



# Mendlesham Primary School

## Peer on Peer Abuse Policy

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## **Introduction:**

Peer on peer abuse left unaddressed, can have a devastating effect on individuals and their families. It can be a barrier to their learning and have serious consequences for their mental

health. Peer on peer abuse which takes place at school does not only affect an individual during childhood but can have a lasting effect on their lives well into adulthood. By effectively preventing and tackling abuse, we can help to create safe, disciplined environment where our pupils are able to learn and fulfil their potential.

This document has therefore been produced to help us take action to prevent and respond to bullying as part of our overall behaviour policy. It outlines our approach to bullying and the measures we have put into place to tackle bullying.

The Governors, Senior Leadership Team, and all staff and volunteers at Mendlesham Primary School are committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of peer-on-peer abuse (as defined below).

This sets out our strategy for preventing, identifying and appropriately managing peer-on-peer abuse and applies to all staff.

Research has shown that many children who present with harmful behaviour towards others, in the context of peer-on-peer abuse, are themselves vulnerable and may have been victimised by peers, parents or adults in the community prior to their abuse of peers.

#### **Definition of Peer on Peer Abuse:**

Peer on peer abuse is behaviour by an individual or group which can be a one off incident or repeated over time. Peer on peer abuse is behaviour that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.

Peer on peer abuse can take many forms (for instance, cyber-bullying via text messages, social media or gaming, which can include the use of images and video) and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups steered by a dislike for a persons:

- Race
- Religion
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Special educational needs or disabilities
- Where a child is adopted or in care
- Where a child has caring responsibilities
- Where a child has actual or perceived differences, (for example, physical or cultural differences)

Stopping violence and ensuring immediate physical safety is obviously our school's first priority. However, emotional abuse can be as damaging if not more damaging than physical violence; teachers will make their own judgements about each specific case. We recognise that abuse often involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. This could involve perpetrators of abuse having control over the relationship which makes it difficult for the victim to defend themselves. The imbalance of power can manifest itself in several ways, it may be physical, psychological (knowing what upsets someone), derive from an intellectual imbalance, or by having access to the support of a group, or the capacity to socially isolate. It can result in the intimidation of a person or persons through the threat of violence or by isolating them either physically or online.

Low-level disruption and the use of offensive language can in itself have a significant impact on its target. If left unchallenged or dismissed as banter or horseplay it can also lead to reluctance to report other behaviour.

### **Contextual Safeguarding:**

This is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online, can feature violence and abuse. Parent and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

As a school, we seek to include these contexts within prevention, identification, assessment and intervention safeguarding activities.

### **Vulnerable Pupils:**

Peer on peer abuse can happen to all children and young people and it can affect their social, mental and emotional health. Our staff will support all pupils who are bullied. This means we will be alert to the effect any form of bullying can have. We will be especially alert to where it may have a severe impact.

We recognise that the impact of Peer on Peer abuse can be especially more severe not only due to the nature and extent of the bullying but because it may be combined with other factors such as those mentioned below that also affect the social, mental and emotional health of the pupil. For example:

- Children with special educational needs or disabilities
- Children who are adopted
- Children who are suffering from a health problem
- Children with caring responsibilities
- Children in care
- Children who are frequently on the move (for example those from military families)
- Children who are going through a personal or family crisis.

### **Signs and Symptoms:**

All staff should be alert to the well-being of pupils and to signs of abuse, and should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by peer-on-peer 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.

Signs that a child may be suffering from peer-on-peer abuse can also overlap with those indicating other types of abuse and can include:

- failing to attend school, disengaging from classes or struggling to carry out school related tasks to the standard ordinarily expected;
- physical injuries;
- experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing;

- becoming withdrawn and/or shy; experiencing headaches, stomach aches, anxiety and/or panic attacks; suffering from nightmares or lack of sleep or sleeping too much;
- changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a way that is not appropriate for the child's age;
- abusive behaviour towards others

Abuse affects children very differently. The above list is by no means exhaustive and the presence of one or more of these signs does not necessarily indicate abuse. The behaviour that children present with will depend on their particular circumstances. Where a child exhibits any behaviour that is out of character or abnormal for his/her age, staff should always consider whether an underlying concern is contributing to their behaviour and, if so, what the concern is and how the child can be supported going forwards.

### **Bullying Outside the School Premises:**

We will use our disciplinary powers to address pupils' conduct when they are not on school premises and are not under the lawful control or charge of a member of school staff, but only if it would be reasonable for the school to regulate pupils' behaviour in those circumstances. This may include bullying incidents occurring anywhere off the school premises.

Where abuse outside of school is reported to our school, we will investigate and take appropriate action. We will consider whether it is appropriate to notify the police for example, if we believe an offence has taken place.

### **Cyber-bullying:**

The rapid development of, and widespread access to, technology has provided a medium for cyber bullying, which can occur in or outside school. Cyber-bullying is a different form of bullying and can happen at all times of the day, with a potentially bigger audience.

If a member of staff seizes an electronic device, (such as a mobile phone) which has been used in the course of cyber bullying;

- We may examine data or files where there is good reason to do so.
- However, we will speak to a parent to inform them of any action taken regarding the search of electronic devices.
- If we seize an electronic device that is prohibited by the school rules and the member of staff has reasonable grounds to suspect that it contains evidence in relation to an offence, we will give the device to the police as soon as it is reasonably practicable.

### **Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Children:**

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any sex. They can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children. Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment will likely find the experience stressful and distressing. This may adversely affect their educational attainment. Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and may overlap, they can occur online and offline (both physical and verbal) and are never acceptable.

We will:

- Make clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is not acceptable, will never be tolerated and is not an inevitable part of growing up
- Not tolerate or dismiss sexual violence or sexual harassment as “banter”, “part of growing up”, “just having a laugh” or “boys being boys”
- We will challenge behaviours (which are potentially criminal in nature), such as grabbing bottoms, breasts and other private areas of the body.

### **Responding to Allegations of Peer on Peer Abuse:**

It is essential that all concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse are handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly. The way in which they are responded to can have a significant impact on the individuals involved and their families.

Any response should:

- reassure any child who makes a disclosure that they will be supported throughout their ordeal.
- be reviewed by our Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) who will manage the concern from any member of staff, child or parent
- treat all children involved as being at potential risk - while the child allegedly responsible for the abuse may pose a significant risk of harm to other children, s/he may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves. We will ensure a safeguarding response is in place for both the child who has allegedly experienced the abuse, and the child who has allegedly been responsible for it.
- follow our school’s safeguarding policy which will ensure that the DSL will gather as much information and context pertaining to the disclosure. This information will then be referred to the MASH team who will advise us of how to proceed with the concern.
- Include other agencies such as police and social if appropriate.

We will take into account:

- that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the children involved, and consider and address the effect of wider socio-cultural contexts - such as the child's/children's peer group (both within and outside the School); family; the School environment; their experience(s) of crime and victimisation in the local community; and the child/children's online presence.
- what changes may need to be made to these contexts to address the child's/children's needs and to mitigate risk;
- the views of the child/children affected. Unless it is considered unsafe to do so (for example, where a referral needs to be made immediately), the DSL should discuss the proposed action with the child/children and their parents and obtain consent to any referral before it is made, unless informing the parent will put the young person at risk of harm.
- any decision not to inform the parents would generally be made in conjunction with other services such as children’s social care and/or the police, who would take the lead in deciding when the parents should be informed.

- manage the child/children's expectations about information sharing, and keep them and their parents informed of developments, where appropriate and safe to do so.

If a pupil is in immediate danger, or at risk of significant harm, a referral to children's social care and/or the police will be made immediately. Any member of staff 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.

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

If a child speaks to a member of staff about peer-on-peer 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.

Where the DSL considers or suspects that the behaviour in question might be abusive or violent on a spectrum (as opposed to inappropriate or problematic), the DSL should contact the MASH team and agree on a course of action, which may include:

- Managing it within school with help from external specialists where appropriate and possible
- Undertake/contribute to an early help assessment, with targeted help provided to address the needs of the child/children and their family (e.g. CAMHS, CAF team)
- Refer child/children to children's social care for a section 17 and/or 47 statutory assessment
- Report alleged criminal behaviour to the Police

### **Children Sharing a Classroom:**

Any report of sexual violence is likely to be traumatic for the victim. However, reports of rape and assault by penetration, though rare, are likely to be especially difficult with regard to the victim and close proximity with the alleged perpetrator is likely to be especially distressing. Whilst we establish the facts of the case and start the process of liaising with children's social care and the police, the alleged perpetrator and victim will be separated from each other as much as possible, which may include being split into different classes or rooms where it is within our power to do so. These actions are in the best interests of both children and should not be perceived to be a judgment on the guilt of the alleged perpetrator. In all cases the initial report will be carefully evaluated considering any immediate evidence, the wishes of the victim, the nature of the allegations and advice from other agencies (such as the police or social services).

### **Safeguarding and Supporting the Victim:**

The following principles are based on effective safeguarding practice and will help our decision making process regarding safeguarding and supporting the victim. We will:

- Consider the age and the developmental stage of the victim, the nature of the allegations and the potential risk of further abuse.

- Consider the needs and wishes of the victim. The victim will be listened to and acknowledged. It is important they feel in as much control of the process as is possible.
- Ensure that the victim will never be made to feel they are the problem for making a report or made to feel ashamed for making a report.
- Consider the proportionality of the response. Support should be tailored on a case-by-case basis. The support required regarding a one-off incident of sexualised name-calling is likely to be vastly different from that for a report of rape.
- Complete a Preventative Supervision Plan on both pupils (Appendix A)

### **Safeguarding and Supporting the alleged Perpetrator:**

The following principles are based on effective safeguarding practice and should help our decision making process regarding safeguarding and supporting the alleged perpetrator. We will consider:

- How we will continue to provide the alleged perpetrator with an education, safeguarding support as appropriate and implementing any disciplinary sanctions.
- The age and the developmental stage of the alleged perpetrator and nature of the allegations. Any child will likely experience stress as a result of being the subject of allegations and/or negative reactions by their peers to the allegations against them.
- The proportionality of the response. Support (and sanctions) should be considered on a case-by-case basis. An alleged perpetrator may potentially have unmet needs (in some cases these may be considerable) as well as potentially posing a risk of harm to other children. Harmful sexual behaviour in young children may be a symptom of either their own abuse or exposure to abusive practices and or materials.
- Complete a Preventative Supervision Plan on both pupils

Advice will be taken, as appropriate, from children's social care, specialist services and the police.

We will risk assess the situation at the earliest stage of the report and will continue to review the risk throughout the internal and or external investigation of the report of abuse.

### **Prevention:**

Our school's response to Peer on peer abuse will not start at the point at which a child has been abused. Our staff proactively gather intelligence about issues between pupils which might provoke conflict and develop strategies to prevent bullying occurring in the first place. This might involve talking to pupils about issues of difference, perhaps in lessons, through dedicated events or projects, or through assemblies. Staff themselves will be able to determine what will work best for their pupils, depending on the particular issues they need to address.

Our school has created an ethos of good behaviour where pupils treat one another and the school staff with respect because they know that this is the right way to behave. That culture extends beyond the classroom to the corridors, the dining hall, the playground, and

beyond the school gates including travel to and from school. Values of respect for staff and other pupils, an understanding of the value of education, and a clear understanding of how our actions affect others permeate the whole school environment and are reinforced by staff and older pupils who set a good example to the rest.

Our school will:

- Involve parents to ensure that they are clear that the school does not tolerate any form of peer on peer abuse. We will make parents aware of the procedures to follow if they believe that their child is being abused by their peers. We want parents to feel confident that our school will take any complaint about bullying seriously and resolve the issue in a way that protects the child. We will expect parents to reinforce the value of good behaviour at home.
- Will involve pupils. All pupils understand the school's approach and are clear about the part they can play to prevent peer on peer abuse, including when they find themselves as bystanders
- Regularly evaluate and update our approach to take account of developments in technology, for instance updating 'acceptable use' policies for computers and take into account what can still be improved.
- Implement disciplinary sanctions. The consequences of peer on peer abuse will reflect the seriousness of the incident so that others see that abuse is unacceptable and will be sanctioned.
- Openly discuss differences between people that could motivate abuse, such as religion, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexuality or appearance related difference. Also children with different family situations, such as looked after children or those with caring responsibilities. We teach children that using any prejudice based language is unacceptable.
- Provide effective staff training on how to deal with peer on peer abuse. All school staff understand the principles and purpose of the school's policy, how to resolve problems, and where to seek support.
- Make it easy for pupils to report bullying so that they are assured that they will be listened to and incidents acted on. Pupils should feel that they can report abuse which may have occurred outside school including cyber-bullying
- Create an inclusive environment where pupils can openly discuss their experiences of peer on peer abuse, without fear of further abuse or discrimination
- We recognise that some children with special educational needs or disabilities may lack the social or communication skills to report such incidents so we ensure our training builds in regular awareness of this.
- We frequently address the impact of abuse within our school and what constitutes appropriate, safe and acceptable behaviour with our children and staff.

#### **Monitoring and review:**

This policy will be reviewed and ratified by the Local Governing Body every year, or sooner in the case of new information, changes and/or legislation.



Appendix A

# Mendlesham Primary School

## Preventative Supervision Plan

Name of Child: ..... Class: .....

Completed by: ..... Date: .....

To be shared with: .....

### In the classroom

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### Outside the classroom

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### Coming to and going from school

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**Communication with staff**

**Communication with parents (inc parent's view)**

**Pupil's views (where appropriate)**

**Monitoring and review arrangements**

Signed (staff) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signed (parent) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_