

SAFEGUARDING 6: CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE POLICY

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Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to the employees of Benenden School (Kent) Limited and its subsidiaries (collectively 'Benenden' or 'the School').

The Governors, Senior Management Team, and all staff (which term shall also apply to all volunteer staff members) at Benenden School are committed to the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse (as defined below) and that it can happen both inside and outside of School or online. Benenden School recognises that children are vulnerable to and capable of abusing other children. We take such abuse as seriously as abuse perpetrated by an adult. This includes verbal as well as physical abuse. Child-on-child abuse will not be tolerated or passed off as part of 'banter' or 'growing up'. It is important that all staff recognise the indicators and signs of abuse and know how to identify it and respond to reports. All staff should understand that even if there are no reports of child-on-child abuse at Benenden, it does not mean that it is not happening. Therefore, if staff have any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse they should talk to the DSL. Staff should maintain the attitude that 'it could happen here' and when concerned about the welfare of a child, they should always act in the best interests of the child. Staff should not assume a colleague will take action and must share information that might be critical in keeping a child safe; Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

What is Child-on-child abuse?

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

Child-on-child abuse is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- Bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudiced-based and discriminatory bullying)
- Abuse in intimate personal relationships between children, (sometimes known as 'teenage relationship abuse')
 - 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 nude or semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery)
 - Upskirting, 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
 - 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). This may also be an indicator of wider exploitation such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and/or Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and/or County Lines

Examples of online child-on-child abuse would include, child-on-child grooming, sexting or the distribution of youth involved sexualised content, and harassment. Technology can be used for bullying and other abusive behaviour.

Our Approach and Recognition of Child-on-child Abuse

We are committed to a whole School approach to ensure the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse within our School and beyond. All staff must maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here' and this is especially important when considering child-on-child abuse.

In cases where child-on-child abuse is identified we will follow our child protection procedures, taking a contextual approach to support all children and young people who have been affected by the situation. Staff should understand the important role they have to play in preventing child-on-child abuse and responding where they believe a child may be at risk. It is essential for staff to challenge inappropriate behaviour between children which is abusive in nature.

In particular, we at Benenden:

- Believe that in order to protect children, our community should:
 - (a) be aware of the nature and level of risk to which our students are or may be exposed, and put in place a clear and comprehensive strategy which is tailored to their specific safeguarding context; and
 - (b) take a whole school community Contextual Safeguarding approach to preventing and responding to child-on-child abuse with particular reference to being a boarding school community and
 - (c) recognise that it is more likely that girls will be victims and that boys will be perpetrators but acknowledge that Benenden is an all-girls school and it can happen here
 - (d) recognise that all child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously.
- Regard this policy as a preventative measure. It is our priority to take a proactive and robust approach.
- Ensure pupils feel confident we will respond in a proactive and fair way to all reported concerns.
- Value comprehensive consultation with relevant agencies.
- Encourage parents to work with us on this issue, so that if their child is feeling unsafe as a result of the behaviour of any other child, they should inform the School so that we can ensure the appropriate and prompt action is taken in response.

The Aims of this Policy

- Recognises that abuse is abuse and should never be passed off as 'just banter', 'just having a laugh', or 'part of growing up' or as this can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours, an unsafe environment or in worse case scenarios a culture that normalises abuse leading to children not coming forward and reporting it.
- At Benenden, we do not use the term 'alleged victim' and/or 'alleged perpetrator'. This is because Benenden takes a safeguarding approach to all individuals involved in concerns or allegations about child-on-child abuse, including those who are alleged to have been abused, and those who are alleged to have abused other children, in addition to any sanctioning work that may also be required for the latter.

- At Benenden, we use the terms 'child' and 'children', which is defined for the purposes of this policy as a person aged under 18. We have nonetheless chosen not to restrict our approach to child-on-child abuse under this policy to children but instead to adopt a wider interpretation of our safeguarding responsibilities so that they apply to all students on our roll, regardless of age.

Where members of the community have questions about this policy or practice, they should consult a member of the Safeguarding Team, SMT or refer to the additional documents listed at the end of this policy.

When does behaviour become problematic or abusive?

All behaviour takes place on a spectrum. Understanding where a child's behaviour falls on a spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it.

How can a child who is being abused by another child be identified?

All staff should be alert to the wellbeing of students and to signs of abuse, and should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by child-on-child abuse. However, staff should be mindful of the fact that the way(s) in which children will disclose or present with behaviour(s) as a result of their experiences will differ. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

- Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) are three times more likely to be abused than other children without SEND, and additional barriers can sometimes exist when recognising abuse in children with SEND.
- Some children may be more likely to experience child-on-child abuse than others as a result of certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, or religious beliefs.

Taking a proactive approach

At Benenden, we actively seek to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by:

- Educating all Governors, our Senior Management Team, Staff, Students, and Parents about this issue. This includes training all Governors, the Senior Management Team, and staff on the nature, prevalence, and effect of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify, and respond to it. All staff are updated at least annually on this policy or as required.
- Taking into account family circumstances and identifying children who may be more vulnerable to child-on-child abuse. This may involve carrying out a welfare risk assessment.
- Educating students about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse, positive, responsible, and safe use of social media, and the unequivocal facts about consent, via PPD (PSHE) and the wider curriculum. For example, by addressing gender inequality in a statistics class, or by reviewing literature in an English class which addresses bullying and its effect on mental health.
- Educating students about consent including teaching them basic facts such as (i) a child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity; (ii) the age of consent is 16; and (iii) sexual intercourse without consent is rape, and engaging parents on these issues.
- Supporting the on-going welfare of the student body by drawing on multiple resources that prioritise student mental health, and by providing in-school counselling (up to four sessions provided by the school) to address underlying mental health needs.
- Responding to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately.

- Ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are referred to the DSL and Safeguarding Team so that they can monitor and address any concerning trends and identify students who may be in need of additional support.

What should you do if you suspect either that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by other children, or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing other children?

If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by another child, or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing another child, they should discuss their concern with the DSL without delay so that a course of action can be agreed. A risk assessment should be considered.

Responding to Concerns or Allegations of Child-on-child Abuse

This policy outlines both our preventative measures and the ways in which we respond to any potential child-on-child abuse situation.

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

Any allegation of child-on-child abuse should:

Be referred to the DSL or member of the Safeguarding Team. Any concern of alleged child-on-child abuse should be treated as any other safeguarding issue would and therefore it is essential that an immediate referral to the DSL or Safeguarding Team is made. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

If a child speaks to a member of staff about child-on-child abuse that they have witnessed or are a part of, the member of staff should listen to the child and use open language that demonstrates understanding rather than judgement. For further details please see the procedures set out in the child protection policy.

Remember, you can never promise confidentiality.

Recognise that it may be easier for a pupil to report an incident anonymously using Tootoot.

Where a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer from harm, it is important that a referral to children's social care (and, if appropriate, the police) is made immediately.

Anyone can make a referral. Where referrals are not made by the DSL, the DSL should be informed as soon as possible that a referral has been made (see the making a referrals section of the Safeguarding Policy).

Disciplinary Action

The school will consider whether disciplinary action may be appropriate for any child/children involved. However, if there are police proceedings underway, or there could be, it is critical that the School works in partnership with the police and/or children's social care. Where a matter is not of interest to the police and/ or children's social care, the School may still need to consider what is the most appropriate action to take to ensure positive behaviour management. Disciplinary action may sometimes be appropriate, including to:

- a) ensure that the child/children take(s) responsibility for and realise(s) the seriousness of their behaviour;
- b) demonstrate to the child/children and others that child-on-child abuse can never be tolerated; and
- c) ensure the safety and wellbeing of other children.

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

The School will, where appropriate, consider the potential benefit, as well as challenge, of a move of School or exclusion as a response where there is evidence, and not as an intervention, recognising that even if this is ultimately deemed to be necessary, some of the measures referred to in this policy may still be required. For example, action may still need to be taken by the School in relation to other students who have been involved with and/or affected by child-on-child abuse. Exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and only where necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the other children in the School. Assisting with decision-making associated to managed moves and exclusions can also be beneficial. In the event of any managed move, consideration must be given to sharing information with the receiving School regarding the child-on-child abuse in order to allow best protection of children in the new School.

Disciplinary interventions alone are rarely able to solve issues of child-on-child abuse, and the School will always consider the wider actions that may need to be taken, and any lessons that may need to be learnt going forwards, as set out above and below.

Strategies for Prevention

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

Staff training – including for, governors and volunteers.

Making it clear there is a zero-tolerance approach to child-on-child abuse that it is never acceptable and will not be tolerated.

Ensuring it is never passed off as “banter,” “just having a laugh,” “a part of growing up” or “boys being boys.”

Recognising, acknowledging, and understanding the scale of harassment and abuse and that even if there are no reports it does not mean it is not happening, it may be the case that it is just not being reported.

Challenging physical behaviours (potentially criminal in nature) such as grabbing bottoms, breasts, and genitalia, pulling down trousers, flicking bras and lifting up skirts.

Challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside of the classroom).

Responsibilities of the Governing body– they must be aware of their statutory safeguarding responsibilities.

Ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are passed on to the DSL/Safeguarding team so that they can take appropriate action and address any concerning trends and identify those children who may need additional support.

Additional Policies and Documentation

To be read in conjunction with this policy

Safeguarding Policy
Online Safety Policy
Acceptable Use Policy
Anti-Radicalisation Policy
Children Missing in Education Policy
Pupil Behaviour Policy
Whistleblowing Policy
Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023)
Working Together to Safeguarding Children (2018 updated 2020)
Relationships, Sex and Health Education Policy

External Safeguarding Contacts

Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (general enquiries (office hours))	Telephone: 03000 423158 Email: kscmp@kent.gov.uk Address: Room 2.71, Sessions House, Maidstone, ME14 1XQ
Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (emergency contact details)	03000 41 91 91 (Front door) If you think someone is in immediate danger, the best thing to do is call 999 for the emergency services.
Designated Officers of the Local Authority	03301 651440 07540 677200 Area Safeguarding Adviser (Education)



LADO Team	03000 410888 kentchildrenslado@kent.gov.uk
NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line	Weston House 42 Curtain Road London EC2A 3NH 0800 028 0285 help@nspcc.org.uk
Disclosure and Barring Service	DBS customer services PO Box 3961 Royal Wootton Bassett SN4 4HF 03000 200 190 customerservices@dbs.gov.uk
Teaching Regulation Agency	Teacher Misconduct Ground Floor South Cheylesmore House 5 Quinton Road Coventry CV1 2WT 0207 593 5393 misconduct.teacher@education.gov.uk
Independent Schools Inspectorate	0207 6000100 concerns@isi.net

Benenden Safeguarding Team

Designated Safeguarding Lead	Anne Wakefield Deputy Pastoral 01580 236793
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead	Steve Miller First Deputy 01580 236718
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead	Lucy Lynch Assistant Head Pastoral 01580 236973
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead	Kate Dobson Hm Limes 01580 236743
Anti-Radicalisation Officer	Matt Commander Director of International and strategic projects (Interim Director of Estates) 01580 236885
School Medical Officer	Dr Sara Butler-Gallie
Headmistress	Sam Price 01580 236616
Chair of Council	Anna Birkett cmabirkett@benenden.school
Council Member with responsibility for Safeguarding	Fiona Cornish Cmfcornish@benenden.school