

By Robert Long
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Sexual harassment in schools (England)



Summary

- 1 Duties on Schools and colleges
- 2 Behaviour and bullying policies
- 3 Select committee and Ofsted reports
- 4 Allegations against teachers or other pupils
- 5 Policies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

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Summary

All schools in England must have a child protection policy in place, including measures in relation to protecting children from sexual harassment, whether from staff members or their peers. Relevant policies are in place relating to behaviour at school, bullying, and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Guidance and curriculum

[Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) is the statutory guidance to which all schools and colleges in England must regard when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The most recent version came into force in September 2023.

Statutory Relationships Education at primary school, and Relationships and Sex Education at secondary level, became compulsory in all English schools from September 2020. [Statutory guidance](#) has been published on the reformed subjects.

Ofsted review

In March 2021, the Government asked Ofsted to undertake an [immediate review of safeguarding policies](#) in state and independent schools with relation to sexual harassment and abuse. The review was [published in June 2021](#). It depicted widespread sexual harassment in schools, and made recommendations for action in schools, government, and Ofsted to combat the problem.

Scope of briefing

This briefing provides an overview of the relevant policies schools are expected to have in place on sexual harassment, and recent policy developments.

Education policy is a devolved area, and this briefing focuses on the position in English schools. Links are provided to relevant policies in place in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

A separate Library briefing provides information on [Sexual harassment and violence in further and higher education](#).

1

Duties on Schools and colleges

Education policy is a devolved area, and this briefing focuses on the position in English schools, although some sections (such as those relating to equality legislation) are more widely applicable. Section 5 provides links to relevant policies in place in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

The same guidance for schools also applies to colleges, but some different considerations may apply where the students involved have turned 18, depending on context.

1.1

Keeping Children Safe in Education: Government guidance

All schools must have a child protection policy in place.

The then Children's Minister, Edward Timpson, set out an overview of the measures in place to safeguard children from sexual harassment in response to a [Parliamentary Question](#) on pupil-on-pupil sexual assault in February 2017:

Keeping Children Safe in Education is the statutory guidance to which all schools and colleges in England must regard when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The guidance places a responsibility on all staff to provide a safe environment, in which children can learn and to consider at all times what is in the best interests of the child.

The guidance requires schools and colleges to have an effective child protection policy, which includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse and sets out how allegations of peer on peer abuse will be investigated. The policy should reflect the different forms that peer on peer abuse may take and make clear that abuse should never be tolerated or passed off as banter or part of growing up. The policy should also be clear as to how victims of peer on peer abuse will be supported. The guidance is clear that children's social care and the Police should be involved as appropriate.¹

The most recent version of [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) came into force in September 2023.

¹ [PQ 64615 \[Sexual offences: pupils\], 28 February 2017](#)

Previously, the Department for Education published separate guidance on sexual violence and sexual harassment between children, but this material is now incorporated into the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance.

1.2 Relationships and sex education and PSHE

Statutory RSE: Children and Social Work Act 2017

On 1 March 2017, the then Education Secretary, Justine Greening, [announced](#) her intention to put ‘Relationships and Sex Education’ (RSE) – rather than the ‘Sex and Relationships Education’ then in place – on a statutory footing. She also announced her intention to create a power to make personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) statutory in future, following further work and consultation. The necessary legislation was passed shortly before the dissolution of parliament for the 2017 General Election.

The relevant sections of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) require:

- All primary schools in England to teach age-appropriate ‘relationships education’; and
- All secondary schools in England to teach age-appropriate ‘relationships and sex education’

These changes apply to all schools in England – local authority maintained, academies and independent.

The changes further involve:

- Reformed statutory guidance, following consultation
- Retaining the parental right of withdrawal from sex education, with new rights for children to ‘opt-in’ as they approach age 16
- Flexibility for schools in their approach, including for faith schools to teach within the tenets of their faith

[The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education \(England\) Regulations 2019](#) confirmed that these changes would come into force in September 2020. Statutory health education in schools was also brought in as part of these changes.

Final statutory guidance on [Relationships education, relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#) was published by the Department for Education in June 2019.

More information on RSE, including more detail on the planned new curriculum, can be found in the Library briefing [Relationships and Sex Education in Schools \(England\)](#), CBP 6103.

Health education

Justine Greening's March 2017 [announcement](#) also set out the Secretary of State's intention to create a power to make personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) statutory in future, following further work and consultation. Section 35 of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) provides for PSHE to be made statutory at all schools in England through regulations.

The Department for Education announced alongside the publication of the consultation on RSE that it would not be proceeding with the introduction of statutory Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education, but that statutory Health Education would be introduced alongside the RSE changes.

The statutory guidance on [Relationships education, relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#) sets out the changes that would be formally in effect from September 2020.

More information on health education is provided in the Library briefing on [Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education in schools](#) (England), CBP 7303.

2 Behaviour and bullying policies

2.1 Behaviour

All schools should, as set out in the DfE's advice on [Behaviour and Discipline in Schools](#), have a behaviour policy in place. This will include a range of measures that may be used by teachers and head teachers as appropriate, including in more severe cases fixed-term or permanent exclusions. The DfE's [guide for schools on exclusions](#) focuses on the disciplinary background to exclusions and ensuring they are implemented legally.

2.2 Bullying

The gov.uk website provides information on the law as it relates to [bullying at school](#), and also information on reporting bullying to schools and (in some instances) to the police. As it sets out, by law, all state schools must have a behaviour policy in place that includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. This policy is decided by the school. All teachers, pupils and parents must be told what it is.

The site sets out the matters that should be [reported to the police](#). These include:

- violence or assault
- theft
- repeated harassment or intimidation, e.g. name calling, threats and abusive phone calls, emails or text messages
- hate crimes

The Department for Education has published non-statutory advice for schools on [Preventing and Tackling Bullying](#). This includes advice on prevention and intervention, and makes clear that schools can discipline pupils for bullying outside of school.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Schools also have duties introduced by the Equality Act 2010 related to sexual harassment. The 2010 Act makes it unlawful for a school to discriminate

against a pupil or prospective pupil by treating them less favourably because of a protected characteristic.²

The Government's response to the Women and Equalities Committee's 2016 report on sexual harassment in schools (see section 3.2) set out the relevant implications of the Act for schools, in introducing the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED):

The Act introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in 2011 which applies to all schools, including maintained and independent schools, academies, and maintained and non-maintained special schools. Under the PSED Schools have a general duty to have regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity between different groups and foster good relations between different groups. The duty applies to all protected characteristics and means that whenever significant decisions are being made or policies developed, thought must be given to the equality implications, such as the elimination of sexual harassment.³

² The protected characteristics listed in [section 4 of the Act](#) are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

³ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools: Government response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2016-17](#), First Special Report of Session 2016-17, November 2016, HC 826, p4

3 Select committee and Ofsted reports

3.1 Women and Equalities Committee report: attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings (2023)

In July 2023, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee published a report on [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings](#).⁴

The report said that “sexual harassment and sexual violence continues to be a scourge in our schools, with many girls and women feeling powerless.”⁵

The report’s recommendations included that:

- Ofsted “should not delay” in undertaking a further thematic review of the adequacy of safeguarding policies in schools and colleges
- That schools “need the appropriate time and money” to implement the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance properly and provide effective safeguarding training
- The Government should undertake an evaluation of how well schools are following the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance and the impact that guidance is having in practice, within the next six months⁶

The report said that “the teaching of relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) can help to keep children safe”, and “contributes to reducing relationship violence by helping children to recognise situations that are unhealthy, abusive or harmful, and by teaching children that they have a right to ask for and to get help,” but also that:

⁴ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Sexual harassment and abuse of female students and staff a serious problem in education, find MPs](#), 5 July 2023

⁵ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings](#), Fifth Report of 2022-23, HC 331, July 2023, p33

⁶ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings](#), Fifth Report of 2022-23, HC 331, July 2023, p33-34

[the] delivery of RSHE has been inconsistent. The Government must take steps to ensure that teachers and teachers in training have the funding and time they require to learn how to deliver RSHE effectively.⁷

The report made the following recommendations relations to relationships, sex and health education:

- That compulsory RSHE should be extended to young people in post-16 educational settings
- That the government should develop a specific strategy for engaging with boys and young men in primary and secondary schools on the topics of sexual harassment and gender-based violence
- That government should ensure that teachers and teachers in training have the funding and time they require to learn how to deliver RSHE effectively⁸

The committee particularly highlighted the government's current review of relationships and sex education guidance, stating that it should be evidence-led and that it:

should engage with children, teachers, parents and specialist VAWG [violence against women and girls] organisations to ensure that any developments in policy support effectively the Government's commitment to tackling sexual harassment and violence in schools and colleges.⁹

The committee also said that the strategy it proposed for engaging with boys and young men should be laid before parliament alongside the wider review, by the end of 2023.¹⁰

Government response

The Government, alongside Ofsted and the Office for Students, [responded to the report in November 2023](#). The response did not directly address several of the committee's recommendations in light of the ongoing review of RSHE guidance, which the Chair of the Committee, Caroline Nokes, described as "disappointing."¹¹

The Government response included that the Government would consider extending compulsory RSHE to post-16 settings. In response to the

⁷ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings](#), Fifth Report of 2022-23, HC 331, July 2023, p3

⁸ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Sexual harassment and abuse of female students and staff a serious problem in education, find MPs](#), 5 July 2023

⁹ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings](#), Fifth Report of 2022-23, HC 331, July 2023, p34

¹⁰ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings](#), Fifth Report of 2022-23, HC 331, July 2023, p34-35

¹¹ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Government ignores calls for sex education targeted at boys to tackle harassment](#), 17 November 2023

recommendations on engaging with boys and young men, and teacher training, the response said:

A review of the statutory guidance is underway. This includes input from an expert panel, and there will be a full public consultation on the revised guidance.

Following publication of the updated RSHE statutory guidance, the Department will update teacher training modules and assess further support needed.¹²

3.2 Women and Equalities Committee report: sexual harassment and violence in schools (2016)

Launch and Fixers report

In April 2016, the House of Commons Women and Equalities select committee [launched an inquiry](#) into sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

The inquiry sought, among other aims, to establish the scale of the problem, and in advance of launching the inquiry commissioned a series of workshops run by the charity Fixers, which reported that young people had experienced that:

- schools are not playing their part in recognising the pressures young people are under when dealing with matters of sexual harassment and sexual bullying
- teachers may brush off incidents of sexual assaults or sexually threatening behaviour because of students relatively young ages
- many incidents go unreported because students are worried that victims will be punished as well as perpetrators.¹³

The full Fixers report, [The Trouble with...Sex in Schools](#), was published alongside the inquiry launch.

Committee report

The Women and Equalities Committee [published its report](#) in September 2016.

¹² House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings: Government, Ofsted and Office for Students responses to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2022-23](#), First Special Report of 2023-24, HC 258, November 2023, p4

¹³ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools inquiry launched](#), 20 April 2016

The report included evidence that:

- almost a third (29%) of 16-18 year old girls say they have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school
- nearly three-quarters (71%) of all 16-18 year old boys and girls say they hear terms such as "slut" or "slag" used towards girls at schools on a regular basis
- 59% of girls and young women aged 13-21 said in 2014 that they had faced some form of sexual harassment at school or college in the past year¹⁴

The Committee highlighted evidence from young people that “sexual harassment has become a normal part of school life,” and found “an alarming inconsistency in how schools deal with sexual harassment and violence, which is mostly targeted at girls, a disregard for existing national and international equality obligations, and a lack of guidance and support for teachers.”¹⁵

The Committee’s recommendations included:

- Legislation to ensure every school takes appropriate action to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and sexual violence, with support from Government including clear national guidance.
- Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate to assess schools on how well they are recording, monitoring, preventing and responding to incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence.
- Making sex and relationships education (SRE) a statutory subject for all children at primary and secondary school.¹⁶

More detail is available in the [full report](#).

Government response

The [Government’s response](#) to the Committee’s report was published in November 2016.

The response did not commit to further legislation, citing existing requirements, but did announce a review of the relevant guidance:

21) Despite these recent revisions [to the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance], we recognise that the findings of the inquiry suggest we may need to reconsider the specific focus the guidance gives to this issue. We will invite sector specialists to join an advisory group to review existing DfE guidance

¹⁴ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [‘Widespread’ sexual harassment and violence in schools must be tackled](#), 13 September 2016

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

including KCSIE and behaviour and bullying guidance and consider how the committee's concerns and recommendations can be taken on board. We will convene the group at the earliest opportunity and look to review both sets of guidance as a priority.

22) We will also ask the advisory group to consider what further advice and guidance schools might need to help them understand how their existing responsibilities fit together to provide a basis for tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence, and what those sources of advice might be.¹⁷

The response noted that Ofsted had amended its School Inspection Handbook to address concerns about safeguarding and harassment. The 2019 [School Inspection Handbook](#) states that Ofsted inspectors will require from schools:

- records and analysis of sexual harassment or sexual violence
- records and analysis of bullying, discriminatory and prejudiced behaviour, either directly or indirectly, including racist, sexist, disability and homophobic/biphobic/transphobic bullying, use of derogatory language and racist incidents¹⁸

The response did not contain a commitment to statutory SRE or PSHE, although this position has since changed (see section 1.4).

The [Committee stated](#) that the Government needed to go “much further” in dealing with sexual harassment in schools, and that it intended to return to the subject in 2017.¹⁹

Evidence session with Ministers (October 2017)

In October 2017, the Women and Equalities Committee held an [evidence session](#) with Anne Milton, the then Minister for Women, and Nick Gibb MP, then Minister for schools.

Mr Gibb responded to questions from Jess Phillips on perpetrators being placed in classrooms with their victims, and stated that interim advice would be issued on peer-on-peer abuse:

Q61 **Jess Phillips:** The guidance that you just read out does not explicitly say anywhere, “Do not put a perpetrator back in a classroom with a victim”.

Mr Gibb: No, it does not.

Q62 **Jess Phillips:** Is there any reason for that?

Mr Gibb: This guidance cannot anticipate every single possible circumstance that could occur, so it is written in general terms. It says that the policies of the

¹⁷ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools](#), November 2016, p4

¹⁸ Ofsted, School Inspection Handbook, November 2019, p16

¹⁹ Women and Equalities Committee, [New law needed to protect children from sexual harassment and violence](#), 29 November 2016

school “should be clear as to how victims of peer-on-peer abuse will be supported”. That, to me, would include issues of not putting those two children in the same class. [...]

Q64 Jess Phillips: I understand that every case is completely different. However, I would say that it is a fairly basic presentation of all victims’ laws for the past 20 or 30 years that you try to remove a victim from a situation, for example, in court or in health services; keeping a victim and perpetrator separate, has pretty much underpinned every single victim piece of legislation for the past 30 years. Would the Minister consider updating the guidance in order that this one could also be underpinned with the same principle?

Mr Gibb: ...we are going to revise this guidance and the start of that process will happen this November, but also we are going to issue interim advice about peer-on-peer abuse more urgently, as you say.²⁰

Relevant [advice](#) was first published in December 2017, and was most recently updated for September 2021.

3.3 Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges (2021)

In March 2021, the Government asked Ofsted to undertake an [immediate review of safeguarding policies](#) in state and independent schools with relation to sexual harassment and abuse. The review was intended to consider the extent of the problem, the sufficiency of safeguarding guidance, and whether inspection regimes are sufficiently strong. Ofsted were asked to carry out their work with representatives from social care, police, victim support groups, school and college leaders and the Independent Schools Council.²¹

Ofsted published its [plans for the review](#) on 7 April 2021, and noted that the review had been prompted in particular by anonymous testimonials of sexual abuse published on the website ‘[Everyone’s Invited](#)’.

Ofsted stated:

We will visit a sample of schools and colleges where cases have been highlighted. As well as talking to school and college leaders, pupils and students, we will look at how well systems of support and response are working, and we’ll discuss the wider issues raised by the evidence.

The review will look at whether schools and colleges need further support in teaching about sex and relationships, and whether current inspection regimes in state and private schools are robust enough around the issue of sexual abuse. It will also consider how well schools and colleges are working with local multi-agency safeguarding partners.

²⁰ Women and Equalities Committee, [Oral evidence: Work of the Government Equalities Office, HC 356](#), 11 October 2017, Q61-64

²¹ Department for Education, [Government launches review into sexual abuse in schools](#), 31 March 2021

We will work with representatives from social care, police and victim support groups, as well as school and college leaders. The review is aimed to conclude by the end of May 2021.²²

Publication

[Ofsted's review](#) was published in June 2021. The report found evidence of widespread sexual harassment in schools, with 9 in 10 of the girls who spoke to Ofsted saying sexist name calling and being sent unwanted explicit pictures or videos happened 'a lot' or 'sometimes.' Inspectors also heard that 'nudes' were regularly shared by boys on platforms like WhatsApp and Snapchat.

The report also highlighted several key concerns:

- Children often did not see the point of reporting problems because they were seen as normal
- Teachers consistently underestimated the scale and seriousness of harassment, although the impact of easy access to pornography in setting unhealthy expectations of sexual relationships and shaping perceptions of women and girls was recognised by school leaders
- Relationships and sex education did not include sufficiently clear teaching about what constitutes acceptable behaviour
- Many teachers said they did not feel prepared to teach outside their subject specialism, or lacked knowledge on topics like consent, healthy relationships and sharing of sexual images
- Effective joint working between Local Safeguarding Partnerships and schools and colleges was not always happening consistently

The review made recommendations to schools and colleges, to government, and for Ofsted itself. The review recommended that for schools and colleges:

- School and college leaders should develop a culture where all kinds of sexual harassment are recognised and addressed, including with sanctions when appropriate.
- The relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) curriculum should be carefully sequenced with time allocated for topics that children and young people find difficult, such as consent and sharing explicit images.
- Schools and colleges should provide high-quality training for teachers delivering RSHE.
- Improved engagement between multi-agency safeguarding partners and schools.

²² Ofsted, [Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#), 7 April 2021

For government, the review recommended:

- The government should consider the findings of the review as it develops the Online Safety Bill, in order to strengthen online safeguarding controls for children and young people. It should also develop an online hub where schools can access the most up-to-date safeguarding guidance in one place.
- A guide should be developed for children and young people to explain what will happen after they talk to school staff about sexual harassment and abuse.
- The government should launch a communications campaign about sexual harassment and online abuse to help change attitudes, including advice for parents and carers.

The review also found that Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate could “sharpen practice”, and had not been sufficiently robust on sexual harassment during their inspections.²³

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, Vicky Ford, made a statement in the House on the day the review was published. She stated that the Government fully accepted the review’s findings:

On the recommendations that Ofsted has identified for the Government, we will go further. Much of this work is already under way. We are already updating the “Keeping children safe in education” statutory guidance for this September, ensuring that schools have even clearer guidance on how to deal with reports of sexual abuse, and we will also update the “Working together to safeguard children” statutory guidance in line.

We have already introduced the new compulsory relationships, sex and health education curriculum. In both primary and secondary schools, the curriculum’s focus on healthy relationships helps children to know where to seek help and report abuse and address inappropriate behaviour such as harassment, exploitation, sexism and misogyny. It is the first time that the curriculum has been updated since 2000, and from next term we expect the RSHE curriculum to be implemented in full.

There is more that we are doing. We know that our teachers do not always feel comfortable in teaching about sex and relationships, but it is vital that we get this right. We therefore want to support and work with school leaders and other agencies to help teachers and school staff to deliver the RSHE curriculum as effectively as possible, and I am asking schools to dedicate time from an inset day for that purpose.²⁴

²³ Ofsted, [Ofsted: culture change needed to tackle 'normalised' sexual harassment in schools and colleges](#), 10 June 2021

²⁴ [HC Deb 10 June 2021 \[Ofsted Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges\]](#).

Vicky Ford also highlighted the Online Safety Bill, which she said would include “the strongest measures” to protect children, and to ensure children cannot access harmful services such as online pornography.²⁵

The Library briefings [Regulating Online Harms](#) and [Reaction to the Draft Online Safety Bill: a reading list](#), [Online Safety Bill: progress of the Bill](#), provide information relating to the Online Safety Bill.

Maria Miller, who chaired Women and Equalities Committee when it published its 2016 report on sexual harassment in schools, was critical of Ofsted, saying that the report was “not new news” and that Ofsted had not acted quickly enough following the Committee’s report.²⁶

Ofsted guidance

In June 2021, Ofsted published updated education inspection handbooks, effective from September 2021 (since superseded by, for example, the [School Inspection Handbook 2023](#)), which included strengthened requirements on inspectors to assess how schools address sexual harassment and abuse, and how schools deal with accusations of sexual harassment.

Where schools and colleges do have not adequate processes in place, it is likely that safeguarding will be considered ineffective, which can impact on Ofsted’s ‘leadership and management’ judgement and in such instances school’s overall grade is likely to be ‘inadequate’.²⁷

²⁵ As above. See also Department for Education, [More support for schools and colleges to tackle sexual abuse](#), 10 June 2021

²⁶ Guardian, [Tory MP accuses Ofsted of ‘massive failure’ over sexual abuse in schools](#), 10 June 2021

²⁷ Ofsted, [Inspections to look at how schools and colleges work to prevent sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence](#), 28 June 2021

4

Allegations against teachers or other pupils

Allegations against teachers

Schools, along with other bodies, should have clear policies for dealing with allegations against staff members. A clear distinction should be made in such policies between an allegation, a concern about the quality of care or practice and a complaint.

Chapter 4 of the Library briefing [Safeguarding in English schools](#) provides a summary of the procedures that should be followed.

The procedure followed will depend heavily on the circumstances of a particular case and can range from no action being taken, to a multi-agency strategy discussion, a criminal investigation and/or dismissal of the staff member concerned.

Chapter 4 of the statutory [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) provides more detailed guidance.

Allegations against pupils

The statutory [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) guidance, applicable to schools and colleges, sets out the following information on allegations of abuse made against other children, and the child protection policies schools should have in place to address them:

156. All staff should recognise that children are capable of abusing other children (including online). All staff should be clear about their school or college's policy and procedures with regard to child-on-child abuse.

157. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that their child protection policy includes:

- procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse
- the systems in place (and they should be well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible) for children to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously
- how allegations of child-on-child abuse will be recorded, investigated, and dealt with
- clear processes as to how victims, perpetrators and any other children affected by child-on-child abuse will be supported

- a recognition that even if there are no reported cases of child-on-child abuse, such abuse may still be taking place and is simply not being reported
- a statement which makes clear there should be a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, and it should never be passed off as “banter”, “just having a laugh”, “part of growing up” or “boys being boys” as this can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours and an unsafe environment for children
- recognition that it is more likely that girls will be victims and boys perpetrators, but that all child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously, and
- the different forms child-on-child abuse can take, such as:
 - bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)
 - abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (also known as teenage relationship abuse) or physical abuse which can include hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm or sexual violence and sexual harassment. Part five of this guidance sets out how schools and colleges should respond to reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment
 - consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery): the policy should include the school or college’s approach to it. The department provides Searching Screening and Confiscation Advice for schools. The UKCIS Education Group has published *Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people* which outlines how to respond to an incident of nude and/or seminude images and/or videos being shared
 - causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party
 - upskirting (which is a criminal offence), which typically involves taking a picture under a person’s clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress, or alarm, and
 - initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.²⁸

Governors should also ensure that sexting, and the school’s approach to it, is reflected in the child protection policy. Further guidance is available in [advice on searching, screening and confiscation](#) published by the Department for Education and [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings](#)

²⁸ Department for Education, [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#), September 2023, p40-41

[working with children and young people](#), published by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and UK Council for Internet Safety.

5

Policies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

Education is a devolved policy area, and as a result, decisions on many relevant areas are taken by the Governments of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This section provides links to key relevant information.

Scotland

- Scottish Government, [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland](#)
- Scottish Government, [Respect for All: national approach to anti-bullying](#)
- Scottish Government, [Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education](#)

Wales

- Welsh Government, [Keeping Learners Safe](#)
- Welsh Government, [Providing help and advice about violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence](#)
- Welsh Government, [Anti-bullying guidance](#)
- Welsh Government, [Curriculum for Wales: Relationships and Sexuality Education Code](#)

Northern Ireland

- Department of Education, [Publications and guidance on child protection issues for schools](#)
- Department of Education, [Relationships and Sexuality Education](#)
- NI Direct, [Dealing with bullying and getting support](#)

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