

# Child-on-child abuse policy

## Version control

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## Introduction

The Governing Body, senior management team, and all staff (including volunteers) at Cranleigh School (**the School**) are committed to preventing, identifying early, and responding appropriately to child-on-child abuse. This commitment applies both within and beyond the School.

We, the School:

- Recognise that protecting children requires schools to understand the risks their pupils may face and to adopt a whole-school Contextual Safeguarding approach
- View this policy as a preventative measure: tackling child-on-child abuse requires work in four key areas—systems and structures, prevention, identification, and response/intervention
- Acknowledge growing national concern about child-on-child abuse and implement this policy to address harmful attitudes and behaviours
- Encourage parents to hold the School accountable by reporting if their child feels unsafe due to peer behaviour, so the School can act promptly.

## Policy scope

This policy:

- Is the overarching policy on issues relating to child-on-child abuse. It should be read alongside the School's Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy and other related policies, including Anti-bullying/cyberbullying, Behaviour and Discipline, Boarding, and Data Protection
- Outlines the School's strategy for prevention, identification, and response
- Applies to governors, the senior management team, and all staff. It is reviewed annually, or sooner if statutory guidance changes, and updated as required
- Emphasises that abuse is abuse and should never be dismissed as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', or 'part of growing up'
- Complies with *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2026)* and *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026)*
- Uses the terms "victim" and "alleged perpetrator." The School takes a safeguarding approach to all involved, including those who may have carried out abuse
- Defines "child" as anyone under 18, but extends safeguarding responsibilities to all pupils, regardless of age
- Should, where relevant, be read alongside DfE guidance on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment (KCSIE 2024), the Surrey Safeguarding Partnership's procedures, and the *National Minimum Standards for Boarding (2022)*
- Reinforces the School's obligations under the **Equality Act 2010**, ensuring protection against harassment and abuse linked to protected characteristics (e.g. race, disability, sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment).

# Understanding child-on-child abuse

## Definition

Child-on-child abuse includes any physical, sexual, emotional, or financial abuse, as well as coercive control, between children in relationships (intimate or non-intimate), friendships, or peer groups. It can include:

- Serious bullying (including cyberbullying)
- Relationship or domestic abuse
- Child sexual exploitation
- Harmful sexual behaviour
- Prejudice-based violence (e.g. gender-based, homophobic, racist, faith-based, or related to disability)
- Online harms, including sexting, sextortion, grooming, AI-generated sexual imagery, 'revenge porn', deepfake misuse, harassment, and other technology-facilitated abuse

## Contextual safeguarding

This policy is rooted in a Contextual Safeguarding approach, which requires schools and safeguarding partners to consider risks beyond the family and to work collaboratively to create safe spaces. The School adopts a whole-community approach by:

- Understanding the impact of wider social contexts on pupils.
- Embedding policies and training that address harmful attitudes.
- Monitoring pupil behaviour and attendance for warning signs.
- Providing safe channels for pupil voice, including anonymous reporting mechanisms (e.g. worry boxes, online reporting forms).
- Contributing to local safeguarding agendas and challenging poor safeguarding decisions.

## Prevalence

Research indicates that child-on-child abuse is among the most common forms of abuse in the UK. Between 2019–2022, police data in England and Wales showed:

- 40% increase in sexual assaults and rapes involving under-18s.
- 33% increase in rape reports.

## Behaviour spectrum

Children's behaviour exists on a spectrum, requiring proportionate responses:

- *Sexual behaviour*: Hackett's Continuum Model and the Brook Traffic Light Tool help distinguish between developmentally appropriate, problematic, and harmful behaviours.
- *Other behaviours*: Staff should assess incidents by considering factors such as frequency, acceptability, coercion, victimisation, power imbalance, and intent.

## Identifying abuse

Staff should monitor pupil wellbeing, behaviour changes, and incident logs on the Pastoral Module. Disclosures may vary widely between children.

## Vulnerability factors

While any child can be affected, risks may increase due to:

- Peer dynamics and social isolation.
- Being LGBTQ+ or questioning sexuality.
- SEND (children with SEND are three times more likely to be abused, with additional barriers to recognition).

- Characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or religion.
- Boarding arrangements, which may increase risk due to shared accommodation and residential dynamics.

## **A whole school approach**

### **School environment**

The School works to prevent and address abuse by:

- Training the Governing Body, staff, and parents on child-on-child abuse, including online risks, AI-related harms, consent, and equality
- Educating pupils through PSHE, assemblies, and presentations on consent, healthy relationships, online safety, equality, and reporting abuse
- Providing clear mechanisms for anonymous and confidential pupil reporting
- Engaging parents through blogs, meetings, workshops, and open discussions
- Supporting pupil wellbeing through counselling, House staff training (including Mental Health First Aid), and fostering safe relationships with staff
- Promoting tolerance, respect, equality, and diversity throughout the school community, in line with the Equality Act 2010
- Ensuring prompt response to all incidents, with issues reviewed in weekly safeguarding and House meetings.

### **Boarding context**

The School recognises that boarding pupils may face additional vulnerabilities due to shared living spaces. Safeguards include:

- Clear supervision protocols
- Residential staff training on peer dynamics and abuse prevention
- Robust systems for reporting concerns in boarding houses
- Ensuring boarding pupils know how to access support independently, including from external helplines.

### **Multi-agency working**

The School collaborates with the Surrey Safeguarding Partnership, the Police, C-SPA, Children's Services, and other schools. These partnerships:

- Provide clear referral pathways
- Ensure pupils access timely support
- Inform the School of local risks and trends
- Facilitate effective joint responses to complex cases.

## **Responding to concerns or allegations**

### **Principles**

All concerns must be handled sensitively, promptly, and in line with safeguarding procedures. Key points:

- Investigate allegations thoroughly, considering wider context
- Treat all involved as potentially at risk, ensuring safeguarding for both victims and alleged perpetrators
- Consider wider contexts such as family, peer groups, online activity, and boarding arrangements
- Take into account the complexity of consent, power, and choice
- Listen to the views of affected children, keeping them and their parents informed where safe to do so.

### **Staff actions**

- Any concerns must be reported to the DSL/Head of Safeguarding immediately
- If a child is at immediate risk of harm, referrals to Children's Social Care or the police must be made without delay
- Staff must listen to disclosures using open, non-judgemental language.

### **School response**

The DSL/Head of Safeguarding will:

- Take immediate safety steps as required
- Seek urgent support for online image-sharing incidents (e.g. Internet Watch Foundation, CEOP)
- Decide whether the incident should be managed internally, through early help, statutory referrals, or police involvement
- Always consult external agencies in borderline or complex cases.

### **Safety plans and risk assessments**

The School will assess risks for:

- Any child alleged to have behaved abusively
- Any child who has experienced abuse
- Other pupils who may be affected as witnesses or by association.

### **Information and record keeping**

The School will:

- Share information appropriately with agencies, parents and pupils, in consultation with safeguarding partners
- Keep secure, legally compliant records
- Act in accordance with *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2024)*, data protection law, and the principles of proportionality.

### **Disciplinary action**

Disciplinary measures may be considered, balancing safeguarding with justice processes. Exclusion or managed moves are last-resort measures. The School will:

- Ensure children understand the seriousness of their behaviour
- Reinforce that child-on-child abuse will not be tolerated
- Safeguard the wider community while meeting the needs of all children involved.

### **Proactive follow-up**

The School will reflect on incidents to improve prevention, asking questions such as:

- Did the environment or culture contribute to the abuse?
- Are staff training or parental engagement improvements needed?
- Do pupils need further education on respect, consent, online safety, and equality?
- Were there missed opportunities to intervene earlier?

Lessons learned will inform updated action plans and be shared with governors as part of safeguarding oversight.

## Key contacts

### Internal contacts

- DSL, DDSLs, and Heads for Senior and Prep schools (see full contact list in Safeguarding Policy).
- DSL: Andrea Saxel - [aps@cranleigh.org](mailto:aps@cranleigh.org), 01483 542018
- Prep school DDSL: Emma Lewis [efl@cranleigh.org](mailto:efl@cranleigh.org) 01483 542052
- Head of Safeguarding: Sue Fairbrother – [sff@cranleigh.org](mailto:sff@cranleigh.org), 01483 927559.

### External contacts

- Surrey Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA): 0300 470 9100 / [cspa@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:cspa@surreycc.gov.uk)
- Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership: 0300 470 9100 / [partnership.team@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:partnership.team@surreycc.gov.uk)
- Police (non-emergency): 101
- UK Safer Internet Centre: 0344 381 4772
- NSPCC: 0808 800 5000 / [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)
- Childline: 0800 1111
- Ofsted Whistleblowing Hotline: 0300 123 3155
- A comprehensive list of internal and external safeguarding contacts is included in the Safeguarding policy.

This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if statutory guidance changes, and updated as necessary to ensure compliance with statutory guidance and responsiveness.