POLICY NAME	**CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE**
POLICY REF:	**QEHSP26**
EFFECTIVE DATE:	**SEPTEMBER 2025**

Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 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's 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. All staff should understand that even if there are no reports in their schools or colleges 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 if staff have any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse they should speak to their designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy).

At Queen Elizabeth's High School we continue to ensure that any form of abuse or harmful behaviour is dealt with immediately and consistently to reduce the extent of harm to the young person, with full consideration given to the impact on that individual child's emotional and mental health and well-being.

Purpose and Aim

Children and young people may be harmful to one another in a number of ways which would be classified as child-on-child abuse. The purpose of this policy is to explore the many forms of child-on-child abuse and include a planned and supportive response to the issues. At Queen Elizabeth's High School we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Safeguarding Policy

Framework and Legislation

This policy is supported by the key principles of the Children Act, 1989 that the child's welfare is paramount. Another key document that focuses adult thinking towards the views of the child is Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2023 highlighting that every assessment of a child, '*must be informed by the views of the child.* This is clearly echoed by Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 through ensuring procedures are in place in schools to hear the voice of the child.

Introduction to abuse and harmful behaviour

Abusive behaviour can happen to students in schools and their associated activities and it is necessary to consider what abuse is and looks like, how it can be managed and what appropriate support and intervention can be put in place to meet the needs of the individual and what preventative strategies may be put in place to reduce further risk of harm.

Abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed off as 'banter' or 'part of growing up'. Equally, abuse issues can sometimes be gender specific e.g. girls being sexually touched/assaulted and boys being subject to initiation/hazing type violence (KCSIE 2025). It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

Types of abuse

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between students 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.

- **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 accidently, before considering the action or punishment to be undertaken.

- **Sexually harmful behaviour/sexual abuse e.g. (inappropriate sexual language, touching, sexual assault etc.)**
  Sexually harmful 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 sexually harmful 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. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another or sexual assault/abuse.

- **Bullying (physical, name calling, homophobic etc.)**
  Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both young people who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. In order to be considered bullying, please refer to the anti-bullying policy.

- **Cyberbullying**
  Cyberbullying 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.

  It is important to state that cyberbullying 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 indecent images of young people under the age of 18 then this is also a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Outside of the immediate support young people may require in these instances, the school may involve the police to investigate these situations.

- **Sexting**
  Sexting 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 happen in any relationship and 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.

- **Initiation/Hazing**
  Hazing is a form of initiation ceremony which is used to induct newcomers into an organisation such as a private school, sports team etc. There are a number of different forms, from relatively mild rituals to severe and sometimes violent ceremonies. The idea behind this practice is that it welcomes newcomers by subjecting them to a series of trials which promote a bond between them. After the hazing is over, the newcomers also have something in common with older members of the organisation, because they all experienced it as part of a rite of passage. Many rituals involve humiliation, embarrassment, abuse, and harassment.

- **Prejudiced Behaviour**
  The term prejudice-related bullying refers to a range of hurtful behaviour, physical or emotional or both, 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, 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, non-binary, gender dysphoria).

- **Teenage relationship abuse**
  Teenage relationship abuse is defined as a pattern of actual or threatened acts of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, perpetrated by an adolescent (between the ages of 13 and 18) against a current or former partner. Abuse may include insults, coercion, social sabotage, sexual harassment, threats and/or acts of physical or sexual abuse. The abusive teen uses this pattern of violent and coercive behaviour, in a heterosexual or same gender relationship, in order to gain power and maintain control over the partner.

- **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.

Expected action to be taken by all staff

Although the type of abuse may have a varying effect on the victim and initiator of the harm, these simple steps can help clarify the situation and establish the facts before deciding the consequences for those involved in perpetrating harm. It is important to deal with a situation of child-on-child abuse immediately and sensitively. It is necessary to gather the information as soon as possible to get the true facts around what has occurred as soon after the child(ren) may have forgotten. 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/guardians when they become involved. For example; do not use the word perpetrator, this can quickly create a 'blame' culture and leave a child labelled. Staff should not be prejudiced or judgemental in dealing with such sensitive matters but rather neutral and considered.

- **Gather the Facts**
  Speak to all the young people involved separately, gain a statement of facts from them and use **consistent language** and **open questions** for each account. The easiest way to do this is not to have a line of questioning, but to ask the young people to tell you what happened. Only interrupt the young person from this to gain clarity with open questions, 'where, when, why, who'. (What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?)

- **Consider the Intent (begin to Risk Assess)**
  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, from the information that you gather, the school believes any young person to be at risk of significant harm it must make a safeguarding referral to social care immediately (where a crime has been committed the police should be involved also). If this is the case, once social care has been contacted and made a decision on what will happen next then the school will be informed on any next steps to be taken by it. 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/guardians to come to school to be spoken to also. It is important to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take. It may also be that social care feels that it does not meet their criteria in which case the school may challenge that decision, with that individual or their line manager.

- If necessary the school can invoke the Local Authority Escalation Policy. If in doubt staff should check with the Designated Safeguarding Lead or his deputy.

- **Informing parents/guardians**
  If, once appropriate advice has been sought from police/social care, staff have agreement to inform parents/guardians or have been allocated that role from the other services involved, then staff need to inform the parents/guardians as soon as possible. If services are not going to be involved then equally, this information may need to be shared with parents/guardians. If a young person is deemed to be 'Gillick Competent' following the 'Fraser' guidelines and does not wish staff to share the information with parents/guardians, then the school must consider this, especially for example if the young person is pregnant and this is why they are being bullied (unless this has occurred through significant harm in which case a criminal/social care case is likely or the young person is under the age of 13). In all circumstances where the risk of harm to the child is evident then the school should encourage the young person to share the information with their parent/guardian or even with them (they may be scared to tell parents/guardians that they are being harmed in any way). Where school can evidence they are acting in the best interests of the young person they would not be criticised fairly. However, this would be the case if they actively breached the rights and choices of the young person. The best way to inform parents/guardians 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 guardians whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed another.

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 if other issues arise (see following).

- **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 description by all children involved of what occurred?**
  Can each of the young people give the same description 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?

- **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 that has prompted the behaviour? Is the behaviour deliberate and contrived? Does the young person have an understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other person? In dealing with an incident of this nature the answers are not always clear cut. If there is concern or uncertainty as to whether or not there is any risk involved, then advice should be sought from please seek advice from Children's Services Social Care.

- **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?

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.

- **For the young person who has been harmed:**
  What support they require depends on the individual young person. It may be that they 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 this case the young person should continue 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 cyberbullying, relationship abuse etc. It may be that through the continued curriculum of PHSE and Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development (SMSC) 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.

- **For the young person who has displayed harmful behaviour**
  In this circumstance 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. Particular 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 sanction for their behaviour. 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 such case, the young person will need to be provided with appropriate support and education whilst off site.

Even following the conclusion of any investigation 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 of those agencies involved including the young person and their parents/guardians. 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.

The school may also choose a punishment as a consequence which reflects the seriousness of the behaviour and is in line with our behaviour policy.

- **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 such cases, regular reviews with the young people following the incident(s) are imperative.

- **Preventative Strategies for Schools and Settings**
  For all schools and settings, it is important to develop appropriate strategies in order to prevent the issue of child-on-child abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way. Firstly, and most importantly, for schools and settings is recognition that child-on-child abuse can and will occur on any site even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms. It is important to continue to recognise and manage such risks and learn how to improve and move forward with strategies in supporting young people to talk about any issues and through sharing information with all staff.

  This can be supported by ensuring that the school has an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This can be strengthened through a strong and positive PSHE/SMSC curriculum that tackles such issues as prejudiced behaviour and gives children an open forum to talk things through rather than seek a one on one opportunity to be harmful to one another.

  To enable such an open and honest environment it is necessary to ensure that all staff feel confident and enabled to talk about issues and challenge perceptions of young people 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 young people in a way that continues to create an open and honest environment without prejudice. It is incredibly important that staff do not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare those to their own experiences of childhood. 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 young person seeking no further help or advice.

  It is important that signposting is available to young people in the event that they don't feel confident raising an issue to staff or a peer. It is useful to have a resource board with support services on a wide range of issues so young people can seek their own solutions should they wish to. In the same way external services or support programmes could be brought in to talk to young people about specific issues in support of the prevention of child-on-child abuse.

  Finally, 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.

References

Whatis.com: cyber bullying
New Choices Inc: newchoicesinc.org
This is abuse campaign: This is abuse summary report
Stop bullying.gov: stopbullying

Holding Together: equalities, difference and cohesion, a resource for school improvement planning, published for Derbyshire Education Authority by Trentham Books, summer 2009. EACH resources for LGBT CEOP ceop.police.uk safety-centre

Cited in/Cites	Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2025 Edition, Children Act 1989, Working Together 2015, Malicious Communications Act 1988, (Section 1), Communications Act 2003, (Section 127), Sexual Offences Act 2003, The Fraser Guidelines
Affected People/ Groups:	Students and staff
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