

Sacred Heart Catholic College, Crosby

Information & advice relating to Sexual Harassment



September 2021



Purpose of this booklet: Schools are frequently a key site where sexist attitudes and behaviours are fostered and experienced. We believe that understanding and tackling sexism in our school is critical to ensuring that our students of both sexes can learn and live as equals – and make our contribution to ending sex inequality in society.

Recent media coverage has highlighted the problem of sexual harassment and abuse which is a long-standing threat to the well-being of students in all schools. We are aware that this is not an isolated problem and that our own students in the past will have experienced this, our current students are likely to be experiencing this and our future students may become exposed to this. This booklet acknowledges that this is a problem shared by our school and that we must find ways of changing the behaviour of people.

Our commitment: Governors and staff at Sacred Heart are committed to their role in gaining a better understanding of this problem and in learning new ways to ensure the safeguarding needs of young people are met. We know that we have a very important responsibility in teaching young people about sexual consent and respect for others.

- We are constantly seeking ways to improve our PSHCE programme for Relationships and Sex Education (RSE); in September 2021, we launch a new PSHCE curriculum which has a stepped approach to RSE from Yr7 through to Yr11.
- We are revising our mobile phone and social media policy.
- Governors and appointed staff take their responsibilities as designated safeguarding officers very seriously and give regular updated advice to all staff about their responsibilities.

Media Coverage: Despite almost all schools universally having similarly robust provision, this problem, highlighted by the 'Everyone's Invited' website has still developed into epidemic proportions. Coverage of other high-profile cases where sexual exploitation, the abuse of power, historic abuse of young people by religious orders illustrate that this is a problem that

cannot be hidden and needs facing down with improved education and tighter controls. A recent statement from the Secretary of State for Education noted this:

“Sexual abuse in any form is completely unacceptable. No young person should feel that this is a normal part of their daily lives – schools are places of safety, not harmful behaviours that are tolerated instead of tackled. Ofsted’s review has rightly highlighted where we can take specific and urgent action to address sexual abuse in education. But there are wider societal influences at play, meaning schools and colleges cannot be expected to tackle these issues alone. By reflecting young people’s real experiences in what they are taught, I hope more people feel able to speak up where something isn’t right and call out activity that might previously have been written off as ‘normal’.”

The report went on to say that teachers and school leaders will be better supported to recognise sexual harassment and abuse and teach confidently about issues of consent, online pornography, and healthy relationships. Also, we will be encouraged to dedicate inset day time to help train our staff on how to deal with sexual abuse and harassment among pupils and how to deliver the Government’s new compulsory Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum (RSHE).

The DfE says that strengthened safeguarding guidance will be introduced to boost teacher confidence in identifying and responding to these issues, as well as supervision to dedicated members of school and college staff in up to 10 more local authorities, whose role it is to identify safeguarding concerns among pupils, with a specific focus on sexual abuse.

Ofsted: In a very recently published thematic review, several recommendations were made for school and college leaders:

- School and college leaders should create a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated, and where they identify issues and intervene early to better protect children and young people.
- In order to do this, they should assume that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are happening in their setting, even when there are no specific reports, and put in place a whole-school approach to address them. This should include:
 - a) a carefully sequenced RSHE curriculum, based on the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) statutory guidance, that specifically includes sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online. This should include time for open discussion of topics that children and young people tell us they find particularly difficult, such as consent and the sending of ‘nudes’
 - b) high-quality training for teachers delivering RSHE
 - c) routine record-keeping and analysis of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, to identify patterns and intervene early to prevent abuse
 - d) a behavioural approach, including sanctions when appropriate, to reinforce a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated
 - e) working closely with LSPs in the area where the school or college is located so they are aware of the range of support available to children and young people who are victims or who perpetrate harmful sexual behaviour
 - f) support for designated safeguarding leads (DSLs), such as protected time in timetables to engage with LSPs

- g) training to ensure that all staff (and governors, where relevant) are able to:
- better understand the definitions of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online sexual abuse
 - identify early signs of peer-on-peer sexual abuse
 - consistently uphold standards in their responses to sexual harassment and online sexual abuse

What is meant by sexual harassment? For the purpose of this policy, when referring to sexual harassment we mean ‘unwanted conduct of a sexual nature’ that can occur online and offline. When we reference sexual harassment, we do so in the context of child-on-child sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is likely to: violate a child’s dignity, and/or make them feel intimidated, degraded, or humiliated and/or create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment.

Whilst not intended to be an exhaustive list, sexual harassment can include:

- sexual comments, such as: telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks about clothes and appearance, and calling someone sexualised names
- sexual “jokes” or taunting
- physical behaviour, such as: deliberately brushing against someone, interfering with someone’s clothes and displaying pictures, photos, or drawings of a sexual nature; and
- online sexual harassment, which might include: non-consensual sharing of sexual images and videos and sharing sexual images and videos (both often referred to as sexting); inappropriate sexual comments on social media; exploitation; coercion and threats. Online sexual harassment may be standalone, or part of a wider pattern of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence.

How do we respond to reports of sexual harassment? Reports of sexual harassment are likely to be complex and require difficult professional decisions to be made, often quickly and under pressure. Guidance from the DFE is clear that it does not attempt to provide (nor would it be possible to provide) detailed advice on what we should do in any or every particular case; it provides effective safeguarding practice and principles for us to consider in our decision-making process. Ultimately, all decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. The Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) will take the leading role and will use their professional judgement, supported by other agencies, such as children’s social care and the police as required.

Some situations are statutorily clear:

- a child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity
- the age of consent is 16
- sexual intercourse without consent is rape

rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault are defined in law; and creating and sharing sexual photos and videos of under-18s is illegal (often referred to as sexting). This includes children making and sharing sexual images and videos of themselves.

Our basic safeguarding principle is: if a child has been harmed, is in immediate danger, or is at risk of harm a referral should be made to children’s social care. A social worker should respond to the referrer within one working day to explain what action they will be taking. We

will usually inform parents that we are making a referral to children's social care; however, this too is on a case-by-case basis. It may be that we have assessed the situation and believe that a referral is needed without parental knowledge to safeguard students involved.

Once a referral is processed children's social care will consider if early help, section 17 and/or 47 statutory assessments are appropriate (see Keeping Children Safe in Education on our policies page for an explanation of this process). We will support in an early help assessment, child protection enquiry, strategy discussion and child protection conference.

Responding to reports of sexual harassment online: We are aware that incidents sexual harassment that occur online (either in isolation or in connection to offline incidents) can introduce a number of complex factors. These include the potential for the incident to take place across a number of social media platforms and services and for things to move from platform to platform online. It also includes the potential for the impact of the incident to extend further than our local community (e.g., for images or content to be shared around neighbouring schools/colleges) and for a victim (or alleged perpetrator) to become marginalised and excluded by both online and offline communities. There is also the strong potential for repeat victimisation in the future if abusive content continues to exist somewhere online.

We will act in accordance with our Bullying policy if we are made aware that our students are using online platforms which in any way jeopardises the safety of other members of our school community.

What we do in school to educate our children against harmful sexual behaviours: We have a planned programme of evidence-based content delivered through the curriculum and assemblies. Our programme is developed to be age and stage of development appropriate, and tackles such issues as:

- healthy and respectful relationships, including information on consent
- what respectful behaviour looks like
- gender roles, stereotyping, equality
- body confidence and self-esteem
- prejudiced behaviour
- that sexual violence and sexual harassment is always wrong
- addressing cultures of sexual harassment.

Individual initiatives and one-off events to challenge sexism can make a real difference, but we know that comprehensive, long-term change requires a 'whole school approach'. This means that action to promote sex equality is guided by an over-arching framework and involves all members of the school community - including staff, students, parents and governors. By taking a whole school approach, we can work to ensure that girls and boys learn and live as equals.

We also invite organisations and speakers in to deliver information sessions to our students and parents. We have information regarding sexual assault and violence on the safeguarding pages of our website which we update regularly according to lessons learned. We ensure DSLs have appropriate and regularly updated training and all staff are trained to recognise signs of safety and harmful sexual behaviours.