

Ofsted Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges Published 10 June 2021

Recommendations for school and college leaders

School and college leaders 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 tell us 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 LSPs (Local Safeguarding Partners) 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

RSHE - Working With Parents, Families & Community

Following the webinar in partnership with, and on behalf of *Schools Alliance for Excellence*, the following is a collation of strategies that might be useful to schools in creating a culture where sexual harassment is not tolerated and pupils feel comfortable raising concerns.

- Be clear on what behaviours are considered unacceptable. List what counts as unacceptable behaviour in your behaviour policy - make it clear to pupils that they should call out and report anything either on this list or anything else that makes them feel uncomfortable. Include the sanctions you will use and how you'll decide which sanction is appropriate.
- Make sure staff challenge inappropriate behaviours by, for example: making clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is not acceptable, will never be tolerated and is not an inevitable part of growing up; not tolerating or dismissing sexual violence or sexual harassment as 'banter', 'part of growing up', 'just having a laugh' or 'boys being boys' (see *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021*)
- Highlight the importance of calling out this behaviour, focusing on how it benefits everyone. Calling out behaviour as it happens will show pupils what is and isn't acceptable.
- If the incident is very 'low level' – for example, a pupil making a comment that staff believe they don't fully understand – it may be appropriate to explain why it wasn't OK and ask the pupil to apologise to the victim on the spot. Use it as an opportunity to encourage a class discussion about appropriate and inappropriate language.
- Ensure your staff behaviour policy emphasises appropriate adult behaviour and language to create a culture of respect. Challenge adults too.
- Audit your curriculum for gender and LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Small biases and gender stereotypes can feed into a wider culture of sexism and sexual harassment.
- Make sure your curriculum addresses issues that are associated with peer-on-peer abuse and teaches children about safeguarding, including how to stay safe online. However, check that your curriculum also tackles issues such as healthy and respectful relationships, what respectful behaviour looks like, consent, gender roles, stereotyping and equality, body confidence, self-esteem, prejudiced behaviour, sexual violence and sexual harassment.
- Clearly communicate your reporting procedures (see *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021*)
- Reassure pupils that **all** reports will be taken seriously, no matter how 'small', and will be dealt with in line with your procedures (see *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021*)
- Offer support to the alleged perpetrator(s) – remember sometimes when pupils demonstrate sexual behaviour, it's because they're communicating their own experience of abuse. Condemn the behaviour, not the pupil.
- Provide staff with regularly updated and appropriate safeguarding training.
- Work with local partners, who may have valuable information, resources or expertise, such as the police and youth offending teams. Specialist organisations may be able to support you by training staff, teaching children and/or providing them with support. See Annex A of the DfE's advice on sexual violence and sexual harassment