

# THE PAINSLEY CATHOLIC ACADEMY



**The Painsley Catholic Academy**  
Better Together

**Peer-on-Peer Abuse Policy**  
**September 2018**

## Introduction

The Directors, Governors, Senior Leadership Team, and all staff at Painsley Catholic College are committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of peer-on-peer abuse (as defined below) both within and beyond the college.

In particular, we:

- believe that in order to protect children, our college should
  - (a) be aware of the level and nature of risk to which our students are or may be exposed, and put in place a clear and comprehensive strategy which is tailored to their specific safeguarding needs and
  - (b) take a contextual whole-college approach to preventing and responding to peer-on-peer abuse;
- regard the introduction of this policy as a preventative measure, and do not feel it is acceptable merely to take a reactive approach to peer-on-peer abuse;
- recognise increasing national concern about this issue (as highlighted in KCSIE 2018), and wish to implement this policy in order to ensure that our students are safeguarded.
- encourage parents to communicate with the college so both parties can ensure that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response to any type of abuse from other peers.

This policy:

- sets out our strategy for preventing, identifying and appropriately managing peer-on-peer abuse. It is the product of a consultation of key updated legislation - In producing this policy we have consulted KCSIE 2018, working together to safeguard children, the college safeguarding policy, the college mental health and wellbeing policy, safeguard leads at the college and students views.
- applies to all Directors, Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff and volunteers. It will be reviewed annually, and updated, as may be required, to ensure that it continually addresses the risks to students. A number of staff and students are involved in each annual review, which involves and is informed by an assessment of the impact and effectiveness of this policy over the previous year. Key document (KCSIE, college safeguarding policy etc) changes will also be taken into account to ensure current legislation is being followed.
- is the college's overarching policy for any issue that could constitute peer-on-peer abuse. It relates to, and should be read alongside, the college's safeguarding policy, mental health and wellbeing policy, anti-bullying policy, e-safety policy, children missing in education and the rewards and sanctions policy.
- uses the terms 'child' and 'children', which is defined for the purposes of this policy as a person aged under 18. We have nonetheless chosen not to restrict our approach to peer-on-peer abuse under this policy to children but instead to adopt a wider interpretation of our safeguarding responsibilities so that they apply to all students, regardless of age.
- is compliant with the statutory guidance on peer-on-peer abuse as set out in *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (September 2018)
- should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it.

Peer-on-peer abuse is any form of physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised between children and within children's relationships (both intimate and non-intimate).

Peer-on-peer abuse can take various forms, including: serious bullying (including cyber-bullying), relationship abuse, domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour and/or gender-based violence.

These types of abuse rarely take place in isolation and often indicate wider safeguarding concerns. Any response to peer-on-peer abuse therefore needs to consider the range of possible types of peer-on-peer abuse set out above and capture the full context of children's experiences.

When dealing with behaviour which involves reports of, for example, emotional and/or physical abuse, all staff but in particular safeguarding staff decide how to respond depending on the following posed questions. This could include, for example, whether it:

- is socially acceptable
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time
- is socially acceptable within the peer group
- is problematic and concerning
- involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination e.g. related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability
- involves an element of coercion or pre-planning
- involves a power imbalance between the child/children allegedly responsible for the behaviour and the child/children allegedly the subject of that power
- involves a misuse of power

The college recognises that the importance of intervening early and addressing any inappropriate behaviour does not just apply on an individual student basis, but could also apply across groups of students or the whole student body. Behaviour generally considered inappropriate may in fact indicate emerging concerning behaviour to which our college needs to take a whole-college approach in order to prevent escalation. For example, where a group from one gender are making inappropriate comments about the other gender, one-off sanctions are unlikely to be effective and wider actions should be considered, such as arranging for an external person to deliver a year group intervention exercise.

It will also be important to consider the wider context in which the alleged behaviour is reported to have occurred, and which may trigger the need for a referral. For example, some behaviour that is considered inappropriate may be capable of being dealt with internally. However, if there are wider safeguarding concerns relating to the child/children in question, a referral to statutory agencies may be necessary. Where the behaviour which is the subject of the concern(s)/allegation(s) is considered or suspected by the DSL to constitute peer-on-peer abuse, the college will follow the procedures set out in the college safeguarding policy.

All staff are aware of this policy, the college safeguarding policy and KCSIE 2018 so they are fully aware of the importance of students well-being and understand the signs of abuse, and should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by peer-on-peer abuse. However, staff should be mindful of the fact that the way(s) in which children will disclose or present with behaviour(s) as a result of their experiences will differ.

Signs that a child may be suffering from peer-on-peer abuse can also overlap with those indicating other types of abuse and can include:

- (a) failing to attend college, disengaging from classes or struggling to carry out school related tasks to the standard ordinarily expected;
- (b) physical injuries;
- (c) experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing;
- (d) becoming withdrawn and/or shy; experiencing headaches, stomach aches, anxiety and/or panic attacks; suffering from nightmares or lack of sleep or sleeping too much;
- (e) broader changes in behaviour including alcohol or substance misuse;
- (f) changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a way that is not appropriate for the child's age;
- (g) abusive behaviour towards others.

Abuse affects children very differently. The above list is by no means exhaustive and the presence of one or more of these signs does not necessarily indicate abuse. The behaviour that children present with will depend on their particular circumstances. Rather than checking behaviour against a list, staff are alert to behaviour that might cause concerns, to think about what the behaviour might signify, to encourage children to share with them any underlying reasons for their behaviour, and, where appropriate, to engage with their parents/carers so that the cause(s) of their behaviour can be investigated. Where a child exhibits any behaviour that is out of character or abnormal for his/her age, staff should always consider

whether an underlying concern is contributing to their behaviour (for example, whether the child is being harmed or abused by their peers) and, if so, what the concern is and how the child can be supported going forwards.

Any child can be vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse due to the strength of peer influence during adolescence, and all staff should be alert to signs of such abuse amongst all children. Individual and situational factors can increase a child's vulnerability to abuse by their peers. For example, an image of a child could be shared, following which they could become more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse due to how others now perceive them, regardless of any characteristics which may be inherent in them and/or their family. Peer group dynamics can also play an important role in determining a child's vulnerability to such abuse. For example, children who are more likely to follow others and/or who are socially isolated from their peers may be more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse. Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse by their peers.

The college actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of peer-on-peer abuse by educating all Senior Leadership Team, staff, volunteers and students about this issue. All students are educated about peer-on-peer abuse via the Citizenship curriculum and the wider curriculum. Students are told what to do if they witness or experience such abuse, the effect that it can have on those who experience it and the possible reasons for it, including vulnerability of those who inflict such abuse. They are regularly informed about the college's approach to such issues, including its zero tolerance policy towards all forms of peer-on-peer abuse.

The college ensures we are:

- challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside the classroom);
- working with Directors, Governors, Senior Leadership Team, all staff and volunteers, students and parents to address equality issues, to promote positive values, and to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the college community;
- creating conditions in which our students can aspire to and realise safe and healthy relationships;
- creating a culture in which our students feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to; and
- responding to cases of peer-on-peer abuse promptly and appropriately.

#### *Multi-agency working*

The college actively engages with its local partners in relation to peer-on-peer abuse, and works closely with, for example, Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), Staffordshire Police, local PCSOs, children's social care, and/or other relevant agencies, and other schools. The relationships the college has built with these partners are essential to ensuring that the college is able to prevent, identify early and appropriately handle cases of peer-on-peer abuse. They help the college:

- (a) to develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in its local area, as well as the preventative and support services which exist;
- (b) to ensure that our students are able to access the range of services and support they need quickly;
- (c) to support and help inform our local community's response to peer-on-peer abuse;
- (d) to increase our awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in our local area to enable us to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by our students.

The college actively refers concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse where necessary to Staffordshire Police children's social care (first response), and/or other relevant agencies. This is particularly important because peer-on-peer abuse can be a complex issue, and even more so where wider safeguarding concerns exist. It is often not appropriate for one single agency (where the incident cannot be managed internally) to try to address the issue alone - it requires effective partnership working.

It is essential that all concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse are handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly. The way in which they are responded to can have a significant impact on our college.

Any response should:

- include a thorough investigation of the concerns/allegations and the wider context in which they may have occurred and where appropriate added to SIMS communication log and/or "My Concern" portal;
- treat all children involved as being at potential risk - while the child allegedly responsible for the abuse may pose a significant risk of harm to other children, s/he may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves. We will ensure a safeguarding response is in place for both the child who has allegedly experienced the abuse, and the child who has allegedly been responsible for it, and additional sanctioning work may be required for the latter;
- take into account:
  - that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the children involved, and consider and address the effect of wider socio-cultural contexts - such as the child's/children's peer group (both within and outside the college); family; the college environment and the child/children's online presence.
  - the potential complexity of peer-on-peer abuse and of children's experiences and consider the interplay between power, choice and consent. While children may appear to be making choices, if those choices are limited they are not consenting;
  - the views of the child/children affected. Unless it is considered unsafe to do so (for example, where a referral needs to be made immediately), the DSL will discuss the proposed action with the child/children and their parents and obtain consent to any referral before it is made. The college will manage the child/children's expectations about information sharing, and keep them and their parents informed of developments, where appropriate and safe to do so.

**What should you do if you suspect either that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s)?**

**If a student is in immediate danger, or at risk of significant harm, a referral to children's social care and/or the police should be made immediately. Anyone can make a referral. Where referrals are not made by the DSL, the DSL should be informed as soon as possible that a referral has been made (See the safeguarding procedures in the college safeguarding policy).**

If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s), they should discuss their concern with the DSL without delay so that a course of action can be agreed.

If a child speaks to a member of staff about peer-on-peer abuse that they have witnessed or are a part of, the member of staff should listen to the child and use open language that demonstrates understanding rather than judgement.

**How will our college respond to concerns or allegations of peer-on-peer abuse?**

The DSL will discuss the concerns or allegations with the member of staff who has reported them and will, where necessary, take any immediate steps to ensure the safety of the child/all children affected.

The DSL will use their professional judgement to determine whether it is appropriate for alleged behaviour to be dealt with internally and, if so, whether any external specialist support is required. In borderline cases the DSL may wish to consult with children's social care and/or any other external agencies on a no-names basis to determine the most appropriate response. Where the DSL considers or suspects that the behaviour in question might be abusive or violent on a spectrum (as opposed to inappropriate or problematic), the DSL will contact first response or Staffordshire police immediately, and in any event within 24 hours of the DSL becoming aware of it. The DSL will discuss the allegations/concerns with the appropriate agencies and agree on a course of action, which may include:

**A - Manage internally with help from external specialists where appropriate and possible**

*Where behaviour between peers is abusive or violent (as opposed to inappropriate or problematic), scenarios B, C or D should ordinarily apply. However, where support from local agencies is not available, the college may need to handle allegations/concerns internally. In these cases, the college will engage and seek advice from external specialists.*

**B - Undertake/contribute to an inter-agency early help assessment, with targeted early help services provided to address the assessed needs of a child/children and their family**

*These services may, for example, include CAMHS, a specialist harmful sexual behaviour team, and/or youth offending services.*

**C - Refer child/children to children's social care for a section 17 and/or 47 statutory assessment**

*As a matter of best practice, if an incident of peer-on-peer abuse requires referral to and action by children's social care and a strategy meeting is convened, then the college will hold every professional involved in the case accountable for their safeguarding response.*

**D - Report alleged criminal behaviour to the Police**

*Alleged criminal behaviour will be reported to the Police. All concerns/allegations will be assessed on a case by case basis.*

Where there is an incident of peer-on-peer abuse the college will assess and address the nature and level of risks that are posed and/or faced by the child; engage the child's parents and draw upon local services and agencies to ensure that the child's needs are met in the long-term. Consider whether any targeted interventions are needed to address the underlying attitudes or behaviour of any child. If at any stage the child's needs escalate, the DSL will contact the relevant agencies.

The college will consider whether disciplinary action may be appropriate for any child/children involved (following the rewards and sanctions policy) - any such action will address the abuse, the causes of it, and attitudes underlying it. Disciplinary action may sometimes be appropriate, including (a) to ensure that the child/children take(s) responsibility for and realise(s) the seriousness of their behaviour; (b) to demonstrate to the child/children and others that peer-on-peer abuse can never be tolerated; and (c) to ensure the safety and wellbeing of other children. However, these considerations will be balanced against the child's/children's own potential unmet needs and any safeguarding concerns. Before deciding on appropriate action the college will always consider its duty to safeguard all children from harm; the underlying reasons for a child's behaviour; any unmet needs, or harm or abuse suffered by the child; the risk that the child may pose to other children; and the severity of the peer-on-peer abuse and the causes of it. Exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and only where necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the other children in the college. Disciplinary interventions alone are rarely able to solve issues of peer-on-peer abuse, and the college will always consider the wider actions that may need to be taken, and any lessons that may need to be learnt going forwards, as set out above and below.

The college's response to concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse will be part of on-going proactive work by the college to embed best practice and take a whole-college approach to such abuse. As such the college's response will become part of its wider prevention work. This response will include the college asking itself a series of questions about the context in which an incident of peer-on-peer abuse occurred in the college, the local community in which the college is based, and the wider physical and online environment - such as:

(a) how did the college's physical environment contribute to the abuse, and how can the college address this going forwards,

(c) did wider gender norms, equality issues and/or societal attitudes contribute to the abuse?;

(d) does the abuse indicate a need for staff training on, for example, underlying attitudes, a particular issue or the handling of particular types of abuse?;

(e) how have similar cases been managed in the past and what effect has this had?;

(f) does the case or any identified trends highlight areas for development in the way in which the college works with children to raise their awareness of and/or prevent peer-on-peer abuse, including by way of the

college's PSHE/Citizenship curriculum and lessons that address underlying attitudes or behaviour such as gender and equalities work?;

(g) are there any lessons to be learnt about the way in which the college engages with parents to address peer-on-peer abuse issues?;

(h) are there underlying issues that affect other colleges in the area and is there a need for a multi-agency response?;

(i) does this case highlight a need to work with certain children to build their confidence and teach them how to identify and manage abusive behaviour?; and

(j) were there opportunities to intervene earlier or differently and/or to address common themes amongst the behaviour of other children in the college?

# Appendix A - Contact details for local agencies

## First Response

Email - <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/health/childrenandfamilycare/childprotection/First-Response/Report-online/Report-a-concern-online.aspx>

Tel - 08001313126

## Emergency Duty Service (Outside office hours):

Tel - 0845 6042886

## Staffordshire Safeguarding Advice Service

Tel- 01785 895836

## Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board

Website - [www.staffsscbb.org.uk](http://www.staffsscbb.org.uk)

Email - [sscb.admin@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:sscb.admin@staffordshire.gov.uk)

Tel - 01785 277151

## Staffordshire Police

Emergency Tel - 999

Non-Emergency Tel - 101

# Appendix B - Youth Produced Sexual Imagery Policy

Whilst professionals refer to the issue as 'sexting' there is no clear definition of 'sexting'. According to research, many professionals consider sexting to be 'sending or posting sexually suggestive images, including nude or semi-nude photographs, via mobiles or over the internet.' Yet, recent NSPCC research has revealed that when children are asked 'What does sexting mean to you?' they are more likely to interpret sexting as 'writing and sharing explicit messages with people they know.' Similarly, a recent ChildLine survey has revealed that many parents think of sexting as flirty or sexual text messages rather than images.

This policy only covers the sharing of sexual imagery by children. Creating and sharing sexual photos and videos of under-18s is illegal, and therefore causes the greatest complexity for the college when responding. It also presents a range of risks which need careful management.

On this basis, this policy introduces the phrase 'youth produced sexual imagery' and uses this instead of 'sexting'. This is to ensure clarity about the issues this advice addresses.

## What is youth produced sexual imagery?

'Youth produced sexual imagery' best describes the practice because:

- 'Youth produced' includes children sharing images that they, or another child, have created of themselves.
- 'Sexual' is clearer than 'indecent'. A judgement of whether something is 'decent' is both a value judgement and dependent on context.
- 'Imagery' covers both still photos and moving videos (and this is what is meant by reference to imagery throughout the policy).

## What types of incidents are covered by this policy?

**Yes:**

- A child creates and shares sexual imagery of themselves with a peer (also under the age of 18).
- A child shares sexual imagery created by another child with a peer (also under the age of 18) or an adult.
- A child is in possession of sexual imagery created by another child.

## Disclosure

Disclosure about youth produced sexual imagery can happen in a variety of ways. The child affected may inform a class teacher, the DSL in the college, or any member of the college staff. They may report through an existing reporting structure, or a friend or parent may inform someone in the college, or inform the police directly.

All members of staff (including non-teaching staff) are aware of how to recognise and refer any disclosure of incidents involving youth produced sexual imagery. This will be covered within staff training and within the college's safeguarding policy.

Any direct disclosure by a child should be taken very seriously. A child who discloses they are the subject of sexual imagery is likely to be embarrassed and worried about the consequences. It is likely that disclosure in college is a last resort and they may have already tried to resolve the issue themselves.

## Handling incidents

All incidents involving youth produced sexual imagery should be responded to in line with the College's safeguarding policy.

When an incident involving youth produced sexual imagery comes to a member of staff's attention:

- The incident should be referred to the DSL as soon as possible.
- The DSL will hold an initial review meeting with appropriate college staff.
- The DSL will follow the procedures and guidance set out in *Sexting in schools and colleges: responding to incidents and safeguarding children*.
- There will be subsequent interviews with the children involved (if appropriate).
- Parents will be informed at an early stage and involved in the process unless there is good reason to believe that involving parents would put the child at risk of harm.
- At any point in the process if there is a concern a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm a referral will be made to children's social care and/or the police immediately.

## Education

Teaching about safeguarding issues in the classroom can prevent harm by providing children with skills, attributes and knowledge to help them navigate risks. The college will provide children with opportunities to learn about the issue of youth produced sexual imagery, as part of its commitment to ensure that they are taught about safeguarding, including online, through teaching and learning opportunities - as also referred to in the college's e-safety policy.