



St. Stephen's School and Children's Centre

Learning for life

PEER ON PEER ABUSE POLICY

This policy will be reviewed in 1 year.

	Date written	By	Role	Link Governor for safeguarding	Ratified	Date ratified
Version 1	September 2021	Jenna Chapman	Deputy Head Teacher/ DSL	Elizabeth Goodyear	November 2021	25/11/2021

We are a Rights Respecting School and we use the United Nations Convention to ensure that every child has the right to be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them. (Article 19)

1. Introduction

At St. Stephen's Primary School we take peer on peer abuse very seriously and this policy provides all stakeholders with our procedures that we would carry out when an incident occurs. It is normal for some children and young people to display sexualised behaviour towards their peers as they develop. However, sexualised behaviour between peers that has become harmful or abusive is unacceptable and must be addressed.

Our school recognises that all pupils are vulnerable to and capable of abusing their peers sexually. We consider any allegation of peer on peer sexual abuse seriously and do not tolerate or pass off harmful sexual behaviour as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', 'a joke' or 'part of growing up'. These allegations are managed in the same way as any other child protection concern and follow the same procedures, including seeking advice and support from other agencies as appropriate.

This policy is in line with the safeguarding requirements in [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) (Department for Education ('DfE'), 2021), which we must work to; Part 5 of the Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory guidance sets out how schools should manage reports of child-on-child sexual violence and harassment. This policy also links to the guidance issued by the DfE in 2018: [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#).

2. Definition of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse: involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children. The sexual abuse of children by other children is a specific safeguarding issue (also known as peer on peer abuse) in education and all staff should be aware of it and of their school or colleges policy and procedures for dealing with it.

(Keeping children safe in education, DfE, 2021)

3. Examples of peer on peer abuse

Peer on peer 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 which 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 nudes images and or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery)
- upskirting, 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).

Our school also understands the different gender issues that can be prevalent when dealing with harmful sexual behaviour.

We recognise that there are growing challenges surrounding online behaviour and children's ability to adapt to this ever changing world. Our online policies are reviewed regularly and are in place to ensure pupils stay as safe as possible, when online.

All pupils can experience harmful sexual behaviour in various settings. This includes at school, at home (or at another home), in public places, and online. At school, issues can occur in places which are supervised and unsupervised. For example, abuse may occur in toilets, corridors, changing areas, outside spaces such as the playground, and when pupils are travelling home.

4. How we seek to minimise the risk of harmful sexual behaviour

The principle aim of our approach is to foster the conditions in which our pupils can aspire to and realise safe and healthy relationships, at school and as they continue in life. We work to create a culture in which the voice of our pupils is central, where pupils feel able to share their concerns openly, knowing that they will be listened to, and that they will not be judged.

Children and young people

We use relationships and health education (RHE curriculum) to help our pupils understand, in an age-appropriate way, what harmful sexual behaviour is, including by peers. We teach them the knowledge they need to recognise and report abuse, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. We also teach them about the importance of making sensible decisions to stay safe (including online), whilst being clear that if a pupil is abused, it is never their fault.

We help our pupils to develop the skills to understand:

- the difference between good touch and bad touch;
- that such behaviour is not acceptable;
- the possible reasons for such behaviour, and vulnerability of perpetrators;
- that they must tell a trusted adult if someone is behaving in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable - and must tell a trusted adult if they witness such behaviour towards others.

We understand our pupils may not always feel able to talk to adults about peer-on-peer sexual abuse. To help them, we will encourage them to share their thoughts and opinions, respond to their concerns, and respect and listen to them. We want our pupils to feel confident that any concerns they raise will be responded to appropriately. We provide learning mentors within each year group to give all pupils another adult, whom they may feel confident opening up to about issues concerning them.

Parents and carers

It is important that parents and carers understand what is meant by harmful sexual behaviour, and reinforce key messages from school at home. We work in partnership with parents to support our pupils and want to help them keep their child/ren safe. Parents and carers should understand:

- the nature of harmful sexual behaviour
- the effects of harmful sexual behaviour on pupils
- the likely indicators that such behaviour may be taking place
- what to do if it is suspected that peer on peer sexual abuse has occurred

Further information to support parents and carers in relation to harmful sexual behaviour is available online, including on the [NSPCC](#) and [Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#) websites.

Staff

Our staff undertake annual safeguarding training where the different types of abuse and neglect are discussed; this includes information about harmful sexual behaviour and our expectations for staff vigilance about this and other potential types of abuse. Staff also receive updates on safeguarding issues throughout the school year, including about the nature and prevalence of harmful sexual behaviour, where appropriate.

Importantly, the training also ensures that our staff know what to do if they receive a report that harmful sexual behaviour may have occurred, including how to support pupils.

The impact of peer on peer abuse can affect staff member's mental health and as a school we provide support for all staff who may be aware of the incident including;

- a leadership member is available to speak to regarding the incident
- supervision and/or
- the education support group confidential hotline number: 08000 562 561

5. Our response to an incident/allegation

The wellbeing of our pupils is always central to our response to an allegation or incident of harmful sexual behaviour. Any pupils reporting a concern will be treated respectfully. We will reassure them that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe; no pupil will be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting abuse or made to feel ashamed.

Our staff will never promise confidentiality to the pupil as the concern will need to be shared further. The school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will need to be informed as soon as possible of any incident and the details may also need to be shared with Children's Social Care/the police and other specialist agencies. We have in place effective working relationships with our safeguarding partners, which are essential to ensuring that concerns are appropriately managed.

We will explain next steps to the pupil so they understand what will happen, including who will be informed. Where the pupil already has Social Care involvement, such as a Looked After Child, a Child In Need or a child with a Child Protection Plan, we will inform the child's Social Worker and work in partnership with them as appropriate.

Whilst we establish the facts of the case and start the process of liaising with other agencies as appropriate, we will consider how best to keep the victim and alleged perpetrator a reasonable distance apart on school premises, and where applicable, on transport to and from the school.

Where an incident includes an online element, we will always work in accordance with appropriate guidance, taking advice from other partners as necessary. Our staff will not view an indecent image of a pupil unless absolutely necessary, nor forward it for any reason.

Recording

It is essential that information relating to allegations about harmful sexual behaviour are recorded within our school, as with any other child protection concern - and in line with our Child Protection Policy. The record may form part of a statutory assessment by Children's Social Care or by another agency.

Any member of staff receiving a disclosure of harmful sexual behaviour or noticing signs or indicators of this, will record it as soon as possible, noting what was said or seen (if appropriate, using a body map to record), giving the date, time and location. The facts will be recorded as the pupil presents them. In the case of youth produced sexual imagery, all staff are aware that they must never view the images, print the images or transfer the images to another device. In this instance, the device containing the images should be removed from the child and stored in a locked cabinet until the arrival of the police.

The record will then be presented to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or Deputy), who will decide on appropriate action and record this accordingly.

If a pupil is at immediate risk of harm, staff will speak with the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy first, and deal with recording as soon as possible afterwards.

All related concerns, discussions, decisions, and reasons for decisions will be dated and will include the action taken.

Investigation

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (with the support of the Head Teacher) will be responsible for leading investigations, and for liaising with other agencies as appropriate, for example Children's Social Care and the police. They will also be the main point of contact for parents and carers. The Designated Lead will ensure there are accurate records of each stage of the investigation and that any supporting information is included in the Child Protection files. During an investigation the children in question may be spoken to prior to parent/carer involvement. The parents/carer will then be notified of the disclosure/incident as soon as possible after the facts have been ascertained.

Risk Assessment

We will complete an AIMS risk assessment following a report of harmful sexual behaviour, considering all pupils involved in an incident. We will also consider all other pupils at our school and any actions that may be appropriate to protect them. An action plan will be created by the DSL/ Deputy DSL, which will be shared with the Headteacher and Deputy Head teachers.

Risk assessments and action plans will be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain relevant and fit for purpose. Where appropriate, the affected pupil and their parents and carers will be invited to contribute to the completion and review of the risk assessment.

6. Guiding principles

The safety of our pupils is paramount. We will use a proportionate approach, basing our actions on the principle that harmful sexual behaviour is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

All concerns will be considered carefully and on a case by case basis, underpinned by robust risk assessments. Our actions will not be judgemental about the guilt of the alleged perpetrator and will always be taken in the interests of all pupils concerned.

Our approach will help us to ensure that all pupils are protected and supported appropriately. The following principles will guide us:

- the wishes of the pupil in terms of how they want to proceed - the victim will be given as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed and any support that they will be offered
- the nature of the alleged incident(s), including whether a crime may have been committed
- the ages and developmental stages of all pupils involved
- consideration of any power imbalance between the pupil - for example, is the alleged perpetrator significantly older, more mature, or more confident/does the victim have a disability or learning difficulty
- consideration of whether the alleged incident a one-off or a sustained pattern of abuse
- consideration of any ongoing risks to the victim, other pupils, or staff
- consideration of any other related issues and wider context.

Supporting the pupil or pupils who have allegedly experienced harmful sexual behaviour

We will assess what short-term and long-term support a pupil may need to help them manage the immediate aftermath of an incident, and to recover from what they have experienced. The pupil's existing support network will be central to this work; we will work with other partners as appropriate and in accordance with the pupil's wishes and, wherever appropriate, in discussion with parents/carers.

We will consider what is necessary to support the pupil straightaway, for example by making adaptations to their timetable and in-school support and taking steps to protect them from attention or peer pressure they may experience due to making a report. This work will be guided by a robust risk assessment process and we will ensure that the pupil and their parents / carers have an opportunity to contribute. We will also ensure there is regular review of arrangements to be confident they meet the needs of all involved.

It may be necessary to make requests for support to mental health and wellbeing services or for therapeutic intervention. We may also need to link with other agencies to remove inappropriate material from the Internet, such as the [Internet Watch Foundation](#).

Supporting the pupil or pupils who have allegedly displayed harmful sexual behaviour

We have a duty of care to all pupils and we will protect and support pupils who have displayed abusive or harmful sexual behaviour. We will do this through considering the needs of the pupil, any risks to their safety and what multi-agency responses are needed to support them and their family. This work will be guided by a robust risk assessment process and we will ensure that the pupil and their parents/carers have an opportunity to contribute their opinion. We will also ensure there is regular review of arrangements to be confident they meet the needs of all involved.

Examples of the support offered may include 1:1 learning mentor sessions, year group workshops and 1:1 programme of learning.

Some pupils may not realise they have behaved abusively. We will avoid using language that may make them feel judged or criminalised and ensure that any intervention will be at the least intrusive level required to effectively address the behaviour.

We will consider appropriate sanctions using our behaviour policy, and work with the pupil and their support network to consider measures that may help to address the pupil's behaviour.

7. Investigation outcomes

Our investigation of an allegation or incident as set out in this policy will enable us to determine the outcome, working with our safeguarding partners as appropriate. We will always seek to ensure that the outcome of an investigation is appropriate and proportionate to the circumstances in relation to the report. Various options are open to us, as set out below:

Manage internally

In some cases, for example, one-off incidents, we may take the view that the pupil(s) concerned are not in need of early help or statutory intervention. In these cases, we will follow our other school policies in addressing matters, for example our behaviour policy.

We will also consider what support the pupil involved may need going forward - for example, pastoral support, counselling services, and ensuring that there is a trusted adult for those affected to speak with if they wish to. We will also consider whether any intervention or support is required as part of a whole setting approach or with the wider school community.

Early Help

Where statutory intervention is not required or agreed, we may use early help instead. This means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a pupil's life. We will work with parents and carers and other relevant partners when following this approach, which can be particularly useful in addressing non-violent harmful sexual behaviour and may prevent escalation.

Requests for support to Children's Social Care

Where a pupil has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger, we will make a request for support to Children's Social Care. We will generally inform parents and carers of this unless doing so may put a pupil at additional risk. We will seek advice from other partners on such matters.

If we make a request for support, Children's Social Care will consider whether the pupil(s) involved are in need of protection or other services. Where statutory assessments are appropriate, the school will work with Children's Social Care and other agencies as appropriate. Partnership working helps to ensure the best possible package of coordinated support is implemented for the victim and, where appropriate, the alleged perpetrator and any other pupils that may require support.

In some cases, Children's Social Care will review the evidence and decide a statutory intervention is not appropriate. If a statutory assessment is not considered appropriate by Children's Social Care, we will consider what other support may be required. We will make further requests for support to Children's Social Care if we consider that a pupil remains in immediate danger or at risk of harm.

Reporting to the police

Where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made, we will report it to the police. We will generally inform parents or carers about reports of sexual abuse, unless to do so may put a pupil at additional risk. We will seek advice from other partners in individual cases.

In circumstances where parents or carers have not been informed, we will ensure that we support the pupil in any decision we take. This is likely to be with the support of Children's Social Care and any appropriate specialist agencies.

When we have made a report to the police, we will consult with them and agree what information can be disclosed to staff and others, in particular the alleged perpetrator and their parents or carers. We will also discuss the best way to protect the victim and their anonymity.

Where there is a criminal investigation, we will work closely with the police and other agencies as appropriate to support all pupils involved (including potential witnesses). This will help to ensure that any actions we take do not jeopardise a police investigation. Sometimes the police will decide that further action is not required. In these circumstances we will continue to engage with other agencies to support the pupils involved.

8. Review

All child protection concerns are reviewed regularly, to ensure that everything has been fully addressed, that actions are completed, and to consider whether the pupils involved need any further support. We will continue to work with parents and carers and other agencies as appropriate, and risk assessments will be reviewed and updated as required.