Peer on Peer Abuse Policy

(October 2023)

The Ursuline Prep School Ilford Governors and staff are committed to the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of peer-on-peer abuse (as defined below) both within and beyond the School.

<u>CONTEXT</u> (from the Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges published 10/06/21)
Executive summary and recommendations

The review included visits to 32 schools and colleges. In these, we spoke to over 900 children and young people about the prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, in their lives and the lives of their peers.[footnote 1] We also spoke to leaders, teachers, governors, LSPs, parents and stakeholders. Finally, we reviewed the extent to which inspection has given sufficient oversight of this issue and considered how statutory guidance could be strengthened.

This rapid review does not report on individual schools and colleges or cases, all of which remain anonymous. We made a number of visits to schools named on the Everyone's Invited website, as well as others not named. But this should not be assumed to be a fully representative sample of all schools and colleges nationally. It presents a picture of strong and weaker practice across participating schools and colleges, from which we have drawn our conclusions. Our conclusions reflect the strengths and limitations of the evidence. They focus on what we were asked to report on. You can find a full description of the methodology at the end of this report.

This rapid thematic review has revealed how prevalent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are for children and young people. It is concerning that for some children, incidents are so commonplace that they see no point in reporting them. This review did not analyse whether the issue is more or less prevalent for different groups of young people, and there may well be differences, but it found that the issue is so widespread that it needs addressing for all children and young people. It recommends that schools, colleges and multi-agency partners act as though sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are happening, even when there are no specific reports.

On our visits, girls told us that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse, such as being sent unsolicited explicit sexual material and being pressured to send nude pictures ('nudes'), are much more prevalent than adults realise. For example, nearly 90% of girls, and nearly 50% of boys, said being sent explicit pictures or videos of things they did not want to see happens a lot or sometimes to them or their peers. Children and young people told us that sexual harassment occurs so frequently that it has become 'commonplace'. For example, 92% of girls, and 74% of boys, said sexist name-calling happens a lot or sometimes to them or their peers. The frequency of these harmful sexual behaviours means that some children and young people consider them normal.

When we asked children and young people where sexual violence occurred, they typically talked about unsupervised spaces outside of school, such as parties or parks without adults present, although some girls told us they also experienced unwanted touching in school corridors. Children and young people, especially girls, told us that they do not want to talk about sexual abuse for several reasons, even where their school encourages them to. For example, the risk of being ostracised by peers or getting peers into trouble is not considered to be worth it for something perceived by children and young people to be commonplace. They worry about how adults will react, because they think they will not be believed, or that they will be blamed. They also think that once they talk to an adult, the process will be out of their control.

Children and young people were rarely positive about the RSHE they had received. They felt that it was too little, too late and that the curriculum was not equipping them with the information and advice they needed to navigate the reality of their lives. Because of these gaps, they told us they turned to social media or their peers to educate each other, which understandably made some feel resentful. As one girl put it, 'It shouldn't be our responsibility to educate boys'.

<u>CONTEXT</u> (from the Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges published 10/06/21)
Executive summary and recommendations (Continued)

In the schools and colleges we visited, some teachers and leaders underestimated the scale of the problem. They either did not identify sexual harassment and sexualised language as problematic or they were unaware they were happening. They were dealing with incidents of sexual violence when they were made aware of them, and following statutory guidance. But professionals consistently underestimated the prevalence of online sexual abuse, even when there was a proactive whole-school approach to tackling sexual harassment and violence.

In light of this, even where school and college leaders do not have specific information that indicates sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are problems for their children and young people, they should act on the assumption that they are. Leaders should take a whole-school/college approach to developing a culture where all kinds of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are recognised and addressed. To achieve this, schools and colleges need to create an environment where staff model respectful and appropriate behaviour, where children and young people are clear about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and where they are confident to ask for help and support when they need it.

The Ursuline Prep School Ilford:

The recent Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges published 10 June 2021 reveals alarming findings around the prevalence of sexual abuse, the lack of willingness (for many reasons) to report it and the general feeling that it's just common place and nobody can do anything about it. We need to change this and make sure all in our school family understand that peer on peer abuse is unacceptable and has no place in our school.

Our aim is to ensure that "all staff should be able to reassure victims that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe. A victim should never be given the impression that they are certain a problem by reporting abuse, sexual violence, or sexual harassment. Nor should a victim ever be made to feel ashamed for making a report.' (KCSIE Para 18 Sept 21)

This is the School's overarching policy for any issue that could constitute peer-on-peer abuse. It relates to, and should be read alongside, the School's Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy (please see others below)

Introduction
Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023states that Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that their child protection policy includes:
- procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse;
- how allegations of peer on peer abuse will be recorded, investigated and dealt with;
- clear processes as to how victims, perpetrators and any other child affected by peer on peer abuse will be supported;
- a clear statement that abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed off as "banter", "just having a laugh" or "part of growing up";
- recognition of the gendered nature of peer on peer abuse (i.e. that it is more likely that girls will be victims and boys perpetrators), but that all peer on peer abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously;
- the different forms peer on peer abuse can take.

The guidance also states that Governing bodies should ensure their Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy reflects the fact that additional barriers can exist when recognising abuse and neglect in this group of children (Children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities) These can include being more prone to peer group isolation than other children.

While it is recommended that Peer on Peer abuse is associated with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, due to the sensitive nature and specific issues involved with peer on peer abuse this separate policy guidance template has been completed to annex to The Ursuline Prep School Ilford Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. This policy should also be read in conjunction with the Behaviour Policy and E-safety policy.

At The Ursuline Prep School Ilford , we are committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of peer on peer abuse and to ensure that any form of peer on peer abuse or sexually harmful behaviour is dealt with immediately and consistently. This will reduce the extent of harm to the young person and minimise the potential impact on that individual child's emotional and mental health and wellbeing.
This policy applies to governors and members of staff including volunteers.

Definition
Peer-on-peer 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.
Online peer-on-peer abuse is any form of peer-on-peer abuse with a digital element, for example, sexting, online abuse, coercion and exploitation, peer-on-peer grooming, threatening language delivered via online means, the distribution of sexualised content and harassment.
There is no clear boundary between incidents that should be regarded as abusive and incidents that are more properly dealt with as bullying, sexual experimentation etc. This is a matter of professional judgement. If one child or young person causes harm to another, this should not necessarily be dealt with as abuse.

However, it may be appropriate to regard a young person's behaviour as abusive if:

• There is a large difference in power (for example age, size, ability, development) between the young people concerned; or

• The perpetrator has repeatedly tried to harm one or more other children; or

• There are concerns about the intention of the alleged young person

    If the evidence suggests that there was an intention to cause severe harm to the victim, this should be regarded as abusive whether or not severe harm was actually caused.

Vulnerabilities
As a school we will recognise any child can be vulnerable to peer on peer abuse including:

• Individual and situation factors can increase a child's vulnerabilities to abuse by their peers such as the sharing of an image or photograph

• Children who are socially isolated from their peers

• Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse

- Children with certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs

- Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)

Prevention
As a school, we will minimise the risk of allegations against other pupils by:-

- In line with the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance 2019, providing a developmentally appropriate PSHE syllabus (Character Education) which develops pupils understanding of acceptable behaviour, keeping themselves safe, the nature of peer on peer abuse and what is meant by consent

- Having a robust Online safety programme which develops pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills, to ensure personal safety and self-protection when using the internet and social networking

- Having robust monitoring and filtering systems in place to ensure pupils are safe and act appropriately when using information technology in school

- Having systems in place for any pupil to raise concerns with staff, knowing that they will be listened to, believed and valued in a non-judgemental environment

- Delivering targeted work on assertiveness and keeping safe to all pupils

- When required, developing robust risk assessments & providing targeted work for pupils identified as being a potential risk to other pupils

- Creating a safe culture in school by implementing policies and procedures that address peer on peer abuse and harmful attitudes, promoting healthy relationships and attitudes to gender and sexuality

Allegations against other pupils which are safeguarding issues
Occasionally, allegations may be made against pupils by other young people in the school, which are of a safeguarding nature. Safeguarding issues raised in this way may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, teenage relationship abuse and sexual exploitation, bullying, cyber bullying and sexting . It should be considered as a safeguarding allegation against a pupil if some of the following features are present.

The allegation:-
- Is made against an older pupil and refers to their behaviour towards a younger pupil or a more vulnerable pupil

- Is of a serious nature, possibly including a criminal offence

- Raises risk factors for other pupils in the school

- Indicates that other pupils may have been affected by this student

- Indicates that young people outside the school may be affected by this student

Sexual Violence
Children can, and sometimes do, abuse their peers in a sexually violent way. Sexual violence refers to sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 as described as:

*Rape: A person (A) commits an offence of rape if: he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

*Assault by Penetration: A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of her/his body or anything else, the penetration is sexual, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

*Sexual Assault: A person (A) commits an offence of sexual assault if: s/he intentionally touches another person (B), the touching is sexual, B does not consent to the touching and A does not reasonably believe that B consents

Physical Abuse
Physical abuse may include, hitting, kicking, nipping, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm to another person. There may be many reasons why a child harms another and it is important to understand why a young person has engaged in such behaviour, including accidentally, before considering the action or sanctions to be undertaken.

Sexual Harassment
Child on child Sexual Harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that can occur online and offline. Sexual harassment is likely to: violate a child's dignity, and/or make them feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated and/or create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment.
Sexual harassment can include:

- sexual comments, such as: telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks about clothes and appearance and calling someone sexualised names;

- sexual "jokes" or taunting;

- physical behaviour, such as: deliberately brushing against someone, interfering with someone's clothes (schools and colleges should be considering when any of this crosses a line into sexual violence - it is important to talk to and consider the experience of the victim) and displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature; and

- online sexual harassment. This may be standalone, or part of a wider pattern of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence. It may include:
    - non-consensual sharing of sexual images and videos;
    - sexualised online bullying;
    - unwanted sexual comments and messages, including, on social media;
    - sexual exploitation; coercion and threats

Bullying
Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both young people who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behaviour must be aggressive and include:
- An Imbalance of Power: Young people who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.

- Repetition: Bullying behaviours happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally or for a particular reason e. g. size, hair colour, race, gender, sexual orientation, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Cyber bullying

Cyber bullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to harass threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above. It is important to state that cyber bullying can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under the Communications Act 2003, Section 127 which states that electronic communications which are grossly offensive or indecent, obscene or menacing, or false, used again for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another could be deemed to be criminal behaviour. If the behaviour involves the taking, sharing or distributing indecent images of young people under the age of 18, then this is also a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Outside of the immediate support young people may require in these instances, if a child is 10 and above, the school will have no choice but to involve the police to investigate these situations.

Sexting

Sexting is when someone sends or receives a sexually explicit text, image or video. This includes sending 'nude pics', 'rude pics' or 'nude selfies'. Pressuring someone into sending a nude picture can happen in any relationship and to anyone, regardless of their age, gender or sexual preference. However, once the image is taken and sent, the sender has lost control of the image and these images could end up anywhere. By having in their possession, or distributing, indecent images of a person under 18 on to someone else, young people are not even aware that they could be breaking the law as stated as these are offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Emotional Abuse

Can include blackmail or extortion and may also include threats and intimidation. This harmful behaviour can have a significant impact on the mental health and emotional well- being of the victim and can lead to self harm.

Sexual Abuse and Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Sexually harmful behaviour from young people is not always contrived or with the intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a young person engages in sexually harmful behaviour and it may be just as distressing to the young person who instigates it as well as the young person it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another or sexual assault/abuse. It can also include indecent exposure, indecent touching /serious sexual assaults or forcing others to watch pornography or take part in sexting.

Sexual Exploitation

This can include encouraging other young people to engage in inappropriate sexual behaviour or grooming and recruiting members of the peer group into being sexually exploited by other young people or adults. It can also include photographing or videoing other children performing indecent acts.

Upskirting

This typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their buttocks or genitals to obtain sexual gratification or cause the victim humiliation, distress or harm.

Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals

Hazing or initiation ceremonies refers to the practice of rituals, challenges, and other activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group. Hazing is seen in many different types of social groups, including gangs, sports teams and school groups. The initiation rites can range from relatively benign pranks, to protracted patterns of behaviour that rise to the level of abuse or criminal misconduct. Hazing may include physical or psychological abuse. It may also include nudity or sexual assault. Staff need to be alert to such behaviour and act in line with their child protection and behaviour policies.

The school will recognise that the signs that a child may be suffering from peer-on peer abuse can also overlap with signs indicating other types of abuse and can include:

• failing to attend school, disengaging from classes or struggling to carry out

• school related tasks to the standard ordinarily expected,

• physical injuries,

• experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing,

• becoming withdrawn and/or shy; experiencing headaches, stomach aches,

• anxiety and/or panic attacks; suffering from nightmares or lack of sleep or

• sleeping too much,

• broader changes in behaviour including alcohol or substance misuse,

• changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a way that is not appropriate for the child's age

• abusive behaviour towards others

Abuse affects children very differently. The above list is not exhaustive, and the presence of one or more of these signs does not necessarily indicate abuse. The behaviour that children present with will depend on the context of their circumstances.

Where a child exhibits any behaviour that is out of character or abnormal for his/her age, the school will consider whether an underlying concern is contributing to their behaviour including, whether the child is being harmed or abused by their peers.

Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Peer on Peer Abuse

When an allegation is made by a pupil against another student, or about a peer on peer incident they have witnessed or been a part of, members of staff should consider whether the complaint raises a safeguarding concern. If there is a safeguarding concern the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) should be informed.   The member of staff will listen to the disclosure, using open language and demonstrate understanding without judgement.   The school and the Designated Safeguarding Lead will also take account of the wider context in which the alleged incident(s) of peer on peer abuse took place, for example the physical environment of the school; route/travel to and from school; online environment and gender norms   A factual record should be made of the allegation, but no attempt at this stage should be made to investigate the circumstances.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead should contact MASH. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will follow through the outcomes of the discussion and make a referral where appropriate.

If the allegation indicates that a potential criminal offence has taken place, the police will become involved.

Parents, of both/all the student/s concerned with the disclosure/allegation and the alleged victim/s, should be informed and kept updated on the progress of the referral.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will make a record of the concern, the discussion and any outcome and keep a copy on file.

If the allegation highlights a potential risk to the school and the pupil, the school will follow the school's behaviour policy and procedures and take appropriate action.

In situations where the school considers a safeguarding risk is present, a risk assessment should be prepared along with a preventative, supervision plan.

The plan should be monitored and a date set for a follow-up evaluation with everyone concerned.

Where a disclosure or allegation indicates that indecent images of a child or children may have been shared online, the DSL will consider what line of action is to be taken in line with the Child Protection and E-safety policies, MASH team and whether or not devices are to be confiscated, the police contacted, informed and if the images have been uploaded to the internet what specialist help may be required for the images to be removed.

Approved by The Governing Body Date:

To be reviewed ANNUALLY alongside The Ursuline Prep School Ilford Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Date of Next Review: Autumn 2024