

Belton Church of England Primary School

Child-on-Child Abuse Policy



September 2026 – August 2027

Updated to reflect Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, effective from 1 September 2026, and current safeguarding expectations.

Reviewed: September 2026

Policy owner: Designated Safeguarding Lead / Headteacher

Approved by: Governing Body

Review date: September 2027

1. Introduction and policy statement

Belton Church of England Primary School is committed to a whole-school approach to preventing, identifying and responding to child-on-child abuse. The school recognises that children can be vulnerable to, and capable of, abusing their peers. Child-on-child abuse is a safeguarding issue and will be taken as seriously as abuse perpetrated by an adult.

The term child-on-child abuse is used throughout this policy. It includes harmful sexual behaviour, sexual harassment and sexual violence, as well as other forms of abuse between children. The school recognises that abuse can happen inside or outside school, face-to-face, online, or through a combination of online and offline behaviours.

This policy forms part of the school's safeguarding arrangements and should be read alongside the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, Online Safety Policy, Relationships and Sex Education/PSHE Policy and any relevant local safeguarding procedures.

2. What is child-on-child abuse?

Child-on-child abuse can take many forms. It may be a single incident or a repeated pattern of behaviour. It may involve an imbalance of power, coercion, threats, exploitation or intimidation. It may also involve children who have themselves experienced abuse or other adverse experiences.

Examples include:

- bullying, including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying;
- physical abuse, physical assault and harm, or threats of harm with a weapon;
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children, including teenage relationship abuse;
- harmful sexual behaviour (HSB);
- sexual harassment and sexual violence;
- consensual and non-consensual making or sharing of nudes and semi-nudes, including images generated or altered using artificial intelligence;
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent;
- upskirting;
- online sexual harassment, sexualised messages, unwanted explicit content and coercion;
- sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation, including links to gangs, county lines and organised crime;
- radicalisation and extremist influence;
- initiation/hazing-type violence and rituals; and
- other behaviour which causes or threatens harm to another child.

Technology may be used to facilitate abuse, including through social media, messaging platforms, gaming, group chats and image-sharing. The school will treat online abuse and abuse occurring outside school with equal seriousness.

3. Zero tolerance and 'it could happen here'

The school has a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence. Such behaviour will not be dismissed as "banter", "just having a laugh", "part of growing up" or "boys being boys". The school recognises that failing to challenge such behaviour can normalise abuse, misogyny and unsafe behaviour and can discourage children from reporting concerns.

All staff are expected to maintain an attitude of professional curiosity and an awareness that child-on-child abuse could happen here, even where there have been no previous reports.

4. Harmful sexual behaviour and the continuum of behaviours

Children's sexual behaviour exists on a continuum from normal and developmentally expected behaviour through inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent behaviour. The age and developmental stage of the children involved are critical when assessing behaviour.

The school will use professional judgement and, where appropriate, specialist advice when distinguishing between developmentally expected behaviour and harmful sexual behaviour. A significant age difference, developmental difference or power imbalance may be important factors. A younger child may also abuse an older child, particularly where they hold power over them, for example because of disability or physical size.

The school will use the Hackett continuum included in the original policy as a supporting framework, alongside current safeguarding guidance and professional advice. The continuum should support professional judgement rather than replace it.

5. Vulnerability and additional barriers to disclosure

Any child can experience or display child-on-child abuse. The school will be particularly alert to children who may face additional vulnerability or barriers to reporting.

- children with SEND or disabilities;
- children with communication or language needs;
- children who have experienced abuse, neglect or domestic abuse;
- children who are looked after or otherwise vulnerable;
- children who frequently miss or go missing from education, home or care;
- children experiencing mental health difficulties;
- children involved in gangs, county lines, criminal or sexual exploitation;
- children who may be targeted because of sex, race, religion, disability or other protected characteristics;
- children who may be questioning aspects of their identity or who may be perceived by peers to be different; and
- children who are reluctant to disclose because of embarrassment, shame, fear, threats, language barriers, disability or concerns about consequences.

Staff will not wait for a direct disclosure before acting on concerns. Changes in behaviour, increased absence, injuries, peer reports, overheard conversations, online information or other indicators may require discussion with the DSL.

6. Preventative education and culture

Prevention is central to the school's approach. The school will use Relationships Education, Health Education, RSE where appropriate, PSHE, online safety education, behaviour teaching and the wider curriculum to develop respectful relationships and help children recognise and report harmful behaviour.

- Children will be taught that abusive behaviour is not acceptable and that they should tell a trusted adult if they experience or witness it.
- Teaching will address healthy relationships, boundaries, respect, consent as age-appropriate, online behaviour, stereotypes, bullying and the impact of harmful behaviour.

- The school will challenge misogynistic, sexist, homophobic, racist and discriminatory language and behaviour.
- Parents and carers will be provided with information about the school's expectations and how to raise concerns.
- Staff and governors will receive appropriate safeguarding training and updates.
- Leaders will review patterns and trends in behaviour and safeguarding information to identify emerging risks.

7. Reporting concerns

Children are encouraged to report concerns to a trusted adult. This may be a class teacher, teaching assistant, DSL, deputy DSL, senior leader or another adult they trust. Parents and carers can report concerns to the class teacher, DSL, Headteacher or another senior leader.

Staff, volunteers and visitors must report concerns immediately through the school's safeguarding procedures. A concern must not be dismissed because it appears low-level, because the children are friends, or because the behaviour has happened outside school or online.

8. Immediate response to a report

When a child reports child-on-child abuse, staff will:

1. listen carefully and respond calmly and without judgement;
2. reassure the child that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe;
3. avoid making promises of confidentiality;
4. explain, in an age-appropriate way, what may happen next and who the information may need to be shared with;
5. use open questions and avoid leading questions or investigating the allegation themselves;
6. record what the child says, using the child's own words as far as possible, without interpretation or personal opinion;
7. inform the DSL or deputy DSL as soon as practically possible;
8. where possible, manage a report with two members of staff present, preferably including the DSL or deputy;
9. consider immediate safety arrangements for the child and other pupils; and
10. follow the school's safeguarding referral procedures.

9. Reports involving online behaviour and nudes/semi-nudes

The school recognises that online behaviour may form part of a wider pattern of abuse. This includes abusive or harassing messages, misogynistic or misandrist messages, unwanted sexual content, sexualised online bullying, coercion, threats and the making or sharing of nudes or semi-nudes.

All incidents involving the sharing of nude or semi-nude images require a safeguarding response, whether the sharing appears consensual or non-consensual. The response will be proportionate and will consider the age, development and circumstances of the children involved, including coercion, exploitation and vulnerability.

- Staff must not promise confidentiality.
- Staff should not view or forward illegal images of a child.
- Where viewing an image is unavoidable, staff will follow current DfE/UKCIS guidance and ensure the DSL or appropriate safeguarding lead is involved.

- Where appropriate, devices may be confiscated in accordance with the school's searching, screening and confiscation procedures and evidence preserved for the police.
- The school will follow current UKCIS 'Sharing nudes and semi-nudes' guidance.

10. DSL decision-making and case-by-case response

Every report will be considered on a case-by-case basis, led by the DSL or deputy DSL using professional judgement and supported by Children's Social Care, the police and specialist agencies where required.

The DSL will consider:

- the wishes and feelings of the victim, while balancing these with safeguarding duties;
- the nature and seriousness of the alleged incident;
- whether a crime may have been committed;
- the ages and developmental stages of the children;
- any power imbalance, coercion, intimidation or exploitation;
- whether the incident is isolated or forms part of a pattern;
- whether other children may also be victims;
- whether there are risks to the victim, alleged perpetrator or wider school community;
- any links to sexual or criminal exploitation, gangs, county lines or other extra-familial harms;
- the location and time of the incident and whether environmental changes are required; and
- what support is required for every child involved.

11. Four possible routes for managing reports

11.1 Manage internally

Some lower-level incidents may be managed internally through the Behaviour Policy and pastoral support where the DSL decides that neither early help nor statutory referral is required. The decision, rationale and actions will be recorded on CPOMS.

11.2 Family Help / early help

Where children may benefit from additional support but the threshold for statutory intervention is not met, the school may seek community-based or targeted Family Help/early help. Support may be provided to the victim, alleged perpetrator and other children as appropriate.

11.3 Referral to Children's Social Care

Where a child has been harmed, is at risk of harm or is in immediate danger, the school will make a referral to local authority Children's Social Care in accordance with local procedures. The school will normally inform parents/carers unless doing so would increase the risk to a child.

11.4 Reporting to the police

Where a report indicates that a criminal offence may have occurred, the DSL will follow local procedures and consult/report to the police as appropriate. For reports of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault, the starting principle is referral to the police. This applies even where the alleged perpetrator is under ten; the police will take a welfare rather than criminal justice approach.

12. Risk and needs assessment

Following a report of sexual violence, the DSL or deputy DSL will complete an immediate risk and needs assessment. Following sexual harassment, the need for a risk assessment will be considered case-by-case.

The assessment will consider:

- the victim's safety and support needs;
- potential other victims;
- the alleged perpetrator and their safeguarding needs;
- the wider school community, including staff where relevant;
- the location and time of the incident and any environmental risks;
- contact between children, including shared classes, spaces, clubs, transport and activities; and
- measures required to prevent further harm.

Risk assessments will be recorded, regularly reviewed and updated. The school's assessment does not replace specialist assessments by social workers, police or sexual violence specialists.

13. Children sharing classes or spaces

The school will carefully consider whether the victim and alleged perpetrator(s) should share classes, spaces, activities or transport. Any arrangements will be based on risk, safeguarding duties, educational needs and the wishes of the victim as far as reasonably possible.

Where separation or other protective measures are required, these will not be treated as a finding of guilt. The school will continue to review arrangements and will seek to minimise disruption to the victim's education and normal routines.

14. Supporting the victim

- The victim's safety, needs and wishes will be central to decisions, while recognising the school's safeguarding duties.
- The victim will be reassured that they are not responsible for the abuse and have not caused a problem by reporting it.
- A trusted adult will be identified where helpful and, wherever reasonably possible, chosen by the child.
- Support will be proportionate to the nature and impact of the incident.
- The school will consider pastoral, Family Help, specialist sexual violence, mental health and other appropriate support.
- The victim's attendance and educational progress will be monitored and supported.
- The school will take steps to protect the victim from bullying, retaliation, intimidation or online harassment.
- Any move to another educational setting will only be considered with the child's best interests at the centre and appropriate support/information sharing in place.

15. Supporting the alleged perpetrator and children displaying HSB

The school recognises that a child who has allegedly abused another child may themselves be vulnerable and may have experienced abuse, trauma or other unmet needs. Safeguarding support and appropriate disciplinary action are not mutually exclusive.

- The child's age, developmental stage, SEND and communication needs will be considered.

- The nature, frequency and seriousness of the behaviour will be considered.
- The child will receive appropriate safeguarding and pastoral support.
- Specialist assessment or intervention will be sought where required.
- A clear safeguarding management plan may be required to manage risks to other children.
- Behaviour sanctions will be proportionate and consistent with the school's Behaviour Policy.
- Where a child moves school, relevant safeguarding information and ongoing support/risk information will be transferred appropriately.

16. Unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious reports

A report that cannot be substantiated does not automatically mean that it was false or that the child made it up. The DSL will consider whether either child requires further support or whether the report may indicate another safeguarding concern.

Where a report is determined to have been deliberately invented or malicious, the school may consider appropriate action under the Behaviour Policy. All concerns, decisions, actions and rationales will be recorded on CPOMS.

17. Multi-agency working and information sharing

The school will work with local safeguarding partners, Children's Social Care, police and specialist services where required. The DSL will be familiar with local referral arrangements and available specialist support for victims, alleged perpetrators and other children affected.

Information will be shared lawfully, securely and proportionately. Only those who need the information to safeguard children or support an investigation will be involved.

18. Recording and CPOMS

All concerns relating to child-on-child abuse will be recorded promptly on CPOMS, in line with the school's safeguarding recording procedures.

- The initial concern/disclosure and the child's words should be recorded accurately.
- Actions taken, referrals, discussions and decisions should be recorded.
- The rationale for decisions, including decisions not to refer, should be recorded.
- Risk and needs assessments should be stored securely and reviewed.
- Records should be reviewed for patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour.
- Patterns should inform preventative education, supervision, staffing, environmental changes and staff training.

If CPOMS is temporarily unavailable, staff will use the school's agreed contingency recording process and transfer the information to CPOMS as soon as practicable.

19. Prevention, monitoring and contextual safeguarding

Leaders will use safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and pastoral information to identify patterns and wider contextual risks. This may include considering locations, times, peer groups, online spaces and activities where concerns are emerging.

- Child-on-child incidents will be reviewed by the DSL team regularly.
- Trends will be shared with senior leaders and governors through appropriate safeguarding reporting.
- The school will consider whether additional teaching, supervision, environmental changes or staff training are needed.
- The school will review whether incidents indicate wider cultural issues that need to be addressed.
- The effectiveness of preventative education will be reviewed and adapted in response to emerging needs.

20. Staff training and awareness

All staff will receive safeguarding and child protection training at induction and regular updates thereafter. Training will include child-on-child abuse and the school's procedures for identifying, reporting, recording and responding to concerns.

- Staff will understand that child-on-child abuse is a safeguarding issue for both the victim and alleged perpetrator.
- Staff will know how to respond to a disclosure and when to contact the DSL.
- Staff will understand harmful sexual behaviour and the continuum of sexualised behaviours.
- Staff will understand the risks associated with online abuse and the making/sharing of nudes and semi-nudes, including AI-generated imagery.
- Staff will understand the importance of challenging sexualised, misogynistic, discriminatory and bullying behaviour.
- The DSL and deputies will maintain appropriate knowledge of HSB and local specialist support.

21. Relationship with other school policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- Relationships Education / RSE / PSHE Policy
- Attendance Policy
- SEND Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Searching, Screening and Confiscation procedures

22. Statutory guidance and key references

- Keeping children safe in education 2026 – Department for Education (effective from 1 September 2026).
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 – Department for Education.
- Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges – Department for Education (2021 advice; incorporated into current KCSIE expectations).
- UKCIS: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people.
- Searching, Screening and Confiscation – Department for Education.
- Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019.

23. Local safeguarding contacts

The school will maintain current local referral information. Local contact details must be checked before publication and whenever local safeguarding arrangements change.

Service	Current contact / referral route
Children's Social Care	0116 3055500
Police	101/ 999
Family Help / Early Help	0116 3055500
Specialist harmful sexual behaviour / sexual violence support	Local Helpline: 0808 80 200 28

24. Policy review record

Date	Version	Changes	Approved by
September 2026	2026–2027	Updated from 2025–2026 policy to reflect KCSIE 2026, current terminology, expanded child-on-child abuse content, online abuse and AI-generated nudes/semi-nudes, HSB continuum, risk assessment and current multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.	Governing Body