

# Scrutiny Commission Report

**Report title:** Sexual abuse and harassment in schools and colleges

**Meeting date:** 19th January 2022

**Report originator:** Chris Roberts, Head of Wellbeing & Education Safeguarding, LBH

## 1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1. To update the commission on the work being undertaken in response to the publication of Ofsted's report reviewing sexual abuse and harassment in schools and colleges, which was published in June 2020.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the commission notes the progress made since the publication of their report.

## 3. Background

- 3.1. Following the murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021 there was increased awareness of the issue of violence against women and girls. It was at this time that the [Everyone's Invited](#) website came to national prominence.
- 3.2. Everyone's Invited stated that it was '*a place for survivors to share their stories*' and had as its mission '*to expose and eradicate rape culture with empathy, compassion and understanding*'.
- 3.3. The website saw thousands of young women report their experiences of harassment, abuse and assault perpetrated by boys or young men who either attend their own school, a neighbouring school or their university.
- 3.4. The reports were anonymous though the testimonies often named the school or university the perpetrator attended.
- 3.5. Independent and state schools nationally were named on the site.
- 3.6. Reported incidents occurred both in school and out of school (e.g. at parties).
- 3.7. Some boys also posted their experiences.
- 3.8. Nationally in response the following occurred:
  - 3.8.1. A nationally coordinated police response;
  - 3.8.2. A 'Report Abuse in Education' helpline set up;
  - 3.8.3. Ofsted were asked to conduct a review; and
  - 3.8.4. Entries reviewed and, where appropriate, local safeguarding partners notified.
- 3.9. In response Hackney Education held briefings for head teachers, designated safeguarding leads and school governors so they were fully aware of the website, the issues raised and appropriate actions to take in response. The first of these meetings was held on April 21st 2021 and was jointly led by Hackney Education, the police and Young Hackney. Slides from the meeting held on the 21st April can be found [here](#).

## 4. Ofsted's review of sexual abuse and harassment in schools & colleges

- 4.1. In June 2021 Ofsted published their review of into sexual abuse and harassment in schools and colleges having visited 32 schools and spoken with over 900 young people in those settings. Ofsted's report can be found [here](#).

4.2. A summary of Ofsted's findings is set out below.

- 4.2.1. The review highlighted how prevalent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are for children and young people and that incidents were so commonplace that children and young people saw no point in reporting them.
- 4.2.2. Girls told Ofsted that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse was much more prevalent than adults realise and that it occurred so frequently that it had become commonplace. The frequency of harmful sexual behaviours means that some children and young people consider them normal.
- 4.2.3. When asked about where sexual violence occurred unsupervised spaces outside of school, such as parties or parks without adults present, were mentioned though some girls reported to Ofsted that they also experienced unwanted touching in school corridors.
- 4.2.4. 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, they reported that 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 were also worried 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.
- 4.2.5. The Ofsted review found that children and young people reported that they were rarely positive about the relationships, sex and health 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.
- 4.2.6. In the schools and colleges Ofsted visited, some teachers and leaders underestimated the scale of the problem. They found that schools either did not identify sexual harassment and sexualised language as problematic or they were unaware they were happening. They were however dealing with incidents of sexual violence when they were made aware of them, and following statutory guidance.

4.3. Ofsted's report made the following recommendations for schools and colleges:

- 4.3.1. That school and college leaders should create a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated. They should assume that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are happening in their setting, even when there are no specific reports, and put in place a whole-school approach to address them, which should include:
  - 4.3.1.1. A carefully sequenced RSHE curriculum, based on the Department for Education's (DfE's) statutory guidance, that specifically includes sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online;
  - 4.3.1.2. High-quality training for teachers delivering RSHE;
  - 4.3.1.3. Routine record-keeping and analysis of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, to identify patterns and intervene early to prevent abuse;
  - 4.3.1.4. A behavioural approach, including sanctions when appropriate, to reinforce a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated;
  - 4.3.1.5. Working closely with local safeguarding partners in the area where the school or college is located;
  - 4.3.1.6. Support for designated safeguarding leads (DSLs)
  - 4.3.1.7. Training for all staff

- 4.4. Schools and colleges have been told to assume that sexual abuse and harassment is taking place in their school even if there are no reports and plan a whole school response accordingly.
- 4.5. Since publication of the review the Department for Education has updated its guidance relating to [Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Children in Schools and Colleges](#) and [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#).
- 4.6. Ofsted have also updated their inspection framework to ensure peer on peer sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online feature as part of the inspection of schools from September 2021.

## **5. What are schools are doing in response**

- 5.1. Since publication of Ofsted's report, schools and colleges have responded to the issues raised in the review and have sought to create a culture where girls and young women are safe in schools.
- 5.2. Different schools and colleges have responded to the report in different ways depending on their school or college context. Activities have however broadly fallen into one of five categories:
  - 5.2.1. Understanding the current situation by
    - 5.2.1.1. Meeting with groups of pupils
    - 5.2.1.2. Meeting with staff
    - 5.2.1.3. Reviewing behaviour incidents
  - 5.2.2. Handling disclosures by
    - 5.2.2.1. Reviewing and updating reporting mechanisms
    - 5.2.2.2. Introducing anonymised reporting
    - 5.2.2.3. Discussing how best to report with pupils
  - 5.2.3. Policies, procedures and training by
    - 5.2.3.1. Updating safeguarding and behaviour policies
    - 5.2.3.2. Providing training for relevant staff
  - 5.2.4. RSHE Curriculum by
    - 5.2.4.1. Reviewing and updating the RSHE curriculum, including involving pupils
    - 5.2.4.2. Ensuring there was progression and key topics were revisited
    - 5.2.4.3. Training for staff delivering the RSHE curriculum
  - 5.2.5. Raising Awareness by
    - 5.2.5.1. Holding age appropriate assemblies with pupils
    - 5.2.5.2. Briefing staff on the report and any changes to policies
    - 5.2.5.3. Sharing the report with staff and parents
    - 5.2.5.4. Providing advice to parents on boundaries

## **6. How is Hackney Council supporting schools and colleges; and their pupils**

- 6.1. Hackney Education, Young Hackney and the Context Intervention Unit (CIU) have been working in partnership with schools and colleges to support them in this area of work. This

has included individual, group and whole school work, which assists schools in understanding their context and how to address any issues raised by pupils.

- 6.2. In addition Young Hackney has adapted its RSHE curriculum offer to reflect the report and ensure that issues such as domestic abuse, healthy relationships, sexual harassment and consent are addressed appropriately in their sessions.
- 6.3. Hackney Education has:
  - 6.3.1. Held discussions with head teachers, secondary deputy head teachers and designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) on the topic so that the report findings are widely understood.
  - 6.3.2. Worked with the two schools that were referenced in the Everyone's Invited website.
  - 6.3.3. Convened three sessions of the DSL Forum devoted to this topic to ensure DSLs are aware of the recommendations, feel supported in responding and are made aware of good practice and support available from other services.
  - 6.3.4. Promoted to schools the use of the Contextual Safeguarding Network's Harmful Sexual Behaviour in Schools [toolkit](#), which alligns with the wider work being undertaken by the Contextual Intervention Unit. The self-assessment tool in the toolkit has been used widely by schools.
  - 6.3.5. Worked with CIU to develop an Extra Familial Risk & Harm audit tool for schools to use. This will enable schools to examine their understanding and practice regarding sexual harassment as part of their work relating to peer on peer harms. Once this is approved by the CHSCP it will be rolled out to schools next year.
  - 6.3.6. Carried out an audit of schools in December 2021 to ascertain actions taken by schools. This showed schools had overwhelmingly acted upon the report's findings. Key findings include:
    - 6.3.6.1. 94.7% reported that they had assigned a member of SLT to lead on this
    - 6.3.6.2. 86.8% reported that they had reviewed incidents
    - 6.3.6.3. 94.7% reported that the school's safeguarding policy had been updated
    - 6.3.6.4. 81.6% had reported that they had provided training to staff
    - 6.3.6.5. 81.6% reported that they have reviewed and revised their RSE curriculum
    - 6.3.6.6. 76.3% reported that they had reviewed their reporting mechanisms
- 6.4. The Context Intervention Unit has:
  - 6.4.1. Undertaken peer group work in secondary schools around sexual exploitation
  - 6.4.2. Held drop down days in conjunction with CHYPS Sexual Health Service and the Young Hackney Health and Wellbeing Team.
  - 6.4.3. Carried out student surveys in some schools and colleges, which include scoping questions around sexual harm in schools.
  - 6.4.4. Implemented the Mentors in Violence Prevention program in three secondary schools
  - 6.4.5. Developed an early help and critical incident school assessment guide to support schools in responding to extra-familial harm of which sexual assault is one form of harm.

6.5. Young Hackney has:

6.5.1. Held sessions with pupils in a number of primary and secondary schools covering consent, healthy relationship, child sexual exploitation, pornography and sexual harassment.

6.5.2. Delivered training for staff/professionals on harmful sexual behaviour.

## 7. Some examples of practice from schools

7.1. One school is running three projects with students on these issues. For Years 10 and 11 boys - Beyond Equality; for Year 9 they have the Mentors in Violence Prevention program and for Years 7 and 8 they are commissioning a theatre company called Immediate Theatre who are going to work with us to create a relevant performance on the issue.

7.2. Another school issued an all student questionnaire regarding sexual abuse and harassment. They have also held lunchtime reflections to raise awareness and sent letters home to parents/carers regarding sexual abuse and harassment.

7.3. Other secondary schools have worked with Hackney Education and the Context Intervention Unit to disseminate surveys to children and staff members about their experiences of safety, including from sexual harm and exploitation. The responses to these are used as part of 'context assessments' and the targeting of appropriate interventions from Young Hackney and referrals to the Extra Familial Risk Panel where necessary.

7.4. Another school held a parent forum to discuss the RSHE curriculum and the Ofsted findings. They also surveyed all students to give them an opportunity to say how helpful they found RSHE and how they would like to change it.

7.5. One primary school worked with the CIU with Year 6 pupils. This covered sexual messaging and concerns about violence to women in the community. This work will be repeated with the new Year 6 cohort and the plan is to develop a transitions program with the school which focuses on risk of harm in school, peers and community.

7.6. One college is working with Young Hackney to run a fortnightly women's empowerment group.

## 8. Conclusion

8.1. Everyone's Invited started a conversation across the education sector about sexual abuse and harassment in schools. The subsequent Ofsted review then revealed the scale of the issue and the everyday experience of many young women.

8.2. Since then schools have responded to the issue and have adopted the mantra of assume it is happening here. In doing so they have sought to understand the issue in their school, and to tackle the issue by improving reporting mechanisms, raising awareness across staff, pupils and parents; updating policies and procedures; and improving the quality of RSHE teaching.

8.3. The issue of sexual abuse and harassment is bigger than schools alone and is reflective of attitudes prevalent in wider society. Therefore schools will not be able to solve the issue alone but as the Chief Inspector of Ofsted said recently in response to the issue, '*good schools, doing what they do really well, can make a difference*'.

8.4. Likewise an issue as endemic as this will not be tackled overnight and requires a sustained approach that ensures that attitudes and behaviours are changed over time as we seek to make the sexual harassment and abuse of young women unacceptable.

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