

Online Safety 4 Schools

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Online Safety within UK's 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' 2021

In UK, Ofsted's inspectors visited 32 state and independent schools and colleges and spoke to over 900 children and young people about the prevalence of sexual harassment. The Review explores safeguarding and curriculum, multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, victims' voice and reporting and various other considerations and the stark findings reveal the normalisation of sexual harassment in school environments.

The Review found that "professionals consistently underestimated the prevalence of online sexual abuse" and stated that reports from children on relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) taught in schools were "rarely positive". A recurrent theme that emerges from the Review is children's reservations in reporting harmful behaviour for a variety of reasons, including the fear that, once reported, what happened next would be out of their control.

'Sexual Abuse and Harassment, received and experienced by students is occurring 'Online' via Social Media, Games and Gaming Communities'

The findings in the Review highlight the pervasive nature of online sexual abuse in schools:

- nearly 90% of girls, and nearly 50% of boys said that being sent explicit images they did not wish to see happens "a lot" or "sometimes".
- girls reported that being asked to share inappropriate images happened regularly - in one, schoolgirls reported that some girls can be contacted by up to 10 or 11 different boys a night asking for nude/semi-nude images. Further, some evidence suggests access to technology generally and sharing inappropriate images occurs in primary schools.
- 92% of girls and 74% of boys said that sexist name-calling happened "a lot" or "sometimes."
- children said that the words "slag" and "slut" are commonplace in schools, and many felt staff were unaware of the language, dismissed it as "banter" or were not prepared to tackle it.



Ofsted calls for Schools to take a "whole-school" approach and develop a culture where sexual harassment and online abuse are not accepted, and where school and college leaders do not hold specific information that indicates sexual abuse is a problem for their students, they should act on the assumption that they are.

Key Recommendations

- Specific Online Safety workshops for Students – online abuse, harassment & peer on peer abuse
- Training for staff (and governors where relevant) to better understand the definitions of online sexual harassment, online sexual violence, online peer-on-peer sexual abuse, and consistently uphold standards in responses to online sexual harassment and online sexual abuse.

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