The Telford Park School
Ensuring Excellence

Child on child Abuse Policy

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Policy Name:	Child on child Abuse Policy
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1. Introduction

The governors, senior leadership team, and all staff at The Telford Park School are committed to the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse (as defined below) both within and beyond the School.

In particular, we:

- Believe that in order to protect children, we should (a) be aware of the nature and level of risk to which our students are or may be exposed, and put in place a clear and comprehensive strategy which is tailored to our specific safeguarding context; and (b) take a whole-school community contextual safeguarding approach to preventing and responding to child-on-child abuse

- Regard the introduction of this policy as a preventative measure. We (a) do not feel it is acceptable merely to take a reactive approach to child-on-child abuse in response to alleged incidents of it; and (b) believe that in order to tackle child-on-child abuse proactively, it is necessary to focus on all four of the following areas: (i) systems and structures; (ii) prevention; (iii) identification; and (iv) response/intervention,

- Recognise national and increasing concern about this issue, and wish to implement this policy in order to mitigate harmful attitudes and child-on-child abuse in the school setting, and

- Encourage parents to hold us to account on this issue, so that if their child is feeling unsafe as a result of the behaviour of any of their peers, they should inform the school so that it can ensure that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response.

This policy:

- Is the school's overarching policy for any issue that could constitute child-on-child abuse. It relates to, and should be read alongside, the school's child protection & safeguarding policy and any other relevant policies including, but not limited to, behaviour and anti-bullying policy.

- Sets out our strategy for improving prevention, and identifying and appropriately managing child-on-child abuse. It is the product of a comprehensive consultation – which has involved students, staff and parents

- Applies to all governors, the senior leadership team, and staff. It is reviewed biannually, and updated in the interim, as may be required, to ensure that it continually addresses the risks to which students are or may be exposed.

- Recognises that abuse is abuse, and should never be passed off as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', or 'part of growing up',

- Is compliant with the statutory guidance on child-on-child abuse as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education,

- Does not use the term 'victim' and/or 'perpetrator'. This is because our School takes a safeguarding approach to all individuals involved in concerns or allegations about child-on-child abuse, including those who are alleged to have been abused, and those who are alleged to have abused their peers, in addition to any sanctioning work that may also be required for the latter. Research has shown that many children who present with harmful behaviour towards others, in the context of child-on-child abuse, are themselves

vulnerable and may have been victimised by peers, parents or adults in the community prior to their abuse of peers,

- Uses the terms 'child' and 'children', which is defined for the purposes of this policy as a person aged under 18.

- Should, if relevant, according to the concern(s) or allegation(s) raised, be read in conjunction with the DfE's advice on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Between Children in Schools and Colleges (DfE's Advice) (May 2018), and any other advice and guidance referred to within it, as appropriate, and

- Should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it.

2. What is Child on Child Abuse

Child-on-child abuse is any form of physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised between children, and within children's relationships (both intimate and non- intimate), friendships and wider peer associations.

Child-on-child abuse can take various forms, including (but not limited to):

- Serious bullying (including cyber- bullying),
- Physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm
- Sexual violence such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault
- Sexual harassment such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be stand-alone or part of a broader pattern of abuse
- Upskirting which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm
- Sexting (also known as youth produced sexual imagery)
- Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.
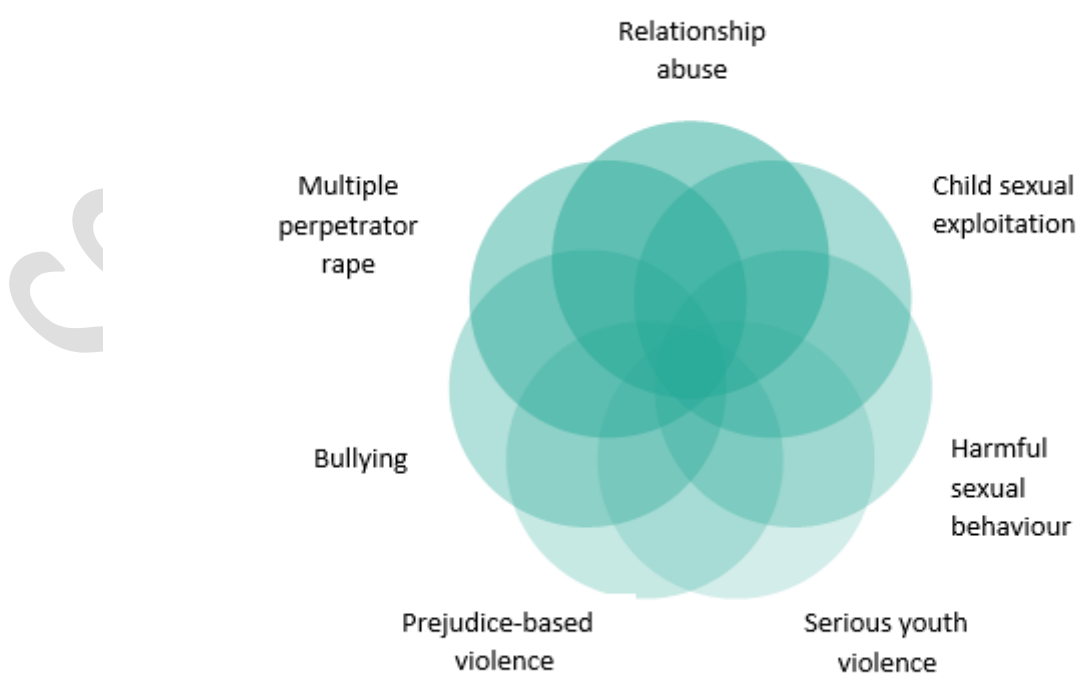
3. Contextual Circles of Adolescent vulnerability

4. What is Contextual Safeguarding

All staff should consider the context within which incidents/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 pose a threat to their safety or wellbeing.

This policy:

(a)   Encapsulates a Contextual Safeguarding approach, which is about changing the way that professionals approach child protection when risks occur outside of the family, thereby requiring all those within a Local Safeguarding Partnership to consider how they work alongside, rather than just refer into, children's social care, to create safe spaces in which children may have encountered child-on-child abuse.

(b)   Adopts a whole-school community Contextual Safeguarding approach, which means:

•   Being aware of and seeking to understand the impact that these wider social contexts may be having on the school's students,

•   Creating a safe culture in the school by, for example, implementing policies and procedures that address child-on-child abuse and harmful attitudes; promoting healthy relationships and attitudes to gender/ sexuality; hotspot mapping to identify risky areas in the school; training on potential bias and stereotyped assumptions,

•   Being alert to and monitoring changes in students' behaviour and/or attendance,

•   Contributing to local child protection agendas by, for example, challenging poor threshold decisions and referring concerns about contexts to relevant local agencies.

5. Sexual Behaviours

The following continuum model demonstrates the range of sexual behaviours presented by children, which may be helpful when seeking to understand a student's sexual behaviour and deciding how to respond to it.

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

This continuum relates exclusively to sexual behaviours and is not exhaustive. Telford Park School also uses The Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool which enables professionals working with children to distinguish between three levels of sexual behaviour – green, amber and red, and to respond according to the level of concern.

6. How can a child being abused by their peers be identified?

Things to look out for in victims of child-on-child abuse:

- Regularly feeling sick or unwell in the morning
- Reluctance to make the journey to and from school
- Money or possessions going missing
- Clothes or school bag torn
- Wanting extra pocket money for no particular reason
- Unexplained cuts and bruises
- Taking different routes to school
- Unexplained behaviour changes, e.g. moody, bad tempered, tearful
- Unhappiness
- Nightmares
- Not wanting to leave the house
- Reluctance to talk openly about school friends and playtimes

If you are concerned your son/daughter is the victim of child-on-child abuse you should contact the school as soon as possible to report the issues through the appropriate channels. Sometimes children have not reported the issues to anyone in school.

The school's safeguarding team regularly reviews behaviour incident logs which can help to identify any changes in behaviour and/or concerning patterns or trends at an early stage.

7. Are some children particularly vulnerable to abusing or being abused by their peers?

Any child can be vulnerable to child-on-child abuse due to the strength of peer influence during adolescence, and staff should be alert to signs of such abuse amongst all children. Individual and situational factors can increase a child's vulnerability to abuse by their peers. For example, an image of a child could be shared, following which they

could become more vulnerable to child-on-child abuse due to how others now perceive them, regardless of any characteristics which may be inherent in them and/or their family.

Peer group dynamics can also play an important role in determining a child's vulnerability to such abuse. For example, children who are more likely to follow others and/or who are socially isolated from their peers may be more vulnerable to child-on-child abuse. Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse by their peers.

Research suggests that:

- Child-on-child abuse may affect boys differently from girls, and that this difference may result from societal norms (particularly around power, control and the way in which femininity and masculinity are constructed) rather than biological make-up. Barriers to disclosure will also be different. As a result, schools need to explore the gender dynamics of child-on-child abuse within their settings, and recognise that these will play out differently in single sex, mixed or gender- imbalanced environments
- Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) are three times more likely to be abused than their peers without SEND, and additional barriers can sometimes exist when recognising abuse in children with SEND.

These can include:
-   assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to a child's disability without further exploration,
-   the potential for children with SEND to be disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying and harassment, without outwardly showing any signs,
-   communication barriers and difficulties, and
-   overcoming these barriers.

- Some children may be more likely to experience child-on-child abuse than others as a result of certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs.

8. A whole school approach

The school actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by:

- Educating all governors, its senior leadership team, staff, students, and parents about this issue. This includes training all governors, the senior leadership team, and staff on the nature, prevalence and effect of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify, and respond to it. This includes

(i)   Contextual Safeguarding,

(ii)   The identification and classification of specific behaviours, including digital behaviours,

(iii)   The importance of taking seriously all forms of child-on-child abuse (no matter how 'low level' they may appear) and ensuring that no form of child-on-child abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing

(iv)   Social media and online safety, including how to encourage children to use social media in a positive, responsible and safe way, and how to enable them to identify and manage abusive behaviour online.

- Educating children about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse, positive, responsible and safe use of social media, and the unequivocal facts about consent, via PSHRE and the wider curriculum. For example, by reviewing literature in an English class which addresses bullying and its effect on mental health. 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 child-on-child abuse. Educating students about consent includes teaching them basic facts such as:

(i)   A child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity

(ii)   The age of consent is 16; and

(iii)   Sexual intercourse without consent is rape

- engaging parents on these issues by:

(i)   Asking parents what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the school address those risks,

(ii)   Involving parents in the review of school policies

(iii)   Encouraging parents to hold the school to account on this issue, in part as a result of visibility of this policy.

- Supporting the on-going welfare of the student body by drawing on multiple resources that prioritise student mental health, and by providing in-school counselling and therapy to address underlying mental health needs.

- Working with governors, senior leadership team, and all staff, students 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 students can aspire to, and realise, safe and healthy relationships fostering a whole-school culture:

(i)   Which is founded on the idea that every member of our school community is responsible for building and maintaining safe and positive relationships, and helping to create a safe school environment in which violence and abuse are never acceptable

(ii)   In which students are able to develop trusting relationships with staff, and in which staff understand, through regular discussion and training, the importance of these relationships in providing students with a sense of belonging, which could otherwise be sought in problematic contexts,

(iii)   In which students feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to

(iv)   Which proactively identifies positive qualities in students, nurtures these qualities, teaches and encourages students to think about positive hopes for the future and supports students in developing small-scale goals that enable realistic ambitions

- Responding to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately

- Ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are fed back to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify students who may be in need of additional support. Incidents are discussed during the schools safeguarding supervision meeting.

9. Multi Agency Working

The School actively engages with its Local Safeguarding Partnership in relation to child-on-child abuse, and works closely with children's social care, the police, Family Connect and/or other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures, and other schools.

The relationships the school has built with these partners are essential, ensuring that the school is able to prevent, identify early, and appropriately handle cases of child-on-child abuse. They help the school to:

(i)   Develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in its local area, as well as the preventative and support services which exist

(ii)   Ensure that its students are able to access a range of services and support they need quickly

(iii)   Support and help inform the School's local community's response to child-on-child abuse

(iv)   Increase the School's awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in its local area to enable it to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by its students.

The School actively refers concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse where necessary to children's social care, the police, Family Connect, and/or other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures. This is particularly important because child-on-child abuse can be a complex issue, and even more so where wider safeguarding concerns exist. It is often not appropriate for one single agency (where the alleged incident cannot appropriately be managed internally by the School itself) to try to address the issue alone – it requires effective partnership working.

10. Responding to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse

It is essential that all concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse are handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly. The way in which they are responded to can have a significant impact on our school environment.

Telford Park Schools response to concerns or allegations will:

(i)   Include a thorough investigation of the concern(s) or allegation(s), and the wider context in which it/they may have occurred – depending on the nature and seriousness of the alleged incident(s), it may be appropriate for the police and/or children's social care to carry out this investigation

(ii)   Treat all children involved as being at potential risk while the child allegedly responsible for the abuse may pose a significant risk of harm to other children, s/he may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves. The school should ensure that a safeguarding response is in place for both the child who has allegedly experienced the abuse, and the child who has allegedly been responsible for it, and additional sanctioning work may be required for the latter,

(iii)   Take into account that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the children involved and consider and address the effect of wider sociocultural contexts – such as the child's/ children's peer group (both within and outside the school); family; the school environment; their experience(s) of crime and victimisation in the local community; and the child/children's online presence.

(iv)   Consider the potential complexity of child-on-child abuse and of children´s experiences, and consider the interplay between power, choice and consent. While children may appear to be making choices, if those choices are limited, they are not consenting

(v)   Obtain the views of the child/children affected. Unless it is considered unsafe to do so (for example, where a referral needs to be made immediately), the DSL should discuss the proposed action with the child/ children and their parents and obtain consent to any referral before it is made. The school should manage the child/children's expectations about information sharing, and keep them and their parents informed of developments, where appropriate and safe to do so. It is particularly important to take into account the wishes of any child who has allegedly been abused, and to give that child as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed and how they will be supported.

If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s), they should discuss their concern with the DSL without delay (in accordance with the child protection policy) so that a course of action can be agreed.

The DSL will discuss the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the member of staff who has reported it/them and will, where necessary, take any immediate steps to ensure the safety of the child/all children affected. Where any concern(s) or allegation(s) indicate(s) that indecent images of a child or children may have been shared online, the DSL should consider what urgent action can be taken in addition to the actions and referral duties set out in this policy.

The DSLs will always use their professional judgement to: (a) assess the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour, and (b) determine whether it is appropriate for the alleged behaviour to be to be dealt with internally and, if so, whether any external specialist support is required.

Where the DSL considers or suspects that the alleged behaviour in question might be abusive or violent or where the needs and circumstances of the individual child/children in question might otherwise require it, the DSL should contact children's social care and/or the police immediately. The DSL will discuss the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the agency and agree on a course of action, which may include:

(i)   **Manage internally with help from external specialists where appropriate and possible.** Where support from local agencies is not available, the school may need to handle concerns or allegations internally. In these cases, the school will engage and seek advice from external specialists (either in the private and/or voluntary sector).

(ii)   **Undertake/contribute to an inter-agency early help assessment, with targeted early help services provided to address the assessed needs of the child/children and their family.** These services may, for example, include family and parenting programmes, responses to emerging thematic concerns in extra familial contexts, a specialist harmful sexual behaviour team, BeeU and/or youth offending services.

(iii)   **Refer the child/children to children's social care for a section 17/47 statutory assessment.** Where a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer from harm, it is important that a referral to children's social care (and, if appropriate, a report to the police) is made immediately. This referral will be made to children's social care in the area where the/each child lives. Depending on the safeguarding procedures issued by the Local Safeguarding Partnership in that area, there will normally be an initial review and assessment of the referral, in accordance with that area's assessment framework. As a matter of best practice, if an incident of child-on-child abuse requires referral to and action by children's social care and a strategy meeting is convened, then the school will hold every professional involved in the case accountable for their safeguarding response, including themselves,

to both the/each child who has experienced the abuse, and the/each child who was responsible for it, and the contexts to which the abuse was associated.

(iv)   **Report alleged criminal behaviour to the police.** Alleged criminal behaviour will ordinarily be reported to the police. However, there are some circumstances where it may not be appropriate to report such behaviour to the police. All concerns or allegations will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and considering the wider context.

11. Risk Assessments

The school will always carefully consider whether a risk assessment is required following an allegation of abusive or violent behaviour. In the vast majority of circumstances and where it is possible that such behaviour may be repeated, a risk assessment should be completed.

Where it is alleged that a child has behaved in a way that is considered to be inappropriate or problematic (as opposed to abusive or violent), the DSL will use their professional judgment to determine whether it would be appropriate to contact children's social care and to carry out a risk assessment.

Careful judgment and consideration are required as to whether alleged behaviour which might be judged to be inappropriate by an adult might actually be harmful to another child. Consultation is recommended with children's social care if there is any doubt about this. Careful consideration should also be given to the context, severity of the alleged behaviour, impact of the alleged behaviour on others, risk to others, and whether there are any patterns of behaviour occurring.

Where other children have been identified as witnesses to alleged abuse or violence, consideration should also be given by the DSL to whether there might be any risks to those children.

12. Information sharing, data protection and record keeping

When responding to concern(s) or allegation(s) of child-on-child abuse, the school will:

(i)   always consider carefully, in consultation with other relevant agencies, how to share information about the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the student(s) affected, their parents, staff, and other students and individuals,

(ii)   record the information that is necessary for the school and other relevant agencies (where they are involved) to respond to the concern(s) or allegation(s) and safeguard everyone involved,

(iii) act in accordance with its safeguarding and data protection duties, including those set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018) and the HM Government Advice on Information Sharing (updated in July 2018).

13. Consequences

Any consequences must be balanced against any police investigations, the child's/children's own potential unmet needs, and any action or intervention planned regarding safeguarding concerns. Before deciding on appropriate action, the school will always consider its duty to safeguard all children in its care from harm; the underlying reasons for a child's behaviour; any unmet needs, or harm or abuse suffered by the child; the risk that the child may pose to other children; and the severity of the child-on-child abuse and the causes of it.

The school will, where appropriate, consider using managed moves or suspensions as a response, and not as an intervention, recognising that even if this is ultimately deemed to be necessary, some of the measures referred to in this policy may still be required.

For example, action may still need to be taken by the school in relation to other students who have been involved with and/or affected by child-on-child abuse. Exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and only where necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the other children in the school.

14. Review and action planning

The school's response to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse should be part of on-going proactive work by the school to embed best practice and in taking a whole-school community Contextual Safeguarding approach to such abuse.

This response could also include the school asking itself a series of questions about the context in which an incident of child-on-child abuse occurred in the school, the local community in which the school is based, and the wider physical and online environment – such as:

(i)   What protective factors and influences exist within the school and how can the school bolster these?

(ii)   How (if at all) did the school's physical environment or the students' routes to and from the school contribute to the abuse, and how can the school address this going forwards

(iii)   How (if at all) did the online environment contribute to the abuse, and how can the school address this going forwards?

(iv)   Did wider gender norms, equality issues, and/or societal attitudes contribute to the abuse?

(v)   Does the abuse indicate a need for staff training on, for example, underlying attitudes or the handling of particular types of abuse?

(vi)   How have similar cases been managed in the past and what effect has this had?

(vii)   Does the case identify areas for development in the way in which the school works with children to raise their awareness of and/or prevent child-on-child abuse, including by way of the school's PSHRE curriculum and lessons that address underlying attitudes or behaviour such as gender and equalities work, respect, boundaries, consent, children's rights and critical thinking and/or avoiding victim-blaming narratives?

(viii) Are there any lessons to be learnt about the way in which the school engages with parents to address child-on-child abuse issues?

(ix)   Are there underlying issues that affect other schools in the area and is there a need for a multi-agency response?

(x)   Does this case highlight a need to work with certain children to build their confidence, and teach them how to identify and manage abusive behaviour?

(xi)   Were there opportunities to intervene earlier or differently?
Answers to these questions can be developed into an action plan that is reviewed on a regular basis by the school's leadership and the DSL.