

Woodlands Primary School, Hedgehogs Nursery & Sunbeams Club Child-on-Child Abuse Policy & Guidance Framework



Date Reviewed: September 2026

Next Review Date: September 2027

Produced in collaboration with the Sexual violence and Sexual Harassment task and finish group: Safeguarding Children partnership, Safeguarding Children in Education team, Cheshire Police, Primary, Secondary and Special school representatives, Cheshire College South and West, CWP, The Proud Trust, Early Help and Prevention team, Youth Justice and NHS Cheshire CCG.

Please Note: This policy template is current and in line with the statutory guidance contained within Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (which comes into effect September 2026), Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and Cheshire West and Chester Safeguarding Children Partnership Policy, Practice and Guidance.

For the purposes of keeping this document in line with Keeping children Safe in Education 2026 guidance, the framework will refer to child-on-child abuse.

Introduction

Woodlands Primary School, Hedgehogs Nursery & Sunbeams Club (the school) recognises that children and young people are vulnerable to and capable of abusing their peers. We take such abuse as seriously as abuse perpetrated by an adult. This includes verbal as well as physical abuse. Child-on-child abuse will not be tolerated or passed off as part of “banter” or “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 setting and beyond.

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

The school recognises that child-on-child abuse can manifest itself in many ways such as:

Domestic abuse – an incident or pattern of actual or threatened acts of physical, sexual, financial and/or emotional abuse, perpetrated by an adolescent against a current or former dating partner regardless of gender or sexuality.

Bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying) – including explicit adjustments to intercept prejudice-based harm (misogyny, faith-based prejudice, racism, homophobia etc.) by actively building an inclusive, anti-discriminatory culture.

Child sexual exploitation – children under the age of 18 may be sexually abused in the context of exploitative relationships, contexts and situations by peers who are also under 18.

Harmful sexual behaviour – children and young people presenting with sexual behaviours that are outside of developmentally ‘normative’ parameters and harmful to themselves and others.

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.

Serious youth violence – any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime, where the victim is aged 0-19 i.e. murder, manslaughter, rape, wounding with intent and causing grievous bodily harm. All staff receive training to notice indicators of risk.

Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals – activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element.

Consensual and non-consensual sharing of self-generated intimate images and or videos – also known as youth produced sexual imagery. This explicitly incorporates AI-generated explicit content, deepfakes, and artificial image manipulation used to exploit or target peers.

The term child-on-child abuse can refer to all of these definitions and a child may experience one or multiple facets of abuse at any one time. Therefore, our response will cut across these definitions and capture the complex web of a child's experiences.

There are also different gender issues that can be prevalent when dealing with child-on-child abuse (i.e. girls being sexually touched/assaulted, or boys being subjected to initiation/hazing type violence).

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

This policy concentrates on child-on-child abuse in the context of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) to give it equal prominence. It is compliant with the statutory guidance on child-on-child abuse as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 and should be read in conjunction with the Cheshire West and Chester Safeguarding Children Partnership's (SCP) Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it.

Children, staff and young people in our school need to know how to report concerns and be confident that they will be listened to and supported. Our policy includes:

Procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse.

How allegations are recorded, investigated, and dealt with.

Clear processes as to how victims, alleged perpetrators and any other students 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.

Policy Development

The policy has been developed in consultation with Cheshire West and Chester's Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment task and finish group and the following groups: Senior leaders, Governors, Staff, Parents, and Children.

The school has a clear set of values and standards, and these will be upheld and demonstrated throughout all aspects of school life underpinned by the school behaviour policy and pastoral support system, and through a planned programme of evidence-based content delivered through the whole curriculum. Our curriculum has been developed to take into account age and stage of development for our children at Woodlands taking into account SEND children and their cognitive understanding, and the curriculum will tackle such issues as:

Healthy and respectful relationships.

What respectful behaviour looks like.

Consent and relationship boundaries.

Gender roles, stereotyping, and equality.

Body confidence and self-esteem.

Prejudiced behaviour and tracking cultures of sexual harassment.

Absolute clarity that sexual violence and sexual harassment is always wrong.

School aims to reduce the likelihood of child-on-child abuse through:

The established ethos of respect, friendship, courtesy and kindness.

High expectations of behaviour and clear consequences for unacceptable behaviour.

Providing a developmentally appropriate PSHE curriculum developing pupils' understanding of safety and healthy links.

Systems for any pupil to raise concerns with staff, knowing that they will be listened to, valued and believed.

Robust risk assessments and targeted work for pupils identified as a potential risk or at risk.

Research indicates that young people rarely disclose child-on-child abuse and that if they do, it is likely to be to their friends. Therefore, the school will also educate pupils in how to support their friends if they are concerned about them, that they should talk to a trusted adult in the school and what services they can contact for further advice.

The school will deliver this through planned, high-quality, Relationships and Sex Education lessons and also through Health Education sessions, and as part of our Commando Joe's character curriculum.

Aims

Strategies: Set out our strategies for preventing, identifying, and managing child-on-child abuse.

Contextual Approach: Take a contextual approach to safeguarding all children and young people involved. Acknowledging that children or young people who have allegedly abused their peers or displayed harmful sexual behaviour are themselves vulnerable and may have been abused by peers, parents, or adults in the community.

Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence and Harmful Sexual Behaviour

The boundary between what is abusive and what is part of normal childhood or youthful experimentation can be blurred. The determination of whether behaviour is developmental, inappropriate or abusive will hinge around the related concepts of true consent, power imbalance and exploitation. Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum, ranging from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent. Problematic, abusive and violent sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage.

Simon Hackett (2010) Continuum Model

Professionals must distinguish normal from abnormal sexual behaviours using the framework columns:

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

A child's sexual behaviour should be considered abnormal if it occurs at a frequency greater than developmentally expected, interferes with the child's development, occurs with coercion/intimidation/force, is associated with emotional distress, occurs

between children of divergent ages/abilities, or repeatedly recurs in secrecy after intervention.

Definitions of Sexual Violence and Consent

Rape: A person intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person with a penis, where the victim does not consent.

Assault by Penetration: Intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person with a part of the body or anything else, sexually, without consent.

Sexual Assault: Intentionally touches another person, sexually, without consent.

Consent: Having the freedom and capacity to choose. A child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity. The age of consent is 16. Intercourse without consent is rape.

Responding to Alleged Incidents

All reports of child-on-child abuse will be made on an individual needs' basis, with the designated safeguarding lead or their deputy taking a leading role using their professional judgement and supported by other agencies such as social care or the police as required.

CRITICAL DISCLOSURE IMMEDIATE RESPONSED PROTOCOL

Empathetic Response: Staff must prioritise an affirmative, victim-centered, and deeply empathetic response, validating the child and acknowledging the deep significance of being chosen as a confidant over purely process-focused instructions.

No Absolute Confidentiality: Staff must explain that the information must be shared with the safeguarding team but will be handled discretely.

Written Records: Upload an objective, accurate report to CPOMs immediately.

Digital Imagery Handling: Follow statutory screening paths. Staff must never view, copy, or forward explicit peer images.

Risk Assessment & Action following a report

The DSL or DDSL will make an immediate risk and needs' assessment for both the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator, recorded and stored on CPOMs. Reports of rape or assault by penetration are handled with extreme gravity, recognizing that these are especially serious and likely to be especially difficult for the victim.

Children sharing a classroom: Staff will immediately arrange to keep the victim and alleged perpetrator a reasonable distance apart on school premises and transport. It may be necessary for the alleged perpetrator to be moved to another class within the same year group. These actions are in the best interests of both children and should not be perceived to be a judgment on the guilt of the alleged person who has harmed.

Internal Management, Family Help and Police Paths

- A. Managing Internally/Family Help:** For low-level, non-violent one-off incidents, internal routing via behavior or anti-bullying frameworks may be used. Where children benefit from early help, the school coordinates with the multi-disciplinary 'Family Help' teams under the national framework. Where a child is harmed or in immediate danger, a referral is sent directly to i-ART/Social Care.
- B. Reporting to the Police:** The default starting point for rape, assault by penetration, or sexual assault is immediate notification to the police (even if the person who has harmed is under 10 years old). School ensures that internal disciplinary paths do not jeopardise the active criminal investigation.
- C. End of the Criminal Process:** If convicted or cautioned, the school updates its risk assessment and implements restrictions. If no further action is taken or a 'not guilty' verdict is reached, the school continues to provide extensive, long-term pastoral support to both the victim and the alleged person who has harmed, recognising that the lack of legal substantiation does not mean the allegation was unfounded.

Prevention and Multi-Agency Working

The school actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by educating governors, staff, and volunteers about contextual safeguarding, classification of specific behaviours, and the absolute zero-tolerance approach to peer-perpetrated abuse.

Multi-agency working: The school works closely with the Cheshire West and Chester Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP), i-ART, Family Help networks, and health teams. Children resident out of county but attending a Cheshire West and Chester school will be reported to Children's Social Care in the area where they live. For Children in Care, the children's social worker must be informed immediately.

Appendix 1

Simon Hackett (2010) has proposed a continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours presented by children and young people, from those that are normal, to those that are highly deviant:

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

[Harmful sexual behaviour framework | NSPCC Learning](#)

A continuum of behaviours

It is vital for professionals to distinguish normal from abnormal sexual behaviours. Chaffin, Letourneau and Silovsky (2002, p208) suggest a child's sexual behaviour should be considered abnormal if it:

- occurs at a frequency greater than would be developmentally expected
- interferes with the child's development
- occurs with coercion, intimidation, or force
- is associated with emotional distress
- occurs between children of divergent ages or developmental abilities
- repeatedly recurs in secrecy after intervention by caregivers.

A continuum of responses

As identified in Hackett's model, above, children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours are a varied and complex group with diverse needs that cannot be addressed by a 'one size fits all' model of service provision.

The diverse needs of these children and young people include the fact that many of them have hitherto unrecognised learning difficulties, specific educational needs, a range of psychosocial risk factors and co-occurring mental health problems (Bladon et al, 2005).

The wide range of harmful sexual behaviours shown by children and young people means their needs should be met in a variety of different placement contexts. These range from

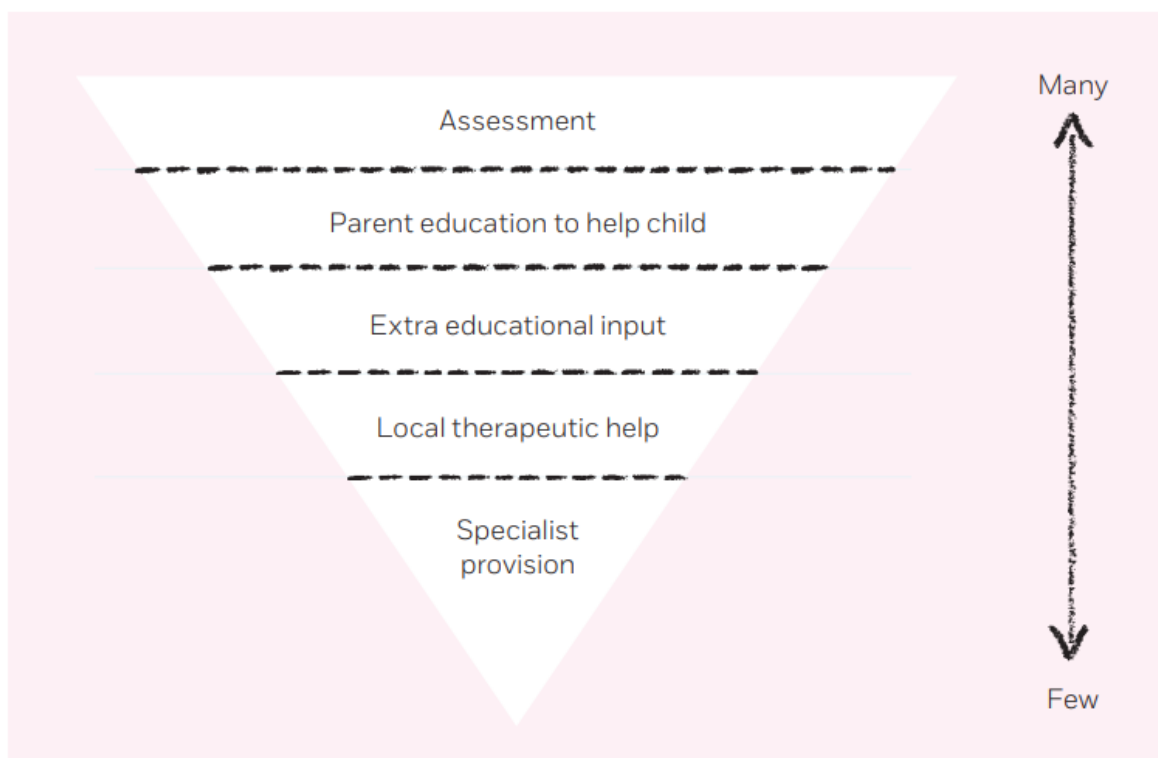
their own homes (most children and young people), general looked-after or care settings (the more disadvantaged and hard-to-manage young people with moderate risk profiles), and more specialist or secure provision (young people who pose a high risk of serious, significant harm to others).

Assessing children and young people and meeting their needs in the context of the notion of a continuum of responses is the subject of the third domain of this framework: effective assessment and referral pathways.

In addition to the initial response and support offered to low level cases in frontline settings, several levels of service response and intensity are required to address various levels of need and concern, as highlighted in the following model developed by Morrison and colleagues (2001).

Hence a small network of regional, highly specialised assessment and treatment services may be required to meet some of the more specialised needs shown by a smaller number of more complex cases.

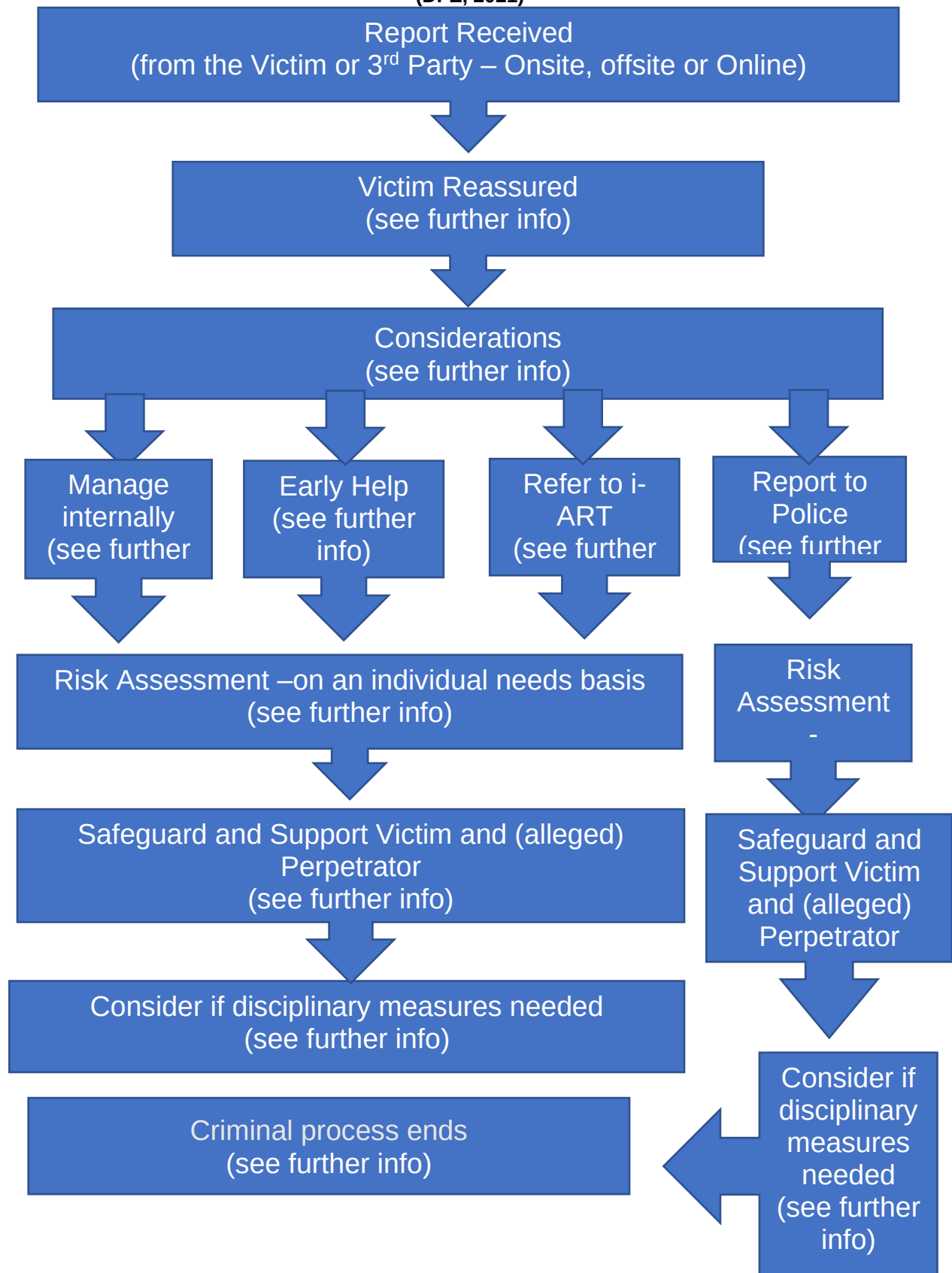
Figure 2: Continuum of service intensity, Morrison and colleagues (2001) adapted from Ryan (1999)



Appendix 2

Sexual violence and sexual harassment flow-chart

*Source – Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges
(DFE, 2021)



Appendix 3

Support for Young People: Local and National

- Internet Watch Foundation (to potentially remove illegal images) www.iwf.org.uk
- RASASC
- SARC
- Lucy Faithful Foundation
- Brook Tool
- [Harmful Sexual Behaviour Support Service](#), run by [SWGfL](#)
- [Marie Collins Foundation](#),
- Proud Trust

Useful Publications and Websites

Government Publications

Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools - [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Keeping Children safe in Education - [Statutory guidance overview: Keeping children safe in education](#) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Preventing youth violence and gang involvement - [Guidance overview: Advice to schools and colleges on gangs and youth violence](#) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Preventing and tackling bullying in schools [Preventing bullying](#) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Other useful documents

Sexting

Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people - [Guidance overview: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Anti-bullying alliance

There are some useful links on the section on sexual bullying

Sexual bullying: developing effective anti-bullying practice- A guide for school staff and other Professionals - [Sexual bullying - anti-bullying guidance for teachers and other professionals.pdf](#) (anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)

Preventing abuse among children and young people-guidance from Stop it Now - [stop booklets childs play preventing abuse among children and young people01 14.pdf](#) (stopitnow.org.uk)

What is Age appropriate? - [What is Age-Appropriate? | Stop It Now](#)

NSPCC-Harmful sexual behaviour - [Understanding Sexual Behaviour in Children | NSPCC](#)

NCB Harmful sexual behaviour - [Workforce perspectives on harmful sexual behaviour](#) (ncb.org.uk)

NSPCC –Is this sexual abuse? - [“Is this sexual abuse?” | NSPCC Learning](#)

Online sexual harassment

Project deSHAME- Digital Exploitation and Sexual Harassment Amongst Minors in Europe Understanding, Preventing, Responding - [Project deSHAME - Childnet](#)

Sexism

It's Just Everywhere- a study on sexism in schools –and how we tackle it - [Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf \(ukfeminista.org.uk\)](https://ukfeminista.org.uk/Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf)

RSE

Relationship Education , Relationship and Sex Education and Health education - [Relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education)

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

In Consultation With		
Date Agreed	Name	Position
October 2026	Victoria Carr	HT
October 2026	Sharon Liversey	DHT
October 2026	Alice Morphet	DSL
October 2026	Clare Cotton	DDSL
Date for Review: September 2027		