

# Hawthorn Community Primary School



*'Cultivating the futures of our children'*

## **Child on Child Abuse Policy and Procedure**

**September 2022**

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## **1 Introduction**

Hawthorn Community Primary School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children. We recognise that children may face different forms of abuse and we work together to protect children from harm. As well as being abused by adults, children can be abused by other children. This is known as 'child-on-child abuse' or 'peer-on-peer abuse'. The school is committed to preventing child-on-child abuse and will protect children that may be suffering, or at risk of suffering harm perpetrated by another child. We appreciate that often there are barriers to reporting child on child abuse and as such, we understand that even if there are no reports it does not mean it is not happening. We maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here' and act in the best interests of the child at all times.

### **1.1 Aims:**

- ensure that the school, including all of those working on behalf of the school, follow all statutory guidance relating to child-on-child abuse;
- provide stakeholders with information about Hawthorn Primary School works to prevent child-on-child abuse;
- provide stakeholders with information about how Hawthorn Primary School responds to concerns, disclosures and/or allegations relating to child-on-child abuse; and to
- provide stakeholders with information about how the school continues to support victims of child-on-child abuse following the conclusion of an investigation.

### **1.2 Definitions:**

- 'Staff' or 'members of staff' refers to all teaching, non-teaching, supply, peripatetic contract staff, governors, volunteers and trustees working in or on behalf of the school
- Child/children refers to any young person under the age of 18.
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as; protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and acting to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

Child-on-child abuse refers to any scenario where a child under the age of 18 abuses another child under the age of 18. It can take place online or offline. These children involved do not have to be the same age and the perpetrator may be older or younger than the victim. All children are capable of abusing their peers and we recognise that girls are more likely to be the victims of child on child abuse and boys' perpetrators. All child on child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously. Child-on-child abuse is most likely to include (but is not limited to):

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying);
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers;

- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse);
- sexual violence, such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence);
- sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse;
- 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;
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nude images and or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery);
- up-skirting, 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 (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).

### **1.3 This policy should be read in conjunction with:**

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Behaviour for Learning Policy

This policy adheres to all statutory guidance and legislation including:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)
- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Education Act 2002
- The Human Rights Act 1998

## **2 Roles and Responsibilities**

### **2.1 The Headteacher will:**

- Uphold all responsibilities under the school safeguarding and child protection policy, Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021) and any other relevant safeguarding statutory guidance and legislation.
- Ensure that this policy and all other relevant policies are followed by all staff.
- Ensure that the school curriculum includes educational opportunities to minimise incidents of child-on-child abuse
- Ensure that the school site promotes positive behaviour and minimises the opportunity for child-on-child abuse.
- Safeguard children's wellbeing and maintain public trust in the teaching profession as part of their professional duties (Teaching Standards, 2012)

### **2.2 The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will:**

- Uphold all responsibilities under the schools Safeguarding and Child Protection policy, Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021) and any other relevant safeguarding statutory guidance and legislation.
- Undertake any training required to uphold their post and the responsibilities outlined in this policy.
- Act as a source of support, advice and expertise for all staff in relation to child-on-child abuse.
- Manage disclosures of and concerns about child-on-child abuse.
- Make referrals to MASH and the police as appropriate.
- Ensure that this policy is known, understood and used appropriately by all staff.
- Safeguard children's wellbeing and maintain public trust in the teaching profession as part of their professional duties (Teaching Standards, 2012)
- Our DSL team recognise that bullying and child on child abuse has overlapping characteristics. It is the role of the DSL team in school to examine incidents between children and decide as to which category the behaviour fits into and follow the relevant procedures. Many of the procedures overlap therefore both policies should be read side-by-side.

### **2.3 The role of all staff:**

- Uphold all responsibilities under the school's safeguarding and child protection policy, Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021) and any other relevant safeguarding statutory guidance and legislation.
- Make referrals to the Designated Safeguarding Lead in cases where they suspect cases of child-on-child abuse or become aware of cases of child-on-child abuse.
- Be aware that children can abuse other children and the forms this can take.
- Be clear as to the school policy and procedures on child-on-child abuse and the important role they have in preventing this type of abuse.
- Be aware that child-on-child abuse can happen in school, out of school or online.

- Know that even if there are no reports of child-on-child abuse, it doesn't mean it isn't happening.
- Understand that abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed off as 'banter,' 'having a laugh,' 'boys being boys' or 'part of growing up.'

### **3 School Strategies**

#### **3.1 Preventative Strategies**

We recognise that a crucial part of our safeguarding responsibility is to minimise the opportunity for child on child abuse to occur. In order to do this, and to establish a safe environment for all children, we:

- have a robust behaviour policy, which makes it clear that we have a zero-tolerance approach to any kind of child on child abuse;
- ensure staff understand what is meant by child on child abuse and the school policy on child on child abuse through regular training and updates;
- train staff thoroughly so that they challenge inappropriate behaviour (even if it appears to be relatively innocuous);
- train staff thoroughly so that they are confident to challenge inappropriate behaviours between peers, that are actually abusive in nature;
- never downplay certain behaviours, for example dismissing sexual harassment as “just banter”, “just having a laugh”, “part of growing up” or “boys being boys”, as this can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours, an unsafe environment for children and in worst case scenarios a culture that normalises abuse leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it; and
- recognise that sexual harassment and sexual violence, as well as other forms of child on child abuse, may be happening even if they are not reported.
- supervise children at all times
- develop a class charter which each class explains how they will follow the three school rules

#### **3.2 How we address child on child abuse within the curriculum and across the school**

Hawthorn Community Primary School addresses peer on peer abuse in an age appropriate manner, through PSHE and the Jigsaw scheme of work, and through online safety lessons. Children are also taught Protective Behaviours to enable them to understand unsafe feelings and secrets. Other agencies such as the NSPCC will be invited into school to reinforce these messages through workshops and assemblies.

We ensure that our systems for reporting all safeguarding concerns are well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible for children to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously. We ensure that children are aware of our safeguarding and child protection procedures, including how to raise concerns about child on child abuse, by talking to them about it in class, through phase assemblies and drawing their attention to the DSL posters throughout the school, showing photographs of staff who are there to keep them safe.

#### **3.3 Staff Training**

All staff are made aware that children can abuse other children, that this can happen online or in person, at school or outside of school. All staff will receive training so that they can confidently recognise the indicators and signs of child on child abuse in order to identify it and respond appropriately to reports. All staff will be made aware of the school's policy and procedures with regards to child on child abuse and the crucial role that they play in preventing it and responding to it as necessary. It will be

made clear that addressing inappropriate behaviour (even if it appears to be relatively innocuous) can be an important intervention that helps prevent problematic, abusive and/or violent behaviour in the future. Staff also receive training on how to record safeguarding concerns on CPOMS.

### **3.4 Additional vulnerabilities**

We recognise that some children may be more vulnerable to child on child abuse than others. For example, children who have already experienced abuse, those that have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), children living in care and children who are LGBTQ+, may be more likely to face child on child abuse than other children. We recognise that girls are more likely to be the victims of child on child abuse than boys. Some children may face additional barriers to telling anyone about abuse because of their vulnerability, disability, sex, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation. We work to protect children with additional vulnerabilities by ensuring staff have been trained to understand that children with additional vulnerabilities may be less likely to talk about abuse. In school, we have worry boxes so that children can leave a message if they don't want to talk. We also have posters with pictures of trusted adults (DSLs) which support children in knowing who they can talk to. All children are taught Protective Behaviours in school, where they learn about safe and unsafe secrets and we work with our children to build their network of support. We have a Senco and Family Support Worker who are able to complete 1:1 work with vulnerable children, using a variety of therapeutic techniques and referring to external agencies where necessary.



## **4. Dealing with suspected or reported child on child abuse**

Our starting point regarding any report of child on child sexual harassment or violence should always be that there is a zero-tolerance approach, it is never acceptable and it will not be tolerated. It is especially important not to pass off any sexual violence or sexual harassment 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.

### **4.1 Methods of reporting by children**

In school, pupils can:

- Speak to a trusted adult
- Leave a note in a worry box
- Draw/write a disclosure
- Express a disclosure through sand/puppet play.

Outside of school, children can:

- Email their class teacher using Class DoJo
- Contact ChildLine
- Contact the NSPCC

### **4.2 Action taken by staff**

If a young person witnesses or experiences any form of child on child abuse, we strongly encourage them to speak to a trusted member of staff, parent or trusted adult about it. ***If a child discloses to an adult, the adult should contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead without delay to report the issue.*** They then must follow this up with a written record, in line with our safeguarding and child protection policy. Upon receiving a concern, report or disclosure of abuse, the DSL will decide on any further action that needs to take place.

All victims will be taken seriously, regardless of how long it has taken them to come forward and they will be supported and kept safe. Abuse that occurs online or outside of the school will be treated equally seriously. A victim will never be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting child on child abuse, including sexual violence or sexual harassment. A victim will never be made to feel ashamed for making a report or have their experience minimised.

### **4.3 The DSL will always consider the following:**

- the wishes of the victim in terms of how they want to proceed. The victims will be given as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed and any support that will be offered;
- the nature of the alleged incident (s), including: the level of coercion or threat, whether a crime may have been committed and consideration of harmful sexual behaviour;
- both the chronological and developmental ages of the children involved;

- any power imbalance between the children, including consideration of the age of children and whether children have special educational needs or disabilities.
- the impact on the victim;
- if there are any ongoing risks to the victim, other children or staff.

#### **4.4 Action taken by the DSL**

We will adhere to Keeping Children Safe in Education (2022) when responding to incidents of child on child abuse. The school takes child on child abuse seriously and will respond to all concerns or disclosures of child on child abuse, including those that have occurred outside of school and online, immediately.

Upon receiving a concern, report or disclosure of abuse, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will decide what further action is necessary. An investigation will usually take the following format:

Step 1: After a reported incident, the school will ensure the victim is safeguarded from any further events. This is done through communication between relevant members of staff and phase teams and decisions made around unsupervised times of day, in class seating etc by the DSL team.

Step 2: The child will be spoken to by a DSL to find out and record the following information:

- What has happened?
- How often has it happened?
- Who was involved?
- Where it happened?
- Who saw what happened?
- What has he or she done about it already?

Any witnesses will also be spoken to and their statement recorded.

Step 3: The alleged abuser should be spoken to by a DSL and details recorded. At this stage it must be determined if child on child abuse has occurred, using the definition to support DSL's in making this judgement.

Step 4: After all evidence has been taken into consideration, the staff member involved should decide on further action. This could include one or more of the following:

- undertake a risk assessment to ascertain steps necessary to safeguard the victim, alleged perpetrator, adults and other children.
- decide to manage the concern internally.
- organise a meeting with relevant staff and agencies to assess risk and agree a safety plan.
- refer the victim and/or perpetrator to local services for Early Help.
- refer the case to Children's Services via MASH.
- liaise with social workers working with children involved, if relevant.
- make a referral to the police.

Step 5: It is also important that the situation is monitored on a weekly basis by SLT. This may involve a 'check in' with both the victim and bully at least on a weekly basis. Positive progress should be acknowledged and shared with parents.

## **5 Next Steps**

### **5.1 Supporting the victim:**

- Hawthorn Primary School recognises that child on child abuse has a significant impact on young people and victims are likely to need ongoing support. Appropriate support will be put in place for victims of child on child abuse whilst investigations are taking place and following the initial report.
- Support will continue for as long as it is needed and will be reviewed regularly to ensure the victim is receiving appropriate care.
- The school will do all it can to maintain the victim's normal routine and protect them from further bullying and/or harassment as a result of their disclosure. This may involve additional wellbeing support from Miss Brown or support from a member of their phase team.
- Additional arrangements may be made in the short term for lunch and play times. Support from external professionals may be sought.
- If the victim moves to a different setting, the DSL will ensure all relevant information is passed to the new setting so support can continue.

### **5.2 Supporting the alleged perpetrator**

- The school has a responsibility to ensure that an alleged perpetrator continues to receive a suitable education. This may be through their normal class teaching, some time educated in another class or with additional wellbeing support. Advice from external agencies will be sought where appropriate.
- We recognise that child on child abuse may be perpetrated by children that suffer abuse themselves. The school will continue to safeguard the alleged perpetrator and provide them with support.
- A plan to reduce the risk posed by the alleged perpetrator will be put in place as part of the risk assessment made following the alleged abuse.
- If the alleged perpetrator moves to another setting, the DSL will share information as necessary to safeguard the individual and other children at the new setting.

The perpetrator may also be given a sanction in line with the schools Behaviour for Learning policy if deemed appropriate.

### **5.3 Informing parents**

- Parent/s and carer/s will be informed of incidents unless sharing information puts a child at greater risk of harm. This may be initially to acknowledge the incident and inform them that an investigation is taking place, with the outcome shared at a later, timely, stage.

- Careful consideration will be given in cases where the child wishes to withhold information from their parent/s and carer/s and the school will operate within the law and relevant guidance at all times.
- Children will always be encouraged to speak to parent/s and carer/s about child on child abuse.

#### **5.4 Recording and Reporting**

Members of school staff will follow the guidelines outlined in the safeguarding and child protection policy for reporting incidents of child on child abuse. Records will be factual and recorded on CPOMS. Urgent concerns are taken straight to a DSL without delay and followed up with a record on CPOMS. We always review our reporting and school systems in light of a disclosure and consider what we could learn from it and what we could do differently next time.

#### **6 Whole school response**

We will keep detailed records of any incidents of child on child abuse and will look out for potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour. Where a pattern is identified, we will take appropriate action. Consideration will be given to whether there are wider cultural issues that enabled the inappropriate behaviour to occur and in order to minimise it happening again, we may:

- Dedicate more teaching time to a particular issue or topic;
- Deliver additional staff training
- Seek advice from specialist agencies.