High Grange

Adaptive thinking, Communication, Emotional wellbeing, Independence

Promoting Wellbeing & Safety		
Child On Child Abuse		
Last Update: November **2025**	Responsible: **Principal**	Page: **1 of 22**

This policy promotes ACE because;	
	This policy supports High Grange School's ACE ethos by strengthening adaptive thinking, communication and emotional wellbeing. Pupils are supported to understand behaviour, express concerns safely and develop problem-solving skills. Through trauma-informed communication, low-arousal approaches and trusted relationships, pupils feel secure, respected and able to form healthy boundaries, promoting safety and positive peer interactions.

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1. Introduction

High Grange School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children. We recognise that children can abuse other children in and out of school and online. We take all concerns seriously, will never downplay abuse as "banter" or "part of growing up", and will respond in a child-centred, trauma-informed, proportionate way. This policy should be read alongside our Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy, Behaviour Policy, Online Safety/Acceptable Use Policies, Anti-Bullying Policy, and Exclusions Policy, and is consistent with **Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2025**.

High Grange School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every pupil. We recognise that within a specialist SEND setting, particularly one supporting autistic children and young people, pupils may experience the world differently and may have differences in

communication, social understanding, emotional regulation, and sensory processing. These differences can sometimes contribute to misunderstandings or behaviours that could cause harm to other pupils.

We are clear that abuse between children is never acceptable and will never be dismissed as part of growing up or as a result of a child's diagnosis.

We adopt a whole-school preventative and trauma-informed approach that places the wellbeing, dignity and voice of every pupil at the centre of all decisions. This policy supports our safeguarding procedures and aligns with current safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 (KCSIE 2025).

Our commitment will be achieved by:

- Creating a school culture based on mutual respect, emotional safety, predictability and belonging, recognising that some autistic pupils may need explicit teaching, visuals and modelling to understand personal boundaries and social interactions.

- Teaching pupils, using accessible and individualised approaches (visual supports, social stories, role-play), about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, consent, personal space, appropriate touch and safe relationships.

- Identifying pupils who may be more vulnerable as a result of their SEND needs and ensuring proactive individual support plans, safeguarding plans, and risk assessments are in place where required.

- Ensuring the governance, Principal, headteacher, DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead), and all staff understand their responsibilities under safeguarding law and KCSIE 2025, remain vigilant to signs of child-on-child abuse — including subtle changes in behaviour or communication — and know how to report concerns immediately to the DSL.

- Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are clear, consistent, accessible and communicated in a way that is understood by staff, parents/carers and pupils (including through visual supports, simple language, communication aids or alternative formats).

"Child-on-child abuse" is defined, for this policy, as any form of abuse inflicted by one child or a group of children, i.e. individuals under the age of 18, against another child or group of children. This policy covers child-on-child abuse both inside and outside of

"Harmful sexual behaviour" is defined as any sexual behaviour which:

- Does not observe and respect any individuals on the receiving end of the behaviour, e.g. touching someone without their consent.
- Is inappropriate for the age or stage of development of the pupil.
- Is problematic, abusive or violent.
- May cause developmental damage.

This policy will use the following terms to describe pupils involved in child-on-child abuse:

- **Victim(s)** – the individual(s) against whom the abuse has, or has allegedly, been inflicted.
- **Perpetrator(s)** – the individual(s) exhibiting abusive behaviour against their peers.
- **Alleged perpetrator(s)** – individual(s) against whom a report of abusive behaviour has been made, where guilt has not yet been ascertained.

Please note: The use of the word 'alleged' does not mean that the pupil in question is not guilty of child-on-child abuse, that the school does not believe the allegation, or that the allegation will not be taken seriously. Staff will remember that the school has a legal duty of care to all perpetrators and alleged perpetrators who are pupils at the school, including a requirement to ensure they can access their education. Staff will also keep in mind that, in some cases, the abusive behaviour will

have been harmful to the perpetrator as well. Victims will be reassured that use of the term 'alleged perpetrator' is not an attempt to discredit their allegation.

Staff will also be conscious of the fact that not everyone who has been subjected to abuse considers themselves a victim or would want to be described this way. Staff will be prepared to use any term that the individual child is most comfortable with. Staff will think very carefully about terminology when speaking in front of pupils, and the use of appropriate terminology will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

2. Context and Definition

At High Grange School, we acknowledge that some of our pupils may experience the world differently due to communication differences, sensory needs, difficulties interpreting social cues, or challenges understanding personal boundaries. However, autism is never an excuse for behaviour that harms another person. Our role is to teach, model and support safe, respectful and appropriate behaviour.

Staff understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviour between pupils immediately, even when the behaviour may appear low-level. Behaviours such as teasing, sexualised comments, inappropriate touching, or "banter" can be minimised or misunderstood, especially within a neurodiverse environment. Dismissing these behaviours as:

- "Just banter"

- "He/she doesn't understand social rules"

- "They're just having a laugh"

- "Boys will be boys"

- "It's part of autism"

creates an unsafe culture where harmful behaviour is normalised and pupils may not feel able to speak up.

Where pupils struggle to understand social expectations, or have difficulty using safe/appropriate verbal or physical behaviour, they will be identified and supported, including by our in-house Speech and Language Therapist, *Marie Wilson*, and other members of the therapeutic and pastoral team.

Definition of Child-on-Child Abuse

Child-on-child abuse is when one child (or group of children) harms another physically, sexually, emotionally, or through coercive behaviour. Abuse may be intentional or unintentional, and may stem from misunderstanding, social communication difficulties, or dysregulation. Harmful behaviour must still be taken seriously and addressed.

All High Grange School staff are expected to maintain the attitude of "it could happen here." If staff are concerned about the welfare of a pupil, they must act in the child's best interests and follow safeguarding procedures without delay.

Child-on-Child Abuse Can Include (but is not limited to):

- **Bullying**, including online or through messaging platforms

- **Physical aggression** (hitting, kicking, biting, pinching, hair-pulling, scratching or any form of physical harm)

- **Sexual harassment** (verbal or physical, including unwanted touching or inappropriate comments)

- **Sexual violence**

- **Sharing of inappropriate or sexual images** (sexting/youth-produced sexual imagery)

- **Coercive, controlling or manipulative behaviours**

- **Initiation/hazing behaviours** or encouraging others to participate in risky, humiliating or unsafe actions

This abuse may be linked to:

- Differences in communication style or misunderstanding of social rules

- Sensory overload or emotional dysregulation

- Targeting pupils due to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or learning need

- Peer pressure or copying behaviours without understanding consequences

Children who harm others may also have additional or complex needs such as:

- Exposure to trauma or domestic abuse

- Emotional or social regulation difficulties

- Anxiety linked to transitions or change

- Low self-esteem or past experiences of being bullied

- Difficulties with relationships or attachment

These factors help us understand why a behaviour has happened, but do not remove accountability or negate the impact on the child who has been harmed.

Our Approach

- The priority is always safety, including stopping any harmful or unsafe behaviour immediately.

- Physical harm must be addressed urgently, but we recognise that emotional or verbal bullying can be equally or more damaging, particularly for autistic pupils who may struggle to process or express their feelings.

- Staff, together with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), will assess each situation individually, using this policy and appropriate safeguarding guidance to determine actions and support for every child involved.

We are committed to ensuring that every pupil at High Grange School feels safe, respected, understood, and heard.

3. Responsability

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE, latest statutory version) states:

All staff should be aware that children can abuse other children (often referred to as child-on-child abuse) and that it can occur both inside and outside of school, and online. Staff must understand and follow their school's policy and know the important role they play in preventing and responding to concerns.

KCSIE also makes clear that:

Governing bodies and proprietors must ensure that the child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse and explains how allegations will be managed, investigated and recorded.

Most importantly, KCSIE emphasises the need to listen to the child:

Schools must ensure that the voice, wishes and feelings of the child are considered when deciding what action to take and what support to provide. Systems must be in place for children to express their views and give feedback.

Responsibilities at High Grange School

Because we are a specialist school for autistic pupils, we recognise that:

- Some pupils may have difficulty identifying unsafe behaviour or expressing what has happened.
- Pupils may communicate distress through behaviour rather than words.
- Traditional methods of reporting concerns may not be accessible to all learners.

Therefore, it is our responsibility to ensure that every pupil can communicate safety concerns in a way that works for them.

All Staff Are Responsible For:

- Maintaining the mindset of "child-on-child abuse could happen here."
- Challenging inappropriate behaviours immediately and consistently, even if the behaviour may appear unintentional or linked to a pupil's autism.
- Reporting concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) without delay.
- Showing curiosity, not assumptions — behaviour may be a form of communication.

Autism may help explain behaviour, but **it does not remove responsibility for harm caused**.

Leadership, DSL and Governance Responsibilities

The Governing Body/Proprietor and Leadership Team must ensure that:

- Child-on-child abuse is explicitly addressed within the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.
- This separate Child-on-Child Abuse Policy recognises the specific needs of autistic learners and includes personalised, preventative approaches.

- Staff receive regular training that includes autism-specific risks, such as misunderstanding personal boundaries or difficulty recognising unsafe behaviour.

- Systems exist for pupils to express concerns in whichever communication method suits them best.

The **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** is responsible for:

- Leading on all concerns and reports of child-on-child abuse.

- Ensuring pupils involved receive appropriate emotional, therapeutic and safeguarding support.

- Overseeing and updating risk assessments and safety plans.

Our Commitment

At High Grange School, any form of abuse or harmful behaviour is dealt with:

- **Immediately**

- **Consistently**

- **With sensitivity**

- **About the emotional and mental wellbeing of every child involved**

We work to ensure pupils learn:

- What safe, respectful behaviour looks like

- How to report concerns in a way they can access

- That harmful behaviour is taken seriously, regardless of intent

Our approach is proactive, autism-informed, and centred on the best interests of the child.

4. Purpose of the Policy

Research, including work by *Farrer & Co (2023)*, shows that children who display harmful behaviours towards others are often vulnerable themselves. They may have experienced trauma, adversity, communication difficulties, safeguarding concerns, or a lack of understanding about boundaries before they harm a peer. This reinforces the need for a supportive, educational and safeguarding-led response, rather than a solely punitive one.

In a specialist setting such as High Grange School, social communication differences, sensory sensitivities and emotional regulation challenges, misunderstandings can occur. These challenges may contribute to behaviour that unintentionally impacts others.

Purpose

This policy aims to:

- Ensure that all forms of child-on-child abuse are recognised and taken seriously, whether intentional or unintentional.

- Provide staff with clear procedures for identifying, reporting, recording and responding to incidents.

- Create a consistent, trauma-informed and autism-aware approach that supports both the pupil who has been harmed and the pupil displaying harmful behaviour.

- Teach pupils what safe, respectful and appropriate interactions look like, using strategies accessible to autistic learners (visuals, modelling, social stories, structured teaching).

- Promote a whole-school culture where pupils feel emotionally safe, know how to report concerns and understand that adults will listen.

We aim to equip pupils with the emotional regulation, communication and social understanding needed to build positive, respectful relationships.

Supporting Policies

This Child-on-Child Abuse Policy should be read alongside the following High Grange School policies, which together ensure a comprehensive safeguarding approach:

- **Child Protection Policy**

- **Bullying Prevention Policy**

- **Behaviour Policy**

- **Physical Contact Policy**

- **Online Safety Policy**

- **Weapons Policy**

- **Relationships & Sex Education (RSE) Policy**

- **Attendance Policy**

These policies collectively support our commitment to preventing harm and promoting the safety and wellbeing of every autistic learner in our care.

5. Framework and Legislation

This policy is underpinned by the legal and statutory safeguarding framework that schools must follow. At High Grange School, we apply this guidance through the lens of a SEND and autism-specific environment, ensuring that safeguarding processes are accessible and adapted to meet the needs of pupils who may have communication differences, sensory regulation needs, or difficulties understanding risk.

This policy has due regard to the following legislation and statutory guidance:

Legislation:

- **Equality Act 2010** – protects pupils against discrimination, including disability-based discrimination; ensures reasonable adjustments are made for autistic pupils.

- **Human Rights Act 1998** – ensures every pupil's right to safety, dignity, and respect.

- **Sexual Offences Act 2003** – defines illegal sexual behaviours, including offences relevant to harmful sexual behaviour.

- **Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019** – makes upskirting a criminal offence.
- **UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)** and **Data Protection Act 2018** – guides how safeguarding information is stored, shared and kept confidential.

Statutory Guidance (DfE):

- **Working Together to Safeguard Children (2024)** – sets out the responsibilities of all agencies working to safeguard children.
- **Keeping Children Safe in Education** – sets out legal duties for school leaders, governors and staff, emphasising that *child-on-child abuse can happen anywhere* and must be responded to consistently and appropriately.

Related Policies at High Grange School

This Child-on-Child Abuse Policy should be read alongside the following school policies, which form our wider safeguarding framework:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Youth Produced Sexual Imagery (Sexting) Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Suspension and Exclusion Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Personal Electronic Devices Policy
- Cyber-Security Policy
- Children Missing from Education Policy
- Low-Level Safeguarding Concerns Policy

Because High Grange School supports autistic pupils:

- Safeguarding procedures are adapted to ensure accessibility (e.g., visual prompts, social stories, alternative communication methods).
- Staff are trained to recognise communication, sensory and emotional regulation differences that may affect disclosure.
- Responses to incidents prioritise emotional safety and education, not punishment alone.

Safeguarding laws apply equally to all pupils — but the way we support them must reflect their individual needs.

6. Preventative Strategies for Schools and Settings

Recognition

At High Grange School, our focus is to prevent child-on-child abuse through proactive strategies, not just respond when incidents occur. We recognise that abuse can happen in any school — including specialist SEND settings — regardless of the support systems in place. A lack of reported incidents does not mean abuse is not happening. For autistic pupils who may have communication differences, it is even more important that staff remain vigilant.

Staff analyse all behaviour-related data to identify patterns, triggers, and any areas around the school site that may feel less safe for pupils (e.g., corridors, unstructured times, transport). Autistic pupils may also communicate distress through behaviour rather than words; therefore, staff must adopt a curious, reflective approach, not an assumed one.

All staff receive regular training and CPD, with a focus on autism, social communication, understanding consent, and responding to child-on-child abuse. In line with **KCSIE**, mental health difficulties may be an indicator that a child is being harmed or is at risk, so staff monitor wellbeing closely and escalate concerns immediately.

School Culture and Zero-Tolerance Approach

High Grange School operates a zero-tolerance culture regarding abuse or harm between pupils. Sexual harassment, sexualised comments, inappropriate touching or "jokes" will never be dismissed as:

- "banter,"

- "They don't understand."

- "part of autism," or

- "boys being boys."

Normalising harmful behaviour creates a dangerous culture where pupils internalise abuse and stop seeking help. All staff are required to challenge inappropriate behaviour — whether online or face-to-face — and must record concerns factually before reporting to the DSL without delay.

Safe Environment + Positive Curriculum

To prevent abuse, we create an open, supportive environment where pupils feel safe to share worries. We embed this culture through our PSHE/SMSC/RSE curriculum, adapted using:

- visuals and communication aids,

- social stories,

- role-play and explicit teaching of personal space, consent and safe touch.

Because some autistic pupils may struggle to identify unsafe situations or name feelings, staff build trusted relationships through predictable routines, low-arousal communication and emotionally safe interactions.

We have clear, accessible systems for reporting concerns (Emotionally Available adults, I wish my teacher knew box, safeguarding email, key worker time). Online safety is reinforced through teaching pupils why age restrictions exist, how to report harmful content, and how to behave

respectfully online. Technology is a common factor in safeguarding; abuse can occur through messaging, social media, image sharing or group chats.

7. Abuse and Harmful Behaviour

High Grange School recognises that autistic pupils may communicate, interact and interpret social situations differently. Behaviour may be unintentional or the result of misunderstanding boundaries, but the impact on the pupil experiencing harm is the priority. We respond in a supportive and restorative way, ensuring pupils are educated and safeguarded.

Child-on-child abuse can take many forms. The following sections outline the types of abuse that may occur, how they may present in a SEND setting, and how we will respond.

Forms of Abuse and Harmful Behaviour

Bullying (Including Cyberbullying and Prejudice-Based Bullying)

Bullying is:

Behaviour that is repeated over time, that intentionally hurts someone physically or emotionally, and where there is an imbalance of power.

Autistic pupils may be especially vulnerable to bullying because they may:

- struggle to recognise unkindness or manipulation,
- interpret comments literally,
- be socially isolated,
- or mask distress.

Bullying can include:

- physical harm,
- intimidation,
- exclusion or social isolation,
- name-calling or mocking,
- copying/stereotyping autistic mannerisms to cause distress.

Bullying may be motivated by actual or perceived differences, including:

- special educational needs or disability,
- race, culture or faith,
- gender or sexuality,
- family circumstances (e.g., looked-after status, young carer).

Low-level behaviours such as teasing or offensive language are taken seriously because when ignored, they escalate. Staff challenge these behaviours immediately and report them to the DSL.

Online / Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying includes using:

- messaging apps,
- online games,
- social media (including group chats),
- image and video sharing platforms to harass, isolate, threaten or embarrass others.

Many autistic pupils prefer online communication and may:

- misunderstand intent or tone,
- overshare personal information,
- assume friendships are genuine,
- struggle to recognise dangers or manipulation.

Online abuse may include:

- sending unkind or threatening messages,
- sharing images without consent,
- excluding pupils from group chats,
- pressuring pupils to respond or engage.

The Malicious Communications Act 1988 and Communications Act 2003 make it a criminal offence to send threatening, indecent, or offensive electronic communications. If sexual images of anyone under 18 are shared (even consensually), this is a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Prejudice-Based or Discriminatory Bullying

(including Hate Incidents or Hate Crime)

This is bullying linked to prejudice about:

- disability or SEND (including autism),
- race or culture,
- gender or sexuality,
- family structure or socio-economic background.

In a SEND school, this may include:

- mocking someone's stimming,
- imitating communication differences,
- excluding someone due to sensory needs or anxiety.

Abuse in Intimate Personal Relationships (Teenage Relationship Abuse)

This involves patterns of controlling, threatening or violent behaviour between young people in a relationship (13–18 years). It may include:

- pressure, manipulation or coercion,

- threats (including online or via messages),

- emotional or verbal abuse,

- sexual pressure or harassment.

Some autistic young people may:

- struggle to recognise coercive control,

- misinterpret attention as friendship or affection,

- be targeted because of vulnerability.

Staff support pupils through explicit teaching of consent, safe relationships and personal autonomy.

Physical Abuse

Includes:

- hitting, kicking, biting, pushing, nipping, shaking,

- damaging a pupil's property to intimidate them.

Physical behaviours may be linked to sensory overload, emotional dysregulation or frustration — these factors help us understand behaviour, but do not minimise its impact. Support may include safety planning, risk assessment, therapy input or positive behaviour support.

Racism

Racist incidents include:

- name-calling,

- stereotyping,

- exclusion,

- physical aggression,

- online racist messaging.

This behaviour may be overt or subtle (microaggressions). Any racist behaviour is recorded and reported according to school safeguarding procedures and may constitute a hate incident or hate crime.

Initiation / Hazing

Initiation or hazing involves making someone perform humiliating, risky or degrading actions to join a group. Autistic pupils are at heightened risk because they may:

- copy others to fit in,

- misunderstand the risks,

- feel pressured to please peers.

Staff intervene immediately to prevent and challenge this behaviour.

Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

Sexual violence is defined in law (Sexual Offences Act 2003) as:

- Rape – non-consensual penetration with a penis
- Assault by penetration – penetration with any body part or object
- Sexual assault – non-consensual sexual touching
- Causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent

Key safeguarding principle:

A child under 13 cannot consent to any sexual activity. The legal age of consent is 16.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, and includes:

- sexualised comments or jokes,
- comments about someone's appearance,
- touching or invading personal space,
- pulling at clothing,
- sexual gestures or noises,
- displaying or sharing sexual images,
- upskirting (a criminal offence).

Autistic pupils may:

- misunderstand that harassment is sexual,
- not realise behaviour is inappropriate,
- or feel unable to report it due to communication barriers.

Staff challenge behaviour immediately and explain why it is not appropriate, using visuals, clear language and social stories where needed.

Online Sexual Harassment and Sharing Nudes (Consensual or Non-Consensual)

Also known as youth-produced sexual imagery, includes:

- sending or receiving sexual images,
- pressuring someone to send images,
- sharing images without consent.

Once an image is sent, the sender loses all control over it.

This behaviour is illegal under the **Sexual Offences Act 2003**, even if:

- both young people are under 18,
- both agree to send the images.

School will always inform the DSL. Police may be involved.

Autistic pupils may struggle to understand digital permanence ("it will exist forever"), so we explicitly teach:

- consent applies online,

- images cannot be taken back,

- how to report pressure or online harm.

Supporting Autistic Pupils

Because autistic pupils may not recognise harmful behaviour or know how to seek help, we:

- use visual communication tools to explain safe vs unsafe behaviours,

- use social stories to teach boundaries and consent,

- prioritise emotional safety and personalised regulation strategies,

- ensure every child has a named trusted adult, Emotionally Available Adult

- teach explicit rules (what is private/public behaviour, what consent means),

- never rely on implied social understanding.

Measuring the Behaviour

High Grange School recognises that behaviour displayed by autistic pupils may arise from communication difficulties, sensory overload, misunderstanding of social rules, or difficulties interpreting boundaries and consent. However, behaviour that causes harm must still be assessed, recorded, and addressed, regardless of intent.

To assist staff in accurately assessing the nature and level of behaviour, we use:

- Simon Hackett's Continuum of Harmful Sexual Behaviour, and

- Brook Traffic Light Tool (used by Alison Seager-Spicer – trained practitioner)

These tools support staff to distinguish between behaviour that is:

- Green (developmentally expected and socially appropriate)

- Amber (concerning, inappropriate, or problematic)

- Red (abusive, coercive, harmful, or illegal)

In a SEND context, these tools help ensure that behaviour is analysed within a developmental framework rather than only a chronological age. Staff consider cognitive ability, emotional maturity, language level, sensory profile and social understanding before concluding.

When using the continuum, staff assess whether the behaviour:

1. Is socially acceptable within the developmental level of the child.

2. Was a one-off incident or has happened repeatedly over time?

3. Was socially acceptable within the peer group, or whether it caused distress, discomfort or confusion?

4. Is problematic, concerning or harmful.

5. Involves elements of discrimination or victimisation (e.g., behaviour linked to disability, race, gender, sexuality or vulnerability).

6. Shows coercion, pressure, manipulation or planning.

7. Involves a power imbalance, including:

   o verbal dominance,

   o emotional/intellectual manipulation,

   o physical strength,

   o group pressure,

   o social status.

8. Shows misuse of power, whether intentional or unintentional.

Behaviour that begins as exploratory or curiosity-led may escalate if not addressed early. Staff intervene at the earliest stage—education, reflection, visuals, emotional regulation and restorative conversations—to prevent behaviour from progressing along the continuum into abusive or harmful territory.

In a SEND/autism setting, early intervention may include:

- creating a personalised social story to explain boundaries,

- clarifying rules visually,

- working with Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) on communication skills,

- addressing sensory or emotional regulation needs.

The purpose is not to label behaviour, but to understand it and reduce harm through education, structure and support.

Expected Action from All Staff

High Grange School uses a whole-school, whole-community approach to prevent and respond to child-on-child abuse. Every adult working in the school environment has a responsibility to challenge inappropriate behaviour, report concerns accurately and ensure that pupils feel heard and supported.

School Community Accountability

- The **Governance** ensures safeguarding, including prevention of child-on-child abuse, remains central to school policy and practice.

- The Principal/ Headteacher ensures that all staff receive regular training that is , trauma-informed and aligned to KCSIE.

- The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) oversees assessments, risk reduction planning and ensures communication with external agencies where required.

- All staff, including teaching assistants, therapists and administrative staff, remain vigilant and proactive in challenging behaviours and reporting concerns.

School Culture

Our culture prioritises:

- **Zero tolerance** of abuse, harassment, bullying or harmful sexual behaviour.

- **Zero assumptions** – autism explains behaviour; it does not excuse harm.

- **Zero judgement** – pupils who harm others also require safeguarding.

Adults model respectful interactions and avoid minimising behaviour by saying:

- "He doesn't understand"

- "She didn't mean it"

- "It's just banter"

- "That's just part of being a teenager"

These responses can create a culture where abuse becomes normalised and victims feel silenced.

We recognise wider societal risks, such as:

- autistic pupils being statistically more vulnerable to exploitation,

- boys being more likely to be the subject of allegations,

- girls and LGBTQ+ pupils being disproportionately affected by some types of abuse.

Therefore, additional safeguarding is offered early to pupils who are more vulnerable or more likely to present risk.

Early Help

When a concern arises, the DSL or Deputy DSL will determine if:

- early help is needed,

- the incident meets threshold for referral to social care or police involvement,

- a safety and support plan should be created for every child involved (victim, alleged perpetrator and witnesses if necessary).

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Autistic learners benefit from early help because:

- behaviour can escalate quickly if emotional needs are unmet,

- pupils may struggle to verbalise concerns,

- regulation difficulties may mask or mimic distress.

Curriculum

Prevention happens through teaching. All pupils access RSHE and PSHE adapted for SEND using:

- visuals, modelling and repetition,

- social stories,

- sensory-aware environments,

- explicit teaching of personal boundaries, consent and "private vs public".

Teaching covers:

- healthy vs. unhealthy relationships,

- coercion and peer pressure,

- online safety (sexting, image sharing, grooming),

- equality, stereotyping and protected characteristics,

- body autonomy and consent ("My body belongs to me").

Pupils are taught how to:

- say "no",

- report concerns,

- recognise when a situation feels unsafe or confusing.

Staff Response to Incidents

When responding to incidents:

1. Reassure the pupil immediately that they are listened to and believed.

2. Do not use labels such as "perpetrator" or "offender." Instead, use:

   o "child who has been harmed"

   o "child displaying harmful behaviour"

3. Record facts accurately and promptly.

4. Remain calm, neutral, and non-judgemental.

5. Follow DSL direction regarding communication with parents or external agencies.

Staff remain aware that autistic pupils may:

- change their account if anxious or overwhelmed,

- try to please adults by saying what they think is wanted,

- struggle to sequence events or recall details.

Therefore, questioning is minimal and non-leading.

Managing Disclosures

- Best-placed adult. Wherever possible, the staff member with the strongest, most trusting relationship should support the child during disclosure. However, pupils may choose any trusted adult; therefore all staff must have basic training in managing disclosures.

- No absolute confidentiality. From the outset, explain in simple, concrete language (and visuals if helpful) that you cannot keep information secret if the child or someone else is at risk of harm or if a crime may have occurred.

- Trauma and memory. Staff should assume an initial disclosure may be one part of a bigger picture. Trauma, anxiety, autistic processing differences, and sensory overload can affect recall and sequencing. Avoid challenging inconsistencies; focus on safety and support.

How to listen and record

- Speak to involved pupils separately and in low-arousal settings.

- Use open prompts ("Tell me what happened") and neutral follow-ups for clarity (who/what/where/when). Avoid leading questions, hypotheticals, or "why" questions that can feel accusatory.

- Mirror the child's own words. Do not interpret or re-label their language.

- Record verbatim after they finish, note time/date/location, who was present, and pass to the DSL immediately following school recording protocols (paper/electronic).

Considering Intent (Begin Risk Assessment)

Ask, in simple terms: Was this deliberate? planned? pressured? Consider whether anyone:

- engineered the situation,

- used coercion, reward, threats, or group pressure,

- targeted a pupil's vulnerability (e.g., communication differences, sensory needs, learning profile).

Use recognised tools (e.g., Hackett continuum, Brook Traffic Light) to gauge where behaviour sits and what immediate protections/supports are required.

Deciding Next Actions

- Significant harm or suspected crime: Make a same-day referral to Local Authority Children's Social Care; involve police where a criminal offence may have occurred. Follow DSL guidance on preserving evidence and pupil support.

- Multi-agency involvement: Be prepared for agency interviews in school and for the time this may take. Ensure safe spaces and trusted adults are available.

- Threshold not met: The school may challenge decisions professionally if thresholds appear unmet. If, after discussion, you agree, proceed with parent/carer communication and school-led support/early help as appropriate.

Confidentiality, Anonymity & the Child's Voice

- Do not promise confidentiality. The DSL will balance the child's wishes with the duty to protect them and others.

Informing Parents/Carers

- Inform parents as soon as it is safe and appropriate, ideally face-to-face. Do not inform if doing so would increase risk.

- Explain processes plainly; expect and validate strong emotions. Offer written/visual summaries of next steps to aid understanding.

- Where agencies are not involved, the school may still need to inform parents and put support in place.

Risk Assessment: Points to Consider

Wishes and feelings of the child who has been harmed

- Offer choices Maximise the child's control where safe to do so.

Nature of the alleged incident

- Consider potential offences and whether harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) features are present (coercion, secrecy, power imbalance).

Age & developmental profile

- Look beyond chronological age: communication level, social understanding, executive functioning, and sensory profile all matter.

Additional vulnerabilities

- SEND increases risk; do not attribute change in mood/behaviour to "just autism." Remove communication barriers and actively seek the child's voice.

Location & supervision

- Where did it occur? Is the area a hotspot needing environmental changes or increased adult presence?

Accounts and understanding

- Do children give similar or different accounts? Could anxiety, masking, or literal interpretation affect their version?

- Do involved pupils understand body autonomy, privacy, and consent? Was behaviour copied, coached, or prompted by online content?

Repetition & persistence

- Has this happened before, to the same or different child? Has it continued after being addressed?

Ongoing risks & context

- Consider risks to the child, peers, and staff. Explore contextual safeguarding (online spaces, transport, community, exploitation links).

KCSIE-aligned risk assessment will cover:

- protection/support for the victim,

- potential other victims,

- the child displaying harmful behaviour,

- protective actions for other pupils,

- time/location factors and environmental changes.

Outcomes (Tiered Response)

Follow local threshold guidance:

- **Tier 4:** Police/Children's Social Care full investigation.

- **Tier 3:** Children's Social Care assessment.

- **Tier 2: Early Help**—school-led multi-agency support without statutory thresholds.

- **Tier 1: School-managed** response with documented plans.

In all outcomes, ensure education continues and implement written safety/risk management plans for every child affected.

Next Steps: Support & Intervention

For the child who has been harmed

- Maintain open, ongoing dialogue; distress can surface later.

- Provide tailored support: trusted-adult check-ins, mentoring, counselling/therapy, adjustments to timetable or environment, supervised spaces.

- Consider restorative work only when safe, appropriate, and led by trained staff.

- Use curriculum inputs (PSHE/RSE/online safety) and whole-class interventions (e.g., sessions on cyberbullying or respectful relationships) where needed.

- Implement an individual safety plan (named adult, safe spaces, strategies for flashbacks/triggers, routes to report).

For the child displaying harmful behaviour

- Explore why the behaviour occurred (communication gaps, regulation needs, peer influence, coercion, prior harm).

- Put support in place: mentoring, therapy, SaLT input for social communication, regulation plans, supervision in hotspot areas.

- Apply proportionate consequences alongside education (restorative work, targeted HSB interventions, agency-led work where required).

- Where there's a criminal investigation, adjust education arrangements to safeguard all parties and ensure continuity of learning.

- Maintain/refresh a multi-agency risk plan; increase supervision or protective strategies if risk persists.

After-Care

- Continue scheduled check-ins with **all** involved children. Watch for delayed reactions (shame, anxiety, self-harm, anger, avoidance).
- Refresh plans as needs change; prevent retaliatory behaviour, social isolation, or online escalation.

Safety Planning

- Use collaborative safety plans (more positive language than "risk assessment") for the child who was harmed and the child displaying harmful behaviour.
- Co-produce with the child, parents/carers, DSL, relevant staff, and (where helpful) external professionals.
- Identify triggers, early-warning signs, self-regulation strategies, safe people/places, supervision arrangements, and clear reporting routes.
- Make plans visual and concrete; review frequently and after any incident.

8. Child-on-Child Abuse Explained Further

Child-on-child abuse refers to any form of abuse between children and young people under the age of 18. It can happen within friendships, peer groups, or intimate and non-intimate relationships. Abuse can be physical, emotional, sexual, financial or involve coercive control. Examples include: bullying (including cyberbullying and discriminatory bullying), physical harm, teenage relationship abuse, sexual harassment, sexual violence, the consensual or non-consensual sharing of nude or semi-nude images (sexting), upskirting, and hazing/initiation behaviours (KCSIE, 2025).

Abuse rarely happens in isolation. Behaviour may link to other risks such as online activity, exploitation, or harmful relationships. Our response considers the full context of the child's lived experience, including what may be happening outside school (Contextual Safeguarding).

In a SEND school, factors such as communication differences, sensory needs, social misunderstanding, or masking may increase vulnerability. Behaviour that seems linked to disability must never stop staff exploring safeguarding concerns. Autistic pupils may be more easily isolated, targeted online, or unable to communicate harm; therefore, we use differentiated communication approaches (visuals, social stories, key adults).

Child on child abuse must never be dismissed as *"banter"*, *"a misunderstanding"*, or *"part of autism"*. Abuse is abuse.

Research shows girls are statistically more likely to experience sexual harassment, and boys more likely to be identified as perpetrators (KCSIE, 2024); **however,** any child can be harmed or cause harm. LGBTQ+ pupils and pupils from minoritised or racialised groups face additional risks including

discriminatory bullying, adultification (being treated as more mature than they are), and barriers to disclosure.

Children with SEND are at higher risk due to difficulties with communication, understanding social boundaries, and dependency on others. Staff must not assume changes in mood or behaviour are related to disability.

Language matters. We use the terms **"victim"** and **"child displaying harmful behaviour"** sensitively and avoid labels that may cause stigma. Our priority is always the safety, wellbeing and dignity of every child involved.