction

Our school recognises that children are vulnerable to and capable of abusing their peers. We take such abuse as seriously as abuse perpetrated by an adult. This includes verbal as well as physical abuse. Child on child abuse will not be tolerated or passed off as part of “banter” or “growing up”. We are committed to a whole school approach to ensure the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of peer-on-peer abuse within our school and beyond.

In cases where child on child abuse is identified we will follow our child protection procedures, taking a contextual approach to support all children and young people who have been affected by the situation.

We recognise that child on child abuse can manifest itself in many ways such as:

- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Sexting or youth produced digital imagery
- Upskirting
- Bullying
- Radicalisation
- Abuse in intimate relationships
- Children who display sexually harmful behaviour
- Gang association and serious violence (County Lines)
- Technology can be used for bullying and other abusive behaviour

Some of these behaviours will need to be handled with reference to other policies in school such as the Relational Policy, Anti- bullying Policy, Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy and Online Safety Policy.

This policy concentrates on peer-on-peer abuse in the context of sexual harassment and sexual violence. It is compliant with the statutory guidance on peer-on-peer abuse as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) and should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it.

Aims

The policy will:

- Set out our strategies for preventing, identifying and managing child on child abuse
- Take a contextual approach to safeguarding all children and young people involved. Acknowledging that children who have allegedly abused their peers or displayed harmful sexual behaviour are themselves vulnerable and may have been abused by peers, parents or adults in the community.
- Acknowledge that, due to the vulnerabilities and prior experiences of our particular students, all allegations must be taken extremely seriously and the Police or Social Care informed.

Understanding child on child abuse

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex or a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children.

The impact of this behaviour on children can be very distressing and have an impact on academic achievement and emotional health and wellbeing. Sexual harassment and sexual violence may also occur online and offline.

The Context

All behaviour takes place on a spectrum. Understanding where a child's behaviour falls on a spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it.

In this policy we recognise the importance of distinguishing between problematic and abusive sexual behaviour (Harmful Sexual Behaviour HSB).

We are adopting the NSPCC definition of HSB as: -

"Sexual behaviours expressed by children...that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child...or adult."

We will also use Simon Hackett's continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours.

(Appendix 1)

Vulnerable groups

We recognise that all children can be at risk however we acknowledge that some groups are more vulnerable. All young people within our setting can be identified as extremely vulnerable, and fall into one of the following categories:

- experience of abuse within their family
- living with domestic violence
- young people in care
- children who go missing
- children with additional needs (SEN and/or disabilities)
- children who identify or are perceived as LGBTQ+ and/or have other protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010.

Whilst research tells us girls are more frequently identified as being abused by their peers and, girls are more likely to experience unwanted sexual touching in schools this is not confined to girls.

Boys are less likely to report intimate relationship abuse and may display other behaviour such as antisocial behaviour. Boys report high levels of victimisation in areas where they are affected by gangs. We recognise that both boys and girls experience child on child abuse, but they do so in gendered ways.

All staff should be aware of indicators, which may signal that children are at risk from, or are involved with serious violent crime. These may include increased absence from school, a change in friendships or relationships with older individuals or groups, a significant decline in performance, signs of self-harm or a significant change in wellbeing, or signs of assault or unexplained injuries.

Unexplained gifts or new possessions could also indicate that children have been approached by, or are involved with, individuals associated with criminal networks or gangs.

Responding to Alleged Incidents Responding to reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment

All reports of peer-on-peer abuse will be reported immediately to social care or the police as required.

The immediate response to a report

The school will take all reports seriously and will reassure the victim that they will be supported and kept safe.

All staff will be trained to manage a report.

Staff will not promise confidentiality as the concern will need to be shared further (for example, with the DSL or social care) staff will however only share the report with those people who are necessary to progress it.

A written report will be made as soon after the interview as possible recording the facts as presented by the child. These may be used as part of a statutory assessment if the case is escalated later.

Where the report includes an online element, the school will contact the Police and follow their advice on searching, screening and confiscation. The staff will not view or forward images under any circumstances but pass this responsibility onto the Police.

The DSL will be informed as soon as possible.

Risk Assessment

When there has been a report of sexual violence, the DSL (or a deputy) will make an immediate risk and needs assessment. Where there has been a report of sexual harassment, the need for a risk assessment should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The risk and needs assessment should consider:

- The victim, especially their protection and support.
- The alleged perpetrator; and
- All the other children (and, if appropriate, adult students and staff) at the school or college, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them

Risk assessments will be recorded electronically on KIT (One drive) and be kept under review.

The DSL (or a deputy) will ensure they are engaging with Police and Social Care.

Action following a report of sexual violence and/or sexual harassment

Following an incident, we will consider

- The wishes of the victim in terms of how they want to proceed. This is especially important in the context of sexual violence and sexual harassment
- The nature of the alleged incident(s), including:
 - whether a crime may have been committed and consideration of harmful sexual behaviour
- The ages of the children involved
- The developmental stages of the children involved
- Any power imbalance between the children. For example, is the alleged perpetrator significantly older, more mature or more confident? Does the victim have a disability or learning difficulty?
- If the alleged incident is a one-off or a sustained pattern of abuse
- Are there ongoing risks to the victim, other children, adult students or school or college staff; and other related issues and wider context?

Follow up Actions

Children sharing a classroom: Whilst the school establishes the facts of the case and starts the process of liaising with children's social care and the police:

- The perpetrator will be removed from any classes they share with the victim.
- We will consider how best to keep the victim and alleged perpetrator a reasonable distance apart on school premises
- These actions are in the best interests of both children and should not be perceived to be a judgment on the guilt of the alleged perpetrator

Options to manage the report

We view both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator as extremely vulnerable due to the nature of our students.

All incidents will be managed by the DSL alongside appropriate external agencies due to the vulnerabilities and SEND of our students. No assumption of guilt will be made, but both parties must be supported by relevant agencies and Professionals immediately.

Collaborative working will help ensure the best possible package of coordinated support is implemented for the victim and, where appropriate, the alleged perpetrator and any other children that require support.

Physical Abuse

While a clear focus of peer-on-peer abuse is around sexual abuse and harassment, physical assaults and initiation violence and rituals from pupils to pupils can also be abusive.

These are equally not tolerated and if it is believed that a crime has been committed, it will be reported to the police and Social Care.

The principles from the anti-bullying policy will be applied in these cases, with recognition that any police investigation will need to take priority. When dealing with other alleged behaviour which involves reports of, for example, emotional and/or physical abuse, staff can draw on aspects of Hackett's continuum (Appendix 1) to assess where the alleged behaviour falls on a spectrum and to decide how to respond. This could include, for example, whether it:

- is socially acceptable
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time
- is socially acceptable within the peer group
- is problematic and concerning
- involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination e.g. related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability
- involves an element of coercion or pre-planning
- involves a power imbalance between the child/children allegedly responsible for the behaviour
- involves a misuse of power

Online Behaviour

Many forms of peer-on-peer abuse have an element of online behaviour including behaviours such as cyberbullying and sexting. Policies and procedures concerning this type of behaviour can be found (in anti-bullying policy, online safety policy, and child protection policy)

Prevention

Our school actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of peer-on-peer abuse by:

Educating all Senior Leadership Team, staff, students, and parents about this issue. This will include training all Senior Leadership Team and staff on the nature, prevalence and effect of peer-on-peer abuse, and how to prevent, identify and respond to it.

This includes:

(a) Contextual Safeguarding.

(b) The identification and classification of specific behaviours.

(c) The importance of taking seriously all forms of peer-on-peer abuse (no matter how low level they may appear) and ensuring that no form of peer-on-peer abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing.

- Educating children about the nature and prevalence of peer-on-peer abuse via PSHE and the wider curriculum.
- Pupils/Students are frequently told what to do if they witness or experience such abuse, the effect that it can have on those who experience it and the possible reasons for it, including vulnerability of those who inflict such abuse.
- They are regularly informed about the school's approach to such issues, including its zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of peer-on-peer abuse.
- Ensuring that all peer-on-peer abuse issues are fed back to the school's safeguarding Team so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify students who maybe in need of additional support.
- Challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside the classroom)
- Working with Senior Leadership Team, all staff, students and parents to address equality issues, to promote positive values, and to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the school community
- Creating conditions in which our students can aspire to and realise safe and healthy relationships
- Creating a culture in which our students feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to
- Responding to cases of peer-on-peer abuse promptly and appropriately.

Appendix 1

Simon Hackett (2010) has proposed a continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours presented by children and young people, from those that are normal, to those that are highly deviant

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
Developmentally expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problematic and concerning behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Victimising intent or outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physically violent sexual abuse
Socially acceptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes misuse of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly intrusive
Consensual, mutual, reciprocal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Context for behaviour may be inappropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No overt elements of victimisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator
Shared decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generally consensual and reciprocal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consent issues may be unclear	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intrusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sadism
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May lack reciprocity or equal power	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informed consent lacking, or not able to be freely given by victim	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May include levels of compulsivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May include elements of expressive violence	

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/publications/harmful-sexual-behaviour-framework.pdf>