

More support for schools and colleges to tackle sexual abuse



PUBLISHED JUN 10, 2021
BY [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

Teachers and school leaders will be better supported to recognise sexual harassment and abuse and teach confidently about issues of consent, online pornography and healthy relationships.

School and college leaders will be encouraged to dedicate inset day time to help train staff on how to deal with sexual abuse and harassment among pupils and how to deliver the Government's new compulsory Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum (RSHE).

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

The measures come as Ofsted publishes the findings from its thematic review into sexual abuse in education, commissioned by the Education Secretary in March following testimonies posted on the Everyone's Invited website which highlighted cases of sexual abuse and harassment of children and young people, including in education settings.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Sexual abuse in any form is completely unacceptable. No young person should feel that this is a normal part of their daily lives – schools are places of safety, not harmful behaviours that are tolerated instead of tackled.

Ofsted's review has rightly highlighted where we can take

specific and urgent action to address sexual abuse in education. But there are wider societal influences at play, meaning schools and colleges cannot be expected to tackle these issues alone.

By reflecting young people's real experiences in what they are taught, I hope more people feel able to speak up where something isn't right and call out activity that might previously have been written off as 'normal'.

In its 8-week review, Ofsted looked at safeguarding measures in schools and colleges, as well as assessing whether extra support is needed for teaching about sex and relationships, working alongside social care, police, victim support groups, education leaders and the Independent Schools Council.

Ofsted's findings demonstrate that incidents of harassment and abuse have been 'normalised' by their frequency, with the majority of the more than 900 children and young people surveyed experiencing some kind of unsolicited images or sexist comments – whether in person at school or college, or online or via mobile phone.

To address this, the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson and Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden have asked the Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza to join a roundtable discussion in the coming weeks with tech companies, law enforcement, children's charities and schools to talk about preventative measures ahead of legislation on age restrictions for app downloading and sharing, and how to support parents and children to make more informed and safer choices online.

Building on the work that the Government has set out on the Online Safety Bill, it follows a joint letter to Dame Rachel from Mr Williamson and Mr Dowden last month asking her to support the Government's drive to protect children from harmful online content and to ensure the voices of children are heard and represented in this work.

This will include working with schools, parents and charities to support them around building strong social norms against underage access to pornography, around children using the internet safely and educating those groups on the impact that

some internet content can have on healthy sex and relationships.

Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza said:

The most fundamental responsibility that education settings have is to keep children safe. There needs to be a clear focus on preventing peer-on-peer abuse from happening in the first place, as well as providing timely and sensitive support to those affected. The contributors to 'Everyone's Invited' showed great courage in sharing their stories of abuse and harassment. Now is the time for these stories to be met with action.

I am pleased to see Ofsted calling for a whole school and college approach to this issue and I look forward to working with them, the Department for Education, education settings and their safeguarding partners to help make the commitments and recommendations set out in this report a reality.

The Online Safety Bill will enshrine in law a ground-breaking new system of accountability and oversight of tech companies, where companies will need to prevent children from accessing minimise inappropriate content, such as pornography and online bullying.

Responding today (Thursday 10 June), the Department for Education has confirmed it will take forward work to strengthen the RSHE curriculum so that teachers are clearer on when different elements should be taught, such as sharing images online and consent, as well as updating statutory guidance to ensure that the definitions used are in line with what pupils understand and experience.

In addition, to ensure continuity in the offer of a safe space for victims of sexual abuse to receive professional advice or to refer matters to authorities, the NSPCC 'Abuse in Education' helpline will also run for a further four months until October.

Launched on April 1 alongside the Ofsted Review, the helpline will ensure that young people who may have experienced abuse at school or any other victim of recent or non-recent

sexual abuse can receive the immediate support and guidance they require. As of Monday 7 June, the helpline has received 426 calls and helpline staff have made 80 referrals to external agencies like the police or social services.

A trial already running in 30 areas will be extended to up to 10 new local authorities to provide supervision for designated safeguarding leads, working with up to a further 500 schools, including independent schools, with a specific focus on sexual abuse.

The programme aims to strengthen support for Dedicated Safeguarding Leads, improve individual safeguarding practices and enable better joined up working across different agencies. The programme will also help build the evidence base on what works in supporting safeguarding leads. At the same time, work is underway to raise the profile of the role in the same way as the role of a SENCo.

All children have a right to be safe from sexual and other forms of abuse. The Government's Stop Abuse Together Campaign is working to stop child sexual abuse, and offers support and guidance to anyone that needs it. For further advice visit gov.uk: Stop Abuse Together

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Press release distributed by Media Pigeon on behalf of GOV.UK, on Jun 10, 2021. For more information subscribe and [follow us](#).

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