



Research and analysis

# Ofsted review into sexual abuse in schools: terms of reference

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The government has asked Ofsted to undertake an immediate review of safeguarding policies in state and independent schools and colleges in relation to sexual abuse. The review will look at whether schools and colleges have appropriate processes in place to allow pupils to report sexual abuse concerns freely, knowing these will be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly and appropriately.

It will establish whether there is sufficient guidance for schools and colleges on how they should deal with sexual harassment and violence allegations, and whether they understand and implement guidance well. It will also seek to identify whether current inspection regimes in both state and private schools are strong enough to address concerns and promote the welfare of children.

Ofsted will work with representatives from social care, police, victim support groups, school and college leaders and the Independent Schools Council. The review will conclude by the end of May 2021 and will seek to establish where safeguarding arrangements and processes are good and have worked well and where improvements are needed.

The review will answer the following key questions:

## Safeguarding and curriculum

- 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?
- How can schools and colleges be supported further to successfully deliver the new RSE (relationships, sex and health education) curriculum, including in teaching about sexual 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 between schools, colleges and local multi-agency partners?
- Does working between schools, colleges and local safeguarding partners, 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 when reporting sexual abuse whether occurring within or outside school?
- What prevents children from reporting sexual abuse?
- Do victims receive timely and appropriate support from the right place?
- Have inspections by ISI (the Independent Schools Inspectorate) and Ofsted been robust enough in relation to the issues raised?

In order to answer these questions, the review will take the following approach:

- Ofsted will review a sample of the recently reported evidence of sexual violence and abuse involving pupils.
- Ofsted will visit a sample of schools and colleges where cases have been highlighted, with ISI where appropriate, to look at how well safeguarding is working and to discuss the wider issues raised by the evidence.
- The review will not report on individual schools or cases, [\[footnote 1\]](#) but present a picture of good and poor practice across the country.

The review will include consideration of:

- the range, nature, location and severity of allegations and incidents, together with context
- the extent of schools'/colleges' (and other agencies' and adults') knowledge of specific incidents and more general problems
- schools' safeguarding responses to known incidents and wider social and cultural problems, including:
  - immediate response to specific incidents, including referrals to safeguarding partners and victim support (and liaison with other schools/colleges, where those involved attend different schools/colleges from abusers)
  - school/college use of sanctions, and
  - any factors that have limited any immediate or subsequent response
- schools' safeguarding knowledge, culture and effectiveness, including their willingness to function as part of the wider safeguarding system with other partners
- the adequacy of school RSE (relationships and sex education)/RSHE/PSHE (personal, social, health and economic) curriculum and teaching
- the extent to which recent inspections explored relevant cases and issues

The review will be informed by discussions with members of a reference group that will include victims' representatives, other inspectorates, representatives from health, social care and the police, school and college representatives and relevant experts.

1. However we will ensure that appropriate referrals have been made in each case we explore. In addition, if we find serious and widespread failures in a school or college's safeguarding arrangements we will immediately carry out a full inspection which will result in a published report. [↩](#)

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