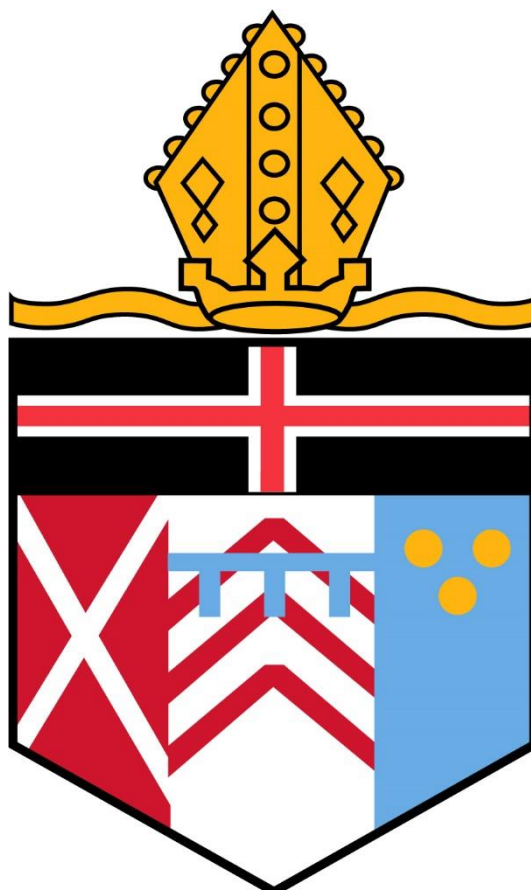


Blue Coat C.E. (Aided) Junior School



Child on Child Abuse Policy

Adopted: April 2025

To Review: April 2026

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1. Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education states that:

‘Governing Bodies and Proprietors should ensure they facilitate a whole school approach to safeguarding. This means involving everyone in the school and ensuring safeguarding and child protection are at the forefront and underpin all relevant aspects of process and policy development. Ultimately, all systems, processes and policies should operate with the best interests of the child at their heart.’

Furthermore, ‘Where there is a safeguarding concern, Governing Bodies, Proprietors and school leaders should ensure the child’s wishes and feelings are considered when determining what action to take and what services to provide. The school safeguarding policies and procedures should be transparent, clear, and easy to understand for staff, pupils, students, parents, and carers. Systems should be in place, and they should be well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible for children to confidently report, any form of abuse, exploitation, or neglect, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously, and knowing they can safely express their views and give feedback.’

All staff are aware that children can abuse other children (child-on-child abuse) and that it can happen both inside and outside of school and online (extra-familial harm). It is important that all staff recognise indicators and signs of child-on-child abuse and know how to identify it and respond to reports.

All staff understand that even if there are no reports of this type of harm, it does not mean it is not happening, it may be the case that it is just not being reported. As such, it is important that if staff have any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse they will speak to their Designated Safeguarding Lead (or Deputy).

This means that **ALL staff** will take a ‘**zero-tolerance**’ approach to any unacceptable behaviour including ‘**banter**’ and will seek to prevent, challenge and take action so that all children understand that any concerns regarding their welfare and safety will be taken seriously. This will encourage and promote a culture of acceptable behaviour and a safe educational environment for all children.

All staff must ensure that they reassure any victims that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe. No victim should ever be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting abuse, sexual violence or sexual harassment. Nor should they ever be made to feel ashamed for making a report.

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 children (sometimes known as teenage relationship abuse).
- 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 stand-alone 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 videos (also known as sexting or youth-produced sexual imagery).
- Upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress, or alarm.
- 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).

(KCSIE 2024)

2. Introduction and Rationale

The Governors, Senior Leadership Team, and staff body at Blue Coat are committed to the prevention, early identification, and sensitive management of child-on-child abuse both within and, as appropriate, beyond the school.

The school recognises the seriousness and pervasiveness of child-on-child abuse. It should never be passed off as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', or 'part of growing up'. It has serious and long-lasting effects, and schools can play a crucial part in mitigating the harm it causes. Though victims are statistically predominantly women and girls, perpetrators may be of any gender or sexual orientation.

In order to safeguard students, it is our responsibility to:

- a) be aware of the nature and level of risk to which students are or may be exposed
- b) put in place a clear and comprehensive strategy, taking a 'contextual safeguarding' approach across the school community to child-on-child abuse
- c) take steps both to try and prevent it and to respond to it effectively when it occurs

A proactive approach is required: rather than simply reacting to allegations of child-on-child abuse our intention is to mitigate harmful attitudes and actions. This requires a partnership with parents and with other agencies, and a strategic focus on prevention & education, identification, systems for response, and follow-up so that good relations are nurtured and harmful attitudes challenged.

This policy is itself a preventative measure which recognises increasing concern about this issue nationally and defines our strategy for improving prevention, identification and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse.

This policy:

- Sets out the overarching approach as to how Blue Coat School educates against, creates a caring environment supports those affected and tackles child on child abuse
- explains the school's approach to any issue that could constitute child-on-child abuse
- should be read alongside the School's Safeguarding Policy and other relevant policies including those on Anti-bullying; Acceptable Use of IT; Data Protection; Relationships & Sex Education; and Behaviour

- will be reviewed at least annually, to ensure that it continually addresses the risks to which students are or may be exposed. Staff and students will be involved in each annual review which will include an assessment of its impact and effectiveness over the previous year.
- is compliant with the statutory guidance on child-on-child abuse as set out in the DfE's Keeping Children Safe in Education Document (most recently updated September 2024)
- should be read in conjunction with Durham Local Safeguarding Partnerships' Safeguarding Policies and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by them.

3. Safe Environment to Share Concerns Alongside a Positive Curriculum

It is important that in school there is an open environment where children feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This will be strengthened through a strong and positive PHSCE/SMSC curriculum that tackles such issues as prejudiced-based and discriminatory behaviour and gives children an open forum to talk things through rather than seek one on one opportunities to be harmful to one another.

The curriculum will be tailored to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of individual children, including children who are victims of abuse and children with special educational needs or disabilities.

All staff are made aware that children may not feel ready, or know how, to tell someone that they are being abused, exploited, or neglected and they may not recognise their experiences as harmful. E.g., children may feel embarrassed, humiliated, or threatened. This could be due to their vulnerability, disability and/or sexual orientation or language barriers. This will not prevent staff from having professional curiosity and speaking to the DSL (or Deputy) if they have concerns about a child. It is also important that staff determine how best to build trusted relationships with children and young people which facilitate communication.

Therefore, to enable such an open and honest environment it is necessary to ensure that Governing Bodies or Proprietors feel confident that the whole workforce are supported and enabled to talk about issues and challenge perceptions of children including use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. In order to create such an environment, it is necessary for whole staff training and CPD around abusive behaviours and talking to children in a way that continues to create an open and honest environment without prejudice. This is in line with school's legal obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010 (including the Public Sector Equality Duty) and local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

It is necessary that staff consider each issue and each individual in their own right before taking action. If staff minimise the concerns raised, it may result in a child seeking no further help or advice. Systems are in place and they are well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible for children to confidently report, any form of abuse, exploitation or neglect, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously, and knowing they can express their views and give feedback. Staff will be enabled to discuss issues about online access and support and reinforce appropriate behaviours online including understanding why age limits are in place on social media platforms, encouraging children to share online concerns, talking about issues that have happened in an open forum and working closely with parents. (Farrer and Co, 2019)

All staff are aware that technology is a significant component in many safeguarding and well-being issues. Children are at risk of abuse online as well as face-to-face. In many cases, abuse will take place concurrently both online and offline. Children can also abuse other children online, this can take the form of abusive, harassing, and misogynistic/misandrist 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. (KCSIE, 2024)

At Blue Coat school we have a clear Online Safety/Acceptable Use Policy that gives clarity and expectations to children about their role in keeping themselves and other children safe in regards to the use of technology both inside and outside of school.

(a) Forums for Children to Make Changes/Have Their Voice Heard

It is useful to ensure young people are part of changing their circumstances and that of the procedures within schools. Having a school council and student voice and encouraging young people to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour' will go far in helping to create a positive ethos in school and one where all young people understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive. Blue Coat students are encouraged and supported in communicating how to improve their school's culture. The school's values underpin all policies and procedures, these values enable the students to support each other, care for each other and those in the wider community and take responsibility for their actions.

4. Understanding Child-on-Child Abuse

(a) What is child-on-child abuse?

Child-on-child abuse (previously known as 'peer-on-peer abuse') is any form of physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse or coercive control exercised between children and young people, and within their relationships, friendships and wider peer associations.

- It can take various forms, including serious bullying (including cyber-bullying), domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour, and/or prejudice-based (including gender-based) violence.
- It may take place in face-to-face relationships or online, including youth-involved sexual imagery, abusive messaging, child-on-child grooming, and harassment.
- It is one of the most common forms of abuse affecting children in the UK. Government research² suggests that over 40% of girls aged 13-17 in England have experienced sexual coercion, 66% of it committed by someone also aged 17 or under
- The term 'child-on-child' is preferred to 'peer-on-peer' so as to emphasise that both parties are children, and that there may be disparity of ages

All behaviour takes place on a spectrum. When dealing with reports of child-on-child emotional and/or physical abuse, the school will assess where the alleged behaviour falls on this spectrum and to decide how to respond. Questions include the extent to which the behaviour:

- is socially acceptable, within the peer group and more widely
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time
- is problematic and concerning
- involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination e.g., related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability
- involves an element of coercion or pre-planning
- involves misuse of a power imbalance between victim and perpetrator

(b) Identifying Signs of Child-on-child Abuse

All staff should be alert to the well-being of students and to signs of abuse, and should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by child-on-child abuse. However, the ways children will disclose or behave as a result of their experiences may differ.

- The signs of child-on-child abuse are similar to those in other forms abuse, as set out in the Safeguarding Policy. They include changes in behaviour or mood, as well as signs of physical injury; school staff are, by the nature of their contact with students, well placed to notice these.
- Individual and situational factors can increase a child's vulnerability to abuse by their peers, e.g. after an image of them has been shared, if they are socially isolated from their peers, if they are questioning or exploring their sexuality; sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs may also increase vulnerability

(c) Children with Special Educational Needs

Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) or certain health conditions can face additional safeguarding challenges. These can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's disability without further exploration
- being more prone to peer group isolation or bullying (including prejudice-based bullying) than other children
- the potential for children with SEND or certain medical conditions being disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs
- communication barriers and difficulties in overcoming these barriers.
- cognitive understanding – being unable to understand the difference between fact and fiction in online content and then repeating the content/behaviours in schools or colleges or the consequences of doing so.

Any reports of abuse involving children with SEND will therefore require close liaison with the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) and the SENCO or the named person with oversight for SEND in a .

To address these additional challenges, schools and colleges should consider extra pastoral support for children with SEND or certain medical conditions particularly when investigating any form of child-on-child abuse.

(KCSIE, 2024)

(d) Children Who Are Lesbian, Gay, Bi or Trans (LGBT)

Children who are LGBT can be targeted by other children and risks can be compounded where children who identify as LGBT lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open. It is therefore vital that staff endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced and provide a safe space for them to speak out or share their concerns with members of staff (KCSIE).

5. Types of Abuse

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between children and this list is not exhaustive. Each form of abuse or prejudiced behaviour is described in detail followed by advice and support on actions to be taken.

(a) Bullying (including Cyberbullying, Prejudice-Based and Discriminatory Bullying)

The new definition of bullying is, 'a person who habitually seeks to harm or intimidate those who they perceive as vulnerable'. (Taken from the Oxford, Cambridge and Collins dictionary, updated 2018)

Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. Bullying can take many forms (for instance, cyber-bullying via text messages, social media or gaming, which can include the use of images and video) and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, special educational needs or disabilities, or because a child is adopted, in care or has caring responsibilities. It might be motivated by actual differences between children, or perceived differences.

Bullying involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. This could involve perpetrators of bullying having control over the relationship which makes it difficult for those they bully to defend themselves. The imbalance of power can manifest itself in several ways, it may be physical, psychological (knowing what upsets someone), derive from an intellectual imbalance, or by having access to the support of a group, or the capacity to socially isolate. It can result in the intimidation of a person or persons through the threat of violence or by isolating them either physically or online. Low-level disruption and the use of offensive language can in itself have a significant impact on its target. If left unchallenged or dismissed as banter or horseplay it can also lead to reluctance to report other behaviour. (Preventing and Tackling Bullying July 2017)

(b) Cyber Bullying

Cyber or online 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. Many children have unlimited and unrestricted access to the internet via mobile phone networks (i.e. 3G, 4G and 5G). This means that some children, whilst at school or college, sexually harass, bully and control others via their mobile and smart technology, share indecent images; consensually and non-consensually (often via large chat groups) and view and share pornography and other harmful content. (KCSIE)

It is important to state that cyber bullying can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under the **Malicious Communications Act 1988** under **Section 1**, which states that electronic communications which are indecent or grossly offensive, convey a threat or false information or demonstrate that there is an intention to cause distress or anxiety to the victim would be deemed to be criminal. This is also supported by 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 also be deemed to be criminal behaviour. If the behaviour involves the use of taking or distributing sexual images of children under the age of 18 then this is also a criminal offence under the **Sexual Offences Act 2003**. Outside of the immediate support children may require in these instances, the school will have no choice but to involve the police to investigate these situations.

(c) Prejudiced-Based and Discriminatory Bullying

The term prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying refers to a range of hurtful behaviour, physical or emotional or both and online, which causes someone to feel powerless, worthless, excluded or marginalised, and which is connected with prejudices around belonging, identity and equality in wider society – in particular,

12 prejudices to do with disabilities and special educational needs, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, gender, home life, (for example in relation to issues of care, parental occupation, poverty and social class) and sexual identity (homosexual, bisexual, transsexual).

(d) Physical Abuse e.g. (biting, hitting, kicking, hair pulling etc.)

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 punishment to be undertaken.

(e) Sexual Violence

Sexual violence refers to sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 as described below:

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. (Sexual assault covers a very wide range of behaviour so a single act of kissing someone without consent, or touching someone's bottom/breasts/genitalia without consent, can still constitute sexual assault.)

Causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent: A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally causes another person (B) to engage in an activity, the activity is sexual. B does not consent to engaging in the activity, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents. (This could include forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party.)

What is consent? Consent is about having the freedom and capacity to choose. Consent to sexual activity may be given to one sort of sexual activity but not another, e.g., to vaginal but not anal sex or penetration with conditions such as wearing a condom. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity and each time activity occurs. Someone consents to vaginal, anal or oral penetration only if s/he agrees by choice to that penetration and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice.

- A child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity
- The age of consent is 16
- Sexual intercourse without consent is rape

(f) Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment means 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline and both inside and outside of school/college. In referencing sexual harassment, it is in the context of child-on-child

sexual harassment. 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 (KCSIE).

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
- Displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature
- Upskirting (this is a criminal offence)
- Online sexual harassment. This may be standalone, or part of a wider pattern of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence.

It may include:

- Consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and videos
- Sharing of unwanted explicit content
- Sexualised online bullying
- Sexual exploitation; coercion and threats
- Unwanted sexual comments and messages, including, on social media
- Coercing others into sharing images of themselves or, performing acts they're not comfortable with online.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex from primary through to secondary stage and college. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children. Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and may overlap. They can occur online and face to face (both physically and verbally) and are never acceptable. Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment will likely find the experience stressful and distressing. This will, in all likelihood, adversely affect their educational attainment and will be exacerbated if the alleged perpetrator(s) attends the same school or college. Safeguarding incidents and/or behaviours can be associated by factors outside the school, including intimate personal relationships. It is essential that all victims are reassured 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 creating a problem by reporting sexual violence or sexual harassment. Nor should a victim ever be made to feel ashamed for making a report. Staff should be aware that it is more likely that girls will be the victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment and more likely it will be perpetrated by boys (KCSIE).

(g) Consensual and Non-Consensual Sharing of Nudes and Semi-Nudes Images and/or Videos

This is also known as sexting or youth-produced sexual imagery. 'Youth Involved/Produced' includes children sharing images that they, or another child, have created themselves.

'Imagery' covers both still photos and moving videos (and this is what is meant by reference to imagery throughout the policy).

Sexting (more commonly known as) 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 occur in any relationship, to anyone, whatever 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**.

(h) Upskirting

'Upskirting' typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm. It is now a criminal offence.

(i) Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum, from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent. Problematic, abusive and violent sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. The umbrella term is 'harmful sexual behaviour' (HSB). Harmful Sexual Behaviour can occur online and/or face to face and can also occur simultaneously between the two.

When considering Harmful Sexual Behaviour, ages and stages of development of children are critical factors. Sexual behaviour between children can be considered harmful if one of the children is much older, particularly if there is more than two years difference or if one of the children is pre-pubescent and the other is not. However, a younger child can abuse an older child, particularly if they have power over them, e.g. the child is disabled, or smaller in stature.

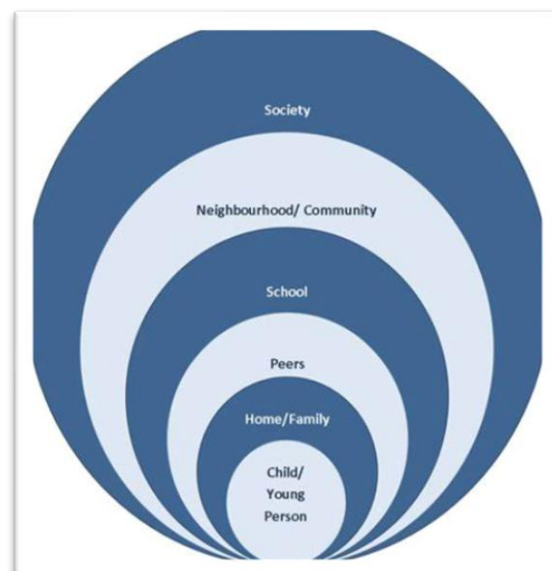
Harmful sexual behaviour from young people is not always contrived or with the intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a young person engages in harmful sexual behaviour and it may be just as distressing to the young person who instigates it as well as the young person it is intended towards. Harmful sexual behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another, sexual assault, rape or abuse.

5. A whole school approach

(a) 'Contextual Safeguarding'

The school operates a 'contextual safeguarding' approach. This involves:-

- recognising that, while occurring between members of a school community, child-on-child abuse will often occur outside the school
- being aware of and seeking to understand the impact that wider social contexts may have on students as illustrated in the diagram
- creating and modelling a safe culture in the school by, e.g., implementing policies and procedures that address child-on-child abuse and harmful attitudes, promoting healthy relationships and attitudes to gender/sexuality, hotspot mapping to identify risky areas in the school, training on potential bias and stereotyped assumptions
- being alert to and monitoring changes in students' behaviour
- contributing to local child protection agendas by, e.g., referring concerns about trends and contexts to relevant local agencies



(b) Multi-agency Working

Child-on-child abuse can be a complex issue, especially where wider safeguarding concerns exist, and often cannot be fully managed by the school alone – it requires effective partnership working. As necessary and appropriate, the school refers concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse to parents, Durham Local Authority, social care, the police and other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures.

The school actively engages with the Local Safeguarding Partnership in relation to child-on-child abuse in order to help

- prevent, identify early, and appropriately handle cases of child-on-child abuse
- develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in the local area as well as the preventative and support services which exist
- ensure that students can access services and support they need quickly
- support and inform the school's response to child-on-child abuse
- increase the school's awareness and understanding of trends and emerging risks in the community

(c) Preventative Measures

The school actively seeks to address all forms of child-on-child abuse by:

- responding to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately
- ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are reported to the school's safeguarding team so that they can spot and address trends and identify students in need of additional support
- frequently and regularly telling students what to do if they witness or experience such abuse, and about the school's approach to such issues, including its zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of child-on-child abuse
- engaging parents on these issues by means of:
 - information evenings
 - one to one discussion as appropriate
 - engaging parents to help identify what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the school address those risks

- working with all stakeholders to promote equality and a culture of respect amongst all members of the school community, so that conditions exist in which students can form safe and healthy relationships
- fostering a whole-school culture founded on the idea that every member of our school community is responsible for building and maintaining safe and positive relationships
- educating all Governors, its Senior Leadership Team, staff, students, and parents about this issue. This includes training for all staff and awareness-raising for Governors on the nature, prevalence and effect of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify, and respond to it

(d) Educational Measures

The school recognises that teaching about safeguarding in the classroom can help to prevent harm by providing children with skills, attributes and knowledge to help them navigate risks. It seeks to do this by:

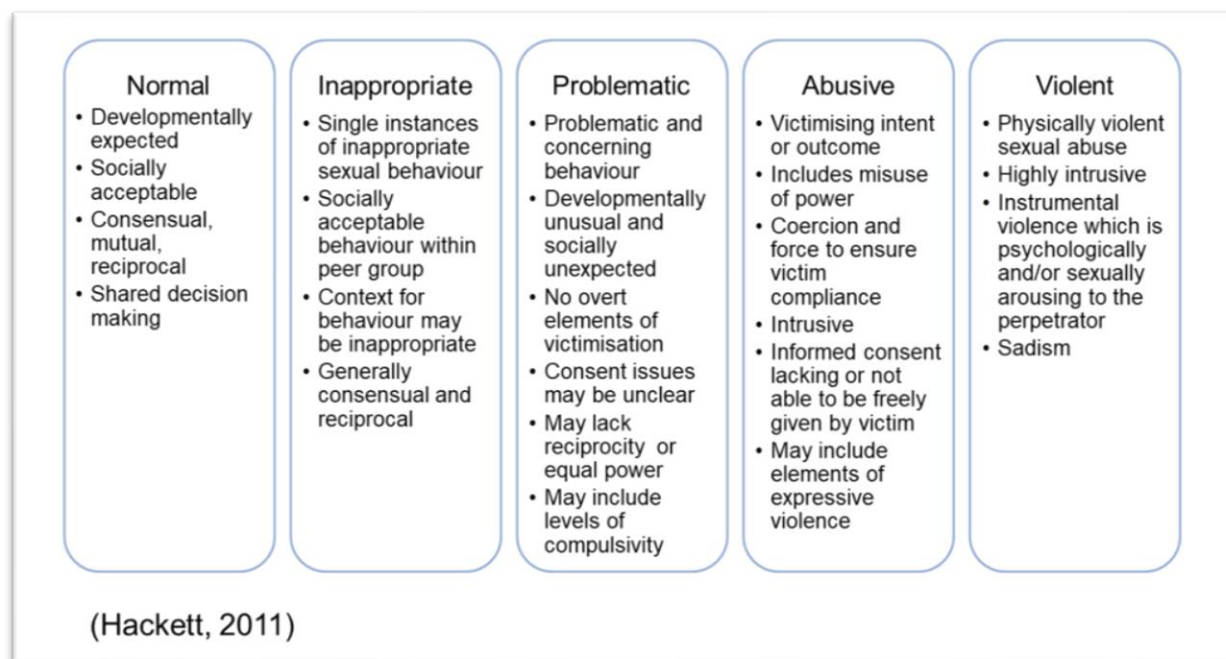
- teaching the issues in a way that is inclusive, age-appropriate, and provides children with the opportunity to discuss and ask questions
- educating students via PSHCE and the wider curriculum about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse, positive, responsible and safe use of social media, the effect that it can have on those who experience it and the possible reasons for it, including vulnerability of those who inflict such abuse
- giving students factual/legal knowledge such as the laws surrounding consent, the definitions of rape, methods of reporting abuse to the school and other authorities, possible steps to remove images from the internet
- reflecting current legislation and police response by focusing on the potential consequences of sharing sexual images without consent, rather than on production of those images per se.
- Avoiding victim blaming or fear-based treatment of youth-produced sexual imagery, which may increase the risk that a student who is abused, coerced, or exploited into such behaviour feels that did something wrong and fails to seek help

(e) Measuring the Behaviour

Simon Hackett's continuum of behaviour can be a useful guide to measure the behaviour that has occurred and consider the circumstances around the incident (s). The continuum looks at whether it:

- is socially acceptable
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time
- is socially acceptable within the peer group
- is problematic and concerning
- involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination e.g., related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability
- involves an element of coercion or pre-planning
- involves a power imbalance between the child/children allegedly responsible for the behaviour and the child/children allegedly the subject of that power
- involves a misuse of power

Behaviour which is not abusive at first may potentially become abusive quickly or over time. Intervening early and addressing any inappropriate behaviour which may be displayed by a child is vital and could potentially prevent their behaviour from progressing on a continuum to become problematic, abusive and/or violent - and ultimately requiring (greater/more formal) engagement with specialist external and/or statutory agencies.



6. Responding to Concerns or Allegations of Child-on-Child Abuse

(a) Disclosure

The school may become aware of child-on-child abuse and youth-involved sexual imagery by:

- A student disclosing their own experience to a member of staff
- A friend or parent reporting to a member of staff on behalf of a student
- A student reporting their belief that abuse has occurred, e.g., when exposed to youth produced sexual imagery as a result of wider distribution
- information gathered incidentally during investigation of other incidents (e.g., images found where a mobile phone has been confiscated)
- information passed to the school through a third party (e.g., police)

All members of staff should report any disclosure of incidents to the DSL team in the same way as for other safeguarding incidents. Any direct disclosure by a student should be taken very seriously: those who disclose are likely to be embarrassed and worried about the consequences. Disclosure in school may be a last resort, and they may have already tried to resolve the issue themselves

(b) General Principles

All concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse will be handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly, mindful of the impact this response can have on those involved and the school environment. The response will:

- include a thorough investigation of the concern or allegation
- be undertaken with full transparency and take full account throughout of the views of the students affected, in particular any student who has allegedly been abused
- give as much control as possible to alleged victims over how any investigation will be progressed and how they will be supported

- treat both alleged victim and alleged perpetrator as being at potential safeguarding risk: while perpetrators may pose a significant risk to others, they may also have unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves. They may both require Safety plans and may need to be kept apart from each other
- be aware of the complexity of child-on-child abuse and consider the interplay between power, choice and consent.
- Respect the maintain the anonymity of all parties, not least in cases of police involvement
- take into account wider safeguarding concerns for any of those involved (including sociocultural contexts e.g., peer groups within and outside School, family, previous experience of victimisation, online presence) and consider how these may need to be addressed
- keep all parties (and their parents) informed of developments, where appropriate and safe to do so
- ensure appropriate follow-up work is scheduled for all students involved in an allegation of child-on-child abuse, whatever the outcome; this will include an opportunity for those students to reflect on the school's handling of the issues
- include a review of all significant cases to ensure that lessons are learned

(c) The School's Response

A member of staff who suspects child-on-child Abuse may have taken place will:

- follow agreed practice for all safeguarding concerns
- listen to students using open language, demonstrating understanding rather than judgement
- record disclosures and other significant information as quickly as possible
- discuss the concern with the DSL/ DDSL without delay
- in urgent cases, make their own referral to Social Care and/or police, informing the DSL team as quickly as possible where this is done

When an allegation has been made, the DSL/DDSL:

- discuss the concern or allegation with the member of staff who has reported it
- assess the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour
- take any immediate steps necessary to ensure the safety of students affected. Where a student is at risk of harm, and/or where indecent images may have been shared, this may include a referral to Social Care and/or Police either immediately or within 24 hours of becoming aware of the alleged behaviour
- consult as necessary with Durham Social Care, the relevant MASH team and/or other agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures on a no-names basis (where possible) to determine the most appropriate response.
- consider whether any external specialist support is required.
- Consider the need for a safety plan in respect of students involved in or affected by alleged child-on-child abuse.

All concerns or allegations will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, using professional judgment and taking account of the wider context. Courses of action may include:

1. Managing them internally, with help from external specialists where appropriate
2. Reporting alleged criminal behaviour to the police (see below)
3. Undertaking or contributing to an inter-agency 'Early Help' assessment, with targeted services to address the assessed needs of students and their families (e.g., family/parenting programmes, CAMHS, specialist harmful sexual behaviour team)
4. Referring student(s) to Social Care for statutory assessment.

(d) Involving Police

- Where the school believes a crime has been committed it has a duty to report this to the police. Parents/ carers /students will be informed before this step is taken but the duty is absolute.
- Where a student in this situation chooses to speak to the police, the school will take steps to ensure that they are supported when giving their account, e.g. giving advance notice of a police interview where possible; offering a preference of 'responsible adult' present for the interview – whether a parent or a member of the DSL team; where the alleged abuse is of a sexual nature, the accompanying safeguarding staff should be of the same gender as the victim.
- A decision to report youth involved in sexual imagery to the police will take account of the severity of the concerns, the age of the students, the impact on any students involved and their views, the context of the production and distribution of the image (e.g., whether production and sharing consensual or coerced, volunteered or requested?)
- A report to the police does not necessarily mean that any of those involved will be criminalised. Since January 2016, the police are able to record an "Outcome 21" against a reported crime, meaning it is not in the public interest to pursue a charge. The majority of youth involved in sexual imagery would fall into this category.
- However, in the event of coercion, exploitation, further harm or aggravated behaviours, police involvement may result in criminal charges. The school will communicate with the police to determine awareness of the Outcome 21 recording and its appropriateness in any given incident.

(e) Informing Parents

If, once appropriate advice has been sought from the police/Local Authority Children's Social Care school have an agreement to inform parents or has been allocated that role from the other services involved then parents should be informed as soon as possible. If services are not going to be involved then equally, this information may need to be shared with parents. Parents would not be informed if by doing so the child was put at further risk of significant harm.).

In all circumstances where the risk of harm to the child is evident then school will encourage the child to share the information with their parent or share it with parents on their behalf (they may be scared to tell parents that they are being harmed in any way). Where school can evidence are acting in the best interests of the child we would not be criticised, however this would be the case if we actively breached the rights and choices of the child.

The best way to inform parents is face to face. Although this may be time consuming, the nature of the incident and the type of harm/abuse a child may be suffering can cause fear and anxiety to parents whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed another

(f) School Disciplinary Action

Where child-on-child Abuse is found to have taken place, the school will consider what sanctions are appropriate for perpetrators or others involved. This will be in line with the school's Behaviour Policy, and take account of:

- any police proceedings underway
- any safeguarding concerns affecting victim, perpetrator or others
- all relevant circumstances within school and outside it
- the wishes of the victim

- the aim of ensuring students take responsibility for their behaviour and realise its seriousness
- the need to demonstrate to students (whether directly involved or not) that child-on-child abuse will not be tolerated
- the need to ensure the safety and wellbeing of other students.

The school may impose its full range of sanctions including, referral to the behaviour panel, managed move, suspension or exclusion. Where a student leaves the school, consideration will be given to sharing information with the receiving setting to ensure protection of students in the new school, as well as the students directly involved.

(g) Information Sharing, Data Protection and Record Keeping

When responding to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse, the school will:

- always consider carefully, in consultation with any other agencies involved, how to share information with the student(s) affected, parents, staff, and others
- record the information necessary for the school and other agencies to respond to the concerns or allegations and safeguard everyone involved
- keep a record of the legal purpose for sharing information with any third party and ensure that the third party has agreed to handle the information securely and to only use it for the agreed legal purpose
- act in accordance with its Safeguarding and Data Protection duties, including those set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023 updated February 2024) and the HM Government advice on Information Sharing (updated in May 2024)

(h) Points to Consider (Risk Assessment):

i. The Wishes and Feelings of the Victim

It is important to understand how the victim wants to proceed to allow as much control as is reasonably possible over the decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed.

ii. The Nature of the Alleged Incident

This includes consideration as to whether a crime may have been committed and/or whether Harmful Sexual Behaviour has been displayed.

iii. What is the Age and Development of the Children Involved?

How old are the young people involved in the incident and is there any age difference between those involved? (In relation to sexual exploration, children under the age of 5, in particular 1–4-year-olds who are learning toileting skills may show a particular interest in exploration at around this stage. This, however, should not be overlooked if other issues arise (see following)). Any imbalance of power and control must be considered.

iv. Are There Any Additional Vulnerabilities?

Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are three times more likely to be abused than their peers. Therefore care must be taken to ascertain any changes in mood or behaviour without attributing that to the child's condition. Every effort must be made to overcome barriers to communication and ensure the voice of the child is heard.

v. Where Did the Incident or Incidents Take Place?

Was the incident in an open, visible place to others? If so, was it observed? If not, is more supervision required within this particular area?

vi. What Was the Explanation by all Children Involved of What Occurred?

Can each of the young people give the same explanation of the incident and also what is the effect on the young people involved? Is the incident seen to be bullying for example, in which case regular and repetitive? Is the version of one young person different from another and why?

vii. What is Each of the Children's Own Understanding of What Occurred?

Do the children know/understand what they are doing? E.g., do they have knowledge of body parts, of privacy and that it is inappropriate to touch? Is the child's explanation in relation to something they may have heard or been learning about that has prompted the behaviour? Is the behaviour deliberate and contrived? Does the child have understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other child?

In dealing with an incident of this nature the answers are not always clear cut. If school are concerned or unsure as to whether or not there is any risk involved, advice will be sought immediately from Local Authority Children's Social Care.

viii. Repetition

Has the behaviour been repeated to an individual on more than one occasion? In the same way it must be considered has the behaviour persisted to an individual after the issue has already been discussed or dealt with and appropriately resolved?

ix. Ongoing Risks Are there any ongoing risks to the victim, other children, adult students or school, college or other setting staff?

x. Contextual Safeguarding/Extra Familial Harm

Is there any other related or wider context involving the child, including any links to child sexual exploitation or child criminal exploitation?

xi. Risk Assessment from KCSIE (all risk assessments should consider:)

- The victim, especially their protection and support
- Whether there may have been other victims
- The alleged perpetrator
- All the other children at the school or college, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them from the alleged perpetrators or from future harm and
- The time and location of the incident, and any action required to make the location safer.

xii. Outcomes

The outcome of the investigation will follow local threshold guidance. Therefore, either a referral has been made to either the police/Local Authority Children's Social Care for a full investigation (Tier 4). It may have resulted in Local Authority Children's Social Care undertaking a further assessment (Tier 3) or as a school we may have identified additional services/intervention that are non-statutory and in which case completed an early help assessment (Tier 2). It may be that on investigation, a decision has been made to handle the incident (s) internally, in which case the school may implement a risk assessment/ safety plan (Tier 1).

In any of the above outcomes, school has a duty of care to manage the education needs of both children in which case a risk assessment/ safety plan may be needed irrespective of the outcome.

xiii. Next Steps

Once the outcome of the incident(s) has been established it is necessary to ensure future incidents of abuse do not occur again and consider the support and intervention required for those involved.

(i) For the Young Person Who Has Been Harmed (Victim)

Victims may not display the whole picture immediately. It is essential that dialogue is kept open and encouraged. Children who have experienced sexual violence display a wide range of responses to their experience, including, in some cases, clear signs of trauma, physical and emotional responses, or no overt signs at all. Therefore, school will remain alert to the possible challenges of detecting those signs and show sensitivity to the needs of the child irrespective of how overt the child's distress is.

What support they require depends on the individual child. It may be that they wish to seek counselling or one to one support via a key worker. It may also be that they feel able to deal with the incident(s) on their own or with support of family and friends. In which case it is necessary that this child continues to be monitored and offered support should they require it in the future. If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the child may need support in improving peer groups/relationships with other children or some restorative justice work with all those involved may be required.

Other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group for example a speaker on cyber bullying, relationship abuse etc. It may be that through the continued curriculum of Relationship / Relationship and Sex Education and Health Education, PHSE and SMSC that certain issues can be discussed and debated more frequently.

If the child feels particularly vulnerable it may be that a risk assessment/safety plan can be put in place for them whilst in school so that they have someone named that they can talk to, support strategies for managing future issues and identified services to offer additional support.

(j) For the Young Person Who Has Displayed Harmful Behaviour (Alleged Perpetrator)

In this circumstance it is important to find out why the child has behaved in such a way. It may be that the child is experiencing their own difficulties and may even have been harmed themselves in a similar way. In such cases support such as one to one mentoring or counselling may also be necessary. Particular support from identified services may be necessary through an early help referral and the child may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the child has been met, it is important that child receives a consequence for their behaviour. This may be in the form of restorative justice e.g., making amends with the child they have targeted if this has been some form of bullying. In the cases of harmful sexual behaviour, it may be a requirement for the child to engage in one-to-one work with a particular service or agency (if a crime has been committed this may be through the police or youth offending service). If there is any form of criminal investigation ongoing it may be that this child cannot be educated on site until the investigation has concluded. In which case, the child will need to be provided with appropriate support and education whilst off site.

Even following the conclusion of any investigation, the behaviour that the child has displayed may continue to pose a risk to others in which case an individual safety plan may be required. This should be completed via a multi-agency response to ensure that the needs of the child and the risks towards others are measured by all of those agencies involved including the child and their parents. This may mean additional supervision of the child or protective strategies if the child feels at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

(k) After Care

It is important that following the incident the young people involved continue to feel supported and receive help even if they have stated that they are managing the incident. Sometimes the feelings of remorse, regret or unhappiness may occur at a much later stage than the incident.

It is important to ensure that the young people do not engage in any further harmful behaviour either towards someone else or to themselves as a way of coping (e.g. self-harm). In which case, regular reviews with the young people following the incident(s) are imperative.

(l) Safety Planning

Safety planning is a positive way of supporting a child who may benefit from a planned approach; this may be either the alleged victim or the alleged perpetrator. Safety plans support the child by considering the behaviours that may be risky and plan ways to manage triggers and to seek support from adults and peers. They are inclusive of parents and staff and are a planned intervention to support young people in feeling secure in the school/setting, helping young people identify behaviours that may leave them feeling anxious or at risk and have strategies that they can apply to keep themselves feeling safe. The language of safety planning is more positive than risk assessment and can give security to the child that a joined-up approach is being followed by all in school.

(m) Review of Circumstances

Following any incident of harm, it is necessary for the school to consider if anything could have been done differently. School should record what lessons were learnt, and what if any identified changes within the school were made. This demonstrates how proactive the school is in continually reviewing its policies and systems in effectively keeping children safe.

This policy has been heavily supported by the key document: Farrer and Co: Peer on Peer Abuse Toolkit 2021. <https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/news-articles/downloads/peer-on-peer-abuse-toolkit-14.pdf>

This policy should be read in conjunction with: Blue Coat School Safeguarding Policy 2024 and the local safeguarding partnership arrangements.

This policy template has been developed and supported by the following: DFE: Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2024.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf

DFE: Preventing and Tackling Bullying: Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies. July 2017
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623895/Preventing_and_tackling_bullying_advice.pdf

Working Together to Safeguard Children, (2023)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

Sharing nudes and semi nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people, March 2024

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people>