

## **Safeguarding – A whole-school response to Everyone’s Invited**

At the time of writing nearly 15,000 allegations of harassment and abuse have been submitted to the Everyone’s Invited website. Whilst the allegations do not only apply to schools, over 100 schools have been identified, some on multiple occasions.

Where the allegations have been linked to schools, the allegations range from misogynistic behaviour /culture to verbal harassment, sexual assault, exploitation and rape. In some cases it is alleged that adults in a position of trust have been perpetrators of sexual abuse and harassment, and there are many instances where it is alleged that reports made to individuals in the school community have been suppressed, dismissed or simply ignored.

It is reported that the website has now stopped including school names in testimonies amid concerns they were taking a “disproportionate amount of blame” and fears that naming schools could also lead to victims being identified

As a response to the website and the infamy it has received through reports in the media the government directed Ofsted to undertake an “immediate review” of the safeguarding policies in state and independent schools; Ofsted reported on 10 June.

The 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. It is therefore recommended 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.

What is striking to the adult reader of the report is the sheer numbers which are involved: Ofsted reported that 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 also reported 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.

### **What action should schools now be taking to meet this newly highlighted challenge?**

Allegations of sexual abuse in schools is nothing new, indeed the last two editions of Keeping children safe in education has contained a whole section dedicated to dealing with peer-on-peer abuse. It is, however, how the allegations are dealt with on a whole school basis that has now be thrown into the limelight; schools can have the best gold plated policies but if they do not reflect

the day to day practice of the institution which they cover they really are “not worth the paper that they are written on”.

We advise that schools now carry out a “health check” of their policies, procedures and practices to ensure that they reflect the practice of the school and include: -

1. Safeguarding policies and procedures (safeguarding and child protection, on line safety and acceptable use, anti-bullying and behaviour and discipline, risk assessment of pupil welfare) and codes of conduct - in particular to ensure that the new NSPCC helpline is referenced and that your arrangements for the management of peer on peer abuse and for listening to pupils are clear.
2. Historic reports of CSA, sexual violence and sexual harassment to identify trends and to consider whether there may be areas of geographical concern on the school site and measures which could be put in place to address any such concerns, e.g. increased staff supervision, the introduction of CCTV cameras or enhanced security lighting.
3. The School’s RSE policy and curricular content; the requirement to teach RSE in secondary schools became mandatory in September 2020, but due to disruption caused by COVID-19 schools were given flexibility to delay the introduction of this curriculum requirement until the commencement of the summer term 2021. This is now a mandatory requirement, and it is anticipated that both the policy and curricular content will be under close scrutiny given recent developments. It may now be appropriate to plan further consultation with parents/ carers and pupils in the light of this and the national dialogue about age appropriate content. In particular, it will be important to ensure that there is adequate and appropriate content on healthy sexual relationships and mutual respect, sexual consent and its withdrawal, personal privacy, pornography and gender stereotypes.
4. Staff training - all staff should be trained to manage a report. It is a requirement of Part 1 of KCSIE that all staff receive annual safeguarding training but is it effective in ensuring that staff are confident about how to manage disclosures effectively? Does it take account of any updated local safeguarding partner advice?
5. Consideration of any arrangements put in place to hear your 'student body voice' – there are a number of strategies that can be employed to include the reporting of concerns, consultation groups and anonymous routes, both internal and external of the school.

6. The school's safeguarding culture. How is this established and measured? Is inappropriate behaviour challenged and action taken?
  
7. Review all related policies to ensure that they dovetail and work together across the School to include: behaviour, anti-bullying; acceptable use; children missing education; risk assessment for pupil welfare; equal opportunities and on-line safety.

Staff should also be aware of the potential for pupils to be at risk from gang involvement, radicalisation and county lines, all of which have the potential to include elements of child sexual abuse, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation.

We would also recommend that all schools now liaise with their local safeguarding partners as we are aware that some local authority safeguarding partnerships have produced specific directed advice for schools in direct response to the Everyone's Invited website.

In addition, Ofsted now recommends that all schools and colleges should create a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated, and where they identify issues and intervene early to better protect children and young people.

In order to do this, they should assume that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are happening in their setting, even when there are no specific reports, and put in place a whole-school approach to address them. This should include:

- a carefully sequenced RSHE curriculum, based on the Department for Education's (DfE's) statutory guidance, that specifically includes sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online. This should include time for open discussion of topics that children and young people reported they find particularly difficult, such as consent and the sending of 'nudes'
  
- high-quality training for teachers delivering RSHE
  
- routine record-keeping and analysis of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, to identify patterns and intervene early to prevent abuse

- a behavioural approach, including sanctions when appropriate, to reinforce a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated
- working closely with Local Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) in the area where the school or college is located so they are aware of the range of support available to children and young people who are victims or who perpetrate harmful sexual behaviour
- support for designated safeguarding leads (DSLs), such as protected time in timetables to engage with LSPs
- training to ensure that all staff (and governors, where relevant) are able to:
  - better understand the definitions of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online sexual abuse
  - identify early signs of peer-on-peer sexual abuse
  - consistently uphold standards in their responses to sexual harassment and online sexual abuse

Going forward what is clear is that safeguarding and the school's response to allegations will once again be a primary focus for all Ofsted inspection teams, together with consideration of how well the school fulfils the new duty to deliver the compulsory RSHE curriculum.

We are always available to review safeguarding policies and procedures, provide specific safeguarding training and have developed a safeguarding toolkit for governors and trustees. To find out more please contact our specialist team of lawyers on 0345 070 7437 or [schoolsupport@wslaw.co.uk](mailto:schoolsupport@wslaw.co.uk)