



1. Purpose

Storybrook is fully committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all pupils. This includes recognising that children can abuse other children and that such behaviour must be taken seriously and responded to appropriately. Child-on-child abuse is understood as a safeguarding issue and will never be dismissed as “banter”, “part of growing up” or normal peer interaction.

As a specialist SEMH setting, Storybrook recognises that pupils may present with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs, which can impact how they relate to others. This policy sets out a clear and consistent approach to preventing, identifying and responding to child-on-child abuse, ensuring that all pupils are supported within a relational, trauma-informed and safeguarding-led framework.

2. Scope of this policy

This policy applies to all individuals working at or on behalf of Storybrook, including teaching staff, support staff, leaders, governors, volunteers and visitors. It applies across all aspects of school life, including the curriculum, behaviour and relationships, SEMH provision, online environments and wider safeguarding systems.

Child-on-child abuse is addressed within the school’s wider safeguarding framework and should be read alongside the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. All staff have a responsibility to remain vigilant, understand the indicators of abuse, respond appropriately and report concerns without delay. The consistent implementation of this policy is supported through training, supervision and leadership oversight.

3. Legal framework

This policy is informed by statutory safeguarding guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education and Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges. These documents set out the expectation that schools must take a proactive approach to preventing and responding to child-on-child abuse.

At Storybrook, child-on-child abuse is managed as part of the school’s wider safeguarding responsibilities. All actions are guided by the principles of early identification, proportionate response, multi-agency working and a child-centred approach. Staff are expected to understand how this legal framework informs their practice and to apply safeguarding procedures consistently.

Child-on-child abuse is managed as part of the school’s safeguarding responsibilities which must be embedded across all aspects of school practice.





4. Definitions

Child-on-child abuse refers to any form of abuse that occurs between pupils and can take place both inside and outside of school, including online. It includes, but is not limited to, sexual violence and sexual harassment, physical abuse, emotional abuse, bullying (including cyberbullying), coercive or controlling behaviour, abuse within intimate or peer relationships, initiation or hazing-type behaviours, and prejudice-based abuse linked to protected characteristics.

It also includes the sharing of nude or semi-nude images, inappropriate use of social media or messaging platforms, exploitation, threats, intimidation, and behaviour intended to humiliate, harm or control another pupil. Abuse may be a one-off incident or a pattern of behaviour and can involve an imbalance of power, whether physical, social or emotional.

At Storyybrook, all forms of child-on-child abuse are recognised as serious safeguarding concerns and are responded to in line with safeguarding procedures, regardless of the perceived intent of the behaviour.

Harmful sexual behaviour

Storyybrook recognises that harmful sexual behaviour exists on a continuum and must be understood within the context of a child's developmental stage, experiences and needs. The school uses recognised frameworks, including Hackett's continuum and the Brook Traffic Light Tool, to support professional judgement in distinguishing between developmentally typical behaviour, problematic behaviour and abusive behaviour.

Staff understand that some behaviours may be inappropriate but not abusive, while others may indicate significant safeguarding concerns requiring immediate intervention. All incidents are assessed carefully by the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), taking into account context, intent, impact and risk.

Responses are proportionate and focus on both safeguarding and education, ensuring that pupils are supported to understand boundaries, relationships and appropriate behaviour, while maintaining the safety and wellbeing of others.

5. Key principles

The school's approach to child-on-child abuse is underpinned by a clear set of safeguarding and relational principles. These ensure that all responses are consistent, proportionate and focused on the needs of the child.

At Storyybrook, safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and all staff understand their role in identifying and responding to concerns. Early identification is essential, and all concerns, including low-level concerns, are taken seriously and acted upon. As a specialist SEMH





setting, the school adopts a trauma-informed approach, recognising that behaviour may be a form of communication and that pupils may present with complex underlying needs.

All responses are child-centred and proportionate, balancing support and accountability. The school promotes a culture of inclusion, respect and belonging, reducing vulnerability and supporting positive relationships. Staff are expected to demonstrate professional curiosity, avoid assumptions and maintain a consistent and vigilant approach to safeguarding.

Storybrook adopts a clear zero-tolerance approach to all forms of child-on-child abuse. Abuse is never accepted, minimised or dismissed as part of normal peer interaction. All incidents are taken seriously and addressed promptly and appropriately.

However, as a specialist SEMH setting, the school also recognises that pupils displaying harmful behaviours may have their own vulnerabilities, unmet needs or experiences of trauma. Therefore, while the behaviour itself is never tolerated, responses remain safeguarding-led, relational and proportionate.

This means that all pupils involved are supported appropriately, with a focus on safety, accountability, understanding and positive change. The school maintains clear boundaries and expectations while ensuring that responses do not stigmatise or exclude pupils unnecessarily.

Staff maintain a culture of vigilance and professional curiosity, recognising that child-on-child abuse can occur in any setting and that early identification is essential.

6. Understanding child-on-child abuse within an SEMH setting

Child-on-child abuse can take many forms, including sexual violence and harassment, physical abuse, emotional abuse, bullying (including online), harmful sexual behaviour and abuse within relationships. It can occur both online and offline and can have a significant impact on pupils' emotional wellbeing, safety and ability to engage in learning.

Within an SEMH context, staff understand that behaviour must be considered within the wider context of the pupil's experiences, developmental stage and emotional needs. Pupils may have experienced trauma, disrupted relationships or a lack of consistent boundaries, which can influence how they interact with others.

Staff recognise that harmful behaviours may reflect unmet needs, confusion or exposure to inappropriate experiences. However, this does not minimise the seriousness of the behaviour. Instead, it ensures that responses are both safeguarding-led and supportive, addressing the needs of all pupils involved while maintaining clear expectations and boundaries.





7. Roles and responsibilities

The effective implementation of this policy relies on clear roles and shared responsibility across the school. The Headteacher, who is also the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), has overall responsibility for safeguarding and for managing all cases of child-on-child abuse. The DSL ensures that concerns are assessed appropriately, recorded accurately and responded to in line with safeguarding procedures, including liaison with external agencies where necessary.

All staff have a responsibility to remain vigilant, identify concerns and report them immediately. Staff must not attempt to investigate concerns themselves but must follow the school's safeguarding procedures at all times. Staff are also responsible for creating a safe and respectful environment, modelling appropriate behaviour and supporting pupils in line with the school's relational approach.

8. Identifying concerns considering SEMH needs

At Storyybrook, staff understand that indicators of child-on-child abuse may present in a range of ways and are often subtle. These may include changes in behaviour, emotional distress, inappropriate sexualised language or behaviour, peer conflict, withdrawal or online concerns.

In an SEMH setting, these indicators may also present through dysregulation, rigid thinking, attachment behaviours or escalation when challenged. Staff must consider the wider context of the pupil's needs and experiences and apply professional judgement when identifying concerns.

All concerns, including low-level concerns or patterns over time, must be reported and recorded. Early identification is essential in preventing escalation and ensuring appropriate support.

9. Responding to concerns

When a concern is identified, staff must respond in a calm, supportive and non-judgemental manner. They must listen carefully, avoid asking leading questions and reassure the pupil where appropriate. A factual record must be made as soon as possible, and the concern must be reported immediately to the DSL.

Staff must not attempt to investigate or resolve the concern themselves. All responses must follow the school's safeguarding procedures to ensure consistency and appropriate escalation.





10. DSL response and decision making

The DSL will take a lead role in managing all concerns relating to child-on-child abuse. This includes reviewing the information, assessing the level of risk and considering the wider context of the pupil's needs and circumstances.

The DSL will determine the most appropriate course of action, which may include internal support, early help or referral to external agencies such as social care or the police. All decisions will be proportionate, recorded and in the best interests of the pupils involved.

11. Risk assessment

Following a report, the DSL will complete a risk assessment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all pupils. This will consider the needs of the victim, the alleged perpetrator and the wider pupil group.

Risk assessments will be recorded, regularly reviewed and updated as required. They will inform decisions regarding supervision, support and any necessary adjustments within the school environment.

12. Supporting pupils

Storybrook recognises that all pupils involved in child-on-child abuse require appropriate and sensitive support. The needs of the victim are always the priority. Victims will be listened to, believed and supported to feel safe, both emotionally and physically. The school will take steps to prevent further harm, including reasonable adjustments to timetables, supervision, groupings or environments where necessary.

The school ensures that victims are not blamed for what has happened and that their experiences are taken seriously. Support will continue regardless of the outcome of any external investigation, including cases where no further action (NFA) is taken.

Pupils displaying harmful behaviour will also be supported in a way that addresses both their behaviour and any underlying needs. This may include targeted interventions, pastoral support, and involvement of external services where appropriate. The aim is to promote accountability, understanding and positive behaviour change, while ensuring that safeguarding remains central.

13. Managing incidents

The school will take appropriate steps to manage incidents, including separating pupils where necessary and ensuring the safety of all involved. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the nature of the incident, the needs of the pupils and the wider safeguarding context.





Actions will be proportionate and will not assume guilt. The focus will remain on safeguarding, support and maintaining a safe learning environment.

Post-incident review and learning

Following any incident of child-on-child abuse, Storyybrook will undertake a review to ensure that appropriate actions have been taken and to identify any learning for future practice.

This may include reviewing patterns or trends in behaviour, identifying any environmental or contextual risks such as specific locations or times of day, and considering the dynamics between pupils. Leaders will also reflect on whether there are any gaps in the curriculum, supervision or school systems that need to be addressed.

This process supports continuous improvement and ensures that safeguarding practice remains proactive, responsive and effective.

14. Online behaviour

Storyybrook recognises that child-on-child abuse can take place online as well as face-to-face. This includes cyberbullying, harassment, coercion, sharing of inappropriate or harmful content, and the sharing of nude or semi-nude images.

Online abuse may involve group chats, social media platforms or gaming environments and can include pressure, threats or manipulation. The school recognises that online behaviour can have a significant impact on pupils' emotional wellbeing and safety.

Staff will respond to online concerns in line with safeguarding procedures, ensuring that evidence is preserved where possible and that concerns are reported to the DSL without delay. The school will work in line with its E-Safety Policy to educate pupils about safe online behaviour and to reduce risk.

15. Prevention

Storyybrook adopts a proactive approach to preventing child-on-child abuse through a broad and balanced curriculum, including PSHE, RSE and SMSC provision. Pupils are supported to develop an understanding of relationships, respect, boundaries and safety.

The school promotes a culture of openness, where pupils feel safe to share concerns and where all forms of abuse are challenged. Staff model positive relationships and reinforce expectations consistently.

16. Multi-agency working





The school works closely with external agencies, including social care, MASH and the police, to ensure that pupils receive appropriate support. Effective multi-agency working ensures that concerns are addressed promptly and that pupils are safeguarded.

All referrals follow safeguarding procedures.

17. Involving parents/ carers

Storybrook recognises the importance of working in partnership with parents and carers. In most cases, parents or carers will be informed when a concern or incident of child-on-child abuse arises.

However, decisions about informing parents will always be led by safeguarding considerations. There may be circumstances where informing a parent or carer is not appropriate, for example where it may place a pupil at further risk or compromise a safeguarding investigation.

The DSL will make decisions regarding parental involvement on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the needs, safety and best interests of the pupil. Where appropriate, parents and carers will be supported to understand the situation and work in partnership with the school to support their child.

18. Monitoring and Review

The implementation of this policy is monitored by the Headteacher and DSL through regular review of safeguarding records, staff discussions and analysis of incidents. The policy is reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and aligned with statutory guidance.

The policy will be reviewed annually.

Monitoring includes review of safeguarding records, analysis of patterns, staff discussions and oversight by leadership to ensure consistent implementation.

19. Links to Other Policies

This policy should be read alongside policies below to ensure a consistent and comprehensive safeguarding approach.

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour and Relationships Policy
- Prevent Duty Policy
- SMSC Policy
- E-Safety Policy





20. Summary Statement

At Storyybrook, safeguarding is central to all practice. Through a consistent, proactive and relational approach, the school ensures that child-on-child abuse is prevented, identified and addressed effectively, and that all pupils are supported to feel safe, respected and able to thrive.

