

# Child-on-Child Abuse Policy



**Westwood Park CP School**

**Child-on-Child Abuse Policy**

**Date: October 2025**

## **Introduction**

**This policy should always be read in conjunction with the school Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Pupils Policy' and the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy**

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022, (page 39). states that Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that their child protection policy includes:

- procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse.
- the systems in place (and they should be well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible) for children to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously.
- how allegations of child-on-child abuse will be recorded, investigated, and dealt with.

- clear processes as to how victims, perpetrators and any other child affected by child-on-child abuse will be supported.
- a recognition that even if there are no reported cases of child-on-child abuse, such abuse may still be taking place and is simply not being reported.
- a statement which makes clear there should be a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, and it should never be passed off as “banter”, “just having a laugh”, “part of growing up” or “boys being boys” as this can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours and an unsafe environment for children.
- recognition of the gendered nature of child-on-child abuse (i.e., that it is more likely that girls will be victims and boys’ perpetrators), but that all child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously; and
- the different forms child-on-child abuse can take, such as:
  - bullying (including cyberbullying prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying).
  - abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers.
  - physical abuse which can include 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.
  - upskirting (which is a criminal offence), 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.
  - Consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery).
  - 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.
  - 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).

The guidance also states that Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their child protection 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 and the potential for children with SEN and disabilities being disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs.

While it is recommended that Child-on-Child abuse is associated with the School Safeguarding Protection Policy, due to the sensitive nature and specific issues involved with Child-on-Child abuse, this separate policy guidance has been completed to annex to our School Safeguarding Protection Policy.

At Westwood Park we are committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of Child-on-Child abuse and to ensure that any form of Child-on-Child 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 well-being.

This policy applies to governors and all members of staff including volunteers.

## **Definition**

Children can abuse other children. This is generally referred to as child-on-child abuse and can take many forms.

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.

All staff will be aware that children can abuse other children and that it can happen both inside and outside of school and online. All staff will understand, that even if there are no reports in the school it does not mean it is not happening, it may be the case that it is just not being reported. As such if staff have any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse, they will speak to their designated safeguarding lead (or deputy).

All staff understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours between peers, and that downplaying certain behaviours, for example dismissing sexual harassment as "just banter", "just having a laugh", "part of growing up" or "boys being boys" can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours, 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 staff will be aware that technology is a significant component in many safeguarding and wellbeing issues. Children are at risk of abuse online as well as face to face. In many cases abuse will take place concurrently via online channels and in daily life. Children can also abuse their peers online, this can take the form of abusive, harassing, and misogynistic messages, the non-consensual sharing of indecent images, especially around chat groups, and the sharing of abusive images and pornography, to those who do not want to receive such content.

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: bullying, fighting and harassment between children are not generally seen as child protection issues. 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 child-on-child 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) are three times more likely to be abused than their peers without 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 which develops pupils understanding of acceptable behaviour, keeping themselves safe, the nature of child-on-child abuse and what is meant by consent
- Having a robust Online and Mobile Technology safety programme which develops pupil's knowledge, understanding and skills, to ensure personal safety and self-protection when using the internet and social networking
- Having robust structures for raising parental awareness of on-line safety and parental controls, particularly when children are using information technology at home
- 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 those pupils identified as being at risk
- 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 child-on-child 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

Examples of safeguarding issues against a pupil could include:

### **Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment**

#### **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 2003/105 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; and
  - 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 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.

### **Consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images**

(also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery).

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.

### **Teenage Relationship Abuse**

Teenage relationship abuse is defined as a pattern of actual or threatened acts of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, perpetrated by an adolescent (between the ages of 13 and 18) against a current or former partner. Abuse may include insults, coercion, social sabotage, sexual harassment, threats and/or acts of physical or sexual abuse. The abusive teenager uses this pattern of violent and coercive behaviour, in a heterosexual or same gender relationship, in order to gain power and maintain control over the partner.

## **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.

## **Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.**

This can include rituals that young people accept they are going to have to endure in order to be accepted within a group or organisation. These rituals are often violent and/or sexually abusive.

## **Identifying a child who is being abused by their peers**

The school will recognise that the signs that a child may be suffering from child-on-child 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 Child-on-Child Abuse**

When an allegation is made by a pupil against another student, or about a child-on-child 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 child-on-child 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 The Bridge Partnership to discuss the case. 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, through the Bridge Partnership, 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 in the Secure Safeguarding Records.
- 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 Online and Digital Safeguarding Policy and whether or not devices are to be confiscated, the police contacted, The Bridge Partnership informed and if the images have been uploaded to the internet what specialist help may be required for the images to be removed.