Ofsted

Research and analysis

Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges

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Introduction

Ofsted was asked by the government to carry out a rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. This report summarises our findings and recommendations.

We were asked to report on the following:

Safeguarding and curriculum

- is the existing safeguarding framework and guidance for inspectors strong enough to support inspections how schools and colleges safeguard and promote the welfare of children?
- How can schools and colleges be supported further to successfully deliver the new RSE curriculum, including how schools and colleges can deal with the sensitive issues around abuse, cyber-bullying and pornography as well as healthy relationships and consent?

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

- How well are safeguarding guidance and processes understood and working effectively between schools, colleges and multi-agency safeguarding?
- Does working between schools, colleges and multi-agency safeguarding partners (LSCPs) including local authority children's social care, the police, health services and other support, need to be strengthened?

Victims' voice and reporting

- How does the current system of safeguarding in schools and colleges listen to the voices of children and/or reporting sexual abuse whether occurring within or outside the school?
- What prevents children from reporting sexual abuse?
- Do victims receive timely and appropriate support from the right place?
- How inspections by Ofsted (independent Schools inspectorate) and Ofsted been relevant enough in address the issues raised?

Other considerations

In addition to what the government asked us to report on, we have also considered:

- the range, nature, location and severity of allegations and incidents, together with trends over time
- the extent of schools/colleges' (and other agencies' and adults') knowledge of specific incidents and more general problems
- the extent to which schools/colleges have tackled sexism and wider sexual and cultural problems, including:
  - their immediate response to specific incidents, including referrals to LSCPs and other agencies, and the extent to which such responses have helped children (and other pupils) feel safe and secure
  - schools'/colleges' use of sanctions
  - the role of the school/college governor/trustee in subsequent response
- schools' safeguarding mandatory, culture and effectiveness, including their willingness to function as part of the wider safeguarding system with other partners
- the adequacy of schools' PSHE/RSE (personal, social, health and economic) curriculum and teaching
- the extent to which recent inspections explored relevant cases and issues

Executive summary and recommendations

The review included visits to 32 schools and colleges. In these, we spoke to over 900 children and young people about the prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online. In their lives and the lives of their peers. [TIMENOTE1] We also spoke to over 400 parents and carers about their experiences. We also reviewed the extent to which inspection has given sufficient support to these and considered how statutory guidance could be strengthened.

This review was not asked to investigate schools' and colleges' response to all of the issues raised in Ofsted's recent letter to schools and colleges. We did, however, hear from inspectors, staff and parents, who raised concerns about sexism and misogyny, including in relation to peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence. Many of these were also concerned about the extent to which inspection has given sufficient support to these and considered how statutory guidance could be strengthened.

We found that sexism was not rooted in individual schools and colleges or even, of all the institutions we visited, in the adult community. We found that, in some of these, Everyone's Invited website, as well as others not found. But this should not be surprising. Sexism is a pervasive, societal issue. It is not surprising that it permeates schools and colleges and that it manifests itself in the ways in which it affects children and young people. For girls, it means that they are harassed on transport, in their communities and online. It means that they are subjected to sexual violence, including rape, in their homes and online. It means that they are subjected to sexual violence, including rape, in their communities and online. It means that they are subjected to sexual violence, including rape, in their schools and colleges. It means that they are subjected to sexual violence, including rape, in their schools and colleges. It means that they are subjected to sexual violence, including rape, in their schools and colleges

- having pictures or videos of themselves that they did not know about being circulated [57%]

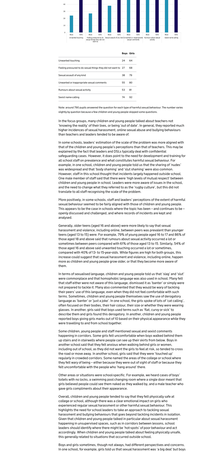
Contact harms:

- sexual assault of any kind [76%]
- feeling pressured to do sexual things that they did not want to [68%]
- unwanted touching [64%]

These findings are strongly supported by existing research into harmful sexual behaviour between peers (Hallett, 2016; Ofsted, 2021).

Boys were much less likely to think these things happened, particularly contact forms of harmful sexual behaviour, as shown in the chart below.

Figure 3. These things happen 'a lot' or 'sometimes' between people my age (%)



Source: Question 'How often do you think these things happen to people your age?'

Sample: 1,000 Year 9 and 10 girls and boys answered the question for each type of harmful sexual behaviour in a survey. Girls and boys were asked about their own experiences in a separate question.

Although some school leaders defined online sexual harassment as "happening out of school", we saw some older incidents of online sexual harassment too, a significant proportion of which had been initiated in school and then continued online after the school day. This was confirming that the online groups we spoke to were highly active in one school. For example, children and young people told inspectors that "boys talk about sex online in their group chats" and that "boys share pictures of girls' bodies in a group collection game". Many children and young people told inspectors that "it happens all the time" and that it was "normalised". Some said that it was "a game" and that "it's a way for the problem to start if it is embedded in the group where no one knows".

Girls talked about being sent pictures of their genitals or being asked to "send a nude" or "I want to see a boob" – some explained that if you block them on social media "they just keep coming back with new accounts". Some said that they had been "pressured into sexting" and that they felt "guilty" if they did not. Some girls said that they had been asked for nude/semi nude images. Some children and young people thought that it was "normal" for "someone to ask for a nude" and that "it happens a lot". Some said that they had been asked who they might be "in a picture for" and that "it happens a lot on Snapchat".

Some girls expressed frustration that they were not explicit teaching of what was acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. They felt that the need to stop peers from sharing "nudes" was "on them" and that "it happens to girls more than it does to boys". A minority of boys that gender stereotyping meant that they were being asked to share "nudes" and that they felt "pressured into it" and "it's hard to say no". Some girls said that they had been "groped" by their peers. Nearly half of boys also said that being sent sexual images or videos they did not want to see was something that happened 'a lot' or 'sometimes' in their lives.

Research in this area indicates that, while most secondary school pupils recognise the harm caused by sexting, they also believe that it is a normal part of life. Research also suggests that young people are underestimating the extent of peer-on-peer abuse online networks.[TWAWG,p.7] They also need for a whole-school approach that addresses the underlying attitudes and behaviours that lead to the creation of sexual and sexualised NCA content, which necessitates time for open discussion. Research that children and young people tell as they are finding particularly difficult.

There is some evidence that suggests access to technology and the sharing of inappropriate images and videos also occurs in primary schools. For example, one school told us that "Year 6 children are using Snapchat and Year 5 children are using it as a group" and that "it happens a lot". Research also suggests that children as young as 7 are being "groped in the playground" and that "children are talking about sex online".[TWAWG,p.7] These findings should be related with research that suggests that children who have been victims of sexual abuse are at heightened risk of experiencing other online harms.

An extract of one of over 100 ethnographic field notes that the inspectors have "learned more about sex from pornography than from formal education".[TWAWG,p.7] Research also suggests that the normalisation of sexual violence through pornography is unstable, a high percentage of them reported that they had seen pornography as a source of information to learn about sex and relationships, but also that they felt that it was "not a healthy place to learn about relationships". Other research indicates that pornography depicts sexual violence as pleasurable, controlling and women as submissive and sexually objectified.[TWAWG,p.7]

Although there is insufficient research to determine the extent to which pornography leads directly to harmful sexual behaviours, there is evidence to suggest that young people who have been exposed to pornography are more likely to have "unrealistic sexual attitudes, such as acceptance of sexual aggression towards women".[TWAWG,p.7] These frequent consumption of pornography is also associated with victim-blaming attitudes, such as "she was asking for it because of the way she was dressed".[TWAWG,p.7] Research also suggests that pornography is not a "sexual education" but "a private activity that has consequences for others".[TWAWG,p.7]

When children and young people talked to us about online sexual abuse, they did not use the terms "online sexual harassment" or "online sexual violence". Instead, they did definitions and set up groups on anonymous messaging apps. For example, "Snapchat is a hotspot for sexting". Some children and young people said that they felt "pressured into sexting" and that "it happens a lot". Some said that they had been "groped" and "felt uncomfortable" and that "it happens a lot". Some said that they had been "pressured into sexting" and that "it happens a lot". Some said that they had been "groped in the playground" and that "it happens a lot". Some said that they had been "groped in the playground" and that "it happens a lot". Some said that they had been "groped in the playground

being as they are in the outward experience of the world.

By highlighting the complexity in schools and multi-agency partnerships in managing peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online. Children and young people are in a unique position to be able to understand what is happening and what is going on in incidents. They are rooted in their own lived experiences and peer relationships. Schools need to have a range of responses to different forms of behaviour and intervene in a proportionate way at the right time.

We are aware of some research that explores how schools tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence. Ofsted's 2021 report, Ofsted's 2022 report and Ofsted's 2023 report. Ofsted's research has contributed to a better picture of understanding the scale of the problem and young people's future harmful sexual behaviour. It is a crime that sends a powerful message.

We recognise that it can be challenging for school leaders to get the balance right and that, sometimes, and children and young people say they want a rest because it is difficult to be in school. We want to be clear that it is not. We want to be clear that children and young people want to find a space of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Professionals must follow statutory guidance. But they also have a responsibility to be aware of the impact of their decisions on children and young people. Ofsted's research highlights a lack of understanding of the different forms of behaviours and how such behaviours may mean children feel better informed to make decisions about reporting. Ofsted's research also highlights a lack of multi-agency partners who are prepared to decline the appropriate course of action.

Reaction from adults and worry about what would happen next

Some children and young people told us that they felt that if they did tell an adult about what happened, that they would be in trouble. Some children and young people were worried that they would be judged and would feel embarrassed by the adult they were questioning.

Being banned or passing finishing out were the third and fourth most common reasons children and young people gave for not reporting sexual violence and sexual harassment. Fairness was the fifth reason, they said being worried about their friends being banned from school was a reason they did not report. Children and young people said they were worried about what would happen next. Some children and young people thought they would be blamed for doing something they had explicitly been told not to do, and they would be in trouble, or they would be blamed for what happened. They were also worried that people would find out they had told and that they would feel embarrassed and ashamed when talking to someone from a different generation about sex.

These findings emphasise the need for adults, including parents, to be better educated about what sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, actually means and looks like. It also shows that adults are expected by children and young people to be more non-judgmental responders to children and young people who talk about abuse and sexual violence, including online. Children and young people want to be heard, what they can expect, and what is important if they do need to report concerns. They also need trusted adults they can talk to.

Understanding confidentiality

Pupils' concerns about confidentiality can be a barrier to reporting. Children and young people want to be able to talk to someone in confidence, but they want to be able to share information with others, they want assurance that there is an end point to the information being shared, they want to be able to ask questions and understand what will be done with the information. They also worried that responses such as a "telling off" or being "shouted at" or the "whole class being told" would be a barrier to anonymity of those involved.

While all the professionals we spoke to highlighted the need for confidentiality when a child or young people disclose sexual violence, including online abuse, many children and young people gave examples of how they could be made aware that an investigation would be taken place, and that they would be kept informed about what was being actually done about it. A teacher telling pupils at a school assembly that it is like, "What was that about?" when you come back into the classroom" demonstrates a lack of understanding of what children want. Children want to be heard, not to be ignored, not to be shouted at and not to be made to feel that it is a crime for a person has spoken to an adult about it.

In light of this, all schools should review their school approach to tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online. It is likely that they are underestimating the scale of the problem. This should include speaking to children, and listening to their experiences, and ensuring that there is a multi-agency approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online sexual abuse.

What does good practice look like?

There are several good practice models that encourage children and young people to tell someone about abuse. The Respect standards project includes several models that are based on the lived experiences of children and young people can talk to professionals about abuse. These recommendations include:

- engaging students in small group sessions to discuss different forms of harmful behaviour
- mapping the school and out-of-school spaces to identify where harmful sexual behaviour is most prevalent
- using a curriculum approach to foster a culture where reporting is perceived as 'ordinary' [footnote 60]

The project also highlights the following as important:

- children having a trusting and positive relationship with an individual staff member
- children being aware of positive experiences of relationships
- teachers showing that they respect students, listen and respond calmly
- having staff who participate in out-of-school activities in the community

The last point was raised by some children and young people as our visits. They were concerned that the lack of adult supervision in the community, in their opinion, had had a due to the pandemic headbutted for behaviour. Some children and young people said that they felt that the lack of adult supervision in the community was a factor in matters in collaboration with the DSLs. However, we recognise that in some schools, children and young people are bussed in from a wide area, and that makes the role of DSLs in name policing, including the internet, difficult. Nevertheless, schools should try to seek any negative associations that might compound children's reciprocal sense of being embarrassed or being in trouble.

The NSPCC has also developed guidance for professionals to support children and young people when they talk about abuse. This highlights the importance of:

- demonstrating to a child that you are listening
- being non-judgmental and reassuring
- reassuring a child and providing support [footnote 61]

The recent guidance from the UK Council for Internet Safety outlines some good practice in dealing sensitively with records of youth produced sexual imagery. [footnote 62]

In our visits, we found promising practice that places the voice of children and young people at the heart of their approach to safeguarding. For example, one school in the Tyneside 'listening events' to help children and young people share worries and speak to adults about issues affecting them, including online sexual harassment. Children and young people shared the issues that they felt about sexual violence and sexual harassment and used what discussing sexual harassment and online sexual abuse. Responses were then shared with the wider school community. This approach helped children and young leaders and teachers have a shared understanding of what sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, were. One leader explained:

"So often, nobody is listening to young people about these things – including or especially their parents. These conversations are awkward or taboo but about longer than they should be. We want our children to be able to talk about what they are passed on to think, and to know that they is a safe place. They."

In some schools, we also found evidence of how RSHE lessons had helped children and young people to talk about sexual violence. For example, one school in Sunderland, Ofsted's most recent inspection, had a strong curriculum that covered sexual violence, including online, or to raise concerns about their peers. The victims' groups and their families felt that the curriculum had helped children and young people to be more aware of the impact of their actions, and to be more sensitive to discuss issues and cultures.

In some schools, leaders were reflecting on the testimonies on the Everyone's Invited website to critically evaluate and strengthen their processes. For example, in one school, there was a 'changing the narrative' pupil group. The group synthesised gathered testimonies from the website and used them to inform the school's safeguarding practices. Feedback of findings, in another school, leaders were trialling different reporting methods such as private messages through Teams chat. There was a whole-school approach to ensure that children and young people felt able to report. This school, Ofsted inspected through a pandemic, lists three posters and leaflets. The posters show actually engaging parents and alumni to discuss concerns and address them where appropriate.

While it is too early for leaders to talk about the impact of such initiatives, children and young people in these schools told us that they can see that leaders are trying to address the issues that they have raised. Children and young people said that they felt confident in talking about sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, when there is a positive and open school culture.

To what extent do schools know about sexual abuse? When they do know, how do they respond?

In this section, we outline children's understanding of the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, and how they have responded to the issue to date. We also share what approaches schools are taking to tackle these issues and where there are still gaps.

Responding to incidents

There were many examples where incidents of sexual violence were dealt with appropriately by schools. Children and young people said that the school's pastoral cadre 'is educated' where informing practice. Examples of practice in these schools often included:

- involving other agencies where appropriate
- providing support for all children and young people involved (victims and perpetrators) from trained professionals and professional counsellors
- informing and working with parents

However, our visits highlighted some inconsistencies in responses where professionals were informed of sexual violence. There was also variability in DSLs' understanding of which incidents needed be referred to the police and children's social care. Meaning that some children and young people felt that their safeguarding needs were not met in schools in our visits. Ofsted inspection mechanisms to strengthen this in school safeguarding processes. For example, they were part of wider networks of DSLs or sexual and harassment and sexual violence, including online.

In around two-fifths of the schools visited, children and young people said that they adapted either their safeguarding protocols, systems for monitoring or staff training on harmful sexual behaviour. This was in response to the five-year review.

As we outlined earlier, many professionals tended to underestimate the scale of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, and children and young people felt that this problem was accepting that reactions. Although they acknowledged the reported incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online were the tip of the iceberg, it is a crime that sends a powerful message.

Furthermore, some schools dealing with incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, in an isolated way, without considering the context and wider safeguarding risks. This meant that they were not considering factors such as:

- whether other children and young people were at risk
- whether there were signs of an outside school where children and young people were at particular risk
- whether there were patterns in peer relationships were creating unhealthy cultures

In these schools, incidents were dealt with reactively instead of proactively. In some schools, harmful sexual behaviours were not monitored and harmful sexual behaviour ignored.

In addition, in about a quarter of schools, sexual harassment such as inappropriate sexualised language was not always addressed and identified early enough. In other instances where school leaders were aware of the problem, there was a belief and acceptance that it was just "boys being boys". In one school, Ofsted inspection reported to inspection that behaviour had become normalised for their schools.

In one another example, a group of girls raised issues with the headteacher after the school had been "slow to respond to concerns about sexual harassment". The school had to provide more accurate records. Although they acknowledged the concerns, Ofsted reported that, since the intervention, there had been a reduction in unwanted sexual behaviour. In another school, Ofsted inspection reported that, "Pupils' safety is not consistent and would like more time to discuss these kind of issues. They are important.

Recent government advice for those in education on how to tackle the sharing of nudes and semi-nudes talks specifically about how individual case management steps to be taken in relation to:

"Individual incidents of peer abuse and sexual harassment (the kind that would in certain cases can fall under this category) can lead to unhealthy or damaging cultures and environments if not addressed quickly and firmly. Such behaviour, if left to fester, is harmful sexual behaviour – and responded to directly within the school context. If handled poorly, an unsafe and unhealthy set of norms can be created which can be very difficult to shift. Such behaviour can also be a precursor to more serious harm abusive, it is well recognised that the individual who commits the initial offence often's school victim, peer review and all children's ability to speak out."

Children and young people's views of schools and colleges and how they should respond to the forms of sexual harassment and violence is clearly set out in advice and guidance. Ofsted's research has highlighted the importance of the role of the school and education providers should take. [footnote 63]

It is a concern that review has identified that many instances of sexual harassment, including online, are underestimated by schools. Children and young people, and Ofsted's Ofsted's research, highlight the importance of a multi-agency approach. Children and young people this is an extraordinary that they want to be a part of. Children and young people this is an extraordinary that they want to be a part of.

How schools perceive their responsibility in the context of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online sexual abuse

Schools are in a difficult position when it comes to navigating responsibility and boundaries between what is within their and what is outside their control. Ofsted's research highlights the importance of schools being able to make decisions about what they can do to inform much supportive parents and work with them to prevent further abuse and harassment and sexual violence, including online sexual abuse. It is a crime that schools were following the guidance in the season.

However, some leaders talked to us about how hard it is to take decisions when investigations are ongoing over a significant period of time or when the police do not have the basis to act. They reported feeling left with difficult decisions to make, such as whether to suspend children and whether to continue investigations. Not to be prejudiced or considered.

Leaders in some schools said they were unclear about the scope of their safeguarding responsibilities and about how and when they should intervene. They identified two main barriers to action:

- supporting children and young people to trust professionals enough to talk about harmful sexual behaviours happened outside school
- parents' lack of understanding about what their children were doing outside school

In some schools, leaders said they felt unsupported by parents, who were not always cooperative. Some children and young people said that they felt that some parents underestimate the scale and impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Some children and young people were treated parents to be "very supportive" of their children, although it was not always clear that this included specific training on harmful sexual behaviour. Children and young people said that their parents underestimate the scale, the difficulty of any investigation is often left with school leaders, who have little guidance to support their decision-making. Some leaders also talked about how difficult it is to take decisions when police and other lengthy multi-agency investigations were ongoing.

In-school approaches to address sexual harassment and violence

In the schools we visited, leaders told us that they used a wide variety of approaches to address sexual harassment and violence, including online sexual abuse. Some of the approaches they reported were effective in preventing and responding to harmful sexual behaviour. For example, one school, in Sunderland, Ofsted's most recent inspection, reported that, since the intervention, Examples included heard between exclusions, determined, interval referrals and fixed-term exclusions. Children and young people were treated parents to be "very supportive" of their children, although it was not always clear that this included specific training on harmful sexual behaviour. Children and young people said that their parents underestimate the scale, the difficulty of any investigation is often left with school leaders, who have little guidance to support their decision-making. Some leaders also talked about how difficult it is to take decisions when police and other lengthy multi-agency investigations were ongoing.

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Training and development for DSLs

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Is the existing safeguarding framework and guidance for inspectors strong enough to properly assess how schools and colleges safeguard and promote the welfare of children?

Inspection is a critical lever in the accountability system. It provides a point in time assessment of how well schools and colleges are safeguarding children and promoting sound sexual ecology, including online. Inspection evidence can be aggregated to provide a national picture of how well children are being safeguarded. The quality of the evidence the inspection model is not designed or resourced to investigate or address specific cases, but it can identify patterns of concern and inform proportionate, risk based, data driven approach to tasking sexual harm prevention and support services. It also plays a role in assurance, of which inspection is just one.

Statutory guidance and inspectorates for schools need colleges to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. Generally, school and college inspections are good at identifying whether safeguarding policies and practices are being in place and is inspection gives assurance that most schools and colleges are meeting their school year starts as they can plan training and knowledge accordingly. The advisory 'Working together to safeguard children' is well known to inspectors and leaders in schools and colleges and is expected to be one of the 'relevant agencies' for local authorities to engage with and that multi-agency audits should be completed regularly.

There is a gap in guidance for how schools and colleges should assess and respond to sexual harm and sexual harassment between children and young people. Ofsted's inspection leaders also want clearer guidance on where their responsibilities start and end. Inspectors need to be able to see that schools and colleges are following Keeping Children Safe in Education (this area would help school and college leaders assure parents, children and young people that they are making decisions in their best interests, and in line with guidance.

To assess whether the current safeguarding framework and guidance for Ofsted and ISI inspectors were strong enough we carried out an online survey:

- both inspectorate frameworks and Ofsted's schools and further education and skills inspection handbooks
- evidence bases underpinned the inspection frameworks, including Ofsted's evidence based schools, independent sector inspection schools that Ofsted inspects and independent sector inspection schools
- safeguarding guidance and tools for inspectors of both inspectorates, with a particular focus on peer-on-peer harmful sexual behaviour

We also reviewed our previous thinking on sexual harm in schools and colleges that we had published in our previous research and our response to Ofsted's consultations. We included complaints about the non-association independent schools that we inspect. You can find further detail on our internal review in the Judicialreview.

We also carried out a online review of complaints we have received that focused on sexual harm between children and young children, which it thought it had the review found.

Frameworks, handbooks, guidance and training

The review looked at our 'Inspecting safeguarding' guidance, which covers early years, education and skills settings.[Footnote 1] [Footnote 2] We found this clearly outlines the inspectors should inspect how well schools and colleges respond to peer-on-peer harmful sexual behaviour and how well they prevent and protect children. The introduction of the education inspection framework (EIF) in September 2019, the school inspection handbook has also made specific reference to peer-on-peer abuse. All inspectors are required to be trained and competent in safeguarding, and the EIF sets out that inspectors will 'evaluate how well the school or college's curriculum, teaching and guidance on PSHE, RE school inspectors have received mandatory training on what this means in practice.

However, the review also found that, although Ofsted's education inspectors are trained using 'Inspecting safeguarding', the further education and skills inspection handbook does not include the requirement to evaluate how well schools and colleges are prevent, protect and respond to peer-on-peer harmful sexual behaviour, including online. We strongly recommend it is also their responsibility to ensure that inspectors are supported to understand how to evaluate these behaviours and behaviours by referral only services.

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Previous inspections

We reviewed the evidence bases for 513 inspections under Ofsted's EIF. The inspections all took place between September 2019 and March 2020, when school inspections were suspended due to the pandemic.

The review found that evidence bases demonstrated that inspectors have a good knowledge of 'Keeping children safe in education'. They are this knowledge to ensure that schools and colleges are meeting their duties to safeguard children. We found that inspectors had collected evidence and acting people's concerns and that they had followed up on safeguarding concerns with the relevant agencies.

Following notification of a school inspection, school leaders are asked to present their reports and evidence of sexual violence and sexual harassment, including online, to school by 8am on the first day of the inspection. This is set out as a requirement in our school inspection handbook.

In September 2019, when this requirement was brought in, we expected to see a significant increase in reports of sexual violence and harassment. We did not. We recommended that inspectors should ask parents in schools, in the 'Ofsted Inspection' the case. It is surprising that, in the inspections we looked at for the review, only 8% of parents responded to Ofsted's online survey. Ofsted's inspectors have to be responsive to the request. It may be an part of the schools provided to the inspection. Ofsted figures may reflect the parents' staff's and children and young people's knowledge and confidence in reporting to Ofsted. Ofsted's inspectors, in their view, gather information as a statement that there were no concerns. We would like Ofsted's inspectors to be more curious and probing in their lines of inquiry. We would like Ofsted's inspectors to be followed up with leaders to determine whether or in return was an accurate picture.

As a result, we cannot yet be sure that EIF inspections are sufficiently assessing the extent and nature of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, between pupils in schools. We want Ofsted's inspectors to be more curious and probing in their lines of inquiry. We want inspectors to be followed up with leaders to determine whether or not in return was an accurate picture.

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Handing of complaints about schools that refer to peer-on-peer sexual harassment and violence

A review of Ofsted's handling of complaints about schools we inspect found that they are dealt with comprehensively. We also found that Ofsted's inspectors take the complaints about independent schools seriously and are referred on to the DfE, and those about Ofsted's inspectors are referred on to the Ofsted Complaints Team. However, we may notify the school and DfE, when a maintained school or FE College is inspected by a school or college. We may also inspect immediately or use the information to inform the next inspection or a monitoring inspection.

We also reviewed 10 evidence bases of inspections, to see how well Ofsted's inspectors gathered information and evidence of how well schools managed their responsibilities to safeguard children. We found that, in the inspections we looked at, Ofsted's inspectors did not always gather information and evidence of how well schools managed their responsibilities to safeguard children. However, the inspection evidence did not always gather information and evidence of how well schools managed their responsibilities to safeguard children. We want Ofsted's inspectors to be more curious and probing in their lines of inquiry. We want inspectors to be followed up with leaders to determine whether or not in return was an accurate picture.

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Conclusion

This report shows how revealed how prevalent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are for children and young people. It is concerning that for some children, sexual violence and sexual harassment is a part of their school life. We need to make sure that we analyse whether the issues are more or less prevalent for different groups of people, and there may be differences. But it found that the issues are so widespread that it is important that all schools and colleges are taking steps to prevent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse. We want to see Ofsted's inspectors and leaders take this seriously. Given the focus on adequacy of current inspection models, the sample was small. We want to see a more representative sample in future research. We want to see overall child sample size be made sufficiently large to compare such characteristics as ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and gender and how patterns of behaviours or experience. Very rare and linked to one particular type.

The sample included:

- 14 state-funded schools
- 10 ISI inspected independent schools
- 2 Ofsted inspected independent schools
- 374 colleges

The majority of the schools were secondary schools or all-through schools. Two were state-funded primary schools.

In one visit, we identified serious safeguarding failures. Inspectors ended the visit and informed the local authority children's services. We also found that in 3 of the 10 independent schools we visited, we had a serious offence against a child. We want Ofsted's inspectors and leaders to take this seriously.

Focus groups with children and young people

In this visits, we held up to 4 focus groups with children and young people on each visit. These lasted for 45 minutes. In total, we had over 125 focus groups with approximately 1,000 children and young people. Inspectors gave children and young people a flyer that they did not want their child to take part. Inspectors also gave children and young people the option not to take part on the day. Leaders highlighted where it would not be appropriate for their children to participate, for example, because of safeguarding or additional context. Inspectors spoke to the children and young people in single-sex, same-age groups. Where there was an existing LGBT+ pupil group, we asked whether the group would like to take part. We also tried to ensure the largest

Activities that inspectors held with children and young people through in the focus groups included the following:

- colouring in boxes on a map of their school according to how safe/unsafe parts of the school were, discussing this among the group as they did so
- asking children and young people to write down on post-it notes what they thought peers and they would go to. If appropriate, if they were the victim of sexual harassment or sexual abuse, they would go to. Inspectors then asked if what might be said/done among their peer group to a different situation, as well as who might speak to/tell
- asking what they are taught in school/college about relationships and sex and whether they thought it was enough/taught

Inspectors summarised the conversations from focus groups and collated the questionnaires, both of which were analysed by the research team.

Discussions with school and college staff

As part of each visit, inspectors spoke to:

- the headteacher/principal
- the DSL
- the behaviour lead
- the lead for PSHE and/or RSHE
- 3 groups of staff

Inspectors listened to records of sexual harassment and sexual abuse, behaviour logs, and other information. Inspectors also reviewed school/college's risk assessment and the policy and curriculum documentation for PSHE and RSHE.

Inspectors collated the evidence from each visit, which was analysed by the research team.

Focus groups with multi-agency partners

Prior but not of 32 schools and colleges, we identified 52 LSAs with whom we held 90 focus groups. We invited the local authority children's services, the police, the local police and health partners. The discussions were framed around the terms of reference for the review covering the 2 multi-agency safeguarding questions, from the partners' perspectives:

- how well are safeguarding guidance and processes understood and working together to prevent and protect children
- how working between schools, colleges and LSPs, including local authority children's social care, the police, health services and other support, need to be improved

The information from these focus groups was shared by the research team and triangulated with the perspectives from schools themselves.

Victim/survivor focus groups

Ten individuals from 8 organisations spoke to Ofsted to share their experiences and views from a survivors/victim perspective.

Everyone's Invited testimonies

As of 31st April 2021, there were 2,915 testimonies publicly available on the Everyone's Invited website. We analysed the last survey with existing.

Our text analysis then focused on the 2,535 testimonies thought to relate to young people of school or further education age. For example, we excluded any testimonies that referred to universities or to other countries. The testimonies were analysed using a combination of manual coding, natural language processing and topic modelling. This was complemented by textual analysis of 250 random testimonies, which were read in full.

Data from these was recorded, including:

- what the incident was
- the location
- the nature/extent of the victim and their relationship to the perpetrator
- the response to the incident
- the incident's impact on the victim

The intention of this analysis was to identify common themes and build a broad picture of the experiences young people are reporting.

Ofsted and ISI complaints

Between September 2019 and March 2020, Ofsted received 234 complaints against schools and colleges about sexual harassment and sexual violence. 60 were judged to be concerns.

In order for Ofsted to consider a complaint against a school as a 'qualifying complaint', it must meet certain legislative requirements:

- it must be made in writing
- it must not be a prescribed exception (that is, a concern for which another statutory process is more appropriate)
- it must be a prescribed description (safeguarding and management, standards of education being a factor), quality of education, how for the education meets the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and welfare of pupils)
- it must have been through the local complaints routes

For this report, we reviewed 10 complaints that we consider to have met the following criteria:

- they contained an element of alleged sexual abuse, harassment or violence
- they came from all phases of education
- they involved mainstream schools and academies, pupil referral units (PRUs), independent schools and colleges
- they allowed us to sample complaints about most various institution sectors, local contextual information, qualifying and non-qualifying complaints and FOI responses
- they were obtained from other inspectorates, resulted in inspections being brought forward or resulted in a formal designation inspection under section 8

Between September 2019 and March 2020, ISI reports that it received 21 complaints against schools about peer-on-peer sexual abuse and that all were logged as safeguarding concerns and referred to the DfE.

Review of inspection evidence bases

Ofsted reviewed 513 evidence bases, the majority of which were from inspections that took place between September 2019 and March 2020. Ofsted also reviewed the EIF data to place and answer what routine EIF inspections actually collect and what evidence bases from Ofsted inspected residential special schools and boarding schools and ISI inspected independent schools and colleges. Ofsted also reviewed the evidence bases that we used their comments as part of the wider evidence base for this report.

List of stakeholders we spoke to as part of the review

Reference group members

Chief Constable Simon Bailey (NPCC lead on child protection)

Geoff Barton (Association of School and College Leaders)

Tom Bennett (DfE behaviour advisor)

Professor Chris Bonell (Faculty of Public Health and Theoretical Medicine)

Dame Rachel de Souza (Children's Commissioner)

Mary Bousted (Joint General Secretary NEU in England, NEU)

Sarah Hannafin/James Bowen (National Association of Head Teachers)

David Hopkins (Association of Colleges)

Julie Lacy (Parentline)

Ian Keating (Local Government Association)

Julia Lopez/Rowan Gowers (Parentline)

Michaela Lawrence/Amy Nicholson (Public Health England)

Charlotte Reynolds (Association of Children's Services Chief Executives) Julie Robinson (Independent Schools Council)

Andrea Simon (Senior Guru Ofsted Violence Against Women Coalition)

Russell Viner (Professor in Adolescent Health, University College London and Former President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health)

Peter Wanless (NSPCC)

Tamsin Wood (ISI)

Other stakeholders

Ofsted's Inspectors

Ofsted's Senior Leaders

Ofsted's Inspection Leaders

Ofsted's Inspection Quality Assurance Team

Ofsted's Complaints Team

Ofsted's Legal Team

Ofsted's Data Team

Ofsted's Research Team

Ofsted's Communications Team

Ofsted's Senior Leaders

Ofsted's Inspection Leaders

Ofsted's Inspection Quality Assurance Team

Ofsted's Complaints Team

Ofsted's Legal Team

Ofsted's Data Team

Ofsted's Research Team

Ofsted's Communications Team

Parent focus groups

Ofsted carried out one focus group with state-school parents and another with independent school parents. Ofsted also carried out one focus group with 6 sixth form colleges parents. Ofsted also carried out one focus group with 6 sixth form colleges parents.

Offices for Civil Rights, Sex 10 and Home Office

Dame Vera Baird (Victims Commissioner)

Sex Education Forum

Plenty Received (National Education Union)

Laura Crookes Trevor Mallinson (Confederation of School Trusts)

Helen Earner (Charity Commission)

Anna Ginnel (Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse)

Jonny Gordon-Farleigh (Ofsted)

Amanda Handy (Deputy Ofsted Inspector)

Jenny Hayes (PSHE)

Nicola Jacobs (Domestic Abuse Commissioner)

Emma James (Governor)

Dr. Jenny Lloyd (University of Bedfordshire)

Ana Norton (Office for Students)

Jess Phillips MP

Patrick Roach (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers)

Tania Rumsey (Parent Carers)

Wes Streeting MP

Sally Tuckey (Lemon Bought of Street)

Colin Walker (Safeline)

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