Child-on-Child Abuse Guidance

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Our Four Critical Questions

Why do we exist?

To improve outcomes, transform lives and enable social mobility.

How do we behave?

Trust • Kindness • Endeavour

What do we do?

We create a strong network of schools which transform the lives of students by enabling them to achieve high educational and personal goals, regardless of their background.

How do we succeed?

Through a clear backbone, strong culture, academic rigour and smart systems.

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1. Child-on-Child Abuse Guidance

This appendix sets out our strategy for improving prevention and identifying and appropriately managing child-on-child abuse. It is reviewed annually and updated as required, to ensure that it continually addresses the risks to which pupils are or may be exposed.

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. 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.

We recognise that all forms of improper behaviour are abuse, and will never be passed off as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', or 'part of growing up'.

We have chosen to adopt a wide interpretation of our safeguarding responsibilities so that they apply to all pupils, regardless of age. Although the starting point is that our school's response to child-on-child abuse should be the same for all pupils, regardless of age, there may be some different considerations to be made. Such as context, environment and whether there is any previous history.

2. What is child-on-child abuse?

Pupils can abuse other pupils. This is referred to as child-on-child abuse and can take many forms. This can include (but is not limited to) bullying (including cyberbullying); sexual violence and sexual harassment; physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm; sexting and initiating/hazing type violence and rituals.

Child-on-child abuse is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying);
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers;
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse);
- sexual violence, such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault ;(this may include an online element that facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence);
- sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse;
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party;
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nude images and or video (also known as sexting or youth-produced sexual imagery);
- up skirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual

gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm; and

- initiation/hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).

- Different gender issues can be prevalent when dealing with child-on-child abuse. This could for example include girls being sexually touched/assaulted or boys being subject to initiation-type violence.

3. Vulnerable Pupils

Any pupil can be vulnerable to child-on-child abuse due to the strength of peer influence during adolescence, but some pupils are particularly vulnerable to abusing or being abused by their peers. Staff will be alert to signs of such abuse amongst all pupils, and individual and situational factors can increase a pupil's vulnerability to abuse by their peers. For example, an image of a pupil 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.

We also appreciate that peer group dynamics can also play an important role in determining a pupil's vulnerability to such abuse. For example, pupils 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. Pupils 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 this difference may result from societal norms (particularly around power, control and the way in which femininity and masculinity are constructed) rather than biological makeup.

- Barriers to disclosure will also be different. As a result, we recognise that these will play out differently in single-sex, mixed or gender-imbalanced environments.

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

These can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to a pupil's disability without further exploration;

- the potential for pupils 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.

4. A whole school approach:

We believe that all pupils have a right to attend our school and learn in a safe environment. Pupils should be free from harm. All staff understand that even if there are no reports or concerns raised, it does not mean it is not happening; it may be the case that it is just not being reported.

4.1 School environment

We work to ensure we have conditions in which our pupils 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 environment in which violence and abuse are never acceptable; and in which certain behaviour is not tolerated
- in which pupils 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 pupils with a sense of belonging, which could otherwise be sought in problematic contexts
- in which pupils feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to
- respond to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately,
- ensure that all child-on-child abuse issues are fed back to the school safeguarding and DSL so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify pupils who may be in need of additional support
- challenge the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside the classroom).

4.2 Staff and Adults

At our school, we actively seek to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by:

- Educating all governors, staff, pupils, and parents about this issue. This includes training **all** staff and governors on the nature, prevalence and effect of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify, and respond to it. All staff are trained to meet low-level mental health difficulties.

This includes:

- contextual safeguarding
- the identification and classification of specific behaviours, including digital behaviours
- the importance of taking seriously all forms of child-on-child abuse (no matter how 'low level' they may appear)
- ensuring that no form of child-on-child abuse is ever dismissed

- social media and online safety, including how to encourage children to use social media in and positive, responsible and safe way, and how to enable them to identify and manage abusive behaviour online
- supporting the ongoing welfare of pupils by using resources that prioritise mental health, and by providing in-school counselling and therapy to address underlying mental health needs
- working with all staff, pupils and parents to address equality issues, promote positive values, and encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the school community.

4.3 Pupils

We also ensure that we are educating pupils about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse, the positive, responsible and safe use of social media, and the unequivocal facts about consent, via PSHE and the wider curriculum.

Pupils are regularly taught and reminded 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 the vulnerability of those who inflict such abuse.

They are informed about the school's approach to such issues, and educating pupils about consent includes teaching them basic facts about consent and the law on sexual activity.

5. Responding to concerns and disclosures

All staff must understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours between peers, many of which are listed below, that are actually abusive in nature. Downplaying certain behaviours can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviour, an unsafe environment for children and in worst-case scenarios a culture that normalises abuse leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.

All concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse must be handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly. The way in which they are responded to can have a significant impact on our school environment.

Any response will:

- include a thorough investigation of the concerns or allegations, and the wider context in which they may have occurred (as appropriate) – depending on the nature and seriousness of the alleged incident, it may be appropriate for the police and/or Children's Social Care to carry out this investigation,
- treat all pupils involved as being at potential risk – while the pupil allegedly responsible for the abuse may pose a significant risk of harm to other pupils, they may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harming themselves. We ensure that a safeguarding response is in place for both the pupil who has allegedly experienced the abuse and the pupil who has allegedly been responsible for it,

take into account:

a) That the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the pupils involved, and consider and address the effect of wider sociocultural contexts – such as the pupil's peer group (both within and outside the School); family; the school environment; their experience of crime and victimisation in the local community; and the child's online presence

b) Consider what changes may need to be made to these contexts to address the pupil's needs and to mitigate risk

c) The potential complexity of child-on-child abuse and of pupil´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.

d) The views of the pupils affected. Unless it is considered unsafe to do so (for example, where a referral needs to be made immediately), the DSL will always (if appropriate) discuss the proposed action with the pupil/ pupils and their parent/carers and obtain agreement to any referral before it is made. We will manage the pupil'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 take into account the wishes of any child who has allegedly been abused and to give that pupil as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed and how they will be supported.

6. How our school responds to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse

If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a pupil may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peers, or that a pupil may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peers, they will record their concern on Safeguard and will discuss their concern with the DSL without delay so that a course of action can be agreed. Where a pupil is suffering or is likely to suffer from harm, the DSL will ensure a referral to Children's Social Care (and, if appropriate, the police) is made immediately.

If a pupil speaks to a member of staff about child-on-child abuse that they have witnessed or are a part of, the member of staff will listen to the pupil and use open language that demonstrates understanding rather than judgement.

6.1 DSL approach

The DSL will discuss the concerns or allegations with the member of staff who has reported it and will take any immediate steps to ensure the safety of the pupil/all pupils affected.

Where any concerns or allegations indicate that indecent images of a pupil or pupils may have been shared online, the DSL will consider what urgent action needs to be taken in addition to the actions and referral duties set out in this procedure, to seek specialist help in preventing the images spreading further and removing the images from the internet.

DSLs will always use their professional judgement to:

a) assess the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour

b) determine whether it is appropriate for the alleged behaviour 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 the Trust DSL, Children's Social Care and/or other relevant agencies to determine the most appropriate response.

Where the DSL considers or suspects that the alleged behaviour in question might be abusive or violent; or where the needs and circumstances of the individual pupils in question might otherwise require it; the DSL will contact Children's Social Care and/or the police immediately and, in any event, within 24 hours. The DSL will discuss the concerns or allegations with the agency and agree on a course of action, which may include:

- Manage internally with help from external specialists where appropriate and possible, where the alleged behaviour between peers is abusive or violent.
- 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 include family and parenting programmes, responses to emerging thematic concerns in extra-familial contexts, specialist harmful sexual behaviour team, CAMHS and/or youth offending services.
- Refer the pupil/pupils to Children's Social Care. Where a pupil 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. If an incident of child-on-child, abuse requires referral to and action by Children's Social Care and a strategy meeting is convened; we will hold every professional involved in the case accountable for their safeguarding response - to both the pupil who has experienced the abuse and the pupil who was responsible for it. We will also consider the contexts to which the abuse was associated.
- Report alleged criminal behaviour to the police. Alleged criminal behaviour will ordinarily be reported to the police.

All concerns or allegations will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and in light of the wider context.

7. Risk Reduction Assessments and Safety Plans

The school will always carry out a risk assessment to develop a safety plan in respect of:

- any pupil who is alleged to have behaved in a way that is considered to be abusive or violent,
- any pupil who has reportedly been abused or affected by the alleged abusive or violent behaviour by another pupil, or
- any pupil who may be at risk due to the alleged abusive or violent behaviour by another pupil as deemed appropriate by the DSL.

Where it is alleged that a pupil 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 concerns and/or allegations raised, and the needs and circumstances of the individual pupils in question. This will help to determine whether it would be appropriate to contact Children's Social Care and to carry out a risk assessment and safety plan.

Careful judgment and consideration are required as to whether alleged behaviour, which might be judged inappropriate by an adult, might be harmful to another pupil. 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, including the context, severity of the alleged behaviour, the impact of the alleged behaviour on others, risk to others, and whether there are any patterns of behaviour occurring.

Where other pupils are identified as witnesses to alleged abuse or violence, consideration will also be given by the DSL to whether there might be any risks to those pupils, and whether a safety plan would be appropriate in relation to any risks presented to them.

8. Disciplinary action

At our school, we may consider whether disciplinary action is appropriate for any pupil/pupils involved. However, if there are police proceedings underway, or there could be, it is crucial that we work in partnership with the police and/or Children's Social Care before making any decisions.

Where a matter is not of interest to the police and/ or Children's Social Care, we may still consider the most appropriate action to take to ensure positive behaviour management.

Disciplinary action may sometimes be appropriate, including:

a) Ensure that the pupil/pupils take(s) responsibility for and realise(s) the seriousness of their behaviour.

b) Demonstrate to the pupil/pupils and others that child-on-child abuse can never be tolerated.

c) Ensure the safety and well-being of other pupils.

Before deciding on appropriate action, we will always consider our duty to safeguard all pupils in our care from harm; the underlying reasons for a pupil's behaviour; any unmet needs, or harm or abuse

suffered by the pupil; the risk that the pupil may pose to other pupils; and the severity of the child-on-child abuse and the causes of it.

Where appropriate, we will 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 necessary, some of the measures referred to may still be required.

The exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and only where necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of the other pupils in the 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.

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Appendix 1 Child on Child Abuse Checklist

Child-on-Child Abuse may be (but not limited to):

• Bullying (including cyberbullying); • Physical abuse such • Sexual violence • Sexual harassment, • Up- skirting • Sexting • Prejudiced Behaviour • Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals

All concerns should follow the safeguarding procedures according to the safeguarding policy. This includes speaking with a DSL.

All staff should act in the best interests of the pupil, immediate consideration should be given as to how best to support and protect the pupil who has allegedly been abused and the pupil who allegedly has abused, as well as any other child.

At this point you must consider intent. Has this been a deliberate or contrived situation for a pupil or pupils to be able to harm others? Remember to include all risk factors and what you can put in place to mitigate and lower the risk.

Points to consider for investigation:
What is the age of the pupils involved?
Where did the incident or incidents take place?
What was the explanation by all pupils involved of what occurred?
What is each pupil's understanding of what occurred?
Does the pupil understand the impact of their behaviour on the other person?

Patterns of behaviour
Has the behaviour been repeated by or to an individual on more than one occasion? Has the behaviour persisted after it has already been discussed or dealt with?

Informing parents: The best way to inform parents is face to face. The nature of the incident and the type of harm/abuse a pupil may be suffering can cause fear and anxiety to parents whether their pupil is the pupil who was harmed or who harmed another. Consider if parental contact is an issue.

If the information that you have available to you at any point indicates that a pupil may be at risk of significant harm or has suffered significant harm, then you must make a safeguarding referral.

Does this need reporting to the police? (Has a criminal act occurred or suspected?

Do we need to consider creating a safety plan for all or some of the parties?

For pupils who have been harmed

What support they require depends on the individual pupil. It may be that they wish to seek counselling or 1:1 support. It may also be that they feel able to deal with the incident(s) on their own or with support of family and friends. Other interventions may target a whole class or year group.

For pupils who have displayed harmful behaviour
It is important to understand why the pupil has behaved in such a way. Once the support required to meet the pupil's needs has been put in place, it is important that the pupil understands the impact of their behaviour. The school may also choose a consequence.

After care! Post incident support for both the pupil who has allegedly been abused and the pupil who allegedly has abused.