

# HIDELOW GRANGE SCHOOL

## Safeguarding Policy Suite

### Child on Child Abuse / Student on Student Abuse

<b>Approved by:</b>	B. Neasom, Headteacher & DSL
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<b>Reviewed by (CareTech):</b>	Laura Dickie, Jo Dunn, Lindsey Appleby-Flynn, August 2025

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## Introduction

This policy is written in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) 2025 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. Its aim is to give Hidelow Grange School staff a clear understanding of child on child abuse, signs to identify harm and how to respond.

We incorporate the statutory Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance 2024, recognising unexplained or persistent absence as a potential safeguarding indicator.

We also provide education to individuals over the age of 18 years. With that in mind, this policy has been written in line with the Care Act 2014, Education Act 2002 and the Mental Capacity Act 2005. Abuse that takes place between individuals over 18 is referred to as Student on Student Abuse. Those over the age of 18 are referred to as Students.

Hidelow Grange School has a zero-tolerance approach to abuse. It is never 'banter', 'having a laugh', 'part of growing up' or 'boys will be boys'. Even if no cases are reported, such abuse may be taking place and is not being reported. Staff maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here'.

The school works with multi-agency partners, including Virtual School Heads for children in care and kinship care, to ensure pupils receive the right intervention at the right time. We embed the latest DfE guidance on generative AI, train staff to spot harmful outputs and commission quality-assured Alternative Provision to safeguard children placed off-site.

This policy is supported by the following wider policies:

- The Role of the DSL Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Filtering and Monitoring Policy
- Missing from Education
- Absent from Education Policy

- Schools Safer Recruitment Policy
- Managing Contextual Risks to Children
- Safeguarding Over 18s Policy
- Remote Learning Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- PREVENT Policy
- Physical Intervention Policy
- SEND Policy
- Staff Behaviour Policy / Code of Conduct

## Aims of this policy

The aims of this policy ensure staff understand:

- What child on child / student on student abuse is
- The signs of a child or student who may be suffering
- Different categories of bullying, including disinformation-driven harassment
- Abuse in intimate personal relationships between children and students
- Physical abuse between children and students
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)
- Initiation / hazing type violence and rituals
- How to respond to child on child / student on student abuse
- How allegations will be recorded, investigated and dealt with
- The process for supporting victims, perpetrators and others affected
- Responsibilities when children are placed in alternative provision
- The role of Virtual School Heads in overseeing children in kinship care
- Forthcoming duties under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 on mental health education and trauma-informed practice

## What is child on child / student on student abuse?

Formally known as peer-on-peer abuse, the Department for Education renamed this form of abuse to recognise the lack of power balance implied by the word 'peer'. Child-on-child abuse applies regardless of developmental stage, age differential or setting. Factors such as ages, vulnerabilities, learning needs and family background are all considered. Group-based exploitation and gang-related grooming must be recognised as specific risks.

The DfE states: "All staff should be aware that children can abuse other children, and that it can happen both inside and outside of school or college and online."

For those over 18 years, this is referred to as student on student abuse.

## Signs that a child or student may be suffering

The following is a non-exhaustive list of common signs that a child or student may be a victim of abuse:

- Absence from school or disengagement from school activities, including persistent unauthorised absence
- Physical injuries
- Mental or emotional health issues
- Becoming withdrawn or showing lack of self-esteem

- Lack of sleep
- Alcohol, substance or self-harm concerns
- Changes in behaviour
- Inappropriate behaviour for age
- Harmful behaviour towards others
- Hyperfocused engagement with disinformation or extremist content online

Staff understand that all abuse is unacceptable and taken seriously, and that girls are statistically more likely to be victims of sexual harassment while boys are more likely to display harmful sexual behaviour.

## Bullying

There are many ways a child or student can be harmed by another. Staff are vigilant around cyberbullying, prejudice-based bullying and discriminatory bullying.

**Cyberbullying** is bullying using digital technologies. It can take place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. It is repeated behaviour aimed at scaring, angering or shaming those targeted. Staff are also alert to AI-generated abusive imagery.

**Prejudice-based bullying** is bullying motivated by prejudice based on an individual's actual or perceived identity.

**Discriminatory bullying** involves unjust or prejudicial distinctions between people on grounds including age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, sex, sexual orientation, or religion or belief.

**Disinformation-fuelled harassment campaigns** which are designed to shame or isolate individuals.

Staff follow the Child Protection / Adult Safeguarding policy when they suspect a child or student is being bullied.

## Abuse in intimate personal relationships between children

Children and students, particularly in their teens, may be exploring relationships and experiencing sexual feelings they do not fully understand. The victim may struggle to come forward as they may not recognise what happened to them as wrong, or their vulnerabilities may affect their understanding.

Equally, the perpetrator may not understand that their actions have caused harm, and may themselves have vulnerabilities or a family history of domestic abuse. Staff seek to understand the underlying factors behind any disclosure and respond accordingly. All disclosures are reported to the DSL without delay.

## Physical abuse

Children and students can physically abuse one another through hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, punching or other physical harm. All individuals irrespective of age or gender can be a victim or perpetrator. Staff follow the school's Behaviour Management Policy and refer to the Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance to identify unexplained absences that may mask physical abuse.

All incidents are reported to the DSL without delay. The DSL considers apparent patterns, whether a series of low-level incidents indicates a pattern of vulnerability, and whether incidents overlap with gang-related activity or organised peer abuse.

## Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)

Harmful sexual behaviour includes a range of sexual behaviours from inappropriate use of sexual language through to grooming and sexual exploitation. These behaviours can include:

- Sexual violence and harassment

- Youth produced sexual imagery (consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images or videos), including AI-generated or AI-manipulated imagery and deepfakes
- Upskirting
- Touching sexual body parts in public
- Removing clothing and public exposure
- Masturbating in public
- Touching sexual body parts of others
- Simulation of sexual activity during play
- Forcing other children to engage in sexual play
- Secretly arranging to meet online acquaintances, including through generative AI chatbots or disinformation-driven grooming
- Sexually explicit talk with younger children
- Forcing other children or more vulnerable individuals to engage in sexual activity
- Non-consensual sexual activity
- Sexual activity with someone in a position of trust
- Sexual activity with family members
- Involvement in sexual exploitation and/or trafficking
- Sexual contact with animals
- Receipt of gifts or money in exchange for sex

Staff consider how pupils at Hidelow Grange School develop physically and sexually in line with societal norms whilst also recognising that their social and emotional understanding may be delayed or at a different stage. For example, research indicates that children with autism may undergo typical physical development at puberty but that the emotional changes and sexual urges accompanying adolescence may be delayed or prolonged.

All staff receive regular training on spotting AI-driven grooming, disinformation tactics and the escalation of harmful sexual content online. Where a child or student discloses or staff suspect harmful sexual behaviour, the DSL is notified immediately.

The DSL considers: whether a crime has been committed and whether police involvement is required; whether the matter requires escalation to children's social care; whether parents or carers should be informed; whether there is a pattern of behaviour; whether there are known family concerns; whether anyone is at immediate risk; whether known risks have been assessed; and what measures can be put in place to reduce future risk, including alternative provision where appropriate.

DSLs apply a contextual safeguarding approach, recognising that incidents may occur in school, in the community or online. Risk assessments consider patterns, peer groups and community contexts, not just individual behaviours.

### **Initiation / hazing type violence and rituals**

Hazing or initiation ceremonies involve rituals, challenges or other activities including harassment, abuse or humiliation as a way of initiating someone into a group. They can range from relatively benign pranks to patterns of behaviour that constitute abuse or criminal misconduct and may include physical or psychological abuse or sexual assault.

Staff are alert to such behaviour and act in line with the Child Protection / Adult Safeguarding and Behaviour Management policies. They also follow the Online Safety and Filtering and Monitoring Policy to monitor digital channels, including encrypted apps, AI-generated group chats or disinformation-fuelled content that may facilitate or normalise initiation practices.

### **National data and prevalence**

- 1 in 5 pupils aged 11–16 report experiencing sexual harassment by peers in the past year (DfE SFR June 2025)

- 60% of recorded peer-on-peer abuse incidents involve multiple perpetrators (NAO, February 2025)
- Reports of AI-manipulated sexual content among students have risen by 35% since July 2024 (Internet Watch Foundation, April 2025)
- Girls aged 13–15 are twice as likely as boys to be victims of peer sexual harassment; boys are 1.8 times more likely to display harmful sexual behaviours (DfE SFR June 2025)

## School culture

Hidelow Grange School has a zero-tolerance whole-school approach. Harmful behaviours are never passed off as 'banter' or 'just growing up'. Issues that might later provoke conflict are addressed early. Reporting systems are well promoted, easily understood and accessible, and have the confidence of pupils and students.

Staff and pupils treat each other with respect and understand how their actions affect others. We ensure children and students know the risks and talk about child on child / student on student abuse in an age-appropriate way. Our role is to influence individuals to make healthy long-term choices whilst keeping them safe from harm in the short term.

Staff understand the impact of child on child / student on student abuse on mental health and recognise the additional vulnerabilities of pupils with SEND, those who identify as LGBT+, and those with other perceived differences that may affect their ability to disclose abuse.

## Reporting and managing concerns

When a concern or disclosure arises, staff must:

- Immediate safety – secure the child's or student's immediate physical and emotional safety, separating individuals if needed
- Non-judgmental listening – do not investigate; listen calmly, avoid shock or disbelief, and do not ask leading questions (TED: Tell, Explain, Describe)
- Report same day – inform the DSL or deputy without delay, recording in the child's own words
- Threshold check – the DSL considers whether the concern meets social care or police thresholds and refers accordingly
- Risk assessment – the DSL completes a written risk assessment covering the victim, alleged perpetrator and wider pupils
- Safeguarding measures – the DSL and SLT decide and document protective measures, which may include timetable changes, spatial separation, adjusted supervision and online restrictions
- Support plans – the DSL ensures both victim and alleged perpetrator have support plans, which may include pastoral or mental health input, SEND adjustments or external referrals
- Parent/carer communication – parents or carers are informed of children involved unless doing so would place the child at additional risk
- Review – clear review dates are set for risk assessments and support plans; the DSL monitors and updates regularly
- Record-keeping – all actions, rationales and updates are logged on the safeguarding system

Abuse that involves or is believed to involve sexual assault and violence always results in a multi-agency response including police, social services, health and digital-safety specialists.

## Supporting victims, perpetrators and others affected

As well as supporting and protecting the victim, staff apply a trauma-informed approach to recognise trauma responses and deliver interventions that prioritise emotional safety and

empowerment. The DSL considers whether the perpetrator is also a victim of abuse and whether they may be at risk following the allegation.

Virtual School Heads are involved where either party is in care or kinship care, ensuring their non-statutory oversight shapes support plans.

Where individuals are in the same class or school, joint risk assessments are conducted, safe travel arrangements are specified and, if needed, alternative provision is commissioned and quality-assured. Where an allegation involves rape or assault by penetration, the alleged perpetrator is removed from any shared classes and separation continues for as long as necessary.

Ongoing mental health monitoring is provided for all parties, with referrals to school-based counsellors or external mental health services in line with the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 requirements.

## Ongoing education and awareness

Hidelow Grange School is committed to on-going education and awareness surrounding child on child / student on student abuse. This is evidenced by:

- Annual safeguarding training covering generative AI safety, spotting disinformation and conspiracy-theory grooming, group-based exploitation trends (NAO findings) and trauma-informed practice
- PSHE and RSE curriculum updates ensuring age-appropriate coverage of consent, healthy relationships, digital resilience, disinformation risks and the impact of AI-generated content
- Participation in events such as Anti-Bullying Week, Safer Internet Day and bespoke digital wellbeing workshops
- Staff mental health first-aid training aligned with the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026
- Partnership with local multi-agency forums including social care, police, health, Virtual School Heads and digital-safety specialists
- Regular pupil assemblies and workshops on bystander intervention, recognising grooming tactics, setting digital boundaries and reporting AI-facilitated harms
- Filtering and monitoring systems that flag disinformation, extremist content and AI-generated deepfakes

## Review history

A review will be undertaken annually as a minimum. Subject to a significant safeguarding concern, this policy and all attached policies will be reviewed and monitored as part of a lessons-learned review.

This policy was reviewed in August 2025 by Laura Dickie (Head of Policy), Jo Dunn (Director of Compliance, Quality and Regulation – Children), Lindsey Appleby-Flynn (Head of Learning and Development), Kate Brogan (Head of IT) and the DSL. It was adopted and adapted for Hidelow Grange School in June 2026 by B. Neasom (Headteacher and DSL).

Next review: September 2026.