

Child-on-Child Abuse Policy



Grange Drive



Birch Wood Vale



Autism Provision

School Name: Birch Wood School

Policy Owner: Rosalind Hopkins

Date Ratified by Chair Of Governors: June 2019

Review Date: September 2023

Next Review Date: September 2024

The School's responsibilities

Introduction

The governors, senior leadership team, and all staff (which term shall apply to all volunteer staff members) at Birch Wood School are committed to the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse (as defined below) both within and beyond the school. We:

1. believe that in order to protect children, all schools should (a) be aware of the nature and level of risk to which their students are or may be exposed and put in place a clear and comprehensive strategy which is tailored to their specific safeguarding context; and (b) take a whole-school community Contextual Safeguarding approach to preventing and responding to child-on-child abuse.
2. regard the introduction of this policy as a preventative measure. We (a) do not feel it is acceptable merely to take a reactive approach to child-on-child abuse in response to alleged incidents of it; and (b) believe that in order to tackle child-on-child abuse proactively, it is necessary to focus on all four of the following areas: (i) systems and structures; (ii) prevention; (iii) identification; and (iv) response/intervention.
3. recognise national and increasing concern about this issue and wish to implement this policy in order to mitigate harmful attitudes and child-on-child abuse in the school setting.
4. encourage parents to hold us to account on this issue, so that if their child is feeling unsafe as a result of the behaviour of any of their peers, they should inform the school so that it can ensure that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response.

This policy:

1. is the school's overarching policy for any issue that could constitute child-on-child abuse. It relates to, and should be read alongside, the school's Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy and any other relevant policies including, but not limited to, bullying (including cyber-bullying), youth involved sexual imagery, online safety, IT use, data protection and retention of records, children missing in education, student behaviour and discipline, exclusions, and (where relevant) weapons.
2. sets out our strategy for improving prevention and identifying and appropriately managing child-on-child abuse. It is the product of a comprehensive consultation – which has involved students, staff and parents, and a risk assessment.
3. applies to all [governors, the senior leadership team and staff]. It is reviewed annually, and updated in the interim, as may be required, to ensure that it continually addresses the risks to which students are or may be exposed. A number

of staff are involved in each annual review which involves, and is informed by, an assessment of the impact and effectiveness of this policy over the previous year.

4. recognises that abuse is abuse. We recognise that children sometimes display harmful behaviour themselves and that even if there are no reports, it may still be happening. Incidents or allegations will be referred on for appropriate support and intervention. Such abuse is unacceptable and will not be tolerated at all or passed off as “banter”, “just having a laugh” or “part of growing up”. This abuse could for example include sexual violence and sexual harassment, “upskirting”, initiation/hazing type violence, all forms of bullying, abuse in intimate relationships between peers, consensual and non-consensual sharing of indecent images, causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent and physical violence (e.g., hitting, kicking, shaking, hair pulling, biting etc.) This may be experienced by both boys and girls; however, girls are more likely to be the victims and boys perpetrators.
5. is compliant with the statutory guidance on child-on-child abuse as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2023).
6. does not use the term ‘victim’ and/or ‘perpetrator’. This is because our school takes a safeguarding approach to all individuals involved in concerns or allegations about child-on-child abuse, including those who are alleged to have been abused, and those who are alleged to have abused their peers. Please consult our Positive Behaviour Policy on how the school would manage consequences where appropriate.
7. Research has shown that many children who present with harmful behaviour towards others, in the context of child-on-child abuse, are themselves vulnerable and may have been victimised by peers, parents or adults in the community prior to their abuse of peers.
8. uses the terms ‘child’ and ‘children’, which is defined for the purposes of this policy as a person aged under 18.
9. We have nonetheless chosen not to restrict our approach to child-on-child abuse under this policy to children but instead to adopt a wider interpretation of our safeguarding responsibilities so that they apply to all students, regardless of age. Although the starting point is that the school’s response to child-on-child abuse should be the same for all students, regardless of age, there may be some different considerations in relation to, for example, a child aged under 10, or a student aged 18 or over in terms of how local agencies and/or partners respond. This, for example, is likely to be different on the part of local authorities, given that their safeguarding duties are limited, in the case of children’s social care – save for a number of specific exceptions – to children and, in the case of adult social care services, to adults with care and support needs.
10. Similarly, the school’s response to incidents involving the exchange of youth involved sexual imagery will need to differ depending on the age of the students involved [see

the school's youth involved sexual imagery policy for further information]. Refer also to the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy for more information about Sexting. There is also likely to be a more significant criminal justice response in relation to any student responsible for abuse who is aged 18 or over.

11. should, if relevant, according to the concern(s) or allegation(s) raised, be read in conjunction with the DfE's advice on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Between Children in Schools and Colleges (DfE's Advice) (May 2018) and any other advice and guidance referred to within it.

Child-on-Child Abuse Defined

For these purposes, child-on-child abuse is any form of physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised between children, and within children's relationships (both intimate and non-intimate), friendships and wider peer associations.

Child-on-child abuse can take various forms, including (but not limited to):

- serious bullying (including cyberbullying),
- relationship abuse,
- domestic violence and abuse,
- child sexual exploitation,
- youth and serious youth violence harmful sexual behaviour,
- and/or prejudice-based violence including, but not limited to, gender-based violence.
- Examples of online child-on-child abuse would include sexting, online abuse, child-on-child grooming, the distribution of youth involved sexualised content, and harassment.

Children will be encouraged to report to a trusted adult in school all incidents of child-on-child abuse wherever it may have happened and will be taught about alternative ways of doing this both in school and elsewhere". They will always be taken seriously and never given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting their concern or made to feel ashamed. Where an incident has occurred or specific risks are identified, the details will be added to a safeguarding or behaviour record for the children concerned and a thorough investigation conducted by the DSL. A written risk assessment will be undertaken by the DSL in order to minimise the risk of further harm and to ensure the safety of all staff and pupils. Parents or carers of the children involved will be informed as soon as it is appropriate to do so. Support plans will be written and help offered, by different adults in school (to avoid a possible conflict of interest) to the alleged victim, the child or young person accused and any other children involved. A referral to any relevant outside agency will be made e.g. Police or Social Care. Detailed procedures are included in the linked school policies mentioned above.

The following steps will be taken to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse:

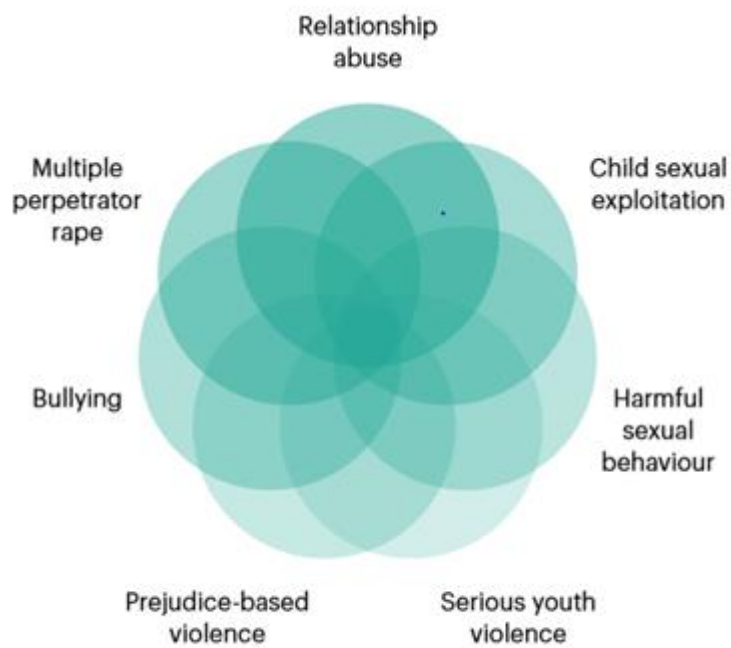
- Staff training, to ensure an understanding of what it is and how to recognise the signs
- Promotion of a supportive environment by teaching about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours (including online) in both assemblies and the wider curriculum (e.g., RSHE).
- Clear procedures put in place to govern the use of mobile phones in school.
- Appropriate staff supervision of pupils and identifying locations around the school site that are less visible and may present more risk to pupils.

Online safety – We recognise that technology is a significant component in many safeguarding and wellbeing issues and that children are at risk of abuse online as well as face to face. Some children may use mobile and smart technology, whilst at school and outside of school, to sexually harass their peers, share indecent images (consensually and non-consensually) and view and share pornography and other harmful content. Many children have unrestricted access to the internet via their mobile phones and our online safety policy describes the rules governing their use in school. It also sets out the school’s response to incidents which may involve one or more of the four areas of risk – content, contact, conduct and commerce. Online safety is a consideration running through the planning and implementation of all relevant policies and procedures. Staff will always respond if informed that children have been involved in sharing indecent images. The DfE guidance “Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people” (Dec 2020) will be used to guide the school’s response on a case-by-case basis.

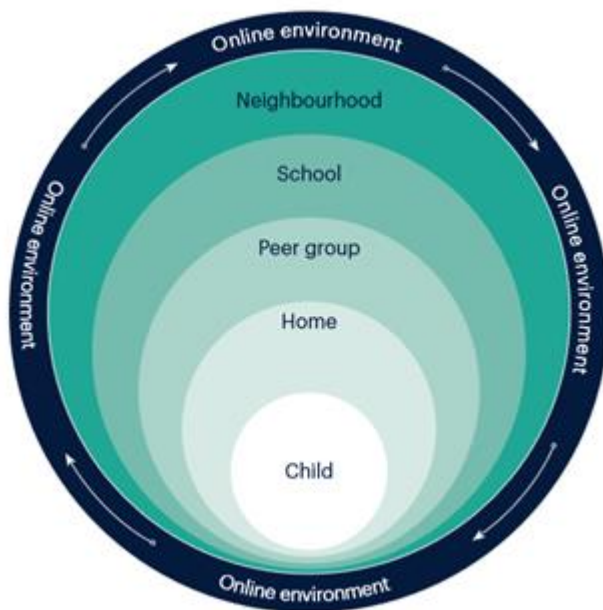
The key points for staff being: -

- Report immediately to the DSL
- Never view, copy, print, share, store or save the imagery, or ask a child to share or download – this is illegal.
- If you have already viewed the imagery by accident (e.g., if a young person has showed it to you before you could ask them not to), report this to the DSL (or equivalent) and seek support.
- Do not delete the imagery or ask the young person to delete it.
- Do not ask the child/children or young person(s) who are involved in the incident to disclose information regarding the imagery. This is the responsibility of the DSL (or equivalent).
- Do not share information about the incident with other members of staff, the young person(s) it involves or their, or other, parents and/or carers.
- Do not say or do anything to blame or shame any young people involved.
- Do explain to them that you need to report it and reassure them that they will receive support and help from the DSL (or equivalent).

Holistic account of child-on-child abuse



Contextual circles of adolescent vulnerability



What is Contextual Safeguarding?

This policy:

(a) encapsulates a Contextual Safeguarding approach, which is about changing the way that professionals approach child protection when risks occur outside of the family, thereby requiring all those within a Local Safeguarding Partnership to consider how they work alongside, rather than just refer into, children's social care, to create safe spaces in which children may have encountered child-on-child abuse.

(b) adopts a whole-school community Contextual Safeguarding approach, which means:

- being aware of and seeking to understand the impact that these wider social contexts may be having on the school's students,
- creating a safe culture in the school by, for example, implementing policies and procedures that address child-on-child abuse and harmful attitudes; promoting healthy relationships and attitudes to gender/ sexuality; hotspot mapping to identify risky areas in the School; training on potential bias and stereotyped assumptions,
- being alert to and monitoring changes in students' behaviour and/or attendance, and
- contributing to local child protection agendas by, for example, challenging poor threshold decisions and referring concerns about contexts to relevant local agencies (see section entitled 'multi-agency working').

How prevalent is child-on-child abuse?

Research suggests that child-on-child abuse is one of the most common forms of abuse affecting children in the UK. For example, [more than four in ten teenage schoolgirls aged between 13 and 17 in England have experienced sexual coercion]. Two thirds of contact sexual abuse experienced by children aged 17 or under was committed by someone who was also aged 17 or under.

When does behaviour become problematic or abusive?

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.

Sexual behaviours

Hackett has proposed the following continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours presented by children, which may be helpful when seeking to understand a student's sexual behaviour and deciding how to respond to it

Sexual behaviours continuum model:

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

Hackett's continuum relates exclusively to sexual behaviours and is not exhaustive.

The Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool can help professionals working with children to distinguish between three levels of sexual behaviour – green, amber and red, and to respond according to the level of concern.

Other behaviour

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 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 and the child/children allegedly the subject of that power, and
- involves a misuse of power.

How can a child who is being abused by their peers be identified?

All staff should be alert to the well-being of students and to signs of abuse, and should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by child-on-child abuse. However, staff should be mindful of the fact that the way(s) in which children will disclose or present with behaviour(s) as a result of their experiences will differ.

The school's safeguarding [staff/lead] should regularly review behaviour incident logs which can help to identify any changes in behaviour and/or concerning patterns or trends at an early stage.

Are some children particularly vulnerable to abusing or being abused by their peers?

Any child can be vulnerable to child-on-child abuse due to the strength of peer influence during adolescence, and staff should be alert to signs of such abuse amongst all children. Individual and situational factors can increase a child's vulnerability to abuse by their peers. For example, an image of a child could be shared, following which they could become more vulnerable to child-on-child abuse due to how others now perceive them, regardless of any characteristics which may be inherent in them and/or their family. Peer group dynamics can also play an important role in determining a child's vulnerability to such abuse. For example, children who are more likely to follow others and/or who are socially isolated from their peers may be more vulnerable to child-on-child abuse. Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse by their peers.

Research suggests that:

- child-on-child abuse may affect boys differently from girls, and that this difference may result from societal norms (particularly around power, control and the way in which femininity and masculinity are constructed) rather than biological make-up. Barriers to disclosure will also be different. As a result, schools need to explore the gender dynamics of child-on-child abuse within their settings, and recognise that these will play out differently in single sex, mixed or gender- imbalanced environments,

Birch Wood is a Special school so particular attention should be paid to the following facts which mean staff should be more vigilant and have greater awareness of the risk:

- **children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) are three times more likely to be abused than their peers without SEND, and additional barriers can sometimes exist when recognising abuse in children with SEND.**

These can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to a child’s disability without further exploration,
- the potential for children with SEND to be disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying and harassment, without outwardly showing any signs,
- communication barriers and difficulties, and
- overcoming these barriers.

Staff at Birch Wood have regular training updates which draw specific attention to these statistics, and which support specific SEND SRE. Our student support services are very robust and higher staff/pupil ratios allow us to respond to our pupil’s greater vulnerability.

- some children may be more likely to experience child-on-child abuse than others as a result of certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs.

A whole school approach

School environment

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

- ◆ educating all governors, its senior leadership team, staff, students, and parents about this issue. This includes training all governors, the senior leadership team, and staff on the nature, prevalence and effect of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify, and respond to it.
- ◆ This includes (i) Contextual Safeguarding, (ii) the identification and classification of specific behaviours, including digital behaviours, (iii) the importance of taking seriously all forms of child-on-child abuse (no matter how ‘low level’ they may appear) and ensuring that no form of child-on-child abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing, and (iv) social media and online safety, including how to encourage children to use social media in a positive, responsible and safe way, and how to enable them to identify and manage abusive behaviour online. Training includes case studies which the staff design themselves.
- ◆ To an appropriate level according to SEND educating children about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse, positive, responsible and safe use of social media, and the unequivocal facts about consent, via PSHE and the wider curriculum. For example, by reviewing literature in an English class which addresses bullying and its effect on mental health.
- ◆ 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 child-on-child abuse. Educating students about consent includes teaching them basic facts such as (i) a child under the age of 13 can never consent to

any sexual activity; (ii) the age of consent is 16; and (iii) sexual intercourse without consent is rape, and

- ◆ engaging parents on these issues by:
 - ❖ talking about them with parents, both in groups and one to one.
 - ❖ asking parents what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the school address those risks.
 - ❖ encouraging parents to hold the school to account on this issue, in part as a result of visibility of this policy.

- ◆ supporting the on-going welfare of the student body by drawing on multiple resources that prioritise student mental health, and by providing in-school counselling and therapy to address underlying mental health needs. These interventions can be 'de-clinicised' and brokered through a positive relationship with the school and its staff. All staff are trained to meet low-level mental health difficulties within the students.

- ◆ working with governors, senior leadership team, and 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 fostering a whole-school culture:
 - ❖ which is founded on the idea that every member of our school community is responsible for building and maintaining safe and positive relationships and helping to create a safe school environment in which violence and abuse are never acceptable, [and in which certain behaviour such as the carrying of weapons is not tolerated].
 - ❖ in which students are able to develop trusting relationships with staff, and in which staff understand, through regular discussion and training, the importance of these relationships in providing students with a sense of belonging, which could otherwise be sought in problematic contexts.
 - ❖ in which students feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to.
 - ❖ which (i) proactively identifies positive qualities in students; (ii) nurtures these qualities; (iii) teaches and encourages students to think about positive hopes for the future; and (vi) supports students in developing small-scale goals that enable realistic ambitions.
 - ❖ which provides supervised activities to students that give them the experience of having their needs met that might otherwise apparently be met in abusive circumstances. These can include experiencing (i) status; (ii) excitement; and (iii) a degree of risk,

- ◆ responding to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately.

- ◆ ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are fed back to the school's safeguarding [team/lead] so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify students who may need additional support. [This is done by way of a weekly senior staff meeting at which all concerns about students (including child-on-child abuse issues) are discussed]; challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside the classroom).

Multi-agency working

The school actively engages with its Local Safeguarding Partnership in relation to child-on-child abuse, and works closely with, for example, children's social care, the police, and/or other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures, and other schools. The relationships the school has built with these partners are essential to ensuring that the school is able to prevent, identify early, and appropriately handle cases of child-on-child abuse.

They help the school to:

- (a) develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in its local area, as well as the preventative and support services which exist;
- (b) ensure that its students can access the range of services and support they need quickly;
- (c) support and help inform the school's local community's response to child-on-child abuse;
- (d) increase the school's awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in its local area to enable it to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by its students.

School actively refers concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse where necessary to children's social care, the police and/or other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures. This is particularly important because child-on-child abuse can be a complex issue, and even more so where wider safeguarding concerns exist. It is often not appropriate for one single agency (where the alleged incident cannot appropriately be managed internally by the school itself) to try to address the issue alone – it requires effective partnership working.

Responding to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse

General principles

It is essential that all concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse are handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly. The way in which they are responded to can have a significant impact on our school environment. Any response should:

- include a thorough investigation of the concern(s) or allegation(s), and the wider context in which it/they may have occurred (as appropriate) – depending on the nature and seriousness of the alleged incident(s), it may be appropriate for the police and/or children’s social care to carry out this investigation.
- treat all children involved as being at potential risk – while the child allegedly responsible for the abuse may pose a significant risk of harm to other children, s/he may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves. The school should ensure that a safeguarding response is in place for both the child who has allegedly experienced the abuse, and the child who has allegedly been responsible for it, and additional consequence work may be required for the latter,
- take into account: – that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the children involved, and consider and address the effect of wider sociocultural contexts such as;

– the child’s/ children’s peer group (both within and outside the school); family; the school environment; their experience(s) of crime and victimisation in the local community; and the child/children’s online presence. Consider what changes may need to be made to these contexts to address the child/ children’s needs and to mitigate risk.

– the potential complexity of child-on-child abuse and of children’s experiences, and consider the interplay between power, choice and consent. While children may appear to be making choices, if those choices are limited, they are not consenting.

– the views of the child/children affected. Unless it is considered unsafe to do so (for example, where a referral needs to be made immediately), the DSL should discuss the proposed action with the child/ children and their parents and obtain consent to any referral before it is made. The school should manage the child/children’s expectations about information sharing, and keep them and their parents informed of developments, where appropriate and safe to do so. It is particularly important to consider the wishes of any child who has allegedly been abused, and to give that child as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed and how they will be supported.

What should you do if you suspect either that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s)?

If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s),

they should discuss their concern with the DSL without delay (in accordance the child protection policy) so that a course of action can be agreed.

Where a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer from harm, it is important that a referral to children's social care (and, if appropriate, the police) is made immediately. Anyone can make a referral. Where referrals are not made by the DSL, the DSL should be informed as soon as possible that a referral has been made (see the child protection policy).

If a child speaks to a member of staff about child-on-child abuse that they have witnessed or are a part of, the member of staff should listen to the child and use open language that demonstrates understanding rather than judgement. For further details, please see the procedures set out in the child protection policy.

How will the school respond to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse?

The DSL will discuss the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the member of staff who has reported it/them and will, where necessary, take any immediate steps to ensure the safety of the child/all children affected.

Where any concern(s) or allegation(s) indicate(s) that indecent images of a child or children may have been shared online, the DSL should consider what urgent action can be taken in addition to the actions and referral duties set out in this policy, and in the school's [youth involved sexual imagery policy], to seek specialist help in preventing the images spreading further and removing the images

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), for example, has a trained team that can evaluate and remove illegal images from the internet when the images are reported to them quickly. They will also share the image with the National Crime Agency's CEOP Command to facilitate an investigation. Any report to IWF will be made in consultation with the police.

DSLs should always use their professional judgement to: (a) assess the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour, and (b) determine whether it is appropriate for the alleged behaviour to be to be dealt with internally and, if so, whether any external specialist support is required. In borderline cases the DSL may wish to consult with children's social care and/or other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures on a no-names basis (where possible) to determine the most appropriate response.

Where the DSL considers or suspects that the alleged behaviour in question might be abusive or violent on a spectrum or where the needs and circumstances of the individual child/children in question might otherwise require it, the DSL should contact children's social care and/or the police immediately and, in any event, within 24 hours of the DSL becoming aware of the alleged behaviour. The DSL will discuss the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the agency and agree on a course of action, which may include:

- A. Manage internally with help from external specialists where appropriate and possible. Where the alleged behaviour between peers is abusive or violent (as opposed to inappropriate or problematic – unless as stated above), scenarios B, C or D should ordinarily apply. However, where support from local agencies is not available, the school may need to handle concerns or allegations internally. In these cases, the school will engage and seek advice from external specialists
- B. Undertake/contribute to an inter-agency early help assessment, with targeted early help services provided to address the assessed needs of the child/children and their family. These services may, for example, include family and parenting programmes, responses to emerging thematic concerns in extra familial contexts, a specialist harmful sexual behaviour team, CAMHS and/or youth offending services.
- C. Refer the child/children to children’s social care for a section 17/47 statutory assessment. Where a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer from harm, it is important that a referral to children’s social care (and, if appropriate, a report to the police) is made immediately. This referral will be made to children’s social care in the area where the/each child lives. Depending on the safeguarding procedures issued by the Local Safeguarding Partnership in that area, there will normally be an initial review and assessment of the referral, in accordance with that area’s assessment framework. As a matter of best practice, if an incident of child-on-child abuse requires referral to and action by children’s social care and a strategy meeting is convened, then the school will hold every professional involved in the case accountable for their safeguarding response, including themselves, to both the/each child who has experienced the abuse, and the/each child who was responsible for it, and the contexts to which the abuse was associated.
- D. Report alleged criminal behaviour to the police. Alleged criminal behaviour will ordinarily be reported to the police. However, there are some circumstances where it may not be appropriate to report such behaviour to the police. For example, where the exchange of youth involved sexual imagery does not involve any aggravating factors [see the school’s youth involved sexual imagery policy for further information]. All concerns or allegations will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and considering the wider context.

Safety plans

The school will always carry out a safety plan in respect of:

1. any child who is alleged to have behaved in a way that is considered to be abusive or violent,
2. any child who has reportedly been abused or affected by the alleged abusive or violent behaviour by another child, or
3. any child who may be at risk due to the alleged abusive or violent behaviour by another child as deemed appropriate by the DSL. Where it is alleged that a child has behaved in a way that is considered to be inappropriate or problematic (as opposed to abusive or violent), the DSL will use their professional judgment – based on the particular concern(s) and/or allegation(s) raised, and the needs and circumstances of the individual child/children in question – to determine whether (as explained above) it would be appropriate to contact children’s social care, and to carry out a safety.

Careful judgment and consideration are required as to whether alleged behaviour which might be judged to be inappropriate by an adult might actually be harmful to another child. Consultation is recommended with children’s social care if there is any doubt about this. Careful consideration should also be given to a range of factors (which are outlined in Appendix including the context, severity of the alleged behaviour, impact of the alleged behaviour on others, risk to others, and whether there are any patterns of behaviour occurring.

Where other children have been identified as witnesses to alleged abuse or violence, consideration should also be given by the DSL to whether there might be any risks to those children, and whether a safety plan would be appropriate in relation to any risks presenting to them.

Information sharing, data protection and record keeping

When responding to concern(s) or allegation(s) of child-on-child abuse, the school will:

- always consider carefully, in consultation with children’s social care, the police and other relevant agencies (where they are involved), how to share information about the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the student(s) affected, their parents, staff, and other students and individuals,
- record the information that is necessary for the school and other relevant agencies (where they are involved) to respond to the concern(s) or allegation(s) and safeguard everyone involved.
- keep a record of the legal purpose for sharing the information with any third party, including relevant authorities, and ensure that the third party has agreed to handle the information securely and to only use it for the agreed legal purpose.

- be mindful of and act in accordance with its safeguarding and data protection duties, including those set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018)⁷⁴ and the HM Government advice on Information Sharing (updated in July 2018).

Disciplinary action

The school may wish to consider whether disciplinary action may be appropriate for any child/children involved. However, if there are police proceedings underway, or there could be, it is critical that the school works in partnership with the police and/or children's social care. Where a matter is not of interest to the police and/or children's social care, the school may still need to consider what is the most appropriate action to take to ensure positive behaviour management. Disciplinary action may sometimes be appropriate, including to: (a) ensure that the child/children take(s) responsibility for and realise(s) the seriousness of their behaviour; (b) demonstrate to the child/children and others that child-on-child abuse can never be tolerated; and (c) ensure the safety and wellbeing of other children.

However, these considerations must be balanced against any police investigations, the child's/children's own potential unmet needs, and any action or intervention planned regarding safeguarding concerns. Before deciding on appropriate action, the school will always consider its duty to safeguard all children in its care from harm; the underlying reasons for a child's behaviour; any unmet needs, or harm or abuse suffered by the child; the risk that the child may pose to other children; and the severity of the child-on-child abuse and the causes of it.

The school will, where appropriate, consider the potential benefit, as well as challenge, of using managed moves or exclusion as a response, and not as an intervention, recognizing that even if this is ultimately deemed to be necessary, some of the measures referred to in this policy may still be required. For example, action may still need to be taken by the school in relation to other students who have been involved with and/or affected by child-on-child abuse. Exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and only where necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the other children in the school.

Engaging in Fair Access Panel Processes to assist with decision-making associated to managed moves and exclusions can also be beneficial. In the event of any managed move, consideration must be given to sharing information with the receiving school regarding the child-on-child abuse in order to allow best protection of children in the new school. Disciplinary interventions alone are rarely able to solve issues of child-on-child abuse, and the school will always consider the wider actions that may need to be taken, and any lessons that may need to be learnt going forwards, as set out above and below.

On-going proactive work for a whole-school community

Contextual Safeguarding approach

“I am not in school today as I am pretending to be ill. I have been bullied every day since I started school and have been having thoughts about ending my own life. I am called fat and ugly and have been told that nobody would care if I died. I feel really sad and want them to stop. Sometimes I think the only way it would all be over is if I killed myself.” (gender unknown)

The school’s response to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse should be part of on-going proactive work by the School to embed best practice and in taking a whole-school community Contextual Safeguarding approach (defined above) to such abuse. As such the school’s response can become part of its wider prevention work.

This response may involve the school working with the local authority to undertake, for example, a Contextual Safeguarding school assessment which would fit into a systems approach to Contextual Safeguarding. The response could also include the school asking itself a series of questions about the context in which an incident of child-on-child abuse occurred in the school, the local community in which the school is based, and the wider physical and online environment – such as:

- What protective factors and influences exist within the school (such as positive peer influences, examples where child-on-child abuse has been challenged, etc.) and how can the school bolster these?
- How (if at all) did the school’s physical environment or the students’ routes to and from the school contribute to the abuse, and how can the school address this going forwards, for example by improving the school’s safety, security and supervision, or by working with local safeguarding partners to mitigate the risks to students’ safety whilst travelling to and from the school?
- How (if at all) did the online environment contribute to the abuse, and how can the school address this going forwards, for example by strengthening the way in which the school encourages positive and safe use of the internet by students?
- Did wider gender norms, equality issues, and/or societal attitudes contribute to the abuse?
- What was the relationship between the abuse and the cultural norms between staff and students, and how can these be addressed going forward?
- Does the abuse indicate a need for staff training on, for example, underlying attitudes, a particular issue or the handling of particular types of abuse, or to address any victim-blaming narratives from staff?
- How have similar cases been managed in the past and what effect has this had?
- Does the case or any identified trends highlight areas for development in the way in which the school works with children to raise their awareness of and/or prevent child-on-child abuse, including by way of the school’s PSHE curriculum and lessons that address underlying attitudes or behaviour such as gender and equalities work, respect, boundaries, consent, children’s rights and critical thinking and/or avoiding victim-blaming narratives?
- Are there any lessons to be learnt about the way in which the school engages with parents to address child-on-child abuse issues?

- Are there underlying issues that affect other schools in the area and is there a need for a multi-agency response?
- Does this case highlight a need to work with certain children to build their confidence, and teach them how to identify and manage abusive behaviour?
- Were there opportunities to intervene earlier or differently and/or to address common themes amongst the behaviour of other children in the school?

Answers to these questions can be developed into an action plan that is reviewed on a regular basis by the school's leadership and the DSL.

The school will, where possible and appropriate, work with the local authority and wider partners to deliver on this plan, possibly as part of a wider Contextual Safeguarding school assessment led by or with input from the local authority.