

ST MARIE'S SCHOOL, A Catholic Voluntary Academy

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Headteacher: Mr J Fernandes



1st November 2021

Safeguarding Update: Sexual Abuse in Schools Review

Dear Parents/Carers,

Please find a summary of Ofsted's report into Sexual Abuse in Schools.

The review recommends that schools, colleges and multi-agency partners act as though sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are happening, even when there are no specific reports. This review did not analyse whether the issue is more or less prevalent for different groups of young people, and there may well be differences, but it found that the issue is so widespread that it needs addressing for all children and young people.

During Ofsted's visits to schools, girls told them that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse, such as being sent unsolicited explicit sexual material and being pressured to send nude pictures ('nudes'), are much more prevalent than adults realise. For example:

- Nearly 90% of girls, and nearly 50% of boys, said being sent explicit pictures or videos of things they did not want to see happens a lot or sometimes to them or their peers.

Children and young people told Ofsted that 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 Ofsted 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, told Ofsted that they 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.

Children and young people were rarely positive about the Relationships, Sex and Healthcare Education (RSHE) they had received. They felt that it was too little, too late and that the curriculum was not equipping them with the information and advice they needed to navigate the reality of their lives. Because of these gaps, they told Ofsted they turned to social media or their peers to educate each other, which understandably made some feel resentful. As one girl put it, 'It shouldn't be our responsibility to educate boys'.

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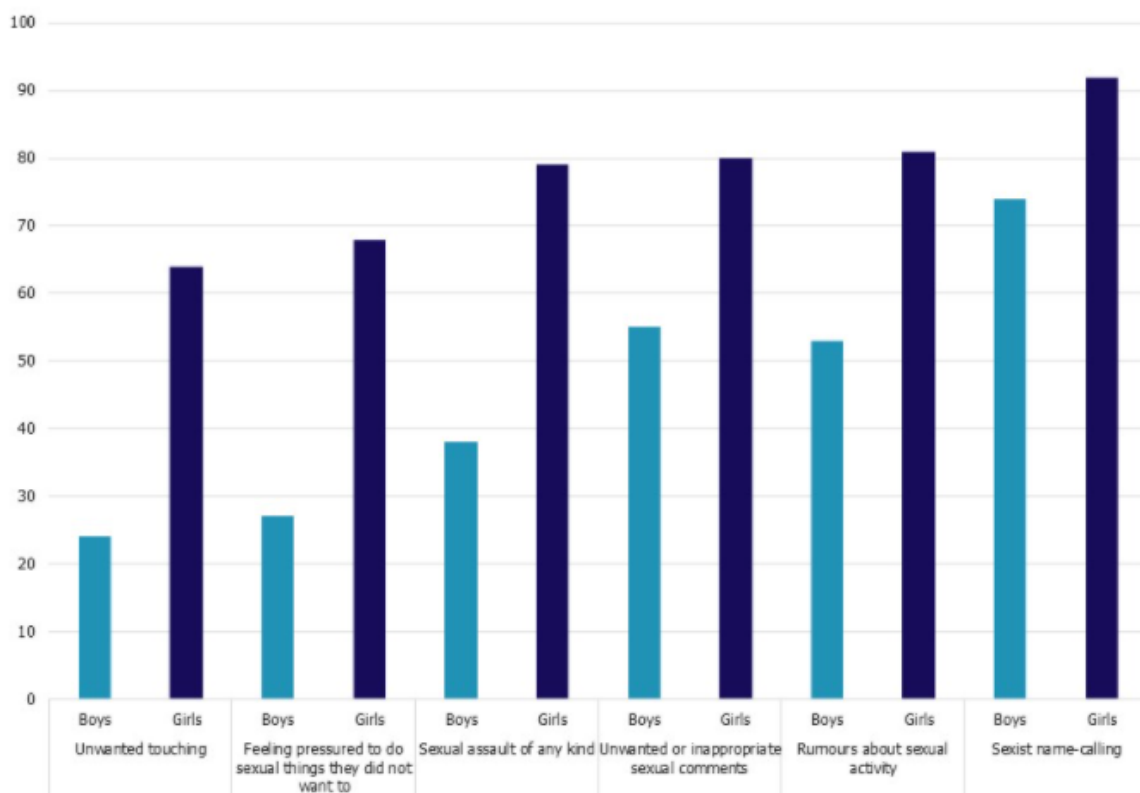
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In the schools and colleges Ofsted visited, some teachers and leaders underestimated the scale of the problem. They either did not identify sexual harassment and sexualised language as problematic or they were unaware they were happening. They were dealing with incidents of sexual violence when they were made aware of them, and following statutory guidance. But professionals consistently underestimated the prevalence of online sexual abuse, even when there was a proactive whole-school approach to tackling sexual harassment and violence. Below are some graphs from the report highlighting the issues.

Figure 2. These things happen 'a lot' or 'sometimes' between people my age (%)



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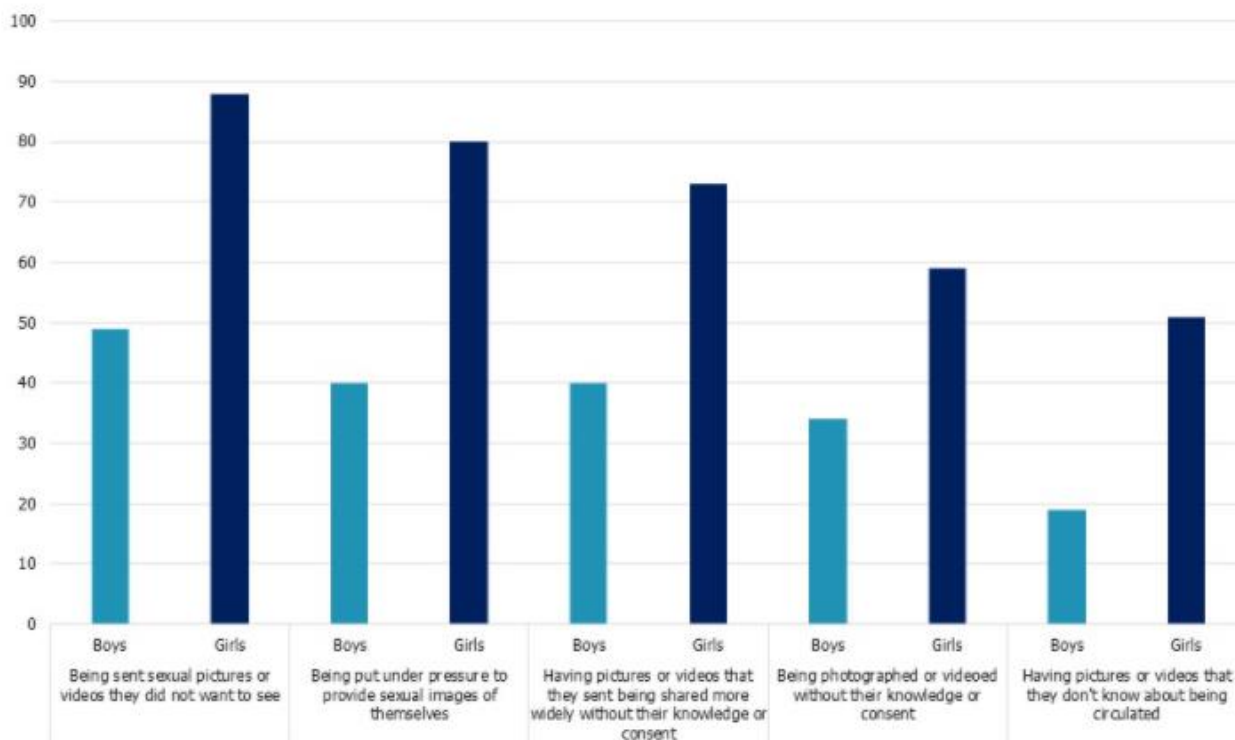
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Figure 3. These things happen 'a lot' or 'sometimes' between people my age (%)



What does Ofsted recommend?

In light of the findings, even where school and college leaders do not have specific information that indicates sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are problems for their children and young people, **they should act on the assumption that they are.**

Leaders should take a whole-school/college approach to developing a culture where all kinds of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are recognised and addressed.

To achieve this, schools and colleges need to create an environment where staff model respectful and appropriate behaviour, where children and young people are clear about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and where they are confident to ask for help and support when they need it.

Central to this should be a carefully planned and implemented RSHE curriculum, sanctions and interventions to tackle poor behaviour and provide support for children and young people who need it, training and clear expectations for staff and governors, and listening to pupil voice.

Our School's Response

However much we would like to deny that this is happening, it is clear that, due to the prevalence of online-sexualised content and social media, our children of all ages are accessing inappropriate sexualised material

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and it is becoming more prevalent in all settings. As the report suggests, the issue is far more widespread than many schools/colleges and parents/carers would like to admit.

Tackling this problem requires a proactive approach to ensuring that our children are both protected from seeing sexual content and that they have the relevant and age appropriate knowledge to challenge some of the misinformation that is highly prevalent in today's society. Our Relationship Sex and Healthcare Education curriculum (Life to the Full) plays an important role in this in which children are provided with times to discuss and share concerns in an age appropriate way.

We pride ourselves on forming positive relationships with our children in which they can be honest and ask questions without fear of recrimination. Our school's approach is clear; we will address all questions, queries and enquiries in an age appropriate way as the report suggests, if children do not get their knowledge from trusted adults, they will find this online. Our circle times and check-ins provide a safe space for children to explore important aspects essential to their personal and social development.

As part of our statutory safeguarding duty, our school adopts the following approach when focusing on safeguarding and child protection **"we know what to look for, we know it can happen here and we know who to report it to"**. We use a range of tools and work with professionals and parents/carers to provide the age appropriate and timely intervention required to ensure every child is aware of what they need to do should they receive any form of sexual harassment/abuse.

If you would like any more information about the school's approach, please don't hesitate to contact me at school. Please don't forget the ['Whisper'](#) button on our school website. This is an anonymous reporting service for pupils, families and local community that allows you to send a message to a confidential school email account where staff experienced in responding to issues will receive it.

Thank you for supporting us in ensuring that all of our children are safe.

Yours faithfully,

Mr Fernandes
Designated Safeguarding Lead

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