

Peer on Peer Abuse Policy

Policy Reviewed: November 2021

Next Policy Review Date: November 2022

Introduction

In recent years there has been growing recognition that children can suffer significant harm, and abuse, at the hands of other children or young people.

Keeping Children Safe in Education makes clear that all staff should be aware that safeguarding and child protection issues can also ‘manifest themselves via peer on peer abuse’. Staff should recognise that children are capable of abusing their peers and be clear about MWS Policy and Procedures regarding peer on peer abuse.

This document aims to

- define peer on peer abuse
- reflect on the different forms of peer on peer abuse, including contextual abuse
- outline procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse
- outline how allegations and disclosures of peer on peer abuse will be investigated and dealt with
- outline how victims of peer on peer abuse will be supported.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with:

MWS Child Protection Policy

MWS Behaviour Policy

This Policy should also be read with the understanding of the following key principles based on the *KCSIE Statutory Guidelines for Schools and Colleges*:

- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children at Moorland Waldorf school is the responsibility of *all* staff.
- Staff should always consider what is in the best interests of the pupils in our care.
- No single staff member can have a full picture of each child and so prompt action and sharing of information is crucial.
- Staff should be aware that abusive behaviour amongst peers can put children in danger; abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed off as “banter” or “part of growing up”, or “having a laugh”.
- All staff should be aware that safeguarding issues can manifest themselves via peer on peer abuse. This may include, but is not limited to, bullying (including cyber bullying) gender-based violence/sexual assaults, sexting, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying.
- Finally, as regarding any safeguarding issue, all members of the community are asked to cultivate an understanding that ‘it could happen here’ and be prepared to ‘think the unthinkable’.

Definitions and Forms of Peer-on-Peer abuse

There is no clear boundary between incidents that should be regarded as abusive and incidents that should be dealt with by MWS behavioural and disciplinary systems. If one child or young person causes harm to another, this should not necessarily be dealt with as abuse: unkindness, physical fighting and harassment between children are not always or inevitably seen as child protection issues.

However, it may be appropriate to regard peer on peer behaviour as abusive if harm is caused because:

- There is a significant **power imbalance** between the young people concerned. The abuse of children is often constructed around an age differential between the abuser and the abused, but in cases of peer-on-peer abuse this may not always be the case. In such circumstances, power imbalances can manifest in other ways, e.g. gender, social status within peer groups, intellectual ability, physical development, economic wealth, social marginalisation and so on. It is important to note that the perpetrator and/or victim may well be subject to power imbalances with other individuals in an incident of abuse and so it is important to investigate any incident as fully as possible.
- The perpetrator has **repeatedly** tried to harm one or more other children.
- There are concerns about the **intention** of the alleged perpetrator. If evidence suggests that there was an intention to cause severe harm to the victim, this should be regarded as abusive whether severe harm was caused or not.

Different forms of abuse are referenced in *MWS Child Protection Policy*. These include physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect. In the context of peer on peer abuse examples include:

- Teenage relationship abuse (both physical and emotional),
- Sexual touching/harassment, sexual violence or assault,
- Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals,
- Sexting (also known as youth produced sexual imagery),
- Prejudiced behaviours such as sexism, racism and social marginalisation,
- Bullying, where the context meets the criteria referred to above,
- Physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling or otherwise causing physical harm.

Issues surrounding Honour Based Violence (HBV), Forced Marriage and Radicalisation may also be relevant where coercion or power imbalances are involved between peers. It is also important to recognise that peer on peer abuse may well involve pupils here at MWS and young people and children in other contexts, thus making a full range of abuse types possible.

When dealing with any disclosure of abuse it is important to take into account the *power, frequency and intention*, as noted above. The extent to which any victim has given consent is also important.

Minimising Risk

KCSIE states: 'Where there is a safeguarding concern, Governing bodies, proprietors and school or college leaders should ensure the child's wishes and feelings are taken into account when

determining what action to take and what services to provide. Systems should be in place for children to express their views and give feedback. Ultimately, any system and processes should operate with the best interests of the child at their heart.'

The MWS recognises the challenge that young people face in talking about such issues and so learning opportunities should aim to develop confidence in our pupils so that they feel they can communicate about safeguarding issues, including asking questions and disclosing concerns.

MWS believes that other underpinning preventative learning about issues such as consent, healthy relationships, online safety, recognising abusive and coercive behaviour may help to support learning about abuse.

Pupils throughout the school are made aware of ways in which they can express their views and feelings on any pastoral matter. They are also given details of external agencies such as Childline 0800 1111, Samaritans and www.childnet-int.org

Procedures Adopted when a Disclosure of Peer on Peer Abuse is made:

The following general principles and guidelines should be followed:

Initial Response

- Any direct disclosure by a pupil of an incident of abuse should be taken very seriously and managed sensitively. Basic principles of listening sensitively, providing reassurance, not asking leading questions and not guaranteeing confidentiality should be remembered.
- All incidents should be responded to in line with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Any incident should be referred to the DSL without delay.
- The DSL should meet with staff involved

Investigation

- The DSL will decide if further information is required to decide on the best response.
- The school will provide relevant facts about the circumstances of the pupil/pupils involved which could influence the decisions of the DSL and which enable a contextual assessment to be made.
- In incidents that involve young people not at MWS, the DSL will decide if there is a need to contact another school, college, setting or individual.
- A pupil against whom an allegation of abuse has been made such that there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm may be suspended from the School during the investigation in accordance with the MWS Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policies.
- When necessary the DSL will take advice from Children's Social Care on the investigation of such allegations and will take all appropriate action to ensure the safety and welfare of all pupils involved including the pupil or pupils accused of abuse.

- If a pupil against whom an allegation of abuse has been made is required to be interviewed by the police, then the pupil will be supported during the interview by an appropriate adult

Risk Assessment and Referral

- The DSL will assess the risk presented by the incident to the pupil/pupils involved and in conjunction with Deputy DSL to decide whether a referral to the police or Local Area Designated Officer is required or whether to proceed using the MWS disciplinary procedures set out in the MWS Behaviour Policy.
- The DSL should inform parents at an early stage and involve them in the process unless there is good reason to believe that involving parents would put the young person at risk of harm.
- At any point in the process, if there is a concern a young person has been harmed or is at risk of serious harm a referral should be made to Children's Social Care. Any staff member can make such a referral but should inform the DSL as soon as possible that a referral has been made.

Recording Process and Outcomes

- Notes should be made of all conversations and meetings to do with any incident of peer on peer abuse. Formal written records should be completed immediately or within 24 hours. Records should include date, time, place, persons involved, nature of disclosure and any relevant details. These should be submitted to the DSL immediately. Records of all safeguarding concerns are kept by the DSL.
- The DSL, class teacher and other named staff will offer ongoing support in the best interests of the pupils in our care and action may need to be co-ordinated where there is a wider investigation involving Children's Social Care and/or the Police.

Endorsement:

Name: Linda Parker

Position: Chair of ECTE

Date: 28/11/2021