MELLERS PRIMARY SCHOOL
PEER ON PEER ABUSE POLICY
NOVEMBER 2021

This policy template remains current and in line with the statutory guidance contained within Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 and Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership.

What is peer on peer abuse?

All children are capable of abusing their peers. This can manifest itself in a whole spectrum of behaviours including:
- Bullying including cyberbullying (see separate anti-bullying policy)
- Sexual violence and harassment
- Physical abuse
- Sexting
- Upskirting (now a criminal offence and has reporting requirements)
- Gang initiation/hazing type violence and rituals

All schools need to include peer on peer 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. Children also need to know how to report concerns and know that they will be listened to and supported.

These should include
- Procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse
- How allegations are recorded, investigated and dealt with
- Clear processes as to how victims, perpetrators and any other children affected will be supported
- Recognition of the gendered nature of peer on peer abuse but recognising, that all forms of this behaviour are unacceptable and will be taken seriously

It is important that schools see this guidance and model template as a framework that will need to be adapted to fit the age and developmental stage and understanding of their pupil group. Additional areas for consideration can be found in Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Children in Schools and Colleges guidance 2021

Some 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. This can also include physical behaviour eg brushing against someone

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.

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 'upskirting' have a mandatory requirement for being reported.

Sexual violence

In this guidance this refers to sexual violence in the context of child on child sexual violence. Children can and do abuse other children. Sexual violence covers a spectrum of behaviour. It can refer to sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2013. This includes:

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

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) Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum, 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. A useful umbrella term is "harmful sexual behaviour". The term has been widely adopted in child protection and is used in this advice. Harmful sexual behaviour can occur online and/or offline and can also occur simultaneously between the two. Harmful sexual behaviour should be considered in a child protection context.

Contextual safeguarding

All staff, but especially the designated safeguarding lead 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.

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. However, a younger child can 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.

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.

Mellers Primary School delivers this through planned, high-quality, Sex and Relationships Education (SRE).

Peer on peer abuse/sexual harassment and violence

Introduction
Mellers 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 as well as physical abuse.

Peer on peer abuse will not be tolerated. We are committed to a whole school approach to ensure the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of peer on peer abuse within our school and beyond. In cases where peer on peer abuse 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 peer on peer abuse can manifest itself in many ways such as:

- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Sexting or youth produced digital imagery
- Upskirting
- Bullying
- Radicalisation
- Abuse in intimate relationships
- Children who display sexually harmful behaviour
- Gang association and serious violence (County Lines)
- Technology can be used for bullying and other abusive behaviour

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 peer on peer abuse in the context of sexual harassment and sexual violence. It is compliant with the statutory guidance on peer-on-peer abuse as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2021) 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.

The policy will:
- Set out our strategies for preventing, identifying and managing peer on peer 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 peer on peer 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. 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:

'Sexual behaviours expressed by children…that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child…or adult.'

This can include: experience of abuse within their family; living with domestic violence; young people in care; children who go missing; children with additional needs (SEND and/or disabilities); children who identify or are perceived as LGBT and/or have other protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010.

Whilst research tells us that girls are more frequently identified as being abused by their peers and that 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 behaviours 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 peer on peer 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, 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, or signs of assault or unexplained injuries. 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.

Responding to alleged incidents of sexual violence and sexual harassment

All reports of peer on peer abuse will be made on a case by case basis with the designated safeguarding lead taking a leading role using their professional judgement and supported by other agencies such as social care or the police as required.

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
- A written report will be made as soon after the interview as possible recording the facts as presented by the child. These may be used as part of a statutory assessment if the case is escalated later
- The DSL will be informed as soon as possible. DSLs are:

1. Amanda Dawson
2. Laura Patel

Action following a report of sexual violence and/or sexual harassment

Following an incident, we will consider
- The wishes of the victim in terms of how they want to proceed. This is especially important in the context of sexual violence and sexual harassment
- The nature of the alleged incident(s), including: whether a crime may have been committed and consideration of harmful sexual behaviour
- The ages of the children involved
- The developmental stages of the children involved
- Any power imbalance between the children. For example, is the alleged perpetrator significantly older, more mature or more confident? Does the victim have a disability or learning difficulty?
- If the alleged incident is a one-off or a sustained pattern of abuse
- Are there ongoing risks to the victim, other children, adult students or school or college staff; and other related issues and wider context? Follow up Actions Children sharing a classroom: whilst the school or college establishes the facts of the case and starts the process of liaising with children's social care and the police
- We will consider how best to keep the victim and alleged perpetrator 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 alleged perpetrator.

Options for managing allegations

1. In some cases of sexual harassment, for example, one-off incidents, we may decide that the children concerned are not in need of early help or statutory intervention and that it would be appropriate to handle the incident internally, perhaps through utilising the behaviour and bullying policies and by providing pastoral support such as our school counselling service.

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 by Amanda Dawson, headteacher, and Laura Patel, deputy headteacher.

2. In line with 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.

3. Where a child has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger, we will make a referral to the MASH 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 alleged perpetrator and any other children that require support.

Physical abuse

While a clear focus of peer on peer abuse is around sexual abuse and harassment, physical assaults and initiation violence and rituals from pupils to pupils can also be abusive.

The principles from the anti-bullying policy will be applied in these cases. When dealing with other alleged behaviour which involves reports of, for example, emotional and/or physical abuse, staff can assess where the alleged behaviour falls on a spectrum and to decide how to respond.

This could include, for example, whether it:
- is socially acceptable
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time
- is socially acceptable within the peer group
- is problematic and concerning
- involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination e.g. related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability
- involves an element of coercion or pre-planning
- involves a power imbalance between the child/children allegedly responsible for the behaviour
- involves a misuse of power

Online behaviour

Many forms of peer on peer abuse have an element of online behaviour including behaviours such as cyberbullying and sexting.

Policies and procedures concerning this type of behaviour can be found in the behaviour policy, online safety policy, and child protection policy.

Prevention at Mellers

Mellers Primary School actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of peer-on-peer abuse by:

- Educating all governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff and volunteers about this issue. This will include training all Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff and volunteers on the nature, prevalence and effect of peer-on-peer abuse, and how to prevent, identify and respond to it.

This includes:
(a) Contextual safeguarding
(b) The identification and classification of specific behaviours
(c) The importance of taking seriously all forms of peer-on-peer abuse (no matter how low level they may appear) and ensuring that no form of peer-on-peer abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing

- Educating children about the nature and prevalence of peer-on-peer 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 peer-on-peer 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;
  (c) involving parents in the review of school policies and lesson plans; and
  (d) encouraging parents to hold the school to account on this issue.

- Ensuring that all peer-on-peer abuse issues are fed back to the school's safeguarding team so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify pupils who maybe in need of additional support
- Challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside the classroom)
- Working with governors, 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 can aspire to and realise safe and healthy relationships
- Creating a culture in which our pupils feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to
- Responding to cases of peer-on-peer abuse promptly and appropriately

Multi-agency working

The school actively engages with its local partners in relation to peer-on-peer abuse, and works closely with, Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership (NCSCP), Nottinghamshire Multi-14 Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), children's social care, and/or other relevant agencies, and other schools.