Child on Child Abuse Policy

Policy Overview

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Date for Review	September 2026
Approving Body	The Strategic Development Committee
Signed Chair of Trustees	S. Trentini

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Striving to forge improvements in communities and become the highest performing MAT in the country.

The Forge Trust Academies **should respond to all signs, reports, and concerns** of child-on-child abuse, including those that have happened outside of the academy premises, and/or online.

1.Introduction

At The Forge Trust we have a **zero-tolerance** approach to all forms of child-on-child abuse including sexual violence, sexual harassment (SVSH) and harmful sexual behaviour (HSB). We believe that child-on-child abuse is never acceptable, and it will not be tolerated. It will **never** be passed off as "banter," "just having a laugh," "a part of growing up" or "boys being boys." We will **respond to all signs, reports, and concerns** of child-on-child abuse, including those that have happened outside of our school premises, and/or online. We recognise that children are vulnerable to and capable of abusing their peers, we take such abuse as seriously as abuse perpetrated by an adult. We recognise 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. We acknowledge that children who have allegedly abused their peers or displayed harmful sexual behaviour are themselves vulnerable. 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.

In cases where child-on-child abuse is suspected or identified we will follow our Child Protection procedures, taking a contextual, trauma-informed, and strengths-based approach to support all children who have been affected by the situation including the victim and **alleged** perpetrator.

Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum, ranging from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent. Problematic, abusive and violent sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. A useful umbrella term is "harmful sexual behaviour" (HSB). The term has been widely adopted in child protection and is used in this advice. HSB can occur online and/or face-to-face and can also occur simultaneously between the two. HSB should be considered in a child protection context.

When considering HSB, both ages and the stages of development of the children are critical factors. Sexual behaviour between children can be considered harmful if one of the children is much older, particularly if there is more than two years' difference or if one of the children is pre-pubescent and the other is not. However, a younger child can abuse an older child, particularly if they have power over them, for example, if the older child is disabled or smaller in stature. Confidential specialist support and advice on HSB is available from the specialist sexual violence sector and sources are listed in Annex B of KCSIE 2025.

This policy is available:

- On each individual academy's website
- From the school office

This policy is reviewed and evaluated throughout the academic year. It is updated annually.

2.Roles and Responsibilities

All staff working with children maintain an attitude of **'it could happen here,'** and this is especially important when considering child-on-child abuse.
The Principal, has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation and liaising with the Trustee Board, parents/carers, LA (Local Authority), and outside agencies.
Safeguarding is the responsibility of all however all staff, parents/carers and pupils need to be aware of who to report to and how to report any safeguarding concerns.

Definitions

Child-on-child abuse is most likely to include, but may not 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.

3.Recognising

At The Forge Trust, we recognise that behaviours associated with child-on-child abuse take place on a spectrum. Understanding where a child's behaviour falls on this spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it. We recognise that all children grow and develop at their own pace. We will use our professional judgement and knowledge of child development when responding to child-on-child abuse.

4.Reporting and Responding

At The Forge Trust, we want children, parents/carers, staff, and visitors to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously. We recognise that our Trust's initial response to a report of child-on-child abuse is incredibly important - how we respond to a report can encourage or undermine the confidence of future victims to report or come forward. As a Trust we will also respond to reports of alleged child-on-child abuse that have occurred online or outside of school. These reports will be treated seriously, and the school remains committed to supporting and safeguarding all parties including the victim, alleged perpetrator, and any other child(ren) who may be affected. We will make decisions on a case-by-case basis, with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or a deputy) taking the leading role and using their professional judgement, supported by other agencies, such as the Local Authority, Children's Social Care, and the Police as appropriate. We will ensure that we reference and follow other school policies and procedures as appropriate.
We have clear reporting systems for each group of our school community, the effectiveness of these reporting systems is reviewed throughout the academic year and may be expanded to meet the needs of all members of our community.

Children (including bystanders)

It is important to understand that a victim may not find it easy to tell staff about their abuse verbally. Children can show signs or act in ways that they hope adults will notice and react to. In some cases, the victim may not make a direct report. We recognise that in some instances another child may report on another child's behalf. All children will know how to report concerns or incidents of child-on-child abuse.
We ask that all children report any concerning behaviour to a member of school staff – this can be any member of teaching or non-teaching staff, including a class teacher, a TA, the Principal, a lunchtime supervisor, or a member of the office team. We talk about trusted adults regularly in class and in assemblies to remind our children of who they can report concerns to.

The member of staff will listen to the child and make an initial note of their concerns, they will then discuss next steps with them and reassure them that they will be supported. In line with the statutory guidance provided in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025, we will never promise a child that we will not tell anyone about a report of any form of abuse, as this may not be in the best interests of the child. The member of staff will make a formal record of the concern/report on the school's recording system (CPOMs) and other relevant members of staff will be alerted. The member of staff will directly alert the academy's Designated Safeguarding Lead if the report is deemed urgent or if a child is considered at risk.

We understand that some children may find it difficult to tell a member of staff about their concerns verbally, we therefore have additional reporting mechanisms in place. All academies have a worry box in each classroom where the child can put their name/a brief note about their concerns/draw a picture of their concern – these worry boxes are introduced to the children at the start of the year and children are reminded of them regularly. Our academies also have an online Worry Monster- if a child feels unable to tell a member of staff about their concerns verbally, they could send a message with their concerns, and these will be followed-up/responded to by the academy's Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy.

Parents/carers

We understand that parents and carers may well struggle to cope with making or receiving a report that their child has been the victim of or is an alleged perpetrator of child-on-child abuse.

In line with the statutory guidance provided in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 Part 5, we will seek advice and support from other services as decided on a case-by-case basis. All decisions and actions taken by the academy will consider the needs of the individual children involved, and the wider school community.

We ask that if parents/carers have concerns about their child experiencing or allegedly perpetrating child-on-child abuse, that they contact the academy's Designated Safeguarding Lead/Deputy (in person/via telephone call/via email) to explain their concerns. The Designated Safeguarding Lead/Deputy will take an initial note of the concerns but may ask to schedule a meeting to allow for more time to discuss the concerns in detail. Following the report and/or the meeting, the Designated Safeguarding Lead/Deputy will make a formal record of the report on the school's recording system (CPOMs) and other relevant members of staff will be alerted. The Designated Safeguarding Lead/Deputy will seek advice from Statutory Services if the report is deemed urgent or if a pupil is considered at risk.

We ask that parents/carers to come directly to the academy with their concerns rather than discussing them with other members of the academy community in person or online.

Our academy remains committed to supporting pupils and their families in all instances of child-on-child abuse. We will endeavour to ensure that all parties are kept informed of progress and any developments, but we will also need to show due regard to GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) and ongoing investigations by statutory services. This may mean, at times, that we are not able to provide or share information or updates.

If a parent/carer is not satisfied with our academy's actions, we ask that they follow our school's complaint policy and procedures. This is available online from our academy website and on request from the main office.

Staff

Our staff work closely with our children and therefore may notice a change in a child's behaviour or attitude that might indicate that something is wrong before receiving a report from a child or a member of the academy community. If staff have any concerns about a child's welfare or are concerned that a child is displaying behaviours that may show they have been the victim of or that they are perpetrating child-on-child abuse, they should act on them immediately rather than wait to be told.

We ask that staff report their concerns to a Designated Safeguarding Lead/directly to the Head Principal. The member of staff receiving the report will take an initial note of the concerns and will then make a formal record of the report on the school's recording system (CPOMs) and other relevant staff members will be alerted. The Designated Safeguarding Lead/Deputy will seek advice from Statutory Services if the report is deemed urgent or if a pupil is considered at risk.

Visitors

We ensure that all visitors to our academy are aware of our Child Protection and Safeguarding procedures and which staff member they should report any concerns to (the member of staff may differ depending on the purpose of the visit e.g., supply teacher, trustee, external agency etc.).

We ask that if a visitor to our academy has any concerns about child-on-child abuse that they have witnessed, or have been told about, that they report their concerns at the earliest opportunity in person to the academy's Designated Safeguarding Lead/the Principal/a member of the Senior Leadership Team. We ask that visitors report their concerns in person by the end of the day. For example, it would not be appropriate to wait until the following day or leave a written note with concerns. The member of staff receiving the report will take an initial note of the concerns and will then make a formal record of the concerns on the academy's recording system (CPOMs) and other relevant staff members will be alerted. The Designated Safeguarding Lead/Deputy will seek advice from Statutory Services if the report is deemed urgent or if a child is considered at risk.

5. Recording and Evaluating

We will ensure a report is made on CPOMs made as soon after the disclosure as possible recording the facts as presented by the child. These may be used as part of a statutory assessment if the case is escalated. We will ensure the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or deputy) will be informed as soon as possible, if they were not involved in the initial report. We will ensure that details of decisions made and reasons for decisions are recorded as well as any outcomes.

We will ensure that any 'safety plans' are recorded on CPOMs and kept under review.

Strategies for Prevention

The Forge Trust, actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by:

Staff training – including for supply staff, Trustees, volunteers, and visitors: -

- Contextual safeguarding
- Identification and classification of specific behaviours – SVSH, HSB etc
- Making it clear there is a **zero-tolerance approach** to child-on-child abuse (especially in relation to SVSH) 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 Trust Board they must be aware of their statutory safeguarding responsibilities (effective child protection policy – child-on-child abuse policy)
- Ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are fed back to the safeguarding lead/team so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify those children who may need additional support.

- **Information for children** (pupils/students) - give specific details of when, where, and how this information is shared – this may include:
  - Creating an ethos and culture in which all children feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgemental environment, and have them listened to
  - All children are frequently told what to do if they witness or experience any form of child-on-child abuse, the effect that it can have on those who experience it and the possible reasons for it.

- They are regularly informed about the school's approach to all forms of child-on-child abuse, including the academy's zero-tolerance approach towards all forms of child-on-child abuse, the process for reporting their concerns of child-on-child abuse and where to go for further help, support, and advice.
- Educating all children about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse via a well embedded RHE/RSHE curriculum, PSHE curriculum or wider curriculum
- Challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside of the classroom).

- **Information for parents/carers** - give specific details on engagement with parents/carers
  - Talking to parents, both in groups and one-to-one
  - Providing opportunities for parents to be involved in the review of academy policies and lesson plans; and
  - Encouraging parents to hold the school to account on this issue.
  - Asking parents what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the academy address those risks.
  - Challenging the attitudes that underlie child-on-child abuse – in academy and/or the wider community.
  - Ensuring parents /carers are aware of the ethos and culture of the academy.

6.RSHE Curriculum

The academy has a clear set of values and standards, upheld, and demonstrated throughout all aspects of academy life, which is supported by a planned programme of evidence based RSHE curriculum.

Our/RSHE/PSHE programme is fully inclusive and developed to be age and stage of development appropriate (especially when considering children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and/or other vulnerabilities)

We will, through our RSHE/PSHE programme promote:

- Healthy and respectful relationships
- Boundaries and consent
- Equality and raise awareness of stereotyping and prejudice.
- Body confidence and self-esteem.
- How to recognise an abusive relationship, including coercive and controlling behaviour.
- The concepts of, and laws relating to – sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, teenage relationship abuse (intimate personal relationships between children), and how to access support, and
- What constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable.

7.Breaches / Complaints

Breaches to this policy will be dealt with in the same way that breaches of other academy policies are dealt with, as determined by the Principal and Trustee Board.
If a parent/carer is not satisfied with our academy's actions, we ask that they follow our Trust's complaint policy and procedures. This is available online from our academy website, and on request from the academy office.

8.Links with other policies

You may find it helpful to read this child-on-child abuse policy alongside the other following academy policies:

Policy	How it may link
Safeguarding Policy	Includes information about child protection procedures and contextualised safeguarding
Behaviour Policy	Includes details about the academy's behaviour system including potential sanctions for pupils
Anti-Bullying policy	Includes information about bullying behaviours and vulnerable groups
Online Safety / E-Safety / Acceptable Use Policies	Includes information about children's online behaviour and details about online bullying/cyberbullying
Equalities Policy	Includes information about our academy's approach to tackling prejudice and celebrating differences. Links to prejudice-related language and crime and the protected characteristics
RSHE / PSHE Policy	Includes information about our school's RSHE programme and how we teach about healthy relationships, friendships, and bullying
Complaints Policy	Includes information about how to make a complaint if you are not satisfied with the academy's response

Further information and support can be found through the following links:

- Part 5: Child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment (pages 112-143) of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) Keeping children safe in education 2025 (publishing.service.gov.uk)
- Definitions - Keeping children safe in education 2025 (publishing.service.gov.uk)
- Simon Hackett (2010) Continuum model of sexual behaviours -
    - Sexual development and behaviour in children | NSPCC Learning
    - NSPCC Learning Understanding sexualised behaviour in children | NSPCC Learning

9.Monitoring and Review

This policy is reviewed and evaluated throughout the academic year. It is updated annually.