Child-on-Child Abuse (including harassment and violence)

Guidance and Model Policy

Please Note: This policy template remains current and in line with the statutory guidance contained within Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026. Useful definitions can be found on page 4.

What is Child-on-child Abuse?

Unfortunately, child-on-child abuse (including harassment and violence) can and does happen in a whole range of settings that children attend, however it often goes unseen. It might take place online, for example, or away from the school or setting. Therefore, training for professionals to help them recognise the signs, and know what to do, is essential. All children are capable of abusing their peers, and this is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- bullying (including cyber bullying);
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm;
- sexual violence, such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault;
- 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;
- 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;
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery; and
- Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.

All schools need to include child-on-child abuse in their schools' policies and procedures and all staff need to be aware of these and ensure they are part of their everyday practice. It should be clear that child-on-child abuse will never be accepted or dismissed as 'children being children'.

Settings should not wait until an incident of child-on-child abuse happens before taking action. We expect any provider educating or caring for children to create an environment in which children and staff show respect for one another. They should know what language and behaviour are acceptable and what to do and who to speak to if they are worried or feel unsafe.

All settings should take a whole-establishment approach to keeping children safe. They should set expectations that violence and harassment of any kind will not be tolerated, support children to have a good understanding of consent and healthy relationships and provide immediate support for victims of abuse.

All schools need to consider:

- Procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse
- What is in place to encourage/support/facilitate disclosures of child-on-child abuse
- How allegations are recorded, investigated and dealt with

- Clear processes as to how victims, the child alleged to have caused harm and any other children affected will be supported
- Recognition of the gendered nature of child-on-child abuse but recognising that all forms of this behaviour are unacceptable and will be taken seriously
- The progressive continuum from harmful sexual behaviour through to sexual violence, and how this is understood within your setting

It is important that schools see this guidance and model template as a framework that will need to be adapted to fit the age, developmental stage and understanding of their pupil group.

Prevention

As well as having strategies for dealing with incidents, schools and colleges should consider what they can do to foster healthy and respectful relationships between boys and girls including through Relationship and Sex Education and Personal Social Health and Economic education. The most effective preventative education programme will be through a whole-school approach that prepares pupils for life in modern Britain. The school will have a clear set of values and standards, and these will be upheld and demonstrated throughout all aspects of school life. This will be underpinned by the school's behaviour policy and pastoral support system, and by a planned programme of evidence-based content delivered through the whole curriculum. Such a programme should be developed to be age and stage of development appropriate (especially when considering SEND children and their cognitive understanding), and may tackle such issues as:

- Healthy and respectful relationships.
- What respectful behaviour looks like?
- Consent.
- Gender roles, stereotyping, and equality.
- Body confidence and self-esteem.
- Prejudiced behaviour.
- That sexual violence and sexual harassment is always wrong; and
- Addressing cultures of sexual harassment.

Schools often deliver this currently, through planned, high-quality, Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education.

Additional considerations for schools

When considering harmful sexual behaviour, ages and the stages of development of the children are critical factors to consider. 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.

A younger child can, however, abuse an older child, particularly if they have power over them, for example if the older child is disabled or smaller in stature. Schools and colleges should ensure that their response to sexual violence and sexual harassment between children of the same sex is equally robust as it is for sexual violence and sexual harassment between children of the opposite sex.

A further consideration that must be made is that SRE should be considered on a 1:1 basis for children whom schools are aware have been sexually abused. This work should be delivered on a 1:1 basis prior to the whole

class SRE sessions so that anything the child wishes to explore, given their own experiences, can be done safely and without fear of judgment.

A Whole School Policy

While schools cover many aspects of child-on-child abuse in other policies such as the whole school behaviour policy, the anti-bullying policy and the online safety policy (cyberbullying and sexting) schools need to be robust and clear about their strategies around wider behaviours including sexist and sexual bullying, sexual harassment, sexual violence and how such behaviour will be managed and addressed. It is recommended that schools introduce a separate child-on-child abuse policy to fully encapsulate the management of such issues.

It's important that all schools and colleges familiarise themselves with the statutory guidance. Individual professionals should know, understand and, most importantly, use their school/college policy on child-on-child abuse to make sure that children are protected.

Multi-agency Approach

Schools should actively engage with its local partners in relation to child-on-child abuse and work closely with Central Bedfordshire Council children's social care, other schools, and/or other relevant agencies.

The relationships the school builds with these partners are essential to ensuring that the School is able to prevent, identify early and appropriately handle cases of child-on-child abuse. They help the School:

(a) To develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in its local area, as well as the preventative and support services which exist.

(b) To ensure that our pupils/students can access the range of services and support they need quickly.

(c) To support and help inform our local community's response to child-on-child abuse.

(d) To increase our awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in our local area to enable us to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by our pupils/students.

School should actively refer concerns/allegations of child-on-child abuse where necessary to Central Bedfordshire Council children's social care, and/or other relevant agencies. Children residing out of county but attending a Central Bedfordshire school/academy must be referred to their home authority Social Care team. In cases involving children who are subject to risk, harm and abuse and who have LAC status, the children's social worker must be informed and a coordinated approach to address any incidents or concerns will be required.

Child-on-child abuse that involves sexual assault and violence must always result in a multi-agency response. As well as supporting and protecting the victim, professionals need to consider whether the child alleged to have caused harm could be a victim of abuse too. We know that children who develop harmful sexual behaviours have often experienced abuse and neglect themselves.

We need to make sure that the children affected are getting the help they need. A typical response will involve:

- children's social care
- the police
- any specialist services that support children who demonstrate harmful sexual behaviour
- the family
- any other professionals who know or have had contact with the child

If the children involved are in the same class, the school will need to consider carefully whether to separate them while the concerns are being investigated. In situations of alleged rape and assault by penetration, the statutory guidance is clear that the child alleged to have caused harm should always be removed from classes they share with the victim.

Schools and colleges need to consider how best to keep the victim and child alleged to have caused harm a reasonable distance apart while they are on the same premises, as well as on transport to and from school or college, where appropriate.

The school will need to consider how long these measures should be in place, especially if any police investigation is inconclusive. Lack of a conviction is not the same as the allegation being unfounded. The school or college must continue to provide support to the victim and the child alleged to have caused harm for as long as necessary. Therefore, any separation arrangements must also be continued with for as long as is necessary to make sure the children are safe.

The importance of context

Professionals also need to consider risks to other children; If there's an incident in a school, has this put other children at risk? Have other children witnessed the incident? Could any siblings of the child alleged to have caused harm be at risk? There may well be a need for a range of assessments and interventions for different children. A multi-agency approach is needed. No school or college can deal with this issue alone.

In addition, schools need to consider the potential vulnerabilities of the victims and any risks to them, including their potential abuse by others. Extra consideration should be given for pupils who may have additional vulnerabilities due to protected characteristics. Schools and colleges should consider how they are supporting their pupils with regard to their sex, sexuality, and if relevant, gender reassignment.

Schools and colleges should assess any potentially unsafe spaces on the premises, based on where incidents have occurred, and consider what can be done to make that environment safer.

It's equally important that schools and colleges think about children's safety outside of the school gates and any extra-familial risks. Things to consider include –

- Are they aware of any unsafe spaces in their local area?
- Do the children attend the same clubs or activities outside of school?
- Are schools and colleges aware of incidents of sexual harassment or violence involving children in the local park or other places where young people congregate?

Contextual information like this needs to be assessed and shared in a multiagency forum so risks can be fully assessed outside of the school.

Useful definitions

Sexual Harassment

This can be defined as 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline. In the context of this guidance this means 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.

It 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.

Sexting

Sexting is when someone shares sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of themselves or others or sends sexually explicit messages. They can be sent using mobiles, tablets, smartphones, laptops - any device that allows you to share media and messages. This is also known as youth produced sexual imagery

The UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) Education Group has published Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people.

Upskirting

This 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 and may constitute sexual harassment. Cases of 'up skirting' have a mandatory requirement for being reported.

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.

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.

It is important to know that: -

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

It is also important to differentiate between consensual sexual activity between children of a similar age and that which involves any power imbalance, coercion or exploitation. Due to their additional training, the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) should be involved and leading the school or college response. If in any doubt, they should seek expert advice.

It is important that schools and colleges consider sexual harassment in broad terms. Sexual harassment (as set out above) creates an atmosphere that, if not challenged, can normalise inappropriate behaviours and provide an environment that may lead to sexual violence.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)

The umbrella term 'harmful sexual behaviour' (HSB) is widely used in child protection and applies to behaviour occurring online, face-to-face, or both. HSB should always be considered within a child protection context.

Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum, ranging from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive or violent. Behaviour that is problematic, abusive or violent is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage.

Initiation/hazing

Hazing or initiation ceremonies refers to the practice of rituals, challenges, and other activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group. Hazing is seen in many different types of social groups, including gangs, sports teams and school groups. The initiation rituals can range from relatively low-level pranks, to protracted patterns of behaviour that rise to the level of abuse or criminal misconduct. Hazing may include physical or psychological abuse. It may also include nudity or sexual assault.

Contextual Safeguarding

All staff, but especially the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) should be considering the context within which incidents and/or behaviours occur. This is known as contextual safeguarding, which simply means assessments of children should consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child's life that are a threat to their safety and/or welfare.

Legislation, guidance and Law

- Keeping children safe in education - Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

- Human Rights Act 1998
- Equalities Act 2010

MODEL CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE POLICY FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION SERVICES

September 2026

Introduction

Thornhill Primary School recognises that children are vulnerable to, and capable of, abusing their peers. We take such abuse as seriously as abuse perpetrated by an adult. This includes verbal abuse as well as physical and sexual abuse. Child-on-child abuse will not be tolerated or passed off as part of "banter" or part of "growing up".

We are committed to a whole school approach to ensure the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse within our school and beyond.

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), 2026 states that -

"All staff should be aware that children can abuse other children (often referred to as child-on-child abuse), and that it can happen both inside and outside of school or college and online. All staff should be clear as to the school or college's policy and procedures with regard to child-on-child abuse and the important role they have to play in preventing it and responding where they believe a child may be at risk from it."

In cases where child-on-child abuse or bullying is identified we will follow our child protection procedures, taking a contextual approach to support all children and young people who have been affected by the situation.

We recognise that child-on-child abuse can manifest itself in many ways such as:

- 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),
- serious physical assault and harm, or the threat of harm with a weapon
- 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
- 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 making or sharing of nudes and semi nudes
- upskirting 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, and

- 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).

Some of these behaviours will need to be handled with reference to other policies in school such as the behaviour policy, anti- bullying policy, child protection policy and online safety policy.

This policy concentrates on child-on-child abuse in the context of sexual harassment and sexual violence. It is compliant with the statutory guidance on child-on-child abuse as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2026) and should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it.

Policy Development

The policy has been developed in consultation with the following groups, Senior Leaders and staff.

Aims

The policy will: -

- Set out our strategies for preventing, identifying and managing child-on-child abuse
- Take a contextual approach to safeguarding all children and young people involved. Acknowledging that children who have allegedly abused their peers or displayed harmful sexual behaviour are themselves vulnerable and may have been abused by peer, parents or adults in the community.

Understanding Child-on-child abuse

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex or a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children.

This abuse is a safeguarding issue for both victim and alleged perpetrator, it is preventable and it may involve serious physical harm or threats involving weapons.

The impact of this behaviour on children can be very distressing and have an impact on academic achievement and emotional health and wellbeing.

Sexual harassment and sexual violence may also occur online and offline.

The Context

All behaviour takes place on a spectrum. Understanding where a child's behaviour falls on a spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it.

In this policy we recognise the importance of distinguishing between problematic and abusive sexual behaviour (Harmful Sexual Behaviour HSB).

We are adopting the NSPCC definition of HSB as: -

"Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people which is harmful or abusive."

We will also use Simon Hackett's continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours (Appendix 1).

Vulnerable groups

Any child can experience child-on-child abuse, but the following are associated with increased vulnerability to experiencing this form of harm:

- are aged 10 and upwards.
- are a girl or a young woman.
- have intra-familial abuse in family history and or living with domestic abuse.
- are a Child in Care.
- are experiencing or having experienced bereavement following the loss of a parent, sibling or friend.
- are attending boarding school or other residential institutions.
- are children who go missing.
- are children with additional needs (SEN and/or disabilities).
- are children who identify or are perceived as LGBTQ+ and/or have other protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010.

Whilst research tells us girls are more frequently identified as being abused by their peers, women and girls are more likely to experience unwanted sexual touching in schools, this is not confined to girls.

Boys are less likely to report intimate relationship abuse and may display other behaviour such as antisocial behaviour. Boys report high levels of victimisation in areas where they are affected by gangs. We recognise that both boys and girls experience child-on-child abuse, but they do so in gendered ways.

All staff should be aware of indicators, which may signal that children are at risk from, or are involved with serious violent crime. These may include:

- increased absence from school, or lack of interest in activities in school
- rumours or 'coded' talk among students that suggests concerning interactions or coercion is occurring
- a change in behaviour, or unexpected behaviour for their age and stage of development
- a change in friendships or relationships with older individuals or groups
- a significant decline in performance
- signs of self-harm or a significant change in wellbeing
- signs of assault or unexplained injuries
- alcohol or substance misuse
- unexplained gifts or new possessions could also indicate that children have been approached by, or are involved with, individuals associated with criminal networks or gangs
- enacting harmful behaviour towards others

Responding to Alleged Incidents

Responding to reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment

All reports of child-on-child abuse will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, with the designated safeguarding lead or their deputy taking a leading role using their professional judgement. Support will be sought from other agencies such as social care, or the police as required.

A thorough investigation of the concerns will take place to include any wider contexts (including siblings) which may be known. The child or young person who has been harmed will always be made to feel safe and actions will be taken to ensure that the abuse is not allowed to continue.

An assessment of an incident between peers should be completed and consider:

- Chronological and developmental ages of everyone involved
- Difference in their power or authority in relation to age, race, gender, physical, emotional or intellectual vulnerability
- All alleged physical and verbal aspects of the behaviour and incident
- Whether the behaviour involved inappropriate sexual knowledge or motivation
- What was the degree of physical aggression, intimidation, threatening behaviour or bribery?
- The effect on the victim
- Any attempts to ensure the behaviour and incident is kept a secret
- The child or young person's motivation or reason for the behaviour, if they admit that it occurred
- Whether this was a one-off incident, or longer in duration

It is important to deal with a situation of peer abuse immediately and sensitively. It is necessary to gather the information as soon as possible to get the true facts. It is equally important to deal with it sensitively and think about the language used and the impact of that language on both the children and the parents when they become involved. Avoid language that may create a 'blame' culture and leave a child labelled.

Staff will talk to the children in a calm and consistent manner. Staff will not be prejudiced, judgmental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.

The immediate response to a report

- The school or college will take all reports seriously and will reassure the victim that they will be supported and kept safe.
- All staff will be trained to manage a report.
- Staff will not promise confidentiality as the concern will need to be shared further (for example, with the designated safeguarding lead or social care) staff will however only share the report with those people who are necessary to progress it.
- It is important to explain that the law is in place to protect children and young people rather than criminalise them, and this should be explained in such a way that avoids alarming or distressing them.
- A written report will be made as soon after the discussion as possible, only recording the facts as presented by the child. These may be used as part of a statutory assessment if the case is escalated later.
- Assess the needs of the victim and child alleged to have caused harm.
- Where the report includes an online element the school or college will follow advice on searching, screening and confiscation. The staff will not view or forward images unless unavoidable and only if another member of staff (preferably the Designated Safeguarding Lead) is present.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed as soon as possible and consider a referral to the police and social care.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead must complete a risk assessment where sexual violence has occurred. This must be shared with Children's Social Care.

When recording sexualised behaviour, it is essential that:

- Record as soon as possible, as you can quickly forget or confuse detail
- Be clear, explicit and non-avoidant, and avoid vague statements or euphemisms
- Follow the prompts on your safeguarding and child protection recording form/system
- Use proper names for body parts but record exactly any language or vocabulary used by the child.
- Use the child's exact words in quotation marks.
- Note where and when the incident happened and whether anyone else was around.

Gather the Facts

Speak to all the young people involved separately and gain a statement of facts from them. Use consistent language and open questions for each account. Ask the young people to tell you what happened. Use open questions, 'where, when, why, who'. (What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?). Do not interrogate or ask leading questions.

Consider the Intent

Has this been a deliberate or contrived situation for a young person to be able to harm another?

Decide on your next course of action

If you believe any young person to be at risk of significant harm you must report to the Designated Safeguarding Lead immediately; they will follow the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

If Social Care and the police intend to pursue this further, they may ask to interview the young people in school or they may ask for parents to come to school to be spoken to. It is important to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take.

Informing parents/carers

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

Is the pupil 13+ and does not want to share with parents? Use the 'Gillick' test and the 'Fraser' guidelines:

Gillick competence and Fraser guidelines | NSPCC Learning

In all circumstances where the risk of harm to the child is evident, the school should encourage the young person to share the information with their parent/carer (they may be scared to tell parents/carers that they are being harmed in any way).

Anonymity

As a matter of effective safeguarding practice, Thornhill Primary School will do all we reasonably can to protect the anonymity of any children involved in any report of sexual violence or sexual harassment. Amongst other things, this will mean carefully considering, based on the nature of the report, which staff should know about the report and any support that will be put in place for the child/ren involved.

Following an incident, Thornhill Primary School will also consider the potential impact of social media in facilitating the spreading of rumours and exposing victims' identities. We will follow the principles described in Childnet's cyberbullying guidance when considering this.

Points to consider

- What is the age 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.
- The wishes of the victim and how they want to proceed.
- Any imbalance of power between the children.
- 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?
- 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 (regular and repetitive)? Is the version of one young person different from another, and if so, why?
- What is each of the children's own understanding of what occurred? Do the young people 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 young person's explanation in relation to something they may have heard or been learning about? Has that has prompted the behaviour?
- Is the behaviour deliberate and contrived?
- Does the young person have understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other person?
- importance of understanding intra familial harms and any necessary support for siblings following incidents.

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?

Risk Assessment

When there has been a report of sexual violence, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) will make an immediate risk and needs' assessment. This will be shared with Children's Social Care. The risk and needs' assessment should consider:

- The victim, especially their protection and support.
- The child alleged to have caused harm; and
- All the other children (and, if appropriate, adult students and staff) at the school or college, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them.
- The time and location of the incident, and any action required to make the location safer.

Risk assessments will be recorded electronically on Cpoms and any handwritten notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room with the Senior DSL and be kept under review.

Follow up Actions

Children sharing a classroom:

Whilst Thornhill Primary School establishes the facts of the case and starts the process of liaising with children's social care and the police:

- The child alleged to have caused harm will be removed from any classes they share with the victim.
- We will consider how best to keep the victim and child alleged to have caused harm a reasonable distance apart on school or college premises and on transport to and from the school or college.

These actions are in the best interests of both children and should not be perceived to be a judgment on the guilt of the child alleged to have caused harm.

Options to manage the report

Manage internally

1. In some cases of sexual harassment, for example, one-off incidents, it may be appropriate to handle the incident internally, perhaps through utilising the behaviour and bullying policies and by providing pastoral support by our safeguarding and Pastoral team. This decision is considered on the outcome of contact with Children's Social Care and submission of a completed risk assessment.

   This decision will be made based on the principle that sexual violence and sexual harassment is never acceptable and will not be tolerated. All decisions, and discussions around making these decisions, will be recorded and stored electronically on Cpoms and Hand written notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room with the Senior DSL.

   Details of sanctions for the child alleged to have caused harm will not be shared with any other persons, other than those providing care for them. This is to maintain confidentiality and privacy for the child involved.

2. In line with point 1 above, we may decide that the children involved do not require statutory interventions but may benefit from early help. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life. Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help can be particularly useful to address non- violent harmful sexual behaviour and may prevent escalation of sexual violence. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will consult the local Pan Bedfordshire Effective support meeting the needs of children guidance document when deciding if Early Help is appropriate.

3. Where a child has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger, we will make a referral to Children's Social Care following locally agreed protocols.

Where statutory assessments are appropriate, the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a deputy will be working alongside, and cooperating with, the relevant lead social worker. Collaborative working will help ensure the best possible package of coordinated support is implemented for the victim and, where appropriate, the child alleged to have caused harm and any other children that require support.

Reporting to the Police

Designated Safeguarding Leads have a responsibility to report all alleged crimes to the police.

when-to-call-the-police-guidance-for-schools-and-colleges

Thornhill Primary School will follow local processes for making safeguarding referrals.

Where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made, this will be passed on to the police immediately. Whilst the age of criminal responsibility is ten, if the child alleged to have caused harm is under ten, the starting principle of reporting to the police remains. The police will take a welfare approach, rather than a criminal justice approach.

Children and Young People's Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ChISVAs) provide emotional and practical support for victims of sexual violence. They are based within the specialist sexual violence sector and will help the victim understand what their options are and how the criminal justice process works if they have reported or are considering reporting to the police. ChISVAs will work in partnership with schools and colleges to ensure the best possible outcomes for the victim

When a report has been made to the police, the school or college will consult the police and agree what information can be disclosed to staff and others, the child alleged to have caused harm and their parents or carers. They will also discuss the best way to protect the victim and their anonymity.

Where there is a criminal investigation, we will work closely with the relevant agencies to support all children involved (including potential witnesses). Where required, advice from the police will be sought in order to help us, such as management of bail conditions.

Whilst protecting children and/or taking any disciplinary measures against the child alleged to have caused harm, we will work closely with the police (and other agencies as required), to ensure any actions the school or college take do not jeopardise the police investigation.

The end of the criminal process

If a child is convicted or receives a caution for a sexual offence, Thornhill Primary School will update our risk assessment, ensuring relevant protections are in place for all children. We will consider any suitable action following our behaviour policy. If the child alleged to have caused harm remains at Thornhill Primary School we will be very clear as to our expectations regarding the child alleged to have caused harm now they have been convicted or cautioned. This could include expectations regarding their behaviour and any restrictions we think are reasonable and proportionate about the child alleged to have caused harm's timetable.

Any conviction (even with legal anonymity reporting restrictions) is potentially going to generate interest among other pupils or students in the school or college. We will ensure all children involved are protected, especially from any bullying or harassment (including online).

Where cases are classified as "no further action" (NFA'd) by the police or Crown Prosecution Service, or where there is a not guilty verdict, we will continue to offer support to the victim and the child alleged to have caused harm for as long as is necessary. A not guilty verdict or a decision not to progress with their case will likely be traumatic for the victim. The fact that an allegation cannot be substantiated does not necessarily mean that it was unfounded. We will continue to support all parties in this instance.

It is also important to note that by law, every child has the right to an education.

Support for Children Affected by Sexual Assault

What support children require depends on the individual. It may be that children wish to seek counselling or one to one support via a mentor. 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 young person continues to be monitored and offered support should they require it in the future. If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the young person may need support in improving peer groups/relationships with other young people, 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 online bullying, relationship abuse etc. It may be that through the continued curriculum of Relationship and Sex Education that certain issues can be discussed and debated more frequently.

If the young person feels particularly vulnerable, it may be that a risk assessment 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.

Thornhill Primary School understand that sexual assault can result in a range of health needs, including physical, mental, and sexual health problems and unwanted pregnancy. Any child or young person that has a health need arising from sexual assault or abuse can access specialist NHS support from a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). SARCs offer confidential and non-judgemental support to victims and survivors of sexual assault and abuse. They provide medical, practical, and emotional care and advice to all children and adults, regardless of when the incident occurred.

We will support the victim of sexual assault to remain in school but if they are unable to do so we will enable them to continue their education elsewhere. This decision will be made only at the request of the child and their family. If the child moves to another school, Thornhill Primary School will ensure the new school is aware of the ongoing support they may need. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will support this move.

Where a criminal investigation into a rape or assault by penetration leads to a conviction or caution, we may take suitable action, if we have not already done so. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances, the rape or assault is likely to constitute a serious breach of discipline and lead to the view that allowing the child alleged to have caused harm to remain in the same school or college would seriously harm the education or welfare of the victim (and potentially other pupils or students).

Where a criminal investigation into sexual assault leads to a conviction or caution, we may, if we have not already done so, consider any suitable sanctions using our behaviour policy, including consideration of permanent exclusion.

Where the child alleged to have caused harm is going to remain at Thornhill Primary School, we will aim to continue keeping the victim and child alleged to have caused harm in separate classes and continue to

consider the most appropriate way to manage potential contact on school premises and transport. The nature of the conviction or caution and wishes of the victim will be especially important in determining how to proceed.

All the above will be considered with the needs and wishes of the victim at the heart of the process (supported by parents and carers as required). Any arrangements will be kept under review.

For the young person who has displayed harmful behaviour

It is important to find out why the young person has behaved in such a way. It may be that the young person 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.

Specific support from identified services may be necessary through an early help referral and the young person may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the young person has been met, it is important that the young person receives a consequence for their behaviour, in line with the behaviour policy. This may be in the form of restorative justice e.g. making amends with the young person they have targeted if this has been some form of bullying. In the cases of sexually harmful behaviour, it may be a requirement for the young person 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 young person cannot be educated on site until the investigation has concluded. In which case, the young person will need to be provided with appropriate support and education elsewhere.

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

Thornhill Primary School may also deem a sanction is appropriate as a consequence, such as exclusion or internal exclusion/inclusion/seclusion for a period of time to allow the young person to reflect on their behaviour. We are aware that school can be a significant protective factor for children who have displayed harmful behaviour, and continued access to school, with a comprehensive safeguarding management plan in place, is an important factor to consider before final decisions are made.

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). For this reason, regular reviews with the young people following the incident(s) are imperative.

Child-on-child abuse policy

Thornhill Primary School will consider the support that children (and adult students) who have witnessed sexual violence, especially rape and assault by penetration, may require. Witnessing such an event is likely to be traumatic and support may be required. Following any report of sexual violence or sexual harassment, it is likely that some children will take "sides". We will do all we can to ensure all involved, including any witnesses, are not bullied or harassed.

Online Behaviour

Many forms of child-on-child abuse have an element of online behaviour including behaviours such as cyberbullying and the making or sharing of nudes or semi-nude images.

Policies and procedures concerning this type of behaviour can be found Thornhill Primary School Policies & Documents Thornhill Primary School - Policies and Documents

Prevention

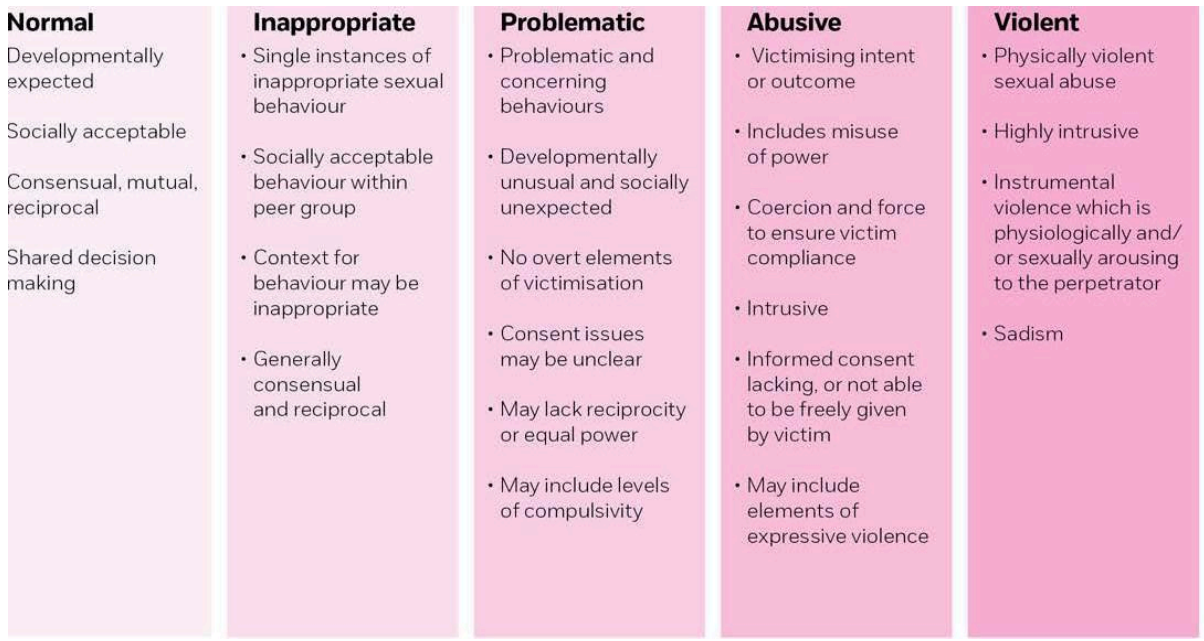
Thornhill Primary School actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by educating all Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff and volunteers, pupils and parents about this issue. This will include training all Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff and volunteers on the nature, prevalence and effect of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify and respond to it. This includes:

- Contextual Safeguarding.
- The identification and classification of specific behaviours.
- The importance of taking seriously all forms of child-on-child abuse (no matter how low level they may appear) and ensuring that no form of child-on-child abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing.
- Educating children about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse via PSHE and the wider curriculum.
- Pupils/Students are frequently told what to do if they witness or experience such abuse, 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.
- They are regularly informed about the School's approach to such issues, including its zero- tolerance policy towards all forms of child-on-child abuse.
- Engaging parents on this issue by:
  (a) talking about it with parents, both in groups and one to one;
  (b) asking parents what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the School address those risks; and
  Ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are fed back to the School's safeguarding team so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify pupils/students who maybe in need of additional support. This is done by way of a weekly staff meeting at which all concerns about pupils (including child-on-child abuse issues) are discussed.
- Challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside the classroom).
- Working with Governors and Senior Leadership Team, all staff and volunteers, pupils and parents to address equality issues, to promote positive values, and to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the School community.
- Creating conditions in which our pupils/students can aspire to and realise safe and healthy relationships.
- Creating a culture in which our pupils/students feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to.

- Responding to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately.

Appendix 1: Assessment tools

Simon Hackett (2010) has proposed a continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours presented by children and young people:



Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
Developmentally expected	• Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour	• Problematic and concerning behaviours	• Victimising intent or outcome	• Physically violent sexual abuse
Socially acceptable	• Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group	• Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected	• Includes misuse of power	• Highly intrusive
Consensual, mutual, reciprocal	• Context for behaviour may be inappropriate	• No overt elements of victimisation	• Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance	• Instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator
Shared decision making	• Generally consensual and reciprocal	• Consent issues may be unclear	• Intrusive	• Sadism
		• May lack reciprocity or equal power	• Informed consent lacking, or not able to be freely given by victim	
		• May include levels of compulsivity	• May include elements of expressive violence	

NSPCC tools:

https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1657/harmful-sexual-behaviour-framework.pdf

https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1149/harmful-sexual-behaviour-framework-audit-tool.pdf

Appendix 2: Support for Young People

If you think that a child has been harmed or is being neglected, contact the Integrated Front Door on 0300 300 8585, or out of hours 0300 300 8123.

The Police are also there to offer support and guidance to both alleged victims and children alleged to have caused harm, they can be contacted on 101.

Further support can be accessed via:

- Internet Watch Foundation IWF (to potentially remove illegal images)
- The UK Safer Internet Centre helpline - 0344 381 4772 or email helpline@saferinternet.org.uk

National charities:

Victim Support
A national charity dedicated to helping anyone affected by crime – not just victims and witnesses, but friends, family and anyone else caught up in the aftermath.

Rape Crisis
A national charity offering confidential help, advice and a range of Rape Crisis Centres around the UK.

Galop
A national charity providing advice and support to members of the LGBT community.

Survivors UK
A national charity supporting men who have been raped or sexually assaulted.

Crimestoppers
A national charity with a free helpline for reporting crime anonymously.

Refuge
Refuge supports women, children and men with a range of services, including refuges, independent advocacy, community outreach and culturally specific services.

Women's Aid

Women's Aid is a national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children.

Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327
Confidential helpline for men experiencing domestic violence from a partner or ex-partner (or from other family members).

Appendix 3: Useful Publications and Websites

Government Publications

- Keeping Children safe in Education
- Preventing youth violence and gang involvement
- Preventing and tackling bullying in schools
- DfE: Statutory guidance: Working together to safeguard children
- DfE: Searching, screening and confiscation at school July 2023
- DfE: Statutory guidance Suspension and Permanent exclusion, August 2024
- DfE: Teaching Online Safety in Schools, Jan 2023
- DfE: Relationship Education and Relationship and Sex Education, Sept 21
- DfE: Behaviour in schools, February 2024
- Mental health and behaviour in schools - GOV.UK
- DfE: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings, March 2024
- DFE: Respectful School Communities: Self-Review and Signposting Tool
- UKCIS: Tackling race and faith targeted bullying face to face and online, May 2017
- UKCIS: Education for a connected world, June 2020
- Gov.uk: Equality Act 2010: advice for schools, June 2018

Other useful documents

- LGFL 'Undressed' -how to teach young children about being tricked into getting undressed online in a fun way without scaring them or explaining the motives of sex offenders
- The Safeguarding Network – Child-on-child abuse
- Preventing abuse among children and young people-guidance from Stop it Now
- What is Age appropriate?
- Brook Traffic lights
- NSPCC-Harmful sexual behaviour
- NSPCC – Is this sexual abuse?
- Childnet - Project deSHAME- Digital Exploitation and Sexual Harassment Amongst Minors in Europe Understanding, Preventing, Responding
- Public Sector Equality Duty: guidance for schools | EHRC (equalityhumanrights.com)
- Key messages from research on children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour - CSA Centre
- NSPCC When to call the Police
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- Pan Bedfordshire Children who Harm other Children Guidance
- Preventing sexual and sexist bullying (anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)
- The Lucy Faithfull Foundation has developed a HSB Toolkit