

Meeting: Children, Education and Skills Sub-Committee

Date: 13 January 2022

Title: Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Policy and online safety

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Service: Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- Explain the statutory responsibilities on school and LA in relation to the implementation of the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Curriculum.
- Identify the issues highlighted by the Everyone's Invited campaign, Ofsted review main findings, and online safety concerns.
- Summarise work being done as a result of the findings of a recent safeguarding audit sent to schools on peer on peer abuse which aimed to understand the need for a local response to the Ofsted review into sexual abuse in schools.
- Highlight specific challenges for NT and support offered.

2. Introduction

Today's children and young people are growing up in an increasingly complex world and living their lives seamlessly on and offline. This presents positive and exciting opportunities, but also challenges and risks. In this environment, children and young people need to know how to be safe and healthy, and how to manage their personal, social and academic lives in a positive way.

To help children and young people to learn the skills and knowledge to live healthy, safe and happy lives in modern society, in September 2020, the DfE made Relationships Education compulsory in all primary schools, Relationships and Sex Education compulsory in all secondary schools and Health Education compulsory in all state-funded schools.

Due to the impact of Covid 19 schools were given a degree of flexibility with the implementation of these subjects but since September 2021 all schools have been expected to teach all content listed in the statutory guidance that can be found [here](#). This document contains information on what schools should do and sets out the legal duties with which schools must comply when teaching Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education.

The introduction of these statutory subjects as part of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education in schools was well overdue. This was highlighted in 2020, when a website called Everyone's Invited was created, aimed at providing a safe place for young people who had experienced sexual violence and sexual harassment in education settings to share their experiences. The anonymous testimonies of thousands of young people uncovered the prevalence of sexual violence, sexual harassment including online sexual abuse, in schools, colleges, universities and society generally. This predominantly impacted on girls and young women but was experienced by young men too.

This led to Ofsted carrying out an urgent review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges by visiting a number of schools in Spring 2021, identified on the Everyone's Invited website, and others not named. 32 settings were visited overall. The review discovered that in some schools, colleges and universities, incidents were so common young people felt there was no point in reporting them. Amongst a number of recommendations provided by Ofsted, school and college leaders were advised to 'create a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated, and where they identify issues and intervene early to better protect children and young people. In order to do this, they should assume that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are happening in their setting, even when there are no specific reports, and put in place a whole-school approach to address them.' The full report and recommendations based on this review by Ofsted can be found [here](#).

Further detail about the RSHE curriculum, the Ofsted review into the Everyone's Invited campaign and our actions so far will be summarised below.

3. Details

3.1 Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education Statutory expectations.

In June 2019 the DfE published [statutory guidance](#) for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leader and teachers containing information on what schools should do, setting out the legal duties with which schools must comply when teaching Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education.

This document was shared with all head teachers and PSHE leads in school at the time and has been recirculated and referred to on many occasions since. All schools were invited to attend training and briefing sessions to help plan the implementation of the statutory content and 61% took up this offer.

A recent 'RSE Ready?' survey of PSHE education leads in North Tyneside, schools indicated that of the 60 replies:

- 93.3% of schools have updated their policies to reflect the statutory content and 6.7% are working on this.
- 81.7% of schools have consulted parents on this policy and 18.3% are working on this.
- 91.7% have updated PSHE education schemes of work to include the statutory content and 8.3% are working on it
- 83.4% of schools are confident that they are covering all statutory content.

PSHE education leads receive regular communications about resources available to support the implementation of the statutory curriculum. Networks sessions are offered termly, staff CPD is available to primary schools through the SLA and online training opportunities and resources are regularly shared.

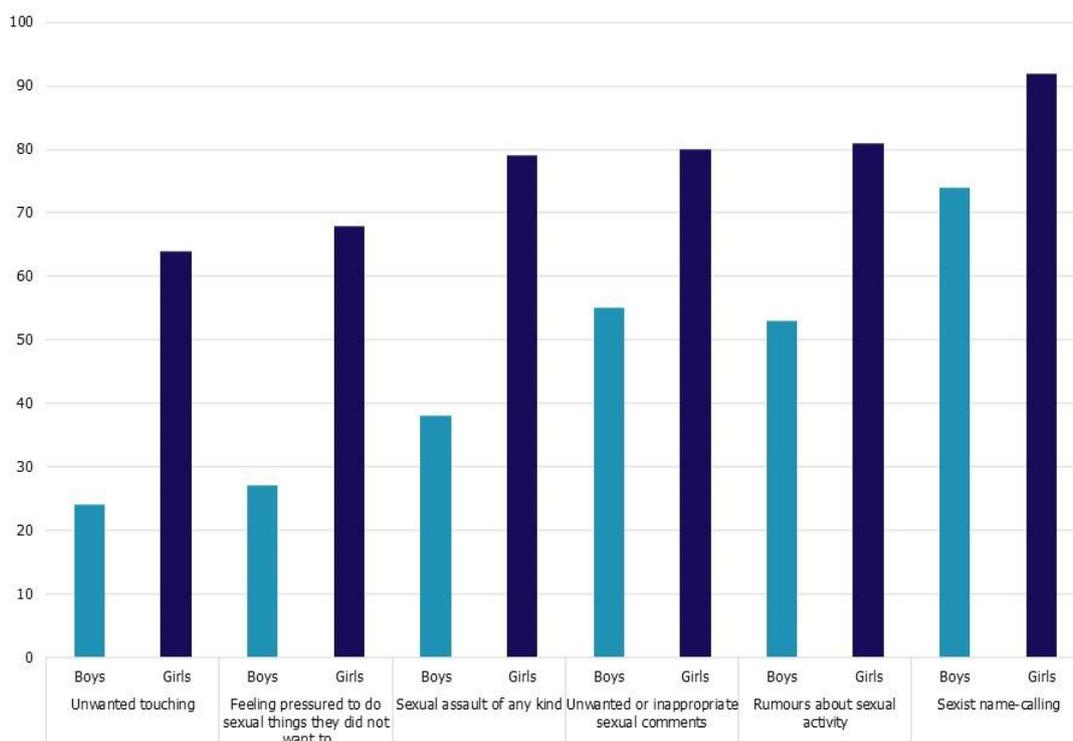
All schools should now be fully aware of the content of the statutory guidance and should have made every effort to implement it. This responsibility ultimately lies with school leaders.

3.2 Ofsted Review key findings

As a result of the Everyone's Invited Campaign, Ofsted were asked by the government to carry out a rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. The review included visits to 32 settings, interviews with over 900 children and young people and conversations with school leaders, teachers, parents, governors and Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs). The review report can be found [here](#).

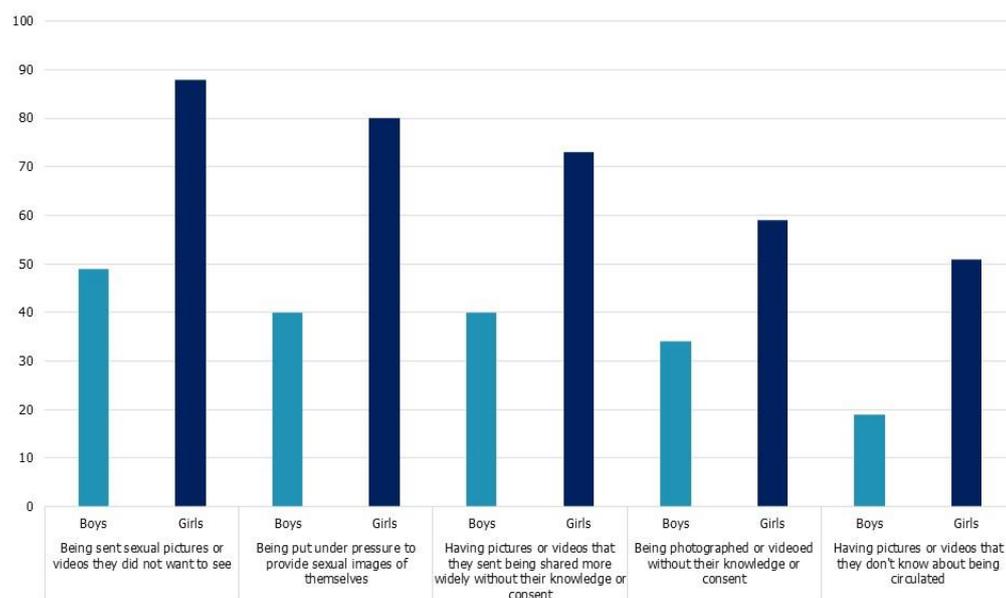
The following graph illustrates some key findings from the report:

Figure 1: These things happen 'a lot' or 'sometimes' between people my age (%)



The Ofsted review highlighted the prevalence of online sexual abuse that children and young people experienced, especially being sent sexual pictures or videos that they did not want to see. The diagram below indicates the extent of this problem:

Figure 2: These things happen ‘a lot’ or ‘sometimes’ between people my age (%)



A summary of the key findings can be found in section 6 Background information.

Following this review Ofsted made a number of recommendations for schools and college leaders, multi-agency partners, the government, inspectorates and Local Safeguarding Partnerships. The DfE guidance on Keeping Children Safe in Education was updated in 2021 to reflect these issues. This is underpinned by the reviewed 2021 guidance on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between children in schools and colleges.

Subsequently, the Ofsted framework was updated to ensure schools address peer on peer abuse, sexual harassment on and off line and sexual violence. Links to these documents can be found in the appendices.

3.3 Our response so far

The recommendations made by Ofsted have been shared with all schools through head teacher briefings, DSL briefings, PSHE lead networks and electronic communications.

PSHE education

The importance of the PSHE education curriculum in preventing sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools has been highlighted and curriculum resources provided to help schools strengthen this provision. PSHE networks have been used to discuss how to address this issue and schools have had opportunity to share good practice.

The ‘RSE Ready?’ survey highlighted the need for further staff training particularly in secondary schools. Colleagues in both primary and secondary schools reported they would benefit from training and support in dealing with and education about peer on peer abuse, sexual violence and harassment and online safety and relationships.

Work underway to support the White Ribbon Accreditation in North Tyneside has highlighted a need for more targeted work with boys and young men as part of PSHE education. Teaching resources that promote positive male role models and challenging old fashioned male stereotypes have been sourced and shared with schools.

Online Safety

Online safety teaching lies within the computing curriculum and the teaching and training materials used by LA are regularly updated to consider new trends or report findings. (Previous large-scale examples of this would include 'The Momo Challenge' in February 2019).

Advice and support about any national trends are shared with schools, usually in conjunction with the safeguarding team as not all schools choose to access the wider computing support.

Recent computing network information has had an online focus. Seeking to raise the profile and importance of the curriculum strand while making it clear that links to other subject areas need to be strengthened, particularly RSE and PSHE education, to ensure:

- clarity of message
- age appropriate advice
- no gaps in curriculum content

LA staff access national forums, webinars and training to ensure that any advice and guidance to schools is current. Regular conversations with the Prevention through Education Police team also ensure that any advice given is accurate in terms of legal implications.

There is a renewed commitment to ensure that all LA staff:

- are aware of current potential online risks
- can identify risks specific to their subject area
- know how to support school staff they work closely with
- know where to access further guidance and support

Wider LA work is ongoing to find new ways to engage with schools who do not currently access computing support and therefore LA online safety advice and guidance (mainly High schools).

Safeguarding

The Designated Safeguarding Leads DSLs (and Deputies-DDSLs) have access to termly Designated Safeguarding Lead briefing and termly newsletters. All aspects of safeguarding in schools are shared with DSLs through these forums.

Peer on Peer abuse (including Sexual Violence and Harassment) and online safety agenda items are regular features at these sessions or through the termly newsletters. The SIAs for PSHE and ICT regularly contribute to the safeguarding information that is shared with DSLs.

The content of the original 2018 version of *DfE Sexual violence and Sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges* was delivered at a DSL briefing at that time and schools subsequently began to think about Peer on Peer abuse policies and procedures that needed to be in place. This involved ensuring an effective curriculum around healthy relationships and understanding the role technology has in facilitating peer on peer abuse.

More recently, the Everyone's Invited website encouraged schools to shine a spotlight on this issue once again. The 2018 guidance supported schools to understand the issue existed but the more recent focus on sexual violence and harassment between peers and the subsequent Ofsted review has highlighted just how widespread the issue is.

The DSL briefing in June 2021 gave an update on the reviewed version of *DfE Sexual violence and Sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges*. This guidance was reviewed

in line with the findings from the Ofsted review on Sexual Abuse in Schools. The updates focussed on ensuring school recognised and addressed the issues and were starting to move towards a culture change. Schools were also guided through the updated 'Sexting' guidance which has now been updated to 'Sharing of Nudes and Semi Nudes' which is the sending or posting of nude or semi-nude images, videos or live streams by young people under the age of 18 online.

This information was reiterated through the publication of the September 2021 DfE Keeping Children Safe in Education and the full content of this was discussed with DSLs at the briefing the same month. Schools were also supported to update their child protection policy at that time.

Following discussions regarding all the above issues, meetings were initiated with the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Partnership (NTSCP) to begin to formulate a local response that would support schools but also be underpinned by a multi-agency approach to peer on peer abuse. For the partnership to understand the issues schools are facing, a survey was sent out and asked the following questions:

1. What are the issues currently raised by pupils in your school linked to peer on peer abuse? (this may include issues that occur in school, out of school, online, on school transport etc)
2. Are the current systems (both internal and external) for reporting peer on peer abuse understood and accessible by all staff and pupils? (this may include staff responses to pupils, pupil's confidence to report to staff, DSL knowledge and skills, multi-agency responses and involvement)
3. Where is your school at with the implementation of the newer aspects of the Relationships Education policy particularly relating to peer on peer abuse? (this may include issues relating to the review of curriculum content, curriculum time, staff training and staff confidence)
4. Do you feel your staff understand the law and legal parameters when it comes to peer on peer abuse? (this may include searching and confiscation guidance, when to call the police guidance, online behaviour and how to manage 'alleged perpetrators' within school)
5. Were there any issues that arose from your consultation with parents on the new RSE policy and procedures?
6. Please outline what would help you to robustly develop a whole school approach to tackling sexual violence and sexual harassment between children and young people?

The response was not overly high compared to the usual DSL response for information (30 responses from 26 schools). Some schools felt that they could not give accurate responses as this was very much a work in progress and a priority for their safeguarding plans for the year.

Responses to survey-general overview

Issues for younger children tend to be facilitated through phones, messaging groups, gaming platforms aimed at younger children or popular platforms e.g TikTok. As children progress through primary, social media becomes a factor.

Primary children use derogatory language which they hear online or at home and bring into school to 'test' out. Some schools also reported homophobic or racist incidents. Sexualised name calling begins to emerge at Primary school level with one school reporting they have had an incident of a pupil sending a semi-nude image.

As pupils move to secondary age, issues are around sexual inappropriateness, online harassment, inappropriate sexual name calling/sexualised language, unwanted touching, sharing nude and semi-nudes sometimes with malicious intent.

Issue for older pupils happen during unstructured times of the day or out of school especially online and on school transport. Some pupils have reported a reluctance to go for help, due to being 'branded a snitch'.

In terms of support, most schools outlined that they would benefit from support with training, shared resources, support from external organisations, support with policies, involvement of multi-agency partners, training and support on mental health, trauma and counselling.

Schools would like support on how to better work with parents. They also feel they would benefit from a proven working model with evidence of success to ensure consistency, mechanisms to develop staff confidence and have a common language around this issue to be able to shift the culture in school.

Points raised in discussion groups at the Head Teacher briefing

The issue was also brought to the Head Teacher briefing in November and breakout rooms were used to discuss. The head teachers were asked in response to Peer on Peer abuse, what are the issues, what's working well and what support is needed. The views of head teachers are summarised below:

- Issues raised regarding children-Mostly online issues:

Children discuss their experiences as seemingly thinking they are safe online but when adults dig deeper, they are unaware of the wider risks. Anonymity causes many issues as do 'pop ups' with links to other sites. Issues with SEND children and EAL can mean additional challenges. Children seem to be more comfortable reporting to school staff rather than parents.

The pandemic has not helped as its difficult to teach PSHE through online lessons and children have spent more time online. Schools feel online platform reporting systems and safety regulations need reviewed.

- Specific barriers

Parents need to be more on board as its difficult to get them to understand the issues and the scale of the problem. They report that their children have more skill and knowledge that they do. Parents appear to feel their children are safe as they are at home but they are often shocked at their child's online activity when an issue comes to light.

Support organisations and other safeguarding partners such as the police cannot always offer proposed interventions due to capacity. Schools feel the government should recognise this better at a national level and provide more support and funding.

3.4 Next steps

The findings locally as outlined above show that North Tyneside schools, teachers and pupils are saying the same issues exist for them as those evident in the Ofsted review.

In order to address this complex issue, joint working between partners, schools and school improvement should ensure the issue is seen as widespread therefore all should know how to address it and a full system approach is implemented.

Joint training should be offered for a consistent approach which should involve schools and LA staff working together. A standardised assessment format should be used across the LA so schools can share practice and multi-agency partners understand the process that has been implemented in school before cases are escalated to a higher level of support.

This should be underpinned by a whole school approach including an effective curriculum, a well embedded culture of online safety for all stakeholders and meaningful and well-understood policies and procedures. This should be overseen, supported and endorsement by the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Partnership (NTSCP).

4. Background Information

The following documents have been used in the compilation of this report and may be inspected at the offices of the author.

- [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers](#)
- [Ofsted Review of Sexual Abuse in schools and colleges](#)

Ofsted Review key findings

Key findings of this review include:

- how prevalent peer on peer, sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are for children and young people.
- sexual harassment and online sexual abuse, such as being sent unsolicited explicit sexual material and being pressured to send nude and semi nude pictures ('nudes'), are much more prevalent than adults realise.
- sexual harassment occurs so frequently that it has become 'commonplace'. For example, 92% of girls, and 74% of boys, said sexist name-calling happens a lot or sometimes to them or their peers. The frequency of these harmful sexual behaviours means that some children and young people consider them normal
- when we asked children and young people where sexual violence occurred, they typically talked about unsupervised spaces outside of school, such as parties or parks without adults present, although some girls told us they also experienced unwanted touching in school corridors.
- children and young people, especially girls, do not want to talk about sexual abuse for several reasons, even where their school encourages them to. For example, the risk of being ostracised by peers or getting peers into trouble is not considered to be worth it for something perceived by children and young people to be commonplace. They worry about how adults will react, because they think they will not be believed, or that they will be blamed. They also think that once they talk to an adult, the process will be out of their control.
- some teachers and leaders underestimated the scale of the problem. They either did not identify sexual harassment and sexualised language as problematic or they were unaware they were happening.

- professionals consistently underestimated the prevalence of online sexual abuse, even when there was a proactive whole-school approach to tackling sexual harassment and violence.
- some school and college leaders are unsure how to proceed when criminal investigations do not lead to a prosecution or conviction.
- schools and colleges cannot tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, on their own, and neither should they. They need support from the government.

5. Appendices

- [Keeping children safe in education 2021 Statutory guidance for schools and colleges September 2021](#)
- [School Inspection Handbook. Updated September 2021](#)
- [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges. Advice for governing bodies, proprietors, headteachers, principals, senior leadership teams and designated safeguarding leads September 2021](#)
- [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#)