



Sexual Abuse in Schools Special Edition

Dear Headteachers and DSLs,

I hope you are well and have managed a (well-deserved) relaxing and enjoyable Easter break.

As you will no doubt have heard on the news and online, a website called 'Everyone's Invited' has gained publicity due to the huge volume of victims of peer on peer sexual abuse who have disclosed their own personal testimonies. Not all of the disclosures are about schools, however over 100 schools have so far been named on the website – some multiple times – and there are instances where reports were made to individuals in positions of trust by pupils, which have then been suppressed, dismissed or ignored.

Following this, the DfE have tasked Ofsted with completing a review into sexual abuse in schools. The terms of reference for this review have now been published and [full details can be found here](#).

However, in this special update, I hope to provide you with further context, some suggested actions and a range of materials and signposting to charities and services available.

What are Ofsted doing?

The review will look at whether schools and colleges have appropriate processes in place to allow pupils to report sexual abuse concerns freely, knowing these will be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly and appropriately.

It will establish whether there is sufficient guidance for schools and colleges on how they should deal with sexual harassment and violence allegations, and whether they understand and implement guidance well.

In order to do this, they will be completing the following:

- Ofsted will review a sample of the recently reported evidence of sexual violence and abuse involving pupils.
- Ofsted will visit a sample of schools and colleges where cases have been highlighted, to look at how well safeguarding is working and to discuss the wider issues raised by the evidence.
- The review will not report on individual schools or cases, but present a picture of good and poor practice across the country.

What is the purpose of 'Everyone's Invited'?

Everyone's Invited is a website, set up in 2020, where young people can submit testimonies of sexual violence and abuse. The aim of the website is to eradicate rape culture by revealing the abuse that

happens in schools in the hope that it leads to change. At the time of writing, over 12,000 have been submitted with many schools being named.

School Responses and Actions

Given the current focus, it would be prudent and advisory that all schools reflect upon their current practice and ensure that reporting procedures are an enabler, not a blocker, to young people feeling able to disclose.

Step 1 - Review current practice.

The [‘Contextual Safeguarding Network’](#) has a fantastic self-review traffic light tool for harmful sexual behaviours (HSB). This includes surveys to gather the views of all stakeholders. The updated traffic light tool now includes a new ‘cultural context’ lever to help you to understand the prevalence of HSB in your school, the levels of peer support available and the extent to which harm may be normalised in your setting.

Part 5 of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020 is all about Child on Child Sexual Violence and Harassment. It would therefore be prudent to ensure that DSLs and SLT, as a minimum, have re-read this section and ensured that school practices reflect the expectations set out.

- As a DSL, as a first step, reacquaint yourself with the statutory guidance and the [2018 advice](#) and ensure your staff are also aware of it, have received training on how to manage a report and, importantly, you can evidence outcomes of that training; in other words, evidence that staff do understand how to manage reports.
- Reports should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and be led by your Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a deputy. Given the high-profile nature of such allegations, we advise that, where possible, the DSL should lead rather than a deputy.
- When it comes to action to manage the report, the needs and wishes of the victim take centre stage. Considerations should include how the investigation proceeds and what support the victim requires (see paragraph 278 of the guidance). It goes without saying that sexual violence and sexual harassment are not acceptable and will not be tolerated and it must not be passed off as banter or part of growing up.
- Reports of child-on-child sexual abuse or sexual harassment can be complex to manage, and multiagency support (particularly children’s social care and the police) can often help. Where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made, children’s social care and the police should be informed. Before doing so, it is important to discuss this with the victim, explaining why it is important for other agencies to know and how these agencies will be able to support the victim.
- The guidance and the DfE advice set out the steps you should take to manage the students involved, including risk assessments, separating the students in lessons, investigating the report, and supporting the victim and alleged perpetrator. It is also very important to consider the support offered to the alleged perpetrator – they themselves may have been a victim historically and / or may require safeguarding, such as a social care referral.

Step 2 – Policy and Practice

Peer on peer abuse is already included within the Halton model policy and will continue to be reviewed in light on the current review. However, if schools feel it would be beneficial and appropriate for their setting, there is a model 'Peer on Peer' model policy, which could be included within appendix 3 of your safeguarding policy, which has been written by Farrer & Co. [A copy can be downloaded here.](#)

It is essential that disclosures are believed and treated respectfully by all staff and that it is not, and will not, be treated like a 'hot potato', but responded to swiftly yet appropriately. To support you, and to enable all staff and stakeholders to feel equipped to respond to concerns and be able to support our families and young people, the [Lucy Faithful Foundation's 'Harmful Sexual Behaviours Prevention Toolkit'](#) can be a very useful and powerful resource to use, as well as providing links to lots of other materials which should come in handy.

Step 3 – Communication

Given the current media attention, it would be appropriate to send a clear and reassuring message to all families and stakeholders.

This should include:

- A reminder of who the safeguarding leads are in school and how they can be contacted – make it as easy as possible – remove the barriers to potential disclosures.
- Provide an anonymous reporting tool via your website. This could be as simply as a 'contact us' box which sends an email to the DSL or [the use of a piece of software such as 'Whisper'](#).
- Share the details of the new dedicated [NSPCC helpline for people who have experienced sexual harassment or abuse in education](#). The number is **0800 136 663**.
- Write to parents and carers to acknowledge the concerns raised, share what you are doing about the issue and offer reassurance that the issue is taken seriously, possibly providing examples of what would happen if a concern is raised.
- Primary schools, in particular, may wish to focus more on how they respond to allegations, including bullying and online abuse. The number of cases of young children self-generating sexual abuse imagery has grown significantly as a result of grooming. [The Internet Watch Foundation's recent publication provides some harrowing statistics on this matter](#). There will be more details on this in my next full safeguarding update.
- All schools need to provide regular support and guidance for parents. ['Parent's Protect' provides an excellent Sexual Abuse learning programme](#), which given the media attention lately, may not receive a greater update from families. It also includes the [opportunity to create a family safety plan](#), which they could either complete on their own or with support from yourselves, such as through the MAP process.

Step 4 – Curriculum

Review the implementation of your RSHE curriculum. Does it sufficiently educate your children and young people in acceptable behaviours? Consider how you teach students about safeguarding, healthy and respectful relationships, respectful behaviour and consent, how sexual violence and

sexual harassment is always wrong, and how you promote an open, honest and respectful culture in your setting.

In terms of online behaviours, ChildNet have developed their 'Step Up, Speak Out' campaign, which addresses the issue of online sexual harassment amongst young people aged 13-17 years. Nearly half of 13-17 year olds have witnessed their peers editing photos of someone to make them sexual e.g. placing sexual emojis over them or adding different faces to pornographic images. [Further details can be found here.](#)

For younger children, [ChildNet have released a new 'learning to read' book aimed at 4+.](#)

School Health 0-19 Support and Advice

Halton 0-19 Service – 5-19 Offer

All of our staff have been trained in Contextual Safeguarding and they are aware of county lines and CSE as per their mandatory safeguarding training and briefing updates.

We are fully supported by the Safeguarding Team who can be contacted for advice and support as required.

Most of the high schools have allowed us to continue to provide a drop in service for their young people and this is fully advertised in schools.

For schools not currently offering the drop in service, young people can be referred to the School Nurse for support.

We have now also introduced ChatHealth which is an online service that parents, and young people can use to obtain advice and support.

www.chathealth.nhs.uk

The service is also operating a one front door system that parents and young people can access and this is another way of getting help and support.

Runcorn 01928 593056

Widnes 0151 495 5200

The School Nurse will offer all young people who want advice and support a holistic assessment at a venue of their choice and all processes / policies will be adhered to if they have concerns for that young person's welfare.

The Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre

The Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre provides specialist trauma focussed counselling for children and young people aged 5 and above in Runcorn and Widnes. For support with the criminal justice system they have Independent Sexual Violence Advisors.

You can directly refer using the following links

Self-Referral - <https://www.dpmscloud.com/external/referralformselfcheshirerc>

Professional Referral - <https://www.dpmscloud.com/external/referralformorgcheshirerc>

Or ring 0330 363 0063 to speak to a specialist advisor.



RASASC A4 Poster - Young People.pdf



RASASC Children YP Therapy Service Leaflet

It is likely that given the current media attention and review into sexual abuse in schools, that there is an increase in disclosures, which can only be seen as a positive, to enable us to support victims and improve practice to ensure that no opportunities are given to perpetrators to offend. We must continue to have an 'it could happen here' approach, and treat all victims with dignity and respect, while also providing support for any accused young people themselves. Remember, I am here if you wish to discuss any cases or concerns.

For further reading...

Here are some links to further resources and reading, which I have used to support the collation of this advice.

- https://brookblog.health.blog/2021/03/30/brook-statement-about-everyones-invited/?mc_cid=d37fe0126e&mc_eid=9c3c8034ae
- <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news/%E2%80%98beyond-heart-breaking%E2%80%99-abuse-predators-groom-children-film-siblings-and-friends>
- <http://www.newsite.aimproject.org.uk/portfolio-item/model-and-guidance/>
- <https://www.everonesinvited.uk/write-to-your-school>
- https://ineqe.com/2021/03/30/everyones-invited/?utm_campaign=Safeguarding%20Hub%20Newsletter%20&utm_medium=email&_hs_mi=119237712&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-_GLOnaglFSWGZURL06RPg_2qeHaWbf7vHuBOuGiTqUNoYK3lZcFCZlqkDCJwVH_mhBFGzDpXBmqgieEoRZrNeDAfGOuBWcTSb73wM98vMUnZcp-Cg&utm_content=119237712&utm_source=hs_email
- <https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/sexual-abuse-learning-programme.htm>
- <https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/clients-and-sectors/safeguarding/farrer--co-safeguarding-peer-on-peer-abuse-toolkit-2019.pdf>
- <https://www.farrer.co.uk/news-and-insights/peer-on-peer-abuse-toolkit/#>
- <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/en/beyond-referrals-levers-for-addressing-harmful-sexual-behaviour-in-schools>
- <https://www.brownejacobson.com/education/training-and-resources/legal-updates/2021/04/everyones-invited-ofsted-to-review-safeguarding-policies>

